Carrying the private in public: language and performance in Susan Jahoda's *Flight Patterns*

Michael Y. Bennett

Department of Languages and Literature, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Whitewater, WI, USA

ABSTRACT
Blurring the lines between public and private language by displaying a series of hand-written letters and envelopes sent through the mail, Susan Jahoda's *Flight Patterns* questions if the demarcation between public and private language is ever really possible. As a matter of central importance to studies of performance and rhetoric, ultimately, Jahoda suggests that performances of the self are constructed by language that is unavoidably, and simultaneously, public and private. The act of *addressing* is a rhetorical performance, or a performance of rhetoric, for the ways in which language both demarcates and blurs the boundaries of self and other.

I. Private and public languages

In October 2001, Susan Jahoda – an artist and art professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst whose work has been featured/discussed in *Yale Journal of Criticism* and *Rethinking Marxism* – presented a performance art installation called *Flight Patterns*. Jahoda's *Flight Patterns* (which can be viewed on Jahoda's professional website, http://www.susanjahoda.com/flight_ex.html) was a part of a group exhibition called "Back and Forth: Mapping Memory" at the Vacancy Gallery in Mott Haven, New York, which is an area in the South Bronx through which every day thousands of commuters pass on their way to and from Manhattan. Writing letters and then sending them in the mail with an address and a return address that were no longer inhabited, Jahoda displayed 10 undeliverable letters and their corresponding envelopes, as well as quirky black-and-white photographs that accompanied most of the 10 letter and envelope pairings. All of the envelopes were addressed to A. Bela-Gera from Agnes Bela-Gera, of 344 East 134 Street #6, Bronx, NY 10454. Each letter began, after the above address and the date, with either "Dear A," or "A," and simply concluded "Agnes."

A typical 4⅛ inch × 9½ inch (10 cm × 24 cm) white envelope is made out of one, folded and glued, roughly diamond-shaped piece of paper. Seldom is the envelope seen in its unfolded form: the envelope lies unprotected; its glue forms a Mobius-like strip around the edges. What becomes apparent in this state is that the envelope started out with neither an inside nor an outside. The questions then follow: is the envelope, itself, "in wrap?" or are the contents of the envelope "in wrap?" The obvious answer would be that the contents of the envelope are "in wrap." However, we would miss the remarkable

way that the envelope masks its own two-dimensionality. By folding upon itself, the envelope has created a three-dimensional outside, as well as a hidden three-dimensional inside. If the envelope, itself, is "in wrap," should we question the assumed separation between the public and private spheres that the concealing attributes of the envelope afford? Or here is another way to ask the same question: *is the difference between the public and the private spheres merely a couple of folds?*

When viewing/reading *Flight Patterns*, one is reminded, almost even forced to think, of A.R. Gurney's 1988 play, *Love Letters*. *Love Letters* is located in the historical moment bordering the dominance of *dramatic text-based* theatre and the emergence of *performance* (and performance art and performance studies). Gurney's play (which is only used here as juxtaposition) is a simple exchange of private letters read out loud between a man and a women over the course of nearly 50 years: as such, its on-stage performance is both odd (in that one generally *reads* letters to oneself) and enlightening (in that one publically sees a generally private reaction to reading a letter). Like Gurney's play, which is cast in the historically appropriate mould of dramatic literature, Jahoda's *Flight Patterns* is cast in its own historically appropriate mould of interdisciplinary performance. *Flight Patterns* is similarly significant for the ways in which a *private* form of *written* communication can so effortlessly become a *public performance* of the self. In its historical moment – finding itself firmly located in computer age, but on the historical precipice of the soon-to-be dominant digital age of social media – Jahoda's piece refigures the Yoruban Trickster, Esu-Elegbara, as the anagrammatic trickster-as-letter-writer, A. Bela-Gera. *Flight Patterns* simultaneously exposes the possibilities and also the dangers that a porous public and private sphere has on language and identity formation by prophesizing the blurring of public and private communication.

When *Flight Patterns* was first exhibited, it would have been rather un-*note*-worthy, for while email had begun to cut in to the volume of letters (and bills) sent through postal services, the world and business still used mail. However, three recent events – one representing the established avant-garde, one representing the emerging avant-garde (inspired by the former), and one representing popular culture – bring the art of letter writing (and, thus, *Flight Patterns*) back into our consciousness: (1) the 2014 death of (performance) artist, On Kawara, known for art using *now*-outdated modes of communication (e.g. postcards and telegrams);[1] (2) award-winning poet Chris Hosea's Kawara-inspired still-ongoing, currently exhibited project of using postcards for communication, but, unlike Kawara, relying, largely, on twenty-first century modes of communication for the presentation of his project;[2] and (3) LeBron James' 2014 decision to return *home* to play basketball for the Cleveland Cavaliers, announced publically in a personal letter *enveloped* within *Sports Illustrated* magazine's cover (in stark contrast to James' earlier announcement that he is going to play for the Miami Heat in a televised circus-like ESPN special/spectacle, "The Decision").[3] In light of these above events, Jahoda's piece, now in hindsight, takes on special relevance and heightened importance: in part because it was a signalling of the end, and in part because it was a sign of things to come.

Flight Patterns lives on the border of literature, theatre, and visual art. In this piece, Jahoda contemplates the connection between words (as texts) and acts (as presentations and/or displays), particularly in relation to *performance*. Especially considering the recent due given to the text-performance divide in this journal's 2014 Special Issue on "Rhetoric and Performance," *Flight Patterns* provides a now-timely case study to

examine the *limitations* of scholarly perceptions viewing *text* and *performance* in a dichotomous manner. Jahoda's piece metaphorically anticipates the twenty-first century phenomenon of social media and the ability to digitalize practically anything to demonstrate that the difference between rhetoric as a textual phenomenon and performance as an aesthetic display is vanishing. By discussing identity formation through language that exists and/or is communicated in the borderland between the public and the private sphere, *Flight Patterns* exposes how our identity (conceived and created by a mix of rhetorical iterations and performances of the self) sits ever so tenuously and precariously on the border between self and other.

II. In public *and* private: performance as both rhetorical strategy and aesthetic display?

Crossing not just the disciplinary borders of art, performance art, and life writing, Jahoda's *process* of (1) *writing* a letter (usually in the literary and metaphorical vein); (2) the *act* of sending, receiving, and opening a letter that was always intended to be returned by the postal service; (3) and the public *display* of personal letters as an art installation in an art gallery; highlights the idea of *communicating the self* – an idea of central importance to the study of performance (as *performances of the self*) and to the study of rhetoric (*self-expression* and the commonality, duality, and double-edged sword of *language-identity formation*). By blurring the lines between public and private language by displaying a series of hand-written letters and envelopes sent through the mail, Jahoda questions if the demarcation between public and private language is ever really possible. As a matter of central importance to studies of performance and rhetoric, ultimately, Jahoda suggests that *performances of the self are constructed by language that is unavoidably, and simultaneously, public and private*. Because a letter is "addressed" to someone (both publically on the envelope and privately in the letter, but in *Flight Patterns*, both become public), the *act of addressing* is a *rhetorical performance*, or a *performance of rhetoric*, for the ways in which language, given the public and private nature of Jahoda's *Flight Patterns*, both demarcates and blurs the boundaries of self and other.

   This essay will, hopefully, be of special interest to readers of this particular journal, especially in regards to the recent 2014 *Text and Performance* special issue on "Performance and Rhetoric." Creating a "hyperbolic example" of the disciplinary differences between Performance and Rhetoric to exaggerate and make their point, the editors of the special issue, Mindy Fenske and Dustin Bradley Goltz, explain the difference between performance and rhetoric as, respectively, "a conspicuous aesthetic display" and "a textual phenomenon," but note the problems with this demarcation:

> If "performance" is understood as simply a conspicuous aesthetic display, it is reduced to being an object of inquiry and loses its conceptual power. Conversely, when "rhetoric" is approached as a textual phenomenon, this necessarily undercuts its capacity to explain non- or extra-textual phenomena. (Fenske and Goltz 4)

While the special issue on performance and rhetoric deals more explicitly with the *doing* of interdisciplinary scholarship, that is, focusing on the need and difficulty of interdisciplinarity between performance and rhetoric scholarship, the co-mingling of the *subject* matters of performance studies and rhetoric – admitted-simply stated (above) as "aesthetic

display" and "textual phenomenon," respectively – is key to both reading/interpreting specifically Jahoda's *Flight Patterns*. Jahoda's piece explores how questions of performance and rhetoric overlap when it comes to presenting *texts as art* to be viewed by the public – that is, the "aesthetic display" of a "textual phenomenon." Jahoda's "text" is a series of private letters, but on "aesthetic display" and open for public interpretation.

Jahoda's *Flight Patterns* shows how, in the porous private and public spheres, *language* is used by a "Trickster" to navigate the borders of public and private and of textual phenomena and aesthetic displays to essentially demonstrate that rhetoric and performance are two sides of the same coin. Anticipating both the ability to digitalize almost anything and the omnipresent nature of social media which yield almost no difference between private forms of writing and public performances of the self, on one hand, possessing the power of the Trickster to navigate this porous space with the creative tactful language yields exciting possibilities and new-found control over one's identity. On the other hand, if one does not have the ability (whether due to natural and/or social constraints) to operate like a trickster, then one enters a dangerous space without a means to control one's identity, lessening one's ability to maintain a dividing line between self and other.

To further the goals of the abovementioned Special Issue of bridging the rhetoric (textual)-performance (aesthetic display) divide and exploring modes of interdisciplinarity, Jahoda's *Flight Patterns* exposes the very inadequacy of scholarly *either/or* models to study "aesthetic display" and "textual phenomenon," providing a key case study that requires – as Tami Spry, Marla Kanengieter, and Daniel Wildeson advocate – transcending the *limits* of "Dame Rhetoric" and "Outlaw Performance" (91). Due to the now-dominance of the digital domain and our ability to digitalize practically everything, Jahoda's piece presciently presents a case study where this *either/or* approach to art/literature/theatre/performance criticism *neither* adequately describes our art (broadly defined) *nor* describes art that reflects our new reality of the digital age. Following Spry, Kanengieter, and Wildeson's above charge, one must understand that "possibility and positionality" – the title of their article – is not just a plea to ease the academic rigidity of the text-performance dichotomty, but is also a reflection of what art (very broadly defined) can, and already does, do. In this vein, Jahoda's piece metaphorically suggests and foreshadows that the only differences between public and private, between language and performance, and between self and other are *a couple of folds,* or, more maybe even more appropriately, *simply unfolding for all to see.*

III. Enveloping language

Now consider the analog information internetwork, a century-old combination of character-transmission telegraph, voice-transmission telephone, and physical-transport Post Office networks. Although these different technological systems were each built upon specialized electromechanical devices, all three worked together in many unrecognized ways. The fact that a telegram sold by the telegraph network could be shepherded by messengers through the other two networks on its way to the addressee is but one example of how the telegraph, telephone, and postal system constituted a multimodal information internetwork that began and ended with messengers but encompassed a variety of technologies, commodities, and institutions in between.

A useful way to begin to think about these two internetworks is to use the technological systems framework, which treats individual technologies – whether physical devices or

scripted procedures – not in isolation but together in the service of larger goals. Historians using this framework have convincingly shown how the resulting large-scale arrangements of technologies emerge through a historically specific process of competition, compromise, and happenstance. This process has been variously labeled the "social shaping" or "social construction" of technology, which simply means that the specific kinds of technological infrastructures that result are neither preordained by the technology itself nor free of the material constraints of the physical and chemical properties of matter, but are instead a compromise between technological possibility and societal action–even if in many cases those actions are carried out by a relatively small and elite segment of society. (Greg Downey "Virtual Webs, Physical Technologies, and Hidden Workers" 213–15)

I know very little about the flight strategies of birds. For example, how do birds decide whether to ignore topographic features or follow them? (Agnes "July 26, 2001" "Flight Patterns")

The word "envelope" comes from the French *enveloppe*, adapted from the modern French word for "envelop," *envelopper*. Its Old French predecessors come through the Provencal *envolupar* and *enveloper*. Made up of the French prefix *en-*, meaning "in," and two Romanic bases of obscure origin, *volup-* and *vilup-* (possibly from the Middle English *wlappen*, meaning "to wrap," from an altered form of *wrap*), which are cognate with the Italian *viluppo*, meaning "bundle," envelop, and therefore envelope, mean "in bundle" or "in wrap" (*OED*). This essay concerns itself with the performance of borders that are "in bundle" or "in wrap."

To *unwrap* this idea, it might be productive to follow a slight tangent. The postcard offers a variation of an open envelope. There is obviously no interior or exterior, however, there is a decided front and back. Though totally "open" to unintended eyes, the postcard does have a public side (the picture) and a private side (the writing). Granted, the private side of a postcard is not necessarily private, in the sense of the word that only the intended reader may read it, but there is a shared specificity between writer and intended reader that cloaks the openness of the writing. Whereas the picture on the postcard needs (sometimes) very little contextualization to, at least, be enjoyed by the casual onlooker, the missing contextualization of shared experience can leave the unintended reader feeling as though he or she is missing something. In that sense, a postcard still contains an amount of privacy. Nonetheless, partly due to its very low cost, the postcard opens (or opened) the world up to a great influx of private conversations that could be consumed by the public. However, because of the very public and private nature of the postcard, a different side of specificity comes under attack: Yoke-Sum Wong writes, "A world in which communication is universally possible is a world in which not much can be said with specificity, and even less with grace, consistency, or sophistication" (Wong 334). Though the writing may be less specific, the vague nature of unspecificity (a strain of universality) reveals so little detail about those in conversation (the writer and intended reader) that the postcard is effectively entirely private.

The intermingling of public and private create, not necessarily a simpler form than the letter, but one that is, in some ways, more complex. Hosea speaks to this very notion of the public and private intermingling on a postcard in his abovementioned piece, "What Do You Feel?":

I thought of, and still think of What Do You Feel? as an experiment. I didn't know what I was hoping to accomplish or demonstrate at the start of the project, and still don't. I had some ideas. I hoped to work my way back to a more polite, neutral, and bland approach to

meeting strangers, and to demonstrate to myself that I was capable of a kind of profession-
alism in art making that I hadn't tested, to the same degree, by writing and reading poems.
But beyond that it was a mystery to me. It remains, I suppose, a kind of prayer in that the
majority of the cards go unanswered. So it is a kind of supplication, I guess. Although it
was recently reported that US spy agencies have sophisticated mail reading technology, so
that in a sense "closed" forms like handwritten letters are quite open for certain individuals,
it's true that there is something about the postcard that is particularly open, available to
anyone who might pick it up. Postcard writers are always writing for more than one audience,
in a sense, and they can't quite ever be sure which people will form that audience. So you get a
kind of generic, often enthusiastic, summing up. Beyond which, of course, I publish the post-
cards on my website, so subjects are aware that they will have an audience of some size, an
audience that is anonymous. However, it is interesting for me to see how some subjects try to
subvert this flattening-out effect by deploying personal (even quite personal) information.
Some of cards could just as well have been sent to Dear Abby. Which, I suppose, is a way
of being private in public, which is part of the interest of advice columns, that they teach
us how to parse our most private worries acceptably. They prune or edit down our lamenta-
tions. With a few important exceptions, I view all of the language on the cards as impersonal,
in that as part of the series what is personal about them is stretched thin, leaving one more
blot in a long swatch of language. Taken collectively, the cards are personal, in that they
might say something about New York City, viewed as a golem, perhaps. But one by one, indi-
vidually, they look to me like more and more delicious sausage links. I really enjoy getting
them. If I often photograph them against reproductions of famous works of art, it is
because I see the cards as phrases in some vast, collective wall text. I think any language
which will conduce toward group action and group change must draw equally, perhaps,
on the personal and impersonal. So in a sense I am simply the custodian of these postcards,
a municipal worker for a bureau to come. (Hosea, Interview)

And, further, Wong notes the fragmentation that the postcard elicited:

The postcard rendered an empire [Britain] as fragments. Consider how fragments manifest
themselves, interlacing the universe of everyday lives – whole intricate worlds, circles other-
wise closed to view, are presented in extract for those who do not take to adventuring, labor-
ing over hard languages, making friends and enemies, learning to "follow" what is said and
what is done. Hindu temples, pyramids, medieval castles, wild game, rattan baskets, and
scantily clad peoples lay alongside the tea cozies in Victorian or Edwardian front rooms
and parlors and were displayed and passed around, pasted randomly or categorically in a
scrapbook or by themselves, evoking myriad responses from gasps to sighs, from giggles
to outrage, from a brief comment to a less brief discussion – and, often enough, a complete
lack of interest. (Wong 356)

The postcard, thus, encouraged and encourages a, sometimes unintended, cultural pas-
tiche. The public form of private writing creates/ed a reliance on the picture to mediate
public and private conversation. Again, the lack of specificity only made/majes the posses-
sion of private experiences that much more necessary. Like a "inside joke," only those who
share the same experiences and knowledge will fully understand it.

The postcard, then, "speaks" like the Signifying Monkey. In his oft-quoted chapter,
"The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey,"
Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls the Signifying Monkey, "he who dwells at the margins of dis-
course, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language" (Gates
988). Occupying a liminal space in language, the Signifying Monkey – an archetypal sig-
nifier in black mythology, most well known in Yoruba mythology as Esu-Elegbara – sub-
verts hegemony by reworking the very same hegemonic norms (of language). Known as a

trickster, the Signifying Monkey is "guardian of the crossroads": "These trickster figures, aspects of *Esu*, are primarily mediators: as tricksters they are mediators, and their mediations are tricks" (Gates 988). This space of the crossroads, then, becomes the threshold of unstable interpretation. As "*Esu* is the Black Interpreter, the Yoruba god of indeterminacy" (Gates 989), the postcard is the indeterminate signified that "embodies the ambiguities of language." Where language works by invoking the referentially specific, the postcard (for all except one) plays off of unspecificity. Why Jahoda invokes the Yoruban trickster is because in the trope of the Signifying Monkey, what the trickster specifically does is reinvent the private uses of language in the face of a vast public, creating a liminal space of private interpretation.

In the same manner, in Jahoda's *Flight Patterns*, she unfolded the envelopes in a number of ways to make them "postcards": namely, displaying torn open envelopes; letters addressed to the ambiguous "A"; and accompanying the letters with a picture. However, the presence of the envelope highlights the dual public–private nature of, not just the postcard, but of writing and communication in general. The envelope invokes a public transfer of private communication that, ultimately in this case, negates itself with its return: remaining entirely private, shared with nobody. But Jahoda's impulse to reveal the utterly private to the public reveals how little she has given up. There is a unique "intersection" between specificity and lack of it, and place and placelessness. Occupying this unique "space" of place and placelessness is the messenger: Esu-Elegbara. Appearing in six of her letters, Esu-Elegbara weaves in and out. "Stepping out of the offices of GEO Information and Mapping," Esu-Elegbara – an anagram of the female *letter writer*, A. Bela-Gera – functions like a "letter carrier" (a postman), or rather, he is a "carrier" of "envelopes."

The word "carry" has its origins in the Latin *carricare*, meaning "load." Though *carricare* was first adopted by Old French to form *charchier* and *chargier*, which would eventually take form to become "charge," it later became *carier* and *charier* (also in Old French) used in the sense of "transport in a cart." In modern English, "carry" has two main divisions: one of which is where "removal," "transport," or "motion" serves as the underlying notion behind the meaning of the word; the second of which is where "support" serves as the principal notion (*OED*). In this sense, as a "carrier" of "envelopes," Esu-Elegbara both "bears" what is "in wrap" and is an agent of motion and transference; in this guise, he performs how language can be carried across borders or dwell within them.

> A swan rose from the waters off a lake. Its neck, the trickster noticed, was pink as the single magnolia blossom on a nearby tree. Esu-Elegbara entered the mind of the flying bird and saw a map of a city spread below. (Agnes, "July 13, 2001")

The photograph that accompanies the letter and envelope for "July 13, 2001," and thus begins *Flight Patterns*, is a black-and-white photograph of an origami*esque* swan (or another type of bird of the same physical stature). What is striking about this photograph is not the almost-stark white contrasting against the deep black background, but the subtle creases of the bird's midsection and the gaping hole under that midsection where the bird's innards should be found. What holds the head and tail, which appears to be one long piece, to the wings, which sit on top of the body of the swan? How does the body of the swan "carry" the wings, which appear to be unattached and merely resting on the body?

Paper-folding, or origami, works by the same following principles as language. The first objection to this argument may be that paper-folding is not quite an arbitrary science (if we can call it that, though there are many manuals of standardized instruction). However, like the Saussurean onomatopoeia, and like language, paper-folding "is only the approximate imitation, already partly conventionalized" (Saussure 69). Paper-folding – again, like language – is a suggestion, a referential approximation that requires a certain amount of shared specificity. Beginning with a flat piece of paper, each fold, each crease brings about some meaning lost and some meaning gained: simultaneous stability and instability are stable constants. Likewise, a border is a crease made by language. The idea of a border, and the act of naming it, requires (though not sonorously, but logically) a referential approximation of an understood, or explainable reality that also requires a shared specificity of not just the "border," but the surroundings.

Therefore, being "at a juncture, an intersection" is being at a place of linguistic power (Jahoda July 13). It is quite empowering to be able to crease language, to give shape to what appears unshapeable. But it is a burden, "a load," fraught with, ultimately, responsibility. Thus, it must be Esu-Elegbara who mediates this power. For language is something slightly out of the control of humans. Though humans may have created language, language shapes how humans think. There is something mystical, but also disfiguring about having power over and within language. In "Yoruba mythology, *Esu* always limps because his legs are of different lengths: one is anchored in the realm of the gods, and the other rests in this human world" (Gates 988). But it takes one who understands disfiguration to be able to transubstantiate and understand the intricate folds and borders that shape our reality: "Esu-Elegbara entered the mind of the flying bird and saw a map of a city spread below." Jahoda's winged Esu-Elegbara – whose *Esu* comes even closer to the winged Greek god, Hermes (whose "role as interpreter lent his name to 'hermeneutics'"), than the *Esu* that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. describes – must take flight. Esu-Elegbara can only understand reality while he is in motion. Similarly, borders can only really be understood when they are crossed and experienced from both sides. Geography, then, with its geological foundations, gives artists a language with which to understand a reality grounded in place:

> An uncanny similarity is emerging between the evolution of certain kinds of art work and the process of geological formation. Geological strata are formed in a two part process: *sedimentation*, or the depositing of material, followed by the *folding* process that fuses the material into a stable and functional structure. This stratification process has been described like this: "Strata . . . consist of imprisoning intensities or singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy. Strata are acts of capture … they proceed simultaneously by code and territoriality." (Ritchie 53)

Thus, when Esu-Elegbara emerges "out of the offices of GEO Information and Mapping," he is ready to deliver the *folds* to humans; he "carries envelopes" that "fuse the material into a stable and functional structure" through language: for "[*Esu*] is known as the divine linguist, the keeper of *ase* (*logos*) with which Olodumare created the universe" (Gates 988).

Jahoda's "July 21, 2001" letter sticks out among the rest for its strength of narrative, overall beauty of language, and its thematic depth, especially in its handling of borders. The letter begins with its normal address to "A" and a question: "Have you ever been inside one of those elegant apartment buildings on the Upper West Side of Manhattan?" With this question, Agnes then describes a foreign world that few are privileged to inhabit.

She writes to "A" that her reason for going was an interview for a job as a free-lance editor. She had to knock on the door, as there was no doorbell. A man, who Agnes described as possessing "a grayness, like a prisoner in need of a change of air," undid the deadbolt and opened the door. Agnes followed the man in and was offered a chair, to which she replied that she would rather stand. She asked whether the man made his living as a writer, and he said "sometimes" and then he lit a cigarette. There is a cool distance in this opening. The elegance, perhaps the plush environment that we expect to encounter, is instead cloaked in "a grayness." Agnes seems to have stepped into a jail, having followed a "prisoner" into an apartment "deadbolt[ed]" to the world. The conversation between the man and Agnes sounds awkward, more for Agnes than for the man, however.

The events and even the tone of Agnes' account to "A" suddenly change when Agnes' impulse, rather than her polite performance, takes over:

> I stepped backwards onto a pile of crumpled papers, my shoe leaving an imprint across a number of sheets. The man turned his head, exhaled, and then flicked some ash into a saucer. I bent down, intending to straighten the papers but, instead, picked up a sheet, and read in a whisper.
> "I took the bird by its neck and squeezed hard. Its breath came in short bursts. A heat from its swelling breast warmed my palm. Its death was repulsive."
> The man smiled and said that he had an interest in ornithology, that he wrote about flight strategies in his free time. "Actually," he continued, I'm an engineer, specializing in invisible fencing for border territories. (Jahoda July 21)

"Enclosure" defines the actions and desires, at least associated with, the engineer. Not all *fold*s are healthy and productive. With the image of the bird being strangled in the tightening grip of the warm palm, we see the destructive nature of the border. He studies, not birds, but "ornithology": he studies the *study* of birds. As a branch of zoology, ornithology is interested in the classification of creatures within this category. Foucault discussed time and time again how medicalization and classification was both productive and dangerous; Zen Buddhism says that if you name something, you destroy it. The engineer specializes in "invisible fencing for border territories." Thus, he specializes in that which masks its own power.

Though the engineer clearly desired control, it was error, however, that allowed Agnes and this man to connect and produce a smile. Up to the point where Agnes stepped on the piece of paper, the introductions, pleasantries and start of the interview had a "scripted" feel, and we know, like the bird gasping for breath, the engineer was "in need of a change of air." It was at the moment of "improvisation" that the strictures relaxed; it was at that moment that the engineer smiled.

The letter concludes: "This is a city of electronic signals that causes birds in flight to lose direction" (Jahoda, July 21). We know that the birds are displaced and maybe lost, and we must pity that our human interference caused this, but we may also smile, for even the birds will now get their moment of improvisation.

IV. Performing language in public/private: performing ourselves

> I'm doing this essay because I want an opportunity to explain myself uninterrupted. I don't want anyone thinking: *He and Erik Spoelstra didn't get along. … He and Riles didn't get along. … The Heat couldn't put the right team together*. That's absolutely not true.

I'm not having a press conference or a party. After this, it's time to get to work. (LeBron James "I'm Coming Home")

Last night Esu-Elegbara came to me as a birdman, carrying a book of empty pages. Placing the book in my hands, he told me to collect all my memories, envision them as unidentifiable landscapes, and walk without origin or destination.

Then he said, "When you have finished your journey, return the book to me." (Agnes, "August 4, 2001")

Given the rise of both private and/or public communication over the past decade-plus through a largely public forum – social media via the internet – Lacan's description of the mirror stage, his analysis of a child's first recognition of himself or herself in a mirror and misinterpreting his or her own individuality, is extremely applicable here. With language we try to right/write our earlier misinterpretation (think of James' letter) by reifying our boundaries through an "address": for example, "you," "Joe," "Mr. Smith," "Mom," etc. and referring to ourselves as "me" or "I," or by our own names.

Suzanne M. Daughton and Nathan P. Stucky, in the same abovementioned special issue on "Performance and Rhetoric" in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, reiterate Mary Frances HopKins' concern about the "facile construction of rhetoric *as* performance," especially in relation to the misinformation surrounding the similarities and difference between performance and Austin's *performatives*, by suggesting that performance can be a rhetorical *event* and act (120). The "address" (e.g. as above, "you," "Dad," "me," "Mrs. Jones," etc.) – thought of both literally and figuratively as a performance and as a rhetorical event and act, in the vein of Daughton and Stucky – is a *performative*, the notion of which J. L. Austin elucidated in order to refute (logical positivists) that a statement is necessarily *either* true or false, but can, in fact, be *neither* true nor false, instead performing something or performing some action. In this case, it is through this process of "addressing" that we, in a sense, dub ourselves "me" or "I" or dub others as "not me." What we dub (what is *performed*) in an address is not the giving out of a name, but the statement of "address" is/becomes an affirmation and/or construction of an identity, or identities (in relation to ourselves): an "address" is, thus, a rhetorical performance, or a performance of rhetoric.

Thus, everything about the letter form encourages an *address*: an envelope needs both an address where the letter will be sent and a return address, demarcating a division of place, and the letter needs an address to the person to whom you are writing – for example, "Dear A," – and an addressing of yourself – your own name, for example, "Agnes." These "addresses," meant to denote where your body, personality, and personal experience end and another's begin, are made through language: made in a common language that both parties must be able to understand. But as Jahoda makes clear in *Flight Patterns*, our own "addresses" are uninhabitable: we occupy an "unknown address." We speak to each other in the crossroads, in an indeterminate place where only *Esu* can reside. Language creates untrue borders that isolate individuals in their bodies: "A" is distinct from "Agnes." But as Jahoda already suggested, "This is a city of electronic signals that causes birds in flight to lose direction." The public, ambiguous "A" is a facet of Anges' private self, forged, ultimately, from the same letters, words, phrases, sentences and definitions.

With language, as *Flight Patterns* suggests, as well as in LeBron James' recent open letter, we do not reinscribe our distinct borders, again reifying our original misinterpretation, rather, we enter the crossroads between the public and the private (a *space* much more understandable and much more commonly experienced in the second decade of this century than in 2001). We enter the juncture where we share our own indeterminacy and finally connect and conjoin to another human being. But we must also "carry" our own private – what is "in wrap" – in public: we must speak to others in order to speak to ourselves. We send out letters (and messages and Facebook posts and Instagram pictures) that we know will never be received: from and to addresses that do not really exist. Yet we do this because of our original misinterpretation. We spend our entire lives using language to try to enter the space of the *trickster*, so that we too may become disfigured, folded and unfolded as we so desire, with "one leg anchored in the realm of the gods, and the other rest[ing] in this human world." Only then, when we interpret our indeterminacy correctly, will we feel comfortable in our space in the crossroads.

Notes

1. In 2014, Kawara passed away. Kawara was known for thinking about time, and two of his most famous works that contemplate the passage and marking of time are particularly relevant to this essay. Starting in 1970 and sending his last telegram in 2000, just a few years before Western Union stopped its telegram service, Kawara composed his piece "I Am Still Alive," dispatching about 900 telegrams with the simple message, "I am still alive." Kawara's "I Got Up" is another art project that is composed of a collection of thousands of postcards postmarked from 1968 to 1979, many sent to his friend and artist, John Baldessari, that simply stated "I got up," with an accompanying time stamp marking the time he awoke that particular morning. The Guggenheim Museum is exhibiting the work of Kawara in 2015.

2. Exhibiting also in 2015 in New York City, and influenced by Kawara's "I Got Up," the still-ongoing three-year project, entitled "What Do You Feel?," by Chris Hosea – whose 2014 book of poetry, *Put Your Hands In*, won the prestigious Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets in 2013, judged that year by John Ashbery – appeared as a part of a larger exhibition of Hosea's work at the Transmitter Gallery throughout the month of July 2015. Hosea collects and displays the postcards he receives in the mail after he approaches strangers and gives them a stamped and self-addressed postcard with just the question, "WHAT DO YOU FEEL?" Hosea's primary means of making the postcards public before his 2015 exhibit was, and continues to be, via his website, <http://chrishosea.com>, and public posts of the returned postcards on his Facebook page. Thus, "What Do You Feel?" is composed on a now-almost outdated mode of communication, the postcard, but is presented (to the majority of people who have and will encounter the project) via two twenty-first century modes of communication: a personal website and public posts on Facebook.

3. In 2010, LeBron James, the NBA basketball superstar, appeared in the ESPN feature presentation, "The Decision." Drawing nearly 10 million viewers (nielsen.com), the live announcement filled, with circus theatrics (i.e. dramatic lighting and pyrotechnics), immediately rocked the internet and Twitterverse. The theatricality of "The Decision" (along with his [often-perceived as pompous] proclamation, "I'm bringing my talents to South Beach") was to blame for a great deal of the criticism surrounding James' announcement that as a free agent, he was leaving his hometown team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, to join forces and create a "Big Three" for the Miami Heat. The form of this announcement probably should not have come as *that* much of a surprise given that the very economy of professional basketball is entertainment, with its performers and spectators: the higher the theatrics, drama, and story, generally the higher the spectatorship and the greater the flow of dollars. But it was the

public interpretation of this televised *event*, "The Decision," that turned LeBron into a "villain," as he commonly came to be known.

Thus, it was in this context that LeBron James, finding himself, again, a free agent, wrote an essay in a summer 2014 issue of *Sports Illustrated* – one of the most hallowed and traditional journalistic outlets for sports coverage and commentary – concerning his decision to return home to play for Cleveland. In such contrast to his earlier "Decision," the essay is essentially a personal letter (in part to himself and) to his entire hometown (and to the world). James' *open letter*, as *privately* told to someone at *Sport Illustrated*, but *addressed to nobody* in particular *within* the magazine's front and back cover, and its written form and its perceived initial success, being well received in the media, in such stark contrast to the 2010 television special.

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