

## Houston Philosophical Society Dinner and Lecture

Cohen House, Rice University

October 17, 2019

After cocktails and dinner, President Browning introduced the guests, reminded those present that new members would be voted on at the November meeting, and congratulated David Furlow.

The program, **“Inventing Tomorrow: A Duet of Technology and Art,”** was presented by **Evans Hankey** and **Anthony Brandt**.

Ms. Hankey followed her curiosity as to how things work to a career at Apple product design, where she has worked for twenty years. She quoted Steve Jobs, “The reason we do what we do is to express our gratitude to our species.”

Mr. Brandt, a composer, said his parents gave him only constructive toys, and he learned to ask three things: (1) Do it yourself; (2) What can you do all day and enjoy?; and (3) Do you want to join the guild of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven?

Ms. Hankey said in designing new products at Apple, one must avoid preconceived notions, feel a “beginner’s mind,” and then share thoughts, disassociating one’s ego from one’s idea.

Mr. Brandt said Beethoven was always trying to do something new and different. Composition engraves the minds of the audience. The composer has to balance novelty with familiarity. In music, one may use the same key but different ideas; or change the key and keep the one original idea. High consensus work has a strong appeal but lasts only a short time; low consensus work is the opposite. Art is on the low-consensus side: you may not like it, but it should be worth your time and not just what all already know and like.

Ms. Hankey mentioned the handle on the first IMAC as something familiar but different. At Apple, they try for the intuitive but use a little surprise, such as the packaging. Another example is the new wireless earphones, which work when you open them and recharge when put back in their box. Function plus beauty, surprise and delight.

Mr. Brandt said we invent beauty, and it is always a work in progress. In the twentieth century, Japan and Africa provided new musical styles to the European tradition. For example, the gamelan is detuned for interest. Now we know too much to go back to a canon—we are all explorers now. He works at his computer, which plays the written music back to him; he saves his drafts.

Ms. Hankey said her work is trying to think of new things—a human, not a machine, job. She believes humanities has a role in the future; it is still important but presently underrepresented.

Mr. Brandt said a creator cannot be right all the time, as a computer is. Creator and computer are complementary. A computer can write a symphony in seconds, but it’s not something you want to hear again.

Both agreed: if you don’t fail, you aren’t trying.