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A Posthuman Performance Methodology

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Devising is a collaborative method of experimental theatre production that seeks to decenter traditional power structures. Posthumanism is a philosophical lens that uses postmodern ideology to critique and expand Humanist convictions. Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale *was a cast performance that deployed devising methodologies in order to stage posthumanist research. This essay examines* Cybernetic Fruit *in order to reveal unique processes, question authorship, and articulate the connections between posthumanism and devising.*

Keywords: Posthumanism; Devising; Performance Studies; Staged Performance

In my experiences with any creative project, the process is where much of the magic happens. Whether that process involves developing film, cutting up magazines, or researching passionately, it is during the creation that I learn about myself, the world, and the material quality of art-making. If my synapses are firing in collaboration with those of others, a solar system of potential mishaps and miracles is introduced, and the project is open to the magic of chance. Buddhist sand-sculptors, Jackson Pollock, and Dada practitioners have all taken dips in the deep-end of emergent process-based art practices, and returned for air with good reviews. This methodology of artistic alchemy provides a generative space where the possibilities border on the infinite. It goes without saying that the process is no way less than the product.

When speaking in terms of devised theatre, the process is as much about producing a method as it is for creating a theatrical work. As Alison Oddey puts it, "any definition of devised theatre must include process (finding the ways and means to share an artistic journey together), collaboration (working with others), multi-vision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events), and the creation of an artistic

product" (3). For *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale,* this undertaking was about building a unique methodology, digging into inspiring theoretical concepts, and forging gratifying creative partnerships. This process began seven months prior to the show's debut.

Cybernetic Fruit (CF) was a show produced in the Kleinau Theatre in September 2009. It was written through devising with the CF Collective and co-directed by Shauna MacDonald and myself. From the first moment Shauna and I met to discuss the possibility of a project, I knew that the methods we would use for creating this show would be different. I cannot say that they were entirely unique, but I can say they were unique to us. At every step of the way, we carved out our own methodology through experimentation. Of course, we had inspirations. We were not the first (or among the first hundred) collaborators to employ devising methods to generate a script (The Wooster Group, Goat Island, and Elevator Repair Service were far ahead of us in that respect). In my experience however, I haven't seen anyone do it quite the same way.

Part of this came from our shared interest in posthumanism, or the philosophical movement to critique and challenge humanism. This essay seeks to connect posthumanism to devised methods of script production through an analysis of our show *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*. Through this *Cybernetic* lens, I describe devising as a posthuman performance methodology.

Devising Perspectives

Employing a devising methodology is about honoring the generative impulses of play. Children do this all the time. I can remember staging full-length soap operas with my Barbie dolls and my childhood friends. I suppose I've always harbored directorial impulses. Before *Cybernetic Fruit,* I had a few experiences with devised theatre. Using these narratives, and the work of Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, and Allison Oddey, I have come to some stable notions of devising practice. My knowledge of devising has also come to shape what I know about posthumanism.

My Devising Experiences

My first exposure to the concept of devising came when I was an undergraduate student. In a Staging Literature course, we formed groups and set to work on semester-length projects. We were a group of four women: two undergrads and two graduate students who had never before met. The first installment of the piece was focused on body image and concretized through ballet. Our script incorporated the words of Emma Goldman (from *Anarchism and Other Essays*), various found texts and objects, sections of writings from each of our journals, and text derived through improvisation.

A few days prior to our final class performance, one of the women in the group expressed some reservations about the script. She was particularly

disturbed by the sections of writing drawn from the work of Emma Goldman. As a devout Christian, she felt that the work we were doing was "anti-family" and "inappropriate." We sat down with her and combed through the entire script, reallocating the lines that she felt uncomfortable speaking. We changed the blocking so that she would not be featured in this particular scene. We tried to be compassionate to her position, even as she edited down the sections of text she had written herself. The next day, she dropped the class and withdrew from the department, leaving her master's degree unfinished.

Using a tape recorder to deliver her lines, we returned to the original script, adding a heated rant about the oppressive force of powerful identities. In several scenes, we left the blocking as it had been, further highlighting the absence of her body. She was present in embodied nonattendance, and the show was performed roughly as planned. The result was powerful and poignant. It was actually better than it would have been before. This experience taught me the value of flexibility and showed me the beauty of artistic accidents. Though my initial journey was rough, I was hooked on devising for life.

The first creative project I worked on as a graduate student was called *Rip Cardigan and the History of the Future.* After auditioning for a part in the show, I was asked to come aboard as assistant director. The concept of the show (a visual representation of a 1940s radio drama) and the characters had all been conceived by the director, Charlie Parrot, but the relationships between characters and various plot elements had yet to be developed. Every night during the first two weeks of rehearsal, we would divide the cast into various character groups and set an agenda for their improvisational work that night. Near the end of rehearsal, we would all reconvene in the theatre and different groups would perform the work they had done. One evening we sent Rip Cardigan (the show's unlikely hero) and Dr. Improbable (his long-time nemesis) into the other room with the task of determining how they met and the relationship of their conflict. When the two performers reemerged at the end of the night, they revealed that Rip and Dr. Improbable had been college roommates, that Dr. Improbable was the first to wear that style of sweater vest, and that Rip had stolen away Dr. Improbable's girlfriend Coco. All cast members were encouraged to comment on the work as Charlie and I took notes. Out of mini-performances like these, and drawing on the comments from the cast, Charlie would then go home and write up the scenes.

In spring of that same year, I was cast in a show entitled *Bat on a Wyre.* This show was directed by Craig Gingrich-Philbrook and Jonny Gray. Like *Rip Cardigan*, the basic plot and character sketches were already in place, with a great deal of space left for experimentation and evolution. Very early in the rehearsal process, we were asked to arrive in character. I played the part of Penny Lane Mozzarella (a mysterious 11-year-old) and arrived wearing a fluffy dress and cat ears. All members of the cast (in various levels of costume) and our two directors sat at a long table and shared dinner in character. In addition to eating and interacting, each of us was also given an index card

with a set of instructions or goals. My index card instructed me to find out whether or not Weasel (another character) was my father.

I found every one of these devising experiences to be productive; out of each, I learned different things, ranging from specific methodologies of generating a script, to negotiating interpersonal drama. I keep these experiences in my creative toolbox and I draw on them whenever I am working on a show, teaching a class, or drafting a paper. These experiences prepared me for and propelled me toward the creation of *Cybernetic Fruit.* Through these experiences I have come to accept devising as a kind of way of life.

Defining Devising and Posthumanism

So how do we define devising? At its simplest, devising is a way of creating non-traditional theatre. Heddon and Milling say that devising "is best described as a set of strategies" (2) used to "generate a performance from scratch, as a group, without a preexisting script" (3). Oddey tells us that a "devised theatre product is work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration" (1). It is a method of creating a staged, aesthetic event. But to begin with, it is a method for creating a *method.*

In some ways it is simple, while also remaining infinite. This proposes a sort of existential dilemma in its description. Heddon and Milling synthesize the work of many authors, from theatre practitioners like Howard Barker to dance artists like Anna Halprin, to compile the following list:

> Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative, language; innovative; risky, inventive, spontaneous; experimental, non-literary. (5)

So how do we define posthumanism? I mentioned above that posthumanism is the philosophical movement created to critique humanism. Humanism means a lot of different things to a lot of different people, but according to both the original Humanist Manifesto (and its revisions) and the American Humanist Association, the fundamental belief is the ability for human beings to lead fulfilling lives without God, using reason to guide their moral judgments.

The other major thread of humanism is the belief that humans, essentially, *are* the world. This tendency can be summed up by Protagoras's outdated assumption that "Man is the measure of all things" (Baldwin). Early cracks in the general faith of the Church (beginning from the time of Galileo) were smoothly replaced by science and reason, evolving into what we began to call humanism in the early 1900s (the first manifesto was published in 1933).

On the bright side, humanist perspectives were essential in wrestling control from the Church and ushering in "free thinkers." The early humanists gave birth to what we think of as "human rights," and why we study in a field known as the "humanities." On the not-so-bright side, this elevation of humanity certainly excludes many kinds of people, has been used to justify all manner of atrocities, and visualizes a universe where the Sun still rotates around the Earth (in other words, that humans are always the center of it).

Posthumanism critiques humanism; more specifically, it critiques the autonomous human subject of modernism or of the Enlightenment. In this way, posthumanism aligns itself effectively with postmodernism, questioning rationality, truth, science, and certainly perfection, all in an effort to deconstruct and redefine what exactly it means to be human. The central project of a posthuman discourse is to directly challenge Protagoras's proclamation and grant agency to non-human subjects (e.g., marginalized human "others," animals, plants, the Earth, or even machines and cyborgs). The cyborg (being both organic and mechanical) has become a sort of mascot for posthuman discourse (Haraway; Gray).

Robert Pepperell suggests that three elements comprise the conditions of the posthuman era. First, we have the end of a human-centered universe (171). Second, the posthuman condition is about the evolution of life, both genetically and mechanically, which does not necessarily mean the extinction of the human species (171). Third, posthumanism concerns itself with how we live. Manifestations of the apparent degradation of humanism can be found in all equal rights (and animal rights) movements. It has to do with the "recognition that none of us is actually distinct from one another. To harm anything is to harm oneself" (172). In this posthuman era, people have begun to open their hearts to encounters with the surreal, and synchronicity shows us that we are not always in control of meaning. Ultimately, the posthuman era comes at a time when we are not sure what it means to be human. This productive troubling of the human category extends outward, allowing us to see all categorizations not as finite, but fluid.

To summarize: Devising is (a) a way of creating a staged, aesthetic performance, (b) a means to challenge the notion of text-centered theatrical practices and the hierarchies found therein, and (c) a process done through collaboration. Posthumanism is (a) a critique of humanism, (b) a way to question the autonomous human subject, and (c) a time when humans are not afraid of the kinship within non-human others. Like the cyborg, posthumanism and devising found fruitful hybridity in the process of our show.

Devising *Cybernetic Fruit*

It all started with a dream. I don't recall the details, but I know it involved Shauna's cyborg persona, Viscera. Like Jung, I tend to believe there is truth present in dreams, and like Breton, I think dreams contain ripe artistic material. I woke up and emailed Shauna. I suggested we propose a show together, possibly trying to locate cyborgian creation myths. Within minutes, Shauna agreed to the project.

In order to draft a proposal for this show, Shauna and I spent a lot of time brainstorming. We generated lists of influences (*Labyrinth*, Donna Haraway, Joseph Campbell, the Care Bears, etc.) and genres with which we wanted to play. We combed step-by-step through the Kleinau Theatre proposal request, carefully answering each of the queries. Forming the theoretical framework was relatively easy, given our shared interests in posthumanism and fairytales. In the original show proposal, we wrote:

> We plan to play with and against basic fairy tale structures as outlined by structuralist and psychoanalytic scholars. Through a process of devising, we will, together with the cast, add flesh to these structural bones to create a postmodern, surreal performance that challenges humanism, explores cyborg subjectivities, and deconstructs the modern telos of perfection. (1)

While using a fairytale structure was useful to us, we aimed to filter this structure through a feminist, posthumanist lens:

> We will explore what happens when archetypal fairytale characters are transported from their traditional contexts into an imagined posthuman world. Informed by Jungian archetypes, the literature of fairytale characters, and the conventions of science-fiction, we will create a cast of posthuman characters that will be both familiar and strange. We conceive of the show as an adaptation in which we remix archetypes to explore the possibilities of posthumanism. (1)

Of course, this method sounds very lovely, and the proposal was nothing if not genuine. However, we still had to figure out how to materially manifest these ideas.

Our first idea was the inclusion of summer devising workshops. The impetus for creating such workshops was originally lack of time: four weeks (the length of time from when the fall semester started and when our show was set to open) seemed like way too little time to put together a devised show. At the same time, finding performers to not only audition over the summer (ultimately excluding anyone who was new or out of town) but to also commit to a longer rehearsal during those last precious moments of summer vacation seemed unrealistic.

As a way to navigate this problem, Shauna and I created summer devising workshops. These were voluntary play dates that were open to fellow speech communication students and members of the community. People who had no real intention of auditioning or dedicating a full month to production, but who wanted to be involved, were invited. Those who wanted a part in the show were strongly encouraged to attend. Some (though not all) of the people from each workshop ultimately ended up joining the cast.

During these workshops, we participated in arts and crafts (creating a gigantic, posthuman, collage-landscape which lived in the green room for the duration of the project), free-writing exercises, and movement-based image theatre. We also did some improvisational devising, dividing the players into groups and asking them to create skits with various goals in mind. During one of these workshops, we asked participants to create a challenge that caused them to question "memory." This resulted in the idea of misplacing a memory crystal, which became central to the plot of *Cybernetic Fruit*. During another workshop, we asked participants to display examples of poetic and non-rational language, which went on to shape our conception of "the language problem," which also functioned to drive the plot of the show.

The use of these summer workshops allowed Shauna and me to use devised material to flesh out our original, pre-rehearsal plot arc. This practice also allowed performers an early glimpse into the project, while also creating space for input from non-performers, and other individuals who would not go on to join the cast.

Finally, it was time to cast the show. Wanting to use the audition time as a generative space, we asked potential performers to prepare a costumed 3-5 minute cyborg performance in which they discussed their own stories of origin or creation myths. We also had each of them perform a cold reading from either *Edward Scissorhands* or *Labyrinth*. The auditions exceeded our expectations. We had just the right amount of performers to cast the roles we had in mind, and each performer seemed to clearly fit into a character. In fact, Shauna and I had already planned the characters of the gender-bending posthuman twins, and sure enough, Sam Sloan and Nichole Nicholson came as matching cyborg twins who spoke in unison. It was from this audition that Lobo and Lodi were born.

On the first day of rehearsal, we presented the cast with a double-sided sheet of information. This piece of paper was our collective jumping-off point. Shauna and I worked hard to cultivate a map of what we were working toward while intentionally maintaining a substantial amount of open space. We endeavored to find an appropriate ratio between what we knew and what we wanted to find out. What follows are the original character sketches, which comprised the front page of the very first handout:

> **Red** (Anna): The heroine of our quest. Witty. Hip. Cute. Cutting edge. A human-to-machine cyborg (htm). Obsessed with optimal performance/perfection.

Granny (Charlie): "mother" of Red, although their actual relationship remains ambiguous. Afflicted by "language problem" but unconcerned. New age. Wise. Grows an herb garden. Think Diana Tigerlily.

Newton (Kyle): Rafiki-type character. Hits Red on head with apple to thrust her on her quest. Seems sneaky/foolish but is actually very wise. Tricks Red into doing things, but always with a purpose.

MacIntosh (Jenn): Riddler of memory. Bumbly mechanic. M.A.C = memory altering cyborg. Red visits her for a repair and she "messes up" her memory.

Aurora (Molly): Riddler of body image/beauty. Goddess/ spider. Speaks in riddles. Beautiful, seductive, mysterious. Almost like a live hologram.

Lobo & Lodi (Sam and Nichole. In either order. Probably we never really know which one is which. Maybe they don't even know.): Twin riddlers of gender. Androgynous or inter-sexed. Tweedle dee/Tweedle dum meets those guys from *Labyrinth* ("One of us always tells the truth and one of us always lies."). Work with the characters from your audition.

Twenty Ounce (Lindsay): Red's sidekick. Animal/ human/machine. Machine-to-human cyborg (mtc). Think Scarecrow from *Wizard of Oz*, Donkey from *Shrek*.

Narrator (Heather): Somehow we want this to involve a puppet? She introduces the story, the characters, and keeps up to date with what's happening "back at the ranch." She is able to interact with the story/characters. May be in control of the entire story/fairy tale world (hence the puppet imagery)? ("Character Sketches and Plot" 1)

For our next meeting, we asked the cast to come in some form of costume, and be ready to sit in the "hot seat." This method was borrowed from my work in *Bat on a Wyre.* During this hot seat rehearsal, we placed one chair on the stage. Each character individually volunteered to sit in the hot seat, while Shauna, myself, and the rest of the cast sat in the audience. We then proceeded to ask that character questions. We asked some questions pertaining to the story, but mostly we asked questions pertaining to the characters themselves (What do you dream about? What are your earliest memories? What is your favorite color?). In my experience with this exercise (both as a participant in *Bat on a Wyre* and as a facilitator in this context), I have been consistently amazed at the ability of this exercise to generate meaningful details about characters.

Using a surrealist methodological framework to catch characters "off guard" and to get them thinking about seemingly unrelated details (e.g.,

What is your favorite song?) has been remarkably successful at uncovering useful character traits. For example, when I was in the hot seat as Penny Lane Mozzarella, I found myself (or I found Penny) involuntarily detailing an experience of riding an elephant with a broken leg, which helped develop Penny's relationship to her mother. This narrative became a part of the final performance script. To provide an example from *Cybernetic Fruit*, Aurora (played by Molly Cummins) was asked if she was poisonous. Aurora responded, "No. . . at least not in the traditional sense," which in addition to appearing verbatim in the performance script, became an important way to think about Aurora's character.

We spent the first week of rehearsal doing exercises in character development, such as free-writing exercises (What is your prized possession?) and movement exercises to explore cyborg embodiment. We ended the week with another devising method pulled almost directly from my work in *Bat on a Wyre*: the dinner party. For this, we asked that the characters again come in costume, and expect to stay in character for a while. Shauna and I served them pizza, bread sticks, and character goals. We gave each character an index card indicating some sort of task they were meant to accomplish throughout the course of the meal. Lobo and Lodi, for example, were asked to guard the food unless they were given the correct "secret word." Granny was asked to describe her experience of dinner using only poetry, the results of which (interlaced with results of a character free-write) went on to become Granny's exposition near the opening of the show.

Once the formation of the characters was well under way, we were able to begin more concrete work on the missing plot elements and generating lines of dialogue. This was accomplished primarily through a process of group scene-writing, which spanned the second and third weeks of rehearsal. Shauna and I had a relatively clear understanding of the general plot arc, but there were several areas that we intentionally left blank. On our first night of rehearsal, in addition to character sketches, we also gave the cast our outline of the plot. Here is what was written on the other side of that original handout:

> This is the story, as far as I know.
>
> **Exposition:** Meet NARRATOR. Introduce audience to this world. Introduce RED.
>
> **Problem:** Uncontrollable laughter. Poetic nonsense speak. Surrealist indulgences. GRANNY becomes afflicted, but does not seem to mind. Introduce tension between GRANNY and RED. RED is obsessed with perfection/optimal performance, so GRANNY drives her nuts.
>
> **The Call:** RED is approached by NEWTON. RED refuses the call. An apple is dropped on her head.
>
> **The Journey:** When she wakes, TWENTY OUNCE is with her. She decides to go on the quest. The journey is to find a magic memory crystal.

First Challenge: Meet AURORA. A challenge ensues involving body image/beauty??

Second Challenge: Meet MACINTOSH. RED is in need of some kind of repair, so she visits MAC's shop. MAC "accidentally" messes up RED's memory crystal and RED is forced to determine which memories are really "real." Questioning the authority of memory??

Third Challenge: Meet LOBO & LODI. A riddle/challenge involving gender??

False Conclusion: RED and TWENTY OUNCE find the magical memory crystal. RED, however, becomes seduced by the power of the crystal (Think of the moment when Abu grabs the ruby from the forbidden cave in *Aladdin*). She realizes the crystal is exactly what she needs to attain perfection. RED asks TWENTY OUNCE to pop the crystal into her memory slot. T.O. tries to stop her, but inevitably pops it into place.

Final Battle: There is a blackout. When the lights come up it is dreamy and creepy. Every character from the show reappears, as the 'perfect' version of themselves. No language problem. No adorable quirks. RED sees the world as she always wished it could be. She is both saddened and seduced by this world. She gets stuck in it and it is up to T.O. [TWENTY OUNCE] to save the day. The moral of the story is exposed: Perfection is a myth spawned from fear of difference. The beauty is in the imperfection.

The Journey Home/Conclusion: Back at the ranch, the language problem has evolved in to a beautiful poetic dance. RED is reunited with GRANNY. *Wizard of Oz* type realization moment. RED is able to accept GRANNY and thus accept herself. THE END. ("Character Sketches and Plot" 2)

From this limited framework, the CF Collective devised the entire script, word by word and line by line.

By our second week of rehearsal, when it became time to decide how we would set about devising the plot, Shauna and I found ourselves a little stuck. In all of our combined experiences with devising, this was the part in the process that had involved the cast splitting up into groups to generate their shared scene work. This was not going to work for us because Red and Twenty Ounce were in every scene, and none of the other characters shared any scenes with one another (except the end, which we had not yet devised). We thought about scheduling Red and Twenty Ounce to be present on every night of rehearsal and asking the riddlers and other auxiliary characters to come only on the nights we worked their prospective scenes, but we decided

against this. A process like that, we felt, would damage cohesion within the cast, weigh heavily on Anna and Lindsay (Red and T.O.), and take up way too much of our precious time. We also wanted to employ a process that included more input from everyone. Without the other performers present to provide their input, the show would retain a limited scope.

Instead, each night of rehearsal we decided to work collectively on one scene. The performers would still be split up into groups, but the characters present in that scene would be divided up among the groups. Shauna and I would generate a worksheet, which we would bring to rehearsal that night. This worksheet explained (a) an overview of the scene (1-2 sentences), (b) the goals of the scene, (c) quotes from the "hot seat" exercise to be used as lines of dialogue for general inspiration, (d) character traits or scene ideas inspired by the "hot seat," and (e) some questions to consider. For example, on the sheet created to devise scene three, "Mac's Workshop," we wrote, "Newton sends Red to visit Mac, the mechanic. Supposedly Mac is to install some information that will aid Red on her quest. In the process, Mac also 'accidentally' messes up Red's memory." One of the goals listed was "For Red to both gain and lose something. This leads us to question the authority of memory." One of the quotes was "Let me ask you a philosophical question: Is memory a memory?" And one of the questions to consider was "How much does Mac know? Which of her actions are intentional?"

After solidifying groups we would hand them the worksheets. (Performers usually accomplished this without our guidance. Sometimes performers who appeared in the scene would act as "team captains" and choose among the remaining performers to form noncompetitive teams.) The groups would disperse and find a comfortable location to work for a specified amount of time (usually 45 minutes to 1 hour). Performers were asked to bring laptop computers if possible, and we made sure that each group had a computer present. The teams would work together to both brainstorm and actually draft the given scene. They would email their scripts by a certain time, I would print them out, and we would all reconvene to watch what the teams had produced. All together, we would then discuss what elements worked or didn't work, what we liked or disliked, and any other ideas that were generated by this experience.

The following morning, Shauna and I would meet up. We would review the various versions of the scene and use them to create a mash-up. We always made sure to honor the opinions of the cast and to consistently include some element of each version. This method resulted in unparalleled synchronicity, extremely high cast morale, and a multi-vocal document of which we could all claim authorship.

Some people might be wondering, what does it mean to be the director (or co-director) of a production like this one? If this devising work really was the horizontally-organized, egalitarian wonderland we all wish it could be, then why would we even *need* a director?

From the beginning, my attempt to navigate the directorial position in a theatrical collective was guided by this intention: I wanted to suspend authority while maintaining responsibility. This sentiment is a classic example of what Eric E. Peterson and Kristen M. Langellier call a "creative double bind," where I was forced to choose between "equally valued and equally insufficient messages" (243). The way Petersen and Langellier suggest we handle a double bind is by establishing it, elaborating it, and exceeding it.

The double bind I have established exists between suspending authority and maintaining responsibility. In order to elaborate this double bind, I questioned how I arrived at this set of criteria. I wanted to suspend authority in subversive retaliation against all oppressive systems, but specifically against those bound to art-making practices. I wanted to suspend authority because I was not comfortable in the role of directorial tyrant. I wanted to suspend authority in a genuine effort to trust in chance, and in the strengths and talents of the collective. I wanted to suspend authority to embody a posthuman troubling of categories. I wanted to suspend authority so that the work could be better than it could ever be if it were mine alone.

At the same time, I needed to maintain a certain level of responsibility. Shauna and I proposed the show, and in that sense, it was our responsibility to the Kleinau, to the department, and to the professors who supported us to make sure that the show not only happened, but flourished. Shauna and I also maintained a responsibility to our cast. This cast was comprised of our colleagues and friends who agreed to sign on to this project because they trusted us and trusted in our vision. There came times in this process when I really needed to evaluate the wants and needs of my co-collaborators. There were times when members of the cast really needed to be heard, and others when they simply wanted to be told what to do. Sometimes taking a position of authority is not an oppressive act, but a generous one.

The method of devising that we employed was atypical to what I have experienced in the past in that every word of text was arrived at collectively through our process of "group scene writing," and as a result, it is very important to both Shauna and me to credit the cast (along with ourselves) as writers of the show under the title CF Collective. Not only did these talented writers and performers collectively create the script, but we also collectively devised blocking, costume, and lighting decisions. The CF Collective is (in alphabetical order): Kyle Cheesewright, Molly Cummins, Charlie Hope Dorsey, Jenn Freitag, Lindsay Greer, Shauna MacDonald, Nichole Nicholson, Sam Sloan, Anna Wilcoxen, and Nico Wood.

Exceeding these categories involves keeping both options at either end of the spectrum and riding a wave in the middle, not unlike the experience of being a cyborg. While this process is undoubtedly challenging, I have found that existing within the space of a creative double bind can be an incredibly generative, perhaps even liminal space. Surfing this particular kahuna involves having a clear vision, while not being wedded to it. It involves

having an idea that you allow to grow and evolve. It involves learning to say no—of knowing when a particular idea or particular line of dialogue has drifted too far from the shore. It involves being patient when something just needs time to develop and knowing when to pull the plug. In short, if you want to be a director—even the most generous director in the most highly-evolved collective—sometimes you will actually need to direct the cast.

Posthuman Devising

A genealogy of my experiences with posthumanism leads back to my earliest exposure to experimental theatre. It also leads back to my childhood fantasies of becoming the Little Mermaid, to intimate experiences with inanimate objects, and to incredible art-themed hippie festivals. For me, posthumanism has always been based in the creative. Creative practices were the way to access it. The personal narratives I have alluded to above (in chorus with many, many more) have both helped me to recognize the cracks in my subjectivity, as well as offer a way for me to express my experience of this postmodern/human condition. Exposure to these elements gave me the tools to notice the fluidity present in all categories.

The problem is that I sometimes find myself in an endless philosophical loop. I trace posthumanism through creativity, which leads me back to the limits of modernism. From one vantage point, it seems that creative practices are essential to posthumanism. From another, the entire notion of creativity seems antithetical to posthuman goals. On the surface, creativity can seem to maintain a modernist/humanist viewpoint of individuality. The mystery of the creative spark is sometimes used to maintain the myth of the autonomous human subject. The notion of beauty is inherently modernist, insofar as it is static, standardized, and connected to truth, but of course that does not need to be the case. Beauty has never really been static, and in any case, beauty and art are not the same thing.

Postmodern and conceptual arts disrupt notions of beauty and of the art object by placing emphasis on the process. This of course leads us right back to devising. In terms of devising, it makes sense to locate the "art product" first in the creation of a method, then in the enactment of the devising process, and finally in the ephemeral act of aesthetic performance. Therefore devising, as a quintessential process-focused art form, offers us a way out of this conundrum. While devising is certainly embedded in material meaning-making, there are seldom material artifacts left to sell.

For this essay, I wanted to explore the ways that devising practices and posthumanism are connected. I wanted to talk about the ways that posthumanism and devising worked together, the ways that their ideals intersect, and the ways that they function in unison. I looked carefully through some books, hunting for matching quotations, finding many. On a large piece of poster board, I created a chart with quotes and page numbers. I thought I was finding great connections.

Looking down at that poster board now, I am not quite as convinced. I can see that devising practices and posthumanism intersect at exactly the nexus of postmodernism. Both are tools to help us understand our existence (Pepperell iii; Heddon and Milling 204; Gane 432) or make sense of the world (Hayles 9). They both value juxtaposition as a tactic to generate thought (Pepperell 17; Heddon and Milling 107). They value collaboration (Hayles 6; Oddey 1). They each talk about multi-linear thought (Pepperell 95) and rhizomatic thinking (Heddon and Milling 196; Hayles 17). They both challenge categories: either the actor/director or the human/nonhuman. They both challenge logic (Heddon and Milling 195-96; Oddey 1) and believe in chaos (Pepperell 181). So they are both invested in postmodernism. Big deal.

This echoes the way I originally felt when I realized that huge chunks of what I loved about posthumanism had already been sort of theorized by postmodernism. If postmodernism is the lens posthumanism uses to reexamine the ways that human bodies, human existence, and above all, humanism itself, are changing in this technological era, how does devising, while using the shared practices of postmodernism, speak directly to posthumanism?

Devising is primarily a *method*, one which both draws upon and seeks to express philosophical and political ideologies. Posthumanism, on the other hand, is a philosophical paradigm, one which makes use of methodologies to creatively express and productively propagate its ideals. The positive end result in both cases is a better understanding of the world and of ourselves. The point here is that posthumanism and devising are like two parts of a Lego set: they need another block to make them connect. This block is called postmodernism. When effectively connected precisely at this point, posthumanism and devising create aesthetically complicated and philosophically generative results.

Another way to think about this is to say that devising helps to make posthumanism go. Both devising and posthumanist scholars talk about the way narratives construct our lives (Pepperell 177; Hayles 22; Heddon and Milling 192). They argue for embodiment (Pepperell 182; Hayles xiv). They believe that we learn through our bodies (Heddon and Milling 199; Hayles 284). This sounds awfully similar to Dwight Conquergood, who tells us that performance is a way of knowing, and reminds us that "performance privileges threshold-crossing, shape-shifting, and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters, and jokers who value the carnivalesque over the canonical, the transformative over the normative, the mobile over the monumental" (138). Viewed from this vantage point, it seems that posthumanism, devising, and performance studies can all be pieces in the same Lego set. One could even say that they were made for one another.

Humanism gains its strength through science, while devising directly challenges a scientific way of knowing. Devising and posthumanism both speak directly to a performance studies praxis, as they both herald the epistemological value of the body. Part of the goal of *Cybernetic Fruit* was to investigate alternative, possible non-human embodiments. While we can never truly *be* non-human, improvisational devising techniques allow us to make genuine attempts. Devising trusts, even thrives on, the phenomenological data received through such interactions, and in doing so, it promotes a sort of posthuman epistemology.

Conclusions

In this essay, I have provided a mixed bag of devising nuggets. I have moved from my own experience of devising prior to this project and an attempt at defining what devising is, to a detailed description of devising *Cybernetic Fruit* with a focus on unique methods, to more abstract questions of posthumanism, devising, and authorship. I have spent much of this essay thinking and writing about devising practices because this method of art-making was one of the elements that originally drew me to the field of performance studies by tapping into my experiences of childhood improvisational (usually Barbie doll-related) play.

To summarize and conclude this essay, I leave you now with some of the profound sound bites I have learned through my devising journey. Lesson one: Make it work. Sometimes you may need a tape recorder as an understudy. Lesson two: Make devising your own. Make your own method. It may not be a groundbreaking innovation. The important thing is for it to be unique to you. Lesson three: Don't be afraid to stand up for your vision. Taking authority can be a generous act. Lesson four: Postmodernism is the adapter Lego that links posthumanism to devising. And lesson five: Authorship is tricky and should be disrupted. The best you can do is be honest about the work you have done, credit those who deserve it, and give thanks that you got to share this moment, this method, and this project with such a talented group of artists and friends.

The process of creating *Cybernetic Fruit* was a challenge and a gamble. It was born out of curiosity, nurtured by commitment, and made fruitful by a great deal of trust. From seed to fruit, from concept to curtain close, it was a process where we learned a lot about devising, posthumanism, and, as is usually the case with big group productions, ourselves. *Cybernetic Fruit* ran for three nights to large, enthusiastic audiences. People from many different walks of life were able to appreciate the show in different ways. Personally, I look back to this show again and again. The friendships made are enduring and the questions asked continue to unfold. *Cybernetic Fruit* continues to offer me insights about devising methodologies, staging complex theory, and investing in posthuman embodiment. This show provides a foundation for devising as a posthuman performance methodology.

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