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From Seed to Fruit: A Posthuman Journey From Stage to Page

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FROM SEED TO FRUIT: A POSTHUMAN JOURNEY FROM STAGE TO PAGE

by

Nicole Wood

B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2006

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree

Department of Speech Communication
in the Graduate School
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THESIS APPROVAL

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
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Master of Arts
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TITLE: FROM SEED TO FRUIT: A POSTHUMAN JOURNEY FROM STAGE TO
PAGE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook

This thesis uses *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale* (a show directed by Shauna MacDonald and Nico Wood) to explore notions of posthumanism. The thesis of this project is that every being possesses beingness (one could say, a soul), be it raccoon, raspberry, or rock; that nothing is perfect or ever can be, for perfection and imperfection (like order and disorder) are human constructions spun from human vantage points and seen with a human-level of resolution; that collaboration fosters propagation of a posthuman discourse and compassionate behavior; and finally, that staging philosophical inquiry, in the flesh and for the community, is a potent methodology for germinating new theoretical fruit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this thesis, I mention the perplexing experience of creating a work of art in collaboration, and then documenting that work in solitude. This description is not entirely truthful, for many people have helped me along the way. For starters, I would like to thank my posthuman co-collaborator, academic big sister and cyborg friend Shauna MacDonald, as well as the entire CF Collective for their creative genius and overwhelming willingness to come along on this ride. I would like to thank my partner, Rafal Kos, for supporting me in numerous ways, not least of which was reading every page of this thesis before it went to my committee: Jonathon Gray, Elyse Pineau, and Craig Gingrich-Philbrook. To Jonny and Elyse, thank you so much for your ideas, advice, and belief in my work. Most of all, to Craig, my brilliant advisor. So much of what is contained in these pages has been learned in your classes or in conversations we've shared. Thank you for introducing me to posthumanism, to devising, and to so many other things that have formed my identity as an artist and a scholar. I could not have done this without you. Endless thanks for all that you teach me.

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CHAPTER ONE: POSTHUMAN FRUIT

“Humanists saw themselves as distinct beings, in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings. Posthumanists, on the other hand, regard their own being as embodied in an extended technological world.”

--Robert Pepperell

(The Posthuman Condition 187)

We live in a world of “posts.” Post-production (sampling, remixing, and digital collage-making) has become the way many of us produce art (Bourriaud). We live in a post-colonialist, post-Darwinian, and post-atomic time. Some say we have entered an era of postfeminism, or a time during which we contradict the values of second-wave feminism (Wright). Performance studies has been referred to as a postdiscipline (Roach). Even one of the popular singer Björk’s most accomplished albums is entitled *Post*.

As an undergraduate, my taste for theory and philosophical inquiry was piqued by postmodernism. I felt liberated by the rejection of master narratives and justified in my own sense of “fragmentation and [a] decentered self” brought on by “multiple, conflicting identities” (Irvine). I later came into poststructuralism, gravitating towards the deconstruction of binaries and the destabilization of the text (Sarup). The funny thing is that I was able to actively embrace these “post” paradigms without ever really getting to the bottom of just what “modernism” and “structuralism” were all about. As I dig further into my own epistemological and ontological inquiries, I often find that I am working backwards, trying to attain a sense of just what it is I have inherited, and what I find myself “against.”

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, I situate posthumanism historically in order to (a) introduce the concept of humanism (to which posthumanism responds); providing several definitions and carving out the way I plan to use it; (b) chart my path in and through posthumanism, paying specific attention to the element of materiality, (c) trace posthumanism in and through postmodernism and poststructuralism, explicating their similarities and specific nuances; and (d) explain the ways that the prefix *post* is not always intended just to critique its predecessor, but instead takes its values more seriously (Eagleton 125). In the second section, I will look at the relationship between posthumanism and a show I co-wrote and directed with Shauna MacDonald entitled *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*. I'll start by (a) telling you what “calls” and version of performance studies we saw the show answering or participating in, (b) talking about the show itself and our process for devising it, and (c) briefly identifying three aspects of the humanist concept “perfection” (gender, beauty, memory) that we emphasized for posthuman scrutiny. Finally, in the third section, I will preview the thesis as a whole, chapter by chapter, to show how I develop these issues and to demonstrate the utility of posthumanism for performance studies practitioners.

This thesis project is not an analysis of an artifact. This is not a “production record” in the traditional sense. It is, instead, another step along a path of research. This project began with an interest in cyborgs and fairytales, which was shared between two graduate students. This interest turned to questions, theories, and desires for experimentation. These desires transformed into a story, which needed a cast. When a cluster of artists was formed, we started an innovative devising process and learned about posthumanism through methods of collaboration. The performance was a research

project, for our cast as much as for Shauna and I. So this document, this “thesis” is not the analysis of a final product. It is not an attempt to recuperate shortcomings or to perform a retrospective corrective for the work. It is an extension of a method of artistic inquiry, which began with theory, grew with a show, and returns now to theory and to the page. This project can only ever be a work in progress. This is process as research. Perhaps theory is to practice as human is to machine, which is another way to say that praxis is a cyborg methodology.

Situating Posthumanism

I came to posthumanism about a year ago. As I enthusiastically read Nicolas Gane’s very thorough article (simply titled “Posthuman”), I was delighted to find that “I have been a posthumanist all along, and I didn’t even know it” (quoted from my own handwritten notes in the margin of his article). So what made me an unidentified posthumanist? I suppose it was my personal belief in equality among all creatures and things. It was wrapped up in my love of technology, inanimate objects, fruits and flowers, sunsets and stars. And it was intertwined in an innate desire to see dominant ideologies shift into something better, something far more nuanced, just, and beautifully diverse. Since then, I have been continually indulging in the invitingly ambiguous waters of posthumanist discourse, on a quest to find my place. The first step in this quest requires that we understand the humanism(s) to which posthumanism responds.

Humanism

Humanism has been a positive step in many ways. Humanism was integral in wresting control from the “church” and our “predetermined fate.” Humanism provided a method by which to think one’s way out of fundamentalism. Under humanist parlay the

“idea of God was philosophically possible, scientifically unproved and religiously unnecessary” (Curtis Reese qtd. in Wilson 8). Humanism nurtured liberalism. It gave birth to what we think of as “human rights.” Although humanism can sometimes be “the slot into which we can insert anything we find abhorrent” (Richard Levin qtd. in Battersby 557), that is not what I seek to do here. There is much to be learned and appreciated from the canons of humanist discourse. However, if we are to admire all of our “progress,” we must also recognize some of our missteps. We must reevaluate whether or not the humanism of today is even comparable to the humble, yet lofty humanist dreams of yesteryear. We must determine how to realign ourselves; we must envision how to take ourselves further. It seems that at the bedrock of all forms of humanism, we come to a place in which the human is central; where rationality rules; and where, to use the words of Protagoras, man is the measure of all things (Baldwin).

“Just as there is no history, only histories, so there is no humanism, only humanisms, a confusing, often contradictory array of humanisms” (Battersby 556). Many different people have many different ideas about just what humanism is. We have renaissance humanism, new humanism, Greek humanism, pragmatic-pluralist humanism just to name a few of the hundreds of flavors. Mark Johnson tells us that “[h]uman beings share a basic biological make-up, they share the same cognitive mechanisms, and they share certain general physical, interpersonal, and cultural needs that are the basis for universally shared purposes, interests, and projects that show themselves in every culture we have encountered” (Johnson 237). This is apparently the (mis)conception upon which humanism is built. For my purposes, I draw my definition of humanism from primarily two places. I will focus on the nine tenets of humanism as outlined by Dr. Mary Klages,

Associate Professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder, while also gaining information from the American Humanist Association's website. Both of these sources could be loosely classified as secular humanism, because they both put their faith in reason and science, and do not follow the ethics of any one deity. The AHA calls humanism a "progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity" (AHA).

Mary Klages tells us that "the basic ideas of the Enlightenment are roughly the same as the basic ideas of humanism." Drawing on the work of Jane Flax, Klages provides a cohesive list of nine elements of humanism. An abbreviated version of her list is as follows:

1. There is a stable, coherent, knowable self. This self is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal
2. This self knows itself and the world through reason
3. The mode of knowing produced by the objective rational self is "science"
4. The knowledge produced by science is "truth," and is eternal
5. The knowledge/truth produced by science (by the rational objective knowing self) will always lead toward progress and perfection
6. Reason is the ultimate judge of what is true, and therefore of what is right, and what is good (what is legal and what is ethical)
7. In a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right (and the beautiful)

8. Science thus stands as the paradigm for any and all socially useful forms of knowledge. Science is neutral and objective . . .

9. Language, or the mode of expression used in producing and disseminating knowledge, must be rational also There must be a firm and objective connection between the objects of perception and the words used to name them (between signifier and signified). (Klages)

Klages refers to these as “some of the fundamental premises of humanism, or of modernism.” She explains that these ideals serve to “justify and explain virtually all of our social structures and institutions, including democracy, law, science, ethics, and aesthetics.”

The AHA provides a list of their own in the third (and most recent) version of *The Humanist Manifesto*. Although the information is certainly presented in a different light, the same principles are present. For example, the first item on their creed reads, “Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis” (AHA). Proponents of modern humanism market it as a way to find personal fulfillment without religion, yet their dogmatic view of rationality, autonomy, and the scientific method seem to contradict some of their goals.

Despite the admirable intentions the AHA boasts, we must admit that humanism has fallen short. How has such a noble idea, “this one that human values are the only values,” resulted in so much cruelty (Schechner, *End of Humanism* 9)? If I were to outline some areas where I found the paradigm of humanism to be particularly lacking, I would hone in on one concept: perfection. Once again, under humanism, “the knowledge/truth produced by science (by the rational objective knowing self) will always lead toward

progress and perfection. All human institutions and practices can be analyzed by science (reason/objectivity) and improved” (Klages). In humanism, progress and time move simultaneously along a long, straight line towards perfection. This is clearly a fool’s race towards an unattainable goal; a horse chasing the proverbial dangling carrot. What we call perfection is actually a drive towards endless progress, with no foreseeable end. Though we may consciously, even explicitly, say things like “everyone is perfect in their own way,” as a way to acknowledge the beauty in diversity and *imperfection*, the presence of this push for the unattainable standard is a tangible and negative force in our lives.

With this in mind, the fundamental question I am asking is: who qualifies as the “human” in humanism? Who have these so-called humanitarian acts come to benefit? To give perhaps a reductive view, it seems that the ideal candidate would be a person who lives in accordance with certain standards, appreciates progress, participates in capitalism, forwards industrialization, and upholds patriarchy. This is sadly incongruous with the freethinking rebels who founded modern humanism. Goals of progress which place the human at the center of the universe, which seek to advance the economic and physical well-being of the “human” (in this sense, the white, straight, upper-to-middle class industrialized human) not only undermine the tenets of traditional humanism, they exploit and dominate people, plants, and animals around the globe. “So what do I propose to take humanism’s place?” Richard Schechner asks in the preface of his *End of Humanism*. “Respect for the planet and all what dwells therein. Measure humans against planetary needs, not the other way around. And see the planet against the field of the cosmos” (9). In the spirit of Schechner’s call for respect, I will now spend some time exploring posthumanism and its relationship to material meaning-making.

Posthumanism and Materiality

To provide a definition of posthumanism, I go to Robert Pepperell. He explains that the posthuman is “where all technological progress of human society is geared towards the transformation of the human species as we know it, and where complex machines are an emerging form of life”(qtd. in Gane 432). In other words, the way we constitute what it means to be ‘human’ has undergone (or is undergoing) a profound transformation. I also go to Katherine Hayles and her poignant book *How we Became Posthuman* to describe the ways that “informational posthumanism” (or a posthumanism that privileges informational pattern over material instantiation) treats the body as the “original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born” (2-3). In this way, posthumanism situates consciousness, long regarded as the “seat of identity in Western tradition,” as an “epiphenomenon” pretending to be the main event, when it is actually only a “minor sideshow” (3). Finally, I go to Donna Haraway to remind us that a posthuman “cyborg world” might be a place in which “people are not afraid of their own kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (154), thus depicting the posthuman world as a space which values equality across all form of life.

Karen Barad uses posthumanist ideology to construct a critique of representationalism in her remarkable essay “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” In this essay, she uses Butler’s account of “materialization” and Haraway’s notion of “materialized refiguration” to propose a materialist and posthumanist reworking of performativity (808), explaining the ways in

which discursive meaning is created through a process termed “intra-action.” Barad uses Bohr’s quantum model of the atom to suggest that atoms cannot be reduced to the transparency of language (Fox 8). “Therefore, according to Bohr, the primary epistemological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather *phenomena*” (815). Her basic argument is that “relata do not pre-exist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions” (815). She suggests the prefix “intra,” as opposed to the more commonly used “inter,” to indicate that meaning is formed *within* phenomena, as opposed to *between* relata and relations. This theory contends that boundaries do not sit still (817), that taxonomies, such as the one dividing human from non-human, are dynamic concepts that exist only *within* the relationship between the categories these taxonomies construct. It is not enough to speak about discursive systems inscribing our meaning (as Foucault might argue), or the stylized repetitive acts by which we enact, and thus construct, our being (as Butler might say). Instead we must think about the literal materiality of these discursive meanings. In performance, for example, this active intervention would entail making material contact with the audience. We may make literal contact by touching, splashing water, or blowing smoke on the audience, or we may figuratively touch the audience through disruptions in language or sound. The important issue is the *exchange*, of atoms, sounds particles, or even thoughts. Through this exchange we can create meaning together. We must allow matter to matter, by actively intervening in the world’s becoming.

Posthumanism, Poststructuralism, Postmodernity

As I was researching for this prospectus, I began taking a class entitled ‘French Communicology.’ In this class I began to dig more deeply into concepts of which I had only scratched the surface, concepts which aligned themselves rather well with everything I was researching. I was invigorated with postmodernist critiques of the human subject. I was inspired by poststructuralist writings on the ‘incessant sliding of the signified under signifier’ (Lacan qtd. in Sarup 1). I was finding the citations I needed to make my argument tangible and credible in an academic context. Then I paused for a moment, dumbfounded. Was the topic of my thesis really anything new? If Foucault had tried to deconstruct the conceptions by means of which we understood the human subject (Sarup 2) forty years ago, then what was I bringing to the table? I truly agonized over this question for two weeks; unable to write, unable to prove my own point, when it finally hit me. Poststructuralism and postmodernism, aside from being philosophical paradigms, are also *methods*. They are *ways* of looking and seeing. They are not formulas. By their very nature, they elude the essence of being clear-cut. But nonetheless, they are windows. They are the windows that we will look through for the duration of this project. In short, posthumanism *uses* poststructuralism (and hence postmodernism) to view and thus critique humanism. Posthumanism uses the theory of the poststructuralists to make a place in the world for our relationship to animals and machines. Posthumanism in turn becomes proof, in a sense (showing the material dissolution of human categories in relationship to other forms of life and technology), of what the postmodernists and poststructuralists have been saying for a long time.

A Second Look at "Post"

I find it important to indicate that posthumanism does not delineate a purely "anti-humanist" sentiment, nor does it seek to indicate a time "after humans exist." It is a critique, an abstraction, a reaction to humanism. It is, and can only be a part of humanism -- a theoretical prosthetic. This is true of many "post" paradigms. Modernism, for example, tends to present a "fragmented view of human subjectivity and history, but presents that fragmentation as something tragic, something to be lamented and mourned as a loss" (Klages). Postmodernism, in contrast, doesn't lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather seeks to accept, explore, or even celebrate this condition. Structuralism aimed its energies at discovering and articulating the structures that govern our lives. Structuralism believed in these categories, but it was poststructuralism that interrogated them, asking how or why they came to be.

James Battersby, who argues for the positive inescapability of humanism, admits that, although "[w]e cannot criticize or evaluate other cultures or our own from some position outside culture, [we] can share understandings and conceptions of what Aristotle called human flourishing and adjust our own and criticize others in the light of such evolving standards, adopting what we admire and censuring what we deplore" (566). For me, this is at the center of the posthuman: to acknowledge our subject position as human beings while simultaneously attempting to critique and change the elements we find outdated and adopt those which we admire, whether what we adopt comes from various elements of nature (to which human beings also belong) or the world of the cybernetic.

Clearly the advent of posthumanist discourse does not mean the inevitable and immediate death of humanism. In this section, I have outlined a working understanding of

humanism, explicating some of its merits along with some of its faults. In particular, I have described the central argument of humanism that I would like to object to, namely the existence of an autonomous human subject. I have also outlined some fluid, yet stable conceptions of the posthuman, which is to say that posthumanism indicates both a shift in the paradigm of social development (after humanism), as well as a transformation of the way we define what constitutes “human” (Pepperell iv). Posthumanism is also heavily steeped and deeply invested in both postmodernist and poststructuralist discourse, to which it owes many of its founding concepts. Finally, this section re-evaluated the term “post” in an effort to dispel some common misconceptions. As Halberstam and Livingstone remind us, “the ‘post’ of ‘posthuman’ interests us not really insofar as it posits some subsequent developmental state, but as it collapses into *sub-*, *inter-*, *infra-*, *trans-*, *pre-*, *anti-*” (qtd. in Gane 432). Drawing upon the concepts outlined above and following dream-spawned impulses, Shauna MacDonald and I joined material forces and began to conceptualize a show.

Posthumanism and *Cybernetic Fruit*

Twice upon a time, in a land not so far away, humans, cyborgs, and machines lived as one. In this world, mythology and mechanics intertwined, creating fantastic landscapes, multiple identities, and surrealist possibilities. This place was called “Vista Bella” and it came into being on the Marion Kleinau Stage, in the Speech Communication Department at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. In a 90-minute performance, Shauna MacDonald, our cast, and I revisited fairytale and cyborg story conventions from a posthuman, feminist perspective. In this section, I will begin by sharing some of the calls and concepts of performance studies we saw this show

responding to and engaging with. Next, I will speak about the show itself and the methodology through which it was created. Finally, I will identify the central themes of *Cybernetic Fruit* (beauty, memory, gender, perfection) and how they are understood and critiqued by (post)humanist discourse.

Calls and Versions of Performance Studies

The way we define “Performance Studies” is always fluid. Like Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg, it eludes specific definition and instead represents a space where many ideas (sometimes contradictory or ironic ones) are set along side each other, because they are all necessary. Richard Schechner describes performance studies as an “elusive, playful, embodied, multi-faceted, protean operation;” one which “blur[s] the distinctions not only between ‘art’ and ‘life’ but also between ‘scholarship’ and ‘art making’” (*Fundamentals* ix). He also tells us that there are two fundamentals of performance studies: “no fixed canons of works” and “enthusiastically borrowing from other disciplines” (*Fundamentals* x). In this sense (through the work of first theorizing our posthuman project, then staging an aesthetic art piece, and now doing the work of theorizing about that process and those discoveries), the creation of *Cybernetic Fruit*, and thus this thesis project, would most certainly contribute to the realm of art and thought known as performance studies. Linda Park-Fuller expresses that “a postdiscipline that strives not only to cross borders but to tear down ivory walls and connect with society in ever changing ways seems an appropriate term for describing performance studies” (209). Working with that definition in mind, what follows are some appeals from various scholars in various disciplines, which I feel both summon and license this work.

When Karen Barad states that “what is needed is a robust account of the materialization of *all* bodies--‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’--and the material discursive practices by which their differential constitutions are marked” (810), I think about *Cybernetic Fruit*. I recall the ways that this piece acted as a site, an experience of material meaning-making, striving to take both the human and the non-human into account. When James Battersby tells me that “the assaults upon [humanism] are so various and, for the most part, so diversely inconsistent and incoherent that any quick ground-clearing or any expeditious exhibition of the positive case is precluded” (555), I feel inspired to draw charts representing the differences between humanism and posthumanism, outlining the myriad similarities and contradictions betwixt and between these camps. When Nicolas Bourriaud expresses that “the critic’s primary task is to recreate the complex set of problems that arise in a particular period or age, and take a close look at the various answers given” (7), I feel called to arms. Richard Schechner tells me that “the relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral” (*Performance Studies* 1), and I feel the need to bring those two elements together in one project. Schechner also describes the “failure to develop ways of transmitting performance knowledge from one generation of theatre workers to another” as one of “six causes for the decline of the [American] avant-garde” (*End of Humanism* 29-30). When I hear this, I am both saddened and inspired. I feel a sense of obligation. I am pulled to heed these calls, to attempt to share what I have learned through the creation and study of this performance.

Performance wants to be a site of innovation: a place where critical scholarship and artistic practice meet, overlap, and interact. Performance studies, through its

acceptance of fragmentation, its investment in performativity, and its understanding of the multiplicities of subjectification, wants to be a posthuman postdiscipline. This project, and projects like this one, can further facilitate this rhizomatic scholarly growth. As this thesis demonstrates, performance studies is always, already becoming-posthuman.

Our Process

To take our part in promoting this becoming-posthuman, Shauna MacDonald and I created *Cybernetic Fruit* through a process of devising. Alison Oddey explains that “the process of devising is about the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit” (1). Shauna and I molded an ambiguous and mysterious vision into a general plot structure. Then, through a series of workshops, auditions, and what we came to call “group scene writing,” *Cybernetic Fruit* and the land of Vista Bella were born. We chose to work through this methodology because, as Oddey states, “there is a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas” (1).

In order to outline a plot, we played with and against basic fairytale structures as outlined by structuralist and psychoanalytic scholars (e.g., Carl Jung, Vladimir Propp). Through a process of devising, we, together with the cast, added flesh to these structural bones to create a postmodern, surreal performance that challenged humanism, explored cyborg subjectivities, and deconstructed the modern telos of perfection. Combining experimental and mediated performance, we explored 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 created a cast of posthuman characters that were both familiar and strange. We conceived of the show as an adaptation in which we remixed archetypes to explore the possibilities of posthumanism.

In our original proposal we stated that “the aesthetic of this show will be one which blends the sleek, metallic look of posthumanism with the colorfully eccentric dream-like appearance of fairytales” (MacDonald and Wood 2). We achieved this effect primarily through costuming and backdrop design, while most of the set remained relatively minimalist. We made use of a range of the Kleinau’s technical capabilities, working with the technologies available and, when necessary (in the spirit of the cyborg), creating our own. We aimed to create a world of fantasy that operated according to its own posthuman logic, “where technology and magic were intertwined, and where cyborg physicality ruled the day” (MacDonald and Wood 3). In order to create this fictional landscape, we chose Donna Haraway as an inspirational ally, and soon found ourselves opposed to the concept of perfection.

Three aspects of Perfection

Donna Haraway makes “an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings” (150). We took this argument seriously and used it as a jumping off point. Out of this notion came *Red*, our posthuman heroine. Red was an unapologetic cyborg with a cat/human/machine-hybrid best friend named Twenty Ounce. Situations were already tense between Red and her Granny, a spacey herb gardener, but they grew worse with the advent of the “problem of poetics.” It seems that a terrible language problem, which had been rumored throughout the land, finally found its way to Vista Bella.

“Uncontrollable laughter, spouts of poetic nonsense, and strange surrealist indulgences troubled the country side” (CF Collective 1). Not long after Granny fell sick with this inexplicable ailment, Red was visited by a mysterious dharma bum named Newton. It was Newton who sent Red on the quest for the Telstar crystal: the only thing that could cure Gran forever.

On this journey, Red encountered many interesting characters and faced several strenuous challenges. First was Mac, a bumbly mechanic who presented Red with a challenge of memory. Next, came Aurora, a spider goddess. This time Red was pitted against the notion of beauty. The third challenge introduced Lobo & Lodi or “the twins.” These ambiguous overlapping characters troubled Red’s concept of gender. The final challenge involved crystals, surreal lighting, contemporary dance moves, and breaking apart the quest for Red’s perfection, although I wouldn’t want to give the ending away just yet.

We chose to hone in on this concept of perfection as it seems to be the touchstone of modern humanism, the desire for a future that “will have been” that propels humanistic forward flow. Imagining Vista Bella, a utopia where the posthuman was alive and thriving, and where equality between all creatures was somehow achieved, we asked ourselves how things would be different. We tried to re-imagine elements of our daily lives under this new, rose-colored lens and tried to envision what sorts of mishaps would arise. During this process of inquiry, we decided that current understandings of beauty, memory, and gender would drastically change in a radically posthuman world. We asked, “If we could re-make our bodies any way we desired them to be, how would we know what is beautiful? What would become of gender? If all of our memories were made

digital, what would memory *mean*?” Simultaneously, we recognized that the representations of these issues were already problematic under humanism. We found humanism to be insufficient in describing or understanding beauty, memory, and especially gender.

Shauna MacDonald and I wanted to explore these issues. We wanted to create a feminist, posthumanist fairytale, holding three potentially paradoxical categories together because they are all necessary and true (Haraway 149), in a mysterious effort to deploy irony and unlock some new way of looking and being.

By now, I believe that the connections between posthumanism and *Cybernetic Fruit* are clear and indispensable. With the help of Donna Haraway, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Richard Schechner (among others), this section demonstrates how the work of this thesis project is not only sanctioned, but necessary within the postdiscipline of performance studies. In addition, this second section has provided a glimpse into both our thought and creative processes, while illuminating the central theme of the show: the elements of perfection.

Preview of Chapters

I have divided my thesis into four main chapters, in addition to this one. Each of these chapters will serve its own function, while contributing to the project as a whole. What I have provided below is a brief description of each chapter. Included in each of these descriptive summaries are points of inspiration, sources I intend to draw upon, the process I will take to complete each one, and some of the conclusions I hope to present.

Chapter Two

For the second chapter, I will provide a scene-by-scene description and analysis of *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*. I will use descriptive, performative writing to help the reader experience the show. As I do this, I will also provide some insight into our performance choices. I will explain both *what* happened and *why* it happened that way. As I work through the show, I will also talk about our sources of inspiration, which have ranged from Carl Jung to the film *Labyrinth*. This chapter offers a clear sense of what *Cybernetic Fruit* was, why Shauna and I developed it in particular ways, and how posthumanism illuminated our performance choices.

Chapter Three

Chapter three gives an in-depth account of the process of creating and executing *Cybernetic Fruit*. The research and preparation for this show spanned seven months of deep reading and creative-sparking between Shauna and I. We would drink copious amounts of caffeinated beverages and brainstorm posthumanist fantasies. Throughout this process, we had a few posthumanist goals and commitments. We wanted to (a) be open to possibilities and synchronicity (of which there was plenty), (b) suspend authority while maintaining responsibility, (c) trust in devising, and (d) suspend time while holding to a strict time schedule. (Posthumanism, of course, thrives on irony). In this chapter, I draw on the writing of Allison Oddey, as well as Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling (on the devising side), and Robert Pepperell (on the posthuman side) to argue that our method, from seed to fruit, was the enactment of a posthuman process. Whereas chapter two familiarizes us with the show and our aesthetic performance choices, at the conclusion of

this chapter readers will also understand the particular process of devising Shauna and I invented and engaged in to cultivate this performance.

Chapter Four

I have begun referring to the fourth chapter as “The Language Problem: Cybernetic Fruit and French Theory.” The land of Vista Bella was troubled by a “language problem.” Through this disruption in rational thought and blind efficiency; through this “sudden brush with the surreal,” according to the narrator, Splendour, “they were now able to dream.” This was a lovely concept and a beautiful idea. Every night of the show I teared up during this, the final line. However, in the world of *Cybernetic Fruit*, the language problem served mostly as a bookend. It was a point of entry and a point of relative closure, but I feel that the critique of rational language we were proposing was often lost under other themes and other emotions being felt. The impetus for this rational language disruption was drawn primarily from the French feminists and from this quote by Hélène Cixous: “Women must . . . invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence'” (886).

If I were to do this show over again, I would give more focus to the language problem. For this chapter in my thesis, I imagine what the show would look like if I had. Drawing from the work of Jacques Derrida, Helene Cixous, and Michel Foucault, among other French theorists, I re-vision the language problem in *Cybernetic Fruit*. Through this ironic exploration of language critique through re-writing, I glean some kernels of truth which can exist outside of Vista Bella, and outside of *Cybernetic Fruit*.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five will serve as conclusion to the thesis as a whole, providing a summary and sense of clarity about the topics discussed. This chapter will draw upon discussions from previous chapters to create a feeling of closure, without attempting to tie things up in a big red bow. In this chapter I will recapitulate what I have learned through this process, and where I would like to see this research go.

The chapters move in this way to create the essence of moving from panoramic to zoom to panoramic again. We begin with a wide overview of theoretical concepts, follow with more tangible questions of process and production, and finally move out again into the more explicitly theoretical. I have structured the chapters in this way to demonstrate that this is (in line with what both performance studies and posthumanism aim) a dynamic process of movement, and of engaging various methods of looking and learning.

Conclusions

Posthumanism is a way of challenging and accepting contradictions. It is a new form of rebellious humanist discourse. It not only seeks to rectify some of humanism's shortcomings, it also ventures into places that these humanisms never dared. "Critical posthumanism reasserts the embodied nature of information, and perhaps even technology, regardless of whether bodies remain 'human'" (Gane 432). Nicolas Gane calls on Robert Pepperell to tell us that "the posthuman . . . is not about 'progress' per se, but is rather a new culture of transversalism in which the 'purity' of human nature gives way to new forms of creative evolution that refuse to keep different species, or even machines and humans, apart." The posthuman then, is a "condition of uncertainty in which the essence of things is far from clear" (Gane 432). My view of posthumanism

seeks to extend love and freedom to all beings - plants, animals, those humans who have often been politically overlooked as human (women, people of color, non-industrialized people, the glbtq community), and would even go so far as to include inanimate objects. “It is in this paradox . . . that the value of the concept of the posthuman really lies: in the possibility of *rethinking* what we call human values, human rights, and human dignity against the backdrop of fast-developing biotechnologies that open both the idea and the body of the human to reinvention and potential redesign (Gane 434). As Katherine Hayles puts it, “my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality” (Hayles 5).

“We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because 'we' are *of this world*” (Barad 829). *Cybernetic Fruit* worked to answer Karan Barad’s call for physical materiality, for action, for *intra*-action, as a methodology for the creation of meanings and meaningful experiences. This show combined thoughtful theoretical inquiry, collective artistic engagements, and tangible material meaning-making to communicate for the dissolution of categories, the breakdown of binaries, the realization of the already inherent porousness of boundaries. This show was conceived from a “threefold viewpoint, at once aesthetic. . . , historical. . . , and social. . .” (Bourriaud 46). By embracing the transgression of categories, *Cybernetic Fruit* called for a decentralizing of the concept of “human” and a blurring of distinctions between the “human” and the “non.” By enacting a process of meaning through matter, this show (and therefore this thesis project) seeks to define agency, in hopes of exposing the “particular possibilities for acting at every moment” (827). Barad calls agency a “doing,” a “being in its intra-

activity” (827). This view of agency “entails the responsibility to intervene in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (827). What we are left with is a new way of thinking about knowing, an “onto-epistemology,” a study of practices of knowing in being (829). Bourriaud tells us that art was, at once, “intended to prepare and announce a future world.” Today it is “modeling possible universes” (13). This thesis will be one way to participate in that important work.

CHAPTER TWO: PLANTING THE SEEDS

“ Creativity does not consist in the production of anything that is completely new. Creativity consists in combining things that already exist, but which had previously been held as separate.”

-Robert Pepperell

(The Posthuman Condition 186)

The magic of live performance often resides in its ephemeral nature. To truly understand or appreciate a piece of theatrical performance work, you have to be there. You have to experience it yourself. This fact makes it difficult to write about performance work, to analyze pieces of a performance work for readers who may be entirely unfamiliar with the whole. In this chapter I will work to seal that gap. In this chapter, I am inviting you to experience *Cybernetic Fruit*.

This chapter has taken on a rather unconventional form. Technically, it is broken down into two major sections, the first being far shorter than the last. In the first section, I frame our choices in terms of genre and explore some of their implications. This part of the chapter is relatively straight-forward. The second, far longer, section is a bit more complex. It seeks to both tell the story of *Cybernetic Fruit*, and comment upon this story. To accomplish these goals, this section is partitioned by scene into seven subsections. These subsections are each then bisected into “story” and “commentary.”

Though this may sound complicated, perhaps even excessively so, this format works to develop the narrative in an organic way while taking pause to provide further explanation, additional clarity, and theoretical insight. I also find it flows far more smoothly than the way it sounds when previewed here.

It is also important to note that there is one scene (Scene 6: The Crystal), which does not receive explicit commentary. In the actual show, this scene was quite abstract, using very little text, but instead employing colored lights and layered sound. In attempting to describe the scene within the context of this chapter, I have already provided a far more detailed theoretical explanation that I could have presented for an audience member, and as such, I find that additional comments on this section are not needed.

Genre Trouble

In order to embark on this cybernetic journey, I will first spend a few pages unpacking our choice to use a fairytale framework, and how this framework ultimately evolved. This section is divided into two parts--fairytale and science fiction-- in which I talk about how *Cybernetic Fruit* functions within and against these genre constructions.

Fairytale

Cybernetic Fruit was meant to be a re-working of traditional fairytale structures, like the work of Margaret Atwood in *The Penelopiad* or Angela Carter in *The Bloody Chamber*. We wanted to take the iconic structure of the fairytale and rework the elements we found to be perpetuating patriarchal social structures. In most fairytales, the main female character is rescued by a man (e.g., *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, etc.). The female character, in many cases a “princess,” either falls victim to her own naïveté or is sometimes harmed by another woman, usually a “witch.” Another element of modern fairytales, one that has been successfully critiqued through Angela Carter’s work, is the absence of the mother figure. In *The Bloody Chamber*, “[Angela Carter] restores prominence to a figure who is strikingly, ominously absent, absent from fairy tales, from

pornographic fiction, and from the Freudian theory of female development: the strong, loving, and courageous mother” (Sheets 645). In ancient myth and storytelling, the mother figure was often the cite of bravery, knowledge, and compassion. However, in most modern fairytales, the mother figure is either evil or absent altogether. Both Snow White and Cinderella have evil stepmothers. The Little Mermaid’s mother is never mentioned--she is raised by her powerful father, the Sea King. As a result, two primary methods for creating a feminist fairytale for us involved the creation of a strong female protagonist, and the inclusion of a positive mother figure. In *Cybernetic Fruit* these characters came in the form of Red and Granny, respectively.

Originally, the drive to reclaim and recreate the fairytale was based primarily on instinct. Eventually, however, it became rather obvious that the fairytale world was the perfect place for a posthuman story to unfold. In what other genre is it fairly normal for enchanted objects, talking star cats, and cross-species hybrids of assorted fashions to (co)exist? In this sense, perhaps fairytales have always already been posthuman, as N. Kathryn Halyes might say. We could argue, as Hayles has, that posthumanism has always been with us, but it has been masked and consigned to locations such as the fairytale. The fairytale has always been one site of refusal to perpetuate anthrocentrism. Often, this refusal is inherently playful and subversive, with a trickster quality. Then, of course, there is the socializing function of the fairytale. These stories, for better or worse, have long been used as effective inscriptions of moral values. Despite our clearly stated resistance to the cautionary mode of operations, it is undeniable that we were venturing to propagate a network of posthuman understanding.

One way in which we sought to concretize our use of fairytale framing was through a “storybook aesthetic.” Through the use of hand-painted, moveable flats, we literally constructed a storybook on stage. At the end of each scene, a magical chime would sound. This signaled the stage hands to come out and physically, materially turn the page. This storybook aesthetic was also achieved through our costume choices. Each of the characters had a very specific and particular look, which was created primarily from my own closet. Each character had his or her own particular color palette, and the cast was, overall, exceedingly brightly-colored. The children’s storybook aesthetic of the show was also communicated through the use of DIY elements.

Aside from creating a consistent look, our choice to embody a DIY mien was multifaceted. At one level, it brings to mind the Riot Grrl art movement, paying homage to strong grrls and powerful feminist artists. On another level, the impulse of creative posthumanism is to make technology your own, or to make your own technology. In this way, we created and painted our own flats (with the much appreciated help of our friends), and created all sound effects live from the booth. This practice gave the show a visual and aural material presence and allowed our physical bodies (as well as the bodies of our friends and technical crew) to corporeally interact with the story, evoking Karen Barad’s theory of posthuman performance and creating meaning through material “intra-action.” Personally, I was drawn to the fairytale structure out of habit. Even as a educated, critical feminist, I still have a warm spot for old Disney movies. The plot arc is familiar and satisfying. For *Cybernetic Fruit*, the story structure is so comfortable that it provides a good platform for other kinds of experimentation.

Science Fiction

Alongside the presence of the fairytale, in *Cybernetic Fruit*, runs a current of science fiction. For a long time, I tried to resist the science fiction label, as I felt that it implied an aesthetic that was not present in the show. I attempted to move away from sci-fi categorization because of the reductive view I held of the genre as harboring a propensity to fall under the cautionary-tale schema. I was also timid about allowing *Cybernetic Fruit* to take on the science fiction demarcation because of my own limited exposure to science fiction and my own (perceived) insufficiency for creating an authentic representation. In addition to this, the scientific elements of the show (e.g., Twenty Ounce's shoulder implants, Red's "Aesthetic-advantage-silicon-wafer-chip") were completely farcical and humorous at best. We really made no attempts to be scientifically logical or accurate. Scientific/rational thinking was, after all, one of the limitations of humanism that the show was taking to task.

As time went on, however, people consistently used the words "science fiction" to refer to *Cybernetic Fruit*. I tried to bracket off my preconceived notions of this genre and cultivate some openness. Though there are many specificities and nuances which denote the differentiation between fantasy, science fiction, speculative fiction, and so on, a basic definition of the science fiction genre is "fiction dealing principally with the impact of actual or imagined science on society or individuals or having a scientific factor as an essential orienting component" (Merriam-Webster). We were using all sorts of "sciencey" terms and ideas in a fantastic fictional context, so calling the show science-fiction didn't seem untrue. Science fiction purists might disagree, explaining that in *true* science

fiction, the technology proposed must be at least theoretically possible and logical in nature.

It is important to note that Shauna and I specifically wanted to avoid the use of this story as a cautionary tale. Guided by a feminist agenda in an effort to rework the fairytale, we intentionally chose to disrupt the Little Red Riding Hood epidemic.¹ Under the lens of our posthuman goals, we wanted to create a space with neither fetish nor phobia in regards to technology. This was not meant to be a story which warned about the perils of technological advances nor one which blindly advanced biotechnological developments (further demonstrating the distinction between posthumanism and transhumanism). We were aware of the possibility of our show being perceived in this light, and remained astute in our work against this possible reading.

In this section, my objective was to both illustrate the origin of our fairytale framework, as well as to show how this foundation evolved. Ultimately, Shauna and I came to consider *Cybernetic Fruit* (in the spirit of the cyborg) a science fiction/fairytale hybrid.

Story and Commentary

As mentioned in the introduction, the format of this section is a bit unorthodox, as it moves back and forth from story to commentary. This is done in an effort to provide a layered experience of the narrative, where story and theory are an inseparable praxis. This section is meant to be both entertaining and insightful, while yielding a detailed account of *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*.

¹ In the story of Little Red Riding Hood, as in many fairytales and myths of this kind, a female character is punished for not following what she is told. These stories are used as cautionary tales to teach young

Scene 1

Splendour's Exposition

In front of a green velvet curtain, a life-sized doll with colored yarn for hair and a polka-dot dress sits hunched over on a box. The box bears the label “BAR CORP,” which refers to a local, avant-garde collective. She stays very still as people enter the theatre and take their seats. When the lights dim, two women take the stage and ask the audience to turn off their cell phones. They wind a key on the doll’s back and then return to their seats.

This doll is a story-telling android named Splendour, similar to your childhood “Teddy Ruxpin” doll. She begins to tell the story of *Cybernetic Fruit* by supplying some necessary background info, as well as bestowing some useful tools for understanding the narrative. First of all, she explains to us that this story contains several different orders of being. Here is the way that she describes them:

1) Androids: Fully machine but made in humanity’s image, these advanced robots are reliable helpers and efficient workers. They are accustomed to supplying comedic relief in human tales and are quite attractive (She bats her eyelashes and smiles). Sometimes they attack humans, but this is not that kind of story.

2) Cyborgs: These hybrids begin as one order of being and are continually in transition. This story includes HTM, MTH, ATM and MTA cyborgs.

According to Donna Haraway, they have illegitimate origin stories but are

women to follow the rules. Another example is the story of Bluebeard, which cautions against the dangers of female curiosity.

fascinating figures. Those of you in the audience with ipods or contact lenses may already be considered cyborgs.

3) Animals: According to the collaborative multilingual database Wikipedia, “Animals are a major group of mostly multicellular, eukaryotic organisms of the kingdom Animalia or Metazoa. Most animals are motile, meaning they can move spontaneously and independently. Most animals are also heterotrophs, meaning they must ingest other organisms for sustenance.”

4) Humans: Although humans are technically a part of the animal kingdom, they do not recognize themselves as such. Humans separate themselves from animals because they have been given the divine gift of rational thought.

5) Mythical Creatures: This category includes creatures such as vampires, unicorns, fairies, mermaids, the Yeti, and the Loch Ness monster. Some of these creatures have their origin in traditional mythology. Many are hybrids, a combination of two or more beings, such as a centaur. Mythical creatures are generally believed to fictitious. However, some of them, like the giant squid, have recently been discovered as real. (CF Collective 1)

Splendour also informs the audience that this tale does not take place in the future.

“It is a *fairytale*,” she says, “and therefore is timeless.”

Commentary: Orders of Being

The inclusion of several different “orders of being” in the world of *Cybernetic Fruit* was one of the first, strongest, and most consistent way in which we embodied a

terrain of posthuman sensibilities. As mentioned above, some of the characters are cyborg, some android, and some human. Some of the characters self-identify as “hybrid,” and for others, their specific orientation is unclear. The original impulse to create a show in this register was sparked by the work of Donna J. Haraway. In her essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” (Originally published in 1989), Haraway speaks of the power of cyborg feminist science fiction, stating that “the cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual entity, or body” (178), often making it difficult for audiences to identify with them in any prefabricated way.

Each performer embodied their “order of being” in a different way. Splendour, the tale’s narrator, was an android, and so she chose to resemble a life-sized doll. Twenty Ounce was a “hybrid” with cat ears, a tail, and metallic boots. Red was a cyborg with mechanical parts attached to her clothing and technological designs painted on her cheek.

The choice to explicitly negate the world of *Cybernetic Fruit* as “futuristic” was one concrete method to resist the cautionary tale reading. Shauna and I did not want to create some future world which we were either working toward or warning against, but instead endeavored to envision a world outside of the linear trajectory of time, where posthuman and fairytale themes could dance and play.

Scene 2

A Problem at Home

In the land of Vista Bella, humans, cyborgs, and machines lived as one. They were not afraid to acknowledge flowers, cardboard, rocks, or computers as family and friends, as the distinction between “animate” and “inanimate” was far less defined. It was not

unordinary to find Granny spinning about in her garden speaking to the plants, or to see Newton conversing with his tea. In this land, several different orders of being lived together peacefully. In addition to androids, cyborgs or hybrids, animals, humans, and mythical creatures, there were also beings which could be called “other-animate,” such as the many apples or the Telstar crystal. One day in Vista Bella, something strange happened. Normally, everything in Vista Bella ran very smoothly, because of their superior efficiency and stellar rational thinking. One day, however, they came upon a problem that science simply could not solve.

Language seemed to be coming unglued. Signifiers were floating about the room. People began to speak backwards and in sonnets. It was as if the Holy Spirit of Dada had descended upon them. It was extraordinarily strange. This bizarre phenomenon, aptly known as “The Language Problem” or “The Problem of Poetics,” began spreading from village to village, causing beings to experience great dissonance and confusion, accompanied by a loosening of their subjectivities. The language problem brought with it a grave decrease in methodical efficiency, and a simultaneous increase in Surrealist indulgences. And this entire mess centers around a young cyborg named Red.

Red has an obsession with perfection. She was born mostly human, but had been working and saving up money for implants and upgrades since as long as she’s been old enough to have them installed. (In Vista Bella, biotech is rather commonplace. You can have radioextractor theme-song generators installed at a kiosk in the mall). Her best buddy in the whole wide world is T.O., or Twenty Ounce, a cat-human-machine hybrid who was reconstructed from findings at a garbage pile and has downloaded many of “her”

memories from other sources. Twenty Ounce mixes the blissful innocence of cat-ness with the brains of a feminist MFA.

One day, Red's Granny wanders out into her garden. Dressed like a psychedelic flower child, Granny begins to speak in a manner that is stranger than usual. She seems to speak in poetic verse, reciting:

I am far too fickle to pick a favorite. Blame it on my human parts, but sometimes they make up lies. So I've narrowed it down to five. Parsley is my first favorite, because it reminds me of paisley. The way it tastes, not the way it looks, but the way it tastes. Rosemary is my second favorite. I had a friend named Rosemary, and she had a little lamb. His name was Toto. Toto Scissorhands. Sage is my third favorite. Some people say I'm wise, but I be crackin' all the time. . . . That reminds me how much time I lost. Thyme! Thyme is my fourth favorite. I like to take thyme tea at tea time. And my fifth favorite? Well, that's just for medicinal purposes. (CF Collective 2)

When Red and T.O. happen upon Granny in such a state. they know that something needs to be done. Since problem solving is often tiresome, T.O. lays down to take a cap nap. Red, left to solve this dilemma on her own, sits down under a fetching young apple tree.

Just then, a ripe, crimson apple rolls across the yard, followed by a second projectile apple which flies at a reasonably velocity. Noticing a pattern, Red gets up and prepares to catch a third apple, which she accomplishes with grace.

“My aim is off today. I should have had it on the first try,” states a colorful dharma bum who comes wandering up to Red.

“You were trying to hit me?!” she asks incredulously. This is how Red meets the infamous Newton.

“Itinerant wanderer; collector of people, places, and things; and currently certifiably sane,” Newton remarks as he hold up a certificate of mental health. Despite his unquestionable membership in the Rainbow family, Newton is remarkably well-informed. He has heard of this language problem and gotten wind that it’s been dealt with by using the infamous Telstar crystal. He tells Red that she must go on a quest for this magical quartz cluster, and that the first step is to find the twisted path of roots that form the life of the aspen grove. “I would start by seeking the memory of your future,” he tells her, to which she just wrinkles her brow. She begins asking him all sorts of questions, like how to get started and which way to go, but he casually ignores her interrogation. “Don’t miss the rhizome for the arborescence,” he shouts as he drifts into the woodwork.

Commentary: Fruit

There are many places in which fruit, particularly apples, play a significant, though subtle role in this production, not least of which is the show’s title. For some time leading up to the show, I had become obsessed with the concept of fruit as a metaphor: for birth, sexuality, growth, change, etc. I had recently created a performance entitled *Bearing Fruit*, which told the story of a teenager who masturbates with a piece of fruit and then finds a tree growing out of her vagina. I mention this because Shauna was in the class where this piece was performed. Shauna created a posthuman poetry piece which allowed her to embody a lighthouse from her home in Nova Scotia. Though the themes of

our work may not seem related, both of these projects went on to influence the work we would do as a team.

One influence, as mentioned above, would be the use of fruit as a central theme in the show. Fruit, especially apples, brought to mind biblical Genesis myths, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and the poison apple, and Sir Isaac Newton being bonked on the head. Apples and apple blossoms have been used as symbols of love, youth, beauty and happiness. According to Kathleen Karlsen, a symbolism expert and scholar, “the apple has long been associated with immortality, as exemplified by its role in the tempting of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden” (Karlsen 2).

One way that we chose to incorporate this lineage of apple stories was to use different varieties of apples to name all of the characters and places. For example, Red (Delicious), Granny (Smith), Aurora, Splendour, Newton, Mac(intosh), Lobo, and Lodi are all varieties of apples. Vista Bella and Esopus Spitzenburg (a town mentioned by Newton) are apple varieties, as well. Even the Telstar crystal is named for a certain type of apple. Fruit was also prevalent in the publicity materials, such as the poster design, handbills, and program, but more importantly, fruit became a metaphor for the show’s production and for this thesis project, which is reflected in the titles of chapters and the title of the document as a whole.

Newton maintains a special kinship with apples. (His first appearance on stage, rolling and whipping apples at Red, is a reference to Sir Issac Newton). Newton fulfills the roles of “dispatcher” and “donor,” according to the eight fairytale characters outlined by Vladimir Propp. As dispatcher, Newton’s primary agenda was to send the hero (Red) on a crucial mission. As donor, Newton gets to be a sort of magical helper, who prepares

Red and furnishes her with valuable, though cryptic, clues along the way. Our original vision of Newton was a *mélange* of wanders. By combining the cryptic wisdom of Rafiki (from *The Lion King*), the wild charisma of Neal Cassady, and the simple purity of Baba Ram Dass, we hoped to invent a posthuman shaman with a childlike disposition. As it happened, Kyle Cheesewright fulfilled these hopes gracefully, adding a sharp philosophical edge that Shauna and I had not anticipated.

Scene 3

Mac's Workshop

Completely unable to decipher Newton's message, Red and Twenty Ounce wander for many hours, before finally stopping to rest. Just then, Twenty Ounce recognizes something. "Don't miss the rhizome for the arborescence. . . Don't miss the forest for the tress! I know what to do!" she shouts and gets down on all fours, performing a jazz-toned cat call. On her third voluptuous meow, a being emerges from out of the forest. The creature rolls toward them, maintaining a challenging yoga pose on a bright silver skateboard.

"Somebody call a Mechanization of Molecular Structures Specialist?" queried the new being.

"Um, she did," Red replied pointing to Twenty Ounce.

"Hi! Welcome to my shop! I am Mac, the Master of the Mechanization of Molecular Structures. The augmentation of molecular memory is my specialty. I see you have utilized my appropriately placed call button. What can I do ya for?"

The word 'memory' triggers something in Red. She reluctantly tells Mac that she is seeking the memory of her future, and as a result, Mac offers her a great deal on a

memory upgrade with a complimentary map pack. Although Red isn't certain that this is the right path, she is seduced by the idea of attaining perfection, and agrees to the new installation.

Magically, a bucket of "tools" appears before them. Mac jingles doo-dads and tinkers with trinkets in order to provide Red with the memory upgrade. "Your memory paths are fascinating," remarks Mac, "I profoundly enjoy the mechanization of your molecular structure. Unhappy memory files, delete all?"

"My torturous memory is fine, thanks," Red responds. During this process, Mac removes what appears to be a memory crystal from Red's data recollection slot, and hands it to Twenty Ounce to hold.

"It's never too late for a happy childhood," whispers Mac.

Easily distracted by shiny objects, T.O. bats the crystal around, pouncing and playing before accidentally slipping the rock in her pocket.

"All finished!" Mac exclaims. But when Red attempts to try out her new maps, she senses that something is wrong. She stumbles around with a touch of vertigo, suddenly realizing her memories are gone!

"What did you do?" she yelps in fear.

"You should not be concerned. I have a 99.375% accuracy rate."

"So, have you ever made a mistake?" Twenty Ounce asks quietly.

"Not that I remember," quips the mechanic. Without paying mind to Red's concerns, Mac excuses herself and rides her silver skateboard away.

Commentary: Memory

As mentioned in chapter 1, I find humanism's obsession with perfection to be particularly problematic. Working under the umbrella term "perfection," Shauna and I outlined three important sub-areas, in which we found humanism's scope to be lacking. These areas became the subjects of Red's challenges over the course of the show. The categories were gender, memory, and beauty. Through this show, Shauna and I wanted to further investigate the ways that humanism has constructed these categories, as well as the ways in which posthumanism might work to undo or reconstruct them.

Memory is an interesting location for posthuman analysis because it does not fit the mold of rationality and yet it still seems to play for the humanist team. Memories are often offered as fact and believed (e.g., eye witness testimonies), yet we all seem to know that memory cannot be "trusted." Who can say they've not been butt of their memory's joke? Our memories contribute to the myth of individuality and yet at the same time illustrate our fractured subjectivities. Memory is obviously fallible and subjective, which helps to illustrate the fluid and inconsistent nature of perception and the phenomenological nature of time. For humanist thinkers, however, our memories seem to be a sacred location of truth. Perhaps we trust the things we recall because we have such high regard for ourselves? Or perhaps the fallibility of memory is one of those things swept under the rug of "human error?" If I can know and trust myself, can I know and trust what I remember?

Eric Berlatsky states that "it is important to note the central role that personal and communal memory have played in the politically radical arm of postmodern thought (1)." In a postmodern world that rejects "master narratives," we are certainly very suspicious of

history. In an effort to disrupt history, we must rely on our own memories of events. “If ‘institutional history’ is the perpetrator and perpetuator of a ‘master narrative’ that marginalizes and confines large portions of a society, the localized and relative ‘truth’ of memory is often seen to be a means of reconstituting identity and fighting repressive power (2).”

To further complicate the matter, one of the more concrete ways that we have become posthuman creatures has been through the augmentation of our memories. We use computers, digital cameras, internet servers, and a host of other mechanical gadgets to assist us in the project of remembering. “In a sense, organisms have ceased to exist as objects of knowledge, giving way to bionic components, i.e., special kinds of information-processing devises” (Haraway 164). This is not to say that our biological memory systems are unnecessary, or even that they are not being used. They are simply viewed in a different light and used in different, more creative ways. Memories are often more like dreams than waking life, creating interesting collage or compelling juxtaposition, so I don’t dispute that there can be sacred truth there. Our mechanical friends, quite simply, do a much better job remembering the specifics.

What does memory become in a posthuman era? If remembering is irrational and inefficient, does it become a hobby? An interesting locus of subjective truth? A way for us to challenge humanist master narratives? The goal of this scene was to introduce some of these questions, asking specifically “Is memory a memory?”

The character of Macintosh, or the “riddler of memory,” was created to investigate some of these tensions. M.A.C. is an acronym for “Memory Altering Cyborg.” She was portrayed by Jenn Freitag, who gave her a spunky innocence that Shauna and I had not

anticipated, She dressed mostly in silver with accents of red, and bumbled energetically across the stage.

Scene 4

Aurora's Web

In addition to losing some of her memories (including the way to get home), Red begins to notice that something else is a bit off. Within minutes, Red's self esteem starts to violently plummet. This is clearly a malfunction in her aesthetic advantage silicon wafer chip, otherwise known as a beauty chip. "It's what allows me to augment my aesthetic appearance to continually upgrade my outer shell in order to have a perpetually new visual appeal!" whines Red emphatically. Red's low self-esteem is exceptionally contagious, and soon even T.O. feels a zap in confidence.

"I think I need a lobe enhancement," moans Red.

"I want to get some tooth extenders," T.O. replies.

As Twenty Ounce and Red feel worse and worse about themselves, they also begin to act worse towards each other. Low self-esteem has often been linked to a bad attitude. The two friends try to top each other's desired upgrades until Red snaps, "Well, why don't you get a transmission flush while you're at it!?"

The transmission flush is a touchy subject with T.O., and a rather uncouth remark to shout in public, as well! Twenty Ounce and Red begin yelling insults at one another in surmounting intensity until they hear a strange and beautiful laughter in the distance.

"If perfection is what you seek, I hold the key. Just follow the beauty of my voice."

The hair on Twenty Ounce's back stands straight up. Her cat sense tells her that something isn't right. Still, drawn to the mellifluous voice and the prospect of perfection, Red advances into the darkness, while trusty Twenty Ounce follows. Soon, a glimmering light begins to shine, illuminating a spider web spun of glitter and lace. A prepossessing sight, to say the least.

"I am Aurora, the most beautiful goddess in the forest," the voice speaks as she comes into view. She is as enchanting as her web, if not more so. "Spider queen, catcher of memory, and benefactress of beauty. Welcome to my web of desire. Or is it lies? You have obviously come to me because you seek solace from your disfigurement. Allow me to be of service in your quest for perfection."

The captivating spider woman moves closer to Red as she speaks. "Red, do you remember the time, at the carnival, when you saw your reflection in a fun house mirror? Though it was only for a moment, you've kept that memory as a motivator to become perfect." Red had never told anyone of this experience. It was a sacred secret of hers. It seems as though Aurora has caught some of the memories Red lost during Mac's memory upgrade! Twenty Ounce's cat sense is engulfed by bad vibrations, but Red is intoxicated by Aurora's power. Twenty Ounce attempts to interrupt this beguilement, but Aurora distracts her with an enchanted ball of yarn. While Twenty Ounce, under the guise of Aurora's spell, frantically plays and entangles herself, Aurora advances towards Red.

"Do you want to be beautiful everlasting?" she asks, backing Red into her shimmering web.

"Well, I want to be perfect, of course," Red utters, stammering backwards, right into the web's clutches. "Wait!? I'm stuck!" she yelps. "What's happening?"

Aurora's ability to stay young and beautiful comes from her malevolent consumption of cyborg parts, but she isn't really interested in eating Red. "Beauty comes at a price, Red. How much are you willing to pay?"

"I don't have anything valuable."

"I was anticipating more of a trade," Aurora growls, ogling Twenty Ounce and licking her lips. "Friendship wasn't built to last."

Red refuses to give Twenty Ounce to Aurora, but the spider goddess won't give up. "Oh come now, my child. It hurts to be beautiful. Friendship is fleeting. It is a minor drop in an infinite bucket of life and lust. You will forsake her eventually, or worse, she you. By the way, where did the foolish cat get those stunning shoulders?"

Like the transmission flush, the shiny shoulders were a point of contention between the girls. Red had dreamed up the possibility of lustrous shoulder implants, but Twenty Ounce had it done first. It wasn't a very nice thing for a best friend to do. Red tries to get T.O.'s attention, but T.O. remains in a trance. Unaware of Aurora's spell, Red is confused and hurt by T.O.'s disregard.

"Everlasting beauty is attainable. And it comes at such a reasonable price," Aurora intones.

Hurt by the painful shoulder-implant memory, and frustrated with Twenty Ounce's antics, Red starts evaluating the benefits of relinquishing her friendship. Just then, the spell on Twenty Ounce is mysteriously broken. "What's going on Red?" T.O. meows.

Red snaps out of it and realizes what she was about to do. "Get out of here, T.O.! I guess you'll just have to eat me instead, spider witch!" Red screams.

Twenty Ounce runs away and then back again, away and then back, unable to decide between helping her friend and saving herself. This makes Aurora lose her appetite, and the sorcery of the web dissolves. Red and T.O. run off hand in hand.

As they trample through the forest, exhilarated by their narrow brush with the jaws of a spider, they happen upon the likes of Newton, crashed out in a hammock-like web.

“Newton, how did you get here? Did you just see that?” meows T.O.

“Yeah, I heard everything. This is one of Aurora's old webs. She lets me take a nap every time I come through the area. All my upgrades are pretty old school, so I don't really suit her palate. But she claims to find my stories delicious.”

“Well thank you so much for helping us,” Red sarcastically replies.

“Now you gotta get all heterogeneous on this quest smoothee. You need to figure out how to make fruit, water, and gender into a delicious drink. The twins know all about that,” proffers Newton.

Commentary: Beauty

We don't talk about beauty much. The very word feels very uncool. “Its traditional reservoirs, religion and the arts, no longer put beauty on their to-do lists and even those artists who confess to aesthetic ambition are reluctant to step out with the b-word” (Farrelly). In smart circles beauty has become somewhat of a faux pas. Even discussing the aesthetics of an art piece is often secondary to unpacking its theoretical implications.

We tend to think of relativism as somewhat recent phenomenon, but according to Elizabeth Farrelly, beauty has been subjective from way back. The Enlightenment (often cited as the birthplace of humanism) accepted beauty as a “matter of taste” and by 19th

century the subjective nature of beauty was widely accepted (Farrelly). But if we look back to Mary Klages, humanists believed that, “in a world governed by reason, the true will always be the same as the good and the right (and the beautiful); there can be no conflict between what is true and what is right (etc.)” What this means is, that although modernists/humanists agreed that beauty is somewhat subjective, they also found it to be an indication of virtue and truth.

Then we come to postmodernism, where beauty is most certainly relative, subjective, and a matter of personal opinion. While you would think these understandings would liberate us from the clutches of beauty, the postmodern era has become a time when “mass conformism masquerades as funky self-expression” (Farrelly). In our postmodern world, we have supposedly moved away from privileging beauty, and yet as a culture we have become more image obsessed than ever.

The goal of this scene was to explore what these thoughts mean for posthumanism. In a world where technological advancements make it possible to drastically alter our bodies, does beauty become a matter of economic status? Of creative drive? Of commitment? Is it possible for beauty to become so subjective that it becomes irrelevant? In a posthuman/cyborg world, is it possible for us to become our avatars? The fact that Red’s perception of self malfunctions when her “beauty chip” breaks indicates that, in *Cybernetic Fruit*, beauty is located in one’s perception. Posthumanism, like postmodernism, reminds us that “the criteria that determine what is aesthetically stimulating or aesthetically neutral are partly subject to social change” (Pepperell 185).

The character of Aurora was played by Molly Cummins, who brought a sickly sweet element to the character. Aurora’s order of being was “mythical creature,” which

allowed her to be both magical and mechanical, both hybrid and whole. Aurora is a spider goddess. This choice was based on the concept of spiders as weavers and tricksters, symbolizing fate, female energy, and creative energy. In Hindu mythology, spiders are sacred weavers of illusion (Klostermaier 598). Aurora calls attention to Red's obsession with perfection by drawing an inverse relationship between ethics and beauty. Whereas modernism saw beauty as virtue, Aurora's everlasting beauty comes at an immoral price.

Scene 5

Lobo and Lodi's Doors

Red and Twenty ounce find themselves getting sleepy, and decide to make camp for the night. As soon as they have laid out their sleeping bags, they hear a strange and ominous sound in the distance. It reminds them of a nursery rhyme.

“Blender, Blender, Blending our gender / Gender Bender, are you an offender?
/Gender, Gender we used to have a blender / Everybody mix it up, X and Y, on the fly.”

“What was that?” shrieks Red.

“I don't know, but I kinda like it,” T.O. responds. The chanting continues at Red and T.O. try to get a better look.

“Gender, Gender, Are you performing gender?/ Magnet, Magnet, That's how we make our coupling / Tell me, tell me, How do you do it?” By this time, Red and T.O. have gotten pretty close the strange beings. It is hard to tell where one of them ends and the other begins. Dressed in matching jump suits and tutus, the beings bob and hop in choreographed unison.

“Ambiguous, Ambiguous, Cyborg Implants / X and Y, do your dance / Do the Robot, Do the Robot / Do the Robot, Do the Robot / Do the Robot, Do the Robot.”

Twenty Ounce begins can't resist dancing along with them, as she is sensitive to a good beat. They suddenly stop and stare at Red and Twenty Ounce. The travelers return the glare, astounded and perplexed.

“If you think we're mere metal works for entertainment you ought to pay,” one of them speaks, matter-of-factly.

“But if you think us to be real like you, or you, you should speak to us,” chimes the other. “That's manners.”

Assuming that these are the twins Newton spoke about, Red and T.O. begin inquiring about the Telstar crystal. These interesting creatures fail to give them any straightforward response.

“Let us introduce ourselves, we are called Lobo and Lodi.”

“Which one of you is which?” Red and Twenty Ounce ask.

“We both are. But mostly we're blended.” Lobo and Lodi be-bop around in syncopated rhythms, alternating speaking patterns or speaking in unison.

“We have a riddle for you that starts with a story. We would like to tell you that once upon a time one of us was human.

“And twice upon a time one of us was robot. But we cannot remember everything. We had to integrate others into our being.”

“We are Trans-Robotic and Trans-Human beings. One of us is an HTM and the other is a MTH. We do not know which is which. We do not care.”

The twins appear to be conjoined by way of a recycled blender. “Blend” is their closest lover and friend. “Blend's existence started as a blender, but Blend is a great conversationalist.”

Red and Twenty Ounce wonder if these beings have been affected by the Language Problem. “Oh yes, language is certainly a problem,” Lobo and Lodi respond. “Particularly gendered language.”

Feeling defeated and surmising that the twins aren’t going to help them, Red and T.O. begin to sneak away. “But don’t you want to know what’s behind these doors?” sing the twins in simultaneity. Behind them appears to be a set a three doors with interesting symbols on them. The left-most door has an “S” with a slash through it, the center door bears the emblem of a rhombus, and the door on the right has a lower-case “a” with a long tail.

“The symbols on these doors are really interesting. I think I’ve seen them someplace before.” Red tries to of step toward the doors, but Lobo and Lodi scuttle in front of her.

“Riddlers of gender are we and of our doors, we have three. Answer our question right and you will find a crystal light. But behind both of the other doors you will find. . . Bum bum bum bum . . . *Certain* death!” Lobo and Lodi laugh with delight, and shuffle towards the leftmost door. “That door is for those who believe in the purity of birth. That door is for those who think it’s all pretend,” they say scooting the right. “And that door is for those who know the secret of the blend,” they shout while standing dead center. “Kristeva, Irigaray, and Judy B All know it is a matter of degree. Blender is the lens through which *we* see!”

Twenty Ounce and Red take a moment to consider the options. Neither of them planned to risk their lives on this mission, but it is clear that they must chose a door. After a few moments, a lightbulb sparks up in Red’s psyche.

“Let me think about how I want to unpack and articulate this. Well, I suppose I would liken it to becoming a cyborg. Because none of us are beings. We are becomings. It’s all just a process of blending where we came from and where we want to go.” Red tenders with eloquence.

“She gets it! She gets it!” the twins cheer with glee.

“I do. I get it. Gender is a social construction: brought into being by language and maintained through the repetition of stylized repetitive acts. But its also much more complicated than that. It’s the middle door. I know it.”

Red and Twenty Ounce advance towards the middle door together, but Red suddenly hesitates. “ I’m sorry T.O., but I think this is something that I have to face on my own.” Twenty Ounce shrugs, nods, and takes a step back. Red boldly proceeds through the rhombus-inscribed portal.

Commentary: Gender

An entire thesis could be written on the subject on gender in a posthuman world, so it goes with out saying that this short commentary, as well as this scene in *Cybernetic Fruit*, barely scratch the surface. This is not meant to be seen as a deficiency. Sometimes scratching the surface is a good place to start.

Our goal with scene 5 was to challenge gender by equating it with cyborgness. As posthumanism highlights the decomposition of strict categories, the boundaries of gender also begin to collapse, participating “in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender” (Haraway 150). In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway draws on the work of Judith Butler to talk about current conceptions of gender as “highly complex categor[ies] constructed in complex sexual scientific discourses and other social practices” (155) and

uses the cyborg as a figure to disrupt these classifications. Haraway claims that, because the cyborg does not depend on human reproduction, it is a character “outside gender.”

In this sense (according to Haraway), creating any kind of story about cyborgs contributes to a “post-gender” discourse, through the disruption of Oedipal narratives, sexual reproduction, and traditional origin stories (150). This critique is made explicit through the characters of Lobo and Lodi. Through Lobo and Lodi, we wanted to illustrate Butler’s claim that gender is not *just* a construction, but more like a set of signs we wear for costume or disguise; to show that gender should be seen as a fluid variable, as opposed to a fixed attribute, which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times (Butler).

Lobo and Lodi were both male/female and human/machine in ambiguous and fluid proportion to one another. The characters were developed and performed by Nichole Nicholson and Sam Sloan, who brought genuine connection and charisma to Lobo and Lodi.

Certainly the hybridity of the cyborg lends itself amiably to the notion of gender fluidity and gender cross-over. The metaphor of the cyborg (being perpetually in transition) is effective for exploring notions of gender transition. The cyborg, as “a creature in a post-gender world” (Haraway 150), makes an adequate poster figure for transgender folks. In *Cybernetic Fruit* we highlighted this connection by designating cyborg characters as either HTM (human-to-machine), MTH (machine-to-human), ATM (animal-to-machine), or MTA (machine-to-animal). These categories are again troubled through the character of Twenty Ounce who is part human, part animal, and part machine, and self-identifies a “hybrid.”

*Scene 6**The Crystal*

Red enters a dark space, illuminated by ominous red and blue lights. The sound of a bass drum echoes remotely. She spots the magnificent Telstar crystal and is instantly engrossed by it. “It’s the Telstar Crystal,” she whispers softly. Gingerly, she takes it into her cyborg hands. As soon as the crystalline structure brushes her skin, she is seduced by the crystal’s unbounded energy. “This is what I have always needed to attain perfection,” she intones. In this moment of intoxicating intensity, Red abandons the quest for a language cure and thinks only of her own corporeal enhancement. She slides the crystal into her data recollection slot, which was left vacant during Mac’s tuneup. The thumping bass swells into a foreboding melody and the red and blue lights radiate inauspiciously.

Two lines of beings advance into the room. They appear from either side and creep towards one another, performing drone-like movements in mindless unison. Inundated by the crystals power, Red stands motionless in the center, while the tribes of automatons make their way towards her. They circle and swarm her, but she is not affected. Her body begins to sway in fluid rhythms, with greater proficiency than ever before. The lines of beings form semi-circles around her. Though Red is oblivious, the identities of these dancers becomes clear. They are all the people Red has encountered on her quest. It is Granny, Newton, Mac, Aurora, Twenty Ounce, Lobo and Lodi, but something is unmistakably different about them. Something seems to be missing or wrong. They all seem to be, well, perfect. In the absence of their unique idiosyncrasies, they all seem a bit too plain.

Once the semi-circles are formed, the beings begin to shout in Red's direction. The polyphonic voices build to a point of dangerous chaos, until Red raises her hands as if to silence them, and replies, "I am perfect. Thank you."

She gets in line, becoming one of them, and participating in this bizarre dance ritual. Just then, Twenty Ounce--the *real* Twenty Ounce--appears. Her cat sense told her that Red was in danger, and it was right. She spots Red and rushes towards her.

"Red what's going on? We have to get out of here!" T.O. shouts.

Red is totally enveloped by the trance. Twenty Ounce tries breaking her out of it.

"Remember when we were little, and we watched E.T., and I was really really scared and you held my hand. Remember that time Granny made macaroni and cheese? And I'm lactose intolerant?" Twenty Ounce pleads, but Red is unresponsive.

"Remember when we went on that awesome adventure, and we almost got to the end, but then you got stuck in a trance, and I saved you?" she says, as she shoves Red out of the line. Red begins to awaken slightly, but she is still in a state of reverie. This is when T.O. notices the Telstar in Red's data slot. Disappointed in Red, she violently yanks the crystal out. Everything goes black.

Scene 7

Home Again

As the room fills with light again, Red and T.O. realize that they are alone. Red shakes off the sleep and gives Twenty Ounce a big hug. She knows she is lucky to have such a great best friend. Red's eyes light up. She realizes that she's learned something from her brush with perfection.

“Y’know T.O.,” Red laughs, “the end result is not nearly as important as the journey. I’m so glad we had this journey together! I guess it’s in our imperfections that we are already perfect!”

Just then, Newton comes sauntering in from the shadows. “You did it you little catty fruit! Now that you learned the lesson, I guess you can head on home!”

Red and T.O. look at one another and shrug. “You say that like it’s so easy, Newton. We don’t even know where we are,” Twenty Ounce meows.

“You had the power to go home anytime you wanted to,” Newton casually explains.

“What?” Red and Twenty Ounce shout.

“Sure! Just click your heels together three times and say to yourself ‘There’s no place like home,’” Newton responds.

Excitedly, Red and Twenty Ounce do as Newton says. Then, they wait. After several awkward minutes, they open their eyes and glare in Newton’s direction.

“My bad. Can’t be right all the time,” he says as he exits. Red and Twenty Ounce look in the direction of Splendour, the story’s android narrator.

“Splendour,” they ask, “do you know how we can get home?”

“Of course I do,” she replies, matter-of-fact. “I am the narrator.” As she says this, Splendour hops down from her box and hobbles over to where Red and Twenty Ounce are standing. “In order to get back to the beginning, you need to reconstruct the story from where you are now.”

There is a long pause as Red and Twenty Ounce try to decipher what Splendour means. Eventually Splendour gestures towards the giant storybook. “Oh!” T.O. yelps, “We need to turn back the pages of the book!”

Magic music begins to play as the three beings turn back the pages one-by-one, until they find themselves back at Granny’s garden. Splendour dutifully returns to her post, while Red and T.O. look around for Granny.

When Granny twirls out from behind some sunflowers, Red and T.O. nearly tackle her. They throw their arms around her as they attempt to recount the details of their amazing trip. “Granny, I missed you so much,” moans Red. “Would you please teach me how to center?”

“Oh sure, Red!” Granny replies, and the three of them--Red, Granny, and T.O.--sit in the lotus position with their eyes closed. They make om-like sounds as they take deep breaths. Once she feels that they are sufficiently distracted, Granny opens her eyes and sneaks away.

She pulls a large platform out from behind her garden shed. On it, sit Aurora, Newton, Mac, Lobo, and Lodi. They are all enjoying slices of delicious apple pie.

“I think I am getting the hang of meditating, Granny. I am starting to smell your apple pie!” Red says, smiling. She then opens her eyes and spins around to see the creatures from her journey, lounging on a green sofa. “I don’t understand this, but I like it,” she says as she gets up and snags a piece of pie.

At this moment, Splendour once again hops down from her box. She hobbles out in front of the pie party and delivers a final remark: “In this moment, the good people of Vista Bella realized that the language problem was more of a blessing than a curse. Prior

to the problem of poetics, the people of Vista Bella led tidy focused lives and slept tidy focused nights. But after their sudden brush with the surreal, they were now able to dream.”

“Oh Splenda!” calls Granny, “You’ve been working awfully hard. Come and have a slice of pie with us.”

To which Splendour replied, “And they all ate pie together. The End.”

Commentary: Splendour and friends

One character who remains largely absent from this re-telling of *Cybernetic Fruit* is Splendour, the show’s witty and steadfast narrator. Throughout the scenes, Splendour would often interject: revealing important plot elements; proffering humorous, salient commentary; and/or clarifying what transpired on stage. Splendour, played by the dedicated Heather Hull, stood on a box near the stage-edge from the time the house opened until the end of the show. Splendour wore a colorful yarn wig, a polka dot dress, and tie-die pantaloons.

In my re-telling of *Cybernetic Fruit*, I am playing the part of omniscient narrator, and as a result many of the lines delivered by Splendour were delivered through my narrations, bringing full circle the cycle of Splendour. Splendour’s lines, unlike those of the other characters, were not generated solely through devising. Often, they were included later to clarify, provide citation, or tell a joke. In this way, Shauna and I often spoke through Splendour. The character of Splendour was meant to be an entry point into the show, a place where the story could be accessed by almost anyone through her frank descriptions and sarcastic clarifications. Indeed, my first year Speech 101 students unanimously agreed that Splendour was their favorite character.

While I am attempting to recuperate some potential short-comings in my reiteration of this narrative, I would like to spend a moment focusing on the character of Granny. As mentioned in the framing section, the choice to include a positive mother figure was one of the earliest decision that Shauna and I made for this project. We were sure that we wanted a strong mother. However, one of the strengths of the cyborg as a figure is her/his separation from traditional origins and sexual reproduction. To navigate this, we created the role of Granny. Granny (named for Granny Smith Apples) certainly nurtures Red, but their actual relationship is always ambiguous. This was further complicated by the fact that Red and Granny are racially diverse (Red is white, while Granny is black).

Granny was portrayed by Charlie Hope Dorsey: a talented poet who is often asked to play serious, somber roles. Charlie was delighted at the opportunity to be “funny,” and did not disappoint. Though she only appeared in the first and final two scenes, Granny’s goofy and loving presence was felt throughout the narrative. Granny’s character functioned at the nexus of new age philosophy and posthuman ideology. Through her deep appreciation of herbs and crystals, her explicit comfort with blurred categories, and her propensity for evoking altered states, Granny proves that posthumanism and new age philosophy are not so different after all.

Conclusions

As with any attempt to capture and re-present a theatrical performance, there are no doubt elements missing, details left out, and absences of ephemeral magic. Like any photocopy, some parts are fuzzy, some are too dark, and often the edges have gotten cut off. In this chapter, I found myself weaving together an eclectic quilt, with some pieces

designed to question gender, others designed to question memory or beauty, and still others created to tell a story. All of these scraps were sewn together with a thread of posthumanism, and once combined, formed an image that was reasonably similar to *Cybernetic Fruit*. Though it is impossible to recreate what was done in the flesh, I believe that this chapter does an adequate job of communicating the feeling, and a better-than-adequate job of describing the thoughts. My intention with this chapter was to provide a colorful, entertaining, and insightful look into *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*, to frame some of our performance choices, and to provide a platform for all subsequent chapters and theoretical observations.

CHAPTER THREE: WATER AND SUNLIGHT

“The process of aesthetic stimulation is heightened when concepts are forced together from relatively diverse locations in a discontinuous way. The amount of energy required to contemplate diverse concepts produces the physical rush of excitement familiar to those who appreciate art.”

-Robert Pepperell

(The Posthuman Condition 186)

In my experience 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 to land 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 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.

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. Of course, we were not the first (or the first hundredth) 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.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I will (a) explain a bit about my own experience with devising and (b) briefly attempt to define devising. This is by no means an exhaustive history of devising, but rather a way to describe some of the core values and explicit goals of a devising methodology. In the second section, I will (a) give a detailed, chronological account of the process Shauna and I used to create *Cybernetic Fruit*, indicating the moments of striking and productive synchronicity; and (b) describe two elements of the process that were unique, most especially a method we have termed "group scene writing." In the final section, I will (a) root these methods in theories of posthumanism in order to illustrate the productive potential inherent in collaborative devising practices, and (b) discuss some of tensions produced under such conditions.

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.

In this section, I will talk first about some of my personal experiences with devising, which I hope will provide some insight into why I so deeply value this method. Then I will attempt to define the somewhat indefinable practice of devising, with the help of Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, and Allison Oddey.

My Devising Experiences

My earliest experiences of collaborative performance-making occurred during high school Group Interpretation. I came from a working-class school district with limited resources and which provided little opportunity for training in the arts. Our speech coach was a social studies teacher with meager experience but a good attitude. The result was a fun, creative experience which never produced a single win, but instead provided a comfortable platform for improvisation and imaginative expression.

My first exposure to the concept of devising came when I was an undergraduate student. In *Staging Literature*, we formed groups and set to work on semester length projects. We were a group of five women: three undergrads and two graduate students, who had never before met. As we began playing and working together, it became obvious that womanhood would be a central theme in our performance. The first installment of the piece was focused on body image and concretized through ballet. After about two weeks of brainstorming and writing, one of the women dropped the class, expressing that

she “just didn’t get it.” It was a set back, but as a group we carried on, divvying up her lines and reworking the blocking. For another month, we wrote together, laughed, and had coffee. Our script employed intertextuality, incorporating 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. It had become a piece about personal identity told from a feminist standpoint. It was a process that I found pleasurable and as the semester progressed, we seemed to grow close.

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.

We still remaining group of three spent late hours over the next two days concocting a plan. 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 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 drawn 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, but unlike *Rip*, there was still 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.

During other non-dinner party rehearsals, we would (in similar fashion to *Rip*) be divided into groups based on who we would have scenes with, and were instructed to play. Sometimes we would be given an agenda (such as, “Penny gets rescued by the Mermaid”), other times we would be told to enact a specific emotion or experience. Often, we would spend more than one night working on a particular scene, attempting to evoke different emotions or discover additional meanings. We would share our work at the end of the night, and sometimes meet with the director(s) outside of rehearsal in order to help generate the script text.

I found every one of these devising experiences to be productive, even my experience in *Staging Literature*. Out of each of these, I learned different things, ranging from specific methodologies of generating a script, to negotiating interpersonal drama. Hopefully, this section has provided you with a sense of my level of experience before embarking on *Cybernetic Fruit*, as well as introducing you to the concept of devising and some common practices in my theatre community. Most importantly, in this section, I hope to have shown the magnetism I feel for devising theatre. I keep these experiences in my creative toolbox and I draw on them (to varying degrees) whenever I am working on a show, teaching a class, or drafting a paper. Through these experiences I have come to accept devising as a kind of way of life.

Defining Devising

So how do we define devising? I have just provided some examples of how it can be done, but we have not really described devising at its essence. Defining devising is necessarily difficult. 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), that can be 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*.

You can start with almost anything: an object, an image, or idea. It could be a story or a message. You may want to start with a form and discover the content as you proceed. You may want to start with generating truckloads of content, and then figuring out the form you want to mold it into. You can use anything that anyone can feel a connection (or a dissonance) with, and brainstorm a performance from there. Sounds pretty simple, right?

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)

Devising evokes postmodernism in its fluid ability to evade categorization; it evokes surrealism in its deployment of chance; and it can be done by almost any group of collaborators, in almost any space or any amount of time. But one piece of the puzzle has yet to be expressed: devising is also inherently political. Heddon and Milling tell us that “collaborative devising processes match contemporary critical concerns, making it the ideal means to explore and embody those concerns in practice” (192). More often than not, devised theatrical work is driven by the impetus to change social circumstances and/or embody shifting philosophical paradigms. Often this is done by prompting an audience to see or think differently, or to become more aware of the political and ethical choices they make and the meanings they attribute (Heddon and Milling 205). It is also important to note, however, that devising practices are “not always in contradistinction to ‘straight’ theatre. Devised work is a response. . . [which] challenges the prevailing ideology of one person’s text under another person’s direction” (Oddey 4), in a relationship similar to modernism-postmodernism or humanism-posthumanism. Which is to say, devising does not seek to throw the values and methods of traditional theatre out

with the bath water. Instead, it offers a critique (as postmodernism does for modernism) which aims to push the values of traditional theatre further.

Devising can be difficult to accurately define because methods of devising are constantly changing. But at its core, devising is a creative way of producing theatrical work through the art of connecting with other people. By creating a script through a process of group expression, devising challenges the “traditional” director/actor hierarchy. “A group devising process is more likely to engender a performance that has multiple perspectives, that does not promote one, authoritative ‘version’ or interpretation . . .” (Heddon and Milling 192).

So what can we say for sure? 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.

In this section on devising, my intention has been to provide as clear an overview as is possible with a productively slippery methodology such as devising. I have tried to do this in two ways: first by sharing some of my own experiences; and second, by synthesizing the works of others. In the following section, I will take these understandings of devising and apply them to the construction of *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*.

Devising Cybernetic Fruit

As I have mentioned several times, engaging in a devising process begins first with devising a method. It was during this process of composing a method that Shauna and I really bonded as collaborators. It started with games we would play with each other: sending each other emails as characters or assigning creative projects to one another. It

was through this open experimentation, propelled by the exciting challenge of building a methodology, that we were able to create not just *Cybernetic Fruit*, but a fruitful and on-going creative/intellectual partnership.

In this section, I will first provide you a detailed, chronological account of the process of devising *Cybernetic Fruit*, and then spend some time detailing specific methodologies that we found to be unique.

Order of Events

It all started with a dream. I don't recall the details, but I know it involved Viscera (a cyborg persona which Shauna periodically embodies for research and play). Just two days prior, I sat in my advisor's office, stumbling through a haphazard collection of ideas for a show and subsequently my master's thesis. Inspired by Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, I wanted to recreate a series of fairytales from a feminist perspective. I talked about potentially staging some of Carter's stories, or perhaps using devising to create some of my own tales. I also spoke of creating a mash-up between the two. "You seem to be putting a lot of different things together," he said, "But you need to decide if you want to make a pizza, with one solid crust and multiple toppings, or a weird casserole with the green beans and the sweet potatoes all mixed together. You need to think about why they are in the same dish." I walked out in a state of mild confusion concerning the project at hand. Over the next day however, this sensation led to a productive narrowing of scope. In order to limit the number of ingredients, I settled on the flavor I wanted to retain: sweet and bitter fairytales. In the days that followed, I tried to imagine the ways that this particular narrative conviction could take shape.

Then I dreamt it. 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.

It is important to note that I hardly knew Shauna. She was a master's student when I was an undergraduate (in a different department), and we had been at some of the same parties. Since I joined the master's program, we had taken a couple of classes together, and we seemed to really respect each other's work. I fell in love with Viscera during her piece in *BAR Corporation Presents* and apparently this influenced my subconscious. Shauna responded to my email within minutes (literally *minutes*) and we made a date to meet.

Though many people found this to be an unlikely pairing, within the first moments of our engagement collaborative sparks flew. The idea of doing a show together went, almost instantly, from hypothetical to impending, and our collective creative juices seemed to cocktail nicely.

I have included this section of the narrative as an effort to pay special attention to moments of synchronicity. For the sake of concision, I will not include every single detail in the process of creating *Cybernetic Fruit*. Instead, I will focus on methods of explicit devising, as well as moments of "loose devising." In other words, I will concentrate on explicating moments I found to be functioning in unconventional, collaborative, and process-oriented paradigms. As with many projects, this cybernetic ball began rolling with research.

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 we wanted to play around with. We combed step-by-step through the proposal request, carefully answering each of the queries. Coming up with the theoretical framework came relatively quickly, 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. . . .

One way we aimed to subvert these structures was by using them in layers. Another way we challenged them was to view them through a posthuman lens. (MacDonald and Wood)

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. (McDonald and Wood)

Of course, this method sounds very lovely, and the proposal was nothing if not genuine. However, we were left with the question of how to materially manifest these ideas. The

method we came up with was a sort of archetype remix. On the final page of the show proposal, we created a chart with five boxes. Four of the boxes were titled “Vladimir Propp’s Folktale Characters,” “Jung’s Archetypes,” “Popular Fairytale Characters,” and “Cyborg Characters,” respectively. In each of these boxes, we generated a list of archetypes for each category. For example, in the box marked “Cyborg Characters,” we listed David from *AI*, The Terminator, C-3PO and R2D2, Wolverine from The X-Men, and so on. In the box marked “Popular Fairytale Characters,” we listed Pinocchio, Little Red Riding Hood, The Wicked Witch of the West, Merlin, and so on. The fifth and central box contained a list of potential character names. We then used colored markers to draw lines originating from each character name and traveling through the various kinds of archetypes. For example, one line of flight (drawn from a character named ‘Avatar’) intersected with Propp’s Magical Helper, Donkey from *Shrek*, Jung’s Anima, and Inspector Gadget. This was the first step in generating our cast of characters.

The next step in our show creation process was the development and deployment of two summer devising workshops. These workshops aided us in the development of character traits and the early construction of the plot. These workshops also helped us to better understand the language problem. These devising workshops will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section on unique methods.

Finally, it came 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. In addition to this, we had each of them perform a cold reading from either *Edward Scissorhands* or *The Labyrinth*. The auditions exceeded our expectations, and in true

synergistic nature, we cast everyone who came out. 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 towards 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. This provided us with both a strong place to start and plenty of space to play. What follows are the original character sketches, which comprised the front page of the very first hand-out:

Red (Anna): The heroine of our quest. Witty. Hip. Cute. Cutting edge. A human-to-machine cyborg (htm). Very brave, although she doesn't quite know it yet. 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 Tigerlilly. Not a cyborg?

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. Appears sweet and innocent, but perhaps with a few tricks up her sleeve.

Aurora (Molly): Riddler of body image/beauty. Goddess/spider. Sits in a Web and speaks in riddles. Beautiful, seductive, mysterious. Almost like a live hologram. Lots of mirrors & reverb voice.

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. Part animal/human, part machine. Machine-to-human cyborg (mtc). Think Scarecrow from *Wizard of Oz*, Donkey from *Shrek*. Has magical powers. May seem as though she is only there for comic relief, but will prove her strength.

Narrator (Heather): The Narrator keeps it all together. Somehow we want this to involve a puppet. . . . She introduces the story, the characters, and keeps up up to date with what’s happening ‘back at the ranch.’ She is also able to interact with the story/characters. May be connected to one character in particular? May be in control of the entire story/fairy tale world (hence the puppet imagery)? Funny, sarcastic. (MacDonald and Wood)

We spent the rest of this meeting talking about the show's concepts, clarifying and developing character motivations, and brainstorming possible costume choices. 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 seeming 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 either left blank intentionally, or simply did not know. 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. “So you really want to change your mother?” In a very Ursula the Sea-witch, kind of way. 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. In order to find it she must walk (not teleport), use a pen and paper, etc. She’ll be kickin’ it old school, which is bothersome to RED (not optimal).

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. To be figured out through devising.

Third Challenge: Meet LOBO & LODI. A riddle/challenge involving gender?? To be figured out through devising.

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. (She was warned by NEWTON not to mess with this crystal. We hear the memory of his warning echo aloud). 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. Just perfect, symmetrical, optimal performance. 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. 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. Imperfection is evolution.

The Journey Home/Conclusion: Back at the ranch, the language problem has evolved in to a beautiful poetic dance. RED is reunited with GRANNY (who was in on it the whole time?). *Wizard of Oz* type realization moment. RED is able to accept GRANNY and thus accept herself. THE END. (MacDonald and Wood)

From this limited frame work, the CF Collective devised the entire script, word by word and line by line. The process by which we achieved this is described below.

Unique Methods

Although many elements of our devising methods were based on the work of others, there were two elements to our process which made it unique. Both of these

practices, like many developments in devising, were borne out of a mix of curiosity and necessity. The first of these was the inclusion of summer devising workshops. The impetus for creating such workshops was originally lack of time. Since Shauna and I both planned to write about this project the following school year, we were assigned the first slot of the Kleinau season.

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 gasps of summer vacation, seemed unrealistic. As a way to have our cake and eat it too, Shauna and I created summer devising workshops.

These were voluntary play dates that were open to fellow speech communication students as well as to members of the community. People who had no real intention of auditioning/dedicating a full month to production, but who wanted to be involved were invited and 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 lives 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,” which resulted in the idea of misplacing a memory crystal. 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.

The use of these summer workshops allowed Shauna and I 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. These workshops helped Shauna and I to make some choices about the characters, to shape the audition methodology we would employ, and to get some sense of who our audition pool might include.

Fast forward to our second week of rehearsal with the cast. At this point, when it became time to decide how we would set about devising the plot, Shauna and I found ourselves in a bit of a pickle. 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 far more cooks in the kitchen. Without the other performers present to provide their input, the show would retain a limited scope.

Instead, to allay our concerns, for each night of rehearsal, we would plan to collectively work 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?” (MacDonald and Wood).

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/didn't work, what we liked/disliked, and/or 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.

Now that I have described the process by which *Cybernetic Fruit* came to be, both explaining the chronological order of events and highlighting unique discoveries, in the following section I will focus more explicitly on the links between posthumanism and devising.

Posthuman Devising

A genealogy of my experiences with posthumanism would lead back to my earliest exposure to experimental theatre. It would also lead 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 offered 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 spilling over of art is always the first spilling over.

This section is divided into two parts. First, I provide a map of where posthumanism and devising practices intersect, illustrating their productively interdependent relationship. Then, I outline some of the tensions and contradictions present in such a practice.

Posthuman Devising

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 as we learned in Chapter 2, that does not need to be the case. Beauty has never really been static, and in any case, beauty and art are not synonymous.

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.

In this section, 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 they intersect at exactly the nexus of postmodernism. Devising and posthumanism are both 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 echos the way I originally felt when I realized that huge chunks of what I loved about posthumanism had already been sort of “covered” by postmodernism and poststructuralism. But then, if you recall from Chapter 1, I realized that postmodernism was the lens posthumanism uses to reexamine the ways that human bodies, human

existence, and above all humanism itself is changing in this technological era. So 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 posthuman 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). 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.

Questions of Authorship

There is the utopian vision of the perfect collaborative collective: one where everyone's input is equally valued and the ownership of the work is equally shared. This balance is difficult, if not impossible to master. 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?

In my experience, it is pretty much essential for someone to be able to see the thing from the outside. When you are performing, not only are you bound by the physical limitations of being on stage, but you are also phenomenologically situated as a character. In order for you to do your job effectively, you have to give yourself over to it. As a director, your job is to see the show from the outside. Certainly, you are bound by your own physical and phenomenological standpoints as well, but the enactment of your role involves an almost heightened sense of awareness. You keep a keen sense of the story, the character nuances, and the staging. Plus, it also helps to have someone who can make the final call.

In terms of the work we execute in the Kleinau Theatre, the term "director" means (or can mean) a wide variety of duties. (The Kleinau truly does adhere to a DIY, beginner's-mind kind of work process). When you propose a show for production in the Kleinau, you are essentially signing yourself on as DIY producer. If your show is chosen, it is your job to produce (or gets the rights to) the script; hold auditions and select a cast; schedule and facilitate rehearsals; design and create (along with the help of the limited technical crew) a set; design and create, or locate and purchase costumes; create the

publicity materials (such as program and poster); and so on and so on. At some level, even working under the most wholesomely altruistic collective work dynamic, it becomes important for someone to take responsibility for this plethora of tasks.

I still worry though. I worry about the ways this practice might allow me to benefit from the hard work of others, in ways that they may not have benefited. Sure, it *says* “Written by the CF Collective,” but I worry that not many people will recognize this fact. From the beginning (and even still) this was “Nico and Shauna’s show.” Shauna and I were handed the keys. We were the ones given Kleinau mugs at the end of the season. We recently entered *Cybernetic Fruit* in a contest for the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender, and if we had won, the award would have been credited to Shauna MacDonald and Nico Wood. You could argue that we did *more* work, and this statement would not be untrue. It is undoubtable that we spent more hours in the lab. However, you could also make the argument that Lobo and Lodi stole the show (as many an audience member has communicated to me.) Lobo and Lodi, who were conceived almost *entirely* by Nichole Nicholson and Sam Sloan, and whose scene (though originally conceptualized and ultimately edited by Shauna and myself) was written *entirely* through devising. I comfort myself by realizing that questions of value (whose and what kind of work we value, what elements and artifacts of a performance we value) and authorship are visibly disrupted through devising, and regardless of whether devising methods bear the kind of unilateral artistry that is the ideal, is not the point. In true posthuman fashion, these processes do not allow the categories of value or ownership to sit still.

I am also consoled by the fact that the Kleinau spirit is also invested--however unconsciously or unevenly--in undermining the autonomy of the work of art. While Shauna and I get the credit for *this* show, others will draw on this experience and employ our help with their future projects. In terms of the Kleinau, “director” is an ephemeral identity.

I have been asked about the tensions that arise from writing about my own work. In this section, I hope to communicate that the strongest tension I feel comes out of the reality that it is not actually “my own work.” At one level, it is mine and Shauna’s and on another level it belongs to the entire cast. 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 I 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 Wilcoxon

Nico Wood

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 would call a “creative double bind,” where I am 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 here is between suspending authority and maintaining responsibility. How did I arrive 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. We needed 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.

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 have to direct them.

In this section, I organically explored the questions of authorship that have arisen from my work with devising practices in *Cybernetic Fruit*. I moved through the tensions I felt: explaining how this show is both not-mine and not-not-mine; asking why a show like this needed a directorial staff; and framing this situation as a creative double bind, while talking about our efforts to exceed it.

Conclusions

In this chapter, 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 thesis 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 chapter, I leave you now with some of the profound sound bites Chapter 3 has had to offer.

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.

CHAPTER FOUR: TENDING THE GARDEN

“Most philosophical problems are debates about language. They arise because of the mistaken assumptions a. that language is consistent and b. that because a word exists there must exist a ‘thing’ that it represents and c. that the things that are represented should, in themselves, be consistent.”

*-- Robert Pepperell
(The Posthuman Condition 179)*

“Language, or the mode of expression used in producing and disseminating knowledge, must be rational To be rational, language must be transparent; it must function only to represent the real/perceivable world which the rational mind observes. There must be a firm and objective connection between the objects of perception and the words used to name them (between signifier and signified).”

*-- Mary Klages, speaking about Humanism
(Postmodernism)*

“Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism.”

*-- Donna J. Haraway
(A Cyborg Manifesto 176)*

In this chapter, I am trying to undo language. I am trying to uproot language: pull it up from its crippling rationality, dig it out from under the weight of its linearity, dust it off from the shelf of predictability. I am trying to undo language.

But *language*? It's such a big word. It's such an all-encompassing master concept. There is just no way around it. *For what can one mean when one speaks of language?*

Before I attempt to answer that question, I would like to take a moment to glance ahead. It is fair to say that this chapter jumps around a bit, for at every turn I find myself trying to justify my critique of rational language through the use of rational language. It continues to be a tough nut to crack and is responsible for the general manifesto-like nature of this chapter over-all. That being said, here is my attempt to preview the content of this somewhat sprawling, anti-rationalist chapter in a clear, linear, and rational way.

This chapter is divided into five sections. I begin by explaining the structural composition of this chapter, in "Post Structure," before proceeding with the section "Situating Language," where I do just that. By drawing on the work of post-structuralist and French feminist scholars, I explain the way I intend to use the concept of language in this chapter, while also pointing out some of my inspirations. Third, in the section "Taking it to the Stage," I explain why the use of (and creations of new) myth(s) and the means to embody them theatrically is essential in undermining rational language. Fourth, I speak about "The Problem of Poetics." In the section "The Problem of Poetics," I re-introduce this concept from the world of *Cybernetic Fruit*, talk about how it functioned, and describe the ways it did or did not work in the show. Finally, in "I've Seen this Scene," I create a new scene for *Cybernetic Fruit*, finishing up with a few concluding observations.

Post Structure

As you are experiencing this chapter, you may notice its structural divergence from the chapters which have preceded it. This is intentional. This chapter is attempting

to materially embody its critique of rational, linear discourse, if only in a minor way. First, the poetic, performative style of this chapter makes generous use of metaphor and metonymy in an effort to access certain subconscious qualities and to create unforeseen connections between thoughts. Second, the heavy use of footnotes is meant to create a zig-zagging discourse in which the messages and meanings are dispersed, making this to some small extent (in the spirit of Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*²) a choose-your-own-adventure paper. Creating the chapter in this way has been an attempt to access and reproduce what Deleuze and Guattari speak about as rhizomatic meaning-making, and what Barthes calls a horizontal discourse. Another way to say this would be, to create a body of text which resists linear, hierarchal movement (like that of a tree or arborescence), in favor of a more sprawling discourse, which spirals in multiple directions at once (like that of a rhizomatic root structure).

Situating Language

Posthumanists and and poststructuralists position themselves in opposition to language. Structuralists and poststructuralist have both offered their critiques of language and meaning. If you asked Saussure, he might highlight the differentiation between signifier and signified. Perhaps he would also emphasizes the notion that each signifier only attains its semantic value by virtue of its differential orientation within the structure of language.³ Lacan could speak of the sliding of signifiers, while Derrida might describe a system of floating signifiers with no fixed relation to any extra-linguistic referents at all.⁴

² see Barthes.

³ see Saussure.

⁴ see Culler.

Terry Eagleton describes the tension involved in using language, while expressing the connection between sign-usage and selfhood:

Nothing is ever fully present in signs. It is an illusion for me to believe that I can ever be fully present to you in what I say and write, because to use signs at all entails my meaning being always somehow dispersed, divided and never quite at one with itself. Not only my meaning, indeed, but I myself: since language is something I am made out of, rather than a convenient tool I use, the whole idea that I am a stable unified entity must also be a fiction.⁵

Marshall McLuhan takes this a step further towards the posthuman, calling the spoken word “the first technology by which humans grasped their environment in a new way (an opinion shared by Lacan),”⁶ reinforcing the idea that cyborg-ness is an essential quality of the human condition.

These are the (perhaps contradictory) lenses through which I would like to view language for this project: as a tool, as a technology, as a clue to our status as chimeras.⁷ But also as something which is intrinsically a part of us, something which both constitutes us and yet to which we cannot be reduced.⁸ Finally, I want see language as something unsettled, something fluid, something that is always already in flux.

Already I am stuck. Here in this thesis, I am already confined by a semiotic system. I am speaking in English, in academic patois. I am using citation. I am relying on the system we all use and know. I am drawing on my own experiences, filtering them

⁵ see Eagleton.

⁶ Quoted in Nusselder 16.

⁷ Reference to Haraway.

through language and translating them to you. You are taking in my choice of signifiers and interpreting them based on this context, your experience, the interface of this page. I've already shot myself in the foot. What follows is my attempt to bandage it in aesthetically appealing, philosophically generative ways.

The writings of Hélène Cixous, in particular her “Laugh of the Medusa,” have been useful for me in this project. Her powerful rejection of all forms of dualistic thinking and her espousal of a feminine practice of writing that privileges the knowledge of the body are the two major threads which create the seams of her work with language. “Feminine writing,” asserts Cixous, “cannot be defined.” Nevertheless, she does ascribe one characteristic to it: its proximity to voice. Speech is privileged because of its closeness to song and thus to the unconscious.”⁹ Feminine writing privileges the associative logic of music over the linear logic of philosophical and literary discourse, which allows speaking to be a transgressive act.

Luce Irigaray has also provided advantageous perspectives on language and writing, again claiming that woman need a language all their own. “It is often said that to speak or write like a man is to assert mastery, to be in control of truth, objectivity, knowledge, whereas to speak like a woman is to refute mastery, to allow meaning to be elusive or shifting, not to be in control, or in possession of truth or knowledge.”¹⁰ What I think this means is that, in order to enact a feminine practice of speaking or writing, one must be open to the impulses and respect the methods of the body, while incorporating aesthetic or musical modes of expression.

⁸ Lacan qtd. in Sarup 10.

⁹ Sarup 112.

¹⁰ Sarup 121.

What Cixous and Irigaray are engaging in battle is the predominance of a phallogocentric discourse, or a privileging of the masculine in communication. This term “evolved from deconstructionists who questioned the ‘logocentrism’ of Western literature and thought, i.e., the belief in the centrality of logos, understood as cosmic reason.”¹¹ Cixous and Irigaray note how all Western languages, in all their features, are male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated, not only in vocabulary and syntax, but also in their rigorous rules of logic and proneness for rigid classifications and binary oppositions. As Donna Haraway puts it, “phallogocentricism was the egg ovulated by the master subject, the brooding hen to the permanent chickens of history. But into the nest with that literal-minded egg has been placed the germ of a phoenix that will speak in all the tongues of a world turned upside down.”¹²

Taking it to the Stage

Maybe this paper can un-write itself. Maybe these words and their meanings can oscillate. Maybe just by drawing attention to the gaps, between signifier and signified, between fantasy and truth, between real and symbolic, we can find a new methodology. After all, “writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.”¹³ Perhaps we can think a new language. Maybe we can inhabit these gaps. And if the words on this page are, by their very essence and structure *just too rigid*, if the words on this page are just too confined, by their sum and substance, by their unambiguous context, or by the grade they subsequently seek, surely there must be a place where words can dance. There must be a sanctioned space where language can

¹¹ see Felluga.

¹² Haraway 148.

¹³ Deleuze and Guatarri 5.

splash, burst, and disrupt, ironic as that may be. There must a laboratory space for language and for the text, where signifiers can eat eat themselves and throw themselves back up. Where can this place be if not the stage?

Rollo May tells us:

There are broadly speaking, two ways human beings have communicated through their long and fitful history. One is rationalistic language. This is specific and empirical, and eventuates in logic A second way is myth. The myth is a drama which begins as a historical event and takes in its special character as a way of orienting people to reality . . . myth refers to the quintessence of human experience, the meaning and significance of human life.¹⁴

Hélène Cixous uses dream and myth in her texts as ways of exploring the archaic and the repressed, and as ways of unsettling the illusion of subjective autonomy and conscious control.¹⁵ Donna Haraway proposes an “ironic political myth” with her frequently cited “Cyborg Manifesto,” which she says ought to strike readers as both “blasphemous” and “ironic.”¹⁶ According to Haraway, cyborg politics have often been linked to oppressive mythologies: scientific progress, racism, male-dominated capitalism, and the exploitation of nature serving the needs of culture, but this doesn’t have to remain the case. In true postmodern fashion, Haraway rejects the mythologies propagated by psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Feminism and posits that her Manifesto is an argument for

¹⁴ May qtd. in Poulos 178

¹⁵ Sarup 112.

¹⁶ Haraway 149.

"pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction."¹⁷

What this means is that we need to take myth-making into our own hands, and in the spirit of Cixous, to formulate different languages for transmitting them. One possibility for these mythic conveyances: staged aesthetic performances.

I once saw an art installation at the Glove Factory in Carbondale, Illinois,¹⁸ in which an artist had created a large (say, twenty square foot) rectangle of duct tape on the floor. Hanging in the marked area was a sheet of paper. The paper was a notice of secession. For twenty-four hours, on this specific day, this area of art space was no longer a part of the United States of America. I want to paste such a square on the stage, or perhaps even on this piece of paper. I want to post an official notice of this space's resignation from the nation of semiotic signifiers. In this safe space, we will begin anew.

Of course, this space exists within contradiction. Of course, using discourse to sanction a space outside of itself is ludicrous. So ludicrous it just might work. This is the struggle I am engaged in with the creation of this chapter and this thesis as a whole. I wish to dissolve boundaries. I wish to challenge and reshape language, to mix and match signifiers and signifieds, and yet *I still wish to be understood*. I'm in a tough spot. I'm in a bind. And pressed against this white wall, I choose to symbolically secede.¹⁹

¹⁷ Haraway 150.

¹⁸ The Glove Factory is operated by the School of Art and Design at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Although I do not recall the name of the artist or the title of the piece, I know it was exhibited in Spring of 2004.

¹⁹ I am referring to Deleuze and Guatarri's concept of the black hole of subjectivity and white wall of the signifier. I think a metaphor which explains what (I think) they mean, is that of subjectivity as a black hole/camera and projector and signifier as white wall/screen. Subjectivity takes 'the real' in, but it needs the space of the signifier ('the symbolic) to project it so it can be seen.

Knowing full well that this space is *only symbolic*, just as the entire world is *only symbolic*, only adds to its charm. Accepting that this space, this freedom, is temporary, is essential to its magic. Like a Buddhist sandcastle washed by a wave, like handcrafted latté art flushed down the toilet, this moment is aware of its own mortality and yet remains in motion. As Dwight Conquergood so eloquently states, this paper calls for “a more poststructuralist and political emphasis on performance as kinesis, as movement, motion, fluidity, fluctuation, all those restless energies that transgress boundaries and trouble closure.”²⁰ It does not matter that this space is only temporary. Perhaps because of its temporal precariousness this “language problem,” this game that we are playing, can exist in *haecceity*: It can come into being in this moment and then continue along its own line of flight unfazed, unconcerned about its lack of staying power and completely unafraid of its own death.

“The Problem of Poetics”

In the land of Vista Bella there was a language problem. This ailment caused innocent, posthuman country folk to speak in sonnets, speak backwards, burst into uncontrollable laughter, and/or engage in bizarre surrealist indulgences. This language problem was a central theme in *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*.

Cybernetic Fruit took this language problem seriously. Greatly influenced by the French feminists, Shauna MacDonald and I latched onto the critique of rational language. Like Irigaray, we were aiming to reveal the patriarchal philosophy underlying language and attempting to move toward a "new" feminine language that would give women the

²⁰ see Conquergood.

means to express themselves outside of, or even against, a phallogocentric discourse.²¹ We wanted to jam the machine of language in order to rethink the relations that make meaning, knowledge, and presence possible. Posthumanism, as one of the appendages of postmodernism, certainly values the critique of rational thought and works to dismantle conceptions of the autonomous human subject. This is simply an extension of the same critique.

Originally, the language problem in *Cybernetic Fruit* functioned in primarily two ways. First, the language problem worked to advance the plot in the beginning, setting into motion a series of events that sent Red, the tale's heroine, on a quest. Second, at the end of the narrative, we discover that Red and the people of Vista Bella were, because of the knowledge gleaned from the quest, now able to accept these new forms of expression and use them in creative, epistemologically fruitful ways. This bookending technique allowed the majority of the show to focus its energy on its more central theme: the critique of perfection.

During the process of writing the show, I found the language problem to be functioning effectively within the world of Vista Bella and *Cybernetic Fruit*. I enjoyed the moments when it made itself known and the ways that it was manifested on stage, mostly through the character of Granny. After the show however, it came to my attention that many audience members did not "notice" or "understand" what we meant by the language problem. To several people with whom I spoke, this element of the show did not resonate strongly enough to make an impact. Thus the critique of rational language, which was essential to our concept, went completely under the radar.

²¹ see Irigaray.

As a result, I will use this chapter to re-conceptualize this element of *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*. Drawing upon the writings of several French theorists, I will re-create this element of the show. In order to flesh out and more strongly theorize this language problem, I will combine elements of standard playwriting format²² with standard MLA.

I desire to re-write this element of *Cybernetic Fruit* not because I am unhappy with the result, but as an experiment of thought and theory. This time around, I would like to imagine the narrative, (which is already a sort of re-imagining) with a new skill set, a new vocabulary, and with a new set of allies at my side.

To be explicit, what I intend to do here is to create an entirely new scene for *Cybernetic Fruit*. I will situate this scene within the already established context of the show, and then use this scene to explore new territory. It was very difficult for Shauna, our cast, and I to tackle this language problem and to wrap our logocentric minds around it. Although the task has not grown any easier, I feel my own capacity for such a journey has become stronger. I think much of the work of building and deconstructing language, of weaving and unweaving this web of words can be accomplished by the work of the metaphor. As Nusselder explains, “metaphors are a means to give form to what does not (yet) have a place in reality ‘as we know it’.”²³

But metaphors can be so sneaky. Sometimes I find metaphors doing the work of language’s propagation and colonization of abstract ideas, while sometimes I see them opening up new generative spaces for unforeseen linguistic ballets. Other times I see

²² I am drawing my concept of “standard professional playwriting format” from playwright and screenwriter Jon Dorf, whose plays have been produced in more than 35 states and on three continents. Specifically, I am following the format he outlines on his website: <http://www.playwriting101.com/>.

language as *always already a metaphor for the real*. Nusselder, under guidance from Lacan, tells us that “the metaphor is therefore always a substitution: it substitutes a ‘real presence that is impossible.’”²⁴ Metaphor can play for either team, which, like the cyborg, makes it a useful and fluid tool.

As much as I want to disentangle language from its limiting arborescent structure, I also do not want to envision a world where we cannot communicate to one another, and I believe there is a way out of this limiting dichotomy. “This is the conundrum we are in: we inevitably ‘live in metaphors’ and at the same time we must avoid the seduction of taking them literally.”²⁵ But what would happen if we did take them literally?

“There is a gap between the object and its ‘exact’ representation, and in the gap the (unconscious) functioning of fantasy takes place as imaginary and metaphorical (trans)formation of data into new forms of reality.”²⁶ I say we exploit the gap. I say we seek the knowledge that falls in the gap. I say we stop ignoring the gap, the crack, the dark caverns and lost grooves. I say that we tap into these underground springs, crack open these geodes, and find bemusement in the crystalline structures we locate inside. I say we allow our fingers to find the pulse of this gap. When we find it, and when we can taste it, I say we dance there. “All sign systems have a gap: they never represent the object as a perfect copy, but always by means of something (words, images, and so on) different from what it represents.”²⁷ We do not need to know *how* this new language will function. “Let’s leave it to the worriers, to masculine anxiety and its obsession with how to

²³ Nusselder 16.

²⁴ Nusselder 17.

²⁵ Nusselder 18.

²⁶ Nusselder 20.

²⁷ Nusselder 20.

dominate the way things work- knowing ‘how it works’ in order to ‘make it work.’ For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to fly.”²⁸

I’ve Seen This Scene

What follows is a new scene for *Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Fairytale*. The objective of this scene is to draw the language problem, which originally served as a sort of bookend for the show, into the meat of the matter. The purpose of this new scene is also to further expose the currents of French theoretical inquiry flowing just below the surface, to pull back the skin allowing the nerve pulsate for all to see, and to illustrate further how vast these creative and philosophical rhizomes can (and have) grow(n). This scene, while refusing to function on a tradition plot arc, will hopefully disrupt the plot trajectory of the play as a whole.²⁹ In order to locate a methodology for this kind of artistic production, I look to Dada and to Surrealism. As Guillaume Apollinaire has stated, “When man wanted to imitate walking he invented the wheel, which does not resemble a leg. In the same way, he has created surrealism.”³⁰

The re-telling of this story begins towards the end of the show. I am adding the new scene after Red’s encounter with Lobo and Lodi. In the original version of *Cybernetic Fruit*, Red selects the center door, which has a rhombus painted on it. Twenty-

²⁸ Cixous 887.

²⁹ While many artists and scholars working under the discipline of Performance Studies resist the use of the word ‘play’ for the more generally accepted ‘performance’ or ‘show,’ in this instance I would like to reclaim this term. *Cybernetic Fruit* was an exercise in exploration, make believe, and tapping into our collective ‘beginner’s minds.’ For these reasons, among others, Shauna MacDonald and I have both regularly and comfortably referenced this work as a play.

³⁰ Qtd in Goldberg 80.

Ounce wants to go with her, but Red asks her to stay behind. In this version of the tale, both Red and T.O. walk through the door together.

ACT II

SCENE 1.1: "HELPING" HANDS

EXT. RED and TWENTY OUNCE (T.O.) have just passed through the center door bearing the emblem of the rhombus. As they cross the threshold, they fall into a long dark hole. On their way down, they are grabbed by "helping hands." This image is accomplished through sounds effects (crunching, breaking sounds, theremin sounds that indicate falling), dark lighting, and several sets of hand coming out from behind the sides of the flats.

RED and T.O.

AHHHHHHHHH!

T.O.

(repeating and overlapping with RED) MEOWWWW! Mrawww.

RED

(repeating and overlapping with T.O.) Help! Helllllp!

ALL HANDS

(speaking with funny and/or eerie voices) What do you mean help? We are helping. We're helping hands.³¹

HAND 1

Do you want us to let go?

ALL HANDS

(Laughter. All hands let go).

RED and T.O.

(They begin to fall again). Ahhhhh!! Meowwww!!!

RED

NO!

³¹ This concept and this line specifically is drawn from *Labyrinth*.

HAND 2

Well then which way do you want to go?

T.O.

What?

HAND 3

Which way?!

HAND 1

Well, its a big decision for her!

HAND 2

Up or down??

RED

Oh. Well since we're already pointed that way, I guess we'll go down.

ALL HANDS

She chose down! (Laughter)

HAND 3

(overlapping) She chose down?

T.O.

Was that wrong?

HAND 2

Too late now!

SCENE 1.2: PSYCHOANALYTIC OUBLIETTE

INT. RED and TWENTY OUNCE are deposited into an underground cavern. It is dusty and covered with cobwebs. It is very dim. T.O. uses a flashlight installed in her tail to light the area a bit. The two stay close to each other as they cautiously investigate their surroundings.

RED

Where are we?

T.O.

(shining light onto a wall plaque) According to this, we're in an oubliette.³² A historically significant oubliette.

RED

Historically significant how?

T.O.

Uh... I guess a lot of people have gotten trapped here. Jacques Lacan, Hélène Cixous, Elvis Presley. . .

RED

Oh. That's fantastic.

T.O.

It's called the black hole of subjectivity. What do think that means?

RED

I think it means that we're never getting out of here. (RED kicks over a brass bucket in defiance and frustration. When she does this a large crystal ball is revealed)

T.O.

Awesome. Maybe that can help us see into the future.

RED

T.O. don't be stupid.

T.O.

After all that has happened today, you can't find the space in your heart to believe in a little magic? God, you're frigid.

RED

I think you mean RIGID.

T.O.

Yeah that's what I said. Brutally confined by your oppressively rational nature. I'm gonna rub that crystal ball.

RED

It's not Aladdin's lamp, T.O.

³² From French, from *oublier*, to forget

(TWENTY OUNCE gets down on all fours and begins purring and rubbing herself against the crystal ball. Within moments, a blurred image begins to appear.)

GRANNY

Is it an appearance or an illusion?³³

RED

Granny is that you?!

GRANNY

Is it fantasy or reality? What do you think Red, is it *Real*?

T.O.

I think that might be a trick question, Red.

GRANNY

You are a smart little cat sometimes, Forty Ounce. It is always an interface between the two.

RED

I feel dizzy all of a sudden. Something doesn't feel right.

GRANNY

Don't fight it, Red. We are all a little mad here, sometimes.³⁴

RED

Don't pull your 'language problem' voodoo on me, Granny. We're not in your garden and I haven't eaten any magical plants. Why can't you just speak like normal person?!

GRANNY

Look inside yourself, Red, This isn't really *your* language. This is the language of oppressors. Why do you defend it so? Why not color outside the lines?

RED

I have a goal, Granny. I really don't think you know what that's like.

GRANNY

I have had many goals, Red. And I have accomplished many things, but I've done it on my own terms. What is your goal, to be *perfect*? To run yourself rampant in pursuit of some unattainable ideal? Not very original or inspiring.

RED

My whole life I've been running at half mast. I can be better than this. I *will* be the best.

³³ Nusselder 101.

³⁴ Reference to *Alice's Adventure's in Wonderland*.

GRANNY

What is your *dream*, Red? Have you ever had one? Have you seen an elephant swimming with a peacock while they float over a purple volcano? Spilling candies and cupcakes and ringlets of smoke? Have you ever *felt*, Red? Don't you want to feel? Don't you want a new language? One that is yours and speaks from your flesh?

T.O.

I had a dream once.

GRANNY

Try to remember it, Little Kitten. There's knowledge there. You have a great strength for becoming. Unlock your language and you may find your way. Surrender to the poem and you may find the key.³⁵

(GRANNY'S image begins to blur and morph. She transfigures into a woman wearing a white lab coat. This is the ANALYST. Her accent is distinctly French.)

ANALYST

Are you ready now? Hahaha. RED-y.

RED

(She appears dizzy). I don't know what's happening.

ANALYST

We're going to have a look inside your psyche, Red. Don't worry dear, it shouldn't hurt much. Just relax.

(Mysteriously a long, soft sofa appears behind RED. She feels weak in the knees and lays down. Something about her seems different. As she sits, the room dims and TWENTY OUNCE is no longer visible. Only RED and the ANALYST are seen.)

RED

I had a dream where I could talk to animals. Large dogs tackled me and started to bite me. But I wasn't afraid. I wasn't at all afraid.

ANALYST

Why not?

RED

Something in the biting told me it was play.

³⁵ Reference to *The Amnesiac's Diary*.

ANALYST

There was a metacommunication there?

RED

Yes. And no. There was something beyond words or before them. Something subtle and powerful at once. I knew something in that moment, but I seem to have forgotten it. Either that or I don't know how to put it into words.

ANALYST

Was there any point in which you could smell your ideas or taste colors?

RED

I haven't gotten that upgrade yet. But it sounds delicious.

ANALYST

I think you are on the verge of something, Red. Please, keep talking.

RED

I feel fractured. I've spent all my life walking around as if I'm supposed to feel some sort of coherence, but I don't. There is always *wanting*. There is always wishing.

ANALYST

This lack is what drives you. But do find your lack to be a support or a lure? You must save place for fantasy, if you ever want to access the real.

Suddenly, the lights come back on and the crystal ball goes dark. RED appears startled and confused. TWENTY OUNCE stands behind her, just as before.

T.O.

What is going on with you Red? You're just laying there babbling to yourself. You are not making any sense.

RED

"It is a problem not of the One and the Multiple but of a fusional multiplicity that effectively goes beyond any opposition between the one and the multiple."³⁶

T.O.

Come again?

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari 154.

RED

The back walk of subjects, the dance of the rain, the movement of being and becoming, not up and down but down, up, back, west, south, and spirals in all six dimensions. Two sex and three sex whole.³⁷

T.O.

Oh my goddess, you've got the language problem!

RED

Sick Ounce-Twenty. Swarming sleep and surreal subconscious. Animal without organs becoming and begoing.³⁸ My face is black holes and white walls.³⁹ Give me my boots, I am now Lady DADA.

T.O.

(Shaking Red) SNAP OUT OF IT?! Here, look in my eyes. Take a deep breath. Now let's try to think about this.

RED

Oh no. Oh no. I've fallen sick. Now I'll never play for the major leagues. (panicking) Over the hills and far away. (She squats down and holds her knees, rocking).

T.O.

Well, do you feel sick? 'Cause you actually don't look that bad.

RED

(Stops rocking, truly assessing how she feels). No, actually. I feel perfectly fine. But my body is tingling, and all these strange images are flooding my brain.

T.O.

What do your visions look like? Granny said we should pay attention to our dreams.

RED

No, T.O. Explanation rational a be must there.

T.O.

I don't know about that. I mean, we've never even tried to understand the language problem. What made it happen? What could it be teaching us?

RED

All I can see is chaos. But when I look really hard, I guess it doesn't seem like chaos at all. It makes me think maybe "order and disorder are relative, not absolute, qualities." I mean, they only really exist in opposition. They can't exist without each other.⁴⁰

³⁷ Irigaray 3-4.

³⁸ Deleuze and Guatarri 232-309 and 149-65

³⁹ Deleuze and Guatarri 167-91

³⁹ Pepperell 181.

T.O.

And maybe what we think of as order and disorder, really has to do with our culture. The way we were brought up, the things we believe in, all that stuff.

RED

It's tempting to think of thoughts or memories as blocks of data in my brain, but it's my body that thinks and remembers and knows. My body and my brain are inseparable. There is no discernible boundary between them.

T.O.

Thoughts don't only move in one direction, so why should language? Thoughts can move in any numbers of ways simultaneously. They can inspire any numbers of other thoughts in the process. It's not as simple as we sometimes make it out to be.

RED

T.O.! That's how we're going to get out of here. That's what Granny was talking about. We're going to have to think a new language.

T.O.

Ok, but what *is* language? This is what my thesaurus has to offer:

language

noun

1 the structure of language speech, writing, communication, conversation, speaking, talking, talk, discourse; words, vocabulary.

T.O. (cont.)

2 the English language tongue, mother tongue, native tongue; dialect, patois, slang, idiom, jargon, argot, cant; informal lingo.

3 the booklet is written in simple, everyday language wording, phrasing, phraseology, style, vocabulary, terminology, expressions, turns of phrase, parlance, form/mode of expression, usages, locutions, choice of words, idiolect; informal lingo.⁴¹

RED

I feel split by the symbolic. The entire history of language is confounded with the history of reason.⁴² Who are we without our histories?⁴³ Who are we if we can't make sense?

T.O.

There are different kinds of senses, Red. When you smell Granny's pie cooking, that makes sense, right? Even before you encode it with language. Your body knows a sense that is presymbolic.

⁴¹ Taken from the thesaurus in the word processing program *Pages*.

⁴² Cixous 879.

⁴³ *The Amnesiac's Diary*.

RED

But how will we do this Red? How can we start this becoming?

T.O.

It doesn't matter how. It only needs to be. When man wanted to imitate walking he invented the wheel, which does not resemble a leg.⁴⁴ The only piece that's missing is desire.

T.O.

If we love this language, maybe we can find the way out. If we find our support we can create a new machine. If you let language move, we can be on a line of flight.⁴⁵ Look inside your thoughts, Red. Can you find us a door?

RED closer her eyes and let's her eyelids flutter.

RED

(opening her eyes) Twenty Ounce, what do you know about becoming-animal? To change language we need to change ourselves.

T.O.

It's tricky. You have to want it and not really want it. You need to enter into composition with something else.

RED

What "something else"?

T.O.

I mean, it's not as simple as wanting to be a dog or a squirrel. There needs to be a another object of your desire, a sort of triangulation.⁴⁶

RED

It is not enough to simply want to be a porcupine.

T.O.

What does a porcupine love?

RED

It is not enough to try to be blind. I need to push my molecules towards *something else*. Salt. I need to *think salt*. I need to focus on my desire to find salt, but also set that desire free.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Apollinaire qtd in Goldberg 80.

⁴⁵ see Deleuze and Guattari.

⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari 272.

T.O.

Give yourself over to movement. Let yourself be taken by rest.

(She closes her eyes and crawls on the floor. She is genuinely meditating on this exercise. After a few moment, with eyes still closed, she happens upon an ax.)

RED

Uncertainty in nothing to fear. The world has always been just as uncertain as it is right now.

(RED picks up the ax and begins swinging it against the wall. The wall, made only of paper, tears under the weight of the blade. Standing in front of RED and T.O. there is a single door. Lacan's formula for the fantasy is inscribed on it ($\$ \diamond a$). They both begin to advance towards the door.)

RED

No, T.O. I feel like this is something I have to face alone.

TWENTY OUNCE backs away, while RED advances through the door.

END SCENE.

Conclusions

I have not always been a fan of revision, wanting to believe that the first way something is done is bound to be the best. I have of course, learned to sing a different tune, venturing to say that the rareness of first-time excellence would rival that of the albino unicorn. But revision has never come easy to me. I have had to work myself up to it.

Creating any piece of expression, especially an embodied, theatrical performance, should be a dynamic process. Like any good oil painting, the beauty is in the layers. My objective here was not to simply change the "Language Problem," nor to admit some kind of defeat for the project. Instead, I wanted to open myself (and this show) to the magic of

⁴⁷ Referencing Craig Gingrich-Philbrook's narrative about becoming-porcupine.

the revisionary process, allowing the power of hindsight, enhanced by countless hours of rigorous theoretical study to do the work I could not do the first time around. I aimed to propel the “Language Problem” in slightly more developed directions, applying a bit of elbow grease to the rough spots. I reflected on what was learned through the process of presenting it the first time and applied that knowledge to this new installment. I wanted to breath fresh life into the “Language Problem,” realizing, through the process, that perhaps I needed a bit of training in linguistic CPR.

In this chapter, I put my own process of working through this contradictory critique on the page, attempting to balance a poetic, resistant style (which could at least *partially* stand up to my critique), and the clarity required of a well-crafted academic paper. The result mixes explanation and citation with the passionate language of an art manifesto and finishes up with an avant-garde, although somewhat educational, performance script. This attempt to straddle the edge of artist/scholar fence has been challenging and heuristic. I am finding that sometimes the most difficult chapter is the one you can have the most fun with.

Prior to the work of this chapter, the language problem was either a jumping off point or a bookending technique in *Cybernetic Fruit*. By now, this critique of rational language is essential, if central to the project. I still don’t always understand what a non-rational discourse should look and sound like, but I think a more productive question is what a radically alternative discourse *feels* like. I may not always know how to define it, or how to write a prescription for its recurrence, but I do know linguistic resistance when I feel it. My body knows when I am on the right track.

The web of signifiers is set up so that the obvious opposite of “rational” is “irrational,” but nonsense is not the only alternative to a phallogocentric disquisition. Sure it is one path, and certainly a useful one. For where would this conversation be without Dada? Another path, however, is the unconscious. The psychoanalysts and Surrealists have demonstrated that smashingly. The French feminists say that this resistance is all about the body, about speech and singing, and speaking with the flesh. Deleuze and Guattari recommend working in rhizomatic ways, fighting against the myth of hierarchy and linearity. Tom Robbins encourages us to think the way objects think,⁴⁸ while Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird suggest we look to the behavior of plants.⁴⁹ This is without even scratching the surface of the arts: the language of acrylic paint, the vernacular of ballet, and so on. The clues are all around us. Instead of merely *irrational*, this new approach to linguistic expression is fundamentally poetic.

Through this process, I feel I have learned something about the function of irony and paradox. Let’s say you take two items, artifacts, or ideas and place them side by side. Now let’s say they are of a different register and quality; two concepts that explicitly clash with one another. Rub them together like sticks for a flame; something will happen. Both concepts, both artifacts will inevitably sand down.⁵⁰ There will eventually be a space between the two. Generating these spaces is the work of critical theory. “When two thoughts are continuous . . . the pathway between each of these thoughts is well established, and it will require little energy to pass from one to the other. Where two thoughts are not well connected . . . more energy is required to fuse the thoughts

⁴⁸ see Tom Robbins’s *Skinny Legs and All*.

⁴⁹ see Tompkins and Bird.

[together].”⁵¹ Mental pathways, just like muscles or skin, are constantly changing. When we exercise our neuro-receptors, when we carve out new pathways, we are strengthening our abilities to think and see the world in a different way. By simply speaking about impossible thoughts, we make them known. When we speak in conscious, deliberate contradiction, we sing new spaces into being. I feel I have learned how to operationalize a messy and amorphous abstraction into a relatively coherent line of flight through this process of critiquing rational language through rational language. By inhabiting the paradox, by inhabiting this space, we can encounter unforeseen ideas. Like a shaman going into the great beyond and bringing back mystical kernels, I have found that I enjoy these theoretical backpacking trips into softly trodden wilderness. I appreciate the breadcrumbs that many have left behind and hope that the thoughts I have foraged are enough to feed my tribe today.

⁵⁰ A friend once explained to me why he thought the term “square” was an insult, by saying “their edges haven’t been sanded down yet.”

⁵¹ Pepperell 182.

CHAPTER FIVE: HARVESTING THE FRUIT

“Science will never achieve its aim of understanding the ultimate nature of reality. It is a futile quest. . . . The universe(s) will always be more complex than we will ever understand.”

-- Robert Pepperell

(The Posthuman Condition 179)

If humanism maintains that we may lead happy, complete and fulfilling lives without God, then posthumanism asserts that we may lead happy, fragmented lives without science, or rather without blind belief in the myth of objective science and the detrimental tunnel-vision of rationality. Robert Pepperell provides three elements that comprise the conditions of the posthuman era. First, we have the end of a “human-centered universe,” or in other words the end of humanism, which is “the long held belief in the infallibility of human power and arrogant belief in our superiority and uniqueness” (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. There are prehistoric beings still inhabiting the Earth. The evolution of new creatures does not always mean the eradication of old ones. It is about the potential emergence of “distinct mechanical life forms,” as well as the incorporation of more mechanized upgrades into our already chimeric bodies. Third, posthumanism concerns itself with how we live. Manifestations of the apparent degradation of humanism can be found in the movements of feminism(s), animal rights, GLBTQ rights, environmentalism(s), civil rights, and anti-slavery (172). 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. Exposure to chaos teaches us not to be afraid of it. Our understanding of the ways that animals and plants communicate is being revolutionized. Personal relationships to machines have never before been so prevalent, individual dependence on technology has never been so widely accepted, and technological advancement has placed the means of digital art production into the hands of consumers. Perhaps through attending to these encounters, by pushing ourselves to think and express ourselves in new and contradictory ways, we can dream a new world into being.

The process of working on and witnessing the performance of *Cybernetic Fruit* was a joyous, fruitful experience. It taught me the value of having a vision; of trusting that vision; and of allowing it to flow freely through many pairs of hands, ears, and eyes. I learned about the negotiation between collaboration and responsibility; about co-authoring a concept; group-authoring a performance script; and then sauntering down the long, solitary road of composing a thesis alone.⁵² It has been a quest, and in the grand tradition of fairytale pilgrimages, what I have found has been more about my own subjectivity than it has been about any one concept.

The Role of a Critic

I struggle in the role of a critic. In this position, it can seem like I am telling people what to do or how to live their lives, but that is certainly not my intention. I am continuously interrogating the state of the world and negotiating my own subjectivities. I

⁵² This statement is not meant to, in anyway, take away from the tremendous support I have received throughout this process. I could not have done this without Shauna MacDonald; Rafal Kos; and most significantly my patient advisor, Craig Gingrich-Philbrook.

don't pretend to know some kind of answer or have some righteous path to lay before you. It just isn't that simple. If there is one posthuman sentiment I can stand behind under almost any circumstances, it is that it is fundamentally not that simple. There is no one way. There is no *right* way. In this paper, and in my life as an academic, I seek to identify the ways that I see the world becoming. I seek to describe, analyze, create abstractions for, and critique the changes I see happening or not happening all around me. I am not trying to tell you how I think it should be. I am trying to tell you how I think it is.

Frequently, public mentioning of posthuman theory incites a kind of human vexation. I often try to avoid these encounters, as I'm not the most comfortable with face-to-face conflict. However, the fact that people become angered at the deconstruction of these categories, or at the mere *discussion* of this breakdown, has proven to me that (a) these boundaries (between human and animal, human and machine, animate and inanimate, and so on) are already in danger; (b) human beings (especially the most privileged ones) hold a real stake in sustaining these divisions; and (c) although many of these same people refuse to admit it, language wields a dynamic power for constituting reality.

Many of the ideas I support or propose have been critiqued as being unrealistic or even utopian. I am inclined to say that maintaining an idealized image of what the future could be is important. I would like to say that wanting the world to be beautiful and equal is a good thing, an important thing, and something we are so far away from that it would be advantageous to strive towards the impossible. But then again, wasn't this thesis, at least partly, meant to be a critique of perfection? Isn't the drive for ultimate utopia a kind of philosophical manifest destiny? Doesn't it almost sound Christian, if not Humanist?

So let's try this again. Let's acknowledge that the world will never be perfect. Let's agree that we are not in control. Let's take a step back from predicting the future and begin describing what we see *right now*. I see a world undergoing an inevitable transformation. This world, though riddled with fear and ransacked by exploitation, may actually learn to thrive on the nourishment of compassion. I perceive a cacophony of new and ancient languages learning to harmonize or hum with discordance and finally being heard. But I've always been a glass half-full kind of person. Let's pay attention to our biases, our positionalities, our histories, and our standpoints and describe the trends that are changing around us. Once we have that down, let's take particular note of the changes we like. I like the advancements in clean energy and the emergence of books like *The Secret Life of Plants*. I like that a kind of awakening, which for so long seemed to only inspire apathy in those around me, appears to be generating different results. Every oil slick makes a rainbow, afterall.

Summary

Now seems like an appropriate time to encapsulate what I hope to have communicated through this thesis. In the first chapter, *Posthuman Fruit*, I described posthumanism through discussions of humanism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, laying the foundations for *Cybernetic Fruit* and this thesis as a whole. In the second chapter, *Planting the Seeds*, I told you the story of *Cybernetic Fruit*, interjecting to shine some light on staging choices and philosophical currents running through the show. In the third chapter, *Water and Sunlight*, I spoke about devising, moving chronologically through a detailed description of our process. This is the only chapter where I speak at any length about the CF Collective, which troubles my own aims and claims for group

authorship. In the fourth chapter, *Maintaining the Garden*, I took on rational language, attempting to pull *Cybernetic Fruit's* 'Language Problem' into a crisper focus. This was accomplished through the addition of new scene, "The Psychoanalytic Oubliette," and through immersion in the kind of ironic expression Donna Haraway advocates for.

A couple of days ago, I was asked, as I often am, to explain what my thesis is about. "It's about a show I directed. And posthumanism," I began.

"Yeah, but I mean, what's your *thesis statement*?" the questioner queried.

I paused, I stammered, and I blurted out something that I don't quite remember. Then I closed the conversation with, "I guess a can't really put it in just once sentence." After some ardent and thoughtful reflection, I would like to use this space to revise my awkward and ineffectual response. The thesis of this project is that every being possesses beingness (one could say, a soul), be it raccoon, raspberry, or rock; that nothing is perfect or ever can be, for perfection and imperfection (like order and disorder) are human constructions spun from human vantage points and seen with a human-level of resolution; that collaboration fosters propagation of a posthuman discourse and compassionate behavior; and finally, that staging philosophical inquiry, in the flesh and for the community, is a potent methodology for germinating new theoretical fruit.

The Trek

This thesis has been a journey. Today it finds me in Missoula, Montana, sitting in an alley behind a coffee shop. Dwelling within this alley, there are several people who obviously live on the road. They are playing the most beautiful, home-grown bluegrass I've heard in years. The air outside is a mild 70 degrees and the sun is shining brightly. One of the gentlemen next to me is giving a lesson in long division on a piece of

cardboard with a sharpie. The other side of the cardboard sign is to be used for hitchhiking later today. There are also some people who look like they live in this town, some of whom I know and some I do not, and one big black dog. This town and this coffee shop are special. This alleyway is a mecca of simple freedom and open expression. At least for this moment on this afternoon.

Being out here, I can't help but feel that these people just "get it." Sure, it's easy to romanticize any place when you're only visiting, but there really is something different and noteworthy here. People just help each other. I'll give you an example: Two of my friends lost a key in the center of campus here, which would be something like losing a needle in a haystack. Within minutes, fifteen or more people had stopped to help them. There was laughter, smiles, and ultimately defeat, but simultaneously a kind of victory for compassion. People here do not seem afraid to be who they are. They're not afraid to speak to the river or to dogs or to birds. They may still need some nurturing to fully embrace some facets of "technology," being somewhat wary of cell phones and flat screen TVs. However, they certainly care for their musical instruments as lovers and friends. And while their technophobia on certain fronts may seem archaic or even humanist, it comes from a love of simple pleasures and a desire for connection.

I am left here thinking and wondering what I have learned through this process. Where do I locate the locus of change in my own perception? Where does humanism live for me now? Well, I am certainly not so naïve to think that it has evaporated. Tuning into my senses, I can perceive the people (and one dog) in this alleyway to be distinct in certain ways from the plants that vine through the chain-link fence, or even the fence itself. I can see the ways that we are still human, and that humanness and birdness,

dogness and plantness, cardboardness and fenceness are still with us. But being in a special space in a optimistic moment, I can also see the ways that respect and compassion seem to be always already transcending those boundaries in ways that our consciousness need only to follow.

I'll try not to get too carried away. For nothing is perfect, as we have learned. My mood is produced by the thrill of writing on my laptop on this beautiful day, by the dark Montana coffee that is swirling in my cup, by the absence of stress in my body, and by the energy of friendship all around me. It is also fueled by the adrenaline induced by being so close to the end of this project. Which begs the question, what now? Where do I want this research to go? In this long and perpetual process of becoming-scholar, few concepts sincerely ignite my fire the way posthumanism does, and few processes in life thrill and satisfy me like creative, theatrical expression. So I think it is safe to say that the party is not over yet. In many ways, I have barely scratched the surface of posthuman discourse, and I look forward to digging in deeper, while working to generate some of my own. My adventures in the world of Vista Bella have edified me on many levels. I've learned about scholarship and directing, about archetypes and quests, and most extraordinarily about friendship. Once again, I have the CF Collective to generously thank for that.

Pulling the focus back now to my planted position on this globe, I leave you with this one simple sentiment: Posthumanism is alive and well in an alley in north western Montana. It thrives on compassion and is powerfully contagious. It makes you want to pet dogs and caress a banjo. It shows you how to read the river and know the mountaintop. It allows you to bond with your laptop in whole new ways. I get the feeling that it is beginning to thrive everywhere: in farmers' markets and local art shows, in letters to

congress and digital music sharing, in our dreams, in our fantasies, and in our plays. It is a good time to be conscious matter. Viva posthumanism and welcome home.⁵³

⁵³ The phrase “welcome home” is not meant to refer to, or indicate the presence of, some permanent, fixed location. “Welcome home” is a phrase routinely deployed by wanderers, particularly within “Temporary

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Autonomous Zones," such as the Burning Man Festival or a Rainbow gathering. In this context, "welcome

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