

Cyborg Phenomenology: Performative Inquiry in a Technoscientific World

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Technoscience and posthumanism point to paradigmatic shifts that require innovative methodological thinking in terms of the questions they pose. In this essay and digital diffraction, drawing from my own performance work, I detail a methodology for examining lived experience within a technoscientific lifeworld. Turning to phenomenology as a philosophical approach, I argue for a posthuman methodology called “cyborg phenomenology.” I then outline a series of phases through which scholars of performance and artistic inquiry might move in order to gain an understanding of posthuman, technoscientific experience, and attempt to exemplify the methodology through phenomenological writing and the use of digital performance as one set of diffracted “findings.”



The shifting existential, political, and social paradigms we are experiencing require new modalities of reflection, which need to occur, in effect, out on a limb, reaching beyond our existing methods and approaches while maintaining relevance to our lives. (Susan Kozel 8)

Diffraction #1: Re-Entry

“It’s over,” the voice was saying. The fog receding, the room came into focus. I removed the mask but stayed kneeling, clinging to the vestiges of that other space-time. I had never been in so deep; the exit could only be described as disorienting. This world is louder, brighter—harsh. (Once you’ve made this kind of journey, it’s home that feels foreign). Staring down at the mural, the paint on my (her?) hands, the carpet leaving ridges in my knees, I breathe back into myself and search for the words. Finding them lacking, I just smile as I stand and begin to disinvest myself of the trappings of transport. I rub my eyes and cradle my breasts, willing my body to expand back into its human fluidity and fullness (contracting to fit the avatar leaves an imprint) and wonder how to report on this evening’s expedition. (Language is the detritus of possibility left by the implosion of the virtual—word pieces turn up everywhere.)

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When I open my mouth to speak, her words tumble from that space at the base of my neck, mixing with my own in a double-voiced duet, each of us inhaling the pieces and setting them aflame. (I gather the ashes and carry them home as ink.) The writing, when it comes, is halting and often as gray as the ashes from which it springs. But she and I, we must story our experience, if for no other reason than to understand the holograms (uncanny mirrors) we found as we turned space-time corners together. Diffracted mosaic of light and dark, of hard cold and warm wet, of disembodied voice and electronic touch, of confusion, love, revulsion, desire, symbiosis, violation, fear, song, care, breath, life, a vortex in a vacuum, the inside of the implosion, the echo of the violent clash of personae. These are the things little cyborgs are made of. We danced, she and I. We held hands somewhere on the inside, diving to the depths of networks unseen, grafting intentionalities directed towards the others we found—witnesses witnessing witnesses. They danced before us, a parade of questions veiled beneath the shields of identity constructions. We swayed before them, serpents in a trance, meeting them with uncanny attention. They disappeared, but not before shedding codes for us to enter, holographic hallways to the human. The fabric torn, flickering became us. Uncanny mirrors held us in one state or another, for a time. We became she, locked in the dance with X, became I, nervous in cyborg skin, became she, painting with she, became I, willing mouth to inhale and lungs to fill, became she, became I, became we, became becoming.

You learn to love the infinite regress of your own limits; you hunger for deeper connection because connection alone is the now; you bear desire with double vision that pulls you ever toward the uncanny, because that's where the possibility lives. You (dis)appear. It feels like flying, like the soaring of dreams but in the waking space-time of virtual lifeworlds. It feels like a world-sized gravity-defying carnival ride, but you're the operator, dancing on the ceiling, while riders rotate around you, unaware of the wondrous, violent forces holding them up. It feels like walking through a locked door, shooting from a cannon, breaking the surface of blue water—an experience of breaking through.

You want to live there, to let your life become the next science fiction novel. And then the voice brings you back. But it's not over. (It could never be over.) She lives at the base of your neck; she calls you to dance. Your skin is a mosaic, a kaleidoscope of code. The remnants of the implosion protrude from your being, leak from your pores. The words set fire to the map, leaving tracings to light your lines of flight. You flicker, you breathe, you become. (You hope others are watching.) You wait for your turn, again.¹

Performing (Our Way Through) Technoscience

Donna J. Haraway argues that the billions of people on our planet who live surrounded and affected by technology have been “interpellated, whether we like it or not,” into what she calls “technoscience” (*Modest* 49). We have been thrust into human-animal-technological relations—as vast as they are dense—that condition our being. As one node in this network, I need only look to my smart phone to see that I am at

¹ The theoretical terms alluded to here come from the following sources: “diffraction” (Haraway, *Modest*), “flickering signifiers” (Hayles), “double vision” (Haraway, *Modest*), the “uncanny” (Freud), “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari).

once connected to the possibilities of social networks, scientific discovery, democratic media production, digital art (etc.), *as well as to* the dark machinery supporting them—the digital divide, censorship, propaganda, sweat shop mass production, and mineral mining (to name a few). My use of this example is itself conditioned by a technoscientific tendency to view “technology” from an instrumentalist and progressive point of view, and runs the risk of reducing a complex web of relations to a set of material tools marching toward unquestioned obsolescence. A more nuanced understanding of technology includes those materials we label “tools,” the processes by which we relate to them, and the socio-historical conditions of their becoming in relation to one another. In a technoscientific world, technology can be thought of through the idea of a “machinic assemblage,” approached, in Gordon Coonfield’s words, “not [as] a thing, but as a process, an ongoing organizing of multiplicities, or relations between elements and forces, that produces affects” (290).² In technoscience, “technology” indexes varied and transforming sets of relations among shifting organisms, objects, and processes.

For some thinkers, technoscientific consciousness coincides with a philosophical shift toward posthumanism. A discourse concerned with “the convergence of biology and technology” (Pepperell iv), posthumanism allows for a “*rethinking*” of “human values, human rights and human dignity” (Gane 434). Such questioning is necessary as we navigate technoscientific webs that blur the boundaries between “human and animal,” “animal-human (organism) and machine,” and the “physical and non-physical” (Haraway, *Simians* 151-53) and transform our environments into mash-ups of the digital and the analog, of chaos and continuity. Posthumanism interrogates these transformations without reinforcing the humanist assumptions they explode. While there are many “posthumanisms,” critical iterations decenter the human, posit ontological connection as a priori, recognize agency outside of human being, and demand responsible questioning of technoscience and our participation in its momentum.³ Together, posthumanism and technoscience point toward an experiential horizon not fully explored—a horizon that can be made visible through experimentation with technology, science, and human being/becoming.

I argue, following Haraway, Susan Kozel, and Rosi Braidotti, that technoscience requires alternative forms of agential experimentation, representation, and critique; and that science fiction, art, and philosophy allow for the kind of “conceptual creativity” that makes such alternatives thinkable (Braidotti 169). Braidotti links examples of such creativity—Deleuze and Haraway’s respective theorizations via the invention of

² As Coonfield suggests, to reduce any of Deleuze & Guattari’s concepts is problematic. I point to the machinic assemblage and Coonfield’s articulation here not to define but to index an understanding of technology beyond the instrumental. For an in-depth discussion of technology and the machinic, I recommend Coonfield’s essay. I have gleaned my general understanding of technology from writings of Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway, Heidegger, Idhe, and Coonfield (who bases his in Deleuze and Guattari with support from several other theorists of technology), and the various posthumanist theorists cited throughout this essay.

³ See, for example, Barad (“Posthumanist”; *Meeting*), Gane, Hayles, and Pepperell.

“conceptual personae”—to “figuration” that is, a way of “bringing into representation the unthinkable” (170-71). Alternative representations (the rhizome for Deleuze and cyborgs for Haraway) become figurations that allow us to imagine ways of becoming *differently* than we are. Braidotti reminds us that such experimentation must be rooted in the material, that “a conceptual persona is no metaphor, but a materially embodied stage of metamorphosis” (171). In this meeting of the imaginary and the material rests a call for embodied experimentation in alternative becomings.

Like science fiction’s imaginings of alternative space-time, performance provides performers and audiences with alternative manifestations of becoming, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of the term. “Do not imitate a dog,” they state, “but make your organism enter into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter” (274). Becoming is neither “imitating” (305) nor simple “analogy” (258), but rather, creates the conditions of possibility for the formation of assemblages, “haccities” (265-272) of motions and effects, embodied “multiplicity” (239). To “become” through performance is to engage in “the rigorous and systematic exploration-through-enactment of actual and possible experiences” (Pineau 46) in which the “experiencing body” is the performer’s “methodological center” (Pelias 188). Performance provides an opportunity to witness and experience alternative manifestations of posthuman becoming. Through conceptual creativity, figurations index possibilities for living *differently* in a technoscientific world.

Personally, I have attempted to actualize such conceptual creativity through performative inquiry with/as cyborg personae—iterative, embodied, and experiential. I begin each new project with questions about evocative phenomena (such as human bodily fluids and the possibility of a cyborg’s curiosity about such a messy ontology). I then explore how a cyborg persona might approach this idea, experimenting with embodiment and creating a performance protocol. Based on this exploration, I move to the creation of my persona’s costume, drawing sketches and testing different materials. I try to outfit her for the tasks that lie ahead. When I am (temporarily) satisfied, I move to embodied performance, navigating a protocol inevitably altered by audience presence, environmental conditions, and my emotional state. During and after the performance(s), I reflect upon the experience and audience reactions. This leads to new ideas and a return to new questions. I have performed as two alter-personae in six distinct pieces, and have thus realized that illuminating technoscientific tensions and possibilities through performance requires that they be described, interpreted, and communicated to others.

In this essay, I detail a methodology for performance as research into imaginable futures (and, perhaps, pasts and presents). I begin by outlining my understanding of phenomenology based in Lenore Langsdorf’s work before drawing upon two theorists’ mutations of phenomenology—Don Idhe’s “postphenomenology” and Kozel’s performative phenomenology—to theorize my own. Finally, I describe this method’s movements, using my own performance work as an example. Throughout, I argue

that cyborg phenomenology allows performers to actualize the unthinkable, the not-yet, the what-could-be, of (technoscientific) life.

Mutating Phenomenology

“Phenomenology is,” according to Langsdorf, “at the very least, a choice to study an environment from a situated location in actual experience and oriented toward particular aspects of the spectrum of human activity” (“Why” 1). It is concerned primarily with the investigation of phenomena; that is, with *things* perceived through a *consciousness* within *lived experience*. In order for a consciousness to understand the phenomena toward which it is directed, it must “proceed ‘within the epoche,’” that is, it must bracket (i.e., suspend) its “natural attitude” (i.e., its normal approach to the world) (Langsdorf, “Watch” 85). Only from this position can a consciousness reach “the seeing of essences” toward which phenomenology is directed (Merleau-Ponty 54). It is by engaging in “*imaginary ‘free variation’*”—imagining how aspects of the phenomenon might be other than they seem—to discern “*that which remains invariable,*” that a consciousness arrives at the essence of that phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty 70). Langsdorf describes phenomenology as an iterative practice in five phases:

In the participant observation phase, I develop a careful portrayal of some actual (rather than reported-on, second hand) experience. . . . In the reflection phase, I re-focus from telling “what” is present in participation to “how” those presentations appear. The assertion phase is another re-focusing; now, on particular features in their similarities to and differences from others. In the variation phase, I seek alternative interpretations: how, I ask, could the phenomena (presentations) be construed otherwise? The communication/participation phase is, of course, ongoing throughout these other modes of analysis. (“Watch” 88)⁴

Though inevitably changed by their encounter with posthumanism, these form the basis of my cyborg phenomenology: a creative approach to performative inquiry into technoscientific experience, wherein one orients to that experience from a broadly cyborgian point of view. Haraway defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (*Simians* 149). For my purposes, the cyborg question is less ontic than orientational and experiential. Many assemblages could, at a given time, be oriented *as* a cyborg. A cyborg phenomenologist experiments with becoming “cyborgian,” asking questions of that becoming with an eye toward understanding technoscientific experience. A cyborg orientation is one that features an attempt at non-human experience, an a-teleological time-sense, and a focus on boundary-violation and relationality (see MacDonald, “Performance” 170). It is, necessarily, a “speculative” enterprise, a virtual experience in the sense of the virtual outlined below—a movement into what we cannot really know. Such speculation is, as Ian Bogost alludes, a bracketing aimed at shifting orientation. In some ways like his “Alien Phenomenology,” cyborg phenome-

⁴ See also Langsdorf (“Argument”).

nology is “a phenomenology that explodes like shrapnel” (32) from the condensation of relations indexed in becoming cyborg.

“Postphenomenology” as a Mutated Philosophy

Classical phenomenology is insufficient for technoscientific consciousness; technoscience, posthumanism, and their attendant forces have altered our (orientation to) “environment[s],” “location,” “experience,” and (the) “human” (Langsdorf, “Why” 1) such that phenomenology itself requires some adaptation. Arguing that philosophy “must change with its historical context,” Idhe traces the interconnections of science, technology, and phenomenology to argue for “a modified, hybrid phenomenology” called “postphenomenology” (23). He begins his argument by explaining how pragmatism adds a holistic, “organism/environment model” of experience to phenomenology, expanding the idea of noesis beyond consciousness and emphasizing relationship over individuality, thereby hinting at the possibility of nonhuman experience. “The reverse enrichment [to pragmatism] from phenomenology,” Idhe argues, “includes its more rigorous style of analysis that develops variational theory, recognizes the role of embodiment, and situates this in a lifeworld particular to different epochs and locations” (19). These three aspects—“*variational theory, embodiment, and the notion of lifeworld,*” are key for Idhe. He argues that the process of variation leads not to a discovery of essences, but rather to displays of “multistability” (11-12). Our perception of variations is an active process through which phenomena can be experienced in multiple, distinct, and yet relatively stable ways. This is one important step toward cyborg phenomenology.

Idhe is also careful to note that technological relations are far from new: “technologies have *always been a part of our lifeworlds.*” In our technologically “saturated” era, of course, our relations with technology are more ubiquitous (38-39). Building upon treatments of technology by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, Idhe distills human-technology relations into four models of “relational ontology”: 1) “Embodiment relations,” in which material technologies are incorporated into our perceptual experience (e.g., wearing eyeglasses), 2) “Hermeneutic relations,” in which technologies become referential aspects of the world we interpret (e.g., writing), 3) “Alterity relations,” in which we “engage technologies themselves as quasi-objects or even quasi-others” (he evokes robots here), and finally 4) “Background relations,” in which we relate to technologies as part of our environment (e.g., how we relate to household appliances) (42-44). With this, Idhe makes a move similar to Karen Barad’s argument for the primacy of relations over *relata* and echoes Haraway’s argument that “the world encountered in knowledge projects is an active entity” (*Simians* 198).⁵

⁵ In Barad’s account of “Posthumanist Performativity,” also featured in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, humans are not a priori loci of agency, but phenomena among the phenomena of the world. Phenomena exist together in “intra-action,” that is, relationality that does not presume the existence of independent entities. Phenomena are separated momentarily and

Postphenomenology, then, adds to phenomenology an expansion of noesis (the active or perceptive element in a relationship of intentionality, typically, the cognitive process) beyond consciousness, and a recognition that technology intervenes in perception, between humans and the lifeworld. As such, Idhe's analyses, guided by his three phenomenological variables ("embodiment, practice, technology") influence my conceptualization of cyborg phenomenology (59).

Phenomenology of Closeness as a Mutated Method

Kozel also argues that new technoscientific conditions require new methods of inquiry and/or new orientations to those we still find applicable. Her version of phenomenology begins with the recognition that human experience is deeply intertwined with digital and analog technologies. She turns to posthumanism despite its distance from traditional phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's time, stating: "I cannot help but let myself run with interpretations in the realm of what Katherine Hayles (1999) calls the "post human," [sic] enlarging upon his [Merleau-Ponty's] 'time' by applying his thought to ours" (35).

Kozel also argues for phenomenology's continued relevance, explaining that it has undergone "revitalization" in part based on a need for "dancers, artists, writers, cultural critics, and feminists to be able to describe concrete, lived human life" (5). With this, Kozel immediately places her project in the realm of aesthetics. She is concerned with a particular realm of lived experience: performance with and through "responsive technological systems" (13), from online environments in which students extend their bodies into cyberspace (136-61), to elaborate systems of wearable technology (280-83). Kozel's work, like mine, intersects with performance and posthumanism, discourses that require and effect adjustments in phenomenology.

Performance and phenomenology are arguably congruent; both focus on epistemologies of the body and experience, and both place value on iterative processes for understanding our relations to the world. Posthumanism's relationship with phenomenology is more paradoxical, affecting a sort of "creative double bind," which Eric E. Peterson and Kristin M. Langellier explain as "choice between equally valued and equally insufficient messages" (243). As a performer, I am caught between phenomenology—a method and paradigm with humanist foundations—and posthumanism—a paradigm that questions those very foundations. As Peterson and Langellier argue for performance as a way to "exceed" the double bind, moving beyond it toward new possibilities (250), performance may be one way to apply what Kozel calls "creative disrespect" to phenomenology (6). Cyborg phenomenology takes phenomenology,

locally through what she calls an "agential cut." We, as humans, are the transitory results of intra-action within a web of relationality. We are no more entitled to agency than any other phenomenal manifestation, for "Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity" ("Posthumanist" 815; 826).

posthumanism, and performance as discourses that, together, can present new methodological possibilities.

Placing phenomenology at this nexus implies a simultaneous reduction and expansion of what counts as lived experience. The type of performance to which Kozel and I are referring is situated outside of everyday communication, potentially reducing the experiences relevant to our phenomenology to a very specific “environment” (Langsdorf, “Why” 1). On the other hand, Kozel argues that the encompassing ambiguity of the term “phenomenon,” allows it to span “the human and the nonhuman, animal and machine, microscopic and macroscopic” (13-14). Such a move acknowledges that the experiential phenomena studied through phenomenology can include a multitude of beings as well as objects, and that those objects can exhibit agency—a point also made by Haraway (*Simians* 198).

It is here that we run into some potential incongruities. As Langsdorf points out, phenomenology is concerned with “the spectrum of *human* activity [emphasis added]” (“Why” 1). Despite being prior to any subject-object split, phenomenology holds fast to the subject that “thinks the world,” and posits itself as a method of consciousness—presumably a human trait (Merleau-Ponty 57). It places humans at the center, while posthumanism displaces them (without erasing them). Is phenomenology possible when noesis and noema become little more than “expressions of energy in varying states” (Pepperell 51)? Can the former be directed toward the latter in a movement of intentionality? Can virtual experience be studied phenomenologically? Where does the cyborg, unconcerned with essences, fit into a phenomenological project?

In the face of these questions, it is important to note that, “taking inspiration from the original phenomenologists inevitably requires overlooking certain limitations as being products of different times” (Kozel 6). Phenomenology can change with its context, as Idhe has already demonstrated. Sara Ahmed provides an example of one such “overlooking” by taking up the task of finding “what is queer within phenomenology and us[ing] that queerness to make some rather different points,” thus expanding and altering the phenomenological project (544).⁶ Similarly, I aim to find what is posthuman within phenomenology and so mutate it into a methodology fit for our technoscientific context.

The humanist subject lurking within phenomenology is far from simple. Langsdorf, for example, explains Ricoeur’s understanding of the subject as “a fragmented multiplicity; a subjectivity without a center; a self that coheres by virtue of ‘ipseity’ rather than sameness (*idem*)” (“Doubleness” 47). Here is a self that is much more cyborg-like than the Cartesian conception of the human subject; cyborgs, after all, are beings of “affinity, not identity” (Haraway, *Simians* 155). Langsdorf works with this “multiple, mutable, and permeable” self to describe “generative intentionality,” which “occurs in the variously and persistently communicated relation between self and what is other-than-self” (“Doubleness” 50). It is possible for intentionality to move in

⁶ Ahmed’s arguments are elaborated in her book, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006.

multiple directions, for phenomena to be agential, and for their agency to impact a phenomenologist's (and vice versa).

Kozel places emergent and fragmented collections of agency within a posthuman environment via Merleau-Ponty's concepts of "flesh" and "reversibility." She explains flesh in this way: "Our bodies extend beyond ourselves through the operation of our senses and as such the boundary of the body, skin, is not a boundary at all. We are porous beings, and we are a part of flesh as well as being flesh" (33). "Reversibility," another concept with which Merleau-Ponty seems to depart from human-centeredness, similarly illuminates intentionality. Based in his studies of painting, this principle of the "seeing-seen" and the "touching-touch" is akin to bi-directional intentionality: "just as I see and what I see sees me back, I touch and am touched by objects" (Kozel 36-37). Intentionality becomes interactive, allowing for a phenomenology of experiencing beings and objects always already oriented *toward one another*.

What, finally, is a cyborg phenomenologist to do with phenomenology's focus on "actual experience" (Langsdorf, "Why" 1)? If the virtual is synonymous with an escape from the body, the phenomenological project fails at this juncture, for "we experience *from* the body" (Zarrilli 658). Following André Nusselder (as well as Deleuze and Parnet), however, I argue that it need not be opposed to actuality, nor is it synonymous with disembodied experience.⁷ The virtual is an articulation of what might—but need not—be; it is the "*capacity to cause effects*" (Nusselder 35). Performance, too, reminds us that virtual experience is embodied. It is impossible to uphold a "virtual-real duality" once one has performed with or through a mediated version of oneself or another (Kozel 80). If anything, my own heightened sensory experience in performance supports Kozel's articulation "that the virtual is not opposed to the real" (78), and Deleuze and Parnet's assertion that the "actual" and the "virtual" "are indistinguishable" (151). Virtual experience remains experience, and so can be explored through phenomenological reflection.

Cyborg Phenomenology

Guided by these phenomenological mutations, I argue for cyborg phenomenology as a fused methodology through which performers can come to understand our experiences of staged posthuman performances, and so also our lived experience as posthuman performers in a technoscientific lifeworld, through communicating (about) this understanding. It provides a way for scholars and artists to move through performance, reflection, and diffraction; to enter into discourse about lived practices in ways that could impact technoscientific decision-making.

Cyborg phenomenology adheres to the following tenets. First, it relies upon affinity, not identity; its cyborg practitioners have ipseity—that is, a quality of directed potentiality that collects into a consistent yet fluid ability to act—rather than a singular, located identity. Second, cyborg phenomenology proceeds from the assumption that

⁷ Chvasta makes a similar (extended) argument from within performance studies (164-67).

experiential actors are fleshy beings *within a fleshy world* that extends beyond that of “human activity” (Langsdorf, “Why” p. 1). Not all beings of experience are human, and all phenomena are potentially worthy of phenomenological investigation. Third, cyborg phenomenology applies to performative experience anywhere along the perceptual continuum from so-called actuality to so-called virtuality, so long as the experience in question remains embodied.

My technoscientific alter ego is a theoretical cyborg made flesh. I met her during my first foray into the world of performance art. True to Haraway’s cyborg theories, my cyborg has no precise origin story; I met her gradually. I had just finished re-reading “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” and was studying the communication and performance of bodily fluids. Prompted to create a piece of philosophically inspired performance art, I gravitated toward questions of human fluidity. I was curious about the cultural valuing of bodily fluids and I aimed to draw attention to their semiotics and social arithmetic. I became enamored with the possibility of a cyborg perspective. I wondered how a cyborg would interpret human fluidity. With this question I began to know my cyborg character as a distinct persona. We performed our first series (in a performance seminar) as a scientist-cyborg who constructed mathematical formulae for the cultural valuing of sweat, tears, blood, and urine. A few months later we worked toward a new, mediated performance that involved an embodied and photographic investigation of the phrase, “Don’t cry over spilled milk.”⁸ It was during this performance that I learned my cyborg’s name, and “Viscera” came into becoming. Along the way, I came to know her more as a collaborative partner than a fictional character. I realized that discovering and making decisions about her appearance, movement, and concerns was more like getting to know a friend than creating a piece of art.

Viscera is an embodied being; her materiality is integral to her significance as a persona. Though her physical appearance changes slightly with each performance, three material aspects have remained fairly constant. First, some fleshy parts of her body—her arms, stomach, and usually legs—are always displayed. Second, her chest is constituted through the tight winding of duct tape around my own. (Originally I intended this binding to portray androgyny, but my cyborg soon asserted herself as female, and so the binding became more a critical indexing of femininity.⁹) Third, her face is a clear, immobile mask through which my own skin but not facial expressions can be seen. The mask makes speech difficult, and Viscera has been speechless in most performances. She appeared this way in our largest performance art project to date, a performance installation called *VisceraFeed* (produced as part of an art collective’s showcase) in which she invited audiences into a laboratory to witness her re-

⁸ I was aided in this performance by my colleague, Lindsay Greer.

⁹ That is, I came to understand that my own performance of gender leaked through any attempt at androgyny, and that such attempts were dangerously close to an unproductive erasure of gender politics, as well as a simplified replication of the complicated politics of breast binding. It was more productive to explore these gendered moments than erase them.

search.¹⁰ Together with several collaborators, we transformed a performance space into a multimedia lab where Viscera engaged in explorations of human fluidity, audience members completed questionnaires, a mediated voice spoke to her from afar, and an assistant helped participants contribute via projected text. Like a cyborg descendant of early experimental scientists, Viscera invited audiences to bear “modest witness” to her work (Haraway, *Modest*). Unlike those progenitors, she was uninterested in becoming transparent or objective; she invited all who entered to witness and be witnessed as situated beings.¹¹

Doing Cyborg Phenomenology

Phenomenologically speaking, my natural attitude—that is, my orientation toward my pre-reflective experience—is filled with humanist (and human) goals and actions. Like many humans, I tend not to reflect upon this everyday “humanness,” for as Langsdorf states, focusing on “my own mode of being that would otherwise remain as taken for granted in the background of mundane life” requires the work of “the epoche” (“Watch” 91). Through performing as a cyborg persona, I create the conditions for a specific sort of epoche: I allow myself to bracket not only my previous experience, but also the priority of my humanness.¹² Just as the complete bracketing of one’s experiential horizon is impossible, so too is the complete bracketing of humanness. It is no less heuristic in the face of this impossibility, however, for such bracketing allows glimpses of a less anthropocentric perceptual field. With this first phenomenological move, akin to Haraway’s nonhuman “ethnographic point of view” (*Modest* 52), cyborg phenomenology puts posthumanism into action, reorienting humanity away from the center and toward recognition of our agential immersion in an environment of energy. Engaging in this perceptual shift—this epoche—is turning the dial down on the human so as to hear what our sense of (species) superiority typically overwhelms. Performing as Viscera—embodying her, writing as her, and conducting research through her—I experience the technoscientific world askew. I engage in an experiment, creating the conditions for experience that differs from that of my everyday life. This is the

¹⁰ This is the performance described via all of the phenomenological reflections and diffractions included in this essay. It was a collaboration with several artists, including several working together across distance and many members of The Bureau of Artistic Resources Corporation (performance art collective). For an alternative description and focus, see my essay, “Performance as Critical Posthuman Pedagogy.”

¹¹ The “modest witness” was a concept applied to the norms of validating experimental research beginning in the 17th century. Such witnesses—scientists conducting experiments or select public citizens witnessing them—were to attest to scientific results objectively, transparently, and without any subjective influence. Such witnessing runs counter to the situated knowledge called for by proponents of feminist science and cyborg studies (Haraway, *Modest* 23-39).

¹² I thank Dr. Craig Gingrich-Phillbrook (my dissertation advisor) for the phrase “[bracketing] the priority of my humanness,” coined in a meeting very early in my writing process.

first phase of cyborg phenomenology, though all need not perform as a cyborg.¹³ Suspending the centrality of humanness through performance marks a beginning.

Though I cannot say my experiences as a cyborg (persona) *are* nonhuman or even posthuman, I do know that I experience the world quite differently when performing Viscera. The best way I can describe it is as if perceiving and moving through an environment beside myself—off to the side and doubled. Being experientially “off kilter”—transported—in this way allows a performer to perceive alternative world-making possibilities while also highlighting their multiplicity as an agent—both of which become key aspects of a methodology for technoscience. During one evening of our installation, for example, I (the performer) became so intertwined with her (the persona), that I continued performing beyond the installation’s end. She was kneeling, experimenting with paint and imagery, when her assistant knelt next to her and whispered gently, “Viscera, it’s over.” It took quite some time for me to return to myself.¹⁴ Even now as I look at the paint on butcher paper—technological relations manifest in sketchings of experience—I am convinced it was her doing as much as my own—a representation of her perspective. This was a pre-reflective cyborg experience; I was far too involved in Viscera (or, perhaps, she was too involved in me) to reflect upon what was happening. Examining this moment through cyborg phenomenology, I attempt to bracket out what I (the performer) know about cyborgs, painting, performance art, laboratories, etc., and access how she (the persona) experienced that moment. This is bracketing out the priority of the human. Grasping this experience requires engaging in a process Langsdorf calls “reflection” (“Watch” 91-92); reflecting on how phenomena were revealed to me as a cyborg and how I (as a cyborg) was revealed to the environment.

The first phase of cyborg phenomenology, then, is to work toward becoming a cyborg, or otherwise posthuman. That is, find a performative context that allows access to some form of cyborg orientation and experience. Let your human self “go” for the duration of your experience. Recognize that this is impossible. Do it anyway.¹⁵

Thus far, cyborg phenomenology seems to proceed rather traditionally: I experience in a pre-reflective mode and engage reflection in order to access that experience—still bracketing my prior experience (and the priority of my humanness). An-

¹³ For a discussion of posthuman persona performance more generally, see MacDonald, “Performance.”

¹⁴ Unlike the oft-described experience of method actors, who get so caught up in their characters that they live as/in them for extended periods of time, this was more like getting closer to achieving becoming. While I consciously returned to myself quite quickly, it took an extended period of time to fully re-orient the molecules of my being (in Deleuze & Guattarian terms), to bring myself back into proximity with my typical human self. I note it here in part to show the extent to which becoming through performance is possible, and to highlight the transported nature of the experience.

¹⁵ Throughout this section of the paper, I highlight the “phases” of cyborg phenomenology, separating these from the rest of the text with italics. Apologies to Langsdorf for emulating some of her stylistic choices for outlining phenomenology as method (“Doing”).

other aspect of cyborg phenomenology comes into play here, however. There were moments when Viscera seemed to reflect upon her actions, and others when my own internal voice intervened with hers. We were engaged in something like what Kozel, following Merleau-Ponty, refers to as “hyper-reflection.” Described by Kozel as “the vehicle by which concepts are drawn out of raw experience,” hyper-reflection “can be done in the midst of” said experience, as in a dancer hyper-reflecting *while* dancing. The phenomenological process thus becomes a series of cycles—from hyper-reflection within pre-reflective experience to reflection and so to a reach for pre-reflection, but also in a series of “tiny loops” of hyper-reflection within the moment of experience (Kozel 22).

This is particularly important for a performance phenomenology. In discussing the “‘ecstatic’ surface body” and the “‘aesthetic’ ‘inner’ bodymind” of a performer, Zarrilli argues that our body usually “constitutes a nullpoint in our perceptual field” (658). However, with certain types of trained attentiveness (such as yoga, meditation, or, performance) a “mode of experience and perception through the body is opened and can become available to the experience of the practitioner as the bodymind” (662). In other words, through performance it is possible to achieve a sort of cyborg “double vision” (Haraway, *Modest* 38), a perception of experience that oscillates between the reflective and the pre-reflective, between reflexively attending to performance and performing in the natural attitude.

I experienced a moment like this when a persona—a being wearing dark glasses marked with X’s, with an iguana on his shoulder—arrived, visiting from another installation, and Viscera (or the part of me that was Viscera) was drawn to him in a way she had not been toward anyone else—as if she wanted to make contact with this Other.¹⁶ I (or the part of me that was “I”) reflected on that urge very quickly and decided not to follow through, but to maintain the performance protocol. We remained suspended in a loop of hyper-reflection, oscillating between experience (cyborg persona) and reflection (cyborg performer). It was a moment of intimacy that remained tangibly unexecuted, but also demonstrated that one *can* reflect upon experiences in the moment and that a fragmented, cyborg self is possible to uphold (at least, in performance).

I reflect upon experiences like these by bracketing my humanness during, after, and also before experience. In traditional phenomenology, reflection occurs at a time distinct from pre-reflective experience—before, in the sense that it is only *through* reflection that one can attempt to access the pre-reflective; and after, in the sense that one must have *experienced* before one can reflect. Hyper-reflection condenses these within experiential time. In cyborg phenomenology, non-anthrocentric experience

¹⁶ This was Dr. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook’s (that is, my advisor’s) persona from *Bar Corporation Presents*.

fuses with hyper-reflection, such that these first phenomenological movements condense into an iterative amalgam of experience and reflection.¹⁷

The second and third phases of cyborg phenomenology, then, become intertwined. Enter a trance-like state (or don't), but do believe in your personified becoming. Oscillate between your cyborg and human selves, if maintaining the persona becomes too much (you will invariably oscillate anyway). There is no "one way". Let those moments imprint themselves in your memory. "After" the experience, reflect from a posthuman standpoint: describe your (cyborg) experience from a (cyborg) point of view. Write (or record, or draw, or...) your experience, appealing to as many senses as you can. Go back to the space of your experience, wear part or all of a costume, write/speak in the voice of your cyborg (etc.).

This amalgam of experience and reflection, in turn, changes the relationships among phenomenological "variations." Typically phenomenological analysis proceeds through participation in and reflection on an experience to "reduction" or what Langsdorf calls "assertion" ("Argument"; "Watch"). In choosing examples, here, I am already in some ways engaging in this phase, "discern[ing] categories and characteristics that stand out against the general background of experience" (Langsdorf, "Watch" 94). As a cyborg phenomenologist, I must engage in assertion if I am to communicate meaningfully with others about my performative experience. I must choose aspects of my experience on which to focus—at least temporarily—for my cyborg phenomenology project to continue.

Next, then, choose phenomena to focus on. Become "yourself" again (or, a new version of you). Consult your descriptions. Think of this as a conversation with your cyborg/nonhuman/posthuman persona. Decide which aspects of your experience seem most important.

Following the phenomenological process, the next move would be to engage in "variation." In Husserl's phenomenology as outlined by Merleau-Ponty, the goal of this "*imaginary 'free variation'*" is "to grasp an essence" by exploring variations, such that "*that which remains invariable*" is shown to be "the essence of the phenomena in question" (70). That is, by eliminating alternatives one can come to conclusions about the essence of a phenomenon. Idhe argues, however, that often "what emerged or 'showed itself'" through his [Idhe's] phenomenological analyses was not a phenomenon's essence, but rather its "complicated structure of *multistability*" (12). Using "visual illusions" as his examples, he explains how shifts in embodied perception alter one's interpretation of such images, but also how these interpretations are each in some way essential, and in some cases even continuous (i.e., we can shift between interpretations without a total gestalt shift) (12-16). He shifts the purpose of variation from a reduction to essences to a proliferation of possible interpretations.

¹⁷ This departure runs counter to Langsdorf's argument that, in the reflexive mode, "I am not me; I tell a story (here-and-now) about me-as-participant (as I reflectively take it that I was, there-and-then)." This I and me, however, are not wholly separate, and I wish to add the possibility of hyper-reflection rather than eliminate the idea that most reflection does indeed "occur within a different context" ("Watch" 91).

For cyborg phenomenology, I mutate this broader understanding of variation into “diffraction.” Haraway describes diffraction as “an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world,” and turns to it in place of “reflection,” arguing that the latter leads to “worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real.” In other words, it leads to a search for essences. Cyborg hyper-reflection, however, may lead to diffraction—the explosion of meanings in multiple directions—that might give us “more promising interference patterns on the recording films of our lives and bodies” (*Modest* 16). In doing cyborg phenomenology, I examine my experiences as if through a kaleidoscope, pointing out some of the many trajectories of meaning and presence my interpretations might travel upon.¹⁸ The goal is not to settle upon one but to index the many. I ask not what the essences of my experiences are, but how they might proliferate pathways for negotiating technoscientific life. Moments become nodes from which various “lines of flight” explode (Deleuze and Guattari 3).

Diffraction your descriptions into lines of flight. Think about how else your experiences might have been. Ponder why you felt the way you did, whether someone else may have felt differently, whether you would have felt differently than your cyborg self. Explore as many explanations and/or interesting insights as you can.

These interference patterns become the experiential findings I communicate to the world. “Communication” is integral because it brings us back to relationships with others, allowing us to “participate again in an experience” and to reach for “understanding” (“Watch” 101). Rather than an end, this phase launches us back into our technoscientific lifeworld (as if we ever left) to begin our work anew. “Effective phenomenologies,” according to Kozel, “open paths between hitherto unprecedented combinations of practice and theory,” and as such are “useful, or even essential, when groundbreaking work is undertaken” (55). The end goal of cyborg phenomenology, if there were one, would consist of providing multiple, complex interpretations of experience from which to choose paths toward posthuman becoming.

Rounding out cyborg phenomenology, then, try to communicate along these lines of flight. Speak/write/perform/sing/draw/paint/dance your experience. Strive for “resonance,” not authenticity, through vivid description. This is your chance to connect to others. “The phenomenological impulse is to move from subjectivity to transsubjectivity” (Kozel 25). And then, begin again: realize that you did things all out of order, which is okay and inevitable. Start over again—not because you did it wrong, but because doing it right leads to more questions. You may experience the technoscientific world differently now, but you must still experience it, and so learn from it, and so teach (with) others how to navigate it.

Cyborg Conversations: Diffracting Alterity

¹⁸ I use “meaning and presence” here to evoke the role Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s argument against the hegemony of meaning has played in my theorizing of posthuman performance.

I began with a diffracted, science fiction-inspired description of my performance as a posthuman persona, and of the difficulties of communicating such experience. Before diffracting further, I attempt a summary of what I believe to be the value of such a performative approach. What does it allow, what are the methodological implications, and what have I learned?

First, performing as a posthuman persona (Viscera) allowed me to experience the world productively askew. Of course, all good performance should alter one's perception and/or experience of the world. However, choosing—consciously and systematically—to embody personae from particular cultural or discursive milieux (i.e., personae steeped in the discourse of technoscience) allows a performer to experience *those parts of the world* in ways that could shed theoretical and pragmatic light onto their dynamics. In phenomenological terms, a performer brackets out the priority of the human in order to become cyborgian and/or posthuman, in order to ask embodied questions about what it means to do so. Viscera was my cyborg through whom to phenomenologically explore technoscience. We should continue to ask, then: how does performance “open” worlds, and how can we best study our experiences in and through them?

Second, I suggest that we think of this kind of performative inquiry more as a movement along a continuum of virtuality and actuality than as movement from the possible to the real—that is, as Elizabeth Grosz articulates, “a process of genuine creativity and innovation;” of “actualization” (228) rather than “realization” (226). If I think of performing Viscera as reproducing an image of a cyborg, embodying her to realize her possibility as an ideal cyborg, I am “narrowing down” the possibilities of what a cyborg can be (Grosz 226). If, however, I consider performing her to be a creative, experimental process of inhabiting virtuality, I am proliferating or diffracting various articulations of “cyborgness” or “posthumanness.” The “virtual,” as a concept, implodes “possibility,” indexing the ways in which possibility is doomed to reduction while shifting the focus to the actualization of “multiplicity” (Grosz 228). My conceptualization of performance as virtual (in this way) is deeply intertwined with my development of cyborg phenomenology and its value as a method for others.

Third, performing as Viscera has allowed me to develop cyborg phenomenology, which I believe is a valuable method for performers. To begin, it provides a systematic way to investigate performance *as experience*, particularly technologically inspired or infused performance, which is both necessary and ubiquitous in our current performance milieu. The focus on hyper-reflection allows for exploration and theorizing of the doubled experience of performance—the in-the-moment trained reflection many performers experience but remains difficult to approach through classical phenomenology. The goal of diffraction and multiplicity (rather than a reduction to essences) is in line with posthuman and technoscientific ontology, opening a systematic methodological avenue for performers (like myself) uninterested in seeking the “essence” of experience.

This goal, however, presents a bit of a challenge for the performer seeking to put his or her diffracted experience into language. How does one share the “findings” of

cyborg phenomenology? As is evident from the “diffractions” that begin and end this essay, as well as the examples shared between, I chose to write and speak of my/our experience performatively, but to focus on only a few diffractions/lines of flight. In Diffraction #1, pointing to the difficulty of putting the experience of *VisceraFeed* into words, I state: “Language is the detritus of possibility left by the implosion of the virtual—word pieces turn up everywhere.” One must communicate one’s experience through a language of some sort (be it linguistic or embodied), and in the case of cyborg phenomenology, what one is communicating *about* is virtual experience, or a process of actualizing the virtual. More to the point, performing cyborg or cyborg-like personae, figures of condensation that they are, is an experience of implosion in the service of explosion. Actualizing the virtual (personae) through performance is akin to condensation—a densely packed funneling of capacities into action (the implosion of the virtual). The energy, thus condensed, then expands outward into multiple lines of flight (here, word pieces)—not possibilities waiting to be taken up, but rather, the detritus of possibility itself, the fragmentary pieces produced by virtual experience. All language can do is shoot forth from these remnants, “explode into a line of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 9) from this rupture. As cyborg phenomenologists, then, we write (we language) from the debris of (technoscientific or posthuman) experience, producing multiple lines of flight. Such is a languaging fit for cyborgs.

Finally, revisiting the “detritus of possibility” distributed throughout my writing, I glimpse a theme of this particular inquiry: performance as an enactment of “alterity relations” (Idhe 43). Through the phases of cyborg phenomenology, I have created an account of “the material discursive practices by which” my and *Viscera*’s “differential constitutions are marked” (Barad, “Posthumanist” 810). That is, the multistabilities I see allow for exploration of self-other relations in a technoscientific, posthuman context, which could ultimately allow for greater understanding of alternative beings and becomings.

As outlined above, Idhe’s “relational ontology” describes a continuum of human-technology relationships, from “*Embodiment relations*,” through *hermeneutic relations*, *alterity relations*, and *background relations* (42-44). Through the embodied, technological process of performing/becoming and reflecting/diffracting *Viscera* in this phenomenological exploration, I experienced each of these in interconnected ways (for they are theoretically, but not necessarily experientially, separable). From hermeneutic relations that discursively brought *Viscera* and our installation into conceptualization, to embodiment relations of “molecular proximity” with duct tape and a mask as “apparatuses” of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari 274; Barad, “Posthumanist”) and the pain of technological presence/absence as *Viscera* and these apparatuses (refused to) fade into the background, I experienced human-technology relationships with heightened awareness through performance.¹⁹ In these last paragraphs, however, I wish to focus on alterity relations, for herein lies a valuable lesson in posthuman agency.

¹⁹ I reflect and diffract each of these relations in my dissertation, the longer document from which much of this work springs.

VisceraFeed encouraged several levels of relationship. Audience members, for example, related to Viscera distantly, regarding her as an object more than an agential being, and she related to them with similar detachment.²⁰ These relations were instrumental: she was a scientist observing them; they were audience members who had paid to see a performance. This was an alterity relation of a sort, though one that produced “objects” as *relata* rather than “beings.” Viscera also related to her mediated co-performers in a series of interactions that were really a continuation of the hermetic relations that brought her into being. Unexpectedly, a third set of alterity relations emerged that resulted from Viscera being called to respond in some way—constituted as an agent, that is, through communicative interaction.

As indicated above, two moments continue to resonate deeply: the moment when Viscera’s lab assistant (Meagan Oestry) approached her to say, “Viscera, It’s over,” and the appearance of Craig’s persona on our shared perceptual horizon. Throughout the installation, in fact, Meagan-as-Assistant related to Viscera as a being with her own intentionality. One night toward the end of the run, she knelt next to Viscera and painted, demonstrating kinship in shared experience. The visiting bespectacled personae, for his part, seemed to be saying, “Hello Viscera. I see you for who you are.” Through both encounters, Viscera was called into being *as Viscera* by others who approached her as such.

For Bakhtin, communication involves “answerability, or responsibility, to an other,” which in turn allows for agency (Baxter 252). A subject comes to consciousness through responding to an other. Similarly, when Levinas argues that it is “the human other, and *not the preexisting world*, that makes the subject a *Da*, or a ‘there,’” he does so from a foundation that recognizes an ontology of “preconscious, intersubjective connection” (Bergo 124, 117)—humans are made into subjects through interactions among always already connected others. Moving beyond the human, such conceptualizations of constitution through interaction also approach Barad’s posthuman ontology of “agential realism” (“Posthumanist” 810) and her argument for agency as a conditional and temporary separation of phenomena through a process she calls an “agential cut”:

It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful. A specific intra-action (involving a specific material configuration of the ‘apparatus of observation’) enacts an *agential cut* (in contrast to the Cartesian cut—an inherent distinction—between subject and object) effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object.’ (815)

When others approached Viscera as Viscera (a cyborg scientist), more than as myself (a performer in a mask), they redrew the boundaries around our agency such that “I” faded more into the environment while Viscera became the present being. This is how

²⁰ This was perhaps a product of the audience protocol we had set forth, which included instructions not to touch anything in the laboratory. In retrospect, this was not the most productive of choices, for it inhibited the audience’s ability to act.

posthuman agents come into being as agents, through specific communicative interactions that grant a measure of other-ness to “components” of the world generally perceived as an “other.”

If “the most minimal performance is a differentiating act,” that is, an act of creating a distinction (Blau 140), perhaps *VisceraFeed* allowed for agential cuts to be made in such a way that Viscera’s cyborg agency could be recognized. This is, after all, what posthumanism asks us to do: to redraw the lines of agency, to cut matter differently with our observational practices such that we include animals, machines, and cyborgs on the side of agency. Posthuman agency is not so much about granting agency to nonhuman creatures as it is about seeing the agential cuts that are already there. Performance, analyzed through cyborg phenomenology, is one way to show this boundary marking in high relief, to experiment with how agency is conceptualized, recognized, and responded to. This, in turn, has implications for how we communicate with one another as posthuman beings. An ontology of agency beyond the human, wherein all beings are approached as *response-able*, requires a shift in communication toward an ethic of care and responsibility—the kind of ethic required in a technoscientific world where the stakes of interaction are high. In recognizing the ways we attend to beings as agential (or not), we can ask new questions about posthuman agency, technoscience, and the ethics of care in interaction.

Perhaps the only way to learn the method I call cyborg phenomenology is to witness it in action and then put it into practice. As tentative and abbreviated as this essay may be, I hope it will inspire others to put cyborg phenomenology into practice, entering into and articulating the world of posthuman persona performance. Such experiential adventures into the still foreign cultural landscape of technoscience will provide insight into its communicative, relational, and political dynamics, thus helping us chart diffractive courses outward and into the future.

Diffraction #2: Alterity?

In a moment of reflection, I described how the process of transforming into Viscera for performance felt like her “filling me up”. Creeping up my legs, crawling up my chest, engulfing me to my neck, Viscera’s becoming began to flow through my veins. It felt like some sort of offbeat superhero transformation, I thought. While this seems fantastical—and perhaps it is—I think most would agree that performing as a persona is more than acting in costume. It is a becoming. Once the mask was on—once Viscera filled me to the top, so to speak—I entered into a what performers might call “the zone.” Call it shamanistic, call it meditation, call it artistic focus; I was becoming a material and theoretical cyborg through rudimentary, performative technologies, and Viscera was becoming, period.

I hold a sense image of my lab assistant leaning into me one moment and whispering, “Viscera, it’s over.” What is over, I considered? My research is incomplete. And then I fell into darkness for a while.

When the performances were over, the run of the showcase complete, I was a bit of a wreck. I carried Viscera with me in the form of a deep physical ache where the bandage and duct tape had been, and a felt sense of absence where her presence had been. While her presence had exhausted me, her absence pained me. And I was left with the question of how to write such an experience, how to communicate the lessons of what had become, in some ways, an oddly private (though staged in public) process of performative inquiry. I turned to phenomenology to bring the word pieces together—but not just from my own perspective. I turned to phenomenology to be able to reflect on the experience from Viscera’s point of view as well. She became, in a way, an alter-consciousness with a voice. We wrote, together.

My lab experiences were curious. I studied the humans; I barely noticed them. They maintained great distances from me. I was drawn to the gurney and the mediated patient. The woman on the television. Why was she there? A voice spoke to me in those moments. She spoke of memory but I cannot access her speaking directly. I was in her sound. She spoke to the later me. I painted. My painting is not representational. I feel shapes. You and I had painted that way before. I painted the shapes and sounds received from the laboratory. Human shape sounds.

My lab assistant knelt next to me in my art laboratory. I do not know if we were alone. She painted next to me. She looked at me, not through me. She treated you as a co-conspirator, an “other” but more than that, a being worthy of creating art with. Then there was him. The visitor. He was not like the others. I sensed a kinship in him. He saw me and was not afraid. He appeared almost out of nowhere. He was a curious being. I am not sure if he was human. Our meeting felt—yes, I can say that—it felt like a meeting of like beings. I needed to investigate. I wanted to know he was real. I sensed that I was more real and worried that meant he was a dream.

It could be that I do not really become Viscera, that she is simply a character I play by wearing a mask, and not a cyborg at all. Ontically, Viscera is as organic as I. Does it matter if, ontologically, I experience her as real, and as a cyborg? Does it matter if others experience her this way? In a technoscientific world, do such distinctions matter when I can no longer argue with confidence that I am really a human? How much do they matter? Why?

It could be that I only exist in performance; that my existence requires a suspension of disbelief. Without it, I might be nothing but a costume. Can I be a posthuman agent in your “real” world? Am I merely science fiction? Can agency be distributed in nonhuman beings the way we report, here? I do not know if you are real. Can you teach me to make such distinctions?

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