

Interview with Cally Spooner

Hendrik Folkerts

Cally Spooner's work is, essentially, in the making. Her films, performances, and live installations are rehearsed, presented, then rehearsed again over a longer period of time and across a variety of venues. This process marks the artist's commitment to a moment in-between pre- and post-production: each display is a continuation of the last conversation, onward to the next. *On False Tears and Outsourcing* bears witness to this way of working—a new project cycle that commenced in 2015, it is now manifest, in its current iteration, in the bodies that occupy the New Museum's Lobby Gallery.

This is what the press release might say, but let's make it more concrete: Welcome to the rehearsal! During rehearsal, things are always forming and becoming. A rehearsal is a process of trial and error, of trying out new things with your body, your voice, your language. It is a space in which manifold references fly around the room, which may (not) find their way into the developing work, including references to books, theoretical treatises, films, pop songs, talk shows, etc. It is a time between the conception of an idea and its materialization in which everything might still be possible.

This conversation, conducted by email in February and March of 2016—with a guest appearance by Annie Godfrey Larmon—works through several registers of language that are present in different phases of the making of Spooner's work, from the language of the rehearsal to that of the press release, from the verbiage of the museum's wall text to the mode of conversation between director and performer, and back again to the language of the rehearsal. In-between, we wonder, "Where is the language that an artist can use to speak about her own work?"

So yes, we *are* going to talk about Oprah, and Google, and Matt Damon, and cyborgs, and Rosi Braidotti, and machines, and "super employees," and Paul B. Preciado, and speaking bodies, and Adele, and liveness in capitalism, and Frank O'Hara, and Maurizio Lazzarato, and trans/post-humanism, and Book Club 2.0, and tech-nics, and the New Museum, and STDs, and hauntings. We might lose you along the way, but we hope you can join rehearsals later.

Hendrik Folkerts and Cally Spooner

Hendrik Folkerts: A few weeks ago I asked Google, “How does Google work?”—it was a bit like asking Siri if she can think for herself. Unsurprisingly, one of the first hits that came up was the Amazon listing for the book *How Google Works*, a managers’ favorite authored by Google’s Executive Chairman and former CEO Eric Schmidt and former SVP of Products Jonathan Rosenberg. Amazon was right, it was an “entertaining, page-turning primer” indeed. The publication discusses our current, digital, consumer-oriented, corporation-fueled predicament (my words) and speaks of “smart creatives” as a new breed of employees that is attracted to a company by perpetual change, multifaceted labor, and superior products (their words). Who exactly are these employees, Cally, and does Google really “work”?

Cally Spooner: Okay! So, I can tell you who the employees are because I’ve been reading the book. As you say, it’s not hard to turn the pages because it’s really chatty—which means I can tell you that these employees are knowledge workers who are analytically smart and driven to be great, who know that greatness doesn’t happen between the hours of nine and five, and who work obsessively, not casually. Their perspective is different from other perspectives. They are self-organizing, intensive workers who have a “fire hose” of (always new) ideas. So apparently, Google *is* working, because these employees work at Google.

Google is also working because it knows that managerial plans, organizational charts, and maybe even budgets are not working. (Now I sound like the book...) Google knows that you must not cramp the style of the self-initiating employee when they can think of things your management plan could never anticipate. So, Google is working because it is creating “unusual freedom and power” for its smart creative employees, where traditionally there may have been coercion and restriction. Google has innovated the systems of management and labor via the tools of transparency (openness) and accessibility. I know all this because I read the book, and the book is written accessibly (demonstrated by the fact that I can recount it to you in less than two minutes; not quite an elevator

pitch, but close). It disseminates the message easily, in the casual first-person voice, addressing readers as though they are engaged in a face-to-face conversation.

This accessibility/availability extends from how the book communicates to how knowledge is shared on the job at Google—for instance, with a spreadsheet of one hundred projects that is available for everyone to see and debate—to how the buildings are laid out along long corridors that increase the chances for “serendipitous encounters” between colleagues. These are formal organizing structures—because total disorganization doesn’t work. That would be crazy! So, Google *is* working (on the level of becoming a global empire of knowledge) because it is reinventing organizational structures that manage smart creatives.

Right now, I am about to install a team of six dancers at the New Museum. I suspected that the way I might be organizing them was similar to how Google manages their smart creatives, which is why I decided I needed to read the book. I am not proud of this potentially shared strategy. I’m trying to work out if it is indeed a thing in common and whether I need to change my approach.

HF: Matt Damon is a smart creative. His super-inventive, self-organizing, down-to-earth-yet-super-smart approach to things saved him from being stuck on Mars for the rest of his life. NASA could not help him. The spaceship could not help him. At the end of the day, it was his farming skills, his team, and the not-so-gentle touch of a woman in outer space that brought him home. How does a smart creative like him work in a team, anyway?

CS: For starters, you need to disobey the establishment, and secondly, you need to make friends with your team. It is essential that you’re liked, otherwise your team won’t go back to get you when you accidentally get left on Mars. Matt Damon’s traits—conviviality and playful disobedience—calm any deep concerns that we might have had about advanced technologies taking over for humans. He is rescued, not *only* by technology, but by his team *using* technology

with human (moral) decision-making. The fact that technology alone “falls short” becomes clear when Damon must ride bareback into outer space, in a rocket with no roof or windows, only to be physically caught (after his seat ejects) in a female teammate’s loving, humanist arms.

Five years later, Damon is absorbed by the establishment, paid to lecture to students on how to be a human in a martian terrain. Without responsibility, he broke the red planet’s surface, gained knowledge, grew potatoes, left his shit behind, then returned to earth for a distinguished professorship. At play is an arrogance—the “exceptionalism” of the human. He is not part of nature; he *uses* nature. In his quest for survival and knowledge, Matt Damon innovates constantly (“I’m gonna science the hell out of this”) but transforms nothing. Even his potatoes are temporary. No transformation of the structure of his or others’ subjectivity, nor of *how* knowledge and theory are produced, arrives. Better than ever, cheerfully optimistic, somewhat disobedient: a smart creative.

A smart creative’s success depends on his ability to exercise these traits within a team. Rosenberg and Schmidt say it’s called not being a “knave”: not being the one who blows up his ready-meal in the microwave and lets someone else clean up the mess. It’s about taking great responsibility, not from nine to five, but four hundred martian sols, so we can grow—not capital—but knowledge. And then grow capital from that. If individualism can breed egoism and if self-determination might turn to arrogance and domination, then here with Damon and crew in outer space, the human *never* falls prey to the dark side. Egoism and domination are smoothed over with spirited fun and the Google smart creative’s modus operandi: “Don’t be evil!” “Let’s rescue our buddy!” “Right” decisions are made not by technology, not by NASA, not by an org chart, but by the team.

So...Google works because smart creatives are told that they are relational subjects. This sounds good. Teams are supposed to work across differences while still being grounded and accountable.

Still good. Do we reject individualism? Google and the space crew say: “Of course! We send the team!” Do we, through our work, promote a collective bond that is different from the self-interests of an individual? The space crew says: “We’re coming to get you, Matt!” Google says: “Ego creates blind spots!” Do we propose a better interconnection between self and others by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism? “We’re on Mars! The future’s bright!” But...it doesn’t matter, because actually there’s a bigger elephant in the room, which we could simply call “the hero.”

“Larry Page bins plan!” “Marissa Mayer runs meetings like a TV show!” “Sergey Whoever...works in rollerblades!” *How Google Works* is filled with labor- and subject-defining triumphs. Being a team, therefore, is postulated around the aspiration to be *separate*. Make your history. Tell your own story. “When I was on Mars...” says Matt Damon. “When I started Google...” says Larry Page. These prophets of hard work and innovation promote the cult of distinction and separation from the pack (“I slipped off.” “I wracked my brains.” “I solved it.”), while encouraging team closeness, responsibility, and playfulness (“Clean the microwave.” “Send a meme.”).

As Bonnie Tyler would say: “He’s gotta be strong / And he’s gotta be fast / And he’s gotta be fresh from the fight.” I guess that’s not *exactly* your smart creative, but it might be exactly what is asked *from* smart creatives. How does a smart creative like Matt Damon work in a team? He sticks close while he becomes separate. He’s a hero.

HF: Bonnie Tyler brings me to tears. False tears, that is. Like Rodolphe Boulanger de la Huchette dipping his finger into a glass of water and letting a big drop fall on his farewell letter to Madame Bovary in Gustave Flaubert’s eponymous novel. The water drop mimics a cliché, the lover’s last tear—in this instance, a ready-made, prefabricated emotion that is not felt by the adulterous Rodolphe, but felt all the more harshly by Emma Bovary upon reading his letter. As you have said yourself, the tear becomes a technic and Rodolphe the technocrat. So, on technics...?

CS: It was actually writer and curator Annie Godfrey Larmon who introduced me to Bernard Stiegler's notion of the technic, so we need to ask her first...Annie?

Annie Godfrey Larmon: Gladly. In his 2010 essay "Pharmacology of the proletariat," French theorist Bernard Stiegler considers the symptoms and problems of contemporary society's overreliance on hypomnemata, or technics. Hypomnemata are externalized sources of memory, those stored outside the mind: a text, a rune, a photo, a voice memo. They sit in contradistinction to the deep, remembered knowledge of anamnesis—memories that can be recalled and utilized at will by the subject.

In the context of post-Fordist (immaterial) forms of labor, which have evolved alongside developments in digital and networked technologies, the exteriorization of memory has become hyper-industrialized. Consider the vast amounts of personal information that exist on the cloud, or the ways in which online avatars (our Facebook profiles, Instagram feeds, and Twitter handles) function more fluidly than the subjects they represent; but also consider the proliferation of outsourcing to mechanical turks, spell-checkers, Siri, speed dial. Each of these tools offers convenience and efficiency, but compromises our own agency and abilities. This relationship between subject and tool, subject and technic, leads, Stiegler argues, to a sense of powerlessness and, ultimately, to obsolescence. But as information is passed into machines that reproduce gestures that the worker, performer, or producer no longer needs to know, the subject is excluded from the process of contouring the conditions of production.

HF: Thanks, Annie! Back to Cally: Who's shedding false tears today?

CS: I keep explaining this via Umberto Eco's pop songwriter, who comes up with the word "remember" and then immediately writes about "a sad September." The most obvious rhymes, the accessible solutions, start to make his pop songs *for* him, just as they have done for pop song lyricists before him. His thoughts and decisions

are captured, then extracted by love ballad clichés. Although, Eco says this can actually be a positive form of alienation, but that's a longer story... And that's not answering your question, because you asked me about the tear.

The false tear isn't something Emma Bovary asked for, but what she receives (what a messenger delivers to her on a letter hidden in a basket of apricots) is a performative. Where there could have been a vital negotiation—a physical body, a real lover—she receives an engineered technic, an outsource. "There ought to have been some tears on this; but I can't cry; it isn't my fault," Rodolphe says (but not to her) as he sits at his writing desk. The tear takes on the correct form because it's built from all the right significations and exactly the right amount of water, but in fact—at every level—it is protocol, put in place so that progress with other matters is not impeded by the broken heart of an indebted woman. But I'm not answering your question: Who is producing false tears today?

I recently took a 120-minute tour of Club Wyndham's timeshare apartments in San Antonio, Texas, because a Club representative, who stopped me on the street, promised me free dinner vouchers. Wyndham's pitch, from the flat-screen video presentation by their CEO, to the salesman called Josh, and everything in-between, was booby-trapped with key words: family, commitment, the time is now! Then Josh talked about his mom so that love and loyalty became tools in his laborious attempts to win my emotional commitment to a \$105,000 debt. In this pitch, no liveness or expression is produced, even though real lives and personal, emotive language are used. They're instrumentalized as an invisible script, engineered away from the body of Josh, and also away from me while I fulfill my role in a system of triggers and prompts. Language is kicked into operation by a private enterprise that is outside of our bodies. So, maybe at Wyndham I got a whole bunch of false tears from Josh, who did do a really good job but didn't get me to sign up.

Like a bureaucrat trained in political techniques for managing lives and solving "issues," Rodolphe makes it impossible to negotiate and

respond to his protocol tear. He forces Emma to talk and respond emotionally to a fiction; it's extremely fucked-up. Like a pop-song lyricist, Rodolphe outsources his emotions to the most obvious turns of phrase and manages his universe with stereotypical expression. The result is an exhausted, dried-out tear, a type of Muzak that creates bad faith and alienation.

HF: "Hello, it's me / I was wondering if after all these years you'd like to meet / To go over everything / They say that time's supposed to heal ya / But I ain't done much healing / Hello, can you hear me / I'm in California dreaming about who we used to be / When we were younger and free / I've forgotten how it felt before the world fell at our feet / There's such a difference between us / And a million miles"—let's take it home Cally... "Hello from the other side / I must have called a thousand times / To tell you I'm sorry for everything that I've done / But when I call you never seem to be home / Hello from the outside / At least I can say that I've tried / To tell you I'm sorry for breaking your heart / But it don't matter it clearly doesn't tear you apart anymore / Ooooooh, anymore / Ooooooh, anymore / Ooooooh, anymore / Anymore..."

CS: So...I'm in a Zipvan driving to IKEA to buy kitchen appliances and utensils. This song comes on the radio, and I'm sure I've heard it before because I know exactly what Adele's going to say/sing. Except I haven't heard her song ever, and it is astonishingly boring. For a week the song sticks in my head; it gets downloaded by millions of listeners on almost every continent and spurs a YouTube craze—dogs singing "Hello" in cars—but "Hello," by so many standards, is surely awful.

We've heard the formula as many times as she's tried to call this guy's landline (a thousand), and now it selects and standardizes our response. "Hello" plumps up our most conservative desires. They become mimetic and prolific, permeating into our attitudes, movements, and expressions: specific intonation, standard length, expected key change, predictable rhythm, not *too* much drama,

so that as soon as she starts singing, we know what to do. (Nice delivery, by the way, Hendrik...)

Basically, I think what you just sang me is a readymade. It is so familiar; it preempts us, and we preempt it, even while it extorts certain responses from us. The song pops up, fully formed, ready to satiate us. How synchronized we are with "Hello"! Everyone is very happy. Or very sad, or whatever is needed and intended. I am fitted to its prefabricated audio semiotics and conform cozily to them, as I rattle about IKEA, singing the chorus, buying forks. As Maurizio Lazzarato more or less said, "Nothing unexpected ever happens here. If something is slightly out of place, it is noticed. That is how thoroughly everything is codified." So, "Hello from the other side"—this is way too tragic. Please, let's talk about joy!?

HF: Sure, you can have a Coke with me. Frank O'Hara's poem "Having a Coke with You" ends with the immortal words: "it seems we were all cheated of some marvelous experience / which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I am telling you about it." Cally, tell me about joy and this marvelous experience that we are missing out on?

CS: Well thanks, Hendrik, I think I will. Especially if we're drinking that Coke in Biarritz, or on the Travessera de Gràcia, or anywhere we can take our bodies and perhaps lose our minds. Or maybe unify the two...I think joy may arrive when familiar things become unfamiliar and are seen or intuited differently; his orange shirt, the bright orange tulips...

"I look," O'Hara says. A looking body feels different from an analyzing, innovating, or problem-solving mind. For starters, in order to see clearly, the body must be as grounded as the things it's looking at. In the poem, you feel the ground because the poet is using recorded realism, a materialism marked by tulips, shirts, paintings, places—observations that capture life as a multifarious composition of matter, locations, relations. Here, in O'Hara's writing, the body is present:

It feels heat; it finds color; it travels to the Frick. It knows another body moves beautifully.

For me, joy is *other* to the thrill of the fluid workings of contemporary power and its management. It's about the infinite possibilities of the unimaginable Google style or the management of these options. It is not simple. Quite the opposite: joy is complex, never readily available. It needs to be *composed*. Ultimately, O'Hara's poem is a piece of writing. It transmits a lived, living intensity of a here and a now. Isn't that wild!? The immediate expressive presence of things. From here, he shapes and recounts via his body and feelings, using pragmatism and writing. Pragmatics are way more romantic than fictions.

So...I'm trying to say: you *might* be missing out on communicating your experiences, *if* you are busy being rhetorical and reactionary or speculative. (I know I am often all of these things, but you asked.) As I'm writing this, I'm thinking: "Shit, it's so much harder to be situated and pragmatic than it is to be didactic or reactionary." I'm trying to imagine how I would make work that's about vitalism, materialism, situation. I just cannot imagine what that work would be. I may as well be speculating on Mars; I'm that far away from the tulips.

So, that's my joy intermezzo. Onwards!

HF: I ask, you answer and elaborate. We are using language to make sense of these references—what you are doing, what I am doing. In this conversation, our bodies are not speaking, we are not facing each other. Our fingers are articulating, our email servers are processing, the pixels in our respective screens are speaking. The language between us is one of machines. We have to acknowledge this in order to move on to Maurizio Lazzarato and his *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. In this book, he articulates a theory of semiotics that is not premised on linguistic concepts but based on the apparatuses of capitalism, the flow of materials, and their social and technical machines. In order to work, the social and technical machines of capitalism—for which

the flow of capital is blood in their veins—necessitate the “machinic enslavement” of the subjects that Lazzarato speaks of. I am brutally reducing his argument here, but would like to give one quote that I found interesting: “Capitalism reveals a two-fold cynicism: the ‘humanist’ cynicism of assigning us individuality and pre-established roles...in which individuals are necessarily alienated; and the ‘dehumanizing’ cynicism of including us in an assemblage that no longer distinguishes between human and non-humans, subject or object, or words and things.” Can you speak more about this quote and what it means for your current working process? It is not hard to imagine a human assembly line in Lazzarato's framework—good subjects produced to serve capital—but I do wonder: What about resistance, what about the emancipated subject, what about the body in revolt?

CS: Why was that one so hard!? It has taken me ages to answer... It's much easier to talk about *The Martian* than my “process.” And Lazzarato, he's kind of fiddly... I *think* the quote you pulled is saying that, through information and monitoring (which are dehumanizing) and social participation (which is humanizing), we end up with a fleshly human assembly line. That's the short version. As for the long version, Lazzarato seems to offer examples:

Media: communicates within the limits of the “issues” it has defined in advance, then singles out an individual voice (an expert, a member of the public) to represent complex issues.

Government: offers important political problems to society by constituting them as catchphrases and deploying them in worlds and universes of meaning: “Immigrant!” “Unemployment!” “Debt!” “Default!” “Brexit!” This dismantles complexities. It makes multiplicities singular.

Advertising: (Lazzarato talks about TV, but we could extend his discussion to include social media and Google—Maps/Search/Ad Words) prompts us and preempts us, translating what we say into another language of metadata, shifting the

origins and sense of our words, so that our desires become mimetic tweets, searches, and interests, which a business can plug into (and also, therefore, shape).

In all these cases, enunciation (he says) is crushed by preexisting code, not negatively as repression, but *positively* as encouragement to “speak up.” This gives capitalist subjects the impression they are uttering/expressing while the conditions of real expression are, in fact, suppressed. The available communicational apparatuses (media, advertising, government) shut the subject off from her own collective assemblages of enunciation and connect her to other collective assemblages, such as a business, via the well-oiled triggers and prompts for speakers and receivers.

“Work assuaged, work accomplished, work experience”—in these cases, work is humanized as the promise to speak up and be fulfilled, switching the political dimension of labor (unionized, pragmatic, separate from the worker) with language that relates to an *analysis* of self-realization. This makes sites of capitalist production places where workers may self-realize. Capitalism is a competitive, cruel, unfair arrangement. What a fucked-up place to even allegedly develop your subjectivity. The humanizing promise then hooks up with the machinic: processes, such as diagrams, key performance indicators, tests, outcomes, programs, and so on. These amalgamations seem to be what Lazzarato calls “performatives.” The subjects that emerge out of performatives are prevented from engaging themselves personally; no radical transformation is possible.

How this relates to my project is such a hard question...and I’m late getting back to you because...I’m not sure I know... The main work I’m trying to install (at the New Museum) embodies a tension—the intersection between professional bodies, institution, and authorship. I guess I’m asking whether, through my organization of the bodies, it is possible to articulate expression. So, what about resistance? What about the emancipated subject? What about the body? I do know that I do *not* want the process to reproduce the fleshly production line you spoke of and imagined, and I’d much

rather be writing a love letter... But I don’t write love letters; I organize bodies. So, I need to work out a way to do that, to engage myself, a tension, and...well...a team. Argh... Can we talk about Oprah?

HF: Only if you become a member of Book Club 2.0. Invent and keep reinventing yourself like she did. Is her life story not a complete and utter inspiration? No? You must be very cynical then. How can you not be moved by it—from rags to riches and now dedicating herself to inspiring Americans across the nation. Be sure to sign up, it will change your life. Be sure to buy the magazine, it will change your life. Be sure to tune in, it will change your life. Don’t you want your life to be changed? Don’t you want to realize your dreams? If Oprah can do it, you can do it. You are the common denominator of your problems, you need to change for your circumstances to change. The New American Dream, just sign up already, dammit!

CS: Okay, so I’ve spent the first part of this morning joining Oprah’s Book Club. I’m now a member—with no friends, but that’s up to me to reach out. To make the most of my membership, I really need to download Oprah’s Book Club 2.0 Digital Edition onto my Kindle or iPhone. This gives me access to the book itself and to Oprah’s notes and the highlighted passages that especially meant something to her. Plus, a helpful reading guide designed by Oprah. I really want to download this special Oprah-inflected edition of the book *Ruby*, but iTunes US won’t talk to my UK account...

Q: I don’t have an e-reader. Can I still access Oprah’s notes?

A: Yes! You can see Oprah’s favorite passages [right here on Oprah.com](#).

Chapter 1

Ruby Bell was a constant reminder of what could befall a woman whose shoe heels were too high.

Oprah’s note: An intriguing opening line that compelled me to the next sentence and the next. Made me immediately want to know more about this Ruby.

The Book Club is an extension of Oprah's confession culture—where both audience and guests could disclose themselves and their hardships on TV, made safe by the fact that Oprah had “been there before” (she admitted to personally experiencing childhood sexual abuse on her live show in the late '80s). Share a problem, share a book. It's not bad to share these things, but Oprah is not your friend, Hendrik! She's a business! With Oprah, the fleshly and spiritual humanism of self-realization, delivered with lots of *love*, mingle with machinic and informational instructions to self-improve, monitor, and challenge yourself. It's a confusing double act in which the competitive merges with the very intimate, turning affect into something machinic—or again, performative.

The performative reinscribes who gets to speak and who gets to decide what we think. This is very much present in Oprah's Book Club 2.0 Digital Editions, which are packed with Oprah's optimistic comments on passages. I'm told by a fellow book clubber that these can, unfortunately, get stuck on the screen at the most critical parts of the book (usually when Oprah's gotten really excited, I guess, and heavily identifies with the author), leaving a page of her highlights and profundities on your e-reader screen and obscuring the fiction in a sea of Oprah's “I.” Mostly it doesn't get stuck, but the comments are always there anytime you need them. Just swipe!

*She wore gray like rain clouds and wandered the red roads
in bared feet.*

Oprah's note: I grew up on red roads in Mississippi and often wandered them in bare feet as a little girl. Felt familiar.

Written in the first person, the notes become a kind of bizarre study guide in which objective distance is replaced by Oprah's subjectivity. This is an outsource—to Oprah. Like a spirit on your shoulder, her first person “I” guides you through *Ruby*—a tale of hardship in the deep South—via passages selected by the annotating spirit and nudges readers in directions designated by her own uniquely personal humanity and condition. When we read together and

discuss, we may do so like Oprah, directly from our emergent or emerged “self.” Through relatability and *easy access* (to her own narratives and page highlights), she becomes the expert roadmap to self-knowledge, the heroic anchor of a community, in the public forums of 2.0.

Oprah's note: ...Compassionate connection established.

HF: The making technical—or machinic or, ultimately, robotic—of human emotions, bodies, and labor (with Oprah's self-indulgent ad libs stuck on our digital retina) has been a longer line of inquiry for you, through Stiegler's technic, outsourcing, the false tear, etc. A figure that walks in-between such considerations—hand in hand with Maurizio Lazzarato, Matt Damon, Erik Schmidt, Emma Bovary, and Oprah—is the cyborg. Since Donna Haraway aptly theorized this creature, it has existed as a blurred distinction between what is human and what is other. As such, the cyborg inspires fear of loss (loss of cognition, of the body, of wholeness in general) but also promises us the ultimate hybridity, an outsourcing of our bodies, minds, and identities within our own bodies, minds, and identities. Rosi Braidotti and other authors, such as N. Katherine Hayles, have written about duality and hybridization as essential elements in posthumanism. Have we become posthuman? How is the post-human body performing in your work? Are there cyborgs at the New Museum?

CS: If we go by these guys, yes! We are totally posthuman and that is very good news because, in being so, we upset the old system in which man and his special human brain are the measure of all things. To be human means you receive privileges that have typically not been given so readily to groups including women, queer individuals, the poor, animals, and nonwhites. As Rosi Braidotti says, “The post human! What a chance for those who have never been human.”

Thanks to technology, the posthuman condition is advanced. It has become hard to say where my “I” ends and this iPhone begins, or

whether we can even say any longer that the two are dualistically separate. Who makes and who is made by the machine (what is mind and what is body) is a distinction that is becoming more confounding. With this, other hard-core dualisms that serve as the basis for Western humanity and its power dynamics are upset: self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, active/passive, civilized/primitive, right/wrong. Braidotti claims that we should seize the opportunities opened up by the collapsing distinctions between man and machine.

So...cyborgs at the New Museum? I really hope so! If we borrow from Donna Haraway, a cyborg is a hybrid that is both machine and organism, animal and human, living and dead, and, because of these blurred distinctions, it is able to open itself up as she/he, who is “not afraid of permanent partial identities and contradictory standpoints.” The cyborg is a creature of fiction and of lived experience, of lived social and bodily reality that opens up new lines of flight and possibilities for partial, contradictory, hybrid (and strategic) forms of life and writing. Cyborg writing “explores the limits of language; the dream of communicating experience and the necessity of imitation, partiality...” It records communications and intelligence in order to subvert command and control. In doing so, “cyborg politics becomes the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication.” It is a tool to upset the order of who holds the power to speak. For Haraway, becoming a cyborg is a dream—not of a common language but of a “powerful infidel heteroglossia.” Wow!! I would love my show to be a powerful infidel heteroglossia!

In Braidotti’s take on the cyborg, she says it opens up possibilities for the posthuman, leading us into a space where dualisms that have been subjugating for all who have *not* been human are overturned. For Braidotti, the cyborg is the pinnacle of the intersection between man and technology: the Oscar Pistorius–Blade Runner, part man, part blade (Braidotti wrote this before it became necessary to add “part girlfriend slayer” to this description, but anyway...). She is not trying to think of these things in relation to transhuman mandates, nor is she positing them as spaces where we can mutate and advance ourselves beyond that which we need; but, more

simply, she is opening up questions that expose the definition of the human as tired and violent, and this opens up the chance for us to move beyond this term.

For me...if all goes okay, there will be one cyborg at the New Museum. The cyborg is called *On False Tears and Outsourcing*, and it’s a compound body of six self-organized dancers (trained in movements drawn from competitive sports, romance, and management), institutional glass, soft acoustic panels, daylight bulbs, radio music, an audience, and relationships. It’s a mobile, thinking, and doing entity, complete with leaky intersections between the organic and the machinic. At least that’s what I’m going for... The work will contain almost no language, but I have composed it like I would a piece of writing. I think it might be hard to see this show materially, and perhaps it’s hard to see it politically too, because it’s mostly a tension and an affect. So, is this show posthuman? If it can hold itself in a state that explores and struggles with the limits of language within the architectures of display, delivery, and performatives, then yes, maybe. If it places the brain back in the body, then, yes, I think it is posthuman. Or, it could become a big expensive dance show and fail to do any of these things. That would be a massive shame.

HF: Let’s talk about creepy things that linger in the dark. We both recently saw the film *It Follows*—your typical teenage horror flick, with the characters running around being chased by a seemingly immortal and morphing entity, with the usual (though very elegant) appropriations from such horror classics as the *Halloween* and *Scream* anthologies. Yet, maybe *It Follows* wasn’t so typical... The adolescent protagonists contract this haunting by having sex. Unlike an STD, which will stick with you, passing the haunting on through the most intimate—and arguably, for the teenage mind, the most confusing—bodily experience, is the only way to save yourself. When you are on the receiving end of this chain of transmission, you’ll soon know (such as our innocent heroine, who catches this nasty bug by sleeping with, and then immediately being abandoned by, her macho boyfriend): a creature creeps up on you unexpectedly,

stalks you, manifesting itself in different projections of shame and fear—disfigured mother and father figures, a urinating teen, or an altogether unidentifiable creature. Putting aside its obvious psycho-sexual dread and Freudian connotations, what this film also highlights is the potential for catharsis through an exclusively embodied experience (in this case, sexual intercourse). We have been talking a lot about bodies, whether human or cyborg, but essentially through the (interpretive) lens of language. Should we make the body physical again? And what lingers in-between a discursive and a physical interpretation of the body when we talk about your own work?

CS: In *It Follows* any embodied experience of sex has less to do with pleasure (joy) and exists, instead, more as a negative/reactionary (defense). So, rather than producing a situated, bodily affirmation of intimacy and relations, the body becomes a weapon to create negative and violent interdependency as a defense against a very cruel hex. Day to day, we experience all kinds of stressors—not quite as horrific as a barrage of slow-moving zombies—but, like the zombies, the presence of these stressors does mean we are constantly under pressure and must often carefully size up what bodies are useful to us. What happens to bodies and their status when we think like this? Like when the “nice guy,” who’s in love with the infected heroine, takes the infection from her (a body that matters to him) and transfers it to a prostitute (one that doesn’t). What happens to care and pragmatism when a body is under stress, under attack, from immaterial transferences which cannot (always) be materially seen but which (nevertheless) leave physical marks?

I’m going to make a stretch now and talk about management. The hex in *It Follows*, like management, is a condition. It cannot be seen by everybody (only by the infected, when the hex takes bodily form as a strange, slow-walking zombie). But, despite its invisibility, the hex does leave palpable marks on everyone’s bodies. For instance, the zombies might break a window or throw a table at their infected target and someone uninfected can get hit and damaged by what is otherwise invisible to them. Management is similarly an invisible

condition, a disembodied actor that only becomes visible when it comes into contact with a human body and leaves its marks on that body. If management has power over you—and for some reason you start to feel that power and presence—your body responds physically. Your sympathetic nervous system is triggered. It activates the adrenal glands, which secrete adrenaline into the bloodstream, which keeps this whole process going. This reaction increases your blood pressure, increases your heart rate, increases your breathing rate, expands the air availability in your lungs so oxygen transfer is more efficient, and it materializes, visibly, as dry mouth, hunched posture, sweating armpits, throbbing temples.

The body has been and is always physical. Should we make the body physical again in a way that might enable it to become a site of knowledge, in and for itself? Yes, that we should definitely work on. But in *It Follows*, the teenagers are making bodies physical by weaponizing them to transfer a violent and invisible enemy. That’s what we need to work away from.

So, what lingers in-between a discursive and a physical interpretation of the body when we talk about my own work? A discursive and physical interpretation of the body...I’m not sure...I mean, my work is relatively body-less. I’m partly a writer, but I’m always trying to understand how I can become more present in my writing and how there can be a more immediate connection between my situated self and the fact of my writing—without defaulting to Oprah-style disclosure. The act of writing always leads to rehearsals with other bodies, and these rehearsals lead to performances of bodies—though not of my own body—and this is what I call my work.

I would like my body to become the site of my writing, without this writing being about myself. My body is language-producing, and it is situated and relational. I would like to start to produce writing that reflects this. I’d like to bring my body into the equation, as a way to “be” with other bodies through writing, and not as a way of making another body a resource to me.

HF: In conclusion, I would like to talk about how language about the body and the language of the body can fuse, can become a single utterance. Paul B. Preciado has written beautifully about this, through the act of *writing* about something that his *body* was subjected to. He makes his body discursive. Yet his book also raises other questions, such as: What institutional forces are our bodies (as both discursive and physical entities) and our language subjected to? These ideas have been instrumental in your presentation at the New Museum and also, in many ways, in this lengthy conversation between us: How do you find a language beyond what the institution desires, a language that takes place within a space of rehearsal, a language that directly impacts and affects the bodies in your exhibition, perhaps even a language without technics? What would such a language look like, and why is it so important for you to find it? How do you prevent your language—and, perhaps, with that, your body—from being institutionalized? Or, is it too late for that?

CS: Preciado brings the body back, saving it from post-Copernican duality, which separated it from the mind. *Testo Junkie* is a literal body of knowledge. It *is* an affective, joyfully rebellious, and resilient critique of how wisdom and knowledge are “done” and of who has the right to “do” them.

Preciado is complex; he allows something external (pharmaceutical power) to enter, affect, and effect his own body. Filled up with testosterone that isn't his, he uses this experience as a technic to mutate himself. But he chose to do this to himself as an experiment—as a rehearsal of how to live. He didn't accidentally outsource himself to the technic. I somehow feel that this lack (of accident) is exactly why he is not institutionalized.

Power and control are triggered by vocabulary; say the words “key performance indicator,” “research points,” or “design thinking,” and everyone will nod in agreement. But these words carry no meaning; they carry no thought. They are fictions designed to mobilize neoliberal power and render recipients of the language passive and powerless. So, to what institutional forces are our bodies (as both

discursive and physical entities) and our language subjected? Well, I feel that as publishers and exhibitors of thought, knowledge, and language, we can make a difference and actually refuse passivity. Press releases, exhibition catalogues, wall texts, reviews, essays, panel talks, a thank you list... These are all interfaces between communicating bodies, between an audience and an artist and an institution. The question for me remains: How do I then find a language beyond what the institution desires from me? To be clear, it's not about antagonism; it's not about giving an institution or governing body or that which wields some power exactly what they did *not* ask for. It's about asking: Who are we writing for if not for each other? We should do one another the decency of finding a clear voice—lucid, vibrant, and self-organized—of speaking from a situated, intuiting body, rather than a body whose utterance is stitched together from business or governance.

The museum is exactly where we can start this project. The critique is not located in the building itself anymore, or in what it represents, as it was in the work of Michael Asher, let's say, or as Andrea Fraser sometimes dealt with it. It's in the information distribution, the language. It's in neoliberal performatives, which carry the promise of fleshly human self-realism—Cally Spooner's work, Cally Spooner's research, Cally Spooner's exhibition, combined with the machinic language of promise—will explore, will challenge, will consider, will elucidate, etc. We have to completely transform the tired and violent performatives by producing a lucid, exhilarated voice through which we speak as and to, a thinking, caring, desiring other.

For me, Preciado is circumnavigating the usual codes of *how* to speak institutionally and philosophically. He writes directly from his *situated*, experiencing body. Of course, we're always up against it in art-making because everything must always be promised and always be new—not yet arrived. So, the body isn't there yet. Immediately we're in a space of protocol fictions and speculations, which is really grim. We are not situated. That's where the performative, its jargon, sneaks in as an appendage to that absence. But it's insane! We have this incredible, beautiful, thinking apparatus at our

disposal: these desirous, fierce, and hopeful thinkers (artists, curators, writers, directors, activists, politicians, teachers, supporters), who are so smart and so invested, but their utterances and efforts can get so easily and accidentally stuck on jargon, performance, appendages, and some documentary images which prove that the promise to deliver an outcome was realized. If everything is pulled down and fixed into place, there is no experiment and no rehearsal. If everything is known in advance, it's our fault.

So, how do I prevent my language—and, perhaps, with that, my body—from being institutionalized? How can I, by my own ways and means, refuse the usual codes of knowledge and power, day to day, in my work? My work, like your work, and like the work of other people we know, is trying to shift consciousness to notice that which is less noticed, to shape other states of life and formations of thought. We must not accept the given apparatus and norms of communication because they absolutely contain power and violence that are disguised as “helpful” and accessible tools, when in fact they mask hierarchies—of who organizes our thinking and who has no power of organizing how thinking is distributed. Even in the smallest instance of text—even a few lines—that fails to acknowledge this, capitalism wins, and we become a little more eroded, a little less vital. It's the saddest thing because it's really a terrible accident. No one meant for this happen. But we let it, no? We outsourced ourselves to it! So, is it too late? I don't think so at all. It's about learning to transform our performatives into rehearsals, where there are no false tears or outsourcing.

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