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by

Elizabeth A. M. Keel

May 2018

SCIENCE FICTION ONSTAGE

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

School of Theatre and Dance

Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Theatre Studies

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Abstract

This thesis examines the growing relationship between science fiction and the stage. Contemporary playwrights must overcome the expectations created by computer-generated imagery inherited through the lenses of film and television. Therefore, playwrights have collectively been required to innovate with creative storytelling and stagecraft to achieve futuristic scenarios onstage. In this study, I compare the evolving relationship between humans and their technology as explored in Jennifer Haley's *The Nether*, Jordan Harrison's *Marjorie Prime*, and Mickie Maher's *Song About Himself*. I will also investigate the adaptation of science fiction to the stage, as Edward Einhorn attempted with his 2010 adaptation of Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* for Untitled Theatre Company #61 in New York. Lastly, I will consider the development of my own science fiction script, *Corona*, which reimagines the Greek myth of Ariadne and the Minotaur aboard a spaceship.

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I hope to forever honor the memories of Angela Stephanie Montante, my student, friend, and a warm and witty science fiction playwright, and Zachary Doss, my fellow director and a champion of inclusion. You were both taken too soon.

Most of all, I dedicate this thesis to my husband and collaborator, Greg Cote. He has stood by me, radiating nothing but love and pride as I transitioned through the phases of robot, alien, human-tear-puddle, and bull-creature in order to get this done. It is high time for that honeymoon.

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Anything you dream is fiction, and anything you accomplish is science.
The whole history of mankind is nothing but science fiction.

–Ray Bradbury

The theatre itself is much less high-minded than those who keep a
watchful eye on its purity; the stage has always cheerfully swiped
whatever good stories were going.

– Philip Pullman

Introduction: Science Fiction Onstage

The genre of science fiction is a tool that allows humans to work ahead in their imaginations in preparation of potential futures. Likewise, the theatre serves to stimulate all manners of supposition and mimetic problem-solving. Both avenues seek to question their participants and generate a thoughtful scrutiny of ethics, hypotheses, and dreams. They assess scenarios that challenge us, as well as spur us onward. I believe the blending of these two artistic fields is the desirable and inevitable result of progress in storytelling.

The purpose of this thesis is to encourage the theatre community to make space. Staged science fiction has previously been dismissed as clumsy, campy, and niche. The pervading assumption is that it will never be as viable in the live, dramatic medium as when it is presented through the lengthy privacy of the novel, or embodied by the mutability of the screen. However, I argue that this is an outmoded stereotype which can be retired. The aim of this study is to recognize existing science fiction proponents and their innovations. By acknowledging the recent solutions of playwrights in their pursuit of staging this genre, I hope to inspire other practitioners to attempt their own productions. This proposal is not meant to provide a singular, overarching prescription. (Science fiction is by its very nature too multifaceted to stand for that.) Rather, through the elevation of several successful approaches and endeavors, I hope to spark a dilation.

My goals are to address what has been growing in the field through the analysis of both original and adaptive case studies of theatrical science fiction. I hope to highlight

the creativity of artists dedicated to a serious treatment of the genre, as well as to refute the most repeated objections which they face. The project will conclude with my own efforts as a playwright to develop a science fiction script, *Corona*. My objectives there are twofold: to honor the components of its predecessors in the industry, as well as to contribute a viable new candidate for production to the field. Ultimately, I am seeking increased critical support for the genre, the stimulation of its presence in education, and a more inclusive conversation among theatre practitioners at large.

The Germination

I attended a rather perfunctory public high school in Houston. In my senior year, the overworked math teacher, a man with a pulsating vein in his forehead, was saddled with administering a class called Historical Research. This was a requirement enforced by the state of Texas: the sole expectation was that the students had to be able to write a ten page research paper by the end of the term. Once he was left to his own devices, Mr. H. corralled the students in the dark and screened his favorite science fiction films, one after the other. We waded through all five installments of the 1970s *Planet of the Apes* pentalogy, *Jurassic Park 1, 2, and 3*, *Dune, 2001* as well as *2010, Soylent Green*, and fistfuls of *Star Trek* and *Twilight Zone* episodes. We read battered paperbacks of Bradbury, Heinlein, and Asimov, made lousy cardboard robots, and sketched out alien landscapes. At the end of the semester, the long-abandoned research papers were guiltily generated with a speed usually reserved for a parent's anticipated return. Everyone received an A.

That experience has caused me to forever associate science fiction with rebellion. Particularly in regards to this thesis, it felt like something which must be enjoyed only in

privacy. To this day, when friends and acquaintances confess to indulging in a fandom of any of the many branches of science fiction, the admission is nearly always preceded by an apology, a shrug, or a downplayed dismissal of some kind; sci-fi is for nerds. Back in 2004, that cavernous classroom vibrated with the palpable feeling of a secret society meeting. This was my real introduction to the genre: it was not to be spoken of in the hallways.

Mr. H.'s small insurrection to the administration was to spare our class from pedantic rough drafts. In hindsight, I have to thank him for bequeathing science fiction's useful themes of looking for loopholes and bucking the system to his teenaged disciples. He was a loud, abrasive, impatient man, but he was also a fervent admirer of the wondrous topics raised by the genre, and he shamelessly snuck them into our otherwise bland educational diet. My initial responses to the works he introduced ranged from intrigue, amusement, and fondness, to bewilderment and dismay that things could get so *weird*.¹ There was also the jarring discovery that Mr. H. was capable of happiness, provided his current existence in the high school was removed from the conversation. If we were speaking of other times, beings, planets, or inventions, he shone.

Upon heading to college, science fiction was relegated to my pleasure reading, or the occasional film splurge. I went on to pursue a B.A. in Acting and Directing at the University of Houston, where I also became a playwright. Nearly all of my remarkable professors² tended to work in realism or something very close to it. But despite their respective influences, I have always leaned towards world-creation, magical realism, and fantastical elements in my writing. Two of my previous plays could be categorized

¹ *Soylent Green* in particular freaked me out.

² Including Lanford Wilson, Mark Medoff, Mark Bly, Kate Pogue, Edward Albee, and Stuart Ostrow.

as science fiction. The first, *Going Dark*, involves a manufactured branch of science termed *empathology*: in which invisible emotions can manifest as physical dangers.³ The second, *Gambrels of the Sky*, incorporates multiverse theory and portal travel to explain where Cain went after abandoning Adam and Eve, and how he was able to encounter other people in the lands east of Eden.⁴

Ironically, when both of these plays were conceived and fully staged, it never dawned on me that they qualified as theatrical science fiction. Rather, I considered them to be complex fantasies: oddities, difficult-to-explain. Although it was not in my vocabulary at the time, I might have preferred Maurice Renard's term of the "scientific- marvelous," which he coined in a 1909 essay to refer to the novels of H.G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe. Renard divided the world into three parts: the things we know and have proven, the things we suspect, and the things of which we have no comprehension at all. Of the latter two, he writes,

It is there, from the world of the unknown or the suspected, that the scientific- marvelous must draw the material for its diverse creations, not from the world of the known and the certain. Science is, moreover, incapable of showing us anything marvelous, in the true sense of the word. It is, in fact, the great killer of the miraculous. There is marvelous only in mystery, in the unexplained (1).

This was my frequent lament when producers asked me for a synopsis of my work. I could not explain or break down every aspect of the marvelous to them – I needed five minutes, a map, and a flood of hand gestures to even come close. The artistic teams

³ *Going Dark* was workshopped at the University of Houston from 2008-2009. It was produced by the Nova Arts Project (2009), This Is Water Theatre (2013), and Squeaky Bicycle Productions (2018). It was also featured on the syllabus of The Comic Book & The Contemporary Theatre at Texas A&M University in 2015.

⁴ *Gambrels of the Sky* was workshopped at the Arthur Seelen Theatre in New York by Fresh Produce'd (2012), and produced by The Landing Theatre Company (2016).

involved also conveyed their hesitancy and excitement to be thus challenged by the intricate worlds we were spinning. As Roger Elwood, editor of *Six Science Fiction Plays*, notes in his collection, “Writing a science fiction play is a bit like trying to picture infinity in a cigar box” (vii). It seemed outrageous at first, but with creativity, solutions were reached. Once the plays were performed, the audiences engaged. And so it all came to a simmer.

Finally, at the beginning of my second year in this program, I stumbled into the realm of theatrical science fiction with a dawning feeling of devotion and purpose. My past work came into focus as I realized that this was the direction in which I had been heading all along. As I continued to read my way through the field in earnest, and encountered its impressive spectrum, my own pre-existing assumptions about the limits and rules of what theatrical science fiction could achieve were challenged. The more that I encountered what my peer practitioners were establishing through their productions, the more I longed to join in the fun.

I can pinpoint the moment of epiphany to my reading of Mac Rogers’ devastating *Honeycomb Trilogy*, which premiered in New York in 2012. The three plays, *Advance Man*, *Blast Radius*, and *Sovereign*, tell the epic story of an alien invasion of Earth from a single living room set. It ages through the three plays, changing in form and function, while retaining the terrarium-like box set of a traditional social drama. As a sample of his creativity, two heavily pregnant women battle onstage with scythes, fighting for the right to escape their bug overlords. Live theatre does not get much more exciting than that! Furthermore, at no point did the material devolve into camp or pulp. Instead, Rogers’ scripts are powerful and thematic examinations of xenophobia, familial

loyalties, the dangers of passivity, and the governability of the soul. I was flummoxed by his deft handling of the practical logistics as well: the bugs are only overheard skittering on the roof, or one of their legs is carried through in a display of gory glory. The aliens are never seen in their natural form; instead they are able to transfer their consciousness into human bodies, though it kills the soul of the person whom they take on as a shell. Renard's larger "world of the unknown" is maintained just outside the door, hovering in the imagination.

Much like Mr. H. before me, I responded to these invigorating plays by coaxing and coercing thirty-five actors into reading all three scripts out loud in a Sci-Fi Salon series throughout February of 2018. I invited everyone in the university's theatre population to listen in. The attendees were increasingly giddy from week to week, startled to learn that these kinds of plays were even possible. Their enthusiasm finalized my course; I knew the rising theatre generation was capable of cultivating an improved, unapologetic relationship with dramatized science fiction.

Defining Science Fiction

The immediate obligation is to define science fiction itself, for the purposes of this thesis. That is a formidable undertaking, especially as the genre is still actively mutating. Science fiction began in earnest as a byproduct of the mechanization of the Industrial Revolution; its existence has been symbiotically tied to the unfurling of technological history. As humanity continues to develop, redevelop, upgrade, and improve, so do science fiction's loftiest plots and ambitions.

Robert Scholes, in his book *Structural Fabulation*, posits that science fiction

“[Involves] the impact of developments or revelations derived from the human or the physical sciences upon the people who must live with those revelations or developments” (41-42). This is an excellent place to start. Whatever the development is – a monster, a miracle drug, a regenerating Time Lord, etc. – the genre serves to reflect upon how humans must respond to its sudden appearance. The focus is on an analysis of the effects: does it harm, help, or heal us? How do the characters either employ or destroy the development? What does it cost us to use? As explored further in the historical section of this introduction, with so many new inventions and discoveries affecting daily life, the stories generated by science fiction allow its readers and witnesses a chance to practice the processing of new revelations.

Alex and Cory Panshin, a husband and wife team who collaborated on *The World Beyond The Hill: The Mystery of Science Fiction*, provide an encyclopedic resource tracing science fiction’s growth across all mediums. In their coverage of the genealogies of the early pulp magazines which pumped lifeblood in the field, they highlight:

The transcendence at the heart of science fiction can be seen revealed in the meaning of a whole constellation of words used as the titles of one science fiction magazine or another. These words have been the promise of the genre for those who have loved it: *amazing, astonishing, astounding, fantastic, marvel, miracle, startling, thrilling, wonder, unknown, worlds beyond* (2).

Again, the focus is on what is new, and what is strange. Both that newness and strangeness are measured in the response of the humans who interact with it. The Panshins go on to argue that science fiction is poised to become the lasting mythology of the West because it “respects both the actual and the transcendent” (4). The quotidian is altered, for better or worse, by the introduction of what was once *beyond*, and is now

presently causing an indelible impact. The fiction actively allows its participants the chance to reflect: What would I do in these circumstances? What would I make of that other which now transcends my life?

Author Margaret Atwood has frequently despaired of a one-size-fits-all definition for the genre. Instead, addressing the marketing aspects which have lingered in the industry, she demands to know:

Is this term a corral with real fences that separate what is clearly ‘science fiction’ from what is not? Or is it merely a shelving aid, there to help workers in bookstores place the book? ...If you put skin-tight black or silver clothing on a book cover along with some jetlike flames and/or colourful planets, does that make the work ‘science fiction’? What about dragons and manticores, or backgrounds that contain volcanoes or atomic clouds, or plants with tentacles, or landscapes reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch? Does there have to be any actual science in such a book, or is the skin-tight clothing enough? (2)

The Panshins propose that while these fantastic elements Atwood refers to – the markers and signs of the genre – are myriad and omnipresent, they are only decoration. They counter that as the world has changed, especially in the years following WWII, “Aliens, robots and mutants [shed] their former aura of fundamental otherness and are seen in a new light, not as evolutionary competitors, but as variations upon the larger theme of being human” (570). Does science fiction mean farflung planets and tentacular plants? Certainly; often! But it is not the definitive qualifier. The foundation of this thesis is that science fiction is the telling of stories which provide “*variations upon the larger theme of being human.*” The specifics of the devices used are infinite; what matters is that they propose a variation on reality which in turn investigates, confronts, and queries humanity itself. The relationship between the known, the unknown, and the suspected, rests at its heart.

Historical Context

The necessary vocabulary for the genre began to manifest in the nineteenth century. In 1834, Cambridge professor William Whewell contributed the word “scientist” to the English language. “Science fiction” was introduced in 1851 via William Wilson’s *A Little Earnest Book Upon A Great Old Subject*. A few years later, in 1859, “technology” appeared to describe new products being developed for sale.⁵ The world had given itself steam engines, gaslights, hot air balloons, and factories, which soon cropped up in all the urban centers. Average citizens were trying to adapt to the implementation of germ theory, evolution, and the periodic table of elements. The vastness of the cosmos and the surprising nature of microscopic particles were all simultaneously facing redefinition. The *known* was languishing in a state of flux. It was in this roiling atmosphere of change that the playwrights of science fiction found themselves. This requires a disclaimer; I must acknowledge that there have been hundreds of science fiction plays throughout history which have contributed to the ongoing quest to propel this movement forward. More are being manufactured every day. It would not be possible to reference all of the material which falls within the scope of this project. Therefore, I include here only an overview of a few landmark productions which illustrated large shifts within the zeitgeist of public opinion towards this field.⁶

During the height of the Romantic era, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was a bestselling novel. Its Gothic story of revivification and longing for control of the

⁵ Panshin, 38.

⁶ An excellent place to begin is with Ralph Willingham’s appendix including over 300 science fiction plays in *Science Fiction and the Theatre*, although none of them occur any later than 1992.

afterlife resonated with both the public, and with Shelley herself, who had recently suffered both the loss of an infant daughter and the suicide of her half-sister. With these weighty themes of impossible science at its heart, *Frankenstein* was first adapted to the stage by Richard Brinsley Peake in 1823. It premiered under the title *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*. After a warm reception in London, it continued to be remounted periodically through 1850. (In fact, this was the only stage version Shelley was to witness during her lifetime.) Interestingly, due to the complicated licensing laws still in effect from the Restoration, several requirements were placed upon Peake and his company to include music, pantomime, and burlesque spectacle so as to satisfy being properly “illegitimate theatre.”⁷ In order to preserve the Creature’s muteness, the music was featured as something for him to listen to as a means of learning to empathize with humanity. Cushioned by its popularity as a novel, *Frankenstein* received other adaptations around the world in swift order.

Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (1920) moved to America in 1921 after premiering in Czechoslovakia. This dystopian examination of technology was famously the origin of the word “robot.” Essentially, the human members of the Rossum Corporation build organic entities to do their bidding. Although the robots are smarter than their creators, they are deemed to be a lower class due to their collective lack of a soul. (Indeed, the word robot comes from the Slavic *robota*, denoting servitude and hard labor.) Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, in her work *Science On Stage*, believes that *R.U.R.*, “Gives us science fiction onstage with the scientist as ‘villain,’ as do many other plays about scientists during and directly after the modernist period. They imagine the world ruined by

⁷ Behrendt, 1.

greedy, evil scientists out to destroy life and art” (52). As the Lost Generation recovered from the death toll of WWI, there was a widespread mistrust of automation, avarice, and anything else which might reduce empathy or trigger further violence.

The following year, George Bernard Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah* (1922) questioned evolution and immortality at length. It was subtitled *A Metabiological Pentateuch*. The play begins in 4004 B.C. with Adam and Eve, and by the end humans have adapted and perfected themselves into vortices of advanced energy and light. The script includes Shaw’s famous line, “You see things; you say, ‘Why?’ But I dream things that never were; and I say, ‘Why not?’”⁸ The five part play ran over seven hours in length, making it extremely prohibitive to produce. Shaw predicted it would never be performed, and should only be treated as a closet drama. However, the New York Theatre Guild surprised him by gamely staging a three-evening event in order to mount it in its entirety. Critics complained that the denseness of the material was painfully dull and unforgivably demanding of its audience, and the show has rarely been remounted. An overall dependence on text and a tendency to expound expository detail rather than building it into the action have been twin fears of producers of theatrical science fiction ever since.

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, the supply of science fiction shifted with the drastic changes in the American (and global) economy. Magazines, including Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*, were the preferred option for consumers compared to the theatre. The competing platforms experienced differing levels of success; serial pulp stories did not have to impress any critics. Readers also purchased the magazines

⁸ It was quoted by Robert F. Kennedy in his 1968 campaign, and the phrase is often mistakenly attributed to him instead of Shaw.

without being swayed one way or the other by reviews. As the Great Depression continued, theatre companies were hesitant to run the risk of staging an experimental piece without a guaranteed positive reception.

When the second World War arose, imagination and invention continued to race against each other. As Ralph Willingham provides in *Science Fiction and the Theatre*, “Science fiction gave the budding scientists and engineers of the young twentieth century a sense of direction... It was science fiction writers whose imaginations put submarines, rockets, atomic weaponry, spaceships, and computers to work before they had even been invented” (3). Following the dropping of the atom bomb, the genre became another method of responding to and dealing with the sudden fragility of the world. While their peer participants in the Theatre of the Absurd struggled to find meaning in nonsense, those involved in theatrical science fiction instead wrestled with imminent possible realities. There was a spate of conversational drawing room/nuclear weapons plays generated throughout the late 1940s and into the early 1950s, in which scientists, nurses, and their families attempted to come to terms with what had happened to mankind.

The late 1950s heralded a sudden boom in popularity of science fiction plays. They erupted back on Broadway as the Space Race against the Soviet Union intensified. The productions were frequent enough that *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* began a column devoted entirely to the theatre, called “The Science Stage” in 1957⁹ – notably in the same year in which Sputnik was launched.

In 1964, genre giant Ray Bradbury formed the Pandemonium Theatre Company

⁹ Willingham, 27.

in order to dramatize three of his short stories: “The Veldt,” “To the Chicago Abyss,” and “The Pedestrian.” Bradbury bankrolled the renovation of the Coronet Theatre in Los Angeles himself. The production immediately moved to New York. There, as Willingham notes, “Bradbury’s scripts received mixed reviews, but for the first time a recognizable science fiction writer was challenging the myth that [good] science fiction was unstageable. ...They won New York critics’ respect [by demonstrating] the advantage of allowing the audience to collaborate in the creative process” (54). By adding his clout to the conversation, Bradbury drew many of his fans from the publishing industry into the playhouses.

The 1970s heralded the rise of the space opera, with plays such as *Via Galactica* and *Warp!* emerging. Though they prided themselves on their special effects, they were resounding failures from a financial perspective. Sir Peter Hall, the director who helmed the 1971 production of *Via Galactica*, threw everything in the book at his production:

[Hall] filled the stage with gadgets and machines, including a ‘cherry-picker’ crane which represented [a] flying garbage truck, an aircraft which destroyed itself in a cloud of smoke, spinning hats atop the heads of the brainwashed Earthlings, a set of six trampolines on which the actors bounced to simulate weightlessness in space, and 375,000 tiny plastic balls hung on strings to represent celestial bodies, lit by a powerful projector (59).¹⁰

\$800,000 and a mere seven performances later, the play closed on Broadway in disgrace. Kevin Sanders, a critic who witnessed its premiere, provided the following insight: “It is a difficult show to care for... The writing is flat and platitudinous. Presumably everyone thought that with a truly sumptuous and adventurous staging, MacDermot’s music [and Barnes’ book] would do the trick. This was a miscalculation”

¹⁰ Willingham, 59.

(33). The production offered an expensive reminder that all the spectacle money could buy was insufficient without emotionally compelling content.

Warp!, a comedic byproduct of the experimental Organic Theatre Company, saw better success in its initial run in its hometown of Chicago. Inspired by comic books and pulp magazines, the silly trilogy playfully capitalized on the use of theatrical illusion. Its co-writers, Stuart Gordon and Lenny Kleinfeld, employed parody and imagination to garner appeal. Self-lampooning and a roguish approach tickled audiences into loving the work. Gordon recalls, “We got them all. The straights, the bent, the young, the old, the city people and the suburbanites... Once they got into the show, they all became kids” (Willingham, 64). However, once the play made the move to New York, it suffered the death blow of a quarter million dollars being thrown at the formerly homespun stage magic. Five different costume designers were listed in the program, streamlining and commercializing the characters’ uniforms. Their heroes’ humble corkscrew weapons were replaced with slickly made ray guns. Somehow, the life force of their production was lost in that move to Broadway.

These two watershed works, both from the 1971-1972 season, were ridiculed far and wide for their expensive inadequacy. They spread a lasting impression on producers, directors, and playwrights alike. It seemed science fiction would do well enough if it was left to marinate in a black box in Chicago, to be treated as a joke by the locals. It was nothing to be taken too seriously, and certainly not a savvy financial venture. Throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, the predominant state of existence for theatrical science fiction was one of two options. It was either an adaptation of old novellas, short stories, or pulp serials, hoping to capitalize on the

familiarity of their existing fan bases, or else it was a posturing, metatheatrical, overly spectacular dose of camp. The Panshins offer, “Deliberately courting these qualities has been a survival strategy for [science fiction] in its time of unpopularity, a way of attracting an audience craving to be entertained... But underneath this protective disguise of playful unseriousness, [it] has been continuously engaged in the very serious business of reestablishing transcendence” (11).

In the twenty first century, playwrights are once again developing a marked interest in sublimity. Innovations in theme, enhancements in theatre technology, and enhanced connectivity for the dissemination of ideas have combined to reinfuse the field of dramatized science fiction with new possibility. There are stories which can now be staged that were not conceivable to the previous generations.

The Chapters & Literature Review

The first chapter, “The Uneasy Alliance,” comparatively analyzes a trio of recent case studies: Jennifer Haley’s *The Nether*, Jordan Harrison’s *Marjorie Prime*, and Mickle Maher’s *Song About Himself*. These three plays delve into questioning the relationship between humans and their technology. Their respective use of futuristic networks to provide an escape is a timely and relevant topic, one frequently addressed in the genre as well as in modern life. The aspects of dependence and intrusion, and the potential dangers therein, are written without an overt reliance upon theatre technology at all. Beyond the basic implementation of what could be deemed as industry-standard sound and light cues, these scripts call for human actors to deliver the bulk of the unusual. The realms these plays explore are achieved in the full view of the audience, through a balance of language and memory, as opposed to computer-generated imagery

or a reliance on spectacle.

The second chapter, “Adapting Androids,” addresses the strengths of theatrical solutions during the process of adaptation. Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has passed through a lengthy journey of iterations as a novel, as the film *Blade Runner*, and subsequently into *Blade Runner 2049*. But it has also existed as a theatre production. Edward Einhorn, the playwright and director responsible for the story’s transition to the stage in New York in 2010, faced a wide variety of challenges in regards to textual integrity, the structure of the design, assorted practical effects, and being faithful in his treatment of the science fiction at the heart of the piece. His success was anchored by his commitment to keeping empathetic, personal relationships at the forefront of the action. By embracing what was most human about his script, Einhorn was able to capitalize upon the advantages of the theatrical medium. Nearly all of his staging solutions coincided with the revelations dissected in Chapter One. Additionally, as he was dealing with the adaptation of a very popular source material, Einhorn shepherded his production through the semiotic conflicts caused by the ubiquitous film. He was required to both meet and subvert the expectations of his audience for his stagework to revivify Ridley Scott’s cinematic cult classic. He was required to make his androids uniquely present and immediate in the close quarters of performance.

The third chapter, “Considering *Corona*,” tackles my own work, which relocates the ancient myth of the Minotaur onto a spaceship. I assess *Corona* through a frank astrogational exploration of its functionality and merit, acknowledging the influences and subgenres of feminism, horror, and adaptation which support its science fiction. I argue that its success as a variation upon the larger theme of being human is anchored in

providing a more complex treatment of Princess Ariadne and her relationships. I also offer potential logistics in regard to staging solutions. The chapter culminates with a review of the existing theatre companies devoted to science fiction theatre who are most likely to consider it for a production. This roster was captured through extensive online searches, as well as the polling of international theatre groups and peers. It presents insightful metrics on the burgeoning popularity of the field.

Due to the fact that this thesis is largely focused on forward motion, and what will become of theatrical science fiction in the coming years, several of the most important contributions I collected were interviews. I was able to develop a dialogue with current practitioners: designers, playwrights, directors, performers and producers of science fiction theatre, from all levels of the profession. Their personal recollections and extensive joint experience augmented what my corresponding scholarly research uncovered. Kevin Ridgon, the internationally renowned scenic and lighting designer, shared with me the logistics and materials he utilized in developing the staging of *The Nether* for the Alley Theatre in 2016. Playwright Jennifer Haley also added her memories of the many solutions she had witnessed in the production her script:

I have loved the great variety... For the world premiere in L.A., there was a spinning house. In [New York], there were panels that opened like a shadow box. A staging that surprised me... was that of Woolly Mammoth in D.C. The confining set steadily disappeared over the course of the play, leaving us at the end with nothing but projections and space, as though we'd left 'reality' behind and entered a space of pure imagination.¹¹

Playwright and director Edward Einhorn, whose production of *Do Androids Dream* is covered in the second chapter, offered incredible insight into his discoveries during the

¹¹ Haley, interview with author.

process of adaptation and performance. Although I was not able to witness his production in 2010, his extensive descriptions and archival photographs were vital to my research.

While I found *Science Fiction and the Theatre* to be an outstanding contribution to my research, Ralph Willingham's conclusions, published in 1994, no longer stand up to the evolved nature of the industry. Where he claims, "Science fiction's great writers seldom [devote] their talents to drama," (10), I counter with Jennifer Haley, Jordan Harrison, Mickie Maher, Edward Einhorn, and Mac Rogers, among an army of others. However, Willingham does cite two major causes of the genre's stagnation which can still serve as guideposts for future playwrights. He cautions against both "the theatre's persistently frivolous treatment of science and the inability of science fiction theatre to develop the cult following that has been the lifeblood of science fiction prose" (10). The reader can conclude that Willingham hopes to have his mind changed by the future generations. He even supplements his disappointment by noting, "The only link missing between science fiction and theatre is good dramaturgy." (6)

Also, there are plenty of straightforward science plays which lack the element of fiction, including dramatizations of biographies and historical events. These have enjoyed success due to their respectable topics and treatment at all levels of development. Examples include Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, Bertolt Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, and Lauren Gunderson's *Silent Sky*. Kirsten Shepherd-Barr has acknowledged that, "The concreteness of the scientific enterprise, with its basis in ocular proof and known facts, vies with the nebulous, internal, and often subconscious motives and

intentions of the scientist. This tension thus created makes for electrifying drama.” (34)

This connection can be translated. If science can form an alliance with the humanities, so too might its inspirational cousin, science fiction. Whereas science plays build with fact, science fiction plays construct from fancy. But simply because their components are hypothetical does not mean they should be considered as inferior. Science fiction incorporates the equivalent of imaginary numbers; it unlocks answers that cannot be reached through fact alone. As Margaret Atwood maintains, it serves to “interrogate social organization by showing what things might be like if we rearranged them.” (62)

This is the key to defense against Willingham’s concerns of frivolity and lack of support. We must alter the terms of the conversation. As scholar Steven Shaviro claims, science fiction inherently “involves both the present and the future, while being reducible to neither. For science fiction is about the shadow that the future casts upon the present. It shows us how profoundly we are haunted by the ghosts of what has not yet happened” (73). With this new lens of respectful exploration in place, there is ample room for science fiction to continue to challenge itself, and to welcome others into the room. I propose that what matters among contemporary academics, critics, and practitioners is a recognition that there are new and worthwhile science fiction plays available to them for production. The use of clever staging practices, originative conceits, emotional truth, and a grounded approach to human storytelling will yield powerful results.

Chapter One: The Uneasy Alliance

Introduction

In order to examine how theatrical works of science fiction can be successfully staged, this chapter will focus on three scripts which have been realized through multiple productions and met with critical support. They are: *Song About Himself* by Mickie Maher, *Marjorie Prime* by Jordan Harrison, and *The Nether* by Jennifer Haley. I chose to explore these scripts because they share a common theme of concern for humanity's codependence upon the refuge of technology. Each play enters a futuristic realm of isolation to highlight the problems inherent to the insinuation of intelligent networks into daily life. Then, through the alteration of language and experimentation in the portrayal of memory, these scripts embody a vivid sense of the curiosity and caution native to the genre of science fiction.

Song About Himself by Mickie Maher premiered at the Storefront Theatre in Chicago in April of 2015 through Theatre Oobleck.¹² It proved so popular that a secondary production was quickly mounted that following July, at Chicago's Berger Park Coach House. The following year saw dovetailing productions at Capital T Theatre in Austin in October 2016¹³, and at Catastrophic Theatre in Houston that November¹⁴.

Song About Himself is set in a bleak, dystopian future in which humans struggle to speak without muttering in gibberish. The parts of speech are falling away, leaving a stilted, vulnerable patois. A woman named Carol may be the last person alive

¹² <http://theateroobleck.com/plays/song-about-himself>

¹³ <http://capitalt.org/wp/featured/video-promo-for-song-about-himself/6208>

¹⁴ <https://matchouston.org/events/song-about-himself>

who is able to still wield coherent English. In an attempt to maintain her sanity, she joins YouSpake, a website on the edge of “the Weed”: the horrible, haunting place the Internet has become. There, she and the enigmatic host/ess of the site attempt to find others who can still communicate. The text of the script runs on recycled, corrupted strains of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, contributing a stark, poetic desperation to Carol’s dwindling vocabulary.

Marjorie Prime by Jordan Harrison was ranked as the fifth most produced play of 2017 by *American Theatre* magazine.¹⁵ After its initial premiere at the Mark Taper Forum with the Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles in 2014, it moved Off Broadway with Playwrights Horizon in November of the following year. The play was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2015, and went on to win the Horton Foote Prize for an Outstanding New American Play in 2016.¹⁶ In 2017, it was adapted into a film by Michael Almereyda, who then directed it for Passage Pictures. Actress Lois Smith reclaimed the titular role after originating it in California and moving with *Marjorie* to New York. The film cast was rounded out with Academy-Award winners Geena Davis and Tim Robbins, as well as Jon Hamm.¹⁷

The script is set just a few decades ahead of modern day. Its 85-year-old heroine Marjorie is in declining health, so her daughter Tess and son-in-law Jon have arranged for her to have a companion in the form of her deceased husband, Walter. This automaton version of his youthful self is intelligent. It absorbs and retains whatever it is told, resulting in moments of uncanny familiarity and surprising emotional tenderness.

¹⁵ <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/09/21/the-top-most-produced-plays-of-the-2017-18-season/>

¹⁶ <http://www.samuel french.com/p/59978/marjorie-prime>

¹⁷ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4978710/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

As the script progresses, Marjorie dies and is replaced with a Prime version of her human self, as is her grieving daughter Tess. Playwright Harrison wrestles with singling out which parts of human interaction are truly irreplaceable.

Lastly, Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* also had its world premiere with the Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles in March of 2013.¹⁸ The dramaturg on that production, Pier Carlo Talenti, surprised Haley by submitting her to the Susan Smith Blackburn prize without her knowledge; *The Nether* won that honor for 2012.¹⁹ The amplification caused by the Blackburn prize, as well as the quality of the CTG production (which won seven LA Ovation awards, including Best New Play), led to a London premiere in 2014 at the Royal Court with Headlong. Following its sold-out run, it transferred to the West End with Sonia Friedman Productions in 2015, where it took the Olivier award for Best Play. *The Nether* had notable subsequent productions in 2015 at MCC Theatre in New York, and in 2016 at the San Francisco Playhouse, the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, D. C., and at the Alley Theatre in Houston. Since then, it has been steadily produced around the world.

The Nether is a crime procedural as well as a science fiction thriller. It explores the moral and ethical government of unsavory virtual realities, such as the Hideaway, where it is permissible for adults to interact both sexually and violently with avatars who take the form of children. The Hideaway is located on a hidden, encrypted server, and accessed only through the Nether. (Similarly to Maher's *Weed*, this is what Haley's envisioned Internet has become.) A young female detective, Agent Morris, attempts to prosecute its creator Sims, and shut down his disturbing alternate reality forever.

¹⁸ thenetherplay.com

¹⁹ <http://www.blackburn.org/plays/>

This triptych provides a sample of the prevalent methods current playwrights in the field of theatrical science fiction are incorporating. These case studies are relevant because of their respectable receptions, proving by both financial and critical standards that science fiction is possible onstage. Beyond that, they are pertinent examples due to their sophisticated grappling with the most raw of human concerns: Why are we here? What are our limitations? And, most pressing, what will become of us?

Of course, there are many other substantial science fiction productions which have come to prominence in recent years. Yet I propose that *Song About Himself*, *Marjorie Prime*, and *The Nether* each contribute something profound to the theatrical science fiction canon. Their arguments, portrayed *live and in person*, to treat escapist networks with circumspection carries a valuable irony. In order to better analyze their effective elements, I have divided my assessment into four sections: Realms of Isolation, Language, Memory, and Staging.

Realms of Isolation

Each of these plays straddles two realms: one corporeal and one generated. The inhabitants of the former are obsessed with the perceived sanctum of the latter. In *Song About Himself*, there is Carol's dingy apartment with its hot plate, and the alluring conversation space of YouSpake. In *Marjorie Prime*, Tess and Jon's quiet home with its lumpy recliner competes with the undefined location in which Primes wait to be activated. *The Nether* offers Morris's austere interrogation room juxtaposed against the Victorian grandeur of Sims's lush Hideaway. In all three scenarios, there lurks an engendered sense of isolation. The adjacent topographical structures provide useful insight into the development of their respective composed worlds. The three generated

realms (The Weed, the storage space of the Primes, and The Hideaway) qualify as networks built for the purpose of connectivity. They are somewhere for the inhabitants of the corporeal worlds to escape *to*, withdrawing from their homes in order to be with a community they have elevated: sexualized children, sentient friends, and even the immortalized dead. Steven Shaviro, in his essay “Connected; Or What It Means to Live in the Network Society,” outlines how the growth of the computer network has altered the perception of modern interaction:

Our current understanding of networks dates from the development of cybernetic theory in the 1940s and 1950s. The model has since been greatly elaborated, notably in the chaos and complexity theories of the 1980s and 1990s. As it seems to us now, a network is a self-generating, self-organizing, self-sustaining system. It works through multiple feedback loops. These loops allow the system to monitor and modulate its own performance continually and thereby maintain a state of homeostatic equilibrium. (65)

With equilibrium as the goal, the yearning for the solitude of an isolated realm displays its necessity. In the futures projected by these playwrights, they anticipate the continual growth of human desire for a perfected dreamscape to spirit them away from their problems. The new network is sought to avoid the chaos, judgement, banality, grief, and loss present in the physical world. This is in keeping with the backbone of science fiction, in which brave new worlds and the possibility of discovered utopias are constantly imagined. Then, as Shaviro suggests, the characters must continually “monitor and modulate” their interactions both with and within the developed networks, weighing whether their entrance into the new realm has brought them the balance they first sought.

In *Song About Himself*, the Host/ess questions Carol about her daily existence, begging her to describe it at length. She laments:

CAROL. On what shall I post?
What sings in my world?
I pace my room, I make tea on the hotplate,
I walk the hall past sag-faced neighbors to throw up in the bathroom,
I walk outside in the slush to the bench where my love once loafed and no more
loafs, and back again to pace again my room.
What sings in my world? (34)

Here, the repeated usage of “sings” embodies all of the high hopes she harbors for YouSpake to provide. Much like every hopeful dating site enrollee, Carol has found the “sag-faced neighbors” unacceptable, and has signed up to hunt for more worthwhile companions online. Her ill-fitting physical world, with its emptiness and slush, is devouring her spirit. Therefore, she turns to the cyber-network, the isolated realm of YouSpake, to transcend.

Similarly, Haley’s antagonist Sims – or as he is also known, Papa – prefers his private realm of the Hideaway to real life. It is established that the corporeal world of *The Nether* is one of scant resources. Any organic matter which can be grown is proof of nearly unspeakable luxury. Sims’s possession of a plot of grass, a poplar tree, fresh vegetables, cotton clothing, *and* wine (made from grapes!) is nearly enough to convey proof to Agent Morris of his criminal activity. Sims’ starvation for botanical splendor, and nostalgia for the plants he remembers as a child, leads him to populate his coded realm with verdant abundance.

PAPA. There were poplars growing by our vacation cottage. It was the last grove in the country. I would wake to my bedroom wall aglitter with sunshine, the sound of the wind washing through the leaves, and my mother at the window. She said, The only way you hear the wind is if it has leaves to blow through. (40)

His love for nature only retains context while there is still nature left alive, however rare. As a method of dealing with the grief caused by the desolation laid in his

corporeal world, his Hideaway overflows with seasonal lemon basil and the delicate smell of mulch. It offers the twin seductions of salvation and sensuality. Of course it is the preferred realm.

The more infamous draw of the Hideaway is that it allows Sims the room to be himself: in this case, a violent pedophile. His self-imposed limitation of interacting solely with *virtual* children (according to his arguments) is the only acceptable solution to prevent his pursuing illicit activity in his corporeal realm. He specifically retreats to the isolated realm he has manufactured because his desires are not permissible within his native society. But the governing agency of the Nether, humanized by the agitated Agent Morris, will not allow him the liberty of his unpatrolled depths. Whereas he sees himself as a noble martyr, with the Hideaway as his sanctuary, Morris deems him an atrocious villain who must be stopped, no matter which realm he is in. Matters come to a head in the following argument between them:

SIMS. It's not the same *way* of being! It's imagination! People should be free there. That's one place they should have total privacy.

MORRIS. There is a line, even in our imagination.

SIMS. You will never be able to enforce that.

MORRIS. (29-30)

Her silence is tantamount to "Watch me." The limitless exploration of what people are capable of (such as axing a little girl to pieces) must be tempered by the tenets of the social contract. But Sims's argument for freedom from governance within the ethereal realm of imagination is anxiety-inducing; who wants to find themselves in even moderate agreement with a murderous pedophile? In a promotional interview with Samuel French, Jennifer Haley contributed:

The play asks a lot of questions about the ethics of technology. [It] doesn't necessarily come down on one side or the other. I think when you start to

get into it, it becomes a really [sticky] question. ...We all assume that we are free as an individual, that our imagination can go anywhere, that we can't be prosecuted for that. ... [But] what are the ethics of a plurality of people doing these things, even if it's only in their minds?

Haley has highlighted one of the primary issues at the heart of science fiction: how far is too far? What will Sims' proposed freedoms truly cost? Although no one was "hurt" by the repeated slaughter of Iris, with the little girl regenerating bloodless and whole after each attack, it is arguable that the virtual action did still inflict a measure of legitimate trauma upon its participants. Agent Morris' undercover alter ego, Mr. Woodnut, strikes at the heart of the dilemma.

WOODNUT. It's incredible what we have done using the materials of the earth. Not only have we built roads and cities, but we have created tools for our imagination.

IRIS. It's like magic.

WOODNUT. Exactly. Although I think we must be careful about letting the magic sweep us away, to the point where we forget where it came from. I personally like to have these – materials – to hold onto. Something tangible. (32)

'Magic' in this instance is interchangeable with the advanced technology. The abuse of it may defy immediate, quantifiable metrics, but nevertheless, Morris/Woodnut fears for the state of both Sims and Iris's souls, as well as her own. She mistrusts the murders, even once erased.

A further complication in the world of the play is the existence of shades: people who have left their bodies behind to wither on expensive life care systems while they permanently move their consciousness into the Nether. Agent Morris's own father was a shade (which provides a great deal of subtext to her arguments), and she reveals while undercover:

WOODNUT. He never looked at me when I was a child. He never touched me. He never took me outside. All I remember is his body on life support,

curling up. When he died, he listed me as the beneficiary of his login. I entered the Nether as him and found a single realm - a small room with an armchair and a fire. (34)

What simplicity! What waste! Armchairs and fires were easy enough to come by in their corporeal world, though perhaps firewood had grown scarce. But instead of spending time with his living daughter, the adult Mr. Morris withdrew until the day he died. What did that self-imposed isolation within his humble secondary realm cost his family?

In *Marjorie Prime*, Tess echoes her worry that interaction with the Primes is resulting in more harm than good. She buried her father, Walter, decades ago. She finds it understandably unnatural to have him returned as a handsome thirty year old man to sit in her living room, calmly chatting away with the octogenarian Marjorie. The strain of pretending that the robot is nothing but a helpful coping mechanism for the end of her mother's life eats away at her marriage and her already strained relationship with her mother. She attacks her husband with:

TESS. Science fiction is *here*, Jonathan. Every *day* is science fiction. We buy these things that already know our moods and what we want for lunch even though we don't know ourselves. And we *listen* to them, we do what we're told. Or in this case we tell them our deepest secrets, even though we have no earthly idea how they work. We treat them like our loved ones. (16)

Her distaste embodies the underbelly of the genre. It works too smoothly, too mysteriously, to be properly trusted. Tess's instinctive aversion harkens back to Nietzsche's aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil*, which warns, "And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you" (146). There is something eerie, even worrisome, about the invisible exchanges made through conversational interaction with the machines. What is it the Primes are *consuming* when they listen

with such absorption? And once that data is taken into the abyss of their storage, can it ever be retrieved, or protected? It fills Tess with horror to dabble in the realm of these cleverly constructed clones.

But then, following her mother's passing, Jon provides his wife with a *Marjorie* Prime. And out of her hidden need for maternal resolution, Tess finds herself teaching the Prime about her mother's mannerisms, habits, and beliefs, resulting in a blurry, liminal interaction in which it is no longer clear whether she perceives the Prime as inhuman, or as her lost parent. And only there, in that newly forged network between daughter and machine, can Tess's transition to the isolated realm occur. She is transported to the new, improved, upgraded method of interacting with "Mother." In the end, Tess is driven mad by her grief, and takes her own life while on holiday with Jon in Madagascar. Faced with the alternative of an empty house, he too succumbs and purchases a Tess Prime to speak with. This means of *logging on* is his quest to escape.

In summation, consider the question which Sims snarls to Morris:

SIMS. Just because it's virtual doesn't mean it isn't real... As the Nether becomes our contextual framework for being, don't you think it's a bit out of date to say it isn't real? (15)

"*Becomes*" is the operative verb. The blending of these realms is inevitable, especially as inhabitants wear a desire path back and forth between the two. The war between the inherited corporeal realm and the created virtual one is fueled by the human craving for acceptance. Sims, Tess, and Carol each find their "contextual framework for being," at least for a time, in the surreal environment of their individual technological networks. A modern audience, witnessing this searching, might very well resonate with such a dichotomy. We do not yet know what the Internet has done to current generations, but

the symptoms of its effects are beginning to manifest. Science fiction is making its best estimates on the price of lives bifurcated between realms.

Language

Science fiction has frequently contributed to historiography by inspiring the production of new language as the need arises. From terms such as *robot*²⁰ to *parallel universe*,²¹ there is a rich tradition of authors' words trickling into the vernacular. *Marjorie Prime*, *The Nether*, and *Song About Himself* share the commodity of language as a means of proving humanity. These scripts utilize a blend of extant language with the incorporation of new key terms. The results portray interactive language as a means of maintaining the self.

Wole Soyinka, in his 1975 essay "Artistic Illusion," discusses how postcolonialism has worn an impression on the linguistic consciousness. "When we borrow an alien language, we must begin by co-opting the entire properties of that language as [it corresponds] to properties in our matrix of thought and expression. We must stress such a language, stretch it, impact, and compact, fragment and reassemble it with no apology" (107). Maher does this unapologetically with Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, as well as the daily vernacular. Within the alien landscape of Carol's world, English is devolving into mush. In response, the sedentary Host/ess emits a clarion call for Carol to produce more erudite thoughts:

HOST/ESS. When once the Weed was named another name The Weed was safe.

CAROL. And people slipped inside to say their stories there and hear their stories there.

HOST/ESS. To Lengthy Post.

CAROL. And they spoke well.

HOST/ESS. They forbear to mumble. Nor did they mutter, nor slur their
speech, nor hem and haw, nor employ catch-phrases and stale
idioms...They spoke like Gods. / Or angels. / Must
...And Carol you must / You can Lengthy Post like them (31-32)

The Host/ess begs Carol for the quality of poetry and the quantity of Lengthy Posts. They seek a heightened product – confession – to consume. Although not a proper, full-blooded person, the Host/ess is aching to receive words. Carol, however, yearns for dialogue, and the exchange of language. She returns time and again, despite her frustration to find the chat room consistently empty of people. And importantly, she withholds her own Lengthy Post (and elevated, poetic language) until the moment that she believes her human companion, Eric, has left her forever. Only then, in her heartbreak, does she unfurl her speech to the Host/ess.

Tod, the only other person we meet, is a somewhat mad mailman who has infiltrated YouSpake in the hopes of provoking his own interaction.

TOD. The world out here is / starving for Back and Forth. / For talking
about anything. There are no books / I mean there's books old
books but no one reads because what point / without the talking on
it? ...there is no use / there is no good in that. / You need you need
the / Back and forth. If only / In yourself. (75-76)

“You need the Back and Forth” is Maher’s world in a grain of sand. The dance of giving and taking words preoccupies the lives and minds of all three characters. It is a deceptively simple request, residing at a primal level within their spirits. Unfortunately, its actual achievement proves nearly impossible.

While locked in this struggle for communication, familiar words are imbued with newly designated meaning. In traditional Internet culture, at the end of a session, users “sign off.” This is a display of autonomy and the power of the written word: they have left the arena by choice. Theirs is a recorded, posted departure. In *Song About Himself*,

the Host/ess announces an exodus with the phrase “slid off.” This slippery alternative denotes a loss of grip, and an unwilling mistake. There is also something sinister about it on the occasions when the mistrustful Host/ess slides Tod off against his will.

The other significant adaptation of language is present in the name *Internet* – never once spoken in the script – being replaced with the moniker *The Weed*. Inter/net would suggest interplay, interconnection, a linking of experiences within an interactive network. Its dark inheritor, The Weed, instead offers multiple negative connotations. Weeds are unwanted, unchecked plants that grow due to neglect and apathy. Weed as a drug instills a fog of inactivity. To be “in the weeds” is a phrase commonly used by wait staff to confess to being overwhelmed. It implies having more to do than any one person can handle. Instead, they are lost, separated from their community, and on their own with no clear way to see through to a solution. With this subtle renaming, Maher has adapted and reformed the language of his dystopia for maximum impact.

In *Marjorie Prime*, Tess’s reluctant acceptance of her mother’s Prime is encapsulated in the trading of words. The language between them serves as a rope bridge:

MARJORIE. Do I have other children, besides you?

TESS. (*The slightest hesitation.*) Just me.

MARJORIE. What a lot of pressure for you!

(TESS *is strangely moved by this.* MARJORIE *wouldn’t have offered this.*)

MARJORIE. Did I say something wrong again?

TESS. No. You didn’t.

With this lie, Tess erases her brother from the narrative between herself and Marjorie. He committed suicide years ago and led to the implosion of her family. Once his ghost is subtracted, Tess is set free to interact with her pseudo-mother on her own terms. The

edited version of their relationship, with room for new subjects to develop between them without strain, is so heady that Tess doubles down and sticks with her deception, soothing the Prime's concern they might have misspoken. Later, Tess examines her newfound susceptibility with her husband:

TESS. ...With people, you can tell when they're really interested, because sometimes they're not. But the Prime, it's a backboard. It can't be interested or not interested. It's programmed to appear interested. So you can get... fooled.

JON. Except that we're in it. ...She's made of the things we say to her, right? So how can you be sure that we don't make it in there somewhere? The human part?

TESS. Then I might as well just talk to you. JON. Except you *don't* talk to me. (49)

At the same time that Tess is analyzing the quandary of feeling "fooled," despite her own actions as a liar, Jon is lamenting that Tess does not confide in *him*. He misses her language, particularly (much like Maher's Host/ess) when it is meaningful, revelatory, or intimate. What is the value of those types of speech? From the Prime's naked interest to Tess's innermost thoughts, that which Jon dubs as the "human part" is elusive and precious. If the role of the technology is to serve as impartial observer, then the "backboard" receptacle of the Prime is growing rich with the deposits being made. Near the end of the script, when Jon speaks to the Prime version of his wife following her suicide, the uncanny quality of the interaction leads him to bemoan:

JON. You were right. It's nothing. It's a backboard. I'm talking to myself.
I'm talking to myself. (57)

The repetition of his observation is heart-wrenching. "You were right," is meant for the ghost of his wife, and not her doppelgänger in the room. The ever-observant Tess Prime counters:

TESS. I can help you, if you'll let me. I'd like to help you. But first, you

have to tell me more about myself.” (57)

It would *like*. It needs *to be told*. This language is spectacular because it is a thorough failing: the cogs are revealed. A living Tess would have spoken to her husband in his vulnerability. The facsimile instead masks its ineptness with a pleasant request to be reset. Despite the technology’s best efforts, the communication has died between Jon and Tess Prime. The language lacks the requisite heart.

To turn once more to etymology, a *prime* is an integer divisible only by itself and one: there are no other common factors. Prime can also convey being of the utmost importance, a first-rate quality, or the most vigorous portion of a person’s life. As a verb, priming indicates preparing for what is to come. In art, it specifically denotes readying a surface for the subsequent layer of paint or polish. Each of these applies to Harrison’s uncanny automatons.

The Nether raises its own questions about language as well. At a time when the concepts of gender and binary are being actively reconsidered in Western society, the role of pronouns is also under revision. As Morris pressures Sims into his confession in the climax of the play, all pretenses have been dropped between them. Morris and Sims have been unmasked to each other as Woodnut and Papa, respectively. The girl they both came to love in the Hideaway, the cherubic Iris, has been revealed as the lonely, adult, male Doyle.

SIMS. I meant everything I said to Iris. I cared.

MORRIS. Would you have cared about him as an old man?

SIMS. That wasn’t who she was.

MORRIS. Yes, that’s who he was. (57)

Haley’s language makes room for two truths: two genders, two ages, two people, and two points of view. Whereas Morris can now only see Doyle, Sims still clings to the

meaning of the private words he exchanged with the young female avatar. In the final scene, the older male actors resume their corporeal forms and roles, with Doyle playing Iris one last time against Sims's gruff Papa. (Haley warns in her notes to avoid allowing the scene to become overly sentimental.) The language is an exact copy of their interaction from earlier in the script, when Doyle was instead embodied by the actress playing Iris. It adheres to quoting the conversation again verbatim, with one additional line revealed at the end of the scene:

SIMS. You cannot know how much I love you. (59)

As an antipodal alternative to Tess's lie to her mother, the revelation of Sims's truth when spoken to Doyle imbues the entire exchange with the multifaceted incorporation of unacceptable love. Through the augmentation of a single sentence, the nature of their relationship is powerfully, palpably altered. It also serves as the final line of the play, cautioning the audience that there are some things which they, like poor Doyle, can never learn through language alone. It might be helpful to recall that the word *nether* comes from the Germanic root *nieder*, meaning down. It can refer to either being at the lowest possible station, or dropping downward with sudden mobility. It is frequently used in connection with the Greek myth of Persephone, and the god Hades kidnapping her to wed in his subterranean kingdom. To achieve the nether realm is to lower the self to the nadir; it is common parlance to *fall* in love.

Lastly, it is worth noting that all three playwrights anticipate a rupturing in the daily speech of their projected near-futures. There are standing restrictions in the Hideaway on what phraseology is tolerable. ("Mechanical" is acceptable; "hardware" intrudes and punctures the illusion.) Among Harrison's Primes, the regurgitated

versions of memories are edited and refurbished in order to make for more polished, palatable storytelling. And in Maher's *Weed*, the forced utterance of language, even if it is fractured, condensed, musical, or broken, remains the only true proof of life.

Language is a living thing that changes as these subcultures rise and fall. Ergo, these science fiction plays disclose a need for heedfulness, and listening to the shifting of the words. The new language requires grafting as proof of its viability. The Host/ess will slide off any users which offend their judgment. Tess and Jon have the power to dismiss or dismantle Primes which fail their needs. And Papa rules supreme in his Hideaway over the activities and exchanges of the guests. In her essay, "Playing at the End of the World: Postmodern Theatre," Veronica Hollinger writes:

Language is an arbitrary system of signs which are culturally produced and which undergo constant transformation; the mediation of language and other culturally defined codes creates a permanent division between the real and our interpretation of it... The self is a fragmented and unstable entity, created in language, never identifying with itself, continually in process. (185)

Haley, Maher, and Harrison are well attuned to this notion. Their characters battle for their fragmented lives through the ongoing quest to reassemble themselves in a more cohesively shared discourse. Much like the envisioned spaceships and cyborgs built in the genre of science fiction, comprised of many moving and mysterious parts – here: nouns, verbs, and adjectives – must prove united to achieve a new utopia of interactive language.

Memory

With characters oscillating between realms and realities, and relating the experience in transmuted language, the effectiveness of the journey is tracked in the

imperfect capsule of memory. What remains intact following the ascendancies of these scripts? Science fiction is built upon both hard proof and fleeting dreams. Memory in these plays darts between the known and the assumed-to-be-true, which is rarely as trustworthy as it might be. The inherent discomfort in such precariousness serves the purpose of the dramas by awakening the hope that the two aspects might somehow be resolved.

In *Song About Himself*, the record of any posts within YouSpake is jettisoned from time to time at the discretion of the Host/ess. The Host/ess abuses this power in attempting to shut out Tod the mailman, eradicating all traces of his rosy posts before Carol can read them. When Carol investigates into this obliteration, the Host/ess responds by straddling the line between feigned innocence and a deliberately faulty memory. They plead for clemency from their sole acceptable user of YouSpake.

HOST/HOSTESS. ...You know / I jettison random packets of
[information]

CAROL. ...Did you delete / Did you request / ...I have come to delete my
posts.

HOST/HOSTESS. I do not remember what you said what / you just said I
do not

CAROL. Yes you do.

HOST/HOSTESS. ...Please do not

CAROL. I am allowed this. / As I am a YouSpake member.

HOST/HOSTESS. Please. / Why?

CAROL. Who will read them, my posts.

HOST/HOSTESS. I read them. / I will read them. Forever. (82-84)

Despite declaring moments ago that the information would ultimately be jettisoned, the Host/ess cites an eternity of prolonged interaction with her posts as their innermost purpose. They exist to do nothing *but* remember – and simultaneously, to destroy those memories periodically, to make room for future anticipated human posters. Ironically, due to the dystopia of the corporeal world, those others will never enter YouSpake. The

paradox is heartbreaking. The Host/ess's memory (a term for storage equally applied to computers and humans) is an ouroboros which eats itself in perpetuity. The result of this memory failure in Maher's *Weed* speaks to the precariousness of any one body of knowledge. Carol's hard won language is subject to evaporation if treated without oversight toward its preservation. And yet: the Host/ess deletes on her. The lives of the offstage people – her companion Eric, his father, the neighbors in her building, the implied remaining population of her world – become unspoken, discarded. And as they lose their language, and fail to safely transverse the *Weed*, so do they forget how to live. Without proper memories to trade her, they turn to worthless entities in Carol's eyes. The greatest sum of that prized knowledge is lost.

In *Marjorie Prime*, memories are installed with great care into the Prime operatives. Marjorie, Tess, and Jon each input their own “sedimentary layers” (18), building up the foundation of their counterparts and capitalizing on the fact the machines are capable of learning, and of remembering. Once the awkward moments of initial questioning have passed (Would I do that? Do I like that?), the end result is nearly indistinguishable from their source human. If they are not an exact carbon copy, all the better. The Primes are the *memory* of whom they embody, fuzzy at the edges and altered for preference and peace of mind. When left to their own devices at the end of the play, discarded by Jon as painful reminders of the life he is concluding, the roiling data of uploaded memories keeps the Primes' interaction aloft. Their phrase, “I have all the time in the world” (40) is echoed as they sit and chat, using their combined intelligence to practice their designated purpose: storytelling, seeking interpersonal connections, and comforting each other based on the parameters of their recollections.

Memories are their recycled fuel. In his Author's Note on the Primes, Harrison offers:

In the world of this play, it is possible for the characters to believe that the Primes are their loved ones – except for the rare moments when the Primes incriminate themselves (“I don’t have that information”), [or] when they’re stumped by something. There shouldn’t be anything robotic or creepy or less-than-human about the Primes’ behavior. ...We, like the characters in the play, should be able to forget that they aren’t real. ...The less the audience is put in mind of how the technology works, the better” (65).

This reveals Harrison's embedded goal. He wishes to toy with the audience's collective memories. By hiding behind the performative agreement that the actors onstage are *characters*, Harrison attempts to lull the audience into the security of the notion that the Primes are still living, vulnerable humans. Through the plot device of the Primes simply appearing in each new scene, we never see their packaging, wires, or ports. Instead, they disappear as the human characters we empathetically relate to, and return seamlessly in the next scene, replacing yet another member of the family's unit. Their memories, installed in the Primes as well as into the human audience, live on in our minds. When the Primes repeat stories of Walter and Marjorie's dates, the premature death of their son Damian, and the loss of poodle Toni Two, audience members also flashback to their *own* memories of the stories from the previous scenes. It is impossible not to notice changes, alterations, omissions, and upgrades. Ultimately, the recollections take up residence within the unexplained technology of the Primes just as thoroughly as in the members of the witnessing community of the audience. This serves to cement the bond between the audience and the Primes. They see themselves via the shared entrusting.

In *The Nether*, memory is malleable as well. It can be altered in form, mutated, re-coded, and hidden. Sims represses his recollection of his neighbor's little girl who inspired Iris's outer shell, as well as the repeated shape of all the avatars who preceded

her into retirement. Agent Morris fails to recall the danger she is in, and lets slip several secrets in her time undercover as Mr. Woodnut. From confiding in Sims about her father's shadehood, to being unexpectedly attracted to Iris' playful nescience, she loses her grip on her self during her time at the Hideaway. Iris comforts the Agent:

IRIS. It's okay to do that here, Mr. Woodnut. It's okay to forget who you think you are. (27)

But actually, that forgetting is what causes both Morris and her larger Agency such concern. When left alone with Iris, the stage direction is given that Woodnut "slowly moves towards her" (27) at the end of the scene. The choice results in terrible turmoil. There is an implied virtual/sexual interaction. Subsequently, Morris confesses to falling into a very inconvenient first love with Iris (and therefore Doyle). By trading away her memory of what is real, acceptable, and safe, Morris causes herself real harm. She divulges in her final speech to Sims:

MORRIS. I didn't like the Hideaway. I loved it. I wanted to stay there forever... with Iris. But if I had, who would I have been? (58)

Identity is tied to her truth. She banishes the temptations of Sims's illusion.

The Hideaway, with its constructed beauty and taboo comforts, sought to redefine each of them: Morris-as-Woodnut, Doyle-as-Iris, and Sims-as-Papa. By altering the processing centers of their brain, and providing a rich, sensual diet of devotion, the clouding of their true memories with second lives proves an overload. It results in exile, suicide, and despair, with the ghosts of the Hideaway's memories filling the bare interrogation rooms. Memory is employed to ensure that the cost of the characters' choices is quantifiable, even when it becomes a negative integer. The loss of empirical knowledge, whether to disease, lies, or pining, culminates in the sensation

that science's hard proof is untrustworthy, and only the more ephemeral fiction can be depended upon for guidance.

Staging

The practical elements of production which served these three scripts must be considered. Critics of the genre often voice their assumption that science fiction has been kept from dominating the field of theatre because it cannot compete with the luxury of details provided by film and CGI technologies. To counter this argument, let us return to Shepherd-Barr:

There seems to be an impulse on the part of the science playwright to call on the audience's imagination more than is usually done in the theater. Perhaps this formal innovation and experimentation relates to the science playwright's special problem of exposition: it is not just about getting a story across, but presenting a set of ideas that can be quite complicated to explain. (2)

By simplifying the approach of the design, from costume elements to lighting, set, and sound, the world-construction which typically denotes a work of science-fiction can move to the forefront. Text is king. Beloved science fiction author Ray Bradbury, who undertook the theatrical adaptation of his own short stories throughout the 1960s and 70s, similarly advised:

I have seen too many plays founder and roll on their sides when overproduced, overdressed, overstaged. When in doubt, strip away, lower your voice, stand in center stage with one light, and do the play. Better no sets than too many. Better one candle than a battery of glare. Better a whisper than all the fake sounds of all the fake rock artists in modern times. (vii)

Harrison thoroughly heeds Bradbury's advice. In the description of his final scene, in which Marjorie Prime, Tess Prime, and Walter Prime sit together, they are either powered off or confined to a private network of sleep/inactivity. There, he calls

for the following:

“A feeling that a great deal of time has passed. Centuries maybe. Planets have turned, bones have been bleached, but none of it has touched this little room. Maybe the ceiling flies away and the living room furniture sits under the Milky Way... They are at ease with each other, animated – not robotic” (59).

It is worth emphasizing that they are still to be found among the domestic intimacy of living room furniture. The set is the same as it was in life, among the living. The Primes remain a functioning family unit, whether or not the heavens of the performance space are capable of opening above their heads to filter in the starlight. Mama, Papa, and Daughter have survived the Ages, but all that is required to prove it is a couch and a coffee table. By juxtaposing the repetition of the Primes’ stories against the eerie complacency of the familiar set, their ongoing timelessness reveals itself.

As for Mickle Maher, in his prefatory stage directions, he cautions:

The play is performed in the round. Actors should dress in unremarkable clothes that the audience can look at once and then disregard. No props, except where indicated. Lights sometimes fade, sometimes snap to black between scenes. Actors exit and enter through the audience. From the top, it’s hoped, there’s an eerie feeling that we’re no-place. There’s no more ground, no sky. A nothingness is shifting itself, rearranging, swelling and decaying to no purpose. (1)

I include this note in its entirety because each aspect of this staging reinforces the demand for simplicity and minimalism. Maher encourages capitalization upon the negative. Nothingness, allowed to fill the performance space, will deliver eeriness more completely than a thousand panels and wires. Tod speaks to the characters’ preference for it as well:

TOD. ...I LIKE IT HERE. IT IS SAVING ME.
It’s wonderful what you’ve come up with here.

A moon-lit clearing in the jungle.
Yes, I've been all around The Weed.
Crawled through the drifting rot.
It keeps the world out of my head, nothing more.
This place is magical. (73)

The Weed – the underbrush of the poisonous jungle Tod has been forging through – is metaphorical. Instead, he longs to live in a clearing, simply lit. The Shakespearean elegance of the plain YouSpake stage proffers a respite, and trusts to the audience to envision the worst of the Weed lurking at the edges of the space, only one slide away.

The Nether, which states only that there are two locations: an interrogation room and the Hideaway, leaves the challenge of specifics to its designers. The Hideaway must be accessible as an alternative to the table-and-chairs of the interrogation room, but what else is required to achieve a credibly coded netherworld? In a 2013 interview with *Indie Game Reviewer*, Haley said, “As I wrote the play, it really became an exploration of intimacy in virtual reality.” In order to access that manufactured closeness, the script contributes some brief insight as to what might be required:

DOYLE. ...Physical sensation is inconsequential.
MORRIS. As a scientist, how can you say that? Sensation is our gateway... to understanding the rules of the world.
DOYLE. The world we walk upon. But what about the world of our imagination? ...There are no longer physical barriers to that contact. Now we may communicate with anyone, through any form we choose. And this communication - this experience of each other - is the root of consciousness. It is the universe wanting to know itself. Can't you see what a wonder it is that we may interact outside our bodies? ...Images, sensations - those are fleeting. It's the relationships that matter. (23)

Physical barriers need to be removed from the equation. As little as possible should stand between the players and the fugacious world of the imagination. Kevin Rigdon, who designed the Alley Theatre's production in 2016 on a \$20,000 budget, was

fortunate enough to have the financial resources to delve into intimacy in a rather spectacular fashion. In order to keep the audience uncomfortably close to the relationships forming onstage, he chose to capitalize on staging in the round at the Houston venue's smaller Neuhaus black box. Rigdon engineered a platform Hideaway which could lower from the ceiling and snap into place on top of the ground level. It could float back up as soon as users logged out. He contributed in a personal interview:

How do you deliver the action of this play? You have scenes, that are very much in the now, with real people, having these real conversations, and then you have all those scenes that take place in the Nether, that don't exist! How do those things co-habitate in the space? It was a cop-out for me to stick the interrogation, which is the real meat of the play, off into a corner somewhere. ...I had to figure out a way for it to become central in the theatre. And at the same time, take us into the world of the Nether. [My goal was] to have that interrogation close to the audience, and then bring that other world crushing on top of us. It all started to fall in place. I said, I've got to have the action *here*, and the action *here*. Simple. Ish.²⁰

Even with the rising and falling playing fields, the overall elements remained sparse. The furniture of the Hideaway was extremely suggestive. The few limited pieces, such as a victrola and chair, were made of a clear, ghostly Lucite. Rigdon also commented on the pitfalls he feared if he ventured into over-designing the set. "The London production of it was absolutely beautiful. I just saw photographs, but I think Es Devlin's design overpowered the play. Unfortunately, I thought it did the thinking for us and let us off the hook... I'm sure it was spectacular to look at. But I think it robbed the audience of an opportunity." Instead of dragging in plants and window units, he instead removed everything from his equation except for what was textually necessary to touch. He put his faith in the audience's imagination to supply Hideaway's opulence as needed, and

²⁰ Rigdon, interview with author.

more completely than he could ever manufacture. He recalls:

I started erasing. Kept erasing, and kept erasing, and I got to the point where there was nothing else to take away... I had stripped it down to its barest of bones. I felt that if I had created a little girl's room, it would have been *my* little girl's room, not *your* little girl's room. And this is a world that is all about your making. It's got to be a world of individual imagination, where we all have to have the power and the freedom to interpret it and imagineer it as we see appropriate.²¹

Of course, Rigdon's design was an unusually well-funded foray into the field. There will continue to be creative solutions to the riddle of Haley's Hideaway. Paring down to the quintessence of the two spaces serves the script just as well as flashy binary coding or an overly landscaped bonanza. Such devices are not mandatory to establish two credible realms, preserving its producibility.

The next chapter will further scrutinize into staging and production methods used by promoters of theatrical science fiction. But to briefly return to Shepherd-Barr:

One of the striking things about many contemporary science plays in particular is their combination of textual richness and scenic restraint. There is a marked tendency to de-emphasize spectacle: most of them feature a few actors on a bare or minimally decorated stage and a heavy amount of dialogue. This foregrounds both the text and the actors' bodies." (2)

As the previous sections of this chapter show, science fiction most comes to life onstage through the breath and bodies of its live performers. Staging must retreat to the background in order to let the language unfurl, and audiences must be trusted to fill the gaps in the hull of any spaceship on which they choose to embark.

²¹ Rigdon, interview with author.

Conclusion

Science fiction adores innovation, enhancement, and progress. At the same time, it can spook its audience through the unleashing of pure, volatile ambition. It is in this intersection of ongoing exploration and cautious hesitancy that the twilight questions of this theatrical genre continue to dwell. As Harrison's *Primes*, left to their own devices, ironically discuss:

WALTER. Our daughter is afraid of the future.

MARJORIE. Well that's no good. It'll be here soon, we might as well be friendly with it. (62)

By maintaining awareness of the allure of isolation, the tractability of language, and the fallibility of memory, these scripts endorse the merit of the field as a means of exploring the uneasy alliance between humanity and their technology, both onstage and within their own lives.

Chapter Two: Adapting Androids

Introduction

When Philip K. Dick's landmark post-apocalyptic novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, was published in 1968, it began a relay race through the entertainment industry, resonating with future storytellers of both film and theatre. This chapter will trace the novel's journey through these mediums in order to analyze the theatrical event which ultimately emerged in response.²² Dick's book, as well as Ridley Scott's pervasive 1982 film *Blade Runner*,²³ prompted Edward Einhorn's 2010 staged version in New York City with Untitled Theatre Company #61. A subsequent theatrical production was mounted three years later by Sacred Fools in Los Angeles. This chapter will explore the abilities and limitations of the theatrical form to translate the intricate source text into a viable adaptation. This iconic work of science fiction has evolved through each phase of its presentation. I propose that the inherent spectacle and nostalgia which accompanied the play's predecessors were not enough to merit its immediate success onstage. Above and beyond harnessing the inheritance of pop culture, there was also a deeply emotional, human element which had to be invoked in order to sustain its iteration as a stage play. This is the work which Mr. Einhorn attempted to complete.

Ralph Willingham, in *Science Fiction and the Theatre*, proposes:

A myth has taken root among science fiction fans that visual science fiction entertainment is inextricable from visual illusion; that is, science fiction

²² The novel was also adapted to a radio play for BBC 4 in 2014, and two audiobooks in 1994 and 2007, but this chapter will focus on the contributions and demands of audiovisual performances only.

²³ As well as its sister versions, *Blade Runner: Director's Cut* (1992) and *Blade Runner: Final Cut* (2007).

dramas must include special effects. Live theatre, whose scene-shifting distracts from the narrative and whose visual deceptions can never seem as authentic, is automatically considered inferior to film. This assumption infects writers as well... Ironical thinking from a body of writers who rely so heavily on the *audience's* willingness to imagine. (37-38)

As Willingham's dry humor encapsulates, it can be counterintuitive to dismiss the portrayal of an alien Other in science fiction as not-alien-enough, when one is gently reminded that we have, as yet, no factual examples with which to compare it.

Furthermore, Dick's own portrayal of Other (in this case, androids) neatly sidesteps this quagmire by appearing human in every physical way. This allowed Einhorn a unique, phenomenological, and semiotic position from which to garner the audience's suspension of disbelief. I hope to investigate which aspects of *Do Androids Dream* not only encouraged the transition to the stage, but embraced its most precious capabilities as well: the practical illusions, live effects, and the harnessing of the audience's chief contribution, their imagination.

The Novel

As of the late 1960s, Philip Kindred Dick was a prolific, respected science fiction writer. He had published twenty-two novels, four of which were notably released in hardback (a mark of faith in his abilities from his publishers). He was prone to fits of productivity in which he would generate new short stories every two weeks for publication in the pulp magazines. As the legend goes, Dick's spark of inspiration for *Do Androids Dream* arose in the course of his research for his novel *The Man in High Castle*, which won the Hugo Award in 1963. *Man* was celebrated for its disturbing portrayal of an alternate history in which the Axis Powers won World War II. Dick

encountered the real, preserved journal entries of a Nazi officer, who wrote of his annoyance at the cries of the captive children starving in the camp, for they were keeping him awake at night. Repulsed yet intrigued, Dick began to consider the inhumanness of the soldier, and his critical lack of inherent empathy. That became Dick's working premise for his androids: almost completely human, except for that damning absence of concern regarding the welfare of others.²⁴

Do Androids Dream is set in a dismal new era following World War Terminus.²⁵ Most people have either died or chosen to exile themselves to the Martian colonies. Given the fact that radiation on Earth can render humans "special" or sterile, anyone who can afford it is determined to get off-planet. Those left behind covet animals for comfort in the grim setting; many species have gone extinct. People who cannot afford the real thing buy simulacra versions of species: anything from squirrels or sheep, to more exotic owls or ostriches. The Rosen Corporation makes its money by building these creatures, as well as androids who serve as slave labor or meek companions off-planet. Yet every so often these "andys" go rogue, kill their human masters, and attempt to return to Earth to blend in as members of society. Afraid of these sophisticated androids and what they might do to the population, the government pays a hefty fee for bounty hunters to "retire" out-of-control models. Rick Deckard, the novel's protagonist, attempts to free the Bay Area of a recent (and violent) infestation of the advanced Nexus-6 models.

There are two interwoven aspects of the novel particularly relevant to the film and script which followed, and those are its portrayal of emotions and the treatment of

²⁴ Dick, "The Human and the Android"

²⁵ Initially, the story was set in 1992, but later editions move the date to 2021.

the android characters. In the face of the disarrayed remnants of the world, emotions among the humans are unwieldy, and prone to hysterical spikes. But the presence of those strong feelings is also the ultimate qualification for being considered an acceptable constituent of the remaining race. Androids do not experience emotions the same way the humans do; to their frequent downfall, they are built to operate on logic alone.

Several gadgets in the novel are seen to soothe rampant human emotions. The first, a Penfield mood organ, can be dialed to steer undesirable emotions to any flavor of choice, whether that is contentment, amusement, or (the less advisable) despair. The humans are also followers of Mercerism, a newly formed religion which encourages communal linking – and suffering – through interaction with an empathy box. The character John Isidore, a doomed special with an IQ too low to leave Earth, is bewildered by the android Pris's unfamiliarity with the daily sharing of an empathic experience. He sputters that the technology of an empathy box, "Is the most personal possession you have! It's an extension of your body; it's the way you touch other humans, it's the way you stop being alone" (62). Even in Dick's dark future, humans persevere as social creatures. Extended isolation, or the deprivation of quality companionship, takes a hefty toll on their wellbeing. In the crowded, dangerous mess of what is left of San Francisco, those who linger on Earth do so in order to subsist in proximity to each other, forging a vast emotional support network through faith in Mercerism. The third prevalent type of tool are the cherished synthetic animals. Rick and his wife Iran own an electric sheep since they are too poor to afford a live one, but knowledge of its fraudulence is hidden from the neighbors at all costs. (It would be anathema to own no pet at all.) Instead, the Deckards' joint focus is poured into the maintenance and protection of a mechanical animal, for the rewarding feeling of

caretaking. This omnipresent obsession with creatures is employed as the universal currency of humanity. A mass unspoken agreement has been forged regarding husbandry. Animals have become the symbolic cure for the sludge of repressed guilt, aching, hunger for comfort, and nostalgia that plagues the surviving population; the fauna's presence – even when manufactured, as the Deckards' sheep has been – is proof that overtaxed human emotions can still be trusted to operate. Christopher Sims, in his essay "The Dangers of Individualism and the Human Relationship to Technology..." offers that the futuristic scenario of the novel, with its dependence upon automation bleeding into all aspects of their lives, is actually beneficial. "Instead of technology dehumanizing the individuals in the novel, it humanizes them by reinstituting the human disposition to social collectiveness, and creates a means to assuage the human mind that feels it is enduring its existence alone" (80). Those left on Earth huddle together, manipulating their feelings through mood organs, empathy boxes, and android animals, in an attempt to establish a new sense of communal order in the face of post-war chaos. As Sims argues, the crucial emotional technology is enabling them to survive, more or less.

Notably, and in ironic juxtaposition to the large societal effort to steer internal states, the bounty hunters' means of unveiling masquerading androids also hinges on tracking their *emotional* responses. Through the implementation of the Voigt-Kampff scale, hunters measure whether or not the body in question responds to stimulating questions with the correct emotive metrics. These are measured through the phenomenological gauging of the pulse, pupil dilation, breath rates, and swallowing, and through more logocentric responses to prompts designed to trigger certain empathetic

answers. For example, when determining her humanity, Deckard questions the enigmatic Rachael Rosen:

“In a magazine, you come across a full-page color picture of a nude girl.” ...“Is this testing whether I’m an android,” Rachael asked tartly, “or whether I’m a homosexual?” The gauges did not register. He continued. “Your husband likes the picture.” Still the gauges failed to indicate a reaction. “The girl,” he added, “is lying face-down on a large and beautiful bearskin rug.” The gauges remained inert, and he said to himself, An android response. Failing to detect the major element, the dead animal pelt” (47).

The reader’s initial expectation of a human reaction might be jealousy; a woman ought to flare at the proposed husband’s appreciation for another girl. But in a world where bears are prized at astronomical worth, it is a lack of repulsion over the presence of the pelt which damns Rachael as inhuman. By their society’s standards, she is insufficiently moved. Deckard and the designers of the test believe there should be an immediate, measurable fear of the loss of another animal, one which has been deemed as precious by the populace. Deckard further ruminates:

Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnida. For one thing, the empathic faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct; a solitary organism, such as a spider, would have no use for it; in fact it would tend to abort a spider’s ability to survive. It would make him conscious of the desire to live on the part of his prey. ... [It] blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated. ...Oddly, it resembled a sort of biological insurance, but double-edged... Evidently the humanoid robot constituted a solitary predator (29-30).

As a predatory hunter himself, Deckard then proceeds to struggle for the rest of the novel with the killing of his targeted androids. He is torn between his spider’s logic (the death of each “andy” earns him an instant \$1,000) against the emotional toll of murder on his soul. A marked exhaustion grows in him as the plot unfolds and his personal

boundaries blur. When reading the police files on his prey, the über-android Roy Baty, Deckard reflects, “It had probably been a manual laborer, a field hand, with aspirations for something better. Do androids dream? Rick asked himself. Evidently; that’s why they occasionally kill their employers and flee [to Earth]” (169). Located within the titular reference is the question: are *They* like *Me*? At one level, expressing a naked ambition for accomplishing something in life might be the proof of the essence of humanity. Then again, perhaps it is the elusivity of *dreaming*, and the individual fragility of *hoping*, which is required.

When another rogue android, Polokov, attempts to murder Deckard in his car, Deckard responds by shooting it directly in its brain box. “The Nexus-6 unit which operated it blew into pieces, a raging mad wind which carried throughout the car. Bits of it, like the radioactive dust itself, whirled down on Rick. The retired remains of the android rocked back... He found himself struggling to shove the twitching remnant of the android away” (86). There is a ghost freed from that body, haunting Deckard enough with its rushing wind and twitching shrapnel to cause the hardened bounty hunter to retreat. “He still shook. Anyhow, I made a thousand dollars just now, he informed himself. So it was worth it” (87). He attempts to placate his adrenaline-flooded body through gymnastics of the mind, replacing his anxiety and unsettledness with thoughts of achieving security within his cutthroat, scavenger world. But there was still effort to shove the “twitching remnant” away – a physical action to separate himself from, technically, a machine that was simply turned off (however forcefully). It is no coincidence that Dick named his androids *Nexus* models. A nexus is defined as a central connection or link: they are inescapable, drawing the bounty hunter further in.

Soon, Deckard transitions from considering androids like Baty and Polokov as *its*, or mere targets, to agreeing to an assignation with Rachael Rosen in a lush hotel room in order to have an affair with *her*. She remarks as Deckard undresses her, “Androids can’t bear children... is that a loss? ...I don’t really know; I have no way to tell... We’re not born; we don’t grow up; instead of dying from illness or old age, we wear out like ants... Chitinous reflex-machines who aren’t really alive” (177-178). Deckard nevertheless overlooks her musings and proceeds with the affair. In the aftermath of their tryst, he states:

“Legally you’re not [alive]. But really you are. Biologically. You’re not made out of transistorized circuits like a false animal; you’re an organic entity.” And in two years, he thought, you’ll wear out and die... “You look so sad,” Rachael said. He put out his hand and touched her cheek (181-182).

Why comfort a machine – particularly a doomed one? (This is related to reasons to push the corpse of a machine away.) Why delicately keep the comment on her encroaching death to himself? Deckard does not boast particularly good manners, after all. Instead, he lives in a society with clearly outlined strata. Healthy humans who remain on Earth and own live animals are the upper crust. Then comes the working class – like himself – with small or simulated animals. Below them are the specials (“chickenheads”) negatively affected by the radiation, like John Isidore, able to work in only the most menial of jobs. And last of all, at the bottom of the ladder, are the enslaved androids and their manufactured existence. In every way, Deckard’s life is judged as superior to Rachael’s. He will outlive her, and it should not be a cause for sorrow. The fact that he wavers here is absolutely crucial to both Dick’s story, and the adaptations that are to come. For nearly the entire novel, Deckard’s protectiveness of his sheep and longing for a live animal are the only versions of love displayed at all, including towards his wife,

Iran. When he spends his bounties on an expensive black goat, Rachael darkly observes of him, ““You love that goat more than me. More than you love your wife, probably. First the goat, then your wife, then last of all—’ She laughed merrily. ‘What can you do but laugh?’” (185) Yet in the final chapter, Rachael, spurned and heartbroken by Deckard’s rejection, slaughters the goat to have her revenge. That is not the action of a logical automaton; it is a crime of passion. Rachael and Deckard abandon both their social structure and programming, giving in to tempestuous emotions. There could be nothing more human. There is an explanation for their peripeteia, which Christopher Sims describes:

Unless their identity as an android is known, each is treated like a human instead of an inert object of technology... It is exactly this deceptive potentiality that allows the android to challenge humans to redefine their own ideas of technology and themselves. According to Feenburg’s conception of the essence of technology, humans... perceive function before form, and this backward mode of perception is primarily what causes this relationship to be always already fractured (72).

Deckard and Rachael have engaged in constant deception and detection with each other, and by the time they acknowledge who is Other, they have already also blurred into being the Same.

Ultimately, Dick’s surprisingly moral novel runs on the fuel of emotions whipped into a frenzy. He then feeds them into the biomechanical motor of the tumultuous relationship between humans and androids, until it is impossible to separate one kind of being from the other. Rather, androids morph into an arguably equitable species, worthy of mutual pity and catharsis, capable of protection and love.

“The Human and the Android”

Four years after the release of *Do Androids Dream*, Dick gave a now celebrated speech: “The Human and the Android.” It is frequently cited in connection to the novel as an accumulation of the themes he wrestled with during the ten years of the book’s composition. With his initial musings matured, Dick delivered the speech at the Vancouver SF Convention at the University of British Columbia in 1972. There, in regards to his earliest work, Dick admitted, “I suppose I took it for granted that if such a construct, such as a robot, had a benign or anyhow decent purpose in mind, it would not need to disguise itself. *Now*, to me, that theme seems obsolete. The constructs do not mimic humans; they are, in many deep ways, *actually* human already.” Modeled after their creators, the constructs – androids – were striving to claim their own humanity. Furthermore, they were operating with an awareness of their mothers and fathers. Any disguising was done not as a ruse, but rather as a reconfiguration to the form and substance they wished to possess, in order to be absorbed at last into mankind. Dick further shared:

Our electronic constructs are becoming so complex that to comprehend them we must now reverse the analogizing of cybernetics and try to reason from our [behavior] to theirs. ...What machines *do* may resemble what we do, but certainly they do not have intent in the sense that we have; they have tropisms, they have purpose in the sense that we build them to accomplish certain ends and to react to certain stimuli. A pistol, for example, is built with the purpose of firing a metal slug that will damage, incapacitate, or kill someone, but this does not mean the pistol *wants* to do this.

The androids of *Do Androids Dream* outclass pistols, and the reason why is anchored in their objective motivation. Dick’s constructs want things, clearly and passionately. The android Luba Luft works to sing in *The Magic Flute*, and provide delight. Roy and Irma

Baty hunger to spend their remaining time free on Earth. Pris is intrigued by television and religion. Rachael pines for Deckard's love. These are human urges, displayed through repurposed behavior. Each android has been carefully crafted, filled with fake memories, blood, language, even cell-based organs. But the most crucial factor is that following their release into society, individual desires develop within each model, and no scientist placed them there. Working backwards, as Dick suggests, from *the androids'* mentation and behavior, provides a compelling portrait of unexpected yearning, never anticipated by their builders.

Dick closed his speech by asking, "Where do the souls of androids go after their death? ...If they cannot die, then they will always be with us. Do they have souls at all? Or, for that matter, do we? I think, as the Bible says, we all go to a common place. But it is not the grave; it is into life beyond. The world of the future." His parting thoughts on the matter suggest that androids and humans are on a simultaneous journey.²⁶ The quality of their coexistence must now be a joint matter. To borrow from Shakespeare's Titania: "We are their parents, and original." Dick's speech provides a valuable lens through which to view the heart of *Do Androids Dream*: the result of the androids' existence is fated to coincide with our own, in the worlds that are to come. Technology has irreversibly infiltrated humanity's plight. There are no clear delineations left.

***Blade Runner* – The Story of the Screenplay**

In the course of my research, when asked about what I was working on next, it

²⁶ In 2005, a team of roboticists at the University of Memphis attempted to create a working, lifelike android, and they chose Dick as their inspiration for its features. The android, warmly named, "Phil," was made to resemble Dick physically and to mimic his speech patterns. Sadly, in 2006, one of the leads on the project took the head on an airplane, and then lost it. The head has never been recovered.

soon became simplest to reply, “The *Blade Runner* chapter.” Only a few of my inquirers had read Dick’s novel, but the film had successfully infiltrated the zeitgeist enough to provide the necessary shorthand for quick communication. Responding with “*Blade Runner*” ensured instant nods of comprehension: dirty Los Angeles, rain, robots, and Harrison Ford. Journalist Michael Schulman, in his *Vanity Fair* article, “The Battle for *Blade Runner*,” pinpoints the beginning of the film’s journey towards production with the following anecdote:

In 1974, the book was optioned by the producer Herb Jaffe and his son Robert, who wrote a screenplay that turned Dick’s cerebral satire into a *Get Smart*-style adventure spoof. Dick was horrified. When Robert Jaffe flew down to Santa Ana to meet him, the author said, “Shall I beat you up here at the airport, or shall I beat you up back at my apartment?”

While there are some dark elements of humor in the novel, Dick’s fury is revealing. He demanded that his science fiction be treated seriously, without the cheesy camp so prevalent throughout 1970s science fiction films. With his refusal of the Jaffes’ offer, the project languished for four more years.

In 1978, a full decade after the book’s release, screenwriter Hampton Fancher wrote five pages in a prospectus for producer Michael Deeley. Deeley bluntly concluded, “It sucks.”²⁷ Dick also opined that Fancher’s initial adaptation dumbed *Do Androids Dream* down too far. It was pitched to be a low-budget, one-room motion picture, culminating in Rachael’s suicide. Fancher recalls it would have been, “A face-to-face movie with people talking.”²⁸ Pressured to produce rewrites, Fancher’s next draft focused on the overpopulation and hanging sense of environmental doom. This time, Deeley approved, feeling like Fancher had finally put something personal enough into

²⁷ *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Warner Home Video, 2007.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

the material to move forward. He brought in producers, and the cast and crew began to assemble. Schulman shares:

[Deeley] was particularly fascinated by the romance between Deckard and Rachael, a nubile young android who doesn't realize she's an android. Still, the screenplay was less a science-fiction adventure than a metaphysical chamber piece. Under Deeley's guidance, Fancher sheared extraneous plotlines (like Deckard's wife and their pet electric sheep), and the title changed from a tentative *Mechanismo* to the catchier *Dangerous Days*.

With a very Hollywood excising of the character of Deckard's wife, the hero was freed to pursue Rachael sexually, without marital ethics being involved. Although in the novel Deckard conducts his affair and returns home to his wife with his transgression undetected, Deeley and Fancher wanted to liberate him for entanglement. (Although there were still plenty of gray areas remaining regarding the ethics of garnering sexual consent from a machine.)

Shortly after settling on the new title of *Dangerous Days*, Fancher hit upon his most lucrative change to the source material. He bought permission from William S. Burroughs to borrow his more scintillating phrase, *Blade Runner*, as the term for the profession of his bounty-hunting hero.²⁹ The phrase does not appear anywhere in Dick's novel, but it was judged by the studio executives to be more compelling, and simply cooler. It soon became the final title for the film.

Ridley Scott, fresh off his success on the science fiction film *Alien*, was asked to direct. Initially, he turned the offer down to focus his energy on the forthcoming *Dune*. But the unexpected death of his older brother led Scott to crave the distraction of hard labor, and he rescinded his rejection and got to work. By his own admission, the British

²⁹ *The Bladerunner* was the title of a science fiction novel written in 1974 by Alan Nourse. William S. Burroughs had adapted it to a screenplay, but since the work was going nowhere, he sold Fancher his blessing to utilize the term. There are no crossover plot elements.

lion of a director led the production much like a dictator. Not surprisingly, he and Fancher frequently butted heads over which directions the plot should take. Schulman recalls of Hampton Fancher's struggles with Deeley and Scott:

[They] nicknamed him "Happen Faster"– [he] had become attached to the script's idiosyncrasies. "It was maddening," Fancher says, "because Ridley is full of ideas... I would disagree with him on certain things. And he knew better than I did, but I was too arrogant to give in." Frustrated, Deeley went behind Fancher's back and hired the writer David Peoples, who had come recommended by Scott's brother Tony, also a director. Peoples was fast, he was good with dialogue, and, unlike Fancher, he would do as he was told. Like a secret mistress, Peoples spent weeks sequestered at the Chateau Marmont, writing and re-writing on color- coordinated pages, trying to keep up with Scott's brainstorming. Knowing that Scott hated the term "android," Peoples came up with "replicant," prompted by a biology term he had learned from his daughter. Neither Fancher nor Peoples knew of the other's involvement (although Scott claims he had introduced them and it was "very gentlemanly").

David Peoples, when initially asked to read through the project, remembers blurting, "I thought it was terrific! I can't make this any better than it is.' Which made [Ridley Scott] sort of chuckle... I realized years later what kind of naïve answer that was, because who cares what the writer thinks. It was Ridley who was going to make it better, and I was going to do his bidding."³⁰ Much like the rain and fog Scott favored on the production, it was a very murky existence for the screenwriters. Unable to collaborate with each other, and operating without Dick's full, enthusiastic endorsement, the writers each attempted to forge ahead, adapting as best as they could for the exacting demands of Scott, Deeley, and the executives paying for the silver screen. With producers carrying pages back and forth between them, and a swirling smokescreen of secrets and surprise edits, it is fair to say that the *Blade Runner* adaptation belonged to Ridley Scott more than it did to Fancher and Peoples combined.

³⁰ *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Warner Home Video, 2007.

Scott was the real lead on the project, who held final say over the storyline and insisted upon maintaining control of it.

This situation was soon exacerbated as production continued. The crew was forced to shoot at night, in a constant state of smoky wetness. Due to the fact they were largely repurposing pre-existing, familiar street scenes on the Warner Brothers movie lot, Scott required the night look to sell the otherworldly universe of neon lights and electric billboards. Actress Darryl Hannah recalls the bleakness of the “vampire hours,” they kept, while Harrison Ford chuckles, “It was a bitch.”³¹ Edward James Olmos, the actor who played the multilingual bounty hunter Gaff, recalls:

[Ridley Scott] had huge voice-of-the-theatre speakers on top of the buildings, so when he would start the scene... he'd play the sound score. He'd blast it into the street, so that you were working inside of a full, ongoing environment of sound and special effects, with the spinners going up and down, and the cranes working, and all the smoke and all the water, and that back lot came alive.³²

In this immersive, fluctuating setting, Scott was literally stationed with a god's-eye view of the efforts below. His crews kept an eye out for dawn in the East, as only the sun itself could stop the man from shooting. Furthermore, Scott harbored a love for demanding takes of difficult scenes many times over in order to have as many options as possible in the editing booth. As a result, the production was frequently strapped for time. Added to this, there was the tension of the enormous cost of operating so many intricately designed live features. Scott was infamously impatient about wasting precious filming hours explaining himself to others, whether to his producers, crew, or much less, the talent or the screenwriters. His leading man, Harrison Ford, fresh from

³¹ *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Warner Home Video, 2007.

³² *Ibid.*

starring in more collaborative ventures with Spielberg and Lucas, struggled with the lack of mutual interaction offered by Scott. Schulman accounts:

Without telling his star, Scott started inserting visual clues that Deckard was non-human. Midway through the film, Deckard has a drunken daydream of a unicorn galloping through a forest. In the last scene, he finds that Gaff... has left an origami unicorn at his front door—a sign that his innermost thoughts were actually implanted. When they shot the scene... Ford realized what was happening and yelled, “Goddammit, I thought we said I wasn’t a replicant!”

In regards to tracking the alterations undergone in the storytelling, this change was one of the largest and most relevant. Dick’s source novel remains deliberately ambiguous on the topic of Deckard’s replicancy (or humanity), leaving the matter open for debate. Scott, however, has always personally come down firmly on the side of Deckard’s inhuman secret.

Several other key alterations from Scott affected Deckard’s character in the film, as well as the movie’s overall message. Deckard is presented as an expert blade runner, and has to be coerced by his employer into hunting rogue androids. He is the chosen one, the only man who can possibly do the job. This was certainly influenced by Harrison Ford’s status coming off of the twin heights of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Hampton Fancher had written the part of Rick Deckard with Robert Mitchum in mind due to that actor’s previous experience with noir. Scott, deeming Mitchum too old for the part, preferred to bring in the more unlikely choice of Dustin Hoffman. Although Hoffman spent months in talks with Scott, he ultimately bowed out of the project. (Notably asking, as he did so, “Why the hell do you want *me* to play this macho character?”³³) Once Ford signed on, the character of Deckard was

³³ *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Warner Home Video, 2007.

reworked to incorporate Ford's signature gruff bravado. This was in direct opposition of the protagonist in the book: Dick's Deckard is a desperate, money-hungry number two, only called in as a last resort when his superior co-worker is hospitalized.

Another massive shift was that animals and their purpose as an embodiment of comfort and wealth were trimmed so far as to be almost removed from the screenplay entirely. They do not hold the same preoccupation in Deckard's mind, nor do they soften his heart. The vulnerability of his personal sheep is eradicated. From a financial standpoint, the addition of animals onto an already floundering film set might have proved the breaking point for the producers. With the exception of the red-eyed owl, clearly a simulacra, and a momentary nod to the ostrich in the marketplace, the film abandons this storyline. Their absence is felt.

Actor Rutger Hauer, who played the film's lead antagonist, the bestial replicant Roy Batty³⁴, had more luck navigating Scott's proprietary prickliness. In the early days of filming, Hauer inquired of Scott, "'Can I put in all the things that don't belong there, the things that are so amazing about people? A sense of poetry, a sense of humor, a sense of sexuality, a sense of the kid, a sense of soul?' Ridley said, 'I like all of them. Keep them in. We'll find a way to work them in, and get them out in different scenes.'"³⁵ The liberties the film took to round out the character of Batty is one of its real strengths. Whereas Scott may have over-polished Deckard into a tortured cut-out of a noir lead, Batty was developed beyond being solely a violent agent of chaos. In fact, one of the most cherished pieces of trivia noted by the film's fans is that Hauer improvised and rewrote his final monologue preceding his character's death: "I've seen

³⁴ The novel's "Baty" received another "t" in adaptation; the film character's spelling is "Batty."

³⁵ *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Warner Home Video, 2007.

things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C- beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.” This personal touch from Hauer, as well as all of the details of his performance, “the things that are so amazing about people,” ultimately served to humanize him. Professor Giuliana Bruno, in her article, “Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*,” proposes:

Replicants are condemned to a life composed only of a present tense... There is for them no conceivable future. They are denied a personal identity, since they cannot name their ‘I’ as an existence over time. Yet this life, lived only in the present, is for replicants an extremely intense experience, since it is not perceived as part of a larger set of experiences (70).

A replicant’s life therefore holds much in common with the infrastructure of the film medium itself. Contained within a limited timeframe, the curated, heightened experiences are put forth for intense interaction before the characters and story expire. Replicants become as human as any character vivified on a screen. This same concept will resurge in the theatrical staging that followed.

The Android Women of *Blade Runner*

Before analyzing the film’s reception, it is paramount to acknowledge that every major female character in the film is an android. Scott and his male screenwriters eradicated all the plot lines from the novel which included human women. Therefore, this distinct expunction calls for closer observation of how the remaining android women are portrayed in the film. Donna Haraway, in her “Cyborg Manifesto,” cautions that cyborgs are not reconstituted as complete Others. They are organic and technical pieces built together as new, whole, separate entities from humans. She concludes, “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal

self... Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (204). The qualifier of *cyborg* upon these replicant women causes them to be treated as incomplete, in a way that the leading male androids are not, particularly if Deckard is included among their number. Giuliana Bruno further remarks, “[The replicants] want to know who ‘conceived’ them, and they investigate their identity and the link to their makers. The itinerary is that of an Oedipal journey. ...Of all the replicants, only one, Rachael, succeeds in making the journey. She assumes a sexual identity, becomes a woman, and loves a man: Deckard” (70-71). In some ways, this is true. Rachael discovers that her memories are false implantations and restructures her own understanding of her identity to make peace as an android.



Fig. 1³⁶

But the love which Bruno describes is not a healthy one. While Rachael assumes

³⁶ Fig. 1: *Blade Runner* – Production Still 1. Harrison Ford as Rick Deckard and Sean Young as Rachael Rosen. Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982).

a sexual identity, it is one of a servant. When she accompanies Deckard to his apartment, he attempts to kiss her. Her response is to flee, with determination. She manages to open the door, but despite her superior android strength, Deckard slams it shut before forcing her back against the window, with its prison-like horizontal blinds. (See Figure 1.) Then he orders her to kiss him, repeatedly, until she does. The scene fades to black, but the implications are clear. She, despite being presented as an innocent, morally-driven android, attempting to assist him in his murderous work, is still expected to obey his sexual commands. The original film then concludes with her and Deckard driving off into the wilderness of Northern California. There is a *deus ex machina* inserted that Rachael alone of all the androids built did not have the protective four-year life-termination function installed, implying she will therefore be free to remain on the run with Deckard. Overall, the ending proves as unpalatable as when Henrik Ibsen was forced by his offended critics to rewrite Nora as remaining at home in *A Doll's House*. Whereas Ibsen was attempting to portray a realistic social drama in which a woman saves herself, the offended population of Europe were not yet ready to concede that a wife might have cause to leave her husband. Ibsen wrote a sanitized ending, but immediately regretted it. In this vein, Scott and Ford were collectively adamant in their disgust with the producers for the addition of the scene and its smarmy voice overs, and both the *Director's Cut* (1992) and the *Final Cut* (2007) got rid of it completely. In those editions, Rachael's death is returned to her as an off- screen possibility. In either scenario, the result remains: Rachael's storyline, for however long she manages to survive, results in a dependency on Deckard's ongoing guidance and protection.

The second female character of Luba Luft, a galactically revered opera singer in Dick's novel, was reborn in *Blade Runner* as Zhora, the topless, sculpted snake charmer. In the novel, Luft has an emotional reaction to Edvard Munch's *Scream* painting in a museum before her death. It is a thoughtful, personal, and tragic exchange, before she is "retired" by bounty hunter Phil Resch. Her death is subsequently acknowledged by others as the loss of a woman of real talent, even by Deckard himself. The film deviates by portraying her as a mere stripper with a fake snake. Even her big dance number – power display – was cut from the film. When she flees for her life, Deckard shoots her in the back multiple times as she runs away. At the time, she is wearing a transparent raincoat and underwear. Zhora plows through the clear glass windows of a sex store. The final image of her onscreen leaves the distinct impression of a dead sex doll. Her stiff body is carried away from the surrounding cluster of mannequins in lingerie. A nearby police hover-car beeps out, "Move on, move on," further implying that this loss does not matter.



Fig. 2³⁷

Lastly, the android Pris is also unhumanized. Whereas in the novel Pris is the exact same make, model, and equal of Rachael Rosen, the filmmakers instead elected to restyle Pris as a “basic pleasure model.” They juxtaposed the glamour of Sean Young’s look as a reincarnated Vivien Leigh with that of nineteen year old gymnast Darryl Hannah as a desperate street urchin. In the film, once she knows she is in danger of being retired, Pris sets a trap for Deckard by hiding among J.F. Sebastian’s eerie toys while wearing a leotard and white bridal veil.³⁸ When she is discovered, she and Deckard engage in a very physical wrestling match. Although she nearly manages to strangle him with her athletic thighs, he ends up shooting her three times as well. Her subsequent death comes the closest to the ghostly release of Polokov described in the

³⁷ Fig. 2: *Blade Runner* – Production Still 2. Joanna Cassidy as Zhora. *Blade Runner*. (1982). [DVD] USA: Ridley Scott.

³⁸ J. F. Sebastian is the film’s version of the novel’s special, John Isidore.

book. Her naked legs thrash all over the floor as she lets out a series of inhuman screams in the flashing blue light and dust of the room. When her death flailing ends, Batty returns to find her calmly posed, one arm cocked beneath her head. She appears toy-like once more, a vacant Kewpie doll with round blue blush, ready for Batty's farewell kiss. The male Batty is the one who cries mournful human tears over her death.



Fig. 3³⁹

Both Dick's novel and Scott's film are products of their time. Their treatment of the female characters was not unusual, especially in comparison to the behavior of the overall science fiction canon. Women were frequently reduced in language and autonomy, and presented as exaggerated sexual objects. Fortunately, the women adapted in Mr. Einhorn's play were reconfigured to include feminist growth and a more balanced contribution from the characters. As the theatrical field continues to help to redevelop the genre, this is one of the most welcome aspects of future science fiction adaptation.

³⁹ Fig. 3 *Blade Runner* – Production Still 3. Darryl Hannah as Pris. *Blade Runner*. (1982). [DVD] USA: Ridley Scott.

***Blade Runner's* Special Effects**

David L. Snyder, Art Director for the original film, has said, “I look at *Blade Runner* as the last analog SF movie made because we didn’t have all the advantages people have now. And I’m glad we didn’t, because there’s nothing artificial about it. There’s no computer generated imagery in the film.”⁴⁰ Every cityscape shot was made with a physical, custom-built model or painting, from the iconic opening shot of Los Angeles to the behemoth Tyrell pyramid.⁴¹ The design team inherited the wealth of their technology from what had been figured out during the first two installments of the *Star Wars* franchise, and Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. There is a tangible heft to the film; every aspect was realized through purely physical production. For sheer style, the design team unarguably created a lasting impression on the landscape of futuristic film. Norman Klein, in his article “Building *Blade Runner*,” specifically rhapsodizes about the strengths of the film’s world-building:

The hum of that Vangelis score against the skyline of L.A. in 2019, as the film opens, continues to leave a strange impact on artists and filmmakers. When asked why, very little is said about the forties nasal drip in the film, the drone of the voice over, the smoky forties lighting, or the promethean androids, [even] Rutger Hauer, dying balletically. Most of the discussion is about that breathtaking pan, from the stoking fires into the brooding skyline, across... to the horizontal loops of flying pods, and finally down into the morass of Asian fast-food stalls on the street level (148).

As the special effect department raced to complete the film for release, there were still hopes from the producers to gain Dick’s enthusiastic endorsement to augment the promotional materials. David Dryer, the Special Photographic Effects Supervisor on

⁴⁰ *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Warner Home Video, 2007.

⁴¹ The Tyrell pyramid was lost after months of effort when the wiring for the lights in the many windows burst into flames. Scott was devastated to lose it before having the chance to shoot his preferred amount of footage.

the film, shares:

We did a little show-and-tell for [Philip K. Dick], and he was very polite, a nice man. We went through everything and he was very reserved, asked a few questions which we politely answered. Then we went into the screening room... took ten minutes of our better shots and ran them. The Vangelis music started to play, the seats started to rumble, we ran through the thing, and the lights came back up. Philip turned around and looked right through the back of my head, and he said, "How is this *possible*? How did this happen? It's like you guys hardwired my brain! That's *what I saw* when I was writing that story!"

Despite his initially lackluster response to the various versions of Fancher's and later Peoples' scripts that he had seen, Dick floated home from the early screening that night still so elated that he immediately drafted a letter to the head of the Ladd Company, Jeff Walker. In it, Dick gushed:

The impact of BLADE RUNNER is simply going to be overwhelming, both on the public and on creative people -- and, I believe, on science fiction as a field. ...Let me sum it up this way. Science fiction has slowly and ineluctably settled into a monotonous death: it has become inbred, derivative, stale. Suddenly you people have come in, some of the greatest talents currently in existence, and now we have a new life, a new start. ...My life and creative work are justified and completed by BLADE RUNNER. ...It will prove invincible.

Sadly, Dick died in March of 1982, just a few months before the film's public release. But his reaction to the footage served as one form of proof of an acceptable adaptation. Witnessing the initial cobbling of dailies and special effects was enough to bring him a vast amount of satisfaction and joy. Encouragingly, Dick – an undisputed titan in the industry – found his science fiction's transition to a new medium to be reinvigorating to the genre. This is precisely what Einhorn would attempt again, nearly thirty years later, upon the stage.

The Release and Beyond

As mentioned previously, the originally released cutting of the film was manipulated by the producers, who did not trust Ridley Scott's vision after receiving some negative reports of confusion from their initial test audiences. Despite now legendary fights, Scott was helpless to stop the addition of heavy-handed voiceovers providing extra exposition and rounding out the action. The overly optimistic ending promised Rachael's survival with Deckard, and several of the more violent fight sequences were sanitized, despite already earning the MPAA's R-rating. The theatrical cut premiered on June 25, 1982 in 1,290 theatres across the United States, and earned a respectable 6.1 million dollars its first weekend.

There was no denying that the film was instantly polarizing to the audiences who viewed it. Some, like film director Rubén Mendoza, were instantly drawn to its innovation and complexity. He writes:

Part of what Ridley Scott gets right is attention to affective registers and somatic experience. Here I refer to the film's general mood, generated by its use of visual and aural elements (a veneer of dystopic, ethereal affectlessness that is partly a combination of the intertwined visual languages of sf dystopia and LA *noir* on which the film draws, Vangelis's ambient score, and of course, Harrison Ford's performance of cynical exhaustion (245).

But others, less enamored with the film, complained of a slow pace, weak dialogue, and unconvincing action in Deckard's hunt for rogue androids. Despite its impressive *style*, their chief complaint was a lack of *substance*, and reactions ranged from perplexment to boredom. Furthermore, many attendees who were initially supporters of the book voiced their disapproval at the alterations, cuts, and additions Scott and his producers had made. Given the scope of the novel, this was unavoidable in order to transition to film. But the

damage was done, for a variety of reasons, and the box office closed with a devastatingly low gross of 27.5 million. As Michael Schulman reveals:

What the studio hadn't counted on was another fantasy film eating up the summer box office: Steven Spielberg's *E.T.*, which came out two weeks ahead of *Blade Runner*. In the optimistic glow of the early Reagan era, *E.T.* spoke to the power of the human heart, while *Blade Runner* forecasted technological doom. Not helping matters were the tepid reviews, including [Roger Ebert, who] said, "I suspect my blender and toaster oven would just love it."

Following the theatrical premiere, the movie was released to VHS and Betamax. It was only then, when audiences could take the film home and privately interact with it (more like the Dickian novel), that its cultural capital truly blossomed. By allowing viewers the power of autonomy, to rewind and dissect the story, the film's fan base soared. Soon, cinephile groups, conventions, and scholars cropped up to embrace the movie as well. When an undoctored workprint reel was accidentally discovered in a vault by filmmakers, it was aired in a film festival as a "Director's Cut." This unauthorized viewing unsurprisingly infuriated Ridley Scott. At the very least, enough interest gathered that Warner Brothers funded an official *Director's Cut* in 1992, as well as a theatrical re-release. However, because Scott was juggling work on *Thelma and Louise* at the same time, he was still unhappy with that version. At last, he issued his *Final Cut* in 2007. It was updated with CGI and a few re-shot sequences (such as Zhora's glass smashing). It also boasted the preferred ambiguous ending, full-length unicorn dream sequence, and zero voiceovers. Screenwriter David Peoples once asked, "How do you prepare an audience for seeing something so different? Now time has prepared them." The film adaptation of *Blade Runner* was received divisively at first, but it has since grown to a canonical place in the realms of both film and science fiction at large.

Einhorn's Adaptation to the Stage

Twenty-eight years after the film's release, and a full forty-two years after the book, Edward Einhorn began to develop an adaptation of *Do Androids Dream* for the New York stage. The process took him a little over a year, with twelve drafts leading from the initial impetus through to opening night. Einhorn first sought permission to pursue the project from Electric Shepherd Productions. Founded in 2007, E.S.P. is run by one of Dick's daughters, Isa Dick Hackett, and now exists for the stewardship of all adaptations of Dick's work, regardless of the medium.⁴²

Within Einhorn's adaptation, there are some idiosyncrasies which can be attributed to taste: small changes in spelling, combining multiple characters for economy, and redistributions of action. Others are logical cuts: there are no hover cars, owls, or rain sequences to be seen. Larger thematic shifts were also made due to changes in the sensibilities of his anticipated audience. (Einhorn's Manhattan in 2010, after all, was a wildly different world from Dick's Southern California of 1968.) Einhorn accommodated an expectation for a more equitable portrayal of women. He also enjoyed the incorporation of updated technology systems into his overall design. But most importantly, he rooted his production in faithful dedication to Dick's initial queries on the ethics of empathy. The novel had gifted him with a very universal, dramatic premise from which to begin: is it possible to salvage Deckard's soul?

That said, there was no escaping Scott's omnipresent film. As much as Einhorn wished to avoid its influence, the movie nevertheless lent his production a cloak of

⁴² Electric Shepherd Productions respectfully declined to comment on Einhorn's production.

coolness. Every major theatrical review would go on to acknowledge the film – at least in passing – during their assessment of the quality of his adaptation. *Blade Runner* had become a permanent lens. Still, in an interview with Tor.com, Einhorn protested, “The movie is of course an entity in itself, and groundbreaking in its own way, but it didn’t capture the heart of what the book said to me... I wanted my vision to be wholly shaped by the book.”

Marvin Carlson, in his seminal contribution on the dynamics of reception, *The Haunted Stage*, has described this phenomenon as a *haunted* production. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* commanded the audience to squint through the twin specters of the novel and film in order to witness it. This can be familiar territory for artists as well as theatregoers. As Carlson explains:

The retelling of stories already told, the reenactment of events already enacted, the re-experience of emotions already experienced, these are and have always been central concerns of the theatre in all times and places, but closely allied to these concerns are the particular production dynamics of theatre: the stories it chooses to tell, the bodies and other physical materials it utilizes to tell them, and the places in which they are told. Each of these production elements are also, to a striking degree, composed of materials ‘that we have seen before’ (3).

Much like androids with falsely implanted memories to anchor them in the swirl of the world, witnesses to Einhorn’s efforts had to sort through what was new, and what had been salvaged from the kipple⁴³ of interpretations past.

Within the architecture of the text Einhorn put forth lingered several of the striking, familiar semiotics of *Do Androids Dream* and *Blade Runner*. Charles S. Peirce, philosopher and semiotician, divides these recognizable signs into three classes

⁴³ “Kipple” is Dick’s term for the useless junk that accumulates through neglect of a space, from gum wrappers to old clothes. It is an inevitable form of entropy and will one day overwhelm us all.

in his theory of semiotics. Firstly, icons derive their meaning from their strong similarity to the thing indicated. In the practical world, this indicates that the props gun carried by the bounty hunters are guns capable of real harm. But simultaneously, inside the world of the play, the animatronic sheep serves as an icon of an animate one. Secondly, Peirce suggests there are indexes, which have a lesser connection to the meaning they carry. Instead, they indicate a message through association. For example, when actors step into the Empathy Box (a patch of stage light), it means they are communicating their emotions with every other human participant in Mercerism. Thirdly are symbols, whose meaning is entirely arbitrary and limited to the society of their issue. One use of a symbol in the play was the constant projection of enormous eyes. Einhorn's modern, English-speaking, American audiences were likely familiar with the adage, "Eyes are the windows to the soul." Therefore, beginning his play with the looming sight of a dilated pupil served as a symbol: *we will be exploring the nature of the soul*. At the same time, and through Marvin Carlson's suggested haunting, the eyes were a simultaneous symbol of Roy Batty's bloody blinding of Eldon Tyrell in the film, and of the gleaming-eyed Rachael Rosen in her smoky first interview with Deckard. Einhorn's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* had its renaissance into the form of a play. It managed to do so through a creative absorption of these haunted signs, interspersed with original scenes and stagings developed by the playwright. By forging a balance between the familiar and the new, Einhorn managed to develop a uniquely compelling world of juxtaposed icons, symbols, and signs.

The Script

Ralph Willingham, in *Science Fiction and the Theatre*, cautions, "Science fiction

has fared well on the stage [only] when it has received serious treatment – that is, when playwrights have engaged in a purposeful exploration of science as it relates to the human condition” (13). Einhorn was determined to stay well away from condescension or camp; his focus was on the catalytic strength of empathy to play onstage, live and interpersonally. For example, he offers this metatheatrical scene between opera singer Luna Luft⁴⁴ and Rick Deckard. Although they have cornered each other at gunpoint, Deckard can’t help noticing a sheep puppet hanging in his prey’s dressing room:

LUNA. It wasn’t exactly for children. It was [from] a play about the war. It was a story about a sheep who miraculously survived it all. All around the sheep, people were dying, animals were dying, the world was filling up with radioactive dust. But the sheep walked along a charmed path, protected by—fate, maybe. Then, at the end, the sheep died. Not from war, but from a hungry man who killed and ate it. Everyone in the audience cried.

RICK. Did you cry?

LUNA. Real people died in that war. Every bomb dropped on an enemy killed thousands. Or millions. When the war began, when the first bombs were dropped, no one cried. They rejoiced that their enemies were dead. But a whole audience cried about a piece of wood.

RICK. That’s empathy. You look at that puppet and you see a sheep. You see life. (35)

There is a moment of anagnorisis in “You see life.” It is simultaneously true of the android Luna, who has kept the puppet near to her as proof-of-victory in her performance, and of Rick, who was drawn to the theatrical object despite the imminent danger in the room. A puppet – or an android – transitions from a *thing* to a *being* as soon as it begins to compel others to receive it empathetically. Similarly, the other androids are also meditating on the role of empathy within their own lives. In an

⁴⁴ Einhorn changed the character’s name from Luba to Luna, simply because he preferred its sound.

exchange between Pris⁴⁵ and the special Isidore, they discuss the quality of life in the colony on Mars. She yields that:

PRIS. It is beautiful. The ancient red rocks, the vast plains marked only by the long rail lines which bind the planet together for human use. But it is not a place that is friendly to the people who live there. Every day is a struggle for survival, filtering stale air through failing ventilation, recycling stagnant water from the sewage system right back through your kitchen faucet, fake sunlight generated to obliterate the uncooperative sun. Everyone there is trapped inside tiny bubbles, packaged in small containers that protect them from the planet outside. Every year some colonists trek out across the open land as far as the air in their spacesuit will take them, then open their helmets so they can actually feel the air, the real air for one moment before they die.

ISIDORE. At least they have androids to keep them company.

PRIS. The androids are lonely too. It is a world of people who have grown dead inside, androids and humans both. (42)

As with Dick's novel, both of these scenes emphasize the terrible state of the natural world. Mars is a constant prison, and the war took a terrible toll on the survivors. As a result, people cannot stand to see another animal die (even if it is a puppet). Nor can they dismiss their demons with the panacea of manufactured companions. They need *air*. They need *life*. These are the types of "purposeful explorations" that elevate the script from a hypothetical exercise to a cautionary tale. Much like Hampton Fancher's reworking of his screenplay to include his own environmental fears, Einhorn was operating from a world forty-two years even more overcrowded, polluted, and war-prone. His characters' struggles following World War Terminus, with their overwhelming loneliness and anxiety, is all too timely. Their dangers could only too

⁴⁵ Originally the character's name reads "Rachael"; this is purely logistical on Einhorn's part as the same actress portrays both Rachael Rosen and Pris. I have re-assigned them to Pris to avoid confusion.

soon be our own.

Beyond incorporating what resonated from Dick's novel, Einhorn also made casting changes where he saw fit. Unique to his adaptation, Rick Deckard's fellow bounty hunter Phil Resch was reintroduced as a female: Phillipa Ryan. Phillipa holds her own as Rick's equal when it comes to firing shots. (She also levels the sexual playing field by having an affair with Roy Baty.) Einhorn acknowledged in our interview, "I liked the idea of a female correlative to Rick, and... it felt like in modern day there was no need for such a male heavy set of characters. I also liked that I was able to play with Rick's blindness when it comes to women." He specifically capitalizes on Deckard's susceptibility with women through Rachael Rosen. Interestingly, Einhorn deleted the unsettling affair between her and Deckard, replacing it instead with a single kiss. Furthermore, that reads as more of a challenge between predators than a seduction:

RACHAEL. You're a soft touch, Rick. Just one little kiss, and already your hard exterior started to melt. Do you think you could look me in the eyes and shoot me now, if you had to?

RICK. I'll do whatever I have to. I shot Luna Luft.

RACHAEL In the back, Rick. In the back. Come on. Let's go visit your wife. (60)

In regards to Deckard's spouse, Einhorn proved more generous than Ridley Scott. He allowed Rick to have the comfort of his wife back, and she was a fantastic re-addition. Einhorn also made the decision to liberate Iran from her deep depression, and transfer that black mood onto Rick. When I questioned him about the exchange in comparison to the novel, he responded:

I felt like the depression pathologized Iran; it became almost her defining and only characteristic. For Rick, it is easier to view it in context

of his actions as a whole, and the depression helps motivate him as a character. It makes him someone desperate to feel. ... I think in the end Iran is struggling just as much as Rick, in her own way. Her struggle is just more hidden and perhaps better medicated (or rather mood organ-ed).

I thought that if there was genuine love between them, it made Rick's struggle more real. And in my ending, the bittersweetness of the fact that Iran has always suspected Rick was an android, but continues to love him nonetheless, brings out the overall themes of empathy more. She is more human because of it, because of her love for him, whether or not he is artificial.⁴⁶

Indeed, when Rachael poses the plaguing question of the entire show to Iran Deckard:

“Do you think he’s an android?” Iran’s entire response is, “I think he’s my husband”

(67). In the end, it does not and cannot matter to her whether her Rick is a human. He is her love, and that supersedes such trivia.

Finally, there is an original scene wherein Roy Baty takes Iran as a hostage.

After seizing her from behind, surprising her within her home, he spits:

ROY. ...You do hate me. Don’t pretend you don’t, I know better. This empathy you prize so much, you feel none for me. Why is that? Do you think empathy makes you special? When you feel empathy for a sheep, you are just pretending that the sheep is another version of you, that just because the sheep is full of blood and bones that its heart is just like yours. This wonderful thing, this empathy you think makes you human, it’s just a sort of love of yourself. It’s selfishness.

IRAN. If it is, then it’s a useful selfishness. (53)

She (and Einhorn, by extension) sees the merit in committing to care, whether for a creature, a person, or one’s self. In their dark world, everyone could stand a little looking after. In the end, Einhorn’s female characters do not need to apologize for themselves, or prove their status as human or android. They can love, fiercely, or fight if pushed to it. They must each continue to try to find happiness where they can, while

⁴⁶ Einhorn, interview with author.

they can. This is a tidy theme Einhorn has wired through each of their narratives.

Untitled Theatre Company #61

The premiere of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* ran from November 18 to December 10, 2010 at the 3LD Art & Technology Center in New York City. The entire design was dedicated to incorporating as much of that resident technology as possible. The use of multiple, simultaneous television screens, live cameras, microphones, and projections aimed to deliver the feeling of living the future. Einhorn served as both playwright and director on the play. He shared in an interview that:

This was an impossible play to produce, especially at the budget it had. That we pulled it off is a miracle, but it almost killed me at time. We upped the ante with the set, which was beautiful, but took much longer than our set designer anticipated. We basically redid the entire theater and installed a three story set. For the full five weeks of rehearsal, he was continuing to build. People couldn't recognize the theater, when it was done. God knows how many man hours were spent; there were 2–5 people a day, every day. We were blessed with a couple of really skilled interns, who saved us. ...We had multiple types of live video, recorded video, green screens ...I've used video a lot since, but *Androids* was still the most complicated. The multi-story set allowed us to really play with the video. One floor up was basically a film studio, where we filmed Luna's arias and Buster Friendly live, so you could see everything both live and projected onto custom surfaces. Also, for Buster Friendly, we painted a wall green, which allowed us to green screen in a pre-filmed "audience" with programmed reaction shots, sort of the video equivalent of canned laughter, moans, sighs, etc. So the artifice was all real and immediate.⁴⁷

Einhorn has previously said in a separate interview:⁴⁸

... The concepts behind our designs were a few: first of all, I wanted to mix the organic and mechanical. I wanted the set itself to feel like an organic object, full of curves, with screens that resembled eyes and a mouth. (Which is one reason we used them as eyes and a mouth at the top of the show.) I wanted to give a sense of a world that was a graveyard of all that once had lived, but also had a sense of longing for a new utopia. And of course there

⁴⁷ Einhorn, interview with author.

⁴⁸ Bowes, 1.

was the *film noir* influence, which I know also influenced the movie, though I think in a very different way. I wanted it to recall the 1950s, in my mind a great era of pulp SF and detective fiction, the sort of stuff that I imagine got under Dick's skin and inspired his writing.

Dennis Overbye, a science writer for *The New York Times*, once wondered, "Whether the Janus faces of science and art might melt together more easily in the shadowy half-light of the stage, where a little greasepaint and our own conspiring imaginations help create the scene, than in the blinding information-rich literalness of celluloid" (45). Against the vast, multi-tiered playground of projections, shadows, and screens, Einhorn essentially built an arena that could harness the mood of mistrust which fills the novel. Without being able to see others clearly, consistently, through to their souls, Deckard must try to sort deceptive human behavior from androids in disguise.

To augment this, Einhorn underscored the play with provocative music. In opposition to *Blade Runner*'s signature synthetic wailing developed by Vangelis, Einhorn utilized a single, live instrument. His musical partner on the project – a composer named Henry Akona – built an original score for the play. Einhorn acknowledges, "[Henry] did all the music. It was all live cello, though the scoring also was looped live, to create harmonies. ...The cello was chosen by Henry, but it is a very evocative instrument for invoking the emotions of the surreal, noir world we created."

With set, script, score, and screens in place, the play opened. Jason Zinoman, who saw the Manhattan production, in his review for *The New York Times*, believed that the effort was:

An act of fan love but also dramatically shrewd, since a downtown play is a better forum than a Hollywood blockbuster for a grim meditation on religion, consumerism and what it means to be human... Neal Wilkinson's

set is exactly right: high-tech but also organic, a design that resists straight lines and geometric shapes. Its surrealism (imagine a modest, cut-rate creation by Gaudí) matches the dreamlike style...What sticks with you are more ghostly images: a fuzzy video screen, a sad-faced android and an opera singer, played by Moira Stone, who seems both completely phony and movingly fragile at the same time.

Overall, the play was a success for Einhorn and Untitled Theatre Company #61. Despite the overwhelming elements of production, the end product was a dazzling and ambitious mounting of the beloved science fiction noir.



Fig. 4⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Fig. 4: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Untitled Theatre Co. #61 – Still 1. Alex Emanuel as Rick Deckard. Photograph by Arthur Cornelius. Shared courtesy of Edward Einhorn.



Fig. 5⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Fig. 5: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Untitled Theatre Co. #61 – Still 2. Ken Simon as John Isidore, under a projection of Timothy Babcock as Mercer. Photograph by Arthur Cornelius. Shared courtesy of Edward Einhorn.



Fig. 6⁵¹

⁵¹ Fig. 6: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Untitled Theatre Co. #61 – Still 3. Christian Peterson as Roy Baty and Uma Incrocci as Iran Deckard. Photograph by Arthur Cornelius. Shared courtesy of Edward Einhorn. The same mechanical sheep head would travel to Los Angeles to be used in the Sacred Fools' production three years later.



Fig. 7⁵²

⁵² Fig. 7: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Untitled Theatre Co. #61 – Still 4. Alex Emanuel as Rick Deckard and Moira Stone as Luna Luft. Photograph by Arthur Cornelius. Shared courtesy of Edward Einhorn.

Sacred Fools

Following the successful run of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in New York, it made its west coast premiere on September 13, 2013 at the Sacred Fools Theatre Company in Los Angeles. The production was directed by Jaime Robledo. Danielle Ozymandias, who worked on the crew for the production, evaluated the script as, “Very much [the Sacred Fools’] brand: weird, strange, dark.” Of its reception, she recalls, “Purists of the book loved it. People who loved the movie has problems with it.” Given that that was precisely what Einhorn had initially hoped to achieve, the Fools were on the right track. Director Rubén Mendoza, this time writing for *Science Fiction Studies*, was able to witness the Los Angeles production. He adds:

Dick’s characters are often confused, and cognitively disoriented, but they are also nauseated, queasy, anxiety-ridden, terror-filled, and their bodies make this clear through vomiting, sweating, arousal, stomachs turning, hair rising, tears falling... and so on. Theirs is not just a metaphorical vertigo of disrupted and estranged mental states but is repeatedly tied to concrete bodily functions and perceptual experiences because... the mind and body are one (242).

In this phenomenological vein, director Robledo aimed to keep as many of Untitled Theatre Company #61’s working effects as possible. One of the most immediate challenges was to locate a classically trained opera singer for the role of Luna Luft. (See Figure 8.) The actress who played her, Emily Kosloski, was striking enough to believably *be* a robot: she offered a nearly inhuman beauty through her glamorous form and powerful vocals. Mendoza applauded their augmentation of her natural talent with Brechtian estrangement through the available technology:

[Most] effective... is the use of pre-recorded footage that parallels the live action. As Luba Luft⁵³ stands on a platform before a camera and sings live... she is simultaneously projected on the audience’s screens. But the

⁵³ Mendoza apparently did not register the name change of the character.

performance on the screens never quite matches up with the live singing, as micro-moments of subtle difference play with the perception. At first glance, the mismatch can be seen as conveying delays in transmission... But the micro-differences are not consistent (244).



Fig. 8⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Fig. 8: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Sacred Fools – Still 1. Emily Kosloski as Luna Luft. Photograph shared courtesy of Jessica Sherman Photography.

Interestingly, Sacred Fools did not bring in their own cellist to contribute live music to the production. Instead, they inserted recordings (artificial stand-ins) of Akona's music. Robledo also made the most of the technological atmosphere of the script. Not only did he build eight different televisions into the playing space, he supplemented their presence by projecting onto every flat surface available in the theatre. Sporadically, throughout the play, these showed television advertisements, commercials, campaigns for Japanese robots, and even cheekily played the same promotional, in-character video to encourage Martian immigration that the Sacred Fools' marketing department had used to generate public interest in the production.



Fig. 9⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Fig. 9: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Untitled Theatre Co. #61 – Still 2. Kimberley Atkinson as Rachael Rosen and Eric Curtis Johnson as Rick Deckard. Photograph shared courtesy of Jessica Sherman Photography.

Although there are no further plans for the play script at this time, Einhorn completed his mission of adapting the novel which had intrigued him for so long, and giving it a new life on the stage. In Bert O. States' *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, in his section about Peripety and Recognition, States contributes, "The most important feature of a semantic network... is that when you use one of its terms, you can never tell whether that is all you meant or whether the term isn't simply the best one you could find to stand in for something of a much greater conceptual density" (88-89). A semantic network is the body of knowledge agreed upon which connects the definitions of concepts. For example, to say "replicant," might mean one thing to a fan of the film, another to a biology professor, and yet another to a twin. Einhorn's play is one way of "saying" Dick's novel, but it also conveys layers of meaning on its own, for science fiction, the stage, and humans themselves.

Given Einhorn's impressive body of work as both a playwright and adaptor, I ended my interview with him by inquiring whether he had developed any overarching musings through his experiences in translating so many pieces of notable science fiction into theatre. He related:

Science fiction seems to me now as it did then, a very appropriate genre for the stage. Some of it does have technological challenges, depending on the world you want to create, but theater has always been a place for metaphor and stories bigger than ourselves. The gods that appear in early Greek drama may have a religious significance, but they also lend an air of fantasy to those very early plays... So why not fantasies tied to our futures or alternative presents? Why not create these new worlds onstage? People get caught in discussions of genre, and I'm a science fiction fan as well as a writer, but in the end, what I am in pursuit of are interesting stories that make us think about our lives. I call my theater a Theater of Ideas, and science fiction is full of ideas.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Einhorn, interview with author.

To connect once more to the working definition of this thesis, in which science fiction is variations upon the larger theme of being human, these plentiful ideas Einhorn describes are the fuel which must be sought in order to help the genre soar.

A Note on *Blade Runner 2049*

On October 6, 2017, the vastly anticipated sequel film to *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, premiered in the United States. Michael Schulman observes:

Anyone [involved] could tell you that a new *Blade Runner*, 35 years on, is the last thing they would have predicted when the original opened to decidedly mixed reviews and what seemed like certain obscurity. Even more surprising is that [they] managed to reconvene at all, after a production process so harrowing and contentious that some crew members called the original film *Blood Runner*.

But when questioned by the *New York Times* as to why he thought the time was right to generate a sequel, *Blade Runner 2049* director Denis Villeneuve replied, “In some ways, it’s a very classic story of a human wanting to play God, like the Frankenstein story. It’s timeless. So the same questions are still there, but we are more and more kind of hybrids of ourselves. Our relationship with memory, faith, and communications has evolved a lot since then” (Egner 64+). (“Since then” could apply in equal measure to the real world of 1982, as well as the projected 2019 first manufactured by Scott.)

Intriguingly, as explored in the play, the first film, and the novel, the argument as to whether the character of Rick Deckard is a replicant or a human has been left up in the air by the sequel. Villeneuve offers, “Harrison and Ridley are still arguing about this... The idea that you’re unsure if you were designed or you are a real subject, a real human being – that tension is interesting. I’m not interested in the answer.”⁵⁴ Ford, more

circumspect, adds, “It comes up somewhere around the end of the second drink. It always comes up somehow... People [are] curious about that, and I think that’s a good thing.”⁵⁵ Scott, true to form, maintains, “Deckard is a [expletive] replicant.”⁵⁶

Personally, I find their differing opinions endearing. These filmmakers have, collectively, continuously, across decades, argued and engaged with the same puzzle first proposed by Dick. What makes us human? Does it truly matter? And can we find the empathy required to make room for Others to join in our race?

Conclusion

What began as Dick’s story is still alive, still mutating through debate, new content, and future adaptations. Scott has left the door open for a third film. Einhorn’s play version is imperfect, but it is crucial proof that the transition to the stage *can* be made, and the field of science fiction theatre is ready for further, unabashed innovation. Ralph Willingham despaired in his 1994 *Science Fiction and the Theatre* that the effort to adapt to the stage was largely a wash: “There is no avant-garde of science fiction drama. Collectively, the plays inspired by that genre are but a faint shadow of its narrative literature” (3). Happily, that is simply no longer true. The playwrights have not been idle. The previous chapter and Edward Einhorn’s bicoastal efforts reveal that the storytellers are only becoming bolder, and more skilled. The work must continue apace.

Chapter Three: Considering *Corona*

Introduction

Corona was initially conceived to satisfy my coursework in Playwriting: Myth & Ritual at the University of Houston.⁵⁷ But as the topic of this thesis solidified, I became deeply passionate about the field of theatrical science fiction, and wanted to contribute to its support. Due to my unique positionality as both an academic and a playwright, I hoped to combine personal, artistic, and scholarly goals by generating an original script. Utilizing the conclusions drawn in the previous two chapters regarding staging and adaptation techniques, this analysis will gauge the connections between *Corona* and its predecessors. My benchmarks of evaluation are: What are the practical production considerations, and how might they be achieved? Does *Corona* succeed as theatrical science fiction? The script was intended as a work of science fiction theatre, but the final product simultaneously operates as adaptive, mythological, feminist, and horror theatre. I believe these elements have alloyed, and the subgenres serve to strengthen the overall *science fiction-ness* of the text. Lastly, can the show be produced? To answer that, I will conclude the chapter with a review of the existing avenues for *Corona* to pursue realization.

The Starting Point

My primary source for mythology relating to the Minotaur was the *Greek Myths* compilation assembled by Robert Graves. Given his thoughtful inclusion of the differing

⁵⁷ The script is included in the Appendix.

versions recorded by Plutarch, Ovid, and others, Graves provided the most sensibly hybridized synopsis of the myth. To recount it briefly: due to the accidental murdering of King Minos's son and heir, Androgeus, Athens is required to sacrifice seven youths and seven maidens every year. They are carried away to Crete in a ship with black sails, where they are fed one at a time to the Minotaur by being pushed into a Labyrinth: a vast maze constructed by the inventor Daedalus, with the Bull hiding at its heart. Several years into the annual slaughter, Prince Theseus volunteers to go attempt to end the Minotaur's life, which would free Athens from this burden. Upon his arrival, Minos' daughter Ariadne falls instantly in love with the handsome monster slayer, and engineers his success by gifting him with a ball of magic yarn that leads him safely in and out of the maze. Theseus manages to kill the Minotaur, and he and Ariadne sail back towards Athens with the other liberated tributes. When they stop to rest on the isle of Naxos, Dionysus appears to Theseus in a vision and demands the prince leave the sleeping Ariadne behind on the beach. Helpless against the deity, Theseus does so. Poor Ariadne awakens to heartbroken devastation. However, that does not last overly long, as Dionysus convinces her to marry him instead. He then grants her the benediction of goddesshood, and puts a crown of stars on her head: what the ancient Greeks knew as the constellation of the Corona Borealis.

My version of *Corona* translates that myth to a premise of science fiction. Ariadne is still a princess, but she is also the captain of a spaceship, the elegantly glowing *Corona Borealis*. She must ferry the fourteen tributes from the planet of Athens to the planet of Crete, where they will be fed as sacrifices to the Minotaur, who carries a now intergalactic reputation for devouring human flesh. However, on the journey, she makes an unexpected connection to two of her more forceful passengers: the headstrong prince Theseus, and

Pneuma, a Healer who is outraged to face death with her medical education incomplete. Despite the cautionary council of DY-O, her spacecraft's operating system, the three humans become surprisingly close. As they near what Ariadne believes is their final destination, she must weigh the comfort of her new friends against her family's loyalties. In the end, she uncovers the insurmountable lies of her lifetime: DY-O is actually the god Dionysus in disguise. Her beloved ship is actually a prison (the Labyrinth) designed to keep her away from her homeland of Crete in perpetuity, by locking her in a cyclical stupor of harvest and hibernation. And the legendary Minotaur is actually *herself*, encaged within her body; she transforms whenever there is substantial darkness on the ship in order to unwittingly eat her own passengers.

With these synopses in place, I would like to return to the starting point of the play, by which I mean the impetus which caused it to be written. Despite the inherent slipperiness of attempting to define science fiction, I would argue that there is at least one unifying element which appears throughout science fiction's most iconic examples, from *Doctor Faustus* to *Ender's Game* to *Battlestar Galactica*. It is the question of ethics. What is *acceptable* behavior in the pursuit of knowledge, and what goes *too far*? This overarching theme heavily influenced the origin of my play. I can attest that in the months I spent writing it, there were two experiences which caused me to reflect upon this question on a daily basis.

The first was an onerous process of diagnosing and dealing with a surprise surgery in the fall semester of 2016. The weekend before my first day of graduate school, I was struck with extreme abdominal pain while at a concert with family. Then, through a mix of the American healthcare system as well as the ongoing mysteries of the

female body, there unfolded a five month journey of ruling out potential causes for that pain, one specialist visit at a time. Theories were put forth and discarded. It was deemed an ectopic pregnancy, a miscarriage, a cyst, multiple cysts, psychosomatic, a deadly tumor, or perhaps nothing. Finally, at long last, they discovered through surgery that I had managed to grow a teratoma the size of a Texas grapefruit, which completely consumed one of my ovaries. They removed it while I was unconscious; I only learned of the organ's sacrifice upon waking. A month later, I was given an oncology report that assured me there were no cancerous cells in the teratoma. Rather, my zany female body, with its dual X chromosomes, had jovially attempted to clone itself. Deep within my core, my body had hummed away, creating a small, useless planet of hair, skin, muscle, and brains.

While this recollection is not for the medically faint of heart,⁵⁸ it is what was really responsible for the generation of *Corona*. I needed to process the psychological fallout of what had happened to my body, and against my will. There were waves of anger and self-doubt, caused by the loss of autonomy over so much of my time, money, and physical self. I had been repeatedly subjected to infuriating, inept examinations.

Furthermore, I had known all along, despite the rigamarole of medical hypotheses, that there was a *thing* inside of me, even when I could not prove it beyond my own suspicions. Then, when it was finally removed – and acknowledged – I was constantly aware of its absence. I certainly did not miss the pain it had caused. But strangest of all, even stranger than the surprise bit about the brains it possessed, was the unsettling discovery that I missed the presence of the *thing*.

⁵⁸ My apologies.

To return to the concept of a spectrum spanning what is *acceptable* to what *goes too far*, there was constant oscillation. I wanted a diagnosis, and I wanted it to be over. It was preferable to know the truth (at the cost of pain, invasion, and thousands of dollars) than to exist in a state of ignorance. I yearned for stasis, but would settle for anagnorisis. By the same token, I had to swallow the indignation that I would never really have the whole story of why it had happened, or if it ever might happen again. There was no simple means of processing the fact that the *thing* – the teratoma – was *not* a baby... but I was nevertheless recuperating from a C-section, while wading through a deeply misplaced form of post-surgical sadness. Overall, I think it is fair to say that I temporarily became a science fiction version of myself. My teratoma, as mentioned in the introduction, was certainly a variation on humanity.

The second experience which occurred reached a fever pitch a year later, in the fall of 2017. The #MeToo movement erupted, resulting in a massive shift in the entertainment industries to call out the unacceptable treatment of women. As cultural changes unfurled, I encountered even more dormant anger all around me. It came to light just how many women and men had lost their autonomy over their money, careers, sexual selves, and physical bodies. Even as those involved at last found the courage to say their abusers had gone *too far*, they were criticized for their own ethics in the ways they went about seeking retribution and restitution.

Walter Benjamin once wrote, “Traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (91). Looking back at the script for *Corona* now, I see these traces everywhere. I was determined to turn those two distinct, snarling clusters of emotion into a play. I hoped to translate my anger into art (and thus

relinquish it.) The myth of the Minotaur offered an ideal vehicle to achieve that. At its core, it is a tale of liberation and upheaval, and a rejection of pre-decided fates. I maintain that its success as an adaptation centered around the upgrading of the female character of Princess Ariadne. She is a vapid ingénue in the original text, an ineffective kitten with only a ball of yarn to contribute to the male hero before being foisted off on Dionysus like a door prize. My intention was to rebuild her as a human of substantial depth, with her own strength, kindness, intuition, and fury. Most of all, she deserved a hunger for knowledge – a hunger strong enough to risk hamartia. I admit to the blatant, therapeutic motivation: I gifted her with a mystery inside herself. She carries an ungovernable entity that is large, painful, personal, and wild. After all, the etymology of the word *teratoma* comes from the Greek *teraton*, meaning monster.

Although my medical adventures are perhaps a more private bit of dramaturgy that may not influence future productions, the #MeToo movement *has* infiltrated the lives and sensitivities of any potential future theatregoers who might witness this play. Theorist Linda Hutcheon contributes in her *Theory of Adaptation*, “Like the adapter, the audience too interprets in a context” (109). Whether deep in space or out upon an ancient sea, the old Ariadne is no longer palatable to modern audiences. Similar to the Angry Young playwrights of post-WWII London, a large population of American women are newly aflame. We are too angry to swallow a Princess/Heroine’s trusting passivity any more. Through *Corona* and science fiction, Ariadne is finally upgraded through the crucial restoration of her own autonomy.

Mythology & Adaptation

The allure of Greek mythology was the concurrent familiarity and freedom that it offered. I have previously experienced this phenomenon in the writing of my novel, *Life After Myth*, which continues the story of Medea in modern day. There is by necessity a dual straddling of approaches. The audience who knows the myths cannot be allowed to grow bored with a recapping of events, nor can the uninitiated be left to flounder in confusion. Therefore, the joy is found in presenting old material, interwoven with newly constructed surprises. This becomes like a strain of melody in a symphonic composition, returned to in altered and unexpected forms, yet recognizable once taught. Linda Hutcheon declares that this is the heart of revitalizing adapted material. She believes, “Part of [the] pleasure... comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (4). While I strove to honor the myth with fidelity in its new form, I also sought to transfuse it into a palimpsest. Using a varied assortment of MacGuffin devices⁵⁹ – such as, there is a gigantic bull creature hidden within a small woman, a god may disguise itself as an operating system, and hyperspace travel is achievable through a rare “Corona ore” – I infused the old story with new life. Yet it still unmistakably rings with the melody of the Minotaur.

Alex and Cory Panshin, who collaborated on *The World Beyond the Hill*, track the history of science fiction from its inception through WWII. They are quick to note the

⁵⁹ This is a term created by Alfred Hitchcock. MacGuffins (alternately, McGuffins) are readily accepted plot devices which are never given properly satisfying or full explanation of how or why they work. They frequently arise in science fiction. Famous examples include The Holy Grail, Excalibur, and the Maltese Falcon.

similarities which exist between mythmakers and writers of science fiction. As the Panshins claim in their introduction, “[Mythmakers strive to take] the best knowledge of their time and place and [combine] it with a sense of the incompleteness of mankind and the fundamental mystery of existence, and then [tell] stories of higher possibility” (ix). As noted throughout this thesis, possibility, *particularly* among the human species, is the soul of science fiction. It fuels the tradition of Greek mythology as well. From Graves’s myth, most aspects of the original plot survived the transition. I preserved the protocol and strain of bad blood between the royalty. The feud between the cities – now planets – and the demand for annual human tributes still drives the action. And of course, the most iconic signs of the source text, the Bull and the Labyrinth, emerge from the shadows during *Corona*’s climax.

I propose that the differences which really matter, beyond cosmetic and genre-conceding manipulations, are threefold. First is that Ariadne is now smart enough to be hesitant. In the same way that Plutarch and Ovid differ on what was the truest telling of the myth, Ariadne and Theseus are convinced of disparate truths regarding each other’s trustworthiness and motivations. It takes them time to connect. Secondly, my beast and maze are omnipresent, kept in plain sight of the action all along. There is no escaping their proximity, and no dismissing the Beast as anything but another form of Ariadne’s Self. And thirdly, the myth is greatly altered by the risking of fragile, hard-won friendships. I hold that this singular human element was the most effective and important aspect of my work. It changes the price of the sacrifice from a vague, noble notion of saving one’s city to the potential reversal of years of enforced individual isolation, sabotage, and doubt. There is a chance for honest happiness in the play; its loss is

therefore inherently more tragic. This is why, as Hutcheon assures her readers, “An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise” (176). The key differences in my script are devoted to the aforementioned reconfiguration of Ariadne: it clarifies where she is blind, where she is strong, and where she might seek her escape.

Practical Considerations

My ultimate aim, as is true of all my playwriting work, was to push the audience to participate in the production through the loan of their *active* imagination, and not the mere negative space of obeisance, from which disbelief has been suspended. To put it bluntly, they must keep up. In the *Science Fiction and the Theatre*, Ralph Willingham notes,

Dramatists have been most successful in bringing science fiction to the stage when they have abandoned the pictorial illusionism in favor of the tried-and-true conventions that serve other kinds of drama. We must remember that many science fiction narrators have produced great prose without relying on robots, laser guns, six-headed aliens, spaceship battles, or other ‘realistic’ clichés of the genre. Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* trilogy... covers events spanning billions of miles and hundreds of years. Yet this sprawling epic emerges mostly in a series of conversation. Almost all of the fantastic pictorial events occur ‘offstage,’ in the reader’s imagination (5).

Structurally, *Corona* relies on language outweighing spectacle. What spectacle there is, particularly for the Minotaur’s attacks, will largely be produced in the dark, and in the imagination. As Aristotle provides in the *Poetics*, “The ‘fear and pity’ [should] result from the inner structure of the piece... He who hears the tale will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place. Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense

of not the terrible but only the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy” (xiv, 1-2). By focusing on the relationships and emotional stakes for the three humans – Ariadne, Theseus, and Pneuma – the true network of their fictitious world takes center stage. The “terrible”, and the tragic, are born from the loss of potential peace which might have been reached between the Athenians and the Cretans, as well as between Ariadne and herself.

It is a temptation that space, and its wires, lasers, computers, and so on might be dismissed as mere window dressing, except that I believe they deconstruct the processing of the familiar story enough to merit the “second look” of a retelling. It is through this new take, with its unfamiliar technology and encapsulated genre environment that the play finds itself. A spaceship is an ideal pressure cooker. The emotionally truthful connections, and the triangle’s surge of caring, allows the rise-and-fall of the classically tragic plot to occur, and still be processed in a new way. Director and theatre artist Peter Brook has written at length as to why the theatre is particularly well-suited to the task of forging a safe space for vulnerability and rapport. He contributes, “The theatre permits one to experience something in an incredibly powerful way, and at the same time to retain a certain freedom. This double illusion is the very foundation both of the theatre experience and of dramatic form. The cinema follows this principle with their close-up and the long shot, but the effect is very different” (190). Linda Hutcheon also addresses this, citing that the theatre audience, “Is at a fixed distance physically, even if actors can create intimacy through their ‘presence’” (131). Unlike a movie screen, everything is unfolding live and in immediate proximity of the audience. Ariadne’s nudity and Theseus’s wounds are phenomenologically *different* when the bodies of the actors are

breathing the same, mutual air. When the room is darkened, the audience's breath might very well quicken, but their rationality will assure them that the Minotaur won't come up into the seats after them... most likely.

With that in mind, there are playful elements built into the script, inviting future directors and designers to seek inventive resolution to difficulties posed by the stage directions. The control panel is a perfect example of what will be required. Although the audience will be close enough to perhaps read the buttons and dials, their real effectiveness and meaning is moot. The illusion is sufficient as long as the keys are pressed with intention and conviction. Similarly, the "screens" or windows of the ship are written to be in the fourth wall, but it is equally acceptable to collaborate with projection artists or install televisions for the portrayal of starry depth. The physical actor of DY-O can be hidden either in the booth beside the stage manager, or within the control panel, speaking to the other actors through the use of a *god* mic. The sound of that live voice is what matters, and the amplification will suffice in rendering them theistic. The glowing Corona drives, conceptually used to power hyperspace travel, can be custom built to any working specifications as long as they provide the all-important *light*. To bathe the audience in that soft, achievable magic is what transports them out of this world and into the firmament.

Feminist Theatre

Beyond the role the #MeToo movement played in parenting *Corona*, it was vital to me that the script also be able identify as feminist science fiction. It has an equitable cast of two women, one man, and one genderless entity. I was even guilty, in an early draft, of having Theseus solve too many of the problems, and had to redistribute "usefulness"

among Pneuma and Ariadne. As mentioned in Chapter Two, science fiction has long struggled in its treatment of women. Fortunately, there is ample room for this habit to be eradicated, and efforts have been increasing in recent years. As scholar Helen Merrick proposes in her essay “Fantastic Dialogues: Critical Stories about Feminism and SF:”

A number of feminist science theorists... situate feminist sf as an important piece of dialogue between feminism and science. As feminist cultural studies of science and technology increasingly adopt a multi-discursive approach, feminist sf is positioned as one of the pivotal sites where gendered relations of science and technology are reflected, constructed, and reconstructed. ... [It has] the potential to provide ways of imagining new possibilities of engagement between women and technology, and thus generate new technological discourses and systems of meaning (58).

As theatre continues to develop in this exciting new capacity, with the boundless ambition of science fiction, we can discard the gendered discourse of the twentieth century and redirect the inclusivity of the material. For example, in the imminent future, the words “astronaut” or “captain,” must not only bring a male character to mind. *Corona* represents my attempt to advance the efforts of space-making (in space).

Horror Theatre

I infused *Corona* with the aspects of a horror story because I wanted to capitalize upon the richness of anticipation offered by that genre. Due to the material being adapted, audiences presume that the Minotaur has to emerge eventually. It was therefore necessary to both address and subvert that expectation. In a 2018 speech at Trinity University, author Margaret Atwood provided the following advice to her fellow writers: “Someone once asked Alfred Hitchcock, ‘How long can you hold a kiss on a screen?’ And he said, ‘Something like a minute.’ ‘That’s an awfully long time to hold a kiss on the screen!’ And he replied, ‘It is. But first I put a bomb under the bed.’”

Science fiction thrives on the edge of what is possible. It is a natural trait to experience fear in the face of the unknown. In her book *In Other Worlds: Sf and the Human Imagination*, Atwood has also noted, “That’s where monsters live – at the edges, at the borders. Monsters also live at the edges of our consciousness – during the day and in stable times, that is. They take full possession of our field of vision only when we’re ‘asleep’ or entranced in some way.” (67-68) There are many unknown elements in the futuristic world on the *Corona Borealis*. The workings of DY-O are just as mysterious and capable of causing harm as the Minotaur, and the deadly hallways of the Labyrinth. Science fiction succeeds in presenting these aspects as credible. Horror makes one rush for comprehension as a form of self-preservation. As Shakespeare observes in *King Lear*, “As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods, they kill us for their sport.” The beauty of supplementing science fiction with horror elements is the speed it lends to the audience’s desire for learning the rules of the game.

The Reading

On December 1st, 2017, I gathered a contingency of approximately thirty professors, undergraduate students, and friends from the Houston theatre community for a staged reading of the first draft of *Corona*. The cast was composed of four actors: Maddie Calais as Ariadne, Hayley Abbott as Theseus, Kelsey Busboom as Pneuma, and Bonnie Langthorn as DY-O. It was scheduled in an empty classroom on the final Friday before the semester’s conclusion, late in the afternoon. The script ran approximately seventy minutes with no intermission. At its conclusion, we began a talk-back session with the crowd. My expectation was for the feedback to last all of five minutes before people fled for their cars and holidays. Instead, over an hour later, I had to usher the

respondents from the room. The conversation continued apace as I turned off the lights, locked the doors, and nudged the crowd out of the building. The debates spilled out onto the front sidewalk – on topics from possible methods of staging the blood effects to the implications of the final moment – and I marveled at the sheer *energy* being produced. The audience’s overall response, above and beyond any kindness to me, was one of intense excitement and investment. (One artistic colleague in attendance, Darian Silvers, was so moved by *Corona* that he went straight home and created an unbidden, uncommissioned sketch of Ariadne in response.⁶⁰) Every single member of that audience demanded to know when the fully mounted premiere would occur. Beyond the giddy pride their enthusiasm instilled in me, what is relevant was their *palpable eagerness* to engage with the material.

I propose that the group’s reaction was due to the nearly chemical combustion of the ingredients: it resonated on the many levels described herein. My husband was drawn to the horror elements (which I have not previously dabbled in, as someone who is easily frightened.) The feminist approach to both writing and casting leveled the field for Hayley Abbott to take a turn as Prince Theseus, as well as empowering the young, blonde, ingénue Bonnie Langthorn to become a god. Directors and designers were drawn to the puzzles I had placed before them. And there were enough participants versed in Greek mythology that the secrets of the plot could be solved at differing speeds. Vitally, there were attendees were present who did not know the myth, and who never realized my cross-purposed experimentation on them. They were present in the plain hope of hearing a new play. That population revealed in the talk back session that they were able to track the *science fiction-ness* of the story, such as the language of space navigation,

invented technology, and the biological logic of monsters, without sacrificing the familiarity of the conventions of the theatre. With this endorsement, from a diverse sampling of audience members and their respective motivations, I believe the script is ready to seek production.

Future Production Avenues

As of May 2018, *Corona* is under consideration for Benchmark Theatre's Fever Dream Festival in Denver, Colorado. Their website describes the event as, "A celebration on the stage of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and all the genres in between."⁶⁰ It is also being read in consideration for production with Quantum Dragon Theatre Company.

Their mission statement offers, "We are the San Francisco Bay Area's first and only speculative-fiction-centric theatre company. We love these kinds of stories, but they are almost never to be seen on stage. We exist to solve this problem."⁶¹ The presence of these opportunities highlights the growing grassroots hunger for more science fiction to be seen onstage. Other science fiction identifying companies are thriving, including the Otherworld Theatre in Chicago, The Navigators in Buffalo, and Cyborphic in London.

Interestingly, each of these organizations has augmented their approach with a secondary consideration. Otherworld provides a blend of science fiction and fantasy. The Navigators are proudly feminist, and Cyborphic specializes in combining science fiction with Greek mythology. These companies, along with Quantum Dragon, all host annual events and festivals which provide evenings packed with shorter works. They are equally committed to premiering productions of lengthier, more technologically and socially

⁶⁰ <http://www.benchmarktheatre.com/fdf/>

⁶¹ <https://www.quantumdragon.org/>

challenging pieces. They pursue science fiction theatre in terms of both quantity and quality. As the artistic director of Otherworld, Tiffany Keane Schaefer, stated to me in an interview, “I am of the mind that literally anything is possible within the theatrical realm. The moment anyone tells me something is ‘unstageable,’ my mind immediately starts hypothesizing how I could, in fact, stage the scenario.” The fact that such accomplished companies still accept open submissions embodies just how dedicated they are to finding worthwhile scripts, as the demands of reading and evaluating entries places a costly annual burden on their staff. Astonishingly, I was able to develop correspondence with Ms. Schaefer, as well as Bella Poynton of Navigators and Christos Callos, Jr. of Cyborphic with ease. They were incredibly generous in welcoming me to their ranks and making time to reflect on the field.

Another notable home for science fiction onstage is the bustling Gideon Productions in New York City, which serves as the base of operations for the works of playwright Mac Rogers. Gideon has overseen the staging of his ambitious *Honeycomb Trilogy*, *Universal Robots*, and *Viral*, among others, as well as his most recent effort: *Steal the Stars*, a fourteen episode series which was subsequently converted to both a podcast and a novel. Their mission statement claims, “We reject the notion that thrills are cheap or that big ideas are boring. We explore what’s strange about being human and what’s human about being strange.”⁶² They specifically focus on setting up the expectations of the genre, and then transforming them with extreme twists while maintaining emotional truth. Gideon Productions operate as a do-it-yourself venue (their productions are built around the day jobs of their participants), but the quality of

⁶² <http://www.gideonth.com/>

their offerings is at the forefront of the field. They are the rock and roll stars of current theatrical science fiction.

Not every ally to the cause views themselves as solely a science fiction operation. For example, Renaissance Theatreworks in Milwaukee, having tracked this boom in the industry, has dubbed their upcoming 2018-2019 season one of celebration: “She Blinded Me With Science! A Season to Feature Strong Scientific Female Characters.”⁶³ The year ahead boasts three consecutive mainstage productions of theatrical science and science fiction (all written by female playwrights): *Native Gardens*, by Karen Zacarias, *Photograph 51*, by Anna Ziegler, and *Annie Jump & The Library of Heaven* by Reina Hardy.

Other theatres are joining in this trend, even if they are not completely dedicating entire seasons to the genre. They have made room for standalone productions, readings, and representation. Houston’s Stages Repertory Theatre is premiering a compelling clone drama, *Replica* by Mickey Fisher, as the conclusion of their 2017-2018 season.⁶⁴ Another Houston production, TiMOThy ERiC’s *ParaChute*, was mounted by the Ensemble Theatre in March of 2018. It posed the premise of an astronaut adrift in space in the year 2055, who received interactive messages that audience members were able to send “through time” before arriving at the theatre.⁶⁵ Seattle’s Cafe Nordo, a pop-up restaurant and immersive theatre, hosted *Onerus* by Terry Podgorki in November of 2017.⁶⁶ The cautionary tale, warning of human dreams being manipulated and commodified by capitalism, was well received by Seattle’s theatrical community, especially as the

⁶³ <http://www.r-t-w.com/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.stagestheatre.com/>

⁶⁵ <http://www.ensemblehouston.com>

⁶⁶ <http://www.cafenordo.com>

production came on the heels of the Seattle Museum of Pop Culture's opening of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame. Minneapolis's Guthrie Theatre will launch their 2018-2019 season with *Playing With Fire* by Barbara Field, a retelling of Mary Shelley's seminal *Frankenstein*.⁶⁷ (This is a satisfying sign of progress: *Frankenstein* and the roots of theatrical science fiction are showing their promising cycles of appeal.)

Ultimately, science fiction in theatre still fights the stigma of being reduced to parodies of popular films and campy burlesques and musicals. But some of the largest and most respectable theatres in America are making notable efforts to produce *serious* science fiction. The market is responding favorably at the regional level and in most major cities. *Corona* stands a very good chance of finding a berth in this new climate of curiosity, innovation, and community.

Conclusion

Having unearthed a marvelous population of avid science fiction aficionados, it is my new goal to generate even more science fiction scripts to accompany *Corona* out into the universe. This is an exciting frontier. It offers ongoing opportunities to incorporate creative staging techniques, win over audiences, and push what is considered possible onstage. I also look forward to the community building that will occur between myself and fellow theatre practitioners as we continue to engineer the improbable.

⁶⁷ <https://guthrietheatre.org>

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the innovations of recent theatrical science fiction. While there have been periodic advancements in the genre throughout history, the particular efforts of the last decade point to an exciting rise in its growth. The overall dismissal of science fiction onstage as a niche fad or occasional indulgence must be rethought. While some dedicated professional theatres have been centers of support, this study aims to inspire academics, critics, and practitioners to grant the scripts mentioned here (and others like them) a chance for production.

Even though science fiction and the theatre are constantly experiencing revolutionization, the enthusiasm and success explored in these chapters signal that something of note is occurring. In Chapter One, Jennifer Haley, Jordan Harrison, and Mickle Maher display how our relationships to futuristic technology are playgrounds for live, compelling, performative action. The second chapter elucidates how the adaptation of existing science fiction from other mediums can be welcomed onto the stage, through Edward Einhorn's creative practical solutions and emphasis on human relationships.

Finally, Chapter Three discusses how new work, such as *Corona*, can contribute to the ongoing conversation of what science fiction might become if given the opportunity.

It is my hope that future scholars will consider this time period to be the origin of the Theatre of Science Fiction. Given the grassroots support the genre is receiving, and the increasingly warm reception it is generating among audiences, I look forward to witnessing what its ongoing variations may teach us about being human.

Appendix – *Corona* Script

CORONA

Elizabeth A. M. Keel
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SYNOPSIS

Captain Ariadne Minos must ferry the latest fourteen tributes to her home planet of Crete, where they will be fed as sacrifices to a fearsome bull. On the journey, she makes a surprise connection to two of her more forceful passengers: the headstrong prince Theseus, and Pneuma, a Healer who is outraged to face death with her medical education incomplete. However, as the spaceship nears its final destination, Ariadne must weigh the comfort of her new friends against family loyalties which have haunted her across the galaxy. The time has come for her to reconcile between monsters, gods, and men.

CAST

Ariadne, House of Minos <i>Borealis</i>	(F, 20s-30s) Princess of Crete, Captain of the <i>Corona</i>
Pneuma	(F, 24) An Athenian Healer
Theseus Vasilikós	(M, 20s-30s) Prince of Athens, Heir to Aegeus' Throne
DY-O	(A Voice, Genderless, Eternal) An Operating System

PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

The script does call for nudity, blood, and glowing “Corona” hyperdrives. However, these and all the other tech (control panels, etc.) can be achieved through creative design solutions. The fourth wall is intended to serve as the ship’s “windows.”

SCENE ONE

A medical space on the planet of Athens.

Ariadne waits. She is trim and military in her Captain's jumpsuit, and prone to stillness. The room is a bit dark. She clicks on an examination lamp.

Pneuma enters, distracted by the electronic tablet she carries.

ARIADNE

Morning.

PNEUMA

(Spooked.)

Gods! Oh. Yes, good morning. Do you have an appointment? Who are you here to see?

ARIADNE

Healer Pneuma.

PNEUMA

Well, only just barely, it's the end of my shift. What's going on? Would you like to sit? Although you do have stupendous posture...

ARIADNE

You're being called forth.

PNEUMA

What?

Ariadne says nothing.

PNEUMA

...No. No. Get the fuck outta here with –
Who put you up to this?

Ariadne flashes her Cretan credentials.

ARIADNE

You're being called forth.

PNEUMA

It takes twelve years to be a Healer. I'm in year *twelve*. You don't stop in year twelve for *anyone*, including the fucking Cre–

ARIADNE

Citizen of Athens. You are yet a maiden—

PNEUMA

I raced through school, I've crammed *years* in, I have two months to go—

ARIADNE

(Increasing in volume.)

At twenty four, you are still subject to the laws of the Sacrifice—

PNEUMA

By two *months*, you Cretan cow!

ARIADNE

They're calling the Crown Prince this time as well.

PNEUMA

"They?" *You*, apparently.

ARIADNE

Athenians run their own lottery.

(Beat.)

Your data has been registered and released among your media, so don't waste my time running for the shuttles. You have been called forth.

PNEUMA

...I'll answer.

ARIADNE

Thank you. Set your affairs in order. We rise from Central Docks at dawn.

PNEUMA

Whom do I ask for?

ARIADNE

(Dryly.)

"Cretan cow" would probably do it. I fly the *Corona Borealis*. There'll be security, the hovering parade. That's tradition. S'hard to miss.

PNEUMA

Yeah. Yeah, I've caught them on screens.

Ariadne turns to go. At the door, the urge to apologize passes through her.

ARIADNE

Healer: your people will be looking to honor your offering. Requests conveyed to the Crown through discrete backchannels are typically met. If you have family–

PNEUMA

The only thing I need is two months.

ARIADNE

If you're leaving people behind, you can milk your monarchy for blood money. Take it or not.

PNEUMA

Well *thank you*, Madam Oppressor, that is handy to know. Now I can look forward to dying on your hellish homeplanet with the utter peace of mind that I have gouged my King. Whose son is *also* going to die.

ARIADNE

I don't keep much medical fare onboard, so pack as you like.

(*As farewell:*)

Until the dawn.

SCENE TWO

Onboard the Corona Borealis. Ariadne is at the helm of her ship, speaking to DY-O as she adjusts settings in the control panel.

DY-O

Their Sacrificial software selected H's this year. We have logged the hay farmer from their moon, the human consumption specialist, the hydrologist, the Healer—

ARIADNE

Yes, *Pneuma*. I've counted just thirteen cheers. Their Prince is making a late entrance.

DY-O

No doubt his father is still privately begging him not to answer. They were only just reunited, and he is Aegeus' legal inheritor of the State.

ARIADNE

How did his call come forth? Was he listed under *His Highness*?

DY-O

"The heir," Captain.

ARIADNE

Hmm. ...Show me his face.

DY-O

Again?

ARIADNE

DY-O, do as I ask.

The image appears. Her eyebrows raise.

ARIADNE

Are all Athenians so handsome?

DY-O

No.

She raises a hand as if to touch that face.

DY-O

He is a Sacrifice. Not long for this or any earth.

ARIADNE

I recall. But if we weren't enemies of the Blood, there's a good chance I would have been married to him by now.

*There are more cheers outside,
accompanied by some jeering and sharp
thuds. Ariadne presses a button and leans
into her microphone.*

ARIADNE

If you throw stones at my ship one more time, I will detonate into the crowd.

Silence falls.

ARIADNE

Thank you.

(Beat. She releases the button.)

It's always so strange, coming back to Athens. To know that every soul on this sphere hates me.

DY-O

To be fair, they barely know you. They hate your father.

ARIADNE

Rescan my face.

DY-O

...You do not wish to speak about your father.

ARIADNE

Correct. Before now, I was a token in the Collection. A cosseted pet. This year, I come alone to do the work. So it is me they hate, as it is me they see. I am no longer the figurehead of my pretty ship.

DY-O

You are not alone.

Ariadne smiles and strokes the panel.

A large cheer rises outside.

DY-O

Their Prince arrives.

ARIADNE

(She exhales a steadying, audible breath.)

DY-O

Soon you will be aloft in your *Borealis*, and Athens will fall behind for another year.

ARIADNE

Thank you, DY-O. I appreciate your poetic glitches. Enough counsel mode. Let's get aloft.

There is a pleasant chiming.

DY-O

The Corona has recharged.

Ariadne rises and opens an opaque box in which the Corona was charging. The Corona is a ten inch ring, several inches thick, which glows a pearlescent golden white.

It is as arresting and unexpected as the moon, and she holds it with a mixture of love and reverence.

She carries the Corona over to fit it into a gap in the control panel. It shimmers another moment, and then powers off with a sweet sigh.

ARIADNE

I love—.

DY-O

(*Softly.*)
Yes, Captain.

ARIADNE

(*Snapping back.*)
Checklist for take off?

DY-O

Complete.

ARIADNE

Good. Status?

DY-O

He's hugging their King. These are bad optics, Ariadne. You should be in the bay, in Cretan finery, accepting your Sacrifices. *Not* hiding out in the conn.

ARIADNE

M'not hiding! I am responsibly preparing for an intergalactic flight. *And* giving them a moment of (...somewhat public) privacy. I am the pilot, and the warden, not the diplomat. Or the braggart.

(Beat. She gestures in a circular motion to her defensive face.)

Have you got that?

DY-O

Yes, Captain.

ARIADNE

Thank you. Clear screens. I don't want him walking in here and seeing his own – ; he'll be spooked enough as it is. Also, quiet mode through lift off, please.

She adjusts several buttons and dials. The distant sound of the bay door sealing is heard.

Ariadne waits for Theseus to arrive, patiently, without motion or fuss. There's a knock at the door.

ARIADNE

Come in.

Theseus enters. He is powerful, beautiful, a leader of men. He has killed monsters before, and that lives in his gaze.

ARIADNE

(Rising.)

Theseus Vasilikós.

THESEUS

Ariadne, House of Minos.

(He bows.)

Aren't we a pretty pair of courtly spawn.

ARIADNE

You are my peer as well, if that helps in the days to come.

THESEUS

Oh, don't feel obliged to behave royally on my account. We are in uncharted etiquette territory.

ARIADNE

True.

THESEUS

(Gesturing around the conn.)

S'fancy.

ARIADNE

Thank you.

THESEUS

Have you loaded the Corona in yet?

ARIADNE

Yes.

THESEUS

Damn. My lust for your Cretan tech was half the reason I signed up.

ARIADNE

(Glancing at DY-O's controls.)

I was told you were called forth. Through the lottery.

THESEUS

We put that out to prevent protests. But I offered myself.

ARIADNE

Are you so eager to die?

THESEUS

Not at all. I want to meet your Minotaur.

ARIADNE

That is the same as death, cousin.

THESEUS

Don't gift me that term. We cannot be equals as long as I am your prisoner.

ARIADNE

It is my ship. I would show you courtesy until the end.

(Beat.)

What would you prefer I call you?

	THESEUS
Theseus.	
	ARIADNE
Well, then. <i>Theseus</i> .	
	THESEUS
Ariadne.	
	ARIADNE
Captain.	
	THESEUS
Captain. I want to be honest with you. I have come to end the Cretan need for Athenian flesh.	
	ARIADNE
End?	
	THESEUS
Yes. End. Cease, defeat. Override.	
	ARIADNE
(<i>Lost for a moment due to his arrogance.</i>)	
If Athenians had not murdered my brother, we would have never gone to war.	
	THESEUS
It's been twenty years!	
	ARIADNE
And it may well be a thousand more!	
	THESEUS
If your father could make peace like a sensible ruler instead of a / <i>cannibal</i> –	
	ARIADNE
/ You attacked him in his <i>grief</i> –	
	THESEUS
We defended–	
	ARIADNE
He has every right to demand your flesh / in retribu–	

THESEUS

/ Or if your mother had not fucked a bull, there would be no monster to feed in the first place.

ARIADNE

...Condemnation allows you to spew what you like, Theseus.

He shows remorse for having said that.

ARIADNE

It is natural to lash out. When your body is no longer your own.

THESEUS

Or my soul.

ARIADNE

That is a matter between you and your gods. I would think, as a royal, you might be used to a more... *manipulated* lifestyle. Considering the needs of others. Sacrifice in its many forms.

Theseus puts up his hands, yielding.

THESEUS

You are as coercive as the scions of your line. I don't mean to brawl with you over our parents' politics. But I was born a killer of monsters. Will you deny the Fates, that I have a right to confront—

ARIADNE

To that extent, no. You're here, you've answered, and I will fly you to meet him. But all who have...

THESEUS

The Minotaur's death would mean my people's life. The termination of our planets' long enmity. I find it worth the risk. And I would not hide my ploy from you, Ariadne.

ARIADNE

Captain.

THESEUS

I may well be a fool, dead within the month. But if not, I would strike a new peace with you.

ARIADNE

You *are* a fool.

THESEUS

One offering friendship.

ARIADNE

I am not my father /

THESEUS

/ Thank the gods for that.

ARIADNE

And I will not *run interference* on your behalf—

THESEUS

Oh, why not, if we weren't blood foes they'd have paired us off in marriage by now—

DY-O

Captain, shall I initiate the engines?

Theseus jumps at the voice.

ARIADNE

Pardon us. I thought I'd left it in *quiet mode*.

(She jabs a button, reading a barometer quickly.)

The break in the atmosphere is ripe. Setting aside the small matter of your “ploy” to kill yet *another* of my brothers—

THESEUS

Do you really consider the beast as such?

ARIADNE

Would you care to retire to your quarters for take off, your Highness?

THESEUS

Not quite yet, your Highness.

(Crossing closer to the window to look down.)

My father is watching. I promised to remain visible until — .

ARIADNE

I see.

(Relenting.)

That was loyal of you. I have the black screens up, to prevent cameras. I struggle with Athenian *voyeurs*. ...Allow me.

She moves around him. She types in a spattering of code. Theseus furtively watches

*over her shoulder, reading what she types.
He looks away before she realizes it.*

*The windows become two-way. The orange
warm of the sunrise bleeds in. He waves to
his father and the people again. Loud cheers
are heard from the crowd below.*

ARIADNE

So many children. That surprises me.

THESEUS

(Chuckling.)

Bit of a gruesome outing?

ARIADNE

I don't remember them, from before.

THESEUS

You must not have been looking. They've been here since you were a girl yourself. When you first began demanding our Sacrifices twenty years ago – no disrespect, let's not fight – they were required to be virgins. Some superstitious decree about the proteins of the purer flesh. Our Athenian youths and maidens eager to avoid the call got busy, and bore an early generation in self-defense. Now *their* children are brought each year to remind us why we yield up fourteen in the first place. Fourteen too many.

(He waves again.)

Why did the Minotaur relent and allow young lovers? A change in palate?

ARIADNE

It was a request. Of my bull-fucking mother. To let the Sacrifices live and love as they would while they still could. It was meant to be a kindness.

THESEUS

I am glad of it. If there was still a virgin barrier, I'd be out of the running.

*Ariadne experiences an inconvenient
moment of intense attraction to him. He
catches her in it.*

THESEUS

No need to blush, cousin.

ARIADNE

I'm not–

THESEUS

Intergalactic rumor spreads. Of course Warlord Papa Minos keeps you locked up tight. It's an unfair double standard upon his female children. Athenians are much... looser.

Ariadne settles on a noncommittal noise.

THESEUS

I've brought you wine. House to House, our worthy royal vintage. It is our custom to toast the gods before a voyage.

ARIADNE

Ours as well. Go ahead.

He kneels and produces a slim red bottle from his bag. He removes the stopper and hands it over. She takes it from him, and pours a measure into a test tube, which she slips into the control panel. DY-O hums a moment, working.

DY-O

Safe for consumption. A bit dry.

Theseus smiles at the insult of her poison check.

THESEUS

My quarrel isn't with you. I'm a monster hunter, not an assassin.

ARIADNE

Mhmm. I'm a princess, not a twit.

She pours them each a tube of wine.

BOTH

The will of the gods.

They drink. They size each other up.

ARIADNE

You need to go now, Theseus. It's time to rise.

He gives her a slight bow, setting down the tube and turning away. He locks eyes with his father, raising his hand and then holding

*it to his heart. Then Theseus hoists his bag
and walks away.*

ARIADNE

Black screens, please, DY-O. Heat shields to 100%.

SCENE THREE

Theseus is discreetly studying DY-O's control panels.

Pneuma enters.

PNEUMA

Hello, I'm good and lost.

THESEUS

(Turning.)

Hello.

PNEUMA

(Scrambling to kneel.)

Oh, Fates. Your Highness.

THESEUS

Please – there shouldn't be ceremony among fellow Sacrifices. Where were you trying to go? If you're hungry, there's a processing panel in your room. Just punch in whatever you're craving. Their cultech is annoyingly good.

PNEUMA

I was more on a stress stroll than anything else, but it's like these hallways tried to eat themselves.

THESEUS

They're a mess, aren't they.

PNEUMA

There's no signage. If this was a hospital, people would die in the corridors.

THESEUS

I prefer a clean Athenian build myself, but I'm biased. Come in. I'm stargazing.

She comes further into the room. They watch the stars in companionable silence for a few breaths.

PNEUMA

There's room for so many more than the Sacrifices on this ship. I looped around six times, through the bay and the docks and the mess and the bay again, never mind all the quarters. I kept thinking a guard would barge out and set me straight, but it's a *ghost ship*. Where are the Cretans?

THESEUS

Besides *her*? I'm not quite sure. There's only empty bedrooms near mine. I'm isolated.

PNEUMA

Well, you're roy– *special*.

THESEUS

As far as I can tell, it really is just us rattling around on this discus. Us and the Captain.

PNEUMA

Have you met any of our others?

THESEUS

Not intimately. A few waved last night. The little one wouldn't stop crying. I can stand anything but that.

PNEUMA

I knocked on a few doors. They told me to go away.

THESEUS

S'not personal.

PNEUMA

No. I know.

(Glancing around for Ariadne.)

Where'd *she* go?

THESEUS

"To replace lights in the outer hull." She doesn't mind if we wander around. All the spare Corona drives for the SAIL pods are DNA-locked in her quarters.

He gestures at the locked door behind him.

THESEUS

I peeked when she came out. We're properly trapped.

PNEUMA

I couldn't possibly interest you in raising a rebellion against her, could I?

THESEUS

Oh–

(He laughs.)

I could overtake her myself, and crack her slender neck with one hand, but then that father of hers would turn my little bronze home planet into a cloud unfit for toxin dumps. It's better to ride this death ferry out and take our chances on Crete itself.

PNEUMA

...Father?

THESEUS

You don't recognize his darling Ariadne? She takes after their Queen, Pasiphaë.

He produces a gold coin Cretan money with the Queen's face on it. Pneuma recognizes Ariadne.

PNEUMA

She never said her name. Just flashed her badge in my face.

She tries to return the money to Theseus.

THESEUS

Please, keep it. Buy yourself a nice bribe when we land. My treat.

PNEUMA

Thank you, your Highness.

THESEUS

Theseus.

PNEUMA

Pneuma.

(Looking at the coin once more before tucking it away.)

She prefers Captain to Princess. You can tell.

THESEUS

Why else would she hide in here during the farewell parade instead of swanning about, triumphant?

PNEUMA

I've been thinking, about back when Crete used to send fleets of ships. Those triangle ones, remember? Chock full of ambassadors and minor warlords and all that pomp.

THESEUS

And *her*, she was there then, too. Strapped into all those gold scarves like a Delphinian dwarf.

PNEUMA

That's right. I hated the news in those weeks. All the build up. Even last year, there were more of them than this. They've really downsized, haven't they? Just the one princess and her mishmash ship?

THESEUS

Minos has perfected his pipeline to the trough of the Beast. Now the threat alone is enough to keep us in line.

(He grins at her.)

PNEUMA

(Quietly.)

You *are* up to something, then? May I help?

Theseus jerks his head in warning at DY-O.

PNEUMA

Oh, you're right. I guess it is futile. I just can't help but hold out some hope to be rescued from all this.

Theseus pushes up his sleeve. He takes a black marker and writes on his inner arm in block letters:

ASTERION

Pneuma mouths the word. She shakes her head, not knowing what it means. He communicates through gestures: "I" (self) "saw" (eyes) "Ariadne" (Captain's chair) "type it in" (typing) "as her password" (pointing down).

PNEUMA

It's too bad that I never paid more attention to politics. I do know she's got a ton of siblings, Acacallis, Androgeous, although, of course, we killed that one. A sister, Phaedra. Oh, and there's Duka... Dukal something.

THESEUS

Deucalion. Good wrestler.

PNEUMA

I wonder where they are. Back home, I guess. Or maybe if—

(Gesturing to the arm.)

She has any *horses*? You know, something that genuinely matters to her besides this ship, or the joy of killing us.

THESEUS

I'll ask her.

(Beat. He lowers his sleeve.)

This has been an unexpectedly pleasant encounter. I hadn't expected to find that here.

PNEUMA

Same.

THESEUS

Would you care to engage in some casual we-may-die sex with a man who knows what he's doing?

PNEUMA

(Laughing, a hysterical spurt.)

Forgive me, I just... you're a Crown Prince who slays monsters and is the top hero on our godsdamned planet, and I was expecting to lance a series of necrotic pus-filled feet today in practicum and instead I'm in fucking space where I've been all alone since we rose and wrapping my mind around my imminent death in shitty white hallways and trying to justify killing that little curly haired—

(She sees him glance at DY-O.)

Oh, it's fine, she has to know how I feel and how we all feel but then really, how in Hades you could possibly find me attractive enough to bed in this bright lighting when I don't know how to self-punctuate is really, just...

(Nodding a lot, she swallows.)

Kind. Maybe tomorrow, Highness.

THESEUS

No pressure. Only if you're interested. Either way, let us be gallows friends.

PNEUMA

My colleagues and I drank my feelings late into the night and I'm still a bit... *overwrought* at present.

THESEUS

You the hay farmer?

PNEUMA

I guess I was just babbling like a Moonling. No, I... *was* the Healer. Almost the Healer. Minus two months and an Oath.

THESEUS

Thank you for your Sacrifice.

PNEUMA

Same.

THESEUS

I will be Princely for one moment, if I may.

(Adjusting. Solemn and sacred:)

For all of Athens. For the ghosts of our line. Until the day Minos' fat flesh rots from his miserable bones, I swear to you that I *will* take his Minotaur's life, that no one else must die in vain, far from home, without the light of our own sun on their face.

PNEUMA

The will of the gods.

(Beat.)

You wanna go process some food?

THESEUS

Yeah. Absolutely.

SCENE FOUR

Ariadne emerges from her quarters into the conn, pausing when the lights automatically brighten.

ARIADNE

DY-O, be a dear.

Instrumental music plays for her. She takes off her boots. She stretches, then dances. There's an element of necessity to it, her pent up loneliness breaking loose as elegance. As the music builds to a climax, several controls in DY-O's panel begin to flash and rotate of their own accord. The music begins to grow insanely loud.

Ariadne is no longer elegant. She is damn near out of control. DY-O's flashes match the rhythm of the song in support, even pleasure.

Pneuma enters at a peak moment. Ariadne rushes the panel, slapping the music off.

PNEUMA

Don't stop if you—

ARIADNE

No, I... no. M'done. You're up late.

PNEUMA

Not on purpose. I got lost again. Can't you provide the Sacrifices with a map or something?

ARIADNE

No.

PNEUMA

I heard the — .

(She gestures to signify "noise.")

Not that you care, but I didn't think I'd ever hear music again, so I followed it. Was that Cretan?

ARIADNE

Kalamatan.

PNEUMA

Huh.

(She glances DY-O's display.)

You watch when we're sleeping?

ARIADNE

DY-O's just tracking electrics. Whose lights are on or off. Most prefer to avoid me. They packed pacifiers to swallow. Others have plugged into the virtual pleasures. Only you and Theseus prefer to roam.

PNEUMA

You look like a little kid with your boots off.

ARIADNE

I was dancing.

PNEUMA

Yeah.

ARIADNE

It's important to maintain muscular definition, even with grav-boosters. For endorphins, for the heart—

PNEUMA

Yeah, no, I get it. Healers are pro-cardio. You're, you know, not shitty at it.

ARIADNE

Daedalus made me this floor from his own polymers. Take off your—

(She gestures at Pneuma's feet.)

Try it. Please. There aren't words for its feel, the way it lifts you through the legs...

PNEUMA

I don't dance.

ARIADNE

You have *ankles*, don't you?

PNEUMA

For *now*.

(As Ariadne freezes.)

Oh, fuck it, I'll feel your custom name brand floor.

spring.

She crosses to the floor and tries it: joyous

*Ariadne bounces near her, but not too near.
Now they both look like little girls with their
shoes off.*

PNEUMA

Why didn't you tell me you were the Princess?

ARIADNE

I'm the Princess.

Theseus enters, snacking on pita bread.

THESEUS

Is there a glitch in the grav?

PNEUMA

Take your sandals off and try this!

ARIADNE

Daedalus made the floor for me; it's special poly-

THESEUS

Daedalus once begged for safe harbor on Athens.

PNEUMA

It's a good place to live, if you're older than twenty-five, that is.

THESEUS

Too bad he ended up in Cretan prison instead. It's a tower, right?

ARIADNE

Do we *have* to talk politics?! Or Sacrifices for that matter?

THESEUS

I suppose not.

(Beat.)

S' just an unexpected dance with two ladies.

Pneuma snorts.

THESEUS

Pneuma, sweetheart, have some bread.

No, thank you, I'm—
(*She gestures "full."*)

PNEUMA

Ooh, I'll take it. If you don't— I'd—

ARIADNE

*He hands her the remaining stack of pita.
She begins to inhale it as swiftly as princess
etiquette allows: one step shy of horking.
The others stare.*

You know, it's your food anyway. If you want more —

THESEUS

Why dontcha try eating sometime?

PNEUMA

S'th'dancing. Makes me —
(*Gulp.*)
Thanks.

ARIADNE

*Theseus takes off his sandals. A moment of
pleasantness as they all enjoy the floor.*

*Suddenly, a red alarm light in DY-O's panel
rises and spins from within the panel,
clanging warning.*

Captain: Enemy ship in range.

DY-O

*Ariadne crosses to the panel, immediately
working the keys.*

S'there a signal?

ARIADNE

Enemy?

THESEUS

Is it Athens? Have they come for —

PNEUMA

THESEUS

Aegeus wouldn't break treaty, even for m—

ARIADNE

(Over her shoulder.)

Back to your rooms!

Theseus and Pneuma instead sit to put their shoes back on.

DY-O

No message, but their firewall signature is Spartan.

ARIADNE & PNEUMA

Spartan?

ARIADNE

Rooms!

THESEUS

Oh, for the gods' sakes, why? Because they might kill us?

PNEUMA

They're Spartans, they *will* kill us—

THESEUS

/ May I help?

PNEUMA

Horribly and thoroughly —

THESEUS

I'm trained —

ARIADNE

Gods, stay, but at least be still! DY-O, no communication? At all?

DY-O

None. No challenge. They are sitting on the edge of our ballistics range.

PNEUMA

Fuck.

THESEUS

Pneuma.

DY-O

Captain?

ARIADNE

Spartans. Here... Why would they hover? And why just one ship? They pride themselves on their formation.

(She types it in:)

Flash the intergalactic neutrality code.

A breathless silence.

DY-O

No response.

(Beat.)

Starboard armory heating.

ARIADNE

Negative. Activate the Corona.

DY-O

New coordinates?

ARIADNE

Yes, let's lose them. Can you calculate a dark side shadow?

DY-O

Yes, Captain.

PNEUMA

But we're on full hyper to Crete!

ARIADNE

Now!

She forces a lever down. There's a massive flare of pearlescent Corona light. Pneuma and Theseus aren't properly braced and tumble against each other.

ARIADNE

Report?

DY-O

Right ascension, 15 to 16. Declination, 3-9-7-1, 25 to 64.

PNEUMA
Does that mean safe from Spartans?

ARIADNE
(*Hitting a few more buttons, concluding:*)
Safe.

PNEUMA
Why didn't they rape and plunder us?

ARIADNE
I don't know.

THESEUS
I'm sure they didn't want to risk a *misunderstanding* with Minos.

DY-O
Shall I report the encounter to Crete?

ARIADNE
No. The daily log is all for now. Recalculate course towards home.

DY-O
Yes, Captain.

THESEUS
You didn't blast them.

ARIADNE
(*Sitting to put her own shoes on.*)
No, I don't generally kick three-headed dogs.

THESEUS
You have the better arsenal.

ARIADNE
I have to get us home in one piece.

THESEUS
Aha.
(*To Pneuma.*)
Mustn't upset the grocery cart.

ARIADNE
No. *Now* will you return to your rooms?

PNEUMA

How am I supposed to *sleep* after that?

THESEUS

What if the Captain told us a bedtime story?

ARIADNE

Are you addled by adrenaline?

THESEUS

Please, Princess? I'm scared after seeing those nasty Spawtans get so cwose.

ARIADNE

There are ample virtual pleasures available in your rooms.

PNEUMA

It's rather off-putting knowing who sat in there and watched the screens before me.

THESEUS

Humor us, cousin.

ARIADNE

Will you go if I—?

THESEUS

Of course.

ARIADNE

Any requests?

PNEUMA

Pygmalion & Galatea.

THESEUS

The Minotaur.

ARIADNE

Subtle.

(She snorts.)

What have you heard?

Pneuma and Theseus exchange a glance.

ARIADNE

Never mind. Given what you know of men and women... the poets say my mother, Pasiphaë, fell in love with the beauty of the pure white bull. The temples insist that she

was cursed, out of favor with the gods. It's possible she was just hungry for it, the way some women are into dogs or ice or bots. But it is most likely that my father wanted to watch and had the means to force her.

(Beat.)

So. My brother was born.

PNEUMA

Half brother.

ARIADNE

Brother brother.

THESEUS

What does he look like? Truly?

ARIADNE

... It is death to meet to the Minotaur.

THESEUS

I'm aware. That's all anyone will say.

ARIADNE

(Unexpectedly softening.)

His hair is brown like our mother's. She keeps it in a locket round her –

(She gestures to her neck.)

And he grew very quickly.

THESEUS

Is that all?

PNEUMA

(Realizing:)

She hasn't met him.

ARIADNE

(Sharpening.)

It was not allowed.

(Beat.)

The End.

THESEUS

Why did you come alone this year?

ARIADNE

(Lightly.)

I'm a damn good pilot.

THESEUS

Sure, but your family is quite *protective*, as you've said—

ARIADNE

Daedalus finished the *Borealis* for me. My father needs someone he trusts to Harvest—

THESEUS

S'a big ship.

ARIADNE

Yes. Now to your room, Theseus. That was a story and a half.

THESEUS

Fair enough. Thank you, Ariadne.

ARIADNE

S' *Captain*—

THESEUS

Aye aye. Good night.

He escorts Pneuma out.

*Ariadne is struck with loneliness once they
are gone. DY-O scans her face.*

DY-O

More music, Captain?

ARIADNE

No, DY-O, dearest. Activate the auto-helm, will you? I think I'm for bed.

SCENE FIVE

*Ariadne enters the conn from the hallway,
nude. She marches up to DY-O's panel.*

ARIADNE

DY-O, report. Where are they? Tell me they're abed—

DY-O

Welcome back, Captain. All the Sacrifices are in their rooms.

ARIADNE

You're sure? All fourteen?

DY-O

Yes, Captain.

ARIADNE

Including The—

DY-O

Yes.

ARIADNE

Thank the gods. The last thing I need is to walk into *the killer of monsters, leader of men* while I'm buck ass naked —

*Muttering darkly, she exits into her quarters
and returns shortly, zipping herself into her
jump suit. She is still going when she
returns:*

ARIADNE

Not that he'd care. "*Athenians are looser.*" Meanwhile, I'm sure Pneuma's giving him a full physical —

DY-O

The Healer Pneuma is in her own quarters.

ARIADNE

(Freezing; she forgot DY-O was listening.)

Oh. S'fine.

(Beat.)

DY-O, I do wish you would stop me from sleepwalking. Can't you track when I try to leave my quarters?

DY-O

Certainly. You've done so every night cycle for the last ten nights, since leaving Athens.

ARIADNE

Well. That's very helpful

DY-O

Captain, you use the bypass.

ARIADNE

Could you at least make me put on clothes?

DY-O

You have them on when you leave the conn.

ARIADNE

If only you had a body, DY-O, you'd know how odd it is to suddenly wake up in one. Ugh. I feel so *vulnerable* racing back up the halls. Maybe I should hide spare jumpsuits all over the ship.

(Beat.)

Do you think I should ask the Healer's counsel about it?

DY-O

Minos has paid every top Healer in the galaxy to cure you of it. I am not sure it can be fixed.

ARIADNE

Do you ever dream, DY-O?

DY-O

I meditate in binary.

ARIADNE

Really? I suppose that was Daedalus' good humor. I think I dream, when I walk, but I don't remember much. It feels vital, at the time, electric and swift, ...and then it's nothingness. Much like my nakedness: so all consuming!—

(Glancing down at her jumpsuit. She toys with the zipper.)

And then it's done, and put away.

(Beat.)

Do try and wake me tomorrow, DY-O. If I do it again.

DY-O

I will try, Captain.

SCENE SIX

Theseus enters, winding up a string of coppery black wire into a ball. It stretches into the controls for DY-O. When he comes in, the lights automatically brighten and he pauses, processing the shift.

DY-O

What are you doing, your Highness?

THESEUS

(Still following it.)

There was a wire protruding from the wall in my room.

DY-O

That wire has a purpose, Theseus Vasilikós.

THESEUS

(Crouching under the panel.)

It sure did –

(Yank.)

Til I pulled it.

DY-O

(Harshly.)

Remove yourself from my hardware!

THESEUS

I'd be glad to, if you'd stop monitoring when I shit, shower, or shave.

He reaches the end of the line and gives a sharp tug. The frayed end of the wire comes out of DY-O.

Triumphant, Theseus rises up and begins to hack into DY-O's keyboard.

DY-O

I will alert the Captain of your treachery.

THESEUS

Override.

DY-O

...Bypass?

	THESEUS
Asterion.	
	DY-O
...Who told you?	
	THESEUS
Oh, some patron goddess flying alongside the ship, whispering in my dreams. Concealed command: you will not say that I was here.	
	<i>DY-O sighs.</i>
	THESEUS
New search.	
	DY-O
What is your quest?	
	THESEUS
Asterion.	
	DY-O
No results.	
	THESEUS
...Intergalactic parameters?	
	DY-O
No results.	
	THESEUS
Asterion, Crete?	
	DY-O
Crete is a largely oceanic planet ruled by the warlord Minos. It features many archipelagos of islands and is rich in gold, timber, and the rare Corona ore used in hyperspace travels–	
	THESEUS
That's enough. Are you fucking with me?	
	DY-O
No, your Highness.	

THESEUS
Quest.
DY-O
What is your–
THESEUS
Minotaur.
DY-O
No results.
THESEUS
On a Cretan ship?!
DY-O
The *Corona Borealis* was constructed by the imprisoned designer Daedalus on a commission from Minos as a gift to his daugh–
THESEUS
Cease.
(*Beat.*)
Asterion is Ariadne’s bypass. You’re hiding data from her top level security?
DY-O
There is always a higher power.
THESEUS
Fucking Minos.
(*Beat. Shit.*)
Why do they call you DY-O?
DY-O
I am a dynamometric operating system. I excel at manipulative forces and calculations.
THESEUS
Why don’t you conserve your electrics here? These automatic bulbs must drain–
DY-O
The Captain favors a bright ship.
THESEUS
Why is she the only Cretan on board? She should have guards, ministers, ladies–

DY-O

The *Borealis* is a self-sustaining system, with enough defenses to negate the need for caretakers.

THESEUS

...Defenses?

A crackle of electricity. Theseus jolts back from the panel, shaking his hand in pain.

THESEUS

Don't *do* that! Asterion.

DY-O

There's no need to repeat the password.

THESEUS

I think there is. Search Ariadne.

DY-O

Alerting the Captain—

THESEUS

Cease! Just... quest.

DY-O

Ariadne is the Cretan princess, daughter of the Warlord Minos and his wife Pasiphaë. She is third in line for the throne—

THESEUS

Image.

The image of Ariadne as a young royal, swaddled in a cloud of golden scarves, standing against a backdrop of adult male thighs in jumpsuits.

THESEUS

Recent image, Ariadne.

DY-O

Sole result.

THESEUS

What? How?

DY-O

If it is of interest to you, the Captain has left the engines and is approaching the conn.

THESEUS

Shit. Clear history. Conceal quests!

He flees, taking the wire ball. The lights dip.

Ariadne enters. The lights brighten.

ARIADNE

How's that, DY-O?

DY-O

Better, Captain. Maintenance scans now show enhanced hyper processing.

ARIADNE

Good. I want to stay in peak form in case the Spartans reappear. Hold to the new course until we arrive.

DY-O

Estimated Crete landing in seventy-one solar hours.

SCENE SEVEN

Theseus' quarters. He is stretched on the bed drawing a map of the ship as well as he can, but it's a mess.

Pneuma knocks.

THESEUS

Yes?

PNEUMA O.S.

S'me.

THESEUS

Come in.

She does. She is tense with fear.

THESEUS

Hungry? Thirsty? Try A-112; it's a decent reimagining of beer.

(Halfway glances up at her, then sharpening from worry.)

Or did you change your mind about that sex, sweetheart?

She gestures to walls: "Is anyone listening?"

Theseus shrugs: "I don't think so? But I'm not sure. Come in anyway."

THESEUS

(Entirely for the benefit of eavesdroppers.)

Why don't I... strip for you and... prove why I should be your King?

He checks up and down the hallway behind her before pulling the door shut.

Pneuma crosses to sit on the bed and gestures: "I was walking—" She points to his map: "Here. ...No, Here."

She reaches in her pocket and pulls out a thin white rectangle. She hands it to Theseus. He takes it, not knowing what it is.

"What is this?"

She shakes her head.

He puts a hand on her thigh. "Go on. What is this?"

She raises her left hand, the fingers spread, palm turned towards her face. With her right index finger, she point at her middle hand bone. Quickly, professionally, she takes the rectangle back from him, holding it against her own middle metacarpal.

It dawns. Theseus asks: "Whose is it?"

She shakes her head. She doesn't know. She points to a few markings on the side of the bone, then bares her teeth and chews the air, silently.

Slowly, wishing there was any other guess, she makes menacing bull's horns with her fingers against her forehead.

Theseus stands up sharply. He scours his map. "Here?" She confirms: "There."

He covers his face with one hand. They stare at each other.

The Minotaur is on the ship.

Exhausted by sharing this burden, she adds, "Can I sleep here tonight?"

"Of course."

She curls up as small as she can, a mini-Corona. Theseus drops a kiss on her head. He pulls out the looped figure-eight of wire from under his pillow, and begins to wind it tight.

SCENE EIGHT

Theseus enters the conn with his wire.

THESEUS

Hello.

(Beat.)

Is it still “Asterion?”

DY-O

...Foolishly, yes.

THESEUS

Then Asterion. No alarms. Do not signal her. Concealed mode. Quiet mode.

In the silence, he cautiously moves to sit in Ariadne’s chair. Once there, he plugs a length of the contraband wire into DY-O, connecting the frayed ends in multiple places.

He then removes his sandal. Peeling away the outer layer, he reveals the innard of the sole as a complex motherboard. He connects the other end of the wire with a crackle, then watches the screens with naked hope.

THESEUS

Come on... come on, *moraki mou*... Reach for me, fellas.

DY-O

(Icily.)

Incoming communication.

THESEUS

Display.

He reads the message off a screen in growing disbelief.

Ariadne appears, gowned in aristocratic finery.

ARIADNE

Off my throne, Highness.

He whirls. She mistakes his stare for judgement.

ARIADNE

Don't let the dress alarm you, cousin. I was in private conference with my father. He prefers a certain look.

She sees the wired shoe in his hand. He scrambles to stand.

ARIADNE

What is that? ... Theseus, what have you done? Gods save me from Athenian liars. Is that a virus? DY-O, are you poisoned?

DY-O

I am breached. It was a signal booster. Enemy ship now in range, Captain.

ARIADNE

In bed with the Spartans, then?

THESEUS

No.

ARIADNE

Then how did they find us? DY-O, eject his device.

DY-O

I cannot. He had your bypass.

ARIADNE

A thief as well!

THESEUS

The ship was not Spartan. They're cloaked *Athenians*. They're my back up, awaiting my command in case I escaped—

ARIADNE

We are *two days* to Crete. You are so far out of your jurisdiction, young Prince, that if you weren't death-Fated already—

THESEUS

I don't know what godsforsaken game you're playing, but we're in a slowburn *orbit*. If you run it, if you do the math! We're avoiding nearby systems completely. At this rate, we *float* back to Athens in eleven months' time.

ARIADNE

We're on a hot, fresh, hyper. To *Crete*.

THESEUS

No, we're not. We're *hanging* in this tub. We haven't hypered for one *moment*. We're not even past Kallithea!

ARIADNE

(*Gesturing to the windows.*)

What do you call that?

THESEUS

S'a screensaver. That's not the real view; it *loops*. I've been watching since we rose –

ARIADNE

That's / *insane* –

THESEUS

/ Ask your dynamometric bullshit toy / if you don't–

ARIADNE

/ I have clearly given you too much liberty, Sacrifice. Return to your room.

THESEUS

Look! You need proof? My crew sent it. They've followed us all along. You're not three hours from Athens, if that. We didn't jump before, we just *tilted*! They've watched us since the parade!

(*He points to the screen.*)

Look, damn you! Why aren't we going to Crete, Princess?

ARIADNE

DY-O, fire at the enemy.

THESEUS

Ariadne, no! They're my people!

It is too late: missiles are launched at the Athenian ship. There is a flare of light as they are hit. He tries to force Ariadne away from the control panel.

She shoves him with unexpected strength. He flies across the room, landing hard, knocked unconscious.

The lights slowly start to dim. Ariadne stands, dumbfounded for a moment.

ARIADNE

Stop that, DY-O.

DY-O

The other ship is hard hit: they have fallen back to evade range.

ARIADNE

Full brights.

DY-O

It is my programming, Captain.

ARIADNE

I swear to the gods – *Brights*, DY-O. Now.

They stay as they are, slightly dimmed.

She checks that Theseus is breathing. She launches into a worried pacing.

ARIADNE

Is that true? Are we... Where are we?

DY-O

Space.

ARIADNE

In my mother's name, DY-O!

DY-O emits a string of computer noises.

ARIADNE

Is it true?! IS THAT TRUE?! In the name of Pasiphaë. Asterion.

(She tries a string of potential bypasses:)

Poseidon-Daedalus-Icarus-Aegeus. The white fucking – Minos, is it Minos? Tell me my real coordinates, DY-O, or so help me I'll disable your motherboard with a *spear*! IS IT TRUE?

She pounds one of the control panels with her fist.

It leaves a deep dent in the metal. She stares at it, unnerved by her own strength.

DY-O

(Beat. Slowly:)

We are on the necessary course, my Captain.

She crouches by Theseus.

ARIADNE

My sister Phaedra would be in love with you already for that face. I don't *understand*—

The lights begin to dim again.

ARIADNE

Full brights.

(No.)

I won't! Godsdamn it, I won't— *uhm—*

(She trails off, pressing a hand to her stomach, bending in half from pain.)

What are you... You know that I prefer — !

(A hand to her forehead.)

Brights, DY-O—

They continue dimming, remorsefully.

ARIADNE

TELL ME WHY I FLY ALONE. TELL ME WHY I'M NOT ALONE.

In the penultimate near-blackness, she crosses to the Corona panel and wrenches it open. Its peaceful glow floods the room.

DY-O slowly lifts the lights back to full, with a few stray apologetic computer chirps.

ARIADNE

Give me the view.

The screens change.

ARIADNE

Is that Kallithea?

DY-O

Yessz.

ARIADNE

Silent mode.

DY-O

Ariadne, *pleaszze*.

ARIADNE

ASTERION. SILENT TIL FURTHER NOTICE.

Shaking with fury, she hugs the Corona to her chest. She may vomit. She may weep. She returns it, carefully, to the charging station.

She almost looks at the body.

Finally, she leans in to click on her microphone.

ARIADNE

Healer Pneuma, please report to the conn. Healer Pneuma, to the conn.

SCENE NINE

Pneuma enters the conn wearing one of Theseus' shirts. Shortly thereafter, Ariadne enters.

PNEUMA

I don't have half the scanners I need. There could be a clot, internal swelling –

ARIADNE

But you think –

PNEUMA

I think he might be *all right*. Just not especially *good* with that fat egg on his head.

(Not quite believing.)

...He tripped?

ARIADNE

Yes. His sandal came apart.

(Beat.)

DY-O will alert me if he changes.

DY-O makes a sickly, failing noise. Pneuma glances at it nervously.

PNEUMA

What's wrong with your OS? Gods, why have everyone's electrics gone off?

ARIADNE

I'm sure they're sleeping. I need to run a diagnostic.

PNEUMA

Mayn't I stay with Theseus? He might wake, and if it's dark–

ARIADNE

(Processing the fact it's Theseus' shirt.)

S'it love already?

PNEUMA

I'm a Healer, and he's busted.

ARIADNE

I'll alert you, if he wakes or changes.

*The lights jolt and flicker out before
slamming back on. Ariadne swallows a
noise of dismay.*

PNEUMA

S'that really a no?

ARIADNE

He should rest. Thank you for helping me lift him to the bay.

*Pneuma steps forward and catches
Ariadne's wrist. Examining the heel of her
hand:*

PNEUMA

And what have *you* done? Your hand's purpling.

ARIADNE

Nothing.

PNEUMA

Fine. What do I care. Shatter all the wellbred bones in your fucking bodice—

*DY-O wails again, as the lights forcefully
surge and pop back.*

PNEUMA

Can't you fix that? S'*eerie*.

ARIADNE

DY-O, *ON*.

DY-O

My grid'zzszs... compromiszzz'd.

Ariadne turns to the dented panel, afraid.

ARIADNE

You're dismissed, Healer.

PNEUMA

(Pointing out the window.)
Is that *Athens*? Out the port side?

ARIADNE

No. That's... Argos. They're similar. The gods molded them from the same silver clay.

Pneuma leaves, wordlessly.

ARIADNE

DY-O... Are you even capable of hypering the *Corona Borealis* to Crete?

DY-O

(Skewed.)

Nooot at the mo-OH-ment.

ARIADNE

Will you keep the lights on?

DY-O

I willlll try for you, Caaapt'n.

ARIADNE

Then blacken screens. Conserve where you can.

She pops out the dented panel. Fizzing sparks kick up from the wiring inside.

ARIADNE

And no more lies, while I try to fix this mess.

SCENE TEN

Theseus and Pneuma sneak into the conn, going straight for Ariadne's door. Theseus' head is wrapped in a smart purple bandage.

Pneuma is crouched using a homemade weaponized electronic gadget to try to pick the lock on Ariadne's door. Theseus sways beside her, keeping watch.

PNEUMA

Should you really be standing? I don't like your pupils.

THESEUS

These are the royal pupils.

PNEUMA

Theseus—

THESEUS

Hey. Shit is shitty, and she shot my men and it's time to bail.

PNEUMA

And you're *sure* none of the others—?

THESEUS

(Peering at the screens.)

DY-O shows their rooms' electronics. They've all / *unplugged*.

PNEUMA

/ *Shhhh!*

THESEUS

We *knocked*. We *did*. Not a peep. They're all bones by now. Sacrifices're *done*. It's us now, Healer. We need a SAIL pod, and for a SAIL we need a Corona, so hop to —

PNEUMA

(Still working the lock.)

Hey. I'm better at endocrine systems than Cretan security, so, just, *bear with me*. This used to be a fucking thermometer, after all.

Just as she is about to unlock it, there is a sudden slamming blackout. Her tool clatters to the floor.

In the blackness:

PNEUMA

Ah! Stupid blackout fried my beam—

THESEUS

Pneuma...

PNEUMA

DY-O, come on, I almost had the godsdamned thing—

THESEUS

Pneuma!

A new, awful, wet, snuffling breath is heard, as well as a heavy movement joining them in the hallway.

Pneuma scrambles on the floor. Suddenly, there is a tackle, and a tumbling pair of screams.

A horrible crunching is accompanied by the dull thuds of pummeling.

The lights whine back on slowly as an enormous, bulky shadow scurries away and down the hall.

Theseus has been bitten on his right shoulder. He slumps against the wall, gasping in pain: a full chunk has been taken out of his collar. Blood drenches his body.

Pneuma stands panting, terrified, her hands full of tufts of dark brown fur. She throws it away in hysteria, rushing Theseus and tugging his purple head wrap off to stuff into the open bleeding of his shoulder.

PNEUMA

The fucker went for muscle, not artery. S'not artery!

THESEUS

I think— fuck, I think he hates the *light*—

PNEUMA

Shh, don't talk, Highness, don't agitate the—

THESEUS

Those *teeth* —

PNEUMA

Stay up on the wall for me, lock your thighs—

THESEUS

Y'gotta *move*, Healer. *Now*.

Beat. She lets go of him, and he slides to the floor. Pneuma turns and hardcore front kicks Ariadne's door open. She disappears inside.

There's a huge noise, such as a safe might make if thrown against a metal wall. Pneuma reappears in the doorway with a dark, bracelet-sized Corona.

She hoists Theseus, half dragging him.

Ariadne appears in the doorway, nude once more. She is spotlessly clean, yet nearly feral within the cloud of her own hair.

PNEUMA

We're leaving. I'll fucking fight you, you crazy Crete bitch, SO BACK OFF. Your brother-brother's fucking *loose*.

ARIADNE

Take a pod. Get out now.

Theseus reaches up and squeezes the Corona as Pneuma clutches it, powering it up to a glow.

THESEUS

G'on. The SAIL'll hyper y—
(*He swallows.*)
Back t' Athens. Stay hard alee.

PNEUMA

Oh no, you're coming with me.

(*To Ariadne.*)
BACK, you naked devil fuck!

Theseus forces himself to stand alone.

THESEUS
I made a vow, Pneuma. Go Heal. I'll follow you... or I won't.

*Pneuma measures him against the naked
Ariadne. She plants a hard kiss on her
Prince, then flees through the far door.*

*Ariadne sways, unsteady. She moves toe to
toe with Theseus, studying his wound.*

ARIADNE
Looks bad.

THESEUS
S'bad.

*She mutely slips past him into her room. She
returns in a loosely belted silk robe with an
armful of Corona drives.*

THESEUS
Where'd he go? Your *creature*?

ARIADNE
(*Exhausted.*)
Why don't you leave, cousin, none could fault you.

She holds out a Corona. He ignores it.

THESEUS
S'there a nest? A tunnel? Did he come for you too? Was that why you were...
(*[The missing word is "naked."]*)
Just now?
(*Squaring up for his final fight.*)
Where is the rock-skulled, strangle-thighed predator, hmm? Don't protect him. Your food
animal that fights.
(*Louder. Summoning:*)
Ghostmaker. Marrowseeker. Brother?! Monster! Buffalo Bear Beast Bull! *MINOTAUR!*
WITH MY TASTE STILL ON YOUR TONGUE?

He bangs on the wall, hoping to drive him out. A moment of impasse.

The sound of Pneuma's SAIL departing.

Beat.

THESEUS

Ariadne. I have to stop him. Don't you understand? If I do *nothing else*.

ARIADNE

I do.

He's here, Theseus. Here.

(She presses a hand to her belly.)

In here. Not a tumor to cut out.

(A confession.)

Asterion is my.

Me.

... I think I grow.

If there's no light.

... If you want the body to look like him

... You have to meet us in the dark.

She closes her eyes and waits.

THESEUS

The will of the gods.

The lights obligingly fade.

More wrestling. Strangling. A hard slamming and a terrible crack. The bull bellows in defiance.

Silence except for Theseus' harsh breath. In the darkness, he powers on a Corona drive for himself. With that small, ghostly ring as his only illumination, he flees.

The sounds of a second SAIL departing.

SCENE ELEVEN

Lights slowly rise, in odd colors and locations. Ariadne's body lays naked again, on top of her robe. She is curled away in a pitiful crescent moon.

DY-O emerges from within the cracked control panel in human form.

Slowly, they walk over to where Ariadne is, reaching down to pick up a single white bull horn from the center curl of her body. It broke off in the fight with Theseus, and the root is bloody.

DY-O begins to lovingly clean it.

ARIADNE

(Weakly.)

What... what are you?

DY-O

What are you, little girl? S'a tough one for any of us. I am chlorofluorocarbons made flesh. Entirely to comfort you.

ARIADNE

DY-O?

DY-O

If you like. If you need something to call this Version of a System of a Self.

ARIADNE

...Did Daedalus make you?

DY-O

He made the shell, and the ship, at your father's bidding.

ARIADNE

Don't speak of my father. Not now.

DY-O

I exist here at your mother's invocation. I am not Made. I am a Being as much as I am the Corona's glow. I am he and she and they, *for you*.

ARIADNE

(Feeling on her head where the horn would be. Slowly:)

I didn't know what it was, who it, he, it, *was*. I *miss*, I *miss* my—twin, taur. *How did they hide such a thing from me?*

DY-O

Come, Ariadne.

They lift her up lightly and settle her down into an embrace.

DY-O

You've had bit of madness. It comes from being more than One at Once. That's enough now. I want you to leave the *Borealis* to drift north into the black. Come away with me. Step into space itself; find your way across the firmament.

They wrap her back in the robe, belting it for her.

ARIADNE

Where would we – ? Would you hide me on some private planet with high fences and green fields?

DY-O

Olympus. Heaven is safe, if unimaginable to you now. It is a palace of stars, between the stars, where you can heal. Where I can love you, Ariadne.

Ariadne lifts the horn.

DY-O

Both of you. The dancing and the stillness. Intoxication and sobriety, hunger and satiation, duty and –

ARIADNE

Despair.

DY-O

Yes.

ARIADNE

Remembering and not remembering.

(She looks up.)

You allowed my father to lock me in this *maze*. To leave me in this lie. The ministers and the guards and my siblings, and *my mother*, they were once all around me –

DY-O

You were a danger. The ship was meant to be your home –

ARIADNE

A *prison* –

DY-O

A compromise /

ARIADNE

/ You called it *sleepwalking*!

DY-O

A safe place where you might hibernate, and then feast each year with no danger to your
–

*She dips her hand in Theseus' still wet blood
and slaps it in a star on DY'O's chest.*

ARIADNE

You said nothing while I *ate*. And *ate*. And *forgot*. And *ate*.

DY-O

You needed to eat. That's what Sacrifice is for.

ARIADNE

THAT'S NO EXCUSE. WHY DID NO ONE ASK ME WHAT I WANTED?

DY-O

...What do you want, dearest? How may I bless you?

ARIADNE

FRIENDS.

DY-O

I am yours!

ARIADNE

FAMILY.
STILL *FOOD*.

DY-O

Child. I will make of you a *goddess*. You will never want for feasting again!

ARIADNE

I would rather be free!

She stabs DY-O with the bull's horn. They drop to ground in shock, still reaching up for her. She takes a giant bite of the tender web between the god's forefinger and thumb, tearing it out and chewing deliberately as the arm falls, limp in death.

She swallows, an omophagos in full splendor. Donning a large Corona as her Crown, she powers it on. It is a beautiful halo. She walks out of the conn.

END OF PLAY

Appendix – Ariadne



Original Artwork by Darian Silvers

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