

Chapter 15

‘Choice Is Yours’: Anatomy of a Lesson Plan from University V



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Muse! Bow propitious while my pen relates
How pour her armies through a thousand gates,
As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms,
Enwrapp'd in tempest and a night of storms;
Astonish'd ocean feels the wild uproar,
The refluent surges beat the sounding shore. (Wheatley 1776)

As You Are

Everyone looks out on a different day: A man, a woman, a child, people of a myriad faiths and people of none. Everyone has a separate skin, the biggest organ in the body, a protective membrane that shields us from the outside. It is also a massive interface cloaked in sensors, the touch points that allow us to feel and live the world. Our corporeal selves provide us with our unique interface to the world (Facer 2011; MacCormack 2006). They help us try to learn and then tell the story of the day we each see. But are we more than our bodies? Or are we less? Are we the stories of our bodies? Could we have been cleaved from embodied ways of being and knowing? And if any of the answers to these questions is ‘yes’, then what might such a posthuman scenario imply about the activities we engage in such as teaching and learning (Bayne 2018; Knox 2019)? This chapter aims to explore education as posthuman practice via the anatomy of a simple lesson plan. We use storytelling as a device to

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selectively and deceptively paint pictures of histories that may have been or have yet to come.

The methodology adopted here is that of social science fiction as a specialism of speculative fiction more generally (Gerlach and Hamilton 2003; Ross 2017). This is not an empirical approach. We have no data to sift for truths. Although we do deal with the datafication of students (Williamson et al. 2020; Selwyn and Gašević 2020) – the reduction of people to numbers, bytes and letters – do not fear as no actual students were harmed in our analysis. Rather we adopt an approach that tells stories and attempt to use these tales as a lens through which to explore educational futures (Collier and Ross 2020). We engage in such speculations so that we may reflect on the possible long-term consequences of our current beliefs and practices (Selwyn et al. 2020; Macgilchrist et al. 2020; Bell et al. 2013). Speculative fiction tries to take us out of the known. However, it does not bring us into the unknown but more indirectly back to where we already are. Its purpose is not to know the future but to predict the present.

This methodology, it has been argued, is necessary if Higher Education is to ‘navigate and adapt to unpredictable and shifting circumstances that impact people in profoundly uneven ways [by] imagining, and then enacting, better futures [that are] imaginative, equitable, accessible, sustainable, and decolonial’ (Veletsianos and Houlden 2020). It may be a posthuman modification, or mod, that allows us to see those students not captured under the bell curve of ‘those individuals who are outliers and candidate measures that are at the margins’ (Treviranus 2014).

It may provide different windows to see out of, for it has been argued that the story of mankind has all too often contained plenty of man but little kindness (Le Guin 1989; Macgilchrist 2020). One ingrained narrative, for instance, is that humans are primed for ‘flight or fight’ upon stimulus. After it was noted that such claims were based on a science devised by men and conducted with male subjects, the experiments were re-run with women who reported the alternative response of a ‘tend and befriend’ instinct. This reaction comprises ‘nurturant activities designed to protect the self and offspring that promote safety and reduce distress; befriending is the creation and maintenance of social networks that may aid in this process’ (Taylor et al. 2000). There is no need to fight nor to flee; we can stay and inter-be (Hanh 2010).

The speculative fiction that follows is set in the future, but it also draws on the past for ‘the body is a historical situation [...] a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation’ (Butler 1988). The body we choose to datafy in this chapter is the student body, in both the singular and collective sense. We take the body as an interface. Our corporeal selves try to mediate the personal perspectives we have with each other so as to create collective and shared consciousnesses. We only contribute to consciousness by crude approximation (Hoffman and Prakash 2014). For example, a smile is a roughly hewn icon of the interface that tries to tell us something about the world within. We can only guess what might be going on in the vast consciousness that the smile opens into what someone is feeling or thinking. We never perceive absolute reality because the interface simply offers us short-hands, useful bite-size abstractions. We never see perfectly. As a consequence there

is always the potential, either by accident or design, for duplicity (MacKenzie et al. 2020).

The biggest fiction we tell ourselves is about our ‘humanity’. It is our most enduring story. Once upon a time, humans are set apart by God, by gender, race, authority, intelligence, adaptability, morality and so on – by any and all of the humanist hegemonies, the rights to rule. This story of the human is woven from strands of power, from narratives (Lyotard 1979) of dominion and struggle but interlaced with the micro acts and activities that constitute daily mundane existence. Hence we attempt here to speculate via *posthuman* prophecies (Fuller and Jandrić 2019). Such prognostications do not see the human as certain, nor its characteristics such as race, gender or morality as reliable. Nothing is immutable if we enter the present by splitting it with the axe of the future.

Texts are deceptive and duplicitous because of their plurality of meaning. It would be presumptuous, however, to claim to have given the text that follows a plural effect. That is not the job of the writer. That is a more private affair between the characters and the reader. Their engagement is, via the text, ‘an iridescent exchange carried on by multiple voices on different wavelengths and subject from time to time to a sudden dissolve which enables the utterance to shift from one point of view to another’ (Barthes 1980: 41–42).

We have merely hauled some static words and two-dimensional images to the page. It is up to you, dear reader, to bring them to life. Choice is yours.

Choice Is Yours

On 3 April 2054, I woke early, threw back the covers and strode across the apartment. I felt the mirrors watching me as I moved. I selected a colour and began to paint my nails onto myself: first each toe and then each finger. This was a ritual I undertook every morning before anything else was decided, and oh what decisions there lay ahead today (Fig. 15.1). I opened the balcony doors and let the cool city air flow around me.

I moved back inside and sat on the bed. As I did so, I glanced up at the plaque on the wall above my desk. ‘Digitization, Colonization, Dance’, it read. My heart surged. This was the motto of University V: a mission it believed and lived. I felt so proud to be but one small part of its grand project. It had given me so much. It had given me everything, all of this. Through the benefaction of its Anthony Swan initiative, I had been given a complete sterilization, something I could never have afforded by myself. And how would I have ascended to the position of High Professor without such an essential mod? I shuddered to think of the alternative, of something unfolding inside of me, draining my nutrients, sucking life from me, clawing itself into form.

And where would I be today without my other wonderful augmentations? The mods for my eyes and ears meant everything to me. I could hear students so acutely now. I could sense any waver, instantly fix upon an inflection that might signal some

Fig. 15.1 Before anything else was decided



underlying weakness, and then immediately double down on a line of questioning. And with my new eyes, I saw them so vividly I sometimes almost felt as if I was peering into their souls.

Now it was time for my favourite mod – decision time. I threw open the wardrobe and looked at my collection of skins, my most prized possessions. I touched a sublime brown that felt like drinking liquid chocolate on a winter day. I flicked to a deep radiant black number. In this gown I felt the colour of night; became raven, ‘feathers shiny and black, a touch of blue glistening down her back’ (Williams 2001). But no, not today. Today was a day for white, a late twenty-first-century specimen, an amazing white Irish skin. I held it against my body and stood in front of the mirror. I marvelled at its delicate porcelain, dappled in a starscape of freckles. Each small brown fleck was unique in tone and contour, but they were together woven into one mesmeric camouflage. It had some slight marks where it had been stretched during the primitive barbarisms of childbirth. But even these were beautiful to me, these fingerprints from a life I had never known but would soon step into. And in every other way, it was in fabulous condition – a marvelous pelt.

I slipped it on and immediately it inhabited me. I spun to admire myself in the glass, lithe and graceful. I became the leopard. Yes, today was the day for a hunter’s skin.

Come as I Want You to Be

As I arrived at the lecture theatre, the meat-sacs were still fitting the students into their platforms. Our meat-sac to student ratio was now 3 to 1, the highest figure ever attained globally. Yet more meat-sacs carefully prepared and tuned my lectern, their red bodies traced with faint blue pulses.

With a flick I moved a strand of *rúa* back from my face and plugged myself into the interface: Wow! The datafications were so awesome this year! On the console the students bristled beautifully before me. Arrayed in purple, green and cyan ladders, they swayed in steady suspension from data structures that had been induced to flow down hidden Markov models. The colours moved up and down, vacillating in fluorescent columns like synthesised notes, windows turning on and off, floor by floor, on neon skyscrapers.

I delved in, feeling my way through the data, one student at a time. There was only one datapoint I was interested in today: the Life-Credit Average. Ah, here was a possible candidate: Octavio. His Life-Credit Average was pitifully low and it was abundantly clear why. For a start, he had accrued mountains of debt: tuition fees, textbook loans, food stamps, performance opportunities, yadda, yadda, yadda. More seriously though, his score had been compounded by multiple convictions for egregious breaches of the academic code. What a list of infractions this guy had. He was really on his last legs. Yes, this student would be perfect. Just imagine, I said to myself, how it will feel to wear the skin of a man.

I pulled up my lesson plan on the screen. I had been working on this all summer and I was so happy with it. It was one of the loveliest I had ever fashioned. It was composed of three pedagogical stanzas that would unfold over the course of the semester: two beautiful lures to enchant my students and then one silver hook to catch and reel them in. I had taken instances from ancient times, back when people dealt in the misery of written words and the poisons of literature and history. I would lecture on these topics, mediating the strange, primitive and barbaric written arts to my students. I would herald the promise that three tales would connect, that there was some narrative arc, but then I would bend the curve of flattery down towards a final deception.

The first part of the lesson would be about *The Man in the Iron Mask* (Dumas 1893). This was an ancient tale about a prisoner whose face was always hidden and whose identity was hence mysteriously masked. In another layer to the lesson, the author Alexander Dumas employed over 70 ghost writers to do his writing. One described his work as one of Dumas writing aides:

I used to dress his characters for him and locate them in the necessary surroundings, whether in Old Paris or in different parts of France at different periods. When he was, as often, in difficulties on some matter of archaeology, he used to send round one of his secretaries to me to demand, say, an accurate account of the appearance of the Louvre in the year 1600...I used to revise his proofs, make corrections in historical points and sometimes write whole chapters. (Davidson 1902: 251)

Dumas was the author, however. That is not in doubt. The creative vision was his. In the case of *The Man in the Iron Mask*, Dumas relied on a long-time ghost by the name of Auguste Maquet. The author of the man in the mask himself hid behind another. It was as if Dumas had deployed a proxy to engage in the hideous practice of writing. These ancient people could actually be highly inventive. It was little known at the time of course how dangerous writing actually could be, but true adepts of these arts, and even hacks like Dumas, had some inklings it seemed. It was prescient how Dumas had engaged his ghost as a writing mod, surprisingly skillful

how he deployed a set of human gloves to simultaneously put himself at the centre and at once remove himself from the frightful act.

I like to think that Dumas danced with Maquet, just like escapades of their characters upon the page. In the book, men pranced about as ‘joyful friends who hadn’t abandoned their protector before the gathering storm; and despite the threatening sky; despite the shuddering earth, smiling, considerate and as devoted to misfortune as they had been to prosperity’ (Dumas 1893: 284).

I marvelled at how they clutched each other’s bosoms – always as if one of them had just scored a goal. So interesting – their strange obsession with male physical entanglement.

There were some great comedic elements, such as the eventual legal duel between Dumas and Maquet over the true authorship of what was, by any standard, pretty dull stuff – endless pages of men running around desperately trying not to love each other. The Fast and the Furious had less conspicuous close-ups of gear-shifting (Payne 2017). By contrast, there were no court battles about the many children that Dumas fathered. They failed to make the news, which is as it should be, for books are not like people – they are so much more important.

I allowed myself to drift into the novel, to a particular page and paragraph. I found the character Raoul. I put on his feet and let them dangle over the precipice ‘bathed in that void which is peopled by vertigo, and provokes to self-annihilation’ (Dumas 1893: 348). I lingered to ponder Raoul a moment longer. ‘Is it destruction’, I asked him, ‘that you require to feel?’ (Smith 2004).

It was clearly a rhetorical question, yet the dolt had the temerity to keep wittering on. So I let him finish. I did not interrupt or cut him off. I just let him have his way. ‘The world is a sepulcher’, he crooned, ‘the men and consequently the women, are but shadows, and love is a sentiment to which you cry, “Fie, Fie!”’ (Dumas 1893: 275).

Ah Raoul, Raoul... Okay, you see I *get* skin. I taste all its colours and see how it is woven (Tuck and Yang 2012). But good heavens, from what base metal was man’s sex so badly minted? Homophobia on Monday, misogyny on Tuesday – which are the same two faces of the one dull coin to be fair, so at least there’s that (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985). But then, with the demented idiocy to declaim: ‘It’s Friday I’m in love!’ (Smith et al. 1992). I mean, just ugh! How palid and limply mans’ fetid interface was wrought.

Where was I? Ah yes, next was Phillis Wheatley, the first black poet published in the English language. English was not her mother tongue, of course. Her original name, her language, place of birth, are all obscure. All we know is that she was enslaved somewhere on the west coast of Africa around 1753. She was an afterthought: a small and sickly specimen, selected in a last port of call, to fill a quota that promised a payload of healthy bodies to toil and glisten in gleaming new western colonies. Her exact age is not known, but from her missing front milk teeth we can surmise that she was about 7. So much is missing but we know one thing clearly: her character. We know that something flickered within her even then – a persistence.

She looked out from the ship (Fig. 15.2) at silver sharks that whipped in the water. She watched them, as they circled slowly waiting to dye the sea red. Sharks have an acute sense of smell. They can detect drops of blood dissipating in an expanse of water. They can also smell disease. It was said that they most keenly snaked after those ships that had the greatest numbers of sickly slaves (Rediker 2008). Yes, predators smell weakness as it exudes like musk through skin. They wait for bodies to fall, for the weakest to be cast down.

Yet, a light bore her through the Middle Passage. She did not fall prey to the pathogens that stalked her 'floating prison' (Rediker 1989). She did not follow those who escaped their captivity by flinging themselves overboard, in pagan prayer that they would then soon be united with their ancestors. No, she persisted; she was delivered unto us.

In Boston she emerged from *The Phillis*, the vessel that had spirited her between worlds and would ultimately give her its name. There John Wheatley purchased her, as a gift for his wife Susana. She was a salve perhaps, to fill the gap that had recently been scored by the death of their own 7-year-old daughter. Perhaps it was this ghostly absence that *Phillis* Wheatley stepped into, a void she could inhabit and start to gently burnish. As she haunted the contours of the Wheatley's daughter's memory, they almost forgot she was a slave. As they brought her into the bosom of their family, they taught her to read – English, Greek, Latin, Poetry and the words of The Lord our Creator. Education found her and her fierce intellect began to burn. Her light no longer hidden beneath a bushel, she quickly proved her talent not just in reading but in the art of writing itself.

Fig. 15.2 *The Phillis*



A slave child writing poetry in the style of Alexander Pope sent shockwaves. There was amazement that she could indeed even be literate. This did not fit in the prevalent narratives. A premise of slavery was taken to be the superiority of intellects based on skin. How limiting, I thought, did they not realise that colonization comes in many colours?

The first suspicion was that she was a dupe, that someone else had written her works and they were using her as a lurid circus act. First, she had to prove, through a form of trial, that it really was her who had written the poetry. In such a primitive era of course proving one's identity was no mean feat. There were no biometrics of her. In later digital ages, authors could be more closely tethered to their words. Indeed, they would even spew out of them, unbidden across platforms they believed to be 'social networks'. Not so for Phillis, in her era words were considerably more loosely coupled to their creators, leading to all sorts of potential for duplicity.

The trial was convened. She sparred with her gathered inquisitors and proved, *viva voce*, her authorship. Once this was beyond dispute, all that was left was for it to be decried as bad writing. They were poems, as Thomas Jefferson spat, that 'are below the dignity of criticism' (Gates 2003).

That is education according to two critical steps. Firstly, you prove you wrote it and then you prove it is good, that it fits. Step one is easy: You have proved who you are. Fine, but now do *you fit*? How much is what you have done of worth? Are you worthy? I began to wonder about where the proof of existence ends and worth begins. Is it better to not exist, than to exist, but to be found worthless? Once she had rendered herself into existence, all that was left was to bring their whips down upon her words.

I thought about her stepping forward into the trial. I saw her in the semi-circle of 18 assembled men. Once again she stepped into the parlour light, just as she would be later summoned by literary critics for hundreds of subsequent years, scribed in seances of her own words. I thought about the literary fashionistas stretching across the centuries, busy at work, and Phillis entangled in words: words that critics might snarl were only spoken 'from a sensibility finely tuned by close approximation to [her] oppressors' (Gayle 1975: 3).

I beckoned her gently. 'Come', I said, 'as you are, as you were, as a friend, as I want you to be. [...] Take your time, hurry up. Choice is yours, don't be late' (Cobain 1991).

She stepped forward in her child form and spoke softly. Yet again she uttered some of the most reviled lines in all of poetry:

Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
 Taught my benighted soul to understand
 That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
 Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
 'Their colour is a diabolic dye.'
 Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
 May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train. (Wheatley 1773)

You were not late my child but ever early. Born too soon for their ears to hear. From their loveless, liberal and pagan abyssal, how could they have fathomed you? How could they have heard you above the drone of their virtue signals? Don't worry, I see you, 'piecing together a photo-electric jigsaw, a phosphor-dot mosaic of His divine countenance that we shall worship and adore 'til all the suns are cinders' (Moore and Totleben 1987).

I let my mind drift and I thought about her as a ghost, never at rest, always on call. A curio who could be forever summoned to perform. 'That is the nature of greatness, my child', I whispered to her. But in my heart I knew it was also the very nature of the written word that eviscerates and then embalms such that nothing can ever die.

Writing was, of course, very wrong, as was reading. That was why there were very special precautions to be heeded for the few academics who could actually engage in these activities. To be able to work with these dangerous substances in such a highly controlled and protected environment was a privilege that I was always grateful for. I took my responsibilities very seriously, my key role that allowed me to mediate between this safe digitized world and that knotted, fleshy mess of letters and death. Digitization – the first drum beat of the great motto of University V – had been completed. The second tenant – Colonization – is always happening. It never ends. The ancients thought that colonization was enacted by 'writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations' (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003: 25). They seemed to see machines of war everywhere bulldozing: demolishing houses and cities; uprooting olive trees; riddling water tanks with bullets; bombing and jamming electronic communications; digging up roads; destroying electricity transformers; tearing up airport runways; disabling television and radio transmitters; smashing computers (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003: 25).

Thus they dabbled clumsily. They traced some shadows of the power of writing, but they were wrong about the theatres of war. They had misplaced the kill zones. As I looked about the lecture hall and down below onto the student platforms, I realized they also never knew the importance of dance where 'the technology sets the beat and creates the music, while the pedagogy defines the moves' (Anderson and Dron 2011).

Colonization comes in many colours, and each colour has its own swatch of shades. They come 'thick as leaves in Autumn's golden reign' (Wheatley 1776). The final pedagogical stanza would be a lesson on the Irish famine of the eighteenth century, an event that caused another displacement of people but one with very different dynamics and echoes. Although the other two lessons were in good shape, I was still working on this one. In this gig you are sometimes just one step ahead of the students. I was still layering paint onto the canvas with the flat of my knife. I had yet to begin rounding up the protagonists and herding them onto a coffin ship, a *long cónra*, bound for a new world. And once they were here, how would I then bind them?

It was a really wonderful story that started as the central characters slipped into a 'grey zone' of morality (Mac Suibhne 2017) that is enacted when the colonizers finally grow bored and turn away. It was a story whose cannibalism lay obscured for over a hundred years, even though Swift (1792) had already written the recipe book

from his craggy island exile (Costello 2020). Just imagine, white people eating other white people in a famine created by other white people (APA 2020). How fabulous! This would really confuse my dear students, and I had such questions ready – questions that would pin them to the floor as soon as they faltered. The lures were primed and the line taut.

It all felt so perfect. I knew it would slot into my teaching portfolio with a satisfying click, be its prize scalp. My heart began to soar: ‘The 2054 Medal for Excellence in Teaching in University V, is awarded to...’.

It was my deepest honour to serve as High Professor, but now I dared to dream. I could feel something building within me. I let my mind drift upwards. My acceptance speech as Arch-Dean shimmered into view. But lo! There was yet more. One last pinnacle unveiled itself and I sat upon it, silent and infallible. One day, I said to myself, I would put myself forward and see my name drift in the wind, in the white smoke of the announcement of our new University Pope.

I brought Octavio’s image up and marvelled at his silky hair. How did he maintain his petty body, his wretched, weak male form so well on such scraps as I knew he had left? His impoverishment thrilled me. This was why it was such an honour and a privilege to work here in this marvelous stew of diversity. I knew Anthony Swan’s spoon was doing its vital work, for diversity is key to colonization. It was just as Adebisi (2019) taught us – in the bodies that bob and bloat in the rivulets she wrote us.

Bring ‘Em All In

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be;
 And that which is done is that which shall be done;
 And there is no new thing under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Yes, nothing is new. Nothing is original. No, we just copy and paste bits of ourselves in and out of other people. But we pretend otherwise. We crave the illusion that we sire and birth all manner of novelty. That we are ‘special, so special’ (Hynes and Honeyman-Scott 1979). And nowhere do we ply this fantasy more sweetly than here in these theatres, these lecture halls.

How would I now fashion a rubric to lay Octavio upon? How would I ask him the impossible? How could I coax another infraction of the academic code from him through an originality transgression? Whose words would I make him say, all the while making him think that they were his own?

You must justify your argument, I began, with seven thousand and seventy-seven unique sub-arguments, each one a functional recursion arranged linearly on the convex diurnal. In part B, you will invent and play a non-repeating inverse mixolydian scale that threads an inscape through the memories of how ‘bullets find the guns’, of how ‘bruises find skin to etch themselves onto’ and of how ‘broken finds the bones’ (Williams 2003).

Gather them up. All these things. And bring them to me, Octavio. Bring them here as you would an armful of bones. Bring them all into my heart:

Bring the unforgiven
 Bring the unredeemed
 Bring the lost, the nameless
 Let them all be seen
 Bring them out of exile
 Bring them out of sleep
 Bring them to the portal
 Lay them at my feet. (Scott 1995)

And as you bring it to me, up here to the doors of my heart, it must be as the wind crests the waves of the desert in a scintillation of grains. It must be unadulterated originality with no two notes the same. No pattern. You must walk as the Fremens (Herbert 1965), with no rhythm. Use the footwork of jazz to evade the worm that hunts you across the Dunes, for it was thus that they became its master.

This is the hardest thing: to walk a new path with every step. That is a path with real heart (Kornfield 1993). To remake yourself, to always be reborn. The will is weak, and the temptation to lapse into some pattern, some habit, must be resisted at all times. If you leave a pattern, the algorithm will find you.

Thoughts of patterns and jazz brought Althusser (1970) to mind. He could play the blues. He knew that the real work of colonization is not in the fields and the trenches but here in *these* theatres, these theatres of war. These battle cries that render the silky super-structure of the colonial project – he played them so well because he knew how silent this music really is. Just like I do. Yes, I'm a rockstar professor. Education *is* me. As John Cage (2012) threw bars around silence so I teach.

I watched Octavio whip and writhe on the platform. The deepmind hive AI proctored his moves into words and rendered them for me. I drew close to his interface. I knew I would soon wear his skin, colonize his body.

But somehow this thought, which should have been thrilling, was just grey and dull. Was this not enough for me?

No, wait – there was more. I closed my eyes.

What if I could not just wear a man but write him? What if I could *write* someone? There would be no need for all of the ickiness of the flaying. All this time-consuming hunt, all this protracted dance – it would be so unnecessary. Imagine if you could just write people.

I now knew why writing had eventually been outlawed and extinguished (Costello et al. 2020). I knew this now not as abstraction, but finally as incarnation. Skins were taboo, but that was just to make it fun. Writing was not like that. Writing was wrong. Little wonder you would be immediately and permanently cancelled for it. I heard one of my heroes sing it to me: 'I'm tryin' to right my wrongs but it's funny them same wrongs helped me write this song' (West 2004).

Imagine putting words in someone, inserting feelings directly into them, so easily and effortlessly. And then, when you are tired of them, you could just write someone else. You could spring people to life and then as easily end them, without so much as a parting kiss. Oh what a dark and seductive art – such an occult API.

As I Want You to Be

I suddenly felt exhausted. It had been a day like no other. I was almost breathless from the sheer exertions, from all of the things my thoughts had put me through. I finished class early. I dismissed the students with a particular arch of my eyebrows, sent the meat-sacs scurrying back to their crevices by softly pinching my lower lip with my front teeth. I made my way back through the city traffic to the apartment.

I put on one of my first skins: a beautiful Vietnamese cloak that always brought me succour, that I could relax into. I swam into it, letting her calm envelope me. Her soft black hair touched the nape of my neck and my swirling thoughts began to slow and settle. It was good to be back home. I padded through the apartment. Somehow all of the morning's leopard had not left me yet. I paused by the mirror to admire my current outside self. How lovely I was!

But then a nagging. Something began to intrude. I feel this way sometimes when I get back to the apartment. Never in class, never when teaching, never when I am in flow, in command. *But why the hell now?* Why can I not just be myself now? What is this stupid strangeness? It felt like some kind of gap in me. But why? Why, when I have everything? And who is *doing* this to me? I never asked for this and I've done everything that has been asked of me. What has been bitten from me? Why am I written this way?

I tried to blank all these thoughts out. I tried to think of Phillis. 'Come' I implored her, 'as you are, as you were, as I want you to be' (Cobain 1991). What is your first name? What river banks did you run down? Where is my *túath*? I tried to go further back and conjure the places when language was still only circles upon stone, could only be sunk into the landscape with teeth. I tried to see myself back before the written word came to enslave and envelope humankind, before we became beguiled, ensorcelled and finally constructed by letters.

I heard Phillis Wheatley's footsteps. She was no longer a child but a young adult. Still persisting, still burning. She had attained her freedom, through a masterful legal stroke, leveraging English law by being published in London rather than Boston (Carretta 2011). But the Wheatleys had passed away. Her sponsors and allies seemed to be fading away just as sedition and the chaos of civil war engulfed the American colonies. Was hers to be a pyrrhic victory? Was she destined to be emancipated only to be enslaved into poverty?

She took up her quill. I shivered as I felt her drift past me into the centre of the room ready to speak:

Behold the prophet in his tow'ring flight!
He leaves the earth for heav'n's unmeasur'd height,
And worlds unknown receive him from our sight.
There Whitefield wings with rapid course his way,
And sails to Zion through vast seas of day. (Wheatley 1770)

Now she was a child again. And as I watched her so was I; sitting elbows bent, head to one side. A slumping candle flickered light across the polished table. Her right hand moved carefully but rapidly across one page and then the next. And even the

Fig. 15.3 Always the morrow



pauses to wet the quill were just space to allow more words to align and ready themselves to flow. She did not notice a figure watching from the doorway. Eventually, Mrs Wheatley moved into the room, her voice getting nearer, chiding that it was most definitely lights-out time now and that there would always be the morrow (Fig. 15.3). The candle was snuffed out and I came back to myself, still standing at the mirror.

I walked to the wardrobe, folded the skin away and hung it carefully on its hook. It was getting late. Shadows stretched themselves across the floor. I opened the balcony doors. My footsteps took me outside. Into the cold. I could hear trees ripple in the wind. I closed my eyes and let the neon night flow around me.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore education as posthuman practice via the anatomy of a lesson plan. This was a plan from the future, with roots in the past, written upon skin as 'the site of encounter between enfleshed self and society' (MacCormack 2006). It was written by candlelight to the sound of 'astonished ocean' that 'feels the wild uproar' where 'refluent surges beat the sounding shore' (Wheatley 1776). These are illustrated in Figs. 15.2 and 15.3 and in the following audio illustration, mashed-up with all apologies to Cobain (1991) and Wheatley (1776) and Lackland's Memoria (2020).

The first three words of the title of this book, 'dupery by design', evoke a warning that deception may lurk in structure around us. The first three words of this chapter, 'Choice is yours', are a clarion of optimism, a line from a song (Cobain

1991), a promise of agency. That promise, however, is unravelled in a speculative fabulation (Haraway 2008) that draws stories from different places and times in a type of chaos that seeks to undermine reader involvement and expectations. This chapter attempted to play with ideas and representations of universities as sites of power, prestige and learning and of identities of learners, teachers and indeed authors. A student is datafied, in gory detail, to remind us that getting more data does not necessarily bring us closer to any truth. It is not, per se, a sensemaking activity (Weick 1993).

What, however, can be the fitting response of education to this type of horror? Do we have alternatives to quests for more data, calls for more authenticity, for more demands to see, in ever higher fidelity, the individual? Is there no limit to the pixel count of the anthropos?

This chapter tries not for reconciliation or restoration, but only ‘to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together – [to] staying with the trouble’ (Haraway 2008: 10). As Hanh (2010) has it, we only inter-be, and staying ourselves in this web is the only thing we can do or indeed need. If there are alternative ‘carrier bags’ of fiction that we might knit educational narratives from (Le Guin 1989; Macgilchrist 2020), they should centre on this staying – on ways to tend and befriend (Taylor et al. 2000). In the penultimate scene, Mrs. Wheatley does not datafy her young charge from the threshold of the door. She does not watch her; she is just with her. She holds her in a love that is beyond possession, datafication or deception. But is that how things actually were, or more importantly how they actually are? How do you see it? The choice is yours.

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