

Data's Voice: A Posthumanist Conversation

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This purpose of this paper is to explore a communication strategy that allows for new avenues of conversation with people perceived to be non-human "others." In order to build a strategy this paper uses the theoretical frameworks of posthumanism and Kenneth Burke's identification to analyze the communication methods used by the character Data (portrayed by Brent Spiner) in the Star Trek film Insurrection (1998). The results of the analysis show that through finding common ground with those perceived to be "others" and allowing everyone a voice we can construct a complete vision of reality and understanding of being.

INTRODUCTION

The past century witnessed incredible advances in science and technology. We are surrounded by constructions of scientific genius that continue to evolve and change our socio-cultural climate in dramatic ways. The objects of and resulting societal structures described throughout the entirety of science fiction are now reality. Whether or not we choose to admit it, we may be quickly approaching a moment in time when we will have to make some difficult decisions regarding technology and its uses. Will technology dominate over us or will we rule it? Or, is it possible to build healthy relationships with technology and these brilliant constructions of our genius so that we can live in a truly collaborative environment? How do these relationships with advanced technologies and artificial intelligences inform our relationships with one another?

These questions are by no means original, but it is important to ask them and explore as many answers as possible because the resulting conversations may inform our immediate future. To date many scholars in multiple academic disciplines continue to build theoretical frameworks, such as posthumanism, for examining the implications of blending humans and technology as well as humanity's interactions with advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence. Our culture is in a state of rapid growth in regard to this process of human and advanced technological integration and many of these theories utilize themes within the science fiction genre to inform potential outcomes. Granted sometimes science fiction becomes science fact, but exploring hypothetical situations before actually creating advance technologies within the safe space of "fictional" narratives provides incredible insight into the rules and regulations we might want to put in place in order to prevent possibly devastating consequences.

The telling of stories is nothing new and neither is the exploration of scientific implications through fictional stories. Narratives play a key role in the building of moral and ethical codes within socio-cultural structures and we often transmit narratives in a variety of ways. Today one of the most popular mediums for experiencing stories is through film and television and there is no shortage of narratives that fall into

the science fiction genre. Therefore, since this genre is so popular and these narratives infuse our daily lives both in fiction and reality, it is imperative that we take a step back and critically evaluate the rhetorical implications of the narratives we are exposed to and start to build practical strategies for communication and interaction.

Within the world of film and television one popular mythos and narrative that explores interactions between advanced technologies and humans that deserves a closer look is the *Star Trek* franchise. The *Star Trek* film and television franchise has been around for over fifty years, starting with the Captain Kirk and Spock in *The Original Series* to the newest television series *Discovery*. Over the course of fifty years, all branches of the *Star Trek* franchise have explored important philosophical questions from the “what if” perspective of an almost utopian society that attempts to exist in harmony with aliens and advanced technologies. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (referred to as *ST:TNG* for the rest of the paper) television series, which aired almost twenty years after *The Original Series*, incorporated an entirely nonhuman/alien character, an autonomous android, as one of the main protagonists. The creation and incorporation of Lieutenant Commander Data (portrayed by Brent Spiner) drove many storylines within the series as the creators of the show started asking the difficult questions about the interaction and incorporation of artificial life with ours. Personally, I believe that *ST:TNG* was ahead of its time in asking those particular questions and now that we are quickly approaching a time when Data could be actually be a part of our daily reality, it is time to critically examine those narratives and start planning strategies for interactions. Therefore, I propose one such examination. The purpose this paper is to analyze Data through the lens of Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification in order to unpack posthumanist ideologies that will provide strategies for interactions with both human and nonhuman intelligences. There is a limitation to this analysis, which is that Data, as a nonhuman entity, is portrayed by a human, so it is impossible to completely separate the human from the nonhuman, but this is a valuable starting place for this conversation. The strategy that I propose at the end of this paper comes from an in-depth analysis of Data in the film *Star Trek: Insurrection*, the third out of four films made featuring the *ST:TNG* main cast. Throughout this paper I will provide a discussion of posthumanist theory, Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification, and then follow up with an analysis of Data that includes a framework for a communication strategy that provides practical avenues for communicating both with artificial intelligences and with one another. First, an exploration of posthumanism.

POSTHUMANISM, IDENTIFICATION, AND FILM

Posthumanism and the Cyborg

Posthumanism is a branch of postmodernism that explores the ontological and epistemological implications of the interactions between technology and humanity. In other words, posthumanism explores how technology informs different states of being outside of the traditional human constructs and it does not acknowledge an *a priori* point of view in relation to identifying “a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will” (Hayles, 1999, p.1). In this framework, the role of technology is to situate the human subject objectively and to reveal certain truths about the human condition both literally and symbolically (Ferrando, 2013, p. 29). The way in which this framework objectively explores the human subject is by removing anthropocentric points of view and opens up conversations that include nonhuman voices (such as aliens, animals, and artificial intelligences) and the results of this shift is an epistemic decentering of the human as the primary source of all knowledge and understanding (Ferrando, 2012, p. 10). The decentering of the human as the primary source of all knowledge and understanding of the world symbolically opens up new avenues for conversation and allows for an equal acknowledgment of *all* voices, in spite of socially constructed labels designed by the dominate heteronormative, white, male perspective with which we are all too familiar. In short, the posthumanist perspective is a critical framework that aims to deconstruct a problematic human concept in order to allow the emergence of a multiverse of voices.

There are several premises that posthumanist theory depends upon to work. N. Katherine Hayles (1999), in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, outlines four general guidelines for posthumanist

theory. The first is that information deserves prioritization over source, biological or otherwise. Second, the concept of consciousness should be viewed as a byproduct of evolution and is therefore a minor consideration rather than a primary. The third premise is that body is prosthesis, an object that we learn to operate and technological enhancements are used to enhance the original. Lastly, with all the previous premises considered, the human being has the ability to effortlessly interact with intelligent machines because there really is no difference between the two (Hayles, 1999, p. 2-3). In essence, these premises argue for a removal of human elitism in order to establish true equality between the fusion of humans and machines or the interactions humans and their artificially intelligent machines.

These literal premises work within the realm of symbol and metaphor. As Barber (2017) points out, the “heart of posthumanist thinking is a desire to look across the assumed dividing lines between the human subject and the nonhuman world and to engage with the hybrid identities that modernist thinking actively denies a clear status” (p. 42). One way scholars and critics accomplish this is by exploring the meanings and imagery associated with the cyborg. Donna Haraway (2001), a pioneer in the establishment of posthumanist theories, defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (p. 291). In this context, the cyborg is a fictional, yet concrete, image which acts a vehicle for establishing socialist feminism because it represents the embodiment of the actual dualistic experiences of women (Haraway, 2001, 291). With the image of the cyborg in place, Haraway calls for liberation through the elimination of dualistic language and demands the removal of walls between individuals and political systems for the purpose of redefining “Women” in their own terms instead of living to the social construction established by the dominate white, male voice (Stevenson, 2007, p. 87). Even though Haraway’s cyborg functions as a socio-political critique, its symbolism also has implications within the realm of the science fiction genre and narratives.

The Cyborg within the Science Fiction Genre

The science fiction genre in both film and literature provides a perfect setting for investigating the symbolic and metaphorical implications of the literal as discussed in posthumanist theories. In the generalize sense, science fiction is the genre that explores themes related to the interaction of humans (as individuals and societies) with advanced sciences and technologies and/or with nonhuman entities (such as aliens or androids). Judith Genova (1994) points out that science fiction allows us explore the imaginations of others from the perspective of different times and places. It calls for us to change something by forcing confrontations between how we perceive the world, how it actually is, and how it could be without intervention (Genova, 1994, p. 25). Science fiction constantly asks “what if” or “what happens when” questions. The exploration of the intrinsically philosophical and rhetorical themes within science fiction narratives often lead to deeply profound insights of human and nonhuman states of existence. This is because science fiction’s techniques operate on a different ontological and epistemological level than other literary genres; especially within its narrative construction of Otherness, estrangement, and subjectivity (Gomel, 2012, p. 179). One image that is frequently utilized for this purpose is the cyborg.

The cyborg is a staple within science fiction narratives and themes. Within these narratives, cyborgs represent a contrast to humanness and typically reinforce ideas of human elitism (Brasher, 1996, p. 809). The cyborg itself is a complex entity, because it shows up in appearance and speaks as a human, but it is not human; it is similar, yet different, the cyborg is dramatically Other (Gomel, 2012, p. 178). Just like Haraway’s political cyborg, the fictional entity projects a concrete character as a functional fusion of dualism through its incorporation and acknowledgment of both human and nonhuman elements. Because of this functional fusion, the cyborg can metaphorically represent the complexities of human identity as it is rather than how one dominate voice says it should be (Brasher, 1996, p. 825).

Previous Literature on Posthumanism and Star Trek

Currently there is very little literature that explores the critical impact of *Star Trek* and even less that combines it with posthumanist theories. Here is a brief overview of those conversations. An article written by Jack Presbury, Joe Marchal, and Ed McKee (2003) uses Data as a frame of reference in the

debate about the ethical and philosophical issue surrounding AI's right to personhood, self-ownership, and possible embodiment of a soul. Through this philosophical discussion of AI's rights the writer's also explore what it means for humans to have self-ownership based on the role of emotions in a society that often denies us that right through various establishments and relationships that constantly evaluates our extrinsic worth. As part of their analysis the writer's reference *ST:TNG*'s season two, episode nine "The Measure of the Man," the narrative that explores whether or not Data is property of Starfleet or exists as an entity with the right to choose through the context of a legal trial. Even though the trial concludes with giving Data the right to self-ownership, the primary argument as to why Data should be considered as property of Starfleet resides in his lack of humanity. Presbury, Marchal, and McKee (2003) point out that even though Data's lack of humanity is a deficiency and easy to prove, we must explore what exactly it is that Data, and to an extent other computer controlled intelligences, must possess in order to claim the right of personhood and self-ownership rather than existing as property and to do that we must take a closer look at what it means to have personhood and thus self-ownership (p. 305). The writers argue that one of the important differences between human beings and artificial intelligence is the experiencing of a variety of complex emotional states and the power that relationships and socio-cultural structures can hold over those emotions. As humans we have the choice of whether or not to fully experience emotional states and whether or not we allow outside forces to control those emotions. Essentially, personhood and self-ownership extend beyond legal definitions and reside in whether or not we allow others to dictate our interpretation of our feelings and our identity (Presbury, et al. 2003, p. 318). If we allow the beliefs of others, either socially or individually, to control our emotions and identity, then we are giving up our rights to personhood and self-ownership. What these conclusions mean in relation to Data and other AI is that they are probably not going to experience such existential and ontological uncertainties, but if they do, then they are equally at risk of losing the rights to self-ownership as we are outside of legal definitions (Presbury, et al., 2003, p. 319). The argument for the rights to self-ownership, both as humans and non-humans, outside of a legal discussion relates to my findings later in this paper.

Extending from concepts of personhood and self-ownership, Lynne Joyrich (1996) applied a feminist lens to *ST:TNG* and explored the implications of gendered connotations. Her findings suggest that *ST:TNG* poses itself as an antithesis to the heteronormative, white, male perspective, but the television series actually is not because it depicts the "liberated women" as independent only insofar as their independence is underwritten by the traditional norms (i.e. women are created to serve at the pleasure of) and authorized by men (p. 67, 74). The social structure depicted in the films does not provide women with the agency they deserve considering the supposed egalitarian system promoted by Starfleet. In relation to the posthuman cyborg Joyrich (1996) points out that there is a gap between representations of androids, cyborgs, and women, but there is a connection between the figurations of women and cyborgs where "cyborgs are feminized and women are cyborgized" (p. 66). What this means for non-human characters is that they are in a sense demoted to service-oriented roles provided the allusion of independent agency, but in reality that agency is still at the authorization of the men in power.

Tudor Balinisteanu also contributed to literature regarding posthumanist theories in science fiction and analyzing *Star Trek* characters. In one article, "The Cyborg Goddess: Social Myths of Women as Goddesses of Technologized Otherworlds," Balinisteanu (2007) explores the relationships between characters and the retelling of traditional myths within the film *Star Trek: First Contact*. His findings suggest that the Borg Queen, as a cyborg goddess (a blend of culture and technology) has the potential to change the narrative, but the way the story concluded reaffirmed the traditional endings to the nature goddess versus warrior god myths. Balinisteanu (2012) followed up those findings in article "Goddess Cults in Techno-Worlds: Tank Girl and the Borg Queen" by arguing that Tank Girl and the Borg Queen are partly defined through Goddess characteristics and through Haraway's/posthumanist cyborg characteristics. Balinisteanu also uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the "social myth" and the "antisocial myth" to outline the Goddess ethos in techno-worlds. He proves that "the heteroglossic antisocial myth accommodate a Goddess ethos that is truthful to the Goddess tradition of balance and interdependence between society and nature, while also being compatible with contemporary needs of adaptation to technology" (p. 8).

Lastly, Jacob Barber (2017) wrote an article exploring ‘the human’ concept and its construction within the *Star Trek* universe. Barber (2017) makes the argument that Star Trek aims to present a utopian vision of the future, but instead through its interactions with nonhuman life and technology, it reinforces an idealized vision of the human. He argues that Star Trek’s concept of ‘the human’ is loosely defined through how it is contrasted with the ‘non-human’ Other characters. Essentially, ‘the human’ is not an actualized concept, but rather a fluid idea that is only preserved through interactions with technologies, nonhuman, alien entities that are cast as subpar to ‘the human’ (p. 41). In reference to technology, Barber (2017) argues that Star Trek attempts to manage the role it plays in this futuristic utopian-like society and in so doing limits both the role of technology and the identity of ‘the human.’

Posthumanism and Identification

A practical application of posthumanist theories as they work within communication strategies cannot exist without the concept of identification. When it comes to the study of rhetoric (and persuasion in general), the concept of identification is usually implied. However, Kenneth Burke, in several of his writings, clearly outlined this concept and application to the study of rhetoric and persuasion. For Burke, identification is about finding commonalities; it is a process of discovering in each case, what makes us of the same substance so as to confront the implications of division. When it comes to substance, Burke (1950) points out that it is “an act; and a way of life is *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*”, or essentially of the same essence (p. 21). Identification is the simplest form of the persuasive act. Burke (1950) states that, “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (p. 55). Basically, Burke argues that the act of persuasion begins with addressing division through the process of establishing vital similarities with the other person.

Therefore, the concept of identification is vital to the examination of the implications of posthumanist theories. Regardless of whether or not the theories are explored literally or metaphorically, identification is the key to bringing out harmony between humans and technologies because the relationship between the two is inherently rhetorical. The literal aspect to posthumanism revolves around finding similarities between human and nonhuman entities in order to establish a harmonious existence with those who are like us, but not. From the symbolic perspective, if we use posthumanist imagery as a metaphor for the current socio-political structure, then, based on Burke’s associate between identification and persuasion, we must find ways to discuss and accept those things that make us the same, yet different. One way we attempt to have these conversations is through film and television, so the next section will discuss how identification works through that artistic medium.

Identification and Film

As entities with a capacity to create and understand complex communication systems, it is no wonder that we exploit as many methods as possible to communicate. There are many reasons why we choose to communicate and one of the primary reasons has to do with creating connections through transmitting personal perspectives, experiences, and meaning. Two of the complex systems that we use to communicate come in the form of narratives and visual art. Storytelling is verbal method of communication that is vital to the construction of (among other things) reality, identities, and communities. The visual arts are a nonverbal form of communication created to tap into emotions and portray experiences and states of being. Film is a modern-day art form that blends narratives and visual arts through auditory and visual stimulation for the purpose of saturating the senses with information for the purposes of communicating something (Woodward, 2003, p. 46). Film is also a persuasive medium; it functions as argumentation and encourages audiences to change their thoughts, beliefs, and/or behaviors through a blend of visual/audio presentation that attacks multiple senses and ways of knowing at the same time. All films, in one way or another through story construction and character development, have an undercurrent of Burke’s identification either through intentionally creating division as part of the argument or constructing relationships through similarities to reinforce the point of the film. Since

Burke's initial discussion of identification, rhetoric, and persuasion, many other scholars have built upon his concept and created a perspective through which a critic can analyze a film.

Gary C. Woodward (2003), in his book *The Idea of Identification*, provides a discussion of the evolution of this concept by reviewing the work of other scholars and explaining how identification works through the narrative and visual components of film. Woodward establishes the importance of narratives, stating "storytelling in all of its forms provides a mirror to ourselves and a window from which to view others" (p. 46). Film, as a medium for storytelling, combines the dramatic impact of a novel with the fixed point of view of theater in order to create artistic representations of characters that share similarities with us as individuals or those around us (Woodward, 2003, p. 47). In Woodward's book, he discusses several different approaches to identification, but Murray Smith's "imaginative engagement" works best for this discussion. Smith's imaginative engagement works on three levels, recognition, alignment, and allegiance.

Recognition is the act of a spectator constructing characters, as dictated by the narrative and narrative elements, through the filtering of her/his own experiences and perceptions of reality (Woodward, 2003, p. 50). The second level, alignment, is similar to visual point of view, because it considers how filmic elements (such as framing, camera angles, voice over narration, and so on) privilege specific information through the revelation of carefully selected story elements, which are used to construct meaning and guide the audience's experiences, perceptions of and relationships with the characters (Woodward, 2003, p. 51). Lastly, allegiance, addresses the emotional and psychological engagement between the spectator and the characters. Allegiance is where the spectator positively evaluates the reality and understanding of a character based on psychological factors such as motives, actions, and the context by which the character expresses them (Woodward, 2003, p. 52). Film is perfectly suited to the construction of allegiance between spectators and characters because of its "power to control the flow and sequencing of information to maximize our understanding of a character's virtue" (Woodward, 2003, p. 52). Even though allegiance is a powerful aspect to film identification it can also be a great place to play with narrative distance. Narrative distance is a technique where expected or familiar story structures and characterizations are shifted, violated, or ignored so as to deconstruct the hero or deny her/him the claim on morality (Woodward, 2003, 54). This technique of narrative distance is common in the science fiction genre where the audience is put in a position to expect the unexpected in regard to plot structure and character actions and motivations. With both posthumanism and identification in place, in the next section I will apply both concepts to an analysis of Data.

WHO (OR WHAT) IS DATA?

The film *Star Trek: Insurrection* (Berman & Frakes, 1998) is a brilliant metaphor on how to engage with the posthuman Other, or the nonhuman. This metaphor plays out through literal and symbolic meanings constructed through identification as Data goes experiences three different phases of projections and interactions, which are Data as Feared Other, Data in Negotiation, and Data as Accepted Other. *Insurrection* explicitly explores interactions and relationships between humans and artificial intelligence as part of its narrative, but more specifically the narrative explores interactions between a community that rejects AI and advanced technologies to the point of outright hostility and works to eventually accept Data for who and what he is. Throughout the television series, there have been occasional episodes dedicated to the exploration of the relationship between humans and technology, but within the overall storyline, technology is simply an integrated part of the culture. In the film, the primary storyline follows the crew of the Enterprise as they uncover the truth behind Starfleet's involvement with an alien race known as the Son'a and their plan to harvest the unusual concentration of metaphasic radiation that has unique regenerative properties that are part of a collection of rings that surround a planet that is home to a peaceful race known as the Ba'ku. The Ba'ku are a race of humans who have advanced science and technological capabilities, but because of a war that almost wiped out their entire race, they decided to reject the use and integration of technology in their daily lives and instead focus on aesthetics. The process of harvesting the metaphasic radiation will kill every living being on the planet, so Starfleet in

conjunction with the Son'a decided to secretly move the population of six hundred people by transporting them onto a holoship designed to look like their village without their knowledge. Data, as member of the Enterprise crew, volunteered for the "duck blind" mission that was set up to observe the Ba'ku and during his research he discovered the hidden holoship and was attacked by Son'a weapons, which damaged his systems and made his ethical and moral subroutines kick in. When these subroutines kicked in, Data compromised the mission by revealing himself and the duck blind observation suite to the Ba'ku. Needless to say, the Ba'ku are not happy with the situation they find themselves in and when the Enterprise crew rendezvous with Data, they get involved with uncovering the plot and end up fighting to save this peaceful race. With this brief synopsis in place, I will break down the three different projections of Data and communication interactions that occur between Data and Ba'ku. As mentioned above, there are three distinct stages, Data as Feared Other, Data in Negotiation, and Data and Accepted Other.

Data begins the film as a Feared Other. I define the Feared Other as any entity that awakens fear in another by violating social conventions and expectations either purposefully or by simply existing. In the *Star Trek* universe, the Feared Other is generally portrayed as nonhumanoid aliens or technologies that are set up as divergent from the normal 'human' concept (Barber, 2017, p. 40). In this case, the Feared Other is literally an out of control artificial intelligence that appears to be attacking a population of people at random and for no apparent reason. Outside of the reaction to the need for physical survival, there is a deeper issue at play which is that artificial intelligence that is fully aware and able to express its perceptions and existence can threaten the ontological and epistemological supremacy of the human (Ferrando, 2012, p. 13). In a literal sense this is what Data represents to the Ba'ku, an artificial lifeform that threatens a state of being and a very specific worldview. From a realist perspective, Data and other artificial intelligences can also challenge our actual ontological and epistemic understandings, but Data as a Feared Other also represents any person who threatens the socio-cultural political foothold of the dominant voice (heteronormative, white, male), which is basically any person who is a member of a marginalized or minority group who often feel excluded from the human race and are therefore constructed as, nonhuman voices by those who hold positions of perceived power.

To set the stage of the construction of Data as Feared other, the movie opens with shots of piles of haystacks and children running around playing. The setting is rural and serene. As the camera moves through the village it provides the audience the point of view of a member of the community living their daily routine. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a voice over shocks the audience out of the community mindset talking about resolutions as the camera quickly pans back and reveals a computer monitor inside an observation suite. The next shot is of Starfleet personnel and the camera action mimics the previous scanning of the village, but this time within the duck blind. The audience is thrust into the action and witness's conversations about apprehending "the android" that has, for some unknown reason, gone rouge. There is obvious panic because malfunctioning technology with uncontained free will is unpredictable and therefore incredibly dangerous. For dedicated viewers, "the android" is quite obviously Data, but for those who may not be familiar with the show, the terminology alone constructs Data as separate, nonhuman Other. The camera continues to shift points of view between Starfleet personnel and a member of the Ba'ku who have no idea what is happening or why, allowing the audience to gather as much information as possible. From the Ba'ku's perspective all they see is weapons fire from unknown sources while an altercation ensues between "the android" and other members of the Starfleet ground team. The Starfleet officers outside of the duck blind are wearing red isolation suits that make them invisible to the community and they can only be seen on the computer monitors in the duck blind, so the shifting point of view allows the audience to see both perspectives, what is really happening and what the Ba'ku see. When Data reveals himself by taking off his isolation suit head covering and appearing as a disembodied head to the community, the audience sees Data through the eyes of the Ba'ku, a terrifying bodiless, nonhuman, dangerous thing. For those who are familiar with Data and have some previous attachment to the character already, this sequence of shots creates a shocking narrative distance between the attachment with the anthropomorphized android character and reality of his existence. For the first time we see Data for what he really is, an uncontrollable, technologized, nonhuman Other. The intention

is to create fear and anxiety in the audience because Data is no longer Data, but something *else*, something to fear.

The scene described above depicts something that could possibly happen with malfunctioning artificial intelligence, something that all humans fear, a reminder that we do not have as much control over our environment as we would like to believe and even less so of artificial intelligence programmed to learn, develop, and adjust. Later in the movie the audience discovers that Data encountered radiation that disengaged his “cognitive” abilities, but fortunately his ethical and moral subroutines engaged that prevented him from harming innocents. What this suggests is that when it comes to creating and interacting with artificial intelligence, writing a code of ethical and moral standards is probably a good idea, similar to our own moral codes of conduct that we learn as children. On the symbolic level, this scene flips the script of identification. Data’s physical design is in the image of a dominant, white, male voice, but through the opening sequence of shots we see him as the Feared Other, suggesting identification between the opposing voices. At some point we all experience the Feared Other, either as the one feared or the one fearing someone or something else. For example, the traditionally dominant voice fears the removal from power, while the minority and marginalized societies fear suppression and forced conformity. Regardless of who or what people identify as, people fear what they do not understand and when previous experiences, media, or society tells us to fear a particular group of people, we will, until something changes. The flipped script in the film is a unique way to suggest that both sides view one another as Feared Others and this acknowledgement of fear and the identification of the problem can be the first step towards conversations and change.

The second perspective is Data in Negotiation. Negotiation is the most important stage both as perspective and a communication strategy. Five things must happen in order for negotiation to succeed, which are high levels of self-awareness, ownership of emotions and experiences, willingness to be vulnerable, engaging in difficult conversations, and the ability to set healthy boundaries. Data is aware that he is an android, a nonhuman Other. He is the literal representation of Haraway’s (2001) description of feminist practice, the “self-knowledge of a self-who-is-not” (p. 299). But the question is, how do those with this self-knowledge communicate with others? Data demonstrates how to do this through his negotiation process. The perfect scene to demonstrate what Negotiation can look like is the conversation that Data has with a young boy, Artim (portrayed by Michael Welch) as the Ba’Ku attempt to escape from the attacking Son’a. Prior to this scene, a small landing party from the Enterprise decided to go against Starfleet’s orders and defend the Ba’ku’s right to stay on the planet. In this scene, the audience watches as the Ba’ku evacuate through the hills towards mountain caves that can protect them from the Son’a’s abductions. Prior to the evacuation Artim’s witnessed his father’s abduction in a previous scene and amongst all the commotion, Data saved the boy from the same fate. The scene opens with the camera panning the mountain setting. The audience watches but is not a part of the slow progression of the villagers as they hike towards the caves. As the camera moves, it pauses every so often on the other main characters, until it rests on Data and Artim. Once the camera finds them, it cuts to a medium shot of Data and Artim and follows them as they move away from the group to a set of boulders. Artim opens up conversation by asking Data if he likes being a machine, to which Data replies, “I aspire to be more than I am.” Artim fires back, “I know why. So people like us won’t be afraid of you anymore.” Data responds, noncommittally, “perhaps” (Berman & Frakes, 1998). The two sit down and the camera focuses solely on their conversation, framing both characters inside the boulder so as to block the people walking behind them, allowing the audience to focus solely on the conversation between Data and Artim. Over the course of the next few minutes, the conversation between Data and Artim is tense, but they are able to create some sort of relationship through identification of shared difficulties. Data pursues the conversation by proving his desire to be more than he is by gathering information on what it is like to be a human child. Artim appears to become more comfortable throughout the short exchange, finally offering Data advice on what it’s like to be a child, “look, if you wanna know what it’s like to be a child, you need to learn to play” (Berman & Frakes, 1998).

Identification is a process of creating understanding based on presumed similitude through conversation. The persuasive act occurs when a speaker attempts to discuss and co-create understanding

based on those presumptions. The symbolic meaning of this scene has the largest implications for how to have conversations to bridge gaps between rhetorically constructed opposing camps. It shows that it is possible to negotiate identification, to co-construct new meanings without asking groups to compromise their carefully created identities as separates. This conversation between Data and Artim includes the five actions that must occur for Negotiation to succeed; self-awareness, ownership, vulnerability, difficult conversation, and boundaries. Data, with his self-awareness of his Otherness, takes the first step and attempts to bridge a gap between two socially constructed and feared divergent groups through ownership and vulnerability. Both Data and Artim own their emotions and experiences without judgment of self or the Other. Through their conversation, Data acknowledges Artim's fear, but does not shame him for that experience, instead Data attempts to find ways to help Artim express and talk through that fear. At the same time, Data owns his existence as something other than human without shame for that existence. Both characters express their vulnerabilities while having a clearly difficult conversation and setting boundaries for behavior and future interactions. Talking through fear is never an easy task, but as Data and Artim engage in the conversation, they find ways to identify and build common ground, mostly with Data's admission that he wants to understand what it is like to be a child. As the conversation ensues, both characters establish and build respect for the other's *otherness*.

This scene is the most important in the film both literally and figuratively. As we continue to develop and interact advanced technologies, we have to find ways to relate to objects that are seemingly unrelatable. That does not mean promoting ideas of human elitism and control, but rather attempting to co-create ways that acknowledge the validity of all experiences. Figuratively this scene is an idealistic example of what could be when we do the emotional work and engage in the difficult conversations with those that we personally perceive as Feared Others. Our current social and political communicative environment is a battlefield for control and forced conformity of norms that do not allow all voices their rightful validity. Communication among people in Negotiation, while not easy, is a way to promote healing through constructive interactions, which opens up avenues to transition between Feared Others to Accepted Others.

The final state of that Data experiences is the Accepted Other. Katherine Hayles (1999) acknowledges that from the perspective of the posthuman, the human is no longer seen as the master who must dominate and control, instead, "the distributed cognition of the emergent human subject correlates with the distributed cognitive system as a whole, in which 'thinking' is done by both human and nonhuman actors" (p. 290). The state of existence as an Accepted Other is the position by which rhetorically different groups accept the validity of all voices and no one voice can claim dominance over the other. The Accepted Other is absolute equality. The Accepted Other is the belief understanding is an acceptance of difference and that difference does not equal wrongness. The final scene of *Insurrection* visually brings the narrative full circle and encourages a sense of closure for the audience. After the defeat of the Son'a, the destruction of the collection device, and the Enterprise swoops over in the nick of time to save the day, the film closes by demonstrating unity between the entities that once existed in a state of conflict. In the final scene, there is a sequence of shots that show Data and Artim playing in the haystacks. As the camera rests on a close up of the haystacks, Data pops out of one haystack and Artim from the other in tandem. The audience hears Dr. Crusher's voice calling out to telling Data that it's time to go and in true Data fashion, he imitates the experience of being a child (including a child-like voice) by telling his new friend, "I have to go home now" (Berman & Frakes, 1998). Both Data and Artim sink back into the haystacks in unison and as the camera pulls back both characters, while walking toward the camera and picking hay off of one another's clothing, come into full view. This point of view and camera movement situates the audience as part of the community once again, just like it did in the beginning. Sojef (portrayed by Daniel Hugh Kelly), Artim's father and primary antagonist against Data, approaches Data with an extended hand and says, "Mr. Data, I hope we'll see you again" (Berman & Frakes, 1998). Data reciprocates the behavior and we witness his full acceptance as a non-human Other. Literally, this scene depicts what life can be like with the inclusion of artificial intelligence and advanced technologies. Yes, there are risks involved and we need to discuss them, but there are just as many, if not more, things that can go right. There are advantages potentially beautiful advantages and lessons to learn through the

incorporation of AI into our human-dominated existence. On that same note, there are real advantages to transitioning Feared Others to Accepted Others just as they are without forcing conformity.

In the end, the posthumanist conversation is all about finding common ground, by blending multiple voices and perspectives in order to construct a more complete vision of reality and understanding of being. The interactions between human and nonhuman voices have the potential to open up a multiverse of perspectives and states of being. One perspective does not have to limit or define the boundaries of the other, but rather they can work in unison to create a more beautiful image. This final scene symbolically represents what our conversations could look like when one group stops vying for power and the other stops yelling to be heard, when we work to accept people as they are and listen with the intent to understand and heal, rather than to control.

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