MISperformance – essays in shifting perspectives

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Posthuman Misperformance: BP and the Flight of the Whooping Cranes

Hacking BP

In the wake of the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, which began in April, 2010, artists Mark Skwarek and Joseph Hocking created an augmented reality app for the iPhone called *The Leak is in Your Home Town*. Augmented reality refers to the virtual overlaying of information over physical reality, usually in real-time. *The Leak is in Your Home Town* overlays an animation of a spewing oil pipe on BP's Helios logo, thus allowing iPhone users to hack the logos found in their everyday life and install a gushing plume of oil into one's own home town.

BP performances

We can use the BP disaster to theorize *posthuman misperformance*. The concept of posthuman misperformance brings together two complex concepts, and it's worth spending some time introducing and unpacking them. To begin unpacking "misperformance," it helps to define "performance". My research may seem to focus far from theatrical performance—and it does—but theater itself not only involves cultural performance but also technological performance (from *deus ex machina* to computerized light systems) and organizational performance (there's a reason theatre companies are called "theatre companies"—theater requires organization). Further, theater provides an alternative to Romantic creativity and its models of the poet and painter, which stress individual genius, originality, monomedium, and expertise, whereas theatre entails collaborative effort, reworking of

existing materials, multiple media, and a more open, "let's put on a show" sensibility. With this open and recombinant perspective, let's see what types of performance make up the BP disaster.

First and foremost, the BP disaster foregrounds *organizational performance*. I am not using the term "performance" metaphorically, as if its proper, literal meaning resided in theatre, in contrast to figurative uses by business managers. Rather, managers have developed specific discourses and practices of performance, every bit as real and proper as cultural performance. Organizational performance stretches from individual workers to work groups and divisions, all the up to performance of the entire organization and its top management. Traditionally, organizational performance has meant *efficiency*, in contrast to the social efficacy valorized by scholars studying cultural performance. In the wake of the Gulf disaster, much attention fell on BP's organizational performance, especially the alleged cutting of safety measures on the Deepwater Horizon rig in face of corporate pressures to quickly finish and move on to the next site. In July, 2010, BP CEO Tony Hayward was forced to announce his retirement.

Attention has also fallen on BP's technological performance; specifically, the performance of the "blowout preventers". According to the web site Technology Review, published by MIT, the gulf disaster "reveals an over-reliance on one piece of equipment that academic and industry experts have warned of for close to a decade: The blowout preventers, or BOPs, […] are the industry's primary line of defense against deep water oil spills".[1] In other words, at issue is not only the performance of the specific blowout preventer on the Deepwater Horizon, but the technology itself. Technological performance can be generally understood in terms of technical *effectiveness*, and technologies from missiles to household appliances have "performance specs" detailing their performance.

And cultural performance is also at work in the BP disaster. While one can study organizations with charts and spreadsheets, institutions generate more than numbers and efficiencies; they also have a qualitative, social dimension that is commonly called cultural. Indeed, since its name change from "British Petroleum" to "BP Amoco" after a merger with a US oil firm, and then simply to the initials "BP," the firm has carefully crafted a public, cultural image of itself as a responsible corporate citizen, and its Helios logo—the green and yellow sunflower—was designed to convey BP's commitment to alternative energies and environmentalism. It even looks suspiciously similar to the logo of Canada's Green Party.

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1   Peter Fairley, "How Technology Failed in the Gulf Spill", *Technology Review*, 4 May 2010, http://www.technologyreview.com/energy/25238/ [accessed 1 May 2014].

Just as important as this external cultural performance, however, is BP's internal culture. Here we find a jarring contrast: according to numerous sources in the US and UK, the avoidance of safety measures in the Gulf disaster was not an isolated event. Rather, it reflects what the *Times Online of London* cited in 2007 as BP's "terrifying safety culture," citing an investigation by the US Chemical Safety Board following a Texas accident that killed 15 people and wounded 180.[2] The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration reports that BP has had some 690 violations between 2007 and 2010.

The exposure of this contrast between BP's sunny, responsible cultural image and its "terrifying safety culture" proved financially disastrous for the firm. This leads us to yet another of its BP's performances. As depicted in the graph of BP's stock's financial performance from July, 2009 to July, 2010, its stock value plunged beginning in April, when the disaster started. At one point, BP had lost more than half its market capitalization, a loss of some $95 billion. Again, financial performance is not a metaphorical term: stocks literally perform, as do index funds and entire markets. Indeed, the standard legal disclaimer used by financial firms worldwide reads: "past performance is no guarantee of future results". Given this dismal financial performance and the damage done to its brand, some at the time wondered whether BP might *change its name*, taking up "Amoco," the name it phased out only in 2008 (the America oil company Amoco having merged with BP in 1998).

Cultural performance, organizational performance, technological performance, and financial performance all constitute what I call performance paradigms, specific regimes of knowledge in which discourses and practices

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2   See http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/natural_resources/article1538641.ece.

of performance have been formalized and institutionalized. Other performance paradigms include medical performance (e.g., performance-enhancing drugs) and educational performance (the first IQ tests were called "performance tests"). All of these have emerged in the past half-century or so.

The Performance stratum

That cultures, organizations, technologies, and markets all *perform* suggests that performance may be a—if not, *the*—defining element of the contemporary world. Indeed, at the center of my research is the following proposition: *performance will have been to the 20th and 21st centuries what discipline was to the 18th and 19th, namely, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge.* That is, underlying the performance paradigms at work in the BP Gulf disaster is a more fundamental performance, a *performance stratum* of onto-historical forces that is rein scribing and displacing the disciplinary stratum analyzed by Foucault. Whereas global disciplinarity produced liberal, industrial capitalism, colonialism, and the rise of the nation-state, global performativity entails neoliberal, information capitalism, postcolonialism, and the rise of multinational institutions, not only corporations but also the UN and NGOs.

Moreover, over the past decade, institutions around the world have begun adopting performance management practices focused not only on organizational efficiency and financial profitability but also adopting multivalent performance criteria for assessing their global citizenship and thus helping to generate a better future. Briefly put: processes of performance auditing and evaluation originally developed to improve organizational efficiency and economic profitability have been transformed into tools for activists fighting for labor and human rights, the environment, and transparent corporate governance.

One worldwide effort started in the year 2000 with the United Nation's Global Compact initiative, a project to promote global sustainability by encouraging corporations around the world to self- assess three types of performance: social (human rights), environmental (compliance with laws and standards), and economic (revenues, costs, etc.). The premise is that corporations can begin to trade off or "satisfice" between competing performative values. Collectively, these are known as the "triple bottom line", or "people, planet, and profits", a phrase coined by the Royal Dutch/Shell Group in an influential series of annual reports. The UN's Global Compact provides a highly public forum for corporations to voluntarily report their triple bottom line performance. By trying to shape corporate decision-making and policies, the Compact effectively created satisficial rituals to generate a more sustainable future.

Indeed, "sustainability performance" has emerged as an umbrella term to encompass environmental performance, social performance, and safety

performance. Check page 6 from BP's 2009 Sustainability Review (http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/sustainability/group-reports/bp_sustainability_review_2009.pdf).

On the performance stratum—or "P stratum" for short—we thus not only see the emergence of multiple performance paradigms but also their convergence into ever more complex models of governance and control, some of which purport to build a better future.

While the disciplinary stratum institutionalized Western humanism, the P-stratum portends the emergence of posthumanism, an event that is not only historical but also ontological, as it entails a transmutation of being, not only "our understanding" of it but *what the world is*.

Posthumanism I: Which One?

What is the posthuman? A better question is *"which one?"* for there are several types, which I will also quickly outline, prefacing my remarks by stressing that we should understand the prefix "post-" not only in the sense of following or coming after, but also in the sense of *posting* or sending a letter. I will thus sketch several types of posthumanism, posing each as if it involved someone or *something* that *posts the human*.

First, the *anthropological* posting. Here what posts the human are other, non-Western cultures. In a 2008 symposium on the posthuman at the University of Wisconsin, my late colleague anthropologist Neil Whitehead stressed that different cultures have not only produced alternative concepts and histories of "the human", but also different ontologies—different types of *being human*. From a Western perspective, what does being human mean if one regularly talks with spirits, or can turn into an animal, or walk on a thin string up to sky? It is all too easy to exoticize or, alternatively, domesticate these alternative "being humans" as ideological or mythic conceptions. What posthumanism offers here is a way of relativizing the humanist ontology of Western modernity, reinscribing it in relation to other ontologies.

Second: the *philosophical* posting. I'm tempted to say that the "poster" here is Nietzsche, who might also be hailed as the grandfather—or even the grandmother—of this posthuman, though the familial metaphor is strained and staticky. I'll go with the static and mash together Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze: with this posthuman, we face not the end of human, but its closure, its reinscription and displacement within a nonlinear space-time of onto-historical forces. As Deleuze puts it: this "death of Man" is much less the disappearance of humans and much more than a change of concept. Channeling Foucault, Man is but "an invention of recent date", "like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea", about to be erased. At issue here is the philosophical status of the human as subject of knowledge, agent of history, and master of the world. In addition to Nietzsche, who or what posts the human here might be the trace, the Outside, difference and repetition.

I should note here that Nietzsche famously said "man is a bridge", and his theory of the "superman" stands as a problematic figure of the posthuman, given its sinister appropriation by the Nazis.

A third, closely related, posting is the *technological* displacement of the human, articulated most forcibly by Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, and Avital Ronell. What posts the human here would be *the cyborg, informatics, or technology understood as radical alterity*. Though this is not Haraway's main concern, many readings of the cyborg emphasize prosthetic devices that undermine the human body as privileged site of agency and volition. With informatics, we have a more systemic displacement, for it situates humans within broader flows of information and capital. Finally, the notion of technology as radical alterity *frontloads* technology within human history, making it co-terminus with human development and *not* some recent arrival. As Ronell famously puts it: "There is no off switch to the technological", thus suggesting that it's always been on, pushing our buttons, or—more radically—that it is what turned us humans "on" in the first place.

The *fourth* posting of the human comes from recent work on *animal rights and the distinction of human and animal*. Significantly, several of the writers already mentioned have theorized the "animal": including Haraway with her work on animal sociology, Deleuze and Guattari and "becoming-animal", and Derrida's *"l'animot"*. Here I will single out the work of Cary Wolfe, whose 2003 book *Animal Rites* and his *Zoontologies* collection from the same year have come to mark the initiation of a robust, posthumanist field of animal theory. While animal rights theorists such as Adams, Regan, and Singer have contributed to this emerging field, they have also been criticized for their *residual humanism*. By contrast, Wolfe draws upon Derrida, in particular, in attempting to move beyond the anthropocentric "speciesism" that informs most thinking about animals. Rather than extending human rights to a selection of "human-like" animals, this project involves a reinscription of the very distinction of human and animal. The interest is thus *less* about "how *human* some animals are", and *more* about "how *animal* humans are". In some sense, here *animality* posts the human.

A *fifth* posting might be called the *"ecological posthuman"*, for it situates the human within even larger, environmental processes, not only global but also cosmic. Though one could cite the work of Latour here, or that of radical ecologists, I am thinking of a lineage that connects Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* to Guattari's late work, namely *Chaosmosis* and *The Three Ecologies*. Bateson and Guattari shared an interest in how the human mind links up with material and symbolic processes found in both organic and inorganic "life". Guattari wrote of the "machinic phylum" and the "geology of morals". While Bateson theorized the ecology of mind in terms of the positive and negative feedback loops characteristic of early cybernetic theory, Guattari relied on the autopoetic, recursive loops that became crucial to

chaos theory. For both theorists, the unit of life is no longer the individual or species, but "organism plus environment". Here, *the world or the cosmos* posts the human.

The last posting is the religious, for contemporary religious fundamentalisms can be understood as offering a type of posthumanism. Here, *God, Allah, or Jehovah does the posting*. Now one might be tempted to see fundamentalist attacks on secular humanism as pre-modern or pre-humanistic, but the very terms and media through which such attacks now occur are themselves informed by modernity and humanism. This fundamentalist strain is arguably the most powerful posthumanism operating today: none of the other theories of the posthuman can approach it in terms of institutions, finances, or number of adherents. Thus, while exploring or promoting the posthuman, posthumanism, and even the posthumanities, one should also be wary of becoming unwitting *accomplices* of this fundamentalist posthumanism.

Posthumanism II: The End of Humanism and the Undoable

In light of the BP oil well dug deep in the Gulf of Mexico, we might recall here Conan Doyle's sci-fi story, "The Day the Earth Screamed", in which a certain Professor Challenger proves that the world is a living organism by drilling down through its crust and violently puncturing its skin, at which point the Earth responds by spewing foul, stinking material back up the hole and covering everything around it. While some may balk at the idea of the Earth "living", we can and do conceive of it as a dynamic system, one composed of complex processes that interact and evolve over time: indeed, anything that constitutes or can be described as a system can also be said to perform, for that is precisely what systems do: they perform. Thus, even the world performs.

If the P-stratum indeed helps produce the posthuman, that means it challenges both the liberal humanism of John Stuart Mill, based on individual freedom, and the critical humanism of much cultural theory, which relies on such human social categories as class, gender, and race. Within performance studies, these two humanisms have a long, intimate relationship. Historically, the study of ritual and theatre has long been used to support performance scholars' critiques of liberal humanist individualism and their accompanying valorization of the social, a critique and valorization that I am here calling "critical humanism" due to its stress on critical social forces.

Even with the emergence of solo performance art as a key analytical site in the 1990s, this critical humanist perspective has focused on identity's social construction, rather than the creative genius of the individual performer. However, more recent work in animal performance, digital performance, and environmental performance all test the limits of criti-

cal humanism in profound ways and connect us to the posthuman. To put it bluntly: reducing everything to social construction is itself an all-too-human gesture. Just as individualism was critically resituated in terms of the social, the social is itself being reinscribed within larger performative systems, whether these be animality, technology, the environment, etc.

At the same time, avian and swine flus, shuttle disasters and computer glitches, volcano clouds and oil disasters all bring attention to the fact that both performances and performative misfirings may be irreducible to human agency or human error, giving new and urgent impetus to the study of posthuman misperformance. Significantly, Richard Schechner effectively gestured toward something like posthuman misperformance way back in 1982, in his book *The End of Humanism*. He writes:

> I define stability as accepting limits to human action—limits that are not the outermost boundaries of knowledge or ability but a frame consciously set around what is "acceptable," defining anything outside that frame as "un-doable."
> Accepting such a frame means the end of humanism.[3]

Though Schechner does not use the term "posthuman misperformance", I find his alignment of "the end of humanism" and the "un-doable" to be a premonition of it. Like Schechner, I am skeptical that one can *know* the outermost boundaries of knowledge and ability, but I am also skeptical that one can *consciously* frame the limits of the acceptable and the undoable, the line where the human ends and its others begin.

The bacteria living in our stomach; the imprint of branches and tools on the shape of our thumbs; the role of salt water in the firing of our neurons—all suggest that we can relaunch Bruno Latour's famous dictum that "we've never been modern" into another orbit: "we've never been human". Or at least, we've never been and never will be fully, 100%, totally human, and all those frames we have tried to build and maintain—all those limits between human/divine, human/animal, human/plant, human/machine, human/inorganic—all of them are porous and leaky and escape our conscious ability to delimit the doable and undoable, the living and the dead. As the marine lover Nietzsche provokes us to ponder: life is but a rare form of death, the inorganic.

Posthumanism III: ANT and garden performance

The emergence of posthumanism, I contend, coincides with that of the performance stratum. However awash our thoughts might be with salt water, these posthumanisms help us think performance as an onto-historical for-

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3   Richard Schechner, *The End of Humanism: Writings on Performance*, PAJ Publications, New York 1982, p. 96.

mation. At the same time, performance can help us think the posthuman as the reformatting of human agency within larger performative systems. The work of Latour and other proponents of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) articulate this reinscription. For many years now, Latour and other ANT researchers in Science and Technology Studies have been theorizing the performance of laboratories and inanimate objects.

The relation of ANT and Performance Studies can be posed in a number of ways. In a study of Latour titled *Prince of Networks*, philosopher Graham Harman describes the performative dimension of Latour's ANT (actor-network theory), while also hurling a critical stone at those who understand performativity solely in terms of subject formation. Harman writes that, for Latour:

> the essence of a thing results only from its public performance in the world, and in this respect he does agree with certain postmodernist currents. Yet one can hardly imagine the Judith Butlers acknowledging the "performativity" of *inanimate* objects as well as of human actors. In this way, Latour strikes a tacit [blow] against every version of speech-act theory: what he gives us is not speech-act theory but *actor-act* theory.[4]

Harman's engagement here with the "Judith Butlers" of the world amounts to drive-by critique, as he hurls this critical missive and then speeds away to other arguments. I should note that in a 2010 talk in Berlin titled "From Performativity to Precarity", Butler spoke of the precarity that "implicates us in a non-human world of life". But she also did so at high speed, and in the end remained concerned with the life-and-death political situations of human subjects. My interest here is not to choose between Harman's object-oriented ontology and Butler's subject-oriented political theory. As I have been attempting for some time, one can theorize the performativity of *both* subjects and objects—and beyond. Indeed, since the disciplinary formation institutionalized Descartes' subject/object opposition throughout our lifeworld, we can expect the P-stratum to produce something else. Indeed, since disciplinarity democratized modern critical thinking, we can expect perfumative thought to be something else, as well.

Another ANT perspective on posthuman mis/performance comes via the performance concepts introduced by Donald MacKenzie (no relation), a sociologist who has lately been working in the sociology of economics. MacKenzie's interest in performativity informs the title of his recent book, *An Engine, not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets*, by which he indicates that economic models should be seen not as pictures or reports on

4   Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, re.press, Melbourne 2009, p. 66.

the world but as engines capable of acting in and on it—in short, as perfor-mative processes. MacKenzie may appear to be importing Austin's concept of performative utterance into the field of Science and Technology Studies. But two things counter this appearance. First, as earlier noted, ANT perform-ance concepts have long been deployed in STS by researchers such as Latour, Michel Callon and Andrew Pickering. Second, MacKenzie explicitly distin-guishes his concept of performativity from Austin's performative, arguing that he does not limit his notion of model to cognitive models, linguistic utterances, or beliefs "in the head." Indeed, MacKenzie addresses the ways in which scientific models also become incorporated in *nonhuman* bodies and materials, such as algorithms, procedures, and technical devices.[5]
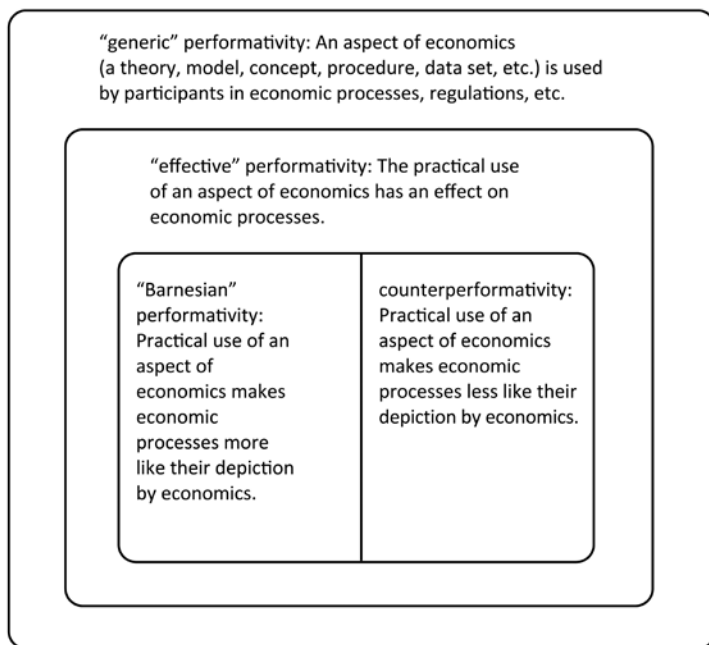
Let us note here that Austin's original formulation of performative misfiring was itself all-too-human, as all four conditions of success focus on human agents: namely, a social convention must be properly executed; the appropriate persons must carry it out; the utterance must be completely ex-ecuted; and those involved must be sincere. These conditions do not suffice when the performativity of technologies, materials, and algorithms enter the picture—the point forcefully made by Harman and MacKenzie. While Butler has focused much attention on the paradox that subjectivity is itself performatively constructed, the ANT folks are on to something else—the performative agency of nonhuman actors.

Beyond this deeper incorporation of models into both people and things, it is MacKenzie's classification of different types or *degrees* of perfor-mativity that may be most relevant to Performance Studies and to theories of misperformance, in particular. In the book's opening chapter, he offers this diagram outlining the relation of four different concepts of performa-tivity. [FIG. 1]

Though MacKenzie does not call these degrees of performativity, I think this is the best way to begin understanding them. At the outer, most general level is "'generic' performativity," the empirical use of an academic theory or model by economic participants, either in business or govern-ment. This use—which could be descriptive or hypothetical—has little or no impact on the economy. Next, for "'effective' performativity." MacKenzie writes that a model must "*make a difference*," perhaps by making an econom-ic process possible or by altering an outcome.

He contends, however, that the most interesting concepts reside in the innermost subsets. On the left is "Barnesian performativity," in which a model or theory impacts economic phenomenon to such a degree that these *conform to the model in question*. In earlier work, MacKenzie called this performativity "Austinian" but later renamed it after the sociologist Barry

5   Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine, not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2008, p. 19.

"generic" performativity: An aspect of economics (a theory, model, concept, procedure, data set, etc.) is used by participants in economic processes, regulations, etc.

"effective" performativity: The practical use of an aspect of economics has an effect on economic processes.

"Barnesian" performativity: Practical use of an aspect of economics makes economic processes more like their depiction by economics.

counterperformativity: Practical use of an aspect of economics makes economic processes less like their depiction by economics.

[FIG. 1] The performativity of economics: a possible classification.
Drawn from Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera*. Page 17, Figure 1.1

Barnes, who studied the role of self-validating feedback loops in social life. With Barnesian performativity, the model or concept becomes almost invisible, as subject and object appear to confirm one another and expectation and reality converge. This performativity is not just ideological, but also material, as it becomes built into tools, infrastructure, even the way phenomena become visible and situated in the world.

On the right of MacKenzie's chart, we find "counterperformativity," whereby a model's impact has the opposite effect: economic processes tend not to conform but rather to *diverge* from that very model. Reality appears to turn on the model using the very evidence generated by it, only now that evidence calls into question the assumptions and biases. [i] Counterperformativity would thus appear to be a version of "misfiring" or "misperformance," though following Derrida, we might want to consider its constitutive effects, essentially installing counter-performativity within generic performativity.

MacKenzie analyzes the performativity of a single economic algorithm known as Black-Scholes— one that, by the way, was once described as seeking to abolish risk by complex hedging of bets. However, the categories of performativity he provides could be applied to *any* theory or model, and my

interest here lies in how counter-performativity can help us understand posthuman misperformance. One might, for instance, consider whether Butler's concept of gender performativity has itself attained the level of Barnesian performativity, becoming part of the world it once theorized. I would argue that it has within LGBT activism. Alternatively, we might consider whether Schechner's concept of the ritualization of theater ever "counter-performed, " for instance, in the early 1980s, since *The End of Humanism* deals precisely with the failure of environmental theatre in the face of actor President Ronald Reagan.

A third way to connect Performance Studies and Actor-Network Theory can be seen in the work of British geographer Russell Hitchens. [FIG. 2]

In his essay "People, Plants, Performance,"—a title reminiscent of Shell's "People, Planet, and Profits"—Hitchens researches eight gardens in North London to analyze the entwined performance of gardeners and plants. He argues that each "enrolls" the other into performing. Hitchens even provides this diagram of the "chains of enrolment" that emerge as gardener and garden perform together. While the person enrolls plants within the garden and becomes a designer, Hitchens writes that:

> The plants performed themselves into existence as discrete entities such that they became almost considered as similar to people. And this was something that the gardeners enjoyed. They enjoyed their enrolment as happy stagehands, not lead actors, waiting for and coaxing out different beautiful plant performances. So it was equally through the active enrolment by plants themselves that the status of the gardener should be understood.[6]

What Actor-Network Theory offers Performance Studies is another way of researching multi-valent posthuman performances, performances composed of people, plants, animals, technologies, etc. In terms of the BP Gulf disaster, we might ask: what has been its impact on seabed performance, or the performance of air, water, and soil?

Posthuman misperformance I

As we've seen, the BP gulf disaster entails a wide variety of performance paradigms: technological, organizational, cultural, and financial. Each paradigm entails self-validating feedback loops and patterns of iterability that allow one to identify performances and their mis-firings. While the four performance paradigms seen in the BP disaster all involve both human and non-human actors, we usually attribute agency primarily to the people

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6   Russell Hitchens, "People, Plants, Performance: on actor network theory and the material pleasures of the private garden", *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4: 1(2003), p. 107.
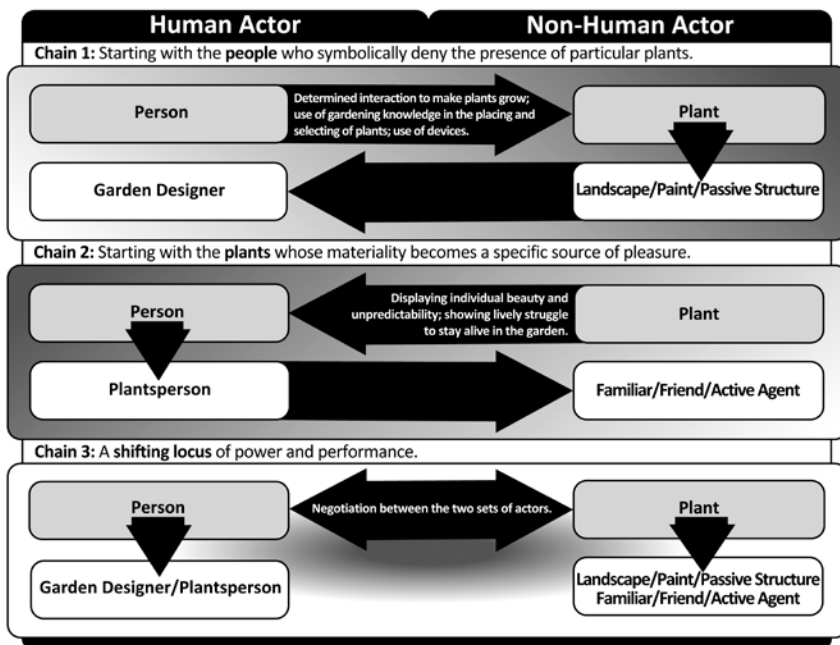
[FIG 2.] Diagram based on Figure 1 "Chains of enrolment in the garden"
from Rusell Hitchens "People, Plants, Performance"

using the machinery, running a meeting, designing logos, or buying and selling stocks. What Latour, Harman, MacKenzie and Hitchens stress is that machines, buildings, materials, and financial instruments also perform, producing events not only between things and humans, but also between things and things.

Beyond the four performance paradigms, the BP disaster reveals other performances. For instance, *geologic performance* or the performance of the rock formation affected by drilling, things like geologic stability, evolution, and ability to absorb injection of fluids. There are also *water performance, soil performance, and atmospheric performance*—all are on-going, sustained performances affected in the short- and long-term by the massive release of oil and chemical dispersants in the sea water, along its winding coasts and beaches, and up in the air surrounding them. Again, I am not coining these terms or using them as metaphors: the performances of water, soil, and atmosphere are already formalized and used in mining, water management, drilling, and environmental industries. I am merely attempting to connect all these performances in the salt water of our thought.

We inhabit complex, overlapping performances in which humans initiate actions and undergo passions. We territorialize and are deterritori-

alized, as wave upon wave of events cascade through diverse systems, some closely connected, some not. One system's performance may trigger misperformance in another, which then gets iterated—repeated differently—in yet another. One does not navigate these massive systems as much one passes through, along, away. Disastronauts all, we are agents one moment, patients the next; at times subjects who act, at other times, objects acted up by both people and things—friends, family, and colleagues; the sea, the sand, and the air; drill holes, explosions, and contaminants.

Posthuman Misperformance II

The flight of the Whooping Crane is another example of posthuman performance—and misperformance. Whooping cranes have been an endangered species for a century. In 1941, only fifteen made the migration from Canada to their winter habitat on the Texas Gulf coast. In 1967, Canadian and American naturalists began rescuing the crane's eggs. Since only one of the two laid eggs survives, they decided to move the second eggs from their Canadian nests to a Maryland incubation lab. The eggs hatch and the babies are raised, but without proper parents, they never learned to live in the wild or reproduce.

In the past decade, a second migration plan was hatched and a more complex performance initiated. To prevent species from being wiped out by a single Gulf disaster, naturalists decided to create a second migration path parallel to first, going from Wisconsin to Florida. To keep the chicks from imprinting upon humans, caretakers always use special costumes and puppets around the birds, beginning when they hatch. Young birds are later introduced to ultra-light airplanes that will guide their migration. The project is called Operation Migration, and it has successfully flown numerous batches of cranes some 800 miles down to Florida, where they winter and then fly back on their own.

The flight of the Whooping Cranes involves animals and people, technologies and food, geography and the weather. The flights are posthuman performances and, as such, they are exposed to the travails of misperformance. In 2007, the cranes made it to Florida, but were killed in tornados near the Gulf coast.

Posthuman Misperformance III

One final thing: I began with *The Leak is in your Home Town*, and I will end with my current hometown, Madison, WI. Near it is the International Crane Foundation, which seems a thousand miles away from the BP disaster. It is, and it isn't.

The International Crane Foundation is home to some 15 species of cranes, most of which you see while walking down its curved paths. A guided tour features avian science and bird lore, and it ends at a special exhibit

devoted to the whooping crane. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the exhibit's name is the Amoco Whooping Crane Exhibit. The leak really is in my hometown.