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Cyborgs and Fox Wives: Interrogating Sign Language Ideologies and Moving Toward Survival, Resistance and Resilience
Cyborgs et *fox wives* : interroger les idéologies de la langue des signes et tendre vers la survie, la résistance et la résilience

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Abstract

Using an arts based posthumanist lens, (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013) I examine my evolving beliefs about American Sign Language (ASL) through the analysis of arts based data (poetry) (Leavy, 2015). Central to my analysis is an examination of Western domination and control of the language used by ‘othered’ communities through the imposition of dualisms, binaries and categories in sign language ideologies (Canagarajah, 2013). This exploration traces the evolution of sign language ideologies embraced by the deaf cyborg subject featured in the poetry volume as she explores ways to survive and resist the effects of a monolingual language ideology embedded in an imaginary assemblage containing intra-actions between human, animal, earth and machine (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Résumé

En utilisant une optique posthumaniste basée sur les arts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013), j’examine mes croyances en constante évolution sur la langue des signes américaine (ASL) à travers l’analyse de données axées sur les arts (poésie) (Leavy, 2015). L’examen de la domination occidentale et du contrôle de la langue utilisée par les communautés classées comme « autre » par l’imposition de dualismes, de binarismes et de catégories dans les idéologies de la langue des signes est central à mon analyse. Cette exploration retrace l’évolution des idéologies sur la langue des signes épousées par le personnage cyborg sourd présenté dans le volume de poésie alors qu’elle explore les moyens de survivre et de résister aux effets d’une idéologie sur la langue monolingue intégrée dans un assemblage imaginaire à travers des intraactions entre l’homme, l’animal, la terre et les machines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Keywords

deaf, hard of hearing, American Sign Language, cochlear implants, deaf education, translanguaging, arts-based data, posthumanism, cyborg, performativity

Introduction

Using an arts based posthumanist lens (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013), I analyze arts based data (poetry) expressing my evolving beliefs and practices concerning the use of American Sign Language (ASL) in response to Western domination and control of language usage in othered populations through their proliferation of dualisms, binaries and categories within language acquisition ideologies (Canagarajah, 2013). Specifically, I interrogate sign language ideologies with a posthumanist frame, paying close attention to Haraway's conception of cyborg (Haraway, 1991) and Latour's Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2007) to contribute to the conception of the self as non-bifurcated. In doing so, I am able to view sign language as performative rather than shaped according to ideological constructs. I offer a tracing of associations made by human and non-human actors as they move throughout an assemblage of characters in a book of poetry called, *The Pear Orchard* (Weber, 2007). The protagonist is a fox wife shifts shapes in response to her experiences of oppression and marginalization afforded by monolingual language ideologies. Arts-based data in the form of poetry allow me, to use autoethnographic sources (field notes, family artifacts, memos, journals, and artwork) to shape a posthumanist narrative about the evolution of sign language ideologies within my own life (Leavy, 2015). In this paper, I explore the assemblage's desires and beliefs concerning my (the fox wife's) use of sign language and spoken language by tracing the associations between human and non-human actors in the text. In doing so, I am able to account for what I, as a posthumanist cyborg subject, do with sign language in an assemblage. I then position the linguistic ideologies held by the assemblage in which the fox wife is immersed within a larger context concerning people with disabilities. In doing so, from a non-bifurcated self, I trace what I do with sign language (as opposed to my practices and beliefs) which then becomes a story of survival, resistance and resilience.

Background

The arts based exploration of poetry which explores my own sign language ideologies within a unique microcosm of ideologies and attitudes surrounding sign languages in Saskatchewan, Canada is an outcome of my practice as a teacher of the deaf mostly within in a small resource program for deaf adolescents. I am a profoundly deaf teacher, having been educated in mainstream education environments throughout my entire schooling save for one year at Gallaudet University in 1987 to 1988. Fluent in spoken English, I am a late signer, having entered the deaf community at the age of 25.

There are ideological conflicts about the use of sign language to enable deaf children to learn and access the curriculum and the use of bio-technology such as cochlear implants to promote the development of listening and speaking skills in the majority language (English in North America). Educational and language policies concerning education of the deaf in Saskatchewan have not been favorable to the use of American Sign Language (ASL) within instructional settings. The Saskatchewan Task Force Committee on Deaf Education (1989) and the Saskatchewan Deaf Education Advisory Forum (1990) recommended the use of signed English with deaf children and youth who needed additional supports to oral habilitation. Signed English is a code devised by hearing people which presents ASL signs in spoken English syntactic order. While this code may have some pedagogical use in teaching English, the system does not qualify as a true language and does not allow for complex and sophisticated linguistic interchange among signers comparable to interlocuters using spoken languages (Des Power et al., 2008). An illustrative analogy of Signed English might be that of presenting the ideographic form of Mandarin within English syntactic structure . Furthermore, the Saskatchewan Deaf Education Advisory Forum (1990) proposed that the use of ASL in the instructional setting be piloted. This proposed project had never received support from the Ministry of Education or any

school division to date (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2016). The lack of support for ASL resulted in the exodus of deaf professionals and paraprofessionals upon the closure of the provincial school for the deaf. In addition, due to the placement of existing students enrolled at schools for the deaf in Alberta and Manitoba, the numbers of fluent ASL speakers were greatly reduced (Carbin & Smith, 1996; Saskatchewan Deaf Education Advisory Forum, 1990). The closure was prompted by the recommendations of the Saskatchewan government's Task Force on Deaf Education (1989), in support of the increasing movement toward education of deaf students in their home communities provided by local school boards (Saskatchewan Task Force Committee on Deaf Education, 1989).

I had already written an autoethnographic paper on the formation of my own sign language ideologies throughout a 28 year period (Weber, 2020). My sign language ideologies were shaped by my professional training as an educator of the deaf, my own early acculturation into becoming a speaking deaf adult and my ongoing sign language acquisition beginning at the age of 25. In that paper, I concluded that while I was hampered by my own negative view of ASL, my sign language practices eventually trumped my beliefs about sign language acquisition.

In that conclusion, however, there appears to be an unexplored liminal space, an interstice between sign language practices and sign language ideology, and while I was frank enough in my admission of a deficit perspective about the value of ASL in the educational and social milieus, the paper presents me as having a divided self in relation to sign language ideologies. I now wonder, did my sign language practices really trump my sign language ideologies? Is my representation of myself as essentially divided, accurate? To avoid binarizing myself and others, and address the perpetuation of dualisms and categories in qualitative research paradigms influenced by Western epistemes (St. Pierre, 2013), I apply the work of Haraway (1991) and of

Latour (2005) to arts based data whose content is gleaned from autoethnographic data such as personal journals, artwork, family artifacts, memos and artwork and expressed in a poetic form (Leavy, 2015).

Onto-Epistemology

In this paper, I wish to turn to the interstitial space between sign language practices and ideologies. This space appears between those who use sign language and those who adopt the dominant language (spoken English). Within the context of deaf experience, interstitial space is described as “inbetweenity”, the space inhabited by those who have received cochlear implants, learn to speak the dominant language and yet use ASL (though not at the same time). Within the interstitial space, the cyborg thrives:

What Haraway’s cyborg myth foretells is that deaf people and the deaf-world won’t likely disappear, implanted as alien others. This is, instead, likely to be a tale of “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions,” as Haraway’s cyborg myth suggests: the boundaries might change, cracks may well appear, life will likely occur in the between spaces, and yet the fusion will likely remain potent (Brueggemann, 2009, p.16)

There may be a hidden narrative that may be made visible through the posthumanist frame which posits that there is no division, between living and no-living entities (Braidotti, 2013). Hence, dualisms, divisions, bifurcations, categories or labels characteristics of standard qualitative research have no place within the posthumanist frame (Braidotti, 2011; St. Pierre, 2013). In moving away from a privileging of representation, I examine posthumanist performativity inherent in the material intra-actions of humans, animals, earth and machine within an assemblage of human and non-human actors. The acts of associating, reassociation, and

reassembling within an assemblage are performative. Posthumanist performativity is about locating myself as the deaf posthuman subject intra-acting with other material, human and nonhuman entities (Barad, 2007). The entities with which I intra-act are agentic, self-organizing and vitalist (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In doing so, I remove myself as the sole arbiter of reality and through my intra-actions with animal, earth, and machine, I come to see myself as producing and being influenced by sign language ideologies in the imaginary assemblage of the Pear Orchard. Here, the emphasis is on the “how” actors and non-human actors relate and modify their behaviour during the course of social, cultural, material interactions. Descriptions of such interactions eschew categorical descriptions of actors, human and nonhuman. Here, ontologies are flattened, and every actor, human and non-human is viewed through their agency and their associations with each other. Latour (2007) proposes the “tracing of associations...[the] social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social” (Latour, 2007, p. 5). While Latour does not refer to disabilities, ANT can eschew hierarchies and categories by examining or tracing the associations between all actors (human and non-humans) as they move through an assemblage. In doing so, social, cultural, linguistic and cultural oppressions concerning people with disabilities are made visible.

Theory

A posthumanist frame enables me to refer to myself as cyborg, one who intra-acts with animals, earth and machine. As Haraway notes, “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). As a cyborg, my intra-actions with humans, animals, plant life, earth,

and sound as energy is profoundly entangled. I must negotiate meaning through adjusting lighting, sightlines, guessing at what is being said, asking for repetition of information (if the speaker exhibits above average patience), demonstrating understanding or not, switching my hearing aid on and off when in noisy environments, and asking for American Sign Language interpreting. The demands of listening and the energy required to patch together broken sounds, words and phrases in the English language often exceed my capacity. Despite being fluent in all modalities of English (speaking, reading and writing), I have been denounced for learning sign language and using ASL interpreters by professionals who also work with deaf children and youth. At the same time, some hearing colleagues have expressed dismay and impatience at having to accommodate me by wearing a microphone attached to an additional listening device (FM system) which augments my ability to hear. Furthermore, I am often thrust in environments where everyone is speaking at the same time despite my persistent efforts to remind them not to. Here, the assemblage is producing and is produced by desires, unconscious and conscious, that dictate where, when and how I use languages available to me.

These intra-actions along with the material forces shaping the transmission of sound emitted through and around hard surfaces, noisy heels, humming lights, and scraping chairs. Available sound supported by lipreading is continually compromised by standing in front of brightly lit windows, and objects obstructing sightlines such as microphones, the back of people's heads, furniture, trees, buildings, cars, windows, bushes, shrubs, and computer monitors. There is a shape shifting quality to my negotiations with diverse environments which may puzzle people. Often, I am assumed to be vacant, hyperalert, cunning, lazy, unintelligent, uncooperative and vague in my responses to the demands of negotiations. I often fake understanding through smiling or nodding, or puzzle over the words or signs I've been given by

others. This frequent shape-shifting becomes visible through the tracing of associations as posited in the ANT (Latour, 2005).

Research Questions

The research question is three fold: 1) what can the interstice reveal about the assemblage's desires and beliefs concerning my use of sign language? 2) What do I, presented as a posthumanist cyborg subject (imagined as a fox wife) do with sign language and speech in an assemblage? and 3) Do the cyborg and ANT theories make possible, the examination of sign language ideologies from the position of a non-bifurcated self? Within the posthuman frame, doing things with language presupposes a singularity as opposed to what one thinks and believes to be true about ASL and English.

Methodology – Cartography

The artist within the posthuman frame, is charged with the task of creating a world (an assemblage) in which human and nonhuman intra-act in ways to produce each other (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). In the assemblage, the posthumanist researcher uses arts based data with view to “dislodging the anthropocentric impulse that continues to inhere the meaning of artistic praxis and creativity” (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, 180). Sign language ideologies are not the property of the human actors but also of the other non-human actors in the assemblages including animal, machine and earth. I engage in arts based research to trace the associations between human and non-human actors produced within an assemblage (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Latour, 2007) related to the use of sign and spoken language.

In posthumanist arts based research, the artist is charged with the task of creating desires that encourage humans to move toward becoming non-human as in becoming animals, machine and earth. Becoming nonhuman is not to adopt the physical qualities and behaviours associated

with animals, machines and earth but to adopt the rhythms, speeds, intensities, and spatial orientations characteristics of the nonhuman (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). The use of poetry from *The Pear Orchard* as arts based data enables me to interrogate the evolution of sign language ideologies produced by intra-actions between human and nonhuman actors in the assemblage that is, a fox wife, her human husband and the mysterious “other”. The performativity of all actors within assemblage suggests perpetual movement, a continuous shifting between identities, locations, objects, and desires while producing and being produced by others.

In this instance, the fox wife in *The Pear Orchard* is a character developed from autoethnographic data. She travels through multiple worlds, engaging with historical and contemporary figures to resolve the quandary imposed by binary views of sign language ideologies. Her ontology is that of a non-human in contrast to human ontologies which often aim to categorize, label, and binarize, thereby creating multiple and irreconcilable bifurcations of the self. In approaching the non-human, she can be understood as a cyborg, which Haraway frames in terms of ontology: “we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics” (Haraway, 1991, p.150). In the positioning of the self as cyborg, language ideologies take on a dramatically different cast. It is no longer about pitting one ideology against the other but about hovering between ideologies and responding to each from the cyborg ontological position. In doing so, the cyborg participates in and resists against monolingual frameworks that extol one dominant language (English) and the supposition that only English is equal to all tasks in the world (Canagarajah, 2013).

Haraway further elaborates that, “cyborg politics is about the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning

perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism (Haraway, 1991, p.176). The shape-shifting elucidated in this paper concerns the deaf cyborg's struggle for language as she/he/it is shaped by intra-actions with humans, earth, machine within an assemblage. The fox wife is the stand-in for the cyborg located in the complex interweaving of the human and nonhuman (animal, earth and machine). Latour's ANT allows one to trace those associations made between actors in the assemblage (Latour, 2007). The tracing of those associations constitutes a cartography, a map that is similar to a freeze frame depicting the human and non-human actors in perpetual motion (Latour, 2007).

Cartography: A Tracing of Associations

Over a period of 24 years (1987-2007), I constructed a world or an assemblage through poetry. In 1987, inspired by a reading of *Sylva*, a novel by Vercors, (1963), I began with the creation of a nonhuman, a vampiric fox wife in the shape of a woman who marries a human farmer. Vercor's fable on the duality of being a fox wife and a human within the same body easily transposed into my mind, the conflicted binaries of being deaf and hearing. In later years, I further constructed the fox wife as a shapeshifter known as the kitsune according to Japanese folklore (Bathgate, 2004). Here, the

shapeshifter shares a great deal with other forms of metamorphosis (*henshin*), a theme whose striking ontological repercussions make it a fundamental element in mythic discourse the world over (O'Flaherty 1984:3). [This] metamorphosis represents a kind of "ontological scandal"; a grotesque challenge to the taken-for-granted boundaries (natural and social) that constitute our sense of cosmic order (2001:179)... Unfettered by the pigeonholes of quotidian existence, the metamorph asserts an undifferentiated continuity behind the distinctions we take for granted, an experience of transgression that poses both the threat of chaos and the promise of liberation. (Bathgate, 2004, p. 8-9).

In this assemblage, the fox wife, as a supernatural creature, inhabits the bodies and lives of artists, scientists, saints, a Celtic warrior, philosophers, writers, fictional characters, musicians, feminists, and biblical characters and the body of a fox. The assemblage reaches far into historical locales, events, objects, and time frames ranging thousands of years and finally moves out onto a Saskatchewan farm where the fox wife interrogates the language used between herself, her husband and a mysterious “other”.

Material objects such as the pear, a pear tree, pear orchard, a polluted pond, and buildings, also shift shapes and purposes through intra-action with the characters in this landscape. For instance, the pear orchard itself is confined by walls, in bedrooms inhabited by lovers, by the snows of winter and even inside a woman’s body. The individual pear appears in a variety of contexts and is used in novel and startling ways by different characters. The dry farmer’s field, the farm kitchen and barns, the seasons, including the grain harvest, mark the solar and lunar cycles. The fox wife also encounters several objects which exert their influence on her, including famous masterpiece paintings, music, the piano, pears, crowns, sarcophagi, a butcher knife, and bicycles. Within this assemblage, data that glows appears at the boundaries of language, material objects and the body (McLure, 2013).

The struggle between the fox wife and her husband is over language, over which language they will use between each other, how they come to develop a language between themselves and how they will use language with the other in the trajectory of becoming deaf. In short, it is about what the actors do with language in the assemblage of actors, living and non-living whose beings are presented in a nonlinear fashion through zigzagging throughout history biology, agricultural practices, animal behaviours, art traditions, religion, mythology, hagiography, and psychoanalysis. In this assemblage, human and non-human actors appear and

reappear to provide a poetic tracing of the associations that contribute to understanding of sign language as performative rather than ideological over a period of twenty-four years (1984-2007).

Assemblage

In 1987, despite my so-called successes in the hearing world, I came to embrace sign language to survive the persistent feeling of being a fraud, isolation, and depression. At first, I was immersed in a dizzying confluence of ASL signs which I struggled to comprehend. The frustration, confusion, and anxiety evoked strong memories of trying to navigate a world that was littered with broken phrases and incomplete thoughts always in spoken English and now again as a beginning student of ASL. I wrote of a pear orchard in which the fox wife, a young deaf woman wanders, enduring hours of boredom, subject to the expectation that she sit throughout endless conversations to which she is not privy. Meanwhile,

...she takes her place in the world,
has a body, a body like everyone else's. Her mother says,
the lights are only flashes, fragments leading
to half formed ideas, a sudden brilliance swallowed by darkness.
Yet broken lights are better than silence.

At least they ward off boredom,
you can play with them in your mind,
look at the trees spangle with hanging mirrors,
such loveliness should compensate for the pears
that cannot be eaten, you'll never fully grasp their meaning,
their enunciation, their place in conversing or even in books.

Her mother tells her, be satisfied with shimmering lights,
think of them as fairies flying among the trees,
for the fruit of the orchard, my dear,
was never meant for you.

(Weber, 2007, p. 7)

In struggling with affects associated with broken sounds, flashing lights signifying very little if not nothing, the fox wife has no place to go but to turn over things in her mind. The shimmering lights, the spinning mirrors, the heavy fruits are only half formed ideas, and she “paws her thoughts/ before language as if they were fond old tricks./They are chickens easily devoured,/eggs sucked quickly into my mouth/farmers outsmarted and hounds/ thrown off my scent” (Weber, 2007, p. 81).

The fox wife then wanders through a historical landscape populated by Western European figures. She begins to inhabit the bodies of a medieval noblewoman, Heloise, Boadicea, the philosopher Simone Weil, writer George Sand, musician Fanny Mendelssohn, scientist Marie Curie, literary characters including Catherine Earnshaw of *Wuthering Heights*, Isolde the Fair, Lara of *Dr. Zhivago*, the subjects of paintings by Geertgen Tot Sint Jan, Jan Van Ecyk, Rembrandt, Renoir and Michaelangelo’s sculptures. The fox wife has a penchant for occupying the bodies of saints and engaging in arguments with them: Teresa of Avila, St. Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen and Dorothy Day and stages her dilemma in the context of the biblical drama of the Annunciation, Mary’s dialogues with Elizabeth, and Zachariah. The assemblage is the collection of the flickering lights of the pear orchard, that is, the affects producing and produced by the bodies of literary, historical and spiritual figures. Essentially, the fox wife is a nomad (Braidotti, 2011), zigzagging between affects produced by bodies, historical

periods, and at the same time, negotiating and shifting the intensities within the affects to direct flow of desires, unconscious and conscious concerning sign language ideology. As she shifts shapes, occupies different bodies, assumes different voices and positionalities, she causes other affects to shift shape too. In doing so, the affects associated with the pear leads to a performativity in becoming earth.

Becoming Earth

There are many affects associated with the pear as a symbol for language which adopts varying rhythms, speeds, intensities, spatial orientations and even different purposes. For instance, the medieval noble husband indicates his preference for the separateness of the two languages between him and his fox wife: “This is the way he likes it,/a language of touch/for the deaf and dumb./She nods in agreement./lies in their cool tomb, her body/a misplaced cipher in both languages” (Weber, 2007, p. 10). Moreover, he tells her “...Your broken words throb/in my ear, let my language come between us,/hard as a young green pear” (Weber, 2007, p. 10). The pear as language is originally used an instrument of sexual desire and domination, first introduced by her husband, and sparks an inchoate desire as the fox wife’s attempt to predict her future by peering at a pear tree as if language would direct her life. The pear later morphs into a womb; its linguistic property now holding forth promise of new life. At the same time, becoming pregnant is an expected duty of a medieval noblewoman and the pear located with her womb and in the headdress that she wears bears a tentative quality: “I’ve worn my pear headdress faithfully (it is so heavy these days) and at the same time it is smashed fruit in her womb: “how can you steep yourself in my womb, float in the tea/of menstrual blood, broken leaves, torn flowers and smashed fruit?” (Weber, 2007, p. 20). The removal of the pear headdress informing her nascent awareness of the politics of language within her body now contradicts the hegemonic control exerted by her husband who favors a monolingual policy that English be the international

language facilitating industrial, political, cultural and social relationships (Canagarajah, 2013)(Canagarajah, 2013). The fox wife is beginning to resist the language imposed by her husband, as the language to be shared between the two of them.

In her nomadic zigzagging throughout history, the fox wife angrily confronts St. Augustine who stole pears only to smash them under his feet when escaping from the garden. The fox wife confronts desire in the form of a destroyed pear: “you smashed the fruit against the stone wall/you ought to have wanted a pear/that would run down your chin,/one that would have reminded you of me,/just one” (Weber, 2007, p. 20). The lack of desire to communicate in multiple languages, to share linguistic repertoires results in the adherence to one language to be shared by all people, results in wasted opportunities for conviviality (Canagarajah, 2013). The waste of pears is contrasted with the fox wife’s relentless hunt for a shared language and potential fragments of understanding which could bring about more new connections enabling belonging and community among all people. The fox wife attempts to mend the contentious relationship with her husband by coaxing him to look at her sign language:

Here is a pear to stay your hunger,
as we wake slowly to the silence,
learn its nouns, parse its verbs,
the whorls of silence will be laid down
...

When you roll the seeds under your tongue,
I will become yours again.

(Weber, 2007, p. 22)

The sign language, however fragile in its beginning, doesn’t stick and the husband, a restless master builder and businessman, leaves his fox wife to raise their daughter alone. The

fox wife worries about her ability to maintain sign language now that it is no longer in use: “All around her is decay, the golden translucent skin of the pear/is mottled with black cuts, sprays of spores, and ripening orange” (Weber, 2007, p. 25). Yet, the fox wife knows, that her language is not dead, that despite her fears, language resides in herself despite her locations, positionalities, boundaries determined by political, social and cultural entities. She speaks to her mother who has now morphed into the caregiving affect displayed by the deaf community who has passed sign language to the fox wife.

Mother, now that you’ve let me be deaf,
scraped your womb of its dank winter trees,
cleared the unkempt patches,
you’ve let me be a pure seed begun
in you, a room of buried longings.

Your passion sang long and hard for me,
this lushness beginning in the spring orchard.
My longings begin their fleshly protrusions,
my most wild need is heard
and is not yours, but mine

As the dream of pears accompanies me
through your seasons until the burst
of my deaf body, a blossom
through your floor, my limbs, strong green vines
push through your windows, straining

with the flesh of my stray desire:

Let me be deaf, hold my ear to your breast,

let me see how the pear orchard grows.

(Weber, 2007, p. 26).

The pear orchard is the assemblage in which language is transmitted. The transmission of language within a social context contravenes the Enlightenment notion that language comes from an inner essence and is the result of cognition. The shape shifting qualities of the fox wife as she crosses borders between geographical, historical and temporal realms serve to reinforce that the language is socially constructed using multiple linguistic repertoires and with the purpose of facilitating intimacy, connection and belonging. She is everywhere and possesses mobile linguistic resources with which to use in the multiple locations and temporalities. Her possession of mobile resources defies the hegemonic effort to standardize languages through purification, codification and prevention of the sharing of multiple linguistic meanings and conventions (Canagarajah, 2013).

Becoming Deaf

The pear orchard and all things European now vanishes from the fox wife's world to be replaced with a jaundiced view of her husband who now owns a farm: "After days of following him with obsequious cant,/I wonder as I collapse into a cacophony of vowels/Before him, should I give in,/Wear this white shift, use a fork,/Sleep in his fresh sheeted bed/Curled between his head and knees. Shall I never again gather the bones of a chicken/That I devoured in my own bed? (Weber, 2007, p. 78-79). The fox wife resists language, as a bounded system, with discrete items as components to be learned in tightly structure pedagogical interventions, and is immediately hierarchized (Canagarajah, 2013). In the assemblage of the pear orchard, the human husband is endowed with a superior language.

The fox wife suggests codemeshing which is the borrowing and swapping of resources within multiple languages include linguistic phrases, grammatical structures and additional semiotic resources to negotiate meaning (Canagarajah, 2013). The desire to communicate, to facilitate cohesion among diverse languages, communities and peoples is the impetus behind codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2013). This desire is apparent in the fox wife's pleading:

You could point, mime, gesture?

dance, or scribble a few words on a notepad.

Whatever I get from that

will be good enough, won't it?

(Weber, 2007, p. 82).

In adding a semiotic resource to her repertoire (the images that she creates to accompany her husband's stories) in the hope of communicating fully with her husband, she signals a break from the Eurocentric notion of reason, liberalism, and the supremacy of the English language (Pennycook, 1998). The fox wife's pleading voice, however, give away her uncertainty about the proposed codemeshing. She asks: "Will it be good enough?" The farmer husband does not respond. The fox wife continues in her attempts to appease the sullen husband: "I've copied the text faithfully,/wouldn't dare change a word, I've gone beyond/language, given them a visual edge./I've made you famous" (Weber, 2007, p. 82). The fox wife's attempt to enhance her husband's words with accompanying visual representations is a beginning of the attempt to use additional semiotic resources to communicate with her phonocentric husband and at the same time, survive the linguistic restrictions placed upon her. Becoming deaf includes the development of a linguistic repertoire essential to negotiate meanings with diverse language users:

deaf people make use of different modalities in their communication and thus manage greater communicative repertoires. Thus, they do not only exploit the iconic nature of sign language lexicon and grammar... but they also profit from their continuous existence in nonsigning, speaking environments. We suggest that this adds to available communicative strategies they have at their disposal” (Crasborn & Hildinga, 2015, p. 63).

Semiotic resources include the visual, material, contexts, gestures, and other modalities used to negotiate meaning. Not everyone will have full fluency in a language, but everyone can make use of semiotic resources to negotiate meaning with other diverse linguistic speakers (Canagarajah, 2013). This is how deaf people survive and resist oppression through the negotiation of meaning.

Becoming other

An unexpected ally comes to the fox wife’s aid; the presence of a mysterious “other” who is an integral part of the prairie landscape where she now inhabits with her farmer husband: Sensing the support, the fox wife says to the mysterious “other”: “you’d shift your feet in shy politeness,/receiving pain and absurdities/in my soaring hands, in my broken vowels,/ the queer pitch of my voice shattering/the broken tongue” (Weber, 2007, p. 88). The sacrificial element on the part of the mysterious “other” involves their partnership in the direct confrontation of English as a hegemonic language. The fox wife observes: “you, who stood in my mind, a silent pole on the flat prairie.../You were shunned, you had gone mad, people said./Somewhere you died, I discovered. Your body/disappeared from a sod shanty no longer than your bones” (Weber, 2007, p. 88). Moreover, the mysterious “other’s” willingness to negotiate meaning through the use of incomplete language repertoires aided by additional semiotic resources has political and ethical dimensions (Canagarajah, 2013). While the farmer husband’s emphasis is on the correct production of lexical and structural features of bounded languages reduces opportunities for

translanguaging between multiple languages (Garcia et al., 2015), the fox wife and the mysterious “other” engage in translanguaging. Translanguaging enables one to develop a general linguistic proficiency and to engage his/her full repertoire toward the mastery of a bounded language. In embracing the other’s language, communication, intimacy, and belonging is possible.

A swift conclusion comes to the fox wife’s tormented years and she says to the mysterious “other”: “There is language between us now./In the ring of our bodies, we are finally human./I thought it was such a good idea./It makes so much sense that two good people/Get together, build a life./You speak, I can sign” (Weber, 2007, p. 87). The boundaries of language seemed to have crumbled, or been deterritorialized to embrace a political ethical orientation that embraces the material and social settings in which language functions. In other words, in opposition to the notion of languages as bounded within communities, language is a function of contact zones (Canagarajah, 2013). Canagarajah (2013) writes of the orientation in which readymade meanings are replaced by collaborative co-constructions including semiotic resources borrowed from diverse languages and symbol systems. Co-construction comes from the desire to achieve a pragmatic purpose between diverse language users and include objects, bodies, setting and participants to create meaning (Canagarajah, 2013). Now, language does not remain as the static property between the human actors in the assemblage. Language is now shared between the fox wife, her farmer husband and the mysterious “other”: “it was you who I loved/before I caressed the body of my husband’ (Weber, 2007, p. 88). This is a movement away from preoccupations with linguistic systems, cognition orientations and forms toward linguistic practices in contact zones.

What then is his role in the life of the fox-wife as she sorts through her liminal selves? Is he merely a cheerleader? The fox wife says to the mysterious “other”, “You fought for me, for

us, for our language, for the word in me while others shook their heads” (Weber, 2007, p. 88). In indicating that he has experienced similar injustices, the mysterious “other” is portrayed as having agency. He has acted upon the fox wife in ways unknown to her human husband. His actions indirectly affect the fox wife’s human husband. Whether the mysterious “other” is human or non-human, the very agency with which he seems to prompt the fox-wife to pull back and reflect upon her own actions, relationships and the politics of language ultimately contributes to her ability to survive, to be resilient and hopeful. At the same time, the mysterious “other” is marginalized, oppressed and eventually dismissed as insane. She suggests that the mysterious “other” is also able to communicate with her in sign language, implying that he, too, is wounded in some way. He is able to accompany her throughout her evolving performative use of sign language in multiple contexts and in multiple ways.

Now having given up on her husband, the symbol of language hegemony, the fox wife’s desire awakens again for the mysterious “other”, producing an affect of urgency: “On the edge of the coulee, I stalk your field./I must have your body again/....your gaze most intrepid,/your hands, bold and strong” (Weber, 2007, p. 85). The fox wife indicates literally wants to cinch the deal and proposes that they belong to each other in the totality of a marriage. The fox wife wants to make decisions quickly and decisively and abandon her difficult situation. Yet, the desire for immediate meanings, judgements, categories is a Western epistemic bid to colonize, control and manage all life and matter, living and nonliving. Then the sudden about face when she reflects further upon her mad rush toward certainty, that is, the fox wife’s decision to “withdraw ever so slightly./My eyes search over the vastness/of the coulee at my feet” (Weber, 2007, p. 85) is indicative of her shift toward materiality. The answer is out there in the assemblage, in the intra-action with the vastness of the prairie, in the performativity of the assemblage always in motion rather than a frozen moment within time. The fox wife, finds herself postponing decisions as she

becomes aware of the stillness of the landscape. She is now willing to be in movement toward something that is yet defined, that is, becoming deaf.

The fox wife is now able to return to her farmer husband and confidently assures him: “Of what I’ve come to know/what you will soon know,/how I stalk a language of the body,/how I stalk a body most delicious” (Weber, 2007, p. 89). In being profoundly entangled with sound as energy, bodies, material objects, sightlines, movement, the fox wife is performative as she strives to negotiate meanings with others using multiple and mobile semiotic resources. As a cyborg, she combines the uncombinable. Haraway (1991) remarks:

These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire the force imagined to generate language and gender and so subverting the structures and modes of representation of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind (Haraway, 1991, p. 176).

The fox wife in her desire for intimacy, becomes comfortable with ‘partiality’. She is satisfied with what she can receive, believing that her life is just as full, as vital and agentic as any other human possessing full hearing. The fox wife will continue to negotiate meaning with multiple others.

Lovely, I am deaf born,
a fox twinned with the hearing,
a shadow colony settling noiselessly
among these stubborn Russian Germans,
thrift and hard work.
Long ago in Russia,
wolves, dark shadows in the sparse birch
haunted the rich bourgeoisie

frozen inside the turrets of onion roofs.

Lovely, I dart out from the ice crusted homes

out onto the prairies toward the wolves

in dark consent.

(Weber, 2007, p. 90).

The dark consent of the fox wife is the agreement to be profoundly entangled with all human and non-human actors in the assemblage, to negotiate meanings with others who may be dangerous and threatening to her. She becomes resilient in the face of future intra-actions within the assemblage of the pear orchard.

Conclusions

The fox wife within the assemblage is confronted with its desire that she assimilate by adopting English as the hegemonic language. Within the interstices in this assemblage, she wanders, attempting to assimilate by inhabiting bodies of major Western figures. Wandering, inhabiting bodies of major Western figure, experimenting with visual, written, gestural forms of communication between her and her husband, and grieving over the loss of the mysterious “other” who promised her acceptance all contribute to her efforts and commitment to engage in translanguaging activities. In other words, her commitment to translanguaging evolved as a performativity, rather than a thinking about language, and then deciding what to do with language. In doing so, she subverts the classical notion of being a unified subject committed to modes of representation which perpetuates categories, labels and dualisms including the mind-body split. In investigating this cartography, one eschews the question of whether practices trumped beliefs.

At the same time, the fox wife learns that “to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many” (Haraway, 1991, p. 177).

The Western episteme extolling the unified subject, exerting hegemonic control through the insistence of one language for the purpose of business, politics, policy development, cultural production, and community relations is in contrast to efforts at translanguaging among deaf subjects who may have incompletely mastered languages and through their desire to achieve the task at hand, negotiate meanings with each other in order to accomplish the task (Canagarajah, 2013). Through translanguaging, the fox wife as cyborg is

[r]esolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household...the relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world (Haraway, 1991, p. 151).

Moreover, the fox wife as a posthumanist subject, is a collection of liminal selves which contribute to performativity through assemblages, while inhabiting the borderlands, spaces inbetween the categories, labels, assumptions, and representative modes of thinking (St. Pierre, 2013). Anzaldúa (2012) suggests that such liminality where the uncombinable are combined, is a state of perpetual psychic unrest to be documented by poets and artists. Anzaldúa's call to poets and artists may be construed as the call to examine performativity of cyborgs, non-humans such as animals, machines, earth within assemblages. After all, deaf or not deaf, we are all cyborgs and the interrogation of sign language ideologies takes on a decidedly different trajectory when considering the actions of cyborgs within assemblages.

Yet one could argue that the fox-wife remains disenfranchised and lacks agency. She is still living within the shadow of her human husband. Haraway's cyborg theory does not address the economic, social and political inequalities associated with not being able to speak or use the

dominant language. No matter how many bodies the fox wife inhabits or how endearing the dialogue between her and the farmer lover may be at times, the fox wife remains isolated on the farm, canning, cooking and reminding her human husband occasionally who she really is. Multiple selves, intersectionalities, partialities and the occasional intimacies between her and her human husband become cold comfort because the linguistic oppression is unresolved. Haraway's contribution to the examination of the cyborg/fox-wife in the *Pear Orchard* is positive in that the existence of partialities, liminal selves contributes to posthumanist performativity and an expansion of what is possible beyond the restricted lens of Western Eurocentrism. Yet, framing the deaf body according to Haraway's potent fusions is inadequate as "cyborg imagery still predetermines differences and boundaries, reinforcing hierarchies between different bodies" (Gibson, 2015, p. 18). Haraway's posthumanism does not allow for the presentation of the disabled body as wholly present because social, cultural, linguistic and economic disparities remain unaccounted for. Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) may make up for this shortfall by tracing the associations between human and non-human actors including those of the fox wife. The tracing of artistic, religious, social, cultural and linguistic associations run throughout the *Pear Orchard* right to the very end and does not put under erasure, continued oppression of the fox wife.

Hierarchies between different bodies remains problematic for the deaf community which has insisted upon being separated and unlinked from the agenda embraced by people with disabilities toward full realization of their own personhood on their own terms. Many deaf people, despite audiological documentation attesting to their hearing loss, have insisted that they are "normal" and "able-bodied" in every other way. This position stems from often repeated experiences of having disabled people who speak the dominant language steer focus groups, committees, and cross disability organization without consideration of the linguistic oppression

of deaf people. Deaf people therefore claim that the primary difference between themselves and the rest of the population is that of language usage. This position is problematic as the insistence on being viewed as normal except for linguistic and cultural differences reveals an ableist position (Mauldin, 2016) and possibly internalized prejudice against people with disabilities. The continual refrain that deaf people are not like disabled people and that their goals are substantially different deserves a further look with the view to establishing ways in which disability and deafness can intersect. (Friedner, 2017) calls for a return to the language of impairment when speaking of deaf populations in the global South who may not have access to sign language resources or the messages of deaf empowerment that is characteristic of North America and the United Kingdom. She draws upon the work of Grech & Soldatic, 2014 in affirming that the language of impairment refers to the ongoing suffering that is the result of palpable violations against the bodies and minds of disabled people. Specifically, Mauldin (2016) notes the presence of a deaf underclass who have not been able to fully benefit from their cochlear implants or biomedical interventions even in North America and who are unable to speak and hear well enough to participate in society. Indeed, the language of impairment may link deaf and disability studies in unprecedented ways. ANT allows for the tracing of the associations between actors, humans and non-humans that allow oppressions to be performative. Disability as traced through the ANT lens, may be an ontological position that is value neutral and at the same time, situated within social, cultural, and linguistic oppression. The language of impairment evident in discourses reinforcing social, cultural, linguistic, economic and physical limits and oppression in the *Pear Orchard* text ends with the fox wife being able to live with her disability in a positive and vibrant way.

The original question in this paper was whether it is possible to interrogate sign language ideological beliefs from an non-bifurcated self. The tracing of associations enables me to

perform and resist assemblage's desires and beliefs concerning my use of sign language.

Haraway's cyborg along with the presence of liminal selves serve to replace what I believe about sign language and speech in an assemblage, with what I do with sign language and speech which then becomes ultimately a story of survival, resistance and resilience.

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