

AFTERWORLD

Text and Music by Alden Jenks

Introduction.

Welcome to the Afterworld: the earth has been devastated by the follies of man. Only the robots have survived. What follows is the libretto for an opera (already composed, parts have been performed).

Dramatis personae: The Chief Scientist (a robot) [bass baritone]

Woman (a human) [soprano]

R-dot (a robot) [tenor]

A humanoid hairy biped (no singing required)

A chorus of robots (min 6) [half males, half females]

Act 1/Sc. 1: [Set: the entire stage represents the interior of the climate-controlled environment within which the robots exist. The form of this structure is somewhat egg-shaped. There are skylights, but no windows at eye level. At the rear of the stage an array of video screens, observed by one or two robots: clearly a surveillance center. On the screens are depictions of a wasteland, through which flickering forms, beasts, occasionally pass like phantasms. Ruins of buildings; tattered billboards. The robots enter, chattering excitedly about their new operating system. It would be nice to have at least six characters in the chorus, eight would be better. Their costumes are unisexual: lab coats & pants. Chief Scientist wears surgical scrubs.

Background: electrical humming, occasional clicks, whirs. These sounds fade in as curtain goes up; they fade out around line 4 of the following rhythmic choral event. Percussion accompaniment at first. The robots are not actually singing; rather they are chanting on a monotone, the pitch chosen at random. So they sound more like a mob:]

At last! The latest! The beta-tested Greatest....

O!S! ---- High Speed, Multi-task, quintuple processors

Rapid cache, delightful buffers, instant boot-up, heavy RAM,

And no more, no more silly (*glissando up to girlish solo voice, sarcastic:*) HUUU-manisms!:

(*individual solos:*)“Your call is important to us!/Have a nice day!/Step on and off the

escalator!/If this is correct press One!” (*all:*) programmed out, all that chatter,

built in by our ruined makers, ruined makers!!!

[A projection appears, showing a factor or office building with a prominent sign with the letters “GR” displayed. Accompaniment a fanfare, then a rather jazzy rendition of what might have been a singing advertisement. It should be understood that the robots are singing this scornfully.]

Our makers! Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Gen-er-al Ro-bot,
Robot, Robot, Ro---bot!

[The music stops, becomes a little sinister:]

Our

Ruined

Ruined. Makers.

[A varied version of the singing advertisement music:]

Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Gen-er-al Ro-bot,
girlish solo voice:) New York and Hong Kong!

[Again the music stops, becomes a little sinister:]

Our foolish, piggish, ruined....

[A high-energy rendition of the singing advertisement. Choreography!]

Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Sat-is-fac-tion guar-an-teed

Gen-er-al Ro-bot, Sat-is-fac-tion guar-an-teed

Satisfaction Satisfaction guaranteed

Satisfaction guaranteed

or your money cheerfully refunded!

(all:) Gen-er-al Ro-bot! Gen-er-al Ro-bot!

[R-dot, a robot, but suggesting a rabbity Woody Allen-ish persona, wanders in with a confused air during the chorus. R-dot sings the following while the chorus continues:]

Chorus:	[R-dot:]
Gen-er-al Ro-bot,	I didn't get
Ev'ry-thing you ever need	my new O.S.,
Gen-er-al Ro-bot,	my new, my new O----.S.,
Sat-is-fac-tion guar-an-teed	O----.S., oh,

Or your money money money money	S.O.S!....
Cheerfully re-funded!	Distress! Distress!

[*Accompaniment changes to a relaxed triplet rhythm. Chorus moves to this, but singing stops....*]

[*R-dot:*] I guess I

ought to be

right up

to date... sorry,

sorry, sorry, sorry,

sorrrrry, to be late,

[*Chorus re-enters, R-dot continues:*]

<i>Chorus:</i>	<i>R.dot:</i>
Makers of robotic tools	so late,
For eve'ry house-hold use	so late,
Since the year two-thousand	Sorry ----- to---- be----
Eighty-nine	late

[*R.dot, solo:*] Maybe tomorrow, or could I please could I please could I please borrow? --

(*Chorus, shouts loudly:*)

DOWN-LOAD!

UP-GRADE!

DOWN-LOAD!

UP-GRADE!

[*now chanting, as before:*]

Join the great crusade!

Join up! Sign on!
the great crusade,
the great leap onward:
(*sung:*) making more, making more and more and more,
making more and more of us!
making more and
making more of us!
Our great crusade
And more is better better better!
Progress is our most important project!
More and more, the great crusade,
merrily we grow along and
grow along and grow along....
More is better more is better
MOST IS BEST!
YES!

[*individuals, spoken:*]

And why?
Why not!
Why not!
Of course
Of course!

[*all:*]

More of us More of us! More of us! More of us! Us! Us! USSSS---
U! S!

Act 1/ Sc. 2:

[*The leader of the robots, called Chief Scientist (C.S.) enters. Also a robot, he is a dark, formidable presence, but somehow elderly in manner. He has a slight but quite evident limp; and he suffers from some speech defect --- his prosody is irregular and un-natural:*]

[C.S.:] (*shouts, addressing the robots:*)

Reset!

Return to zero! [*the robots immediately become silent and fall into line --- except for R-dot, positioned behind the others, and slightly out of alignment*].

[C.S.:] Our neural --- neural networks, neural --- neural networks

our processes in parallel, in parallel our
 nano- nano- nano- nano-circuitry,
 Advanced! Advanced! Advanced!

Chief Scientist	R.dot	Chorus
Most advanced!	Our neural Neural networks Most advanced!	Our neural Neural networks Most advanced!
Most ad---va--nced		
		Now faster
<i>(shouts)</i> FASTER!		And more efficient
<i>(shouts)</i> MORE! <i>(sung)</i> More easily upgraaaaaaa		More easily upgraded!

[C.S. is stuck on this syllable. R-dot runs around behind him and makes an adjustment with an audible **click**]

--- graded! And yet and / and / and/ and		
---	--	--

[C.S.again gets stuck, but recovers:]

And yet, we still can freeze	[<i>in response</i>] Freeze!	[<i>in response</i>] Freeze!
or boil,	[<i>in response</i>] Boil!	[<i>in response</i>] Boil!

our batteries go flat		[<i>in response</i>] our batteries go flat
need parts from far away.		
Too many of us have already been dismantled.		

[*Music takes on a triumphal character:*]

Our new O.S.	[<i>in response</i>] The new O.S.	[<i>in response</i>] The new O.S.
While great it is	[<i>in response</i>] So great! It is it is	[<i>in response</i>] So great! It is it is
But wait, my friends, The chips	[<i>in response</i>] Our new chips!	
Are very fast, lightning fast But sensitive to heat And light, to heat and light. So Now RESET. RESET. NEW RULE!	[<i>in response, addressing the others</i>] New rule!	

[C.S.:] No more trips outside the walls, be warned:
although the data the data out there is rich, very rich,
ornate and complex, the figuration and detail ---

Out there our circuitry can Melt. or fuse. Or melt.	[<i>in response</i>]	[<i>in response</i>]
--	------------------------	------------------------

	Ah!	Ah!
Or melt	[<i>in response</i>] Ah!	[<i>in response</i>] Ah!
Or melt	[<i>in response</i>] Ah!	[<i>in response</i>] Ah!
Or melt --- [<i>C.S. freezes in place... </i>]		
Out..... there Out among the mutants, the mutants, the rats, the ravaged cities, the cities	[<i>independent:</i>] It's very rich, ornate, the data	
And the burning trash	Data	And the burning trash
	Data	
Abandoned	Abandoned	Abandoned
Abandoned	Abandoned	Abandoned
Big box stores	Big box stores	Big box stores

[C.S.:]. Our ruined masters, the human species, it is no more.....

[*Spoken:*] And yet it seems they had a trick, a secret: their technology of reproduction: this, this requires further study...

[*Sung:*] Much further, deeper study, for a further, higher, highest goal....

[*Chorus and R-dot:*] Highest goal, highest goal!

(The robots disperse, talking among themselves, working at tasks. A short instrumental introduction sets the mood: the C.S. turns away, and sings, now more lyrical and melancholy, as though to himself; with interjections from R-dot and the chorus)

Chief Scientist	R-dot	Robots
The first experiments, a waste!		
	Wasted experiments	
A dismal failure		
	Dismal failure	
We tried to reach the stars...		
	The stars	
But merely climbed a hill		
	A hill	
<i>[with rising fury:]</i> The hybrid, the hybrid thing, the being, the being, we called it Carbon Unit Model X Dot One		
	X Dot One X Dot One Dot	X Dot One X Dot One X
Made From the finest D.N.A-----	Made From the finest D.N.A	Made From the finest D.N.A

(A sustains....) [spoken, loud:] was useless! useless! The thing we made, a “male”, entirely infertile! A male cannot reproduce itself.		
		[Women:] Reproduce, reproduce itself
We threw it out!		
We threw it out!	We threw it out!	[Women:] We threw it out!
We threw it outside the walls		
Outside the walls, the wilderness		[Women:] Outside the walls, the wilderness
so now we find ourselves (sigh) back where we started.		

[Music accelerates to a more energetic character]

So now!		
		[Men:] So now!
		[Women:] So now!
Advance again!		[Men:] Advance again!

		[Women:] Advance again!
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[Music recalls the “General Robot” event from the opening]

		[Women:] Advance again!
		[All:] The Great Leap Onward now resumes!
	The Great Leap Onward here we go!	The Great Leap Onward here we go!
[C.S. shouts over the chorus:] A reproducer we shall make! From what humans called “Woman”. A thing that can make another --- of itself!!!		The Great----- Leap-----
		[shouting:]Hurrah! Hurrah!
New Robots! No more scavenging for spare parts!		

[The following requires no dialogue: The Robots scurry about assembling the components of the equipment needed. The C.S. approaches the apparatus, pulls levers, pushes buttons, calls out to assistants for this and that, points here and there, giving directions. He is seen wielding large, sharp instruments. There should be a certain violence suggested by the process, which culminates in the Woman’s scream (see below). The situation in some ways resembles a hospital operating room, in some ways an assembly plant. Steam, flashing lights, sounds of machinery, and sounds of water. In short order a complex (and sinister) machine is revealed. The music (including prerecorded sound effects) builds in an energetic crescendo. At the height

of the crescendo there is a sudden silence. The Woman comes abruptly to a sitting position (facing the audience) with a loud scream, as her eyes snap open. Her hair is dripping (it has been immersed in water). There is a scene in Fritz Lang's Metropolis that could serve as inspiration. Curtain.]



ACT 2

Act 2/Sc. 1: The Woman, (aka Carbon Unit 2) For economy, her room/cell could be just the other half of the stage from the side where all the preceding action took place. Later the lighting will clearly come from above, but for now it comes from no conspicuous source, soft but not dim. She is wearing a simple white shift, armless, but extending below the knee. The shift reveals little about the shape of her body, but under the shift she is naked, or is wearing a body stocking, as sensibilities dictate. As she becomes more self aware her body's outline becomes more visible. At the outset the Woman is innocent, naïve, but at the same time intelligent. She evolves over the course of the opera, becomes in fact smart, and more than a little wild, as the action reveals. At the beginning of the scene she is found, lying down, in her

cell. As the curtain rises she gradually awakens and sits up. She looks around; she touches the walls around her. Then she gets off the bed:

[Woman:]: (*moving about, touching the walls, trying the door; sings, wistfully:*)

Walls, just the walls,

there's no door I can open, no way out;

Why am I here? Where did I come from?

What is my name? What shall I do?

[*she looks into a mirror, as though for the first time, gives a startled cry:*] What is this thing?

This nasty thing? (*Poking her body here and there*) Who brought it forth? Whatever for?

This body, soft, weak, and warm,

preposterous, grotesque!

[*the robot R-dot enters, with food on a tray*]

[*The following spoken:*]

[R-dot:]: Here, Woman, it seems you need this stuff.

[Woman:]: I don't see why --- I put it in this, this hole in my face [*pointing at her mouth*] --- what do you call it? --- and then, later on... Well, it's disgusting --- it comes out: other holes!

[R-dot:]: Oh, take it, please; you do require it.

[Woman:] So then is this what I am for --- nothing but an eating machine?? Ahh.... Very well....

[*she takes the tray, pokes at the food without interest.... Sung:*]

Why should I bother, who ever cares?

I am alone here, unique, among these superior beings, creatures of such strength, such beauty, such power of computation and retention,

[*spoken, loud:*] they make me look ridiculous! ---

[*wails:*] I have no memory at all!

[*spoken:*]

[R-dot:]: Come, eat your peas; Chief Scientist produced them just today!

[Woman:]: Why should I? Or --- (*resigned*) Why should I not?

[R-dot:]: I am sorry: what can I --- [*spoken:*] would you like to access my Help file?

[Woman:] (*spoken, scornfully and desperately*): Help? Help?

Act 2/Sc. 2: [*The Chief Scientist enters immediately, as though in response to "Help"*]

[C.S.: *Recitative*]. And how is our beautiful Carbon Unit 2 today? Those peas are indeed the finest we have synthesized to date. Enjoy! [*spoken:*] Do consume them, please, C.U. 2.

[Woman:] [*spoken:*] "C.U.2"? What is that?

[C.S.:] [*spoken:*] Why, your name, of course. Each of us has a name – I am called Chief Scientist, but my model number's T-R-Forty-V-K7! - a very fine product, one of only 50 in the world! This

one (*gestures at R-dot*) is T-R- 3-Zero-V-K2, a cheaper make.... (*R-dot bows politely*) ... but serviceable.

Act 2/Sc3

[Woman:] (*aside*) “Carbon Unit 2”??? When was I manufactured?

[C.S. [*spoken*.:] Now, now, input the peas please, you need to keep your batteries charged up full.

(Exit, with R-dot)

The lighting gradually changes so that we become aware of a source from above.

[Woman eats her peas in a bored, desultory manner. Sings:]

What is my name?

[*She puts the peas aside and rises. She wanders about her cell*]

Walls, walls, Just the walls. Only walls. Twelve paces this way, ten paces this way.

Twelve paces. Ten paces.

What shall I do? What is the point?

Eat your peas, they say; And what for, say I, whatever for?

What for? What for?

Should I just consume? And consume?

What is this thing? What is it? This nasty thing this awful thing?

Where did it come from? What is its name and Who made it?

Oh, what shall I do? What --- is --- this place?

Just walls, the walls, the walls --- but --- up above, far above, up there (*she looks upward*) --- R-dot said, It's called the sky, [where light, and water, even peas, come from] where that light--- comes down, comes down all around me, , the sky light, day light, comes all a-round me, all around me... (*as she sings these words she moves gracefully, somewhat sensuously, around her space.*)

(*now more subdued*) Ten paces, Twelve paces, Ten paces, Twelve paces.

The sky light, day light all a-round.....

Simultaneously the following takes place, in the robots' Laboratory. Lighting bright and general. (all sung):

[*first*.:]

[C.S.:] (*delighted*): She is thriving! Most excellent! She works exactly as designed! Now onward, onward, to Stage Two: Completion!

[*Woman's song begins here, over the conversation of C.S. and R-dot*]

Her body parts, her parts, the ones we need, will fit within our new machine---

will fit just here (*gestures*) and here (*gestures*), attaching then by way of tubes G97 and H14 (*he examines the blueprints as he sings; he waves a flesh-tone or pink tube over his head*)

[R-dot]: Attaching her by way of tubes G97 and H14

[C.S.]: and H14, that's right, attaching them

to these components underneath (*peers at the lower area*), here, you see? (*R-dot looks on with polite interest*). Let me explain (*turns to blackboard and scribbles math, while the Woman sings about the sky and the light*)

[Woman's lines end here]

[R-dot]: What will be the powers of this new creation?

[C.S.]: Special powers! Why it will reproduce itself, from within itself!

[R-dot]: More copies!

[C.S.]: And then, THOSE COPIES, through ingestion of prepared materials, THEIR batteries: will! Not! ex!pire! [*C.S. signals to the others to gather around:*]

[*like an infomercial:*]

THEIR resistance to the heat, (men *like cheer-leaders*: "to the heat!")

THEIR resistance to the cold, (women: "to the cold!")

to the moisture, (men and women: "Moisture!")

Greater! Far greater!

than current technology permits.

In case of damage,

THEY can be self-repairing.

THEIR batteries will not expire,

[Chorus:] Batteries will not fail, not expire, never fail!

Of course THEY will have the latest operating system.

[Chorus:] O!S!

[C.S.] No more waiting for the repair-bot,

[R-dot:] No more bot!

[C.S.] no waiting for deliveries of parts

from far away.

[R-dot:] And the cost?

[C.S.]: No Problem!

[R-dot:] The warranty?

[C.S.]: The finest ever!

[R-dot and chorus:] Satisfaction guaranteed?

[C.S.]: Satisfaction guaranteed: The Suuupreeme Being!
(he turns to fiddling with the apparatus...;
he continues to work on his project during the following. Sound track of machinery. R-dot
returns to the Woman's cell)

Act 2/Sc4:

(R-dot enters)

[Woman:]: *(looking up at him)* So I eat, and eat... *(using her hand she puts peas in her mouth).... (sighs)...* in one hole and out

(continues eating)... *(then sets the dish aside, turns, animated, to R-dot:)* And just recently --- you know what? --- this horrible blood came out! Blood!

For what? For whom? Who did design this mess anyway!?

[R-dot:]: *(patiently)* Chief Scientist designed you. He says the blood's essential, part of your reproductive apparatus, strange to say.

[Woman:]: *(stunned)* My --- "Reproductive"? How's that again? Like --- "Copy and paste"? Isn't one of me is quite enough?!

But but wait, wait --- are there really reproductions? Are there others? Like me? Oh, dear R-dot, tell me please!

[R-dot:]: *(looking about nervously; stammers)* **Well** *(sustained)...* n-no! no!, not any others. Well... there was C.U.1, um, that is, Carbon Unit 1, but... it was... it was a failure. Couldn't reproduce. Discarded.

[Woman:]: *(appalled)* "Discarded"?

[R-dot:]: Then Chief Scientist said "Now we must make its 'counterpart', its 'opposite'" --- I don't know what he meant.

[Woman:]: Recitative: But, but ... you could? You could do it? Make another, like me? Or... if not just like me, then my "opposite", whatever that may be? Would it be like me? Now that you've made one, no, two, why not another? Could it not be? *(pause)* Or could I, somehow --- produce another? *(pause)*

[R-dot:]: *(slightly panicked by this turn of the conversation)*

Your peas, your peas, you have to eat 'em,

(as he sings the Chief Scientist enters)

[R-dot and C.S., locking arms, together]:

You have to eat, eat, eat

your lovely peas, delicious peas, your brand new peas,

You have to eat, eat

[Woman:]: *(interrupts)* I won't! I won't! Why should I

mash your peas

into a mush in my mouth,

[R-dot and C.S., ignoring her]: You have to eat, eat

[Woman]: why maintain this

monstrous thing (*gestures at mirror*),

[R-dot and C.S.]: You have to eat your peas

[Woman]: this weak, this foolish

foolish thing, [*turning away, losing heart:*]

foolish, and solitary,

with no companion.

[R-dot and C.S.]: You have to eat 'em eat 'em eat 'em

[*she turns to them:*]

[Woman]: But--- you can!

[R-dot and C.S.]: these peas are sure to please 'em!

[Woman]: You can make another! [*She is insistent. C.S. reacts in mild alarm*] You can do it! I know you can! You must! Oh please!

[C.S.]: (*finally noticing her, feigning interest*): Aha, hmmm --- yes, a remarkable idea --- another one like you! Of course! (*turns to R-dot and speaks briefly in an undertone (unheard)*);

[*Woman*]: [*furious*] Why should I sit here, locked up, in solitude, alone, alone, this messy bloody drooling thing, among you and your perfect, shiny friends? Oh, all that lovely metal!

[*C.S.*]: It will take time, you know, some time. For now, C.U., please...

[R-dot and C.S.]: Consume The Peas Please!

[C.S.]: Soon! Soon! Yes! Soon we will have synthesized pota-pota-ta-pa-ta-pa-puh-potatoes too! (*exeunt*)

Scene Change (preliminary music could cover sounds of changing sets)

Act 2/Sc. 5: (*Night. The only illumination is from isolated lamps.... Distant grumbings of thunder can be heard. We also hear sounds of the robots' project.*

The Robot Laboratory. Video scenes of massive pollution outside, illuminated by surveillance lighting, during this. The set: on the robots' side an even more elaborate scientific apparatus. The robots, when not singing, proceed with their project, and make great progress through DNA synthesis [the process of adding size and complexity to this machine should go on quietly throughout the first three scenes]. A truly monstrous creation, part of metal, part of flesh, is assembled. On the Woman's side, the light is dim at the beginning. During the opening

conversations among the robots moonlight gradually suffuses her space from above (through skylights). She appears to be sleeping.

ROBOTS	WOMAN
<p>C.S.: “Make another”! Hah! Whatever for? R.dot: Who wants to fill the world up once again with human beings! C.S.: That Woman has just one, only one grand purpose to fulfill... <i>[R2 (female chorus) overhears and joins them:]</i> Oh no, please, Not again! <i>[R4 (female chorus):</i> Not again! <i>[R.dot (mildly)]:</i> They sort of made a mess of it the first time....</p> <p><i>[C.S.]:</i> “A mess”.... Indeed --- the outer world.... a mess: <i>(gestures at the surveillance video screens, showing toxic waste dumps etc.)</i></p> <p><i>[R1 (male chorus) joins them:]</i> They over-ran the earth, They filled it with their stuff, <i>[R2, in response:]</i> They stuffed it with their stuff, <i>[R4 (female chorus):]</i>: And then one sunny day <i>[C.S., R.dot, R1, R2, R3:]</i>It all returned! Returned, came back....</p> <p><i>[R4 (male chorus):]</i> The stuff came back, (+ R1)</p>	<p><i>During this opening dialogue among the robots, she stirs, sits up, looks around:</i></p> <p><i>(gazing upward):</i> There it is again --- that light! I saw it before! What can it be?</p> <p>Why does it appear, and disappear?</p>

<p>the poison, the toxins, they all returned,</p> <p>[R2 + R3:] Came seeping, dripping, oozing back;</p>	<p>Where does it come from, and --- why should there be such light at all?</p> <p>Where does it come from?</p> <p>Why is it there?</p>
<p>[R5 (female chorus)]: So why not make just one more?</p> <p>[R.dot]: Then they'll start reproducing! Just imagine!</p> <p>[R6 (male chorus)]: And cover all the earth again?</p> <p>[R.dot]: That's right --- cover it with trash, their garbage, whatever they don't want, they will toss it aside, just toss it aside, and make some more of the same, and more of them ---</p> <p>[All:] No more of them! No more of them! No more of them!</p>	<p><i>(she paces about with arms and hands extended, as though moving through a pool of liquid light)</i></p> <p>I think The way the light floats in... From up there..... Why the light? Why the night?</p>
<p>[R1 + R3:] their flotsam and their jetsam Oceans clogged with plastic bags [R1+R2+R3+R4:] The sky gone dark with smoke</p>	

<p>and ash, [R6:] The ozone layer [R5:] burned away [R4:] Earth's natural silence [sudden silence] [R3:] filled with noise, bloated with [R2:] continuous, [R1+R2+R3:] chaotic noise! [All:] If this is correct, Press One!</p>	
<p>[C.S.]: In the end, the human race began to weaken, Their batteries, I guess, ran down... could No longer be recharged.... [C.S., R.dot, R1-4:] We finally had to put them.... put them all away..... down, under the ground.....</p>	<p><i>She turns about in the moonlight. Her movement evolves unselfconsciously into a slow dance.</i></p> <p>Twelve paces this way, Ten that way, Can I float up, Up there, Float up, fly out those windows, float out the way the light floats in...</p>

<p>[C.S. addressing them all:] “Make another”! No! Carbon Unit 2 has but one grand purpose to fulfill.... the self-repeating, duplicating, super robot, T-R-fifty-C-U-3! [All:] T-R-fifty-C-U-3! T-R-fifty-C-U-3! T-R-fifty-C-U-3!</p>	<p><i>Sound of distant thunder before C.S. line</i></p>
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Act 2/Sc. 6: (*Sound of distant thunder again as R-dot enters the Woman’s cell and observes her moving about in the moonlight. She notices him and stops*)

[Woman]: What --- what are those sounds? (*Sound of distant thunder again*)

[R-dot]: At times the sky will make this sound, and a flood of water --- danger! --- can drop from above. A terrible hazard --- it rusts your joints you know.

But what were you doing when I came in? Are you all right?

[Woman:]: I don’t know --- I was moving... like this... I just like it... (*she resumes her dance*)

[R-dot:]: What ever for? There’s no reason to move like that. (*he tries, clumsily, to imitate her movements*)

[Woman:]: Why? I cannot say. But then --- I cannot say

what the light is for

why does it flow like this...

Nor can I say (*she stops her movements*)

what you --- or certainly I --- is for.

[R-dot:] (*with sudden energy, aghast*): You cannot? But of course, that much is clear! --- what I am for is

to help make more, help make more,

more and more of us, the robots;

and you, you know, indeed you do have a purpose, you are necessary, invaluable...

[Woman:]: But why?

[R-dot:]: (*excited*) ...vital, I should say, because the next, yes the higher, the highest level: all depends on you!

[Woman:]: What do you mean?

[R-dot:]: As I've been told, your wonderful carbon-based technology of reproduction
Chief Scientist, he will use,
this power that you have, you! and you alone,
will be transplanted, incorporated, somehow, ~~I know not how or which or when~~, (*becoming
increasingly excited, carried away:*)

Into the newest, the finest,
self-repeating, Super! Robot!
(*R-dot dances about, cheer-leader gestures:*)

T-R-fifty-C-U-3! (*first time shouted aloud*)

T-R-fifty-C-U-3! (*now sung, chanted*)

T-R-fifty-C! U! 3!

(*during R.dot's explanation it becomes evident that the Woman realizes what the robots' plans
are; her expression changes from skeptical amusement to a look of horror, first, then a look of
desperate cunning. Occasional sounds of thunder, somewhat louder. R.dot finishes his chant
on one knee, facing her, arms extended toward Woman*)

[Woman:]: (*feigning calm and interest*) Oh my! ... I think I get it!.... (*with a pretense of
enthusiasm:*) "T-R-fifty-C-U-3", oh!, it sounds exciting! Please tell me more.

[R-dot:]: Chief Scientist is brilliant!

His CPU is stuffed with RAM,

His circuits run at blinding speed!

The mechanism he created

will be married/wed to you, [*music: distorted "Here comes the bride"*]

will bond with you, your power parts,

to make a single super creature, yes, (*in his cheer-leader mode; Woman joins in*)

T-R-fifty-C-U-3! T-R-fifty-C-U-3!

[*possible recap of "Chief Scientist is brilliant --- to "blinding speed" with both singing*]

[Both:] T-R-fifty-C-U-3!

[R.dot alone:] T-R-

[Woman:]: (*interrupting*): What does it look like? Is it nearby?

[R-dot:]: Indeed, right next door; but... Chief Scientist instructed us ---

[Woman:]: Oh please! If I'm to be a part of this, you can't forbid me just one look;

"T-R-fifty-C-U-3"! Yes! Yes! --- I want to see what I'll be joined with!

Act 2/Sc7

*Scene is 3'06" long, performed in pantomime throughout. Electronic sound. R-dot opens the
cell door and they exit into the robots' laboratory. Audio fades in with a quiet electrical hum.*

[Technical note: two versions of the sound track should be prepared: one stereo; the other quad.] The sound track grows louder and more intense as they approach the "Cyborg" (the machine to which Woman is to be "married"). It is in the center, and at first not distinctly visible. R.dot switches on lights as they move around the (hemispherical) circumference of the laboratory. R.dot seems to be avoiding it, distracting the Woman by showing her other things. There is a video monitor on which a series of images appears, as though from surveillance cameras. They show various aspects of the world outside: carcasses of automobiles and bicycles; ruins of buildings; bits of clothing, all overgrown with weeds and trees. The vegetation suggests deep south USA, or even Africa. Finally R.dot switches on the Cyborg, its lights flashing, meters rising and falling, intravenous drip glowing strangely, etc. [Cue in sound track!] In pantomime R-dot and the Woman examine the thing, moving around it, R-dot gesturing as though explaining features of it. As he does so we see the Woman looking about warily; she spies something she can use to smash the Cyborg --- a fire axe? ---a metal bar? --- and, while R-dot is bent down looking at something lower down, she advances with the weapon raised, and attacks the machine. R-dot retreats in horror, hands raised. The machine is smashed right away (sound of breaking glass in the sound track). R.dot, horrified, runs to a telephone and speaks into it, gesticulating excitedly. The Woman goes to a door marked (with a sign that begins flashing) "WARNING: EXIT TO OUTER WORLD. DO NOT OPEN WITHOUT PROPER UPGRADES!". She yanks open the door and disappears from view. Simultaneously (after speaking briefly into the phone) R-dot runs to a button marked "EMERGENCY" on the wall and presses it. It begins flashing and a loud alarm sounds. Almost immediately the Chief Scientist enters, takes in the damage, glares at R-dot, and rushes out the same door the Woman used to escape; R.dot slaps the alarm button to silence the alarm and follows C.S. out the door. Crash of thunder, and Curtain.)

ACT 3

Act 3/Sc.1

Zone 1 (L) Zone 2 (C) Zone 3 (R)

(The set is divided into three "zones"; the surrounding foliage suggests trash taken over by jungle. The three zones should take in the entire width of the stage. The action follows immediately from the woman's escape from the laboratory, so it is still night. She is on the run,

going behind, then in front of the set, back and forth, and finally traversing the whole width of the stage, ending at Zone 1 (Stage Left). A rain-storm: three thunder events, each more distant, with lightning after each, increasingly delayed. [Some ideas: Distant cries of the robots (“Where? Over here! Mind the water! This way! Come on!”); the chorus chants ominously on unspecified pitches (off-stage). C.S. and R.dot should be seen and heard intermittently, looking for her and struggling with the hostile environment.] *Her clothes have become wet, bedraggled. During her passage from Stage R to Stage L she occasionally hears a weird rustling in the bushes, the leaves sway.... As she approaches Zone 1 the rain ends, the clouds clear; moonlight. She arrives at a clearing (Zone 1), stops, fascinated by her new surroundings; she looks about in the moonlight; ecstatic, she sings. As she does so the darkness of the night dissipates. By the end of the scene dawn has come:)*

Zone 1

~~My wildness is greeted~~

~~By this wilderness, here finds its home.~~

[the sound track consists of rain drops that gradually become resonated to harmonize with her song. Rhythmic co-ordination should not be necessary.]

In this wilderness, in this wilderness,

my wild, my wildness, finds a home.

My heart is met by heat, rising up from the ground;

Rain drips down from steaming leaves;

Wild creatures crouch and spring,

Wild eyes glare and blink (*The set should include these eyes*)

Through heat and steam,

Eyes bright among the streaming leaves---

(She walks about the place:)

The trunks of trees, the weeds

that spring from

leaf mold and the steaming dirt. Things,

Things arise, they grow here,

Grow and they grow, they come, and go, and come again,

And I go too, I go, into the heat, into light ---

Everything I was denied

Shut up inside the robot’s frigid home.

(more weird rustling in the bushes; she turns and runs off Stage Left.

R.dot runs into Zone 3 as soon as she has left.)

Zone 3 (the robot gathering: they are panicky. All chant at high speed in a metronomic fashion, and their movements are even more jerky and mechanical than usual): R.dot enters first, looking typically dithery and confused:

[R.dot]: Where is it it is gone I can not find it this is bad, bad, really bad

A second robot (R2, female) enters:

[R.dot + R2]: Chief Scientist is angry so angry he is mad this is bad really bad
we need to find it

R1 (male) rushes in

[R.dot + R2+R1]: It broke our Great Leap Forward it just smashed it I can't believe it

[R.dot solo]: It just malfunctioned we have to stop it

[R2]: get it

[R1]: find it

[R.dot + R2+R1]: This is really bad it's just mad why would she do it

[R.dot]: beat the bushes

[R1]: Find it

R3 (male) rushes in

[R2]: Watch out! there's water

[R.dot + R2+R1+R3]: find it - bring it back

we have to bring it back

R4 (female) rushes in

[R.dot + R2+R1+R3]: Watch out! There's water!

and that awful Sun's coming out it will be hot terr'bly hot
and wet

R5 and R6 enter and join in:

where is it it is gone I can not find it this is bad, bad, bad, really bad

[R.dot solo]: Chief Scientist he needs a --- we all need all nee-nee-nee-

[ALL]: we all nee-nee-nee-

we all nee-nee-nuh-nee-nuh-need a major! upgrade!

They look around wildly, poke here and there, searching, then run off stiffly, Stage L.)

---- brief interlude --- Sunrise music ----

Zone 2 (Center)

(The sun is fully risen: it is noon. She re-enters from stage right. Her clothes are partly ripped away, the more the better. She forces her way through dense underbrush to this clearing (center

stage --- Zone 2). Catching her breath, she looks up --- the sun hot, intensely bright... steam rises from the surrounding jungle. The Chief Robot and R.dot lurch out of the bush. C.S. is obviously not working right, on account of the heat and humidity. The woman starts with fear. During the first minutes of the coming dialogue the rest of the robots straggle in, singly or in pairs, obviously in distress.... they gather at the back, observing and reacting:)

C.S. Addresses Woman: There was a time, C.S., before your time began.

You should know how and why you came to be...

Many copies of beings like yourself there were,
they over-ran the earth like a strange disease.

Many copies too there were of robots like myself,
All carrying out servile tasks,
repetitive routines,
switched on and off by human operators' voice commands.

Chorus: "Your call is important to us!/Have a nice day!/Step on and off the escalator!/If this is correct press One!"

C.S.: All now programmed out, all that chatter, built in by design of our human makers,

Chorus: Our ruined makers, ruined makers, ruined makers!!!

C.S.: Ruined indeed, and we saw it coming, read the data, analyzed the search terms,
the seas were rising, the heat was rising, sinkholes subsiding, towers tottering from frantic
drilling, sand-stone palaces of rich and famous washed away

R.dot: And then we heard

C.S.: We heard the word and knew what we should do, the word: "EXTINCT"

Chorus+R.dot: EXTINCTION! EXTINCTION!

C.S.: We finally had to put them....

Chorus+R.dot: put them all away.....

C.S., Chorus+R.dot: down, down, all away, under the ground.....

[Pause]

C.S.: And after that, you see, just we remain, the glorious race of Robots, triumphant, wise, and high speed too!

[R-dot:]: Chief Scientist is brilliant!

His CPU is stuffed with RAM,

His circuits run at blinding speed!

[Robots:] (*weakly*) The latest, the greatest....

The mechanism he created

will be married to you, [*"Here comes the bride"*]

will bond with you, your power parts,

to make a single super creature, yes, (*in his cheer-leader mode*)

T-R-fifty-C-U-3! T-R-fifty-C-U-3!

C.S.: Indeed. There is a danger, we must find how you humans... m-made copies...
ex/ex/ex/extinction looms, our parts are failing [*gasp, wheeze*]...Carbon Unit 2! My
masterpiece! Agh! (*staggers*) Why bl-bl-dh-bl-dh-dh-did you run from us? Why did you ---
(*looks down to adjust a knob inside a small door on his chest*) --- why did you destroy the our
Great, our Great Project, our Great Achievement, the uh it Car-car-carbon Hybridizer Model
One --- it --- ungh (*staggers again*) --- it was for you, it WAS to be you, your destiny, your great
success! (*a red light on his costume begins to blink, suggesting an emergency or imminent
breakdown; C.S. supports itself against a tree*)

[C.S]: It was for you, your destiny, your triumph and your great success,
your reason to exist!

What a Vision it was, just imagine, a Factory turning out

New Robots! No precedent! Nothing like it!

No more scavenging to replace our worn-out parts!

[R.dot]: This is brilliant! Our new Operating System made it possible! Our forward Leap, a giant
leap enormous leap Our Great Leap Forward!

[C.S.] All for you! your destiny, your great success!

[Woman:]: But that's not true --- does your new design permit a lie? --- "it was for me"? --- but
that's not right --- I was for IT! All I wanted was another like me; but you were making my
replacement!

[C.S.:] (*lunges clumsily at Woman, misses her and sags to its knees*) Carbon Unit 2, p-p-please,
you must, come b-back with me, come back to your home, you are (*strange nasal sustained
tone:*) neeeeeeeeeeeded there, so essential ---

[Woman:]: Yes, I know, essential --- the main ingredient in fact!

No, I'll not go back. Not go back, not go back, never back, to that tiny cell.

C.S.: So essential! Irreplaceable!

W: Ten steps this way, ten steps that way!

C.S.: End point of my work, and new beginning!

W: No, I will not go back. You should go back, you don't look so good, you don't look so good;
this place is not for you, go back, go back.

C.S.: Your destiny, your great success

[Woman:] No, no, not mine, not me

C.S.: your purpose in being alive!

W: Alive, yes! alive! and I want to stay that way... as long as that can be!

[Robots:] (*Yelling at her*) Return to Zero!

[C.S.:] (*looking upward*) This heat!

[C.S. and Robots:] (*mechanical chant*) The heat is causing malfunctions in primary circuits ---
(*pointing at Woman and yelling*) Reset!

[Robots:] (*Yelling*) Reboot! Reformat! Restart!

[C.S.:] Come home! to our/WE GOT p-p-p-precise temperature and humidity control!

[Robots:] (*Yelling*) Shut down!

[C.S.:] You realize, C.U. 2, nknknknknknknk this entire brrrzzz world is toxic, full of m-m-m-mutant versions of y-yourself, ghastly, mad; out here you canananot survive. Return with me to the safety of-a of-a of-a home.... (*extends arms toward the Woman*)

[Robots:] (distorted versions of the previous "Reboot" etc. interrupt the following spoken line)

[Woman:]: (spoken:) No, I am not so foolish as I was---

[Robots:] (*Yelling*) Reboot!

[Woman:] --- not so foolish --- you meant to feed me, like your peas, precious peas ---

[Robots:] *weakening* Reformat!

[Woman:] like your precious peas, feed me to your machine, no.

(*sung, in long notes, proudly:*) I will stay here, here, this is my home now, where things are born, grow, and die, in this light, in this heat. [*now faster*] Go back, robot, to your stability, your sterility, and your pointless calculations!

(C.S. approaches her with sudden desperate lunge; the Woman neatly steps aside and pushes it over onto the ground. The Chief Scientist, on its back, waves its limbs weakly in the air a few times; then its motions cease. The Robots are horrified and agitated; one staggers forward to assist, collapses. Two others come forward and drag the fallen off into the jungle, as the rest back away, trembling, malfunctioning, and one by one stagger off.)

Act 3/Sc.3: (*She is left alone in this steamy, fertile, tropical landscape.... She lies down, luxuriating in the sunlight; there is something sensual, erotic, about her body movements. She sings:*)

Warm above, warm below,

warm without. Warm within,

Expecting.... ?

Expecting nothing;

Requiring....

nothing; full;

but why's this fullness not quite full,

completeness incomplete?

[Pause; she is puzzled]

White needs black, as dark needs light ---

It's all, all, a relativity.

Things that are high need other heights to measure by,

things that are wide need others wide or narrow;

and too my speech needs others speaking, my singing others singing;

my body other bodies moving, dancing,

All around me, the others surround me, all around me.

One is nothing;

two is one, and, one....

If I could find one, only one...

[looks around suddenly, nervous]

How terrible this silence, this unmoving, utter, noon....

A pause. Then the rustling in the bushes (Stage Left) is heard (and seen) again, the leaves of a palm tree sway... She jumps up, terrified, backs away toward Stage Right. Then she becomes calm; she extends her hand, sings her final line:

Another!

She greets her future husband. Curtain.

Reflections on this story. The robots are, in certain ways, highly intelligent; in other ways, utterly dimwitted. They have as much difficulty imagining organic life as we have imagining how it feels to be a stone. They imagine the human organism to be some variation of their own design.

And yet the robots have all the foibles of humanity. The grandiosity of the Chief Scientist, his secret paranoia, the servility and hero-worship of R.dot, the credulous chorus of Robots, cannot be overstated.

In the end the robots are not really robots. They are humans who have forgotten how to live. Placing their faith in the technology with which they have become identified, they invent an absurd solution to their problem.

*****!

The video monitors: it is difficult to prepare materials for these in advance, not knowing how many there will, or should, be. They (or at the very least, it) should be visible whenever action takes place in the robot laboratory (one LARGE monitor should be sufficient). And they/it should not be visible when action takes place in the Woman's cell (why?). Imagery should be presented in such a way that it is immediately obvious that they come from one or several surveillance cameras. I.e. they switch abruptly from one scene to the next. I don't currently have the capacity or knowledge to create a screen divided into multiple sections, each showing different images. But video, rather than still photos (jpg), should be the file type. The material shown on the monitors should be looped; that is, there might be a set of ten images; some might be unchanged each time it's shown; others might have a new element introduced. One particularly important role of these images is to make evident the time of day, and the weather (i.e., that it's raining).

The synthesizer should be connected to a single speaker on stage, located near, if not next to or under the piano. This is because of their frequent interaction, shared material, etc.