Navigating the Posthuman Landscape with case studies from 2013 to 2023

'We need first to understand that the human form - including human desire and all its external representations - may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned.'
—Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture?"[1]

Posthumanism vs Humanism

When considering the term 'posthumanism,' it is crucial to comprehend the underlying concept of 'humanism' and the significance of the 'post-' prefix. According to Keeling and Lehman, 'theories of posthumanism emerged with humanism during classical antiquity, and as a result they share some similarities.'[2] Despite the diverse definitions of humanism, a few key features can be distilled, as humanists assert that humans are (a) uniquely capable of and driven by speech and reason, (b) autonomous from nature and capable of controlling it through the intellectual faculties of the mind, and (c) an exceptional species superior to other creatures[3]. Rooted in the exceptionalism of the human subject, humanists establish a distinction between humans and 'other living creatures,' reinforcing the dichotomy between human culture and nature, viewing them as separate rather than interconnected. The rise of posthumanism can be viewed as a reaction to the excessive focus on humanity and its capacity as the predominant force shaping societies and nature. Posthumanist scholars share common ground with humanist scholarship in areas such as ethics, reason, and civic action—topics scrutinized since the Renaissance Humanism. However, posthumanist scholars approach these subjects from a 'less human-centric' perspective, rejecting the binary division between humans and nature. Instead, they argue that humans are intricately entwined within the world they inhabit. Consequently, human beings are not discrete entities isolated from their surroundings but are 'part of complex environmental systems (Davies, 2008, p.141)'.[4]

The addition of the prefix 'post-' imbues posthumanism with a more definitive and

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[1] Hassan, Ihab. "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" *The Georgia Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1977, pp. 843. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41397536. Accessed 14 Dec. 2023.

[2] Keeling, Diane Marie, and Marguerite Nguyen Lehman. "Posthumanism." *Communication*, 26 Apr. 2018, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.627.

[3] *loc. cit.*

[4] Keeling, Diane Marie, and Marguerite Nguyen Lehman. "Posthumanism." *Communication*, 26 Apr. 2018, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.627.

multifaceted perspective. Typically denoting a temporal 'after,' as seen in terms like postmodern and postcolonial, ‘post-‘ also implies a state of ‘beyondness,’ evident in contexts like post-rock or post-truth. Building on the insights of Keeling and Lehman, Lavender provides a consistent viewpoint on posthumanism, noting that the ‘post’ often retains significant features of what precedes it, and the presence of a name, such as ‘the modern’ or ‘the humanist,’ signifies both continuity and renunciation (Lavender, 2019 : 9).[5] In contrast, Reinelt posits that ‘post’ signifies ‘over,’ declaring that the term it accompanies has reached its conclusion, as seen in postfeminism or posthumanism, ’thus feminism is over, or humanism is passé,’ addressed Reinelt.[6] Rather than outright rejecting the relevance of humanism in contemporary times, I argue that within the realm of drama, theatre, and performance studies, it is more advantageous to view posthumanism as a "continuation with modification" of humanism. This perspective expands its focus to encompass both the human and the non-human while retaining the essential principles of humanity.

In this article, I will anchor my argument in both historical and practical perspectives. The former sheds light on why dismissing humanism from drama and performance studies is implausible, considering its historical entanglement with technological developments. The latter employs case studies spanning the recent decade, from 2013 to 2023, to illustrate how individuals respond to the profound societal changes within the realm of performing arts. Finally, we will delve into how the repercussions of COVID-19 have redefined our expectations regarding ‘embodiment’ in theaters and performances. Within this context, the term ‘posthumanism’ aptly serves as a lens to analyze the evolving human conditions and their societal counterparts.

Historical aspect : Anxiety and Immunity

From a rhetorical standpoint, Keeling and Lehman ascertain that ‘the “post” indicates a rethinking of the individualism and superiority of the human in our worldly relations’.[7] In scrutinizing humanism, posthumanist scholarship examines significant socio-

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[5] Lavender, Andy. “Reflections upon the ‘post’ - Towards a Cultural Hitory and a Performance-Oriented Perspective.” *The Routledge Companion To Theatre And Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon and New York, Oxon and NY, 2019, pp. 9–12.

[6] Reinelt, Janelle. “Parsing The Post - The post-political and its utility (or not) for performance.” *The Routledge Companion To Theatre And Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon and New York, Oxon and NY, 2019, pp. 59.

[7] Keeling, Diane Marie, and Marguerite Nguyen Lehman. o*p.cit.*

technological developments in the 20th and 21st centuries, reflecting 'an anxiety (or else, an urgency) to do with historical shift, nomenclatural definition and segmentation, and the tracing of cultural process,' as identified by Lavender.[8] It wasn't until the 1980s, marked by the widespread advent of the Internet, that discussions about posthumanism experienced a revival across various disciplines, including philosophy, literature studies, and social science. Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* in 1984, with its insightful exploration of feminist theory within the field of science and technology studies (STS), stands as a milestone in the history of posthumanism. This manifesto not only sparked extensive debates on prevailing norms and social orders, particularly gendered inequality, but also served as a wellspring of inspiration for art practitioners, particularly in the science fiction genre. Katherine Matthias underscores the profound influence of Haraway's manifesto on the development of posthumanism:

Her "multispecies feminism" remains a crucial decentering of the humanism that favors and centers the voice of cis white men. […] the post-human recentering of multiple worlds and exploration into those worlds highlights the continuous and expansive possibilities of art-making during this current moment (2020).[9]

This is supported by Keeling and Luhman's study which considers Haraway's writing 'a rallying point for a Renaissance of posthumanism and conceptions of the posthuman body'[10]. Haraway, in emphasizing the intricacy of human identity, disrupted unified understandings of self by characterizing the human is 'a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction"(p. 149)'.[11] So, how this groundbreaking thought was possible to achieve in the 1980s? In fact, without the improvement of scientific research and the advance of technologies, Haraway's statement might have been just a feminist scholar's sci-fi rhapsody. Florêncio's study on the intersection of early theaters and immunity provides a backdrop to understand the socio-technological progress preceding Haraway. According to Florêncio, Stanton Garner's work revealed a historical association between theatre and disease, viewing them as two symptoms of sin, a connection that persisted until the 20th century

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[8] Lavender, Andy. o*p.cit.,* p.9

[9] Matthias, Katharine. "Post-Human Theater and Digital Dramaturgy." Innovations In Socially Distant Performance, Innovations In Socially Distant Performance, 12 Sept. 2020, www.sociallydistantperformance.com/redefining-theater/post-human-theater .

[10] Keeling, Diane Marie, and Marguerite Nguyen Lehman. o*p.cit.*

[11] *loc. cit.*

when modern theatre and the emerging discipline of microbiology were introduced to the public:

[They] appeared to 'foreground similar issues: the interaction of the human organism with its environment, the relationship of inside and outside, the nature of visibility and somatic disclosure, and the definition of individual and social pathology' (2006: 2).[12]

Hence, it's not coincidental that artists frequently utilize disease as a metaphor in their works. Antonio Artaud's '*The Theatre and the Plague'* (1934), for instance, highlighted the medial and cultural shifts unfolding since the late 1800s. This period witnessed milestones such as Ilya Mechnikov's discovery of innate immunity, the development of Germ Theory and vaccination, and Robert Koch's pioneering bacteria research.[13] The scientific strides in immunology brought about an awareness of a 'process of self-/non-self-discrimination' within each individual's body. In the 1940s, the concept of 'self-makers' within each cell was introduced by Frank M. Burnet and Frank Fenner during the Cold War era.[14] These findings 'affirm the primacy of biological identity and to posit that bodily integrity is achieved and maintained through the surveillance, identification and rejection of all foreign bodies'.[15] In this context, what Artaud had called for shattering transformed from 'the regulative boundaries of the self' to a 'self-regulating organism.' Florêncio noted that 'Immunology affirmed the impermeability and impenetrability of the human body as *conditio sine qua non* for a life'.[16] This rhetorical ontology, constructed by the biopolitical apparatuses of modern science, posits the human body as autonomous and self-regulating. It was further solidified as the basic unit of social life under the convergence of scientific discourses, human ideals, and capitalism in the 'contemporary neoliberal privatisation of experience'.[17] However, when applying the lens of biopolitical apparatuses to theatre, Alan Read's research revealed that

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[12] Florêncio, João. "The Theatre of Posthuman Immunity." *The Routledge Companion To Theatre And Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon and New York, Oxon and NY, 2019, pp. 42-25.

[13] Florêncio, João. o*p.cit.,* p.42

[14] 'self-makers' is defined as components that cells must have 'which allow "recognition" of their "self"character'. *loc. cit.*

[15] Florêncio, João. o*p.cit.,* p.43

[16] *loc. cit.*

[17] *loc. cit.*

the performative apparatus of the stage, the humanist tradition of theatre, which Artaud infected with the plague, has also consistently failed to deliver on its didactic promise of summoning the 'human' (2009). Instead, what it has singlehandedly delivered has always been the anxiety of 'homo performans' to become exposed as a precarious life, as '"a life" that is separated and excluded from itself ' (Read 2009: 81–101). [18]

According to Read, this anxiety has contributed to theatre's current role as "the last human venue."In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in immunology studies, with people acknowledging organisms, including the human body, as ecosystems—evolving community formations—rather than radical closure entities (Tauber 2017: 164). Biological organisms are now understood to sustain themselves through 'constant dynamic exchanges of – and negotiations with – foreign substances and bodies that cross into it from the outside, the body is recognized as 'heterogeneous, partially comprising exogenous entities', constructed by its environment and, in turn, shaping it (Pradeau 2012: 269).'[19] While bio-technological advancements seemingly offer a logical basis for accepting Haraway's cyborg statement, lingering questions persist, and new ones arise. Even with the recognition of the human body as a hybrid and evolving entity, does this mean the elimination of anxiety? Or could anxiety still persist in theatre practices for different reasons? What are the underlying factors behind the anxiety experienced by theatre practitioners that surpass concerns about the body's form? Moreover, how can posthumanism assist in comprehending these essential aspects?

Practical aspect : OOO and Transhumanism

Recently, Joseph Dunne-Howrie has traced the evolution of internet theatre and its connections with humanity's historical consciousness. He argues that 'the resistance to recognising the Internet as a legitimate theatrical medium originates from post-Cold War anxieties regarding technological assimilation and cultural homogenisation associated with the digital revolution'.[20] According to Dunne-Howrie, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'ontological debates centred on liveness and presence are well rehearsed in theatre and performance studies (Schneider 2011; Heathfield and Jones 2012; Clarke et al. 2018;

[18] *loc. cit.*

[19] *loc. cit.*

[20] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. "Internet theatre and the historical consciousness of the COVID-19 ERA." *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2021, pp. 176–190, https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2021.2005331.

Sant 2017)'.[21] Specifically, the discussion on 'liveness' and 'presence' pertains to live performances where both performers and the audience are physically present to collectively experience the show in real time. Diana Taylor observed that

performance functions not only as a condition or ontology, as Gómez-Peña proposes, but also as an epistemology, a form of knowing and understanding the world. In its character of corporeal practice and in relation to other cultural practices and discourses, performance offers a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body. (2016: 36) [22]

Therefore, an Internet theatre lacking onsite embodiment, which is a defining characteristic of a 'live performance,' faces challenges in being acknowledged as a 'proper' performance, despite its existence since the early 1990s.[23]Before delving into the ontological debate surrounding performances, my aim is to use posthumanism as a prism, examining the latest trends in theatre practices and unveiling the diverse spectrum it encompasses across both ends of the spectrum.

First of all, if 'onsite embodiment' is deemed essential for a performance to be considered genuinely 'live,' does it hold significance whether the performers are humans or not? In Oriza Hirata's *I, Worker* (2013) and '*Sayonara*' (2013), robots and androids shared the stage with human actors, questioning 'both human and the robot subjectivity, presenting a world where they are all broken objects upon the stage,' as described by Sarah Lucie.[24] To scrutinize the dramaturgical politics, object-oriented ontology (OOO) was proposed by Lucie to analyze these plays, aligning with our posthumanist perspective. Lucie elaborates that OOO refers to the relationship, which is

characterised by an awe of the sensual object whose essence is withdrawn, but with whom the human must coexist in an ever more equal relationship. According to Timothy Morton, "Object doesn't mean objectified. Rather it means totally incapable of objectification" (2013: 176).[25]

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[21] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.177.

[22] Taylor, Diana. "Framing [Performance] ." *Performance*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2016, pp. 1–42. * The emphasis of underlined words (i.e., corporeal practice and body) is added by the study.

[23] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.177.

[24] Lucie, Sarah. "The human object in Oriza Hirata's *I, Worker* and *Sayonara*." *The Routledge Companion To Theatre And Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon and New York, Oxon and NY, 2019, pp. 212–214.

[25] Lucie, Sarah. o*p.cit.,* p.212 (The underlined words are emphasised *in Italic* in the original text).

'*Sayonara*' features a conversation between a dying woman and her female android comforter named Gemini F. Despite limited mobility, Gemini F can blink, and her mouth moves while talking, although not in perfect synchronization. '*I, Worker'* features two robots in Robovie 3 design, possessing a human-like structure with a cartoonish appearance. These two robots have moveable head, neck, torso, and arm, encased in white plastic. Sporting large machinery eyes, they can talk but lack a mouth. One robot, Takeo, accompanies the depressed husband Yuuji, unable to work. The other, Momoko, is programmed to empathize with humans, repeatedly apologizing to the wife Ikue, who suffered a miscarriage and is unable to bear children.The performance revolves around the robots and human actors comforting each other amid their mutual perceived failures in fulfilling their perceived purposes.[26] Three distinct features of OOO enrich the intricacies of posthumanism in theatre practices: communicable, sensible, and equal. As previously mentioned, the android Gemini F, robot Takeo, and robot Momoko all possess communication skills that propel the storyline forward. Therefore, the acting role they play in the performance is evidently equal to that of the human actors. It's noteworthy that Lucie identifies these robot actors as 'the sensible object,' whose aesthetic elements, such as the skin and hair of android Gemini F, or the emotions conveyed through Momoko's voice, are something the audience can sense, and the human actors can interact with. Lucie observed that 'these are the aesthetics through which the human can relate to the robot, which invite an anthropomorphic gaze or a revulsion from the uncanny'.[27] The sensible characteristics of robot actors are crucial for the audience to access the meaning behind the dialogues and be affected by the collaborative performance between human actors and robots. Given the sensual qualities that robots possess, Timothy Morton proposed that 'objects are **form of delivery** […] which in turns means they are **actors**. The most comprehensive way to think causality is to think drama' (2011: 87)'.[28] Furthermore, Lucie suggested that these robots can be good actors, as 'they are functional, expressive, and able to create moments of reflection and critique (Eckersall 2015: 129)'.[29]

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[26] Lucie, Sarah. o*p.cit.,* p.212-213.

[27] Lucie, Sarah. o*p.cit.,* p.213.

[28] Lucie, Sarah. o*p.cit.,* p.214. *The emphasis (words in bold) is added by this study.

[29] *loc. cit.*

Edward Scheer takes this viewpoint even further, asserting that 'both robot and non-robot actors are all in some way reflecting and refracting the projections of the spectators. In this way they all operate as protosubjects, as ontologically indeterminate entities dependent on a specific context for their meaning and function (2015: 147)'.[30] In essence, on one hand, robot actors and human actors are both subjects on the stage, interacting and having their own agency to direct the plot. On the other hand, from the audience's perspective, neither humans nor robots are subjects but 'the sensible objects' that allow spectators to project meanings onto them. Other similar example like Sarah Ruhl's '*The Oldest Boy*' (2014), which portrays a young mother's fear of losing her son, discovered to be the reincarnation of a powerful lama. Amid other human actors, the son was 'represented by a Bunraku puppet handled by three black-clad manipulators, one of whom provided his voice and later embodied the "oldest boy."The puppet was expressive and present in the eerie way of Bunraku […] appeared active and engaged, and his handlers gave him subtle, human-like movements and emotions', noted Jill Dolan.[31] It is a story that encompasses 'religious and cultural differences to meditate on the cost of separating from loved ones'.[32] However, some reviews simplify it as an exotic performance of separation anxiety. One audience member pointed out, 'the son, the oldest boy, is a bunraku puppet voiced by Ernest Abuba, an adult – an excellent idea, in my view; let's have fewer child actors and more puppets'.[33] Although it is good to have alternative thoughts beyond the original plot, this feedback clearly shows the audience's agency in freely projecting their life experiences onto the (non)human actors on the stage.

Lucie considers that in such a theatre setting, a human actor is undoubtedly an object—a form of delivery—who is 'endlessly complex with an active agency, potentiality, and affect. Rather, it is bringing the human into a dynamic relationship with the other objects onstage, in which the human is not the central figure for which all else exists. […] equality is categorised by a mutual empathy and respect between the human and other objects'.[34] This perspective not only exemplifies how posthumanism can be applied to modern

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[30] *loc. cit.*

[31] Dolan, Jill. "Seeing broadly: A cultural omnivore's Menu." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 308, https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2015.0040.

[32] *ibid., p.307.*

[33] Mandell, Jonathan. "The Oldest Boy Review: Sarah Ruhl on Tibetan Buddhism and Separation Anxiety." *New York Theater*, 9 Nov. 2014, newyorktheater.me/2014/11/06/the-oldest-boy-review-sarah-ruhl-on-tibetan-buddhism-and-separation-anxiety/.

[34] Lucie, Sarah., o*p.cit.,* p.214.

theatre but also underscores the 'non-hierarchy' feature of postdramatic theatre. As identified by Lehmann, 'the hierarchy vital for drama vanishes, a hierarchy in which everything (and every *thing*) revolves around human action, the things being mere props'.[35] In posthumanist theatre practices, this hierarchy wouldn't be the case.

Certainly, in posthumanist theatre, the effectiveness of non-human actors as leading roles in live performances has been established. Now, let's consider a scenario where there are no human actors, and all roles are played by non-human actors or non-existent actors. Would such a performance still qualify as posthumanist theatre? In Hiroshi Tamawari's '*VOCALOID Opera Aoi*' (2014), one of the most well-known plays of traditional Japanese Noh Theatre was performed by Bunraku puppets, with their chanting voices created by VOCALOID, the sound synthesis software manufactured by Yamaha Corporation. As clearly stated on its website:

It's a 30 minute-length opera film, in which you will see no human being acting. It's VOCALOID which provides all the songs for the play. […] And all the actresses in the play are Bunraku puppets. Bunraku is one of Japan's traditional performing arts with 250 years of history. The trinity of lifelike puppet play, songs from VOCALOID and techno music using Japanese traditional musical instruments illustrates the complexity of human deep psyche.[36]

Indeed, replacing all human actors with puppets can be viewed as an adaptation for puppetry theatre, an ancient form of theatre dating back to Ancient Greece. However, what makes it distinctly posthumanist is the innovative use of sound to embody these inanimate objects. All the songs sung by the Bunraku puppets are created using the Singer Library of VOCALOID, which 'allows users to input melody and lyrics in order to synthesize singing'. Three libraries—Yamaha's "VY1V3," AHS's "Nekomura Iroha," and "Yuzuki Yukari"—are employed in this play. Although the singing voices are recorded from actual singers, the synthesis operation enables practitioners to produce a new voice identity that didn't exist before. This is achieved by blending different source characteristics through technology. Posthumanist scholars assert that humans are part of an entangled environment who 'move to action through a variety of environmental interactions, affects, habits, and sometimes reasons', therefore are 'formed and

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[35] Lehmann, Hans-Thies, and Karen Jürs-Munby. "Drama." *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 73. *The emphasis (words in Italic) is in original text.

[36] VOCALOID (TM) Opera AOI with Bunraku Puppets. Vocaloid opera aoi: introduction. (n.d.). http://www.opera-aoi.com/intro.html

dependent on their environment' (Keeling and Lehman, 2018). The utilisation of non-human objects in '*VOCALOID Opera Aoi'* not only recognizes the value of an alternative form distinct from human-centered plays but also underscores the crucial role that technologies can play. Indeed, technologies have become indispensable in modern life, shaping today's information environment, which Richard Seymour describes as a 'simulacrum' : '[It's] not a representation of reality. It is reality, albeit generated from digital writing and simulated models. […] but this simulacrum has its roots in capitalist culture's airbrushed advertising […]'.[37] Seymour's reminder prompts our last question: <u>if there's no onsite presence but only digital ones, can performances of this kind still help us better understand the world</u>?

Dead Centre's '*To Be A Machine (version 1.0*)' (2020) premiered during lockdown by streaming live from Project Arts Centre in Dublin. The early iteration of this play is adapted from the Wellcome prize-winning book by Mark O'Connell, which explores how Transhumanism can help humans improve our bodies with the aid of technologies 'to the point where we become something other, and better, than the animals we are'.[38] It's important to note that Transhumanism is not synonymous with Posthumanism. While its meaning of 'beyond-human' can be broadly considered part of Posthumanism, transhumanist scholars' attitude toward human beings is opposite to posthumanist scholarship. Keeling and Lehman's study discovered that

While posthumanists use posthuman to refer to a more diffuse understanding of human bodies, transhumanist scholars also have used it to mean an evolved kind of human and a more technological, advanced, improved humanity. (2018) [39]

The narrative of transhumanism recentralises the 'conceptions of the logically minded human that can create and control technology for human benefit' under the discourse of social progress to achieve human superiority. Hence, a clear distinction can be made : 'posthumanism attends to the dispersion of human agency, whereas transhumanism attends to the concentration of it (Wolfe, 2010)', as concluded by Keeling and Lehman.[40]

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[37] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.180.

[38] *To be a machine (version 1.0)*. Dead Centre. (n.d.). <u>https://www.deadcentre.org/tobeamachine</u>

[39] Keeling, Diane Marie, and Marguerite Nguyen Lehman. o*p.cit.*

[40] *loc. cit.*

Despite their differences, we can still observe them through a broad posthumanist lens to help us address the ontological question—presence. During the live streaming, audiences are required to upload their faces and type their responses to interact with the only onsite performer, Jack Gleeson. According to Dunne-Howrie, 'the uploaded video footage makes the human audience a living part of this environment without their corporeally fleshy presence. As data, they exist as materials that can be potentially interacted with during the live event'. Moreover, Dunne-Howrie continued, 'the act of typing makes the audience part of a communication system between the performance's virtual and corporeal components'. The interplay between virtual (online) and corporeal (onsite) bodies embodies the entire performance, constructing a data loop of multiple presences, occurring in multiple places, existing on multiple devices, simultaneously.

Similarly, Anarchy Dance Theatre's '*CyborgEros*' (2023) also originated from choreographer HSIEH Chieh-Hua 's life experiences during lockdown in Taipei.[41] It's intriguing how choreographer HSIEH Chieh-Hua's pandemic experiences, where having multiple digital doubles on different screens became his 'new reality' for teaching students, served as the catalyst for developing the '*CyborgEros*' project. In '*CyborgEros*', dancers wield handheld cameras while being filmed by other cameras. Each footage is projected in real-time on screens of various sizes on the stage. The three human dancers not only engage in physical dance with each other but also interact with their 'digital bodies' by reconfiguring these screens. In the final part of the choreography, AI recognition restructures these digital bodies, generating 'post-digital bodies' or 'AI bodies.' The dancers then dance with these newly generated AI body images, intertwining with their own bodies and the digital bodies residing on different screens. There are three ways to experience the performance: onsite, where people watch as regular audience members do; online, where the audience can choose which camera/screen to watch outside of the theatre; and onsite and online, where the audience brings their own laptop to the stage, connects to the internet, and freely chooses between the physical performance or the streaming one. Furthermore, the performance allows the audience '[to] replace the dancers with audience members' own bodies. Different perspectives challenge the perception that seeing is believing and the distinction between the stage and audience is blurred'.[42]

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[41] National Taichung Theater. (2023, March 14). 🌱*arts nova*🌷《肉身賽博格》演什麼？謝杰樺來解答！. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQYWd_VulU&list=LL&index=4 *The translation is made by this study.

[42] Dance Theatre, A. (n.d.). Cyborgeros. 安娜琪舞蹈劇場. https://anarchydancetheatre.com/works/32?locale=en

The fluidity of digital identity and body presence within the current information environment is well exhibited in these performances, where a human subject is no longer a singular individual but 'a heterodox entity who flows along networks as data whilst sustaining a corporeal presence', indicated Dunne-Howri.[43]These performances align not only with Haraway's statement (i.e., humans as hybrids of machines and organisms) and biological science's approach (i.e., the human body as an evolving eco-system), but more importantly, they illustrate an undeniable fact that 'the digital revolution has altered the coordinates of the perceptual field to produce a fluid, contingent, transitory, and mutable reality,' noted Dunne-Howri. Therefore, the common belief that 'live performance came to represent the "last resort for resisting the dominant culture of media economy" in the cultural milieu of the 1990s (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 68)'[44] should be understood alternatively after undergoing through COVID-19. Ubiquitous communication technologies and the advent of artificial technology have opened up new possibilities, prompting us to reconsider the close-knit relationship between 'authentic culture' and '(onsite) live performance.' In my opinion, the real in theatres should be 'liberated from the strictures of conceptual, determinate meaning or messages' (Jürs-Munby-Munby, Carroll, and Giles 2013, 26)[45], as the materiality of the Internet has shaped how reality is structured and perceived. Additionally, Dunne-Howri's investigation revealed that

There is no 'authentic' reality separate from digitality that performance can suture a culture to. […] it is important to acknowledge that the transition from corporeal reality to bio-techno hybridity is occurring during a period of [COVID] crisis to consider what new symbolic systems of identification are emerging.[46]

From a posthumanist perspective, when the distinctions between (non)human, subject/object, virtual/corporeal body, or online/onsite presence become less fundamental in judging a performance's quality, it would be a shame to let these dichotomies blind us to the potential of 'mediated authenticity' and the new agency brought by emerging technologies. While staying alert to the latent risks of capitalism in the application of these

[43] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.183.

[44] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.180.

[45] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.182.

[46] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.188.

technologies in performance design, as O'Connell contends that 'transhumanism is a merely a more extreme expression of how technology is used to improve our lives'[47], embracing the posthumanist perspective allows us to see everything, non-human creatures and non-organisms alike, take place in the theatre with their own agency, co-creating stories with us.

Performance is an art practice, an epistemology, a methodological lens that conveys memory and identity, supporting us in understanding the evolving world and the evolving self. Adopting a posthumanist mindset toward this intricate world can help us dispel rigid yet unspoken rules in theatre practices. An authentic performance is a manifestation rooted in the tapestry of real life, seamlessly weaving together the strands of political statements, theoretical investigation, scientific breakthroughs, commercial intervention, social activism, and art practices, as Hayles had envisioned in the dawn of the 21st century:

The chaotic, unpredictable nature of complex dynamics implies that subjectivity is emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it.[48]

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[47] Dunne-Howrie, Joseph. o*p.cit.,* p.182.

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