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Haunted Presences: Theatre After the Real

Savas PATSALIDIS[1]

Abstract: This paper examines how contemporary theatre reconfigures the concepts of presence, liveness, and reality through technological mediation. It traces the shift from traditional co-presence to digitally refracted performance, arguing that technologies, once ancillary now co-constitute meaning alongside human agents. By analyzing examples from The Wooster Group, Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, Punchdrank, Rimini Protokoll, and Suzanne Kennedy, among others, the essay contends that presence is no longer ontological but constructed, an interface effect shaped by projection, feedback, simultaneity, and simulation. Theatre thus emerges not as a mirror of reality but as an ontological machine that stages the instability of the "real" in a hypermediated, post-human era.

Keywords: scenography, technology, interface, presence, absence, theatre ontology.

When scenographic elements like the *periaktoi* (revolving triangular prisms painted with different scenes) were first introduced in ancient Greek theatre, they were met with skepticism. For ancient audiences, theatre was primarily a medium of language, with visual elements serving only a secondary role.[2]

[1] Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Email: spats@enl.auth.gr

[2] Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Arnold Aronson, *The Disappearing Stage:*

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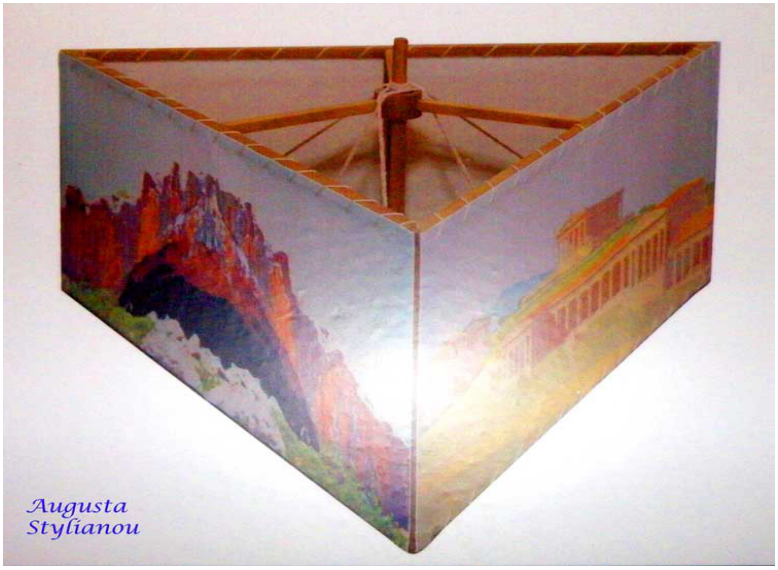


Fig. 1: Periaktoi for the rapid change of scenes in ancient Greek theatre. Photo: Augusta Stylianou Artist. Web/Ancient Greek Technology (http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Technology/AncientGreekTechnology018.html)

Since then, the history of theatre has unfolded as a continual negotiation of distances: between stage and audience, between the live and the virtual, between face and mask, and between reality and simulacrum. These distances have at times contracted and at other times expanded, always shaped by the broader sociopolitical and artistic context.[3]

Consider how the interplay of technology, scenography, acting, presence, absence, and viewing has evolved with the introduction of numerous

Reflections on the 2010s in Scenography (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2020); Lloyd Llewellyn Jones, "The Use of Set and Costume Design in Modern Productions of Ancient Greek Drama," *Classical Receptions in Drama and Poetry in English from c.1970* (The Open University, 2024).

[3] For more, see Donatella Barbieri, ed., *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body* (Bristol: Society of British Theatre Designers, 2019); Sarah Bay-Cheng, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, and David Z. Saltz, eds., *Performance and Media: Taxonomies for a Changing Field* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

innovations: perspective drawings, flat wings, the scene-shifting "carriage-and-frame" method, three-dimensional furnishings and box sets employed by the realists, as well as revolving stages and hydraulically operated platforms, among other advancements. Each of these innovations has contributed to enhancing the relationship between dramatic text and stage realization.



Fig. 2: Perspective drawing, 17th century. This resource was generated with AI.

Theatre history demonstrates that the more intense the upheavals in the social body, the more profound the realignments in artistic hierarchies and practices. Our current preoccupation with these relationships stems mostly from the advent of high technology, whose unprecedented reproductive capacities have caused a seismic shift in the foundations of theatre, destabilizing its very ontology. Especially during the pandemic, extensive discussions and concerns emerged regarding the potential for new technologies to surpass traditional theatrical practices. That is, the concern expressed was not merely the increasing presence of technology in theatre, but rather the extent to

which the stage, as a medium, risks becoming subordinate to the language of this technology. This shift has since compelled the theatrical community to reconsider its foundational assumptions, structural, communicative, and philosophical.[4] It has prompted it to reconsider whether theatre is still defined by the live co-presence of actor and spectator, or whether it has entered a post-human, postdramatic phase in which such binaries are no longer operative.

For recent generations, this ontological redefinition is more than theoretical; it entails the loss of once-reliable frameworks that guided artistic navigation and action. It is therefore worth recalling the defining forces that have shaped this contemporary landscape and catalyzed the paradigmatic turn in performance thought and practice.

Zeitgeist: Ontology in Flux

We have clearly moved from Protagoras's dictum that "man is the measure of all things" to a present in which technology increasingly assumes that role. This moment warrants attention: we are entering a post-humanist era that challenges the primacy of reason and the Ego. Humans are evolving from *homo sapiens to homo silico*, shifting from flesh and bone to *technobodies* and *cyberbodies.* Computers are approaching human-level intelligence and may eventually develop capacities akin to emotion.

Since Aristotle, the question "What is a human being?" has shaped philosophical inquiry. Traditional responses, grounded in religious, classical, and scientific frameworks, have depicted humans as bodies animated by a soul, created in God's image, and distinct from all other beings, tasked with mastering nature through technology.

Contemporary postmodern humanism challenges these hierarchies, seeking instead a new consciousness and cosmopolitan identities. Individuals are encouraged to perceive themselves not merely as citizens of nations but as citizens of Earth, recognizing our shared interdependence, a daunting but essential endeavor. We are now engaging with a reality that resists self-evident

[4] Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness* (London: Routledge, 2006), 89.

truths and fixed ontological essences. Everything is renegotiated from the ground up, with the ambition to "rewrite" the narrative of a post-Genesis, articulating anew notions of rebirth, re-creation, and a transformed Humanity.

Within this emerging cultural logic, traditional dialectical models and binary oppositions are systematically dismantled.[5] Difference is conceived as continuous becoming, a state of flux that resists fixed categories and stable identities. Meaning, on the other hand, no longer emerges from binary structures, such as man/woman, nature/culture, or human/animal, but through relational embeddedness within dynamic interdependent networks. These networks function less through vertical hierarchies than through horizontal interconnection, where entities are interdependent and mutually constitutive.

Unsurprisingly, the poetics of theatre have not, and could not, remain untouched by these profound ontological and epistemological shifts. Questions regarding what constitutes "theatre," the role of text, the formation of subjectivity and language, or the binary of presence and absence have all been reshuffled. Crucially, the point here is not simply that theatre now incorporates technology, this has always been the case, but rather that technology reshapes how theatre thinks, feels, and means. Increasingly, theatre operates through a horizontal structure that I propose to describe as "*salad bowl poetics*," a configuration where sound, image, voice, data, and human presence function as autonomous yet co-constitutive elements. These components no longer serve as secondary supplements to some prior "real;" rather, they actively co-produce reality in real time, the moment of performance.[6]

Assemblage Aesthetic: Toward a "Salad Bowl" Poetics. Refracted Realities

This horizontal poetic configuration signals a significant departure from the Aristotelian unity of action, with its beginning, middle, and end, privileging instead discontinuity, simultaneity, and multiplicity. Performances become assemblages composed of live and pre-recorded media, human and non-human actors, algorithmic inputs, and digital feedback loops. Within this

[5] Johannes Birringer, *Performance, Technology, and Science* (PAJ Publications, 2009); Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, 2006.

[6] Dixon, *Digital Performance*, 137-40; Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, 105.

performative context, the ingredients of meaning, what we might call the aesthetic outcome, remain visible, much like the discreet elements of a salad, as they produce a unified flavour. Each component contributes to the overall effect, yet none loses its autonomy within the composition.

Unlike the centralized logic (and poetics) of the melting pot metaphor (*e pluribus unum*) which suggests assimilation into a dominant cultural form, the "salad bowl" aesthetic (*e pluribus plura*) resists homogenization. It privileges coexistence, layering, contrast, technological co-agency, and intermedial juxtaposition. Screens, sensors, data, projections, and coded environments are not mere accessories but active co-agents, performers in their own right. They serve the politics and poetics of difference and layered realities. An increasingly broader theatrical/performance poetics is taking shape, with its own challenges, its own communicative as well as aesthetic, writing, and acting possibilities and peculiarities, as well as its own notions of presence, absence, ontology, participation, plot, live, etc. This shift is clearly visible in the work of groups such as The Wooster Group and Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, among others.

The Wooster Group

From *Rumstick Road*, based on the suicide of Spalding Gray's mother (1977), to *Brace Up!*, a reinterpretation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1991), to *To You, The Birdie!*, a techno-baroque remix of Racine's *Phèdre* set in a surreal, hypermediated world (2002), and to *Hamlet* (2007), based on the 1964 film of Richard Burton's *Hamlet*, The Wooster Group has consistently destabilized theatrical coherence. Through recursive video loops, fractured *mise-en-scène*, and audio glitches, they deconstruct established notions of character formation, narrative construction, and the spatial-temporal dynamics of performance. Their deconstructive poetics aim to create a theatre in which presence is never unmediated, but always refracted, fragmented, layered, and technologically constructed (LeCompte, *Wikipedia*). Actors do not "present" themselves as stable, expressive subjects; rather, they act as conduits for external voices, images, and data streams. Technology does not illustrate, it structures. It does not support, it generates.

In *House/Lights*, for example, which merges Gertrude Stein's *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights* with the 1960s exploitation film *Olga's House of Shame*, live actors interact with recorded sound, video projections, platform mechanics, cameras, and manipulated voices. These elements are deployed not as visual flourishment but as integral dramaturgical components that disorient normative expectations of "live" theatrical communication. The actor is not the sole source of meaning; rather, presence emerges from the collision and coexistence of live bodies, recorded media, and technological artifacts.[7]

Ontological-Hysteric Theatre

Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre mirrors this dismantling, though with more philosophical rigor. Since the 1970s, Foreman has constructed what he calls "total environments,"[8] dense performative systems composed of projections, sound effects, static tableaux, and fragmented textual overlays. In these worlds, actors do not represent characters; they function as nodes within a broader machinic network. Meaning is dispersed, subjectivity is decentered, and presence is always mediated.

In *Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland* (2000), for example, we have a dense collage of sensory stimuli, sounds, projections, stillness, and language fragmentation, that creates an unstable environment where presence is continually interrupted, deferred, or refracted. Bodies operate within a system, caught in loops, reacting to prompts from the machine-like environment. Foreman's own voice (often serving as an authorial or subconscious narrator) is played via loudspeakers, dictating thoughts, commands, or philosophical fragments. Theatrical presence is no longer "being in the moment," but being subjected to a system of mediation.

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[7] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 92; Dixon, *Digital Performance*, 225.

[8] Richard Foreman, "Ontological Hysteric Theatre: Third Manifesto," *The Drama Review* 19, no. 4 (December 1975): 71-81. Also: Florence Falk, "Ontological Hysteric Theater: Setting as Consciousness," *Performing Arts Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 51-61; and Michael Kirby, "Richard Foreman's Ontological Hysteric Theatre," *The Drama Review* 17, no. 2 (June 1973): 5-32.

In both groups, "liveness" is not a given thing but a construct, an aesthetic and epistemological problem. That means, questions of whether a performance is "live" or pre-scripted cannot be answered through binary thinking but through analysis of how simultaneity, delay, and technological agency shape the event. In both cases, theatre functions as a cognitive apparatus, a "thinking machine" rather than a site for catharsis or narrative coherence (particularly in Foreman's work).[9]

Presence becomes unstable, questionable, haunted, a product of interference. The performer may appear physically present, but the presence we experience is always refracted through technology. The Wooster Group's integration of pre-recorded video or cameras may loop actor and environment, collapsing "live" and "recorded" into a single hybrid temporality. Foreman's own voice often issues through pre-recorded tracks he triggers live from a soundboard, his bodily absence matched by a mediated self that governs the spectacle.

The influence of philosophers and cultural theorists such as Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Judith Butler, Jill Dolan, Elinor Fuchs, and Donna Haraway, among others, has been instrumental in shaping the aesthetics and politics of performance since the 1970s. Rarely in the history of theatre has theory played such a direct and decisive role in the formation of performance itself. The Wooster Group and the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre were among the first to engage deeply with these theoretical frameworks, integrating them not as background influences but as central compositional tools.

More Examples Across the Spectrum

This reframing also characterizes the work of numerous contemporary artists and collectives whose practice does not resist the digital but rather engages in dialogue with it, often staging the operations of technological control, illusion, and fragmentation. One could think, for instance, to tgSTAN, Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Elevator Repair Service, Goat Island, Forced Entertainment, Complicite, DV8, Needcompany, Sotterraneo, Collettivo

[9] Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, 121.

Cinetico, Nowy Teatr, Hotel Pro Forma, Gob Squad, and El Conde de Torrefiel, as well as directors and performers such as Rodrigo García, Katie Mitchell, Dries Verhoeven, Rufus Norris, Tiago Rodrigues, Samuel Achache, Kim Noble, Milo Rau, Robert Lepage, Falk Richter, René Pollesch, Frank Castorf, Romeo Castellucci, Thomas Ostermeier, Alessandro Serra, Valery Fokin, Robert Wilson, Ivo van Hove, Kornél Mundruczó, Christiane Jatahy, Lola Arias, Elli Papakonstantinou, and Oliver Frljić, among others.

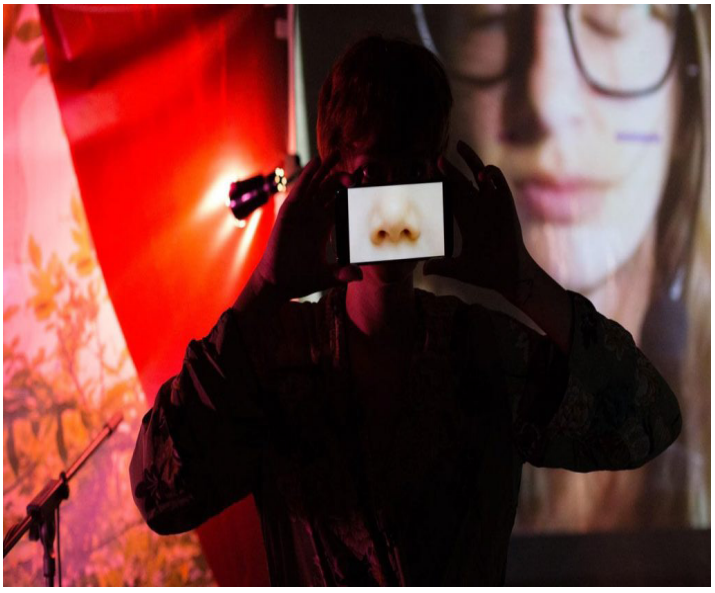


Fig. 3: *Traces of Antione,* an interactive digital performance directed and designed for the Zoom Platform, by Elli Papakonstantinou. Text by Swedish playwright Christina Ouzounidis. Photo: FLP Athens, Sophia Manoli, Mariza Kapsabeli. Web/Elli Papakonstantinou (https://elli.site/projects/traces-of-antigone/#section-credits)

In their diverse practices, these artists turn the stage into a critical interface, one that no longer reflects the world but probes the architectures shaping our perception of it.[10] In *Fantasmagoria* (2011), Philippe Quesne

[10] Rachel Hann, *Beyond Scenography* (London: Routledge, 2019), 73; Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer, *Scenography Expanded: An Introduction to Contemporary Performance Design* (London: Methuen Drama, 2017).

integrates technology in subtle, atmospheric ways: projections, sound design, and mechanized stage elements evoke an eerie interplay between the natural and the artificial. Rather than foregrounding digital spectacle, Quesne uses technology to construct a mediated ecology, an environment where illusion, artifice, and human presence cohabit in fragile balance.

If Quesne's work emphasizes the quiet infiltration of the technological into the natural, Agrupación Señor Serrano's *Birdie* (2016) exposes the apparatus of mediation itself. Live video, miniature models, and multimedia projections are used to juxtapose images of migration and global capitalism, transforming the stage into a hybrid screen-space. The performers manipulate cameras and objects in real time, exposing the mechanisms of representation and inviting viewers to question how media constructs contemporary reality.

A more overt synthesis of live and digital elements is found in *Golem* (2014) by 1927, a paradigmatic example of technology functioning simultaneously as set and character. A few live actors and musicians perform in front of a white screen onto which stop-motion animation, projection mapping, and live media cues are played in synchronization. The animated Golem interacts with performers, guiding the narrative through computer-triggered cues, projected scenes shift, lights change, urban environments come alive, creating a world in which live action and animation co-launch meaning. The performance famously includes 480 video cues, all tied to precise performer positioning, so finely calibrated that a single misstep can undermine the illusion of interaction. It becomes impossible to locate a stable origin or determine what is "real."

This destabilization of presence and reality also defines other technologically mediated performances. In Silviu Purcărete's production of the medieval German poem *The Plowman and Death* for the National Theatre of Iași, the real and the virtual converge in ways that produce profound uncertainty around the concept of presence, an undecidability that becomes its central aesthetic strategy. A similar principle operates in Katie Mitchell's stage works, where projections of actors in dressing rooms are displayed on large screens: the viewer cannot be certain whether the images are prerecorded or live, and this ambiguity becomes the site of a complex reflection on theatrical and cinematic temporality.



Fig. 4: *The Plowman and Death,* directed by Silviu Purcărete.
Photo: Iulian Ursachi. Courtesy of the National Theatre of Iași

In *Sleep No More* (2011), the immersive collective Punchdrunk allows audience members to move freely across multiple floors, wearing masks that heighten sensory perception. Here, technology structures perception itself, rendering the physical environment an active agent in narrative immersion and blurring the boundary between spectator and unreal.

In Rimini Protokoll's *All and Everything: A Public Reading of the Bible* (2008), the entire Bible is read aloud by participants dispersed throughout a city. Audiences experience the performance through a network of timed feeds and mapped locations. Both real people and urban space become dramaturgical material, merging the everyday with performative architecture and collapsing fiction into lived reality.

Contemporary theatre increasingly transforms the stage into algorithmic systems in which the audience functions simultaneously as sensor and subject. These environments do not simulate reality, they generate it: algorithmically, architecturally, atmospherically. Through these practices, technology is not a tool of enhancement but a structural logic, reshaping how theatre conceptualizes, experiences, and stages presence in a world saturated with mediation. This transformation is evident, for instance, in Jan Versweyveld's use of light and architecture,[11] Bunny Christie's emotionally resonant spatial design,[12] and Es Devlin's hybrid environments,[13] all of which demonstrate how scenography constructs presence rather than merely housing it.

Similarly, artists like Michal Korchowiec, Katarzyna Borkowska, the late Robert Wilson and Bert Neumann, impress with the way they handle the integrational dynamics of multimedia elements, thus enriching and redefining the creation of immersive environments by harnessing the full spectrum of technological advancements.

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[11] See his scenographies in *Network* (Lee Hall, directed by Ivo van Hove) with its corporate-like structures, screens, and digital projection to expose the cold media machines that underpin modern politics. Also worthwhile mentioning is his *Lazarus* (musical by David Bowie and Ivo van Hove) which includes minimalistic industrial frames, neon, screens, and stark lighting.

[12] Consider her design of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, where she employs pixel mapping, moving LEDs, digital grids, and dynamic projections to render Christopher's logic, sensory overload, and emotional isolation. Equally illustrative of her style is *The Red Barn* (directed by Robert Icke) in which shifting scenes changes transform the stage into varied cinematic vistas through gauze, projection and strobe effects. In both cases, the boundaries between psychological and physical space dissolve under the influence of technology-driven scenography.

[13] Internationally celebrated for sculpting kinetic, media-rich environments that blur performance and projection, she exemplifies this approach in *The Lehman Trilogy* (directed by Sam Mendes), where a revolving glass cube serves as a mutable stage. Video projections map financial and geographic narratives onto the cube's surface, rendering history itself as a moving architectural media-object. Also notable is her *Hamlet* (Barbican production, starring Benedict Cumberbatch) in which her sculptural design, marked by reflective surfaces and shifting spatial forms, interacts with lighting and projections to produce shifting psychological and iconic reflections, unsettling clear divisions between actor, audience, and digital echo.

In the work of these artists the boundaries between visual dramaturgy and text dissolve, producing a theatre of simultaneous codes and collapsing frames. These works stage identity not as stable presence but as projection, distorted, deferred, and distributed. A striking example of this is Suzanne Kennedy's *Angela: a Strange Loop* where the German playwright pushes the post digital stage to its limit, transforming the theatre into an autonomous system in which perception, identity, and affect circulate algorithmically rather than organically.

Post-Humanist Theatre and the Case of **Angela***: A Strange Loop*

Angela interrogates the boundaries of the "self" within a post-humanist context, asking: What does it mean to be human when we are assimilated into intelligent machines? How much agency remains in an era where machines mediate not only content and communication, but also aesthetics, language, family, and love?

Kennedy dramatizes these "What?" and "How?" questions in her work, expanding the ethical, emotional, and existential dimensions of the post-human in a digital age.[14] Unlike postmodernism, which elucidates how

[14] This is not the first time theatre has grappled with the concept of the post-human. Notable precedents include Georg Kaiser's *Gas Trilogy* (1917-1920), Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1921), Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923), and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), as well as Futurist performances, Piscator's participatory events, and Bauhaus proposals. The rapid modernization of society generated both excitement and anxiety. Between 1880 and 1900, innovations such as the typewriter, telephone, phonograph, airplane, automobile, linotype, radio, cinema, and electricity transformed daily life, inspiring both wonder and fear. These technological developments propelled theatre and other artistic movements toward a pursuit of innovation, exemplified in concepts such as New Drama, New Woman, New Scenography, and New Criticism.

Contemporary works, such as Lucy Prebble's *The Sugar Syndrome* and Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, further blur traditional boundaries, challenging the modernist notion of Subjectivity and highlighting the fragility of the Self and its presence in the world. Also, Hope Hutman's *Your Mind, Girls…* (2025) which stages live actors and XR avatars, the acrobatic *Humans 2.0* (2025) which transforms the human body into a post-human spectacle, the AI-thrust *Disruption* (2023) at Park Theatre probing algorithmic Subjectivity, the tech-themed *Most*

society has been dominated by media and networks, Angela's post-humanism suggests that individuals themselves have become the very mediums through which these forces operate. In her world, human bodies assert their presence within novel spaces, virtual realities, and under continuous "Foucauldian" surveillance. Intelligent machines shape both the story and subjectivity.

Angela emerges as a "subjected subject," an ego whose intelligence and actions are not entirely self-directed but controlled by a vast network that surpasses and simultaneously defines her as an individual-presence. Language does not originate from her; she repeats it like a "parrot," performing what is already mediated. Angela never acquires the qualities of a fully three-dimensional, autonomous entity. From beginning to end she remains an impenetrable surface, a human machine that describes states and situations rather than revealing an inner self.

Angela performs language that is already spoken and mediated, embodying absence rather than presence. She is physically present on stage but remains a ghost of an Ego that gains its substance through the technology it uses, that is, through the act of performance. Her stage presence is more related to the verb "to present" rather than embodying "presence" as a noun. She presents a body that no longer ontologically belongs to her, an instance of alterity. In this sense, neither theatre nor the dramatic characters inhabiting it are ever an absolute, authentic presence; they are repetitions of performances and roles that have preceded and will follow. Each "here and now" is already a pre-mediated moment, a convergence of past and future, original and copy, human and machine. Simultaneity replaces linearity: the present unfolds alongside echoes of the past and anticipations of the future, collapsing traditional narrative structures.

Human Post Human (2024) in Australia, and *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* (2023) which confronts the post-anthropocene-human in ecological collapse, continue to blur classifications and problematize the Self, its control, and its presence in the world.

Conclusion: Presence as Effect, Not Essence

Bertolt Brecht sought to strip away illusion to reveal the truth beneath appearances. Were he alive today, he might have despaired since each layer uncovered no longer reveals authenticity, but yet another replica, and within that, yet another one. The line between the original and the copy becomes endlessly deferred, indistinct.

And yet, let us consider this: we speak of theatre as a mirror of reality, but it has never been a fixed or faithful mirror, not even in its most realist forms. It has always exploited the hidden potential of its own image, its inherent duality, where absences pretend to be presences, and vice versa. Was this not precisely the function of the ancient theatrical mask? Did it not create a dialectic between the real and the imaginary? The answer is, evidently, yes. And was it not upon this dialectic that Brecht built his entire theoretical framework? Again, yes.

As Cormac Power argues, theatrical presence is not a metaphysical constant but a constructed phenomenon, assembled to function within the spatial and temporal limits of a specific action.[15] And theatre, to remain theatre, must always stage not only the spectacle itself but also the function of mediation, not with the intent to reject reality, but to interrogate the manner in which reality is produced. Depending on the technical capabilities of the stage, the artistic intentions behind the work, and the spirit of the times, political, religious, social, and so forth, take on different forms.

Theatre, then, the art of imitation par excellence, does not merely offer us the real or the illusory; it has never been just one thing. Each of its gestures is simultaneously a presence and an absence, a revelation and a concealment, truth and illusion.[16] Like a magician producing doves from a hat, even the most realistic theatre defamiliarizes our habitual relationships to the world, unsettling what we take for granted.

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[15] Cormac Power, *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 170-80.

[16] Power, *Presence in Play*, 175-76.

If theatrical presence is an effect rather than an essence, it is because it arises from a continual interplay of mediation, simulation, and immediacy, a dynamic of "disclosure and absence."[17] Theatre, in this sense, continues to perform its oldest function: it holds a mirror to the world. But in an age when even mirrors can be deepfakes, that function is no longer to reflect, it is to question what reflection means. In light of this, in the age of technological uncanny, presence is no longer about co-location in time and space. It is an effect, produced through projection, delay, architecture, feedback, and interface.

Theatre's essence lies not in its fidelity to liveness, but in its ability to stage the instability of presence itself. "Live" is not an ontological status; it is a carefully crafted illusion, an effect of choices (timing, projection, feedback loops, digital delay, and an epistemological stance on mediation).[18] This ontological fluidity offers new possibilities for political and aesthetic agency, possibilities that we must courageously explore, rather than nostalgically resist.

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[17] Power, *Presence in Play*, 175-80; Stanton B. Garner Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 42-43, Willmar Sauter, *Aesthetics of Presence: Philosophical and Practical Reconsiderations* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), and David Z. Saltz, David, and David Krasner, eds. *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

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SAVAS PATSALIDIS *is Professor Emeritus in Theatre Studies at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He is the author of fourteen books on theatre and performance criticism/theory and co-editor of another thirteen. His two-volume study,* Theatre, Society, Nation *(2010), was awarded first prize for best theatre study of the year. In 2022 his latest book-length study* Comedy's Encomium: The Seriousness of Laughter, *was published by University Studio*

Press. He is on the Executive Committee of the Hellenic Association of Theatre and Performing Arts Critics and the editor-in-chief of Critical Stages/Scènes critiques*, the journal of the International Association of Theatre Critics.*