

Postdramatic Theatre and Form

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Body: Tadeusz Kantor and the Posthuman Stage

Magda Romanska

The Postdramatic and the Posthuman: What is the Difference?

In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann positions Tadeusz Kantor's work as one of the central signposts of postdramatic theory and practice. Unravelling the traditional models of dramatic structure, character, plot and the very notion of stage presence, Kantor challenged both the definition of dramatic theatre as well as devised work that specifically responded to and captured – in both form and content – the postmodern condition. As Lehmann argues, 'the postdramatic theatre of a Tadeusz Kantor with its mysterious, animistically animated objects and apparatus [is] crucial for understanding the most recent theatre'.¹ However, what makes Kantor's dramaturgy even more essential for understanding contemporary theatre is that, in addition to being classified as postdramatic, it can also be classified as posthuman. Using Kantor's theatre as a case study, I illustrate how the two critical and aesthetic paradigms – the posthuman and the postdramatic – differ in their representation and understanding of the human body, agency and subjectivity within and outside of the limits of dramatic and performance theory. In my exploration of this difference, I work to answer the following questions: What is the position of postdramatic theatre in the posthuman, anti-Kantian flat world of speculative realism, which 'denies that all reality is grounded in the human-world relation', and 'in which any thing, *sensu stricto*, is equivalent to another thing'?² Can the analysis of this difference help us delineate the historical and theoretical boundaries of postdramatic theatre – and post-postdramatic theatre?

With its focus on the authenticity of the body in performance, the legacy of the performance theory of the 1960s continues to spark fascination with quasi-religious, pretextual and predramatic performance rituals, seen as the original, authentic source of theatrical experience. This anthropocentric approach,

which developed in conjunction with J. L. Austin's theory of performativity, has focused on the presence of the marked body as the source of theatrical and performative truth, and performative signification.³ These 'human-centered social "performances"' operate through dramatic emplotment⁴ – rearranging aleatory historical events into Aristotelian dramatic structure – of the histrionic body. On the posthuman stage, however, the performative epistemology of the body, which dominates dramatic, predramatic and much of the postdramatic theatre and performance, has been unravelled by the technological progress altering our very (anthropological) perceptions of what is and isn't a 'human' body and even questioning the very need for such a category, along with the anthropocentric model and its hierarchy.⁵

Lehmann argues that the unravelling of a body-centred epistemology is one of the central pillars of postdramatic theatre: the body no longer serves as a central (and centralized) semantic field of a coherent human subject. However, the body serves as a signpost for a broader signifying landscape in which the potentiality for such a subject still exists. As Lehmann suggests: 'The dramatic process occurred between the bodies; the postdramatic process occurs *with/on/to* the body.'⁶ On the posthuman stage, however, the human body as a source of humanist ethics disappears. In *The Politics of New Media Theatre: Life®TM*, Gabriella Giannachi describes the posthuman body as a site of ontologically unstable semiotic constructs:

A space of discourse and materiality, the post-human body continuously reconstitutes itself between dichotomous discourses. No longer ontologically stable, it is a body that must always express itself through performance. . . . This means the post-human body is no longer fixed, unchangeable, but rather that it can be rewritten like a blank canvas. Both signifiers and genes can be altered. *The post-human body is scarred*. Not only is it modifiable semiotically but also medically. Unquestionably, at once terrifying and sublime, the post-human body is already the most crucial and controversial site of aesthetic, biopolitical, ethical and economic dispute in the twenty-first century.⁷

The posthuman body thus crosses the boundaries at the very foundations of Western man's self-perception, like a palimpsest on which the centuries of our culture have etched their forces and tensions. For theatre and performance scholars, the issues involved in defining the posthuman body on the posthuman stage must necessarily be also connected with Lehmann's concept of the postdramatic theatre – comparative study of both can help us delineate their historical and theoretical boundaries as well as help us clarify the nuances surrounding the controversial (and unclear) relationship between the body,

text and performance in postdramatic theatre. What is the difference between the postdramatic and the posthuman body, and, for that matter, between postdramatic and posthuman (and thus also post-performative) theatre?

In 'Posthuman Perspectives and Postdramatic Theatre', Louise Lepage suggests that postdramatic theatre 'is a necessary response to the modern mediatised world... The form of postdramatic theatre shares with posthumanism a more chaotic and emergent structure than is known by either drama or humanism'.⁸ Juxtaposing Peter Szondi's *Theory of the Modern Drama* and Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* with N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman*, Lepage draws a parallel between Drama as a historical form that emerged in the seventeenth century as an Enlightenment expression and repository of humanist ethics and aesthetics, and humanism as an historical category that emerged at the same time as an expression and repository of 'human' – also 'a historically specific construction'.⁹ Just as the 'human' is now 'giving way to a different construction called the posthuman',¹⁰ Lepage suggests that Drama – starting in the early twentieth century – has been giving way to the postdramatic. Since 'Drama' as a historical category is dependent on the 'human' as a stable construct (Drama is dialogic; hence, there can be no Drama without humans), posthuman theatre can be thought of as always already also postdramatic. Drawing on Lepage, we can conclude that the process of unravelling the concepts of 'human' and 'Drama' is therefore codependent (even if that codependency doesn't imply causality). Although we can argue that all posthuman theatre is postdramatic, not all postdramatic theatre is automatically posthuman.

In the postdramatic performance space, the body is no longer a site of performative epistemology but merely one component of the theatrical landscape. As Peter M. Boenisch reminds us, 'postdramatic theatre, at its very heart, challenged the earlier paradigmatic aim for synthesis, coherence, and closure'.¹¹ This includes the concept of the human body as a stable signifier. Postdramatic theatre, Cathy Turner argues, encourages us 'to encompass processual and open-ended structures, admitting the aleatory, entropic and chaotic, examining the potential for multiple narratives, frames and forms of textuality, and including non-hierarchical consideration of both subjects and objects'.¹² The contemporary, globalized dramaturgical process, Turner writes elsewhere, requires an awareness of interconnectivity – between 'materials, words, bodies, sounds, spaces, times, concepts, audiences, socio-political context, subjects, objects, ideologies [and] aesthetics'.¹³ Or, as Robin Nelson puts it: '[P]aralleling the displacement from centre stage of "Man as the measure of all things", the actor's agency and centrality are further diminished by her demotion from the apex of the hierarchy of stage signs. The performer today is just one of many signifiers in a complex, multi-layered event'.¹⁴

The posthuman stage, however, resists any sort of historical and bodily dramatic or postdramatic emplotment, any narrativization of aleatory signs and events that could suggest the existence of a coherent human subject. Postdramatic theatre unravels the concepts of Drama, plot, character and even the human body, but posthuman theatre unravels the very notion of human agency and subjectivity. Analysing Tadeusz Kantor's theatre can help us illustrate this difference. When Kantor's work is juxtaposed with Jerzy Grotowski's, for example, both Grotowski's and Kantor's 'poor theatres' can be thought of as postdramatic (both resist the dramatic form's impulse to unfold according to Hegel's historical model), but only Kantor's theatre can be also thought of as posthuman. If in Grotowski's theatre dramatic texts and objects disappear under the weight of the performer's human body (which is present and presented as a central site of the performance event and an epistemological source of theatrical experience), in Kantor's theatre the performer's human body disappears under the weight of texts and objects. If in Grotowski's work the performer's body is still a human body inasmuch as it's always connected to the human subject that feels or enacts the emotions it is asked to perform, in Kantor's theatre actors' bodies are posthuman bodies inasmuch as they're always connected to and equivalent to an object – performing gestures and movements disconnected from any stable emotions with no localized source.¹⁵

The Posthuman and its Discontents

The postmodern philosophical concept of the 'posthuman'¹⁶ developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s in the poststructuralist lineage, and in response to the traditional Renaissance-era humanist ethics and aesthetics, which presupposed a coherent vision of the human being imbued with certain essential characteristics (i.e. 'soul' and 'human nature') and visually represented by the intact body. The notion of the 'posthuman' refers to the technological disruption of that paradigm, but the concept itself questions the validity of the previously established categories of 'human' – and, most important, 'subhuman' – thus also questioning other definitions: of human rights, life and death. Giorgio Agamben, for example, invented the concept of 'bare life' to demarcate the ethical perimeters of the living body.¹⁷ The posthumanist vision of the future (as envisioned by modern philosophers and science fiction writers and filmmakers) often entails a nightmarish landscape populated by creatures of undefined origins and ruled by the relativist ethics of a flat world where lines of life and death are no longer drawn according to a hitherto established anthropocentric hierarchy, and where monsters, cyborgs and mutant animal-men destroy humans and their

civilization. Hayles argues that 'at the inaugural moment of the computer age, the erasure of embodiment is performed so that "intelligence" becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human life-world'.¹⁸ If 'machines can become the repository of human consciousness', Hayles continues, '[then they] can become human beings. You are the cyborg and the cyborg is you.'¹⁹ By destabilizing the category of what is and isn't 'human', the concept of 'posthuman' also provides a destabilized and destabilizing view of the human body, its capacities and its status in the hierarchical order of things.

Historically, anything not shaped as 'human' was typically deemed monstrous (from hybrid mythological creatures to severely disabled 'elephant men'). In a sense, the stage has always served as a place where we've enacted, defined, and seen our humanity vis-à-vis all other 'nonhuman' and 'subhuman' others. The main characteristic of posthuman aesthetics, then, is the dissociation between the body and human consciousness. Pramod K. Nayar defines posthumanism as 'an ontological condition' in which humans live with 'technologically modified bodies and/or in close conjunction with machines'.²⁰ Nayar argues that postmodern, posthuman art works:

emphasize the blurring of bodily borders, identities (gender, species, race) and even consciousness, in which isolating the 'human' from a human-machine assemblage, cadavers or another form of life is impossible. Critical posthumanism . . . is the radical decentering of the traditional, coherent and autonomous human in order to demonstrate how the human is always already evolving with, constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines.²¹

Essential for this new construction of the posthuman is the connection between the human body and its various inorganic prosthetic extensions. Hayles notes that '[t]he posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born'.²² Thus, the posthuman body is always already a bionic body prepared to integrate with, to be augmented or impaired by, the organic and inorganic matter surrounding it.

Theatre has also always been intrigued by the permeability of the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, the living and the material worlds. Tadeusz Kantor's visual 'manipulations of symbols', his bio-objects and stage-objects, are some of the most complex interrogations of this process. Analysing Kantor's theatre can help us understand the difference between posthuman and the postdramatic bodies.²³

By creating BIO-OBJECTS, theatrical forms that join the living actor with inanimate objects, Kantor formed the first quasi-bionic theatrical bodies.²⁴ As he writes: 'BIO-OBJECTS were not props which the actors used. They were not "decorations" in which you "act". They made indivisible wholes with the actors. They exuded their own autonomous "lives", not related to the FICTION (content) of the play.'²⁵ Estranged from their theatrical roles, Kantor's actors 'act as if automatically, out of habit; we have even the impression that they ostentatiously refuse to own up to these roles, as if they were only repeating somebody else's sentences and actions, tossing them off with facility and without scruples; these roles break down every now and then as if badly learnt.'²⁶ The actors do not live their roles; they don't perform them or enact them in any way. They wear them temporarily, as if by accident, repeating lines and gestures like broken, discarded machines, programmed to mimic human subjects, playing the characters like a musical instrument.²⁷ Many contemporary critics, including Kenneth J. Gergen, have argued that the postmodern self is caught in 'a continuous state of construction and reconstruction', where 'each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality'. In that context, 'the center fails to hold'.²⁸ Kantor's postmodern actors structure their roles within roles as if playing themselves playing someone else. The centre doesn't hold because there is no centre, only words, gestures and movements, independent of one another and the actor who performs them: 'The very condition of BEING ESTRANGED, which places [the actors] on a par with the condition of an OBJECT, removes biological, organic, and naturalistic [expressions of] life.'²⁹ Lehmann elaborates on the antinaturalistic mechanism behind Kantor's actors/objects within the decentred hierarchy of stage signs:

In Kantor's theatre, however, the human actors appear under the spell of objects. The hierarchy vital for drama vanishes, a hierarchy in which everything (and every *thing*) revolves around human action, the things being mere props. We can speak of a distinct thematic of the object, which further de-dramatizes the elements of action if they still exist. Things in Kantor's lyrical-ceremonial theatre appear as reminiscent of the epic spirit of memory and its preference for things.³⁰

By disrupting the hierarchy between humans and objects, Kantor's theatre foreshadows the posthuman stage in which the body belongs no longer to the character but to the interconnected landscape of mapped signs and symbols. In Kantor's theatre, the body is no longer a site of performative truth. On the contrary, Kantor's stage is posthuman insofar as the human subject disappears

into the materiality of his body, which, in turn, disappears into the materiality of the stage-object. As Kantor himself wrote:

The image of a human being, which up till then was regarded as the only truth-telling representation, disappears.

Instead, there gradually emerge biological forms of a lower kind, almost animals, with few remaining traces of their past 'humanity' or, perhaps, a few traces foreshadowing their humanity.³¹

By deconstructing the human body, Kantor seems to want to deconstruct the very image of humanity itself. Without agency, meaning and intention, he reduces humanity to 'bare life'.

The prototype of the BIO-OBJECT was an idea of 'human emballage' developed during the earliest stage of Cricot 2, the Informal Theatre. In the 1960s, Kantor organized a series of happenings during which 'living human insides' were packaged, individually or together, in rolls of paper or other materials. The point of an *emballage* was to transform a human body so that it would lose all of its natural abilities. Up until the premiere of the *Dead Class* in 1975, each of Kantor's performances assembled a 'Human Nature Preserve', a gallery of BIO-OBJECTS. Figures such as the Man with a Suitcase, Man with a Sack and its Unknown Contents, the Woman Drowned in a Bathtub, the Man with his Door, the Helpless Man with a Table and Man with a Chair would reappear time after time in subsequent productions. Describing one of his BIO-OBJECTS, The Man with Two Bicycle Wheels Grown Into His Legs, Kantor writes:

[he] is completely separated from reality of a different kind
and is enclosed in
an inhuman,
but at least for him natural,
feeling for speed
and motion
that can be realized with the help of his legs,
with the consciousness of vehicle.³²

Mutating the actor's body, the wheels transform his sense of reality and of himself. Kantor wrote about another BIO-OBJECT, the Man with a Wooden Plank on His Back:

on the borderline of madness
[he] demonstrates

this unusual case
 of absurd anatomy,
 completely absorbed internally
 by the objective offshoot
 of his body,
 like a martyr nailed
 to his own self.³³

There is also *A Man with Two Additional Legs*, whose additional pair of legs transform his ethical and ontological condition:

unfolds in front of the dumbfounded crowd
 the whole spectrum
 of completely new and unknown
 benefits, advantages, privileges, and possibilities of
 nature's whimsical generosity,
 of expanded psychological processes,
 and even moral consequences,
 side effects, and
 surprises.³⁴

These three examples of Kantorian BIO-OBJECTS illuminate the posthuman aspect of Kantor's theatre. In the posthuman condition, as Nayar emphasizes, 'previously taken-for-granted categories of the human/non-human are now subject to sustained, controversial examination.'³⁵ By connecting an actor to an object, Kantor's BIO-OBJECTS offer such an examination of the boundaries between organic and nonorganic matter. In the BIO-OBJECT, Kantor wrote: 'The actors became its live parts, organs. They were, one could say, genetically joined to it. . . . [They tried] to adjust to it physically, "relate" to it, "find measure", get in touch with it.'³⁶

Both the actor and the character they play become estranged from their bodies and enclosed within their own space, inaccessible for either fiction or reality: neither human, animal nor object. 'The demonstration and manifestation of the "life" of the BIO-OBJECT was not tantamount to representing some kind of set-up existing outside it. It was autonomous, and therefore real!', Kantor wrote. Or, as Michal Kobiak puts it:

[The actors'] bodies could be treated as an intricate field of interplay between two parallel systems, that is, the illusion of being another character and the actor's own Self. Because illusion 'was merely a reflection, / just like a moonlight, / a dead surface', actors in this system

needed to eliminate dependence on the arrangement that existed outside them and to gain autonomy by exposing only themselves, rather than themselves than their characters.³⁷

Kantor's theatrical experiments suspended his actors in a liminal space between fiction and reality, which, as Giannachi points out, is the ontological predicament of the posthuman condition: 'As post-humans, we are at once in social reality and in fiction – in the real and in the world of the "spectacle."³⁸ Kantor forces his actors into the posthuman space 'where the human confronts itself with and indeed incorporates the other-than-human.'³⁹ His theatrical system of symbolic signs functions within the landscape of posthuman 'representations of corporeal-physiological fluidity, ontological liminality and identity-morphing'.⁴⁰ It is the ambivalence of representation that creates the borderline state between reality and fiction; it is also 'the materiality of the body, not only or exclusively its abstract and metaphoric meanings', that brings forth the question of what is and isn't human.⁴¹

What, then, is the difference between postdramatic and posthuman subject as represented on the postmodern stage? According to Hayles, '[t]he posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction.'⁴² Likewise, when talking about the posthuman semiotics of the self, Sadeq Sahimi asks us to

imagine a system of meaning wherein the act of self-identification (as traditionally done by humans) is unfeasible, [because of] a constant state of flux, a seamless ocean of meaning, a state traditionally considered pathological and diagnosed schizoid: a 'smooth space', which is 'in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction'; and which 'has neither top nor bottom nor centre'.⁴³

The posthuman self is decentred, unstable and undefined: it is entangled in the web of signs and things – itself both a sign and thing. If the dramatic self is a character (the human self), and the postdramatic self is an abstract figure (and not a character, as Elinor Fuchs notes), the posthuman self is a sign (neither character nor figure). To elaborate: in *The Death of Character*, Fuchs characterizes postmodern theatre as populated by characters who are no longer characters as such (as understood in the dramatic sense) but who, like Samuel Beckett's Didi and Gogo, are abstract figurations, 'decentered figures' staring blankly at 'a vanished world'.⁴⁴ According to Lehmann, Beckett marks a breaking point between Drama and postdramatic theatre (mostly because Beckett's plays resist Hegel's theological impulse to see history as

drama).⁴⁵ Although Kantor's 'characters' share some of the decentring of Beckett's 'figures', they are fundamentally different: unlike Didi and Gogo, the members of Kantor's 'Human Nature Preserve' do not speak *to* each other; they don't engage in a dialogue of any kind but speak at and past each other towards something and someone somewhere else. Their true interlocutors are either the dead, or memories or never existed in the first place. They acknowledge one another's existence only as material presence: there is no awareness of either the self or the other. In this sense, Kantor's figures – unlike Beckett's – are not just postdramatic but also posthuman. They are an amalgam of metaphors, symbols and textual and visual references that create a secondary layer of meaning – above and beyond the mere limits of a dialogic exchange. They don't just exist on equal footing with things and objects surrounding them; they exist in a world where agency, intentionality and interrelationality are no longer relevant. They are a mere foci of signs.

Following Szondi's theory of Drama, which he defines as both dialogic (it 'consists only of the reproduction of interpersonal relations') and absolute (it is 'conscious of nothing outside itself'),⁴⁶ Lehmann defines postdramatic theatre first and foremost as post-dialogic: it no longer reproduces the social and personal relations between character or between audience and performers. Since Didi and Gogo are abstract figurations, their exchange is no longer grounded in the subjective relationship with the world that surrounds them. Yet, Didi and Gogo still speak *to* each other, and their dialogue, though circular, still advances the resolution of the plot, even if that resolution is their very realization of its circularity and lack of resolution (Godot will not come, but they will keep on waiting). Kantor's 'characters', however, have no discernible purpose or intentionality; thus, their actions can have no resolution of any kind. There is no plot that we can speak of: only movements, gestures and words. Writing about Kantor's visual language, which defines his productions' structure, Lehmann poignantly notes:

Kantor's scenes manifest the refusal of a dramatic representation of the all too 'dramatic' events that are the subject of his theatre – torture, prison, war and death – in favour of a pictorial poetry of the stage. The 'sequences of images, often as from a slapstick movie, "dead funny" and at the same time immensely sad', always move towards scenes that could occur in a grotesque drama. But the dramatic disappears in favour of *moving images* through repetitive rhythms, tableau-like arrangements and a certain de-realization of the figures, who by means of their jerky movements resemble mannequins.⁴⁷

Kantor's theatrical language creates a 'seamless ocean of meaning' with *moving images* framed within the object-stage where aleatory signs and gestures become the very essence of the form.

For Kantor, language and gesture are material tools that serve to unravel the anthropocentric hierarchy of the Enlightenment by dehumanizing his characters with cyclical, robot-like repetitions. In *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1981), family members brought back to life do not carry any objects, yet their repetitive, robot-like movements make them a different kind of BIO-OBJECT. They are connected to their function within the family just as the pupils from the *Dead Class* are connected to their objects. The two uncles, Karol and Olek, argue cyclically about the arrangements of the room ('busy making certain intriguing calculations: measuring distances by paces, or with utmost precision lining up three chairs next to one another'); Aunt Manka 'periodically goes through a religious crisis', mindlessly quoting passages from the Gospels; Grandma, 'doing her morning exercise stretched out on the bed [with numb oblivion] ... pauses for a moment, then gets carried away again to the point of sheer exhaustion'.⁴⁸ In *Today Is My Birthday* (1990), the status of the work as a non-play becomes even more evident as Kantor includes elements from his real life: 'The Priest-actor listened to the voice of the real Priest and repeated some of those phrases. The Cleaning-woman prompted the missing words. The birthday celebration resumed. The Mother and the Father interminably kept repeating the gestures registered on the family photograph'.⁴⁹ Through this stubborn 'REPETITION OF ACTION', Kantor places his characters on the border between life and death, living being and marionette, object and subject. 'They will keep repeating those banal, / elementary, and aimless activities / with the same expression on their faces, / concentrating on the same gesture, / until boredom strikes', Kantor wrote.⁵⁰ In *Let the Artists Die* (1985), all of the inhabitants of the common room hold on to the one thing that defines them. As Pleśniarowicz describes them,

[t]he 'Comedians' present typical Kantorian Bio-Objects of the lowest rank: a Pimp Gambler with a 'speakeasy stool', a Hanged Man 'with his gallows, which has grown together with the site of his suicide, a filthy drain, into a single whole', an individual washing his dirty feet in 'his vulgar bucket', a Bigot 'with her prie-dieu rosary', a Dishwasher 'with her sink in which she constantly scrubs dirty pots and plates'.⁵¹

Simultaneously, the scene of the author's death repeats itself with regularity over and over again until the final reunion of the author and his double. Endlessly performing the same activity, each character becomes identified

with it completely; all the rest of their personalities dissipate in the absurdity of movements they chose to repeat with mechanical oblivion. During the final scene, the actors, separated from their objects, are pilloried on the strange machines. Tortured, they congeal in 'the convulsive poses, turning into the living sculptures of Mariacki Altar'.⁵²

'The Thingness of the Thing That Has Been Forgotten'

In almost all the productions of the Theater of Death, Kantor creates a collection of characters who form a lookalike homogeneous group. In the *Dead Class*, it is the students dressed in their black uniforms; in *Today Is My Birthday*, it is a group of war cripples dressed in the same white gowns; and in *Wielopole, Wielopole, Let the Artists Die, I Shall Never Return* (1989) as well as *Today Is My Birthday*, it is a marching group of soldiers. The uniforms, like objects, entrap actors in a particular identity, implying a certain pattern of behaviour and thinking. In the director's notes to *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor wrote:

Army. Mass. One does not know if it's alive or mechanical, with hundreds of the same heads, hundreds of the same legs, hundreds of the same hands. In rows, columns, diagonals regularly attached heads, legs, hands, arms, shoes, buttons, eyes, lips, rifles. Identically performed movement by hundreds of identical individuals, hundreds of organs, of this monstrous trained geometry.⁵³

Dressed alike, the actors naturally become the generic clones of each other. The actor becomes 'reduced to an external being, to an object, to the DEAD'.⁵⁴

Kantor's theatre disturbs classification of subjects as human and nonhuman as well as the very concept of the 'human' and the historical context in which it developed. Historically, the human body, as represented and defined on stage and in art, has maintained a strictly defined visual integrity. The category of the 'human' was used to circumscribe the boundaries of belonging and the categories of valuation: groups that were racialized as 'subhuman' at different historical moments were so designated for the purposes of commodification or extinction. The category of the 'human' was a protective category marked by visual signposts. In Western culture's anthropocentric worldview, the human body has always been given a central position; it has been imbued with special rights and privileges, both human and divine. When placed outside the category of the 'human', one loses agency,

the right to self-determination and often the right to life itself. The concept of the 'posthuman condition' disturbs this classification, and, most importantly, it disturbs the hierarchy of valuation that it establishes.

In Kantor's theatre, the interrogation of this hierarchy was prompted by the experience of the Second World War. In one of his short essays, Kantor poignantly writes about how war had transformed his relationship to European culture and its anthropocentric foundations. As Kantor notes, the ideological context of Nazi genocide – its elevation of 'human' over 'subhuman' species – was firmly rooted in Western humanism and its peremptory glorification of the 'human' subject:

The time of war and the time of the 'lords of the world' made me lose my trust in the old image, which had been perfectly formed, raised above all other, apparently lower, species.

It was a discovery! Behind the sacred icon, a beast was hiding. . . . This was the explanation I offered in the postwar period.

I still remember the dislike and indifference I felt towards all those human images, which populated museum walls, staring at me innocently, as if nothing had happened, while they were playing, dancing, feasting, and posting. . . .

A distrust of the allegedly 'higher forms' of the human species and civilization was steadily growing in me.⁵⁵

Thus, by blurring the boundaries between 'human' and 'nonhuman,' subject and object, Kantor makes explicit the reduction of 'subhumans' to things. The ideological and historical ramifications of Kantor's aesthetic gesture, however, have theoretical underpinnings as well. In postdramatic theatre there are objects and subjects; on the posthuman stage there are only things. Kantor's theatre is thus proto-posthuman in the literal sense: it responds to that moment in history when the 'human' could no longer assert its supremacy. If any group can be arbitrarily designated 'subhuman,' then, the category of 'human' has lost all validity; it no longer has meaning.

The distinction between postdramatic and posthuman in Kantor's theatre parallels the philosophical distinction between an object and a thing, one existing in a relationship with other objects, other existing in-itself – (as postdramatic figures and posthuman signs). In his first essay on thing theory, Bill Brown points out that 'object' always exists in relationship to 'subject,' whereas 'thing' exists outside this boundary. The object always has the potential to regain its lost subjectivity; the thing does not. An object becomes a thing when it breaks, and when it loses its usefulness, its utilitarian value. Brown writes:

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily.⁵⁶

In *Signéponge/Signsponge*, Derrida makes a similar point, asserting that the 'thing is not an object [and] cannot become one'.⁵⁷ For Baudrillard, likewise, the object exists only as the 'alienated, accursed part of the subject' – the 'individual subject or collective subject, the subject of consciousness or the unconscious'.⁵⁸ Following Hegelian dialectic between in – and for – itself, for Brown, Derrida and Baudrillard, the thing and the object have different ontological properties. Brown argues further that 'the subject/object dialectic itself ... has obscured patterns of circulation, transference, translation, and displacement'.⁵⁹ Always connected to a subject, an object loses its thingness – its material ontology that defines its own separate inter- and intra-relationships. Brown reminds us that 'Latour has argued that modernity artificially made an ontological distinction between inanimate objects and human subjects. [Whereas] Benjamin makes it clear that the avant-garde worked to make that fact known ... modernism's resistance to modernity is its effort to deny the distinction between subjects and objects, people and things'.⁶⁰

For Kantor, one of the foremost avant-gardists of the twentieth century, the distinction between subject and object is blurred, but the distinction between thing and object is always pronounced. In Kantor's theatre, a thing is a discarded and broken object; it belongs to the 'Degraded Reality' or 'Reality of the Lowest Rank'. An object, on the other hand, is suspended 'between garbage and eternity'.⁶¹ An object is attached to a human being in a dialectical relationship (as in BIO-OBJECTS); but an object becomes a thing when – like in the *Dead Class*, for example – it is discarded and it loses its usefulness. They are then both the postdramatic figures and posthuman signs. The discarded objects of BIO-OBJECTS, the discarded child mannequins in the *Dead Class*, the ragdoll of a mother left like rubbish after the rape in *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* – these are all things. They are turned into things by the violence of the gesture – thrown away like trash. In *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, the actress playing the mother is replaced by the ragdoll during the rape – literally, the rape turns her into a thing. In the posthuman theatre, things are signs with meaning disconnected from their signifiers and signified. In the postdramatic theatre, objects are, to use Fuchs's words, 'decentered figures'.

The dialectic between object and subject defines postdramatic theatre; even when the subject is reduced to an object, their dialectical relationship makes the disappearance of the subject visible. On the posthuman stage, however, that dialectic becomes irrelevant as both objects and subjects are

turned into things, a transition that, as Derrida notes, is irreversible. In *What Is Posthumanism?* Cary Wolfe points out that the concept of the posthuman can mean both the reduction of the human subject to an object and the human subject's transcendence of its material body (its objectness). In that second sense, Wolfe notes, one becomes more 'human' by becoming posthuman (i.e. by leaving the human body behind): "the human" is achieved by . . . transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment all together.⁶² Wolfe's two definitions of posthuman depend on what one assumes to constitute the 'human' – the body or the subjectivity. In postdramatic theatre – as in Grotowski – the two are dialectically connected: the 'human' is both the body and subjectivity. In posthuman theatre – such as Kantor's – the 'human' is neither subject nor object, but a thing: the thing then transcends its 'thingness' into the realm of the posthuman. The piles of things left behind by the victims of the Holocaust emanate the absence of their owners. The piles of discarded things in Kantor's theatre emanate their own absences, of people and their bodies. On the crossroads between postdramatic and posthuman aesthetics, Kantor's work can help us illuminate the difference between the two, and thus it can show us the way towards post-performative theory.

Chapter 6

- 1 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, p. 59.
- 2 Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, trans. Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 5.
- 3 Both Victor Turner's anthropology of performance and J. L. Austin's linguistic concept of performative speech derived from human-centered post-Kantian philosophies which are based on the anthropocentric hierarchy of meaning. See: Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York: PAJ, 1986; and J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- 4 I use this term following Hayden White, who defined emplotment as 'the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific

kinds of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with “fictions” in general’. In other words, emplotment, as White defines it, means arranging historical events into narrative with plot. Dramatic emplotment, then, would mean arranging historical, performance and performative events into classic Aristotelian dramatic structure (which privileges plot). Historical emplotment, then, would be akin to Hegel’s dramatic concept of world history, which happens as if ‘in the theatre’. Postdramatic emplotment, on the other hand, would mean arranging historical, performance and performative events into postdramatic form (i.e. nonlinear, nonchronological structure). In that sense, we can propose that there can be no posthuman emplotment, but rather posthuman deplotment, as posthuman aesthetics decentres all narrative historical, dramaturgical and ontological models. See: Hayden White, ‘The Historical Text as Literary Artifact’, in Geoffrey Roberts (ed.), *The History and Narrative Reader*, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 221–236, here p. 223.

- 5 Hans-Thies Lehmann notes that the hegemonic trope of the performing body, which has long dominated Western culture and performance, is undergoing a dramatic shift:

Images of the body are a dominant feature of mass media in neoliberal Western societies. The human body is praised as a value in itself, however manipulated, trained, gendered, and over-sexed, advertised as a product for consumption and abused as a battleground of ideologies, sacrificed for economic profit and for religious or political ideas of every kind. In the age of technical and scientific progress, the ideology of perfected bodies has its counterpart in the elaboration of more and more effective ways to destroy and extinguish the physical existence of whole populations. The very distinction between human beings and animals or machines, an essential precondition of humanist ethics and aesthetics, is radically questioned by the logic of technical progress itself.

Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi, ‘Dramaturgy on Shifting Grounds’, *Performance Research* 14.3 (2009), pp. 3–6, here p. 5.

- 6 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 163.
- 7 Gabriella Giannachi, *The Politics of New Media Theatre: Life*TM*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 63.
- 8 Louise Lepage, ‘Posthuman Perspectives and Postdramatic Theatre: The Theory and Practice of Hybrid Ontology in Katie Mitchell’s *The Waves*’, *Culture, Language and Representation* 6 (2008), pp. 137–149, here p. 138.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 2.
- 11 Peter M. Boenisch, ‘Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience: Reflexive Dramaturgies and Classic Texts’, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 20.2 (2010), pp. 162–172, here p. 162.

- 12 Cathy Turner, 'Mis-Guidance and Spatial Planning: Dramaturgies of Public Space', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 20.2 (2010), pp. 149–161, here p. 150.
- 13 Quoted in Peter Eckersall, Paul Monaghan and Melanie Beddie, 'Dramaturgy as Ecology: A Report from the Dramaturgies Project', in Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane (eds), *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, New York: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014, pp. 18–35, here p. 21.
- 14 Robin Nelson, 'Prospective Mapping', in Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson (eds), *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, pp. 13–23, here p. 23.
- 15 See also: Teemu Paavolainen, *Theatre/Ecology/Cognition: Theorizing Performer-Object Interaction in Grotowski, Kantor, and Meyerhold*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- 16 The concept of the posthuman was first introduced in *The New International Encyclopedia* (published in 1905 in New York) in the context of gods (superhuman) and the dead / ghosts (as posthuman). It was, however, first conceptualized in the modern sense by Ihab Hassan, a literary critic, who wrote in his 1977 article 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture':

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 revisioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism.

Ihab Hassan, 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?', *The Georgia Review* 31.4 (1977), pp. 830–850, here p. 843.

- 17 Defining his concept of 'bare life', Agamben describes a 'zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast'. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 109. Elsewhere, Agamben writes about 'bare life' as that which belongs only to those excluded from the 'human' race: 'In Western politics, bare life has the peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusions found the city of men.' *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 18 Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. xi.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014, p. 4.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 22 Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 2–3.
- 23 In performance theory, one of the first authors to grapple with the 'end of human' was Richard Schechner in his 1992 collection of essays *The End of Humanism*. Although Schechner acknowledges that rethinking humanism

- provokes a conceptual shift, he doesn't engage with the theoretical nuances between performance art, postdramatic theatre and posthuman theatre (nor the difference between posthuman and posthumanist). For Schechner, all modern avant-garde by its very nature is 'posthumanist'. Richard Schechner, *The End of Humanism: Writings on Performance*, New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.
- 24 Although Oscar Schlemmer's experiments with geometric costumes that both constrained and augmented the human body preceded Kantor's work with bio-objects, Kantor was the first to specifically address the unique relationship between human body and objects.
 - 25 Tadeusz Kantor, 'Further Development: The Object,' trans. William Brand, unpublished manuscript in Cricoteka – the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor.
 - 26 Tadeusz Kantor, *Cricot 2 and the Theatre of Death*, Peter Hulton (ed.), Devon, England: Darlington College of Arts Department of Theatre, 1978.
 - 27 The contemporary Bulgarian director Galin Stoev wrote of his own postdramatic actor that he's 'not to play the character, but "play upon the character" in the same manner as a musician "plays upon his instrument"'. Quoted in Joseph Danan, 'Dramaturgy in "Postdramatic" Times,' in Trencsényi and Cochrane (eds), *New Dramaturgy*, pp. 3–17, here p. 14.
 - 28 Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, New York: Basic Books, 1991, p. 6.
 - 29 Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death*, Cracow: Cricoteka, 1994, p. 67.
 - 30 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 73.
 - 31 Tadeusz Kantor, 'My Work, My Journey (Excerpts),' in Michal Kobialka (ed. and trans.), *A Journey through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 17–32, here p. 19.
 - 32 Tadeusz Kantor, 'The Impossible Theatre (1969–1973),' in Michal Kobialka (ed.), *Further On, Nothing: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 174–192, here p. 188.
 - 33 Tadeusz Kantor, 'The Impossible Theatre,' unpublished manuscript in Cricoteka – the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor. Translations by the author unless otherwise noted.
 - 34 Kantor, 'The Impossible Theatre,' in *Further On, Nothing*, p. 188.
 - 35 Nayar, *Posthumanism*, 3.
 - 36 Tadeusz Kantor, notes to *Balladyna* (1942), trans. William Brand, unpublished manuscript in Cricoteka – the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor.
 - 37 Michal Kobialka, 'The Quest for the Self: Thresholds and Transformations,' in *A Journey through Other Spaces*, pp. 269–310, here pp. 289–290.
 - 38 Giannachi, *Politics of New Media Theatre*, p. 65.
 - 39 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
 - 40 Nayar, *Posthumanism*, p. 2.

- 41 Katherine Ott, David Serlin and Stephen Mihm (eds), *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*, New York: New York University Press, 2002, p. 5.
- 42 Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 4.
- 43 Sadeq Rahimi, 'Identities without a Reference: Towards a Theory of Posthuman Identity', *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture* 3.3 (2000), available at: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0006/identity.php> (accessed 17 February 2015), archived at <https://perma.cc/DG3V-EDPK>.
- 44 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 96.
- 45 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 39.
- 46 Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama*, trans. Michael Hays, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 8.
- 47 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 72. Lehmann is quoting Georg Hense's review in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 June 1995.
- 48 Tadeusz Kantor, 'To Save from Oblivion (1988)', in *A Journey through Other Spaces*, pp. 166–171, here p. 166.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Pleśniarowicz, *Dead Memory Machine*, p. 76.
- 52 Kantor, 'To Save from Oblivion', p. 170.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Kantor, 'My Work – My Journey', in *A Journey through Other Spaces*, p. 19.
- 56 Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (2001), pp. 1–22, here pp. 4–5.
- 57 Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 14.
- 58 Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Philip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski, ed. Jim Fleming, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 111.
- 59 Brown, 'Thing Theory', 12.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Kantor, 'My Work – My Journey', in *A Journey through Other Spaces*, p. 19.
- 62 Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. xv.

Chapter 7

- 1 Consideration of recent literary scholarship yields numerous examples of the practical equivalence of form and genre. This, from the second edition of a standard textbook on genre: 'What these two radically different readings reflect, of course, is the significance of literary form or genre', Heather