Why Look at Robots?

Reanimating Aura in Consideration of Live Art

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Abstract

In his seminal essay "Why Look at Animals?" (1980), art critic John Berger describes how when seen by an animal, man perceives a likeness in presupposing he is seen as his surroundings are seen by him. Becoming aware of himself returning the look of the animal, man recognizes the look as familiar. Man's tendency to seek the gaze of the animal can be attributed to his capacity to endow that which is 'other' with the ability to look back. In view of posthumanism, which traverses such dualisms as the distinction between man and animal, this thesis examines this capacity relative to the contours that seem to separate the human and the technological other. It proposes that Walter Benjamin's notion of aura, a form of perception that invests a phenomenon with the ability to look back, be reactivated for the purpose of affirming the vitality exhibited by robots staged in performative situations. Through sorting out the ambiguous role aura plays in Benjaminian thought by way of a close reading of select texts, I explore the role it can play today in accounting for the liveness of nonhuman entities. I also reanimate aura by situating it amidst the theoretical perspectives of Brian Massumi (2008), Susanne Langer (1953), and Alva Noë (2004; 2012) and by bringing it to bear in the analysis of media art forms that animate a posthuman sensibility toward aura. Specifically, I locate aura in Paul Segers's *Walking the Dog* (2016) and Ruairi Glynn's *Fearful Symmetry* (2012) and analyze both as instances of live art despite their lack of human performers. Thus, I argue for a posthuman reading of aura that acknowledges the intersubjectivity present in human-nonhuman relations and that opens how we distinguish self and other, animate and inanimate to change.

Figure Credits

Fig. 1 (p. 39)	“Paul Segers: Walking the Dog (2016) - HACKING HABITAT - ART OF CONTROL.” *youtube.com* 24 Feb 2016. Screenshot. Accessed 24 Jul 2017.
Fig. 2 (p. 40)	“Unpublished footage from *Walking the Dog* (2016).” 3 Jun 2016. Screenshot. Reproduced with permission from the artist.
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Introduction: Posthuman, Not *Post*-human

In his seminal essay “Why Look at Animals?” (1980) art critic John Berger, describes how when seen by an animal, man perceives a likeness in presupposing he is seen as his surroundings are seen by him. Becoming aware of himself returning the look of the animal, man recognizes the look as familiar (5). Man’s tendency to seek the gaze of the animal can be attributed to his capacity to endow that which is ‘other’ with the ability to look back. As feminist scholar Donna Haraway asserts, “We polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves” (1978, 37). In view of posthumanism, which traverses such dualisms as the distinction between man and animal, this capacity can be examined relative to the contours that seem to separate the human and the technological other. Taking its title from Berger’s essay, this thesis critically engages with the contemporary situation, explaining why we might want to look more closely at our robot companions and how we may do so by drawing from theory.

Accordingly, this thesis is concerned with the new relevance that Walter Benjamin’s notion of aura holds for the present moment. Posing the question of how aura may be mobilized in such a way as to point to the liveness of nonhuman entities, it investigates how, when understood as a form of perception that invests in objects and nature the capability to return the gaze, aura is particularly suited for engaging with performative situations involving robots.[1] In doing so, this thesis approaches aura as a site of debate, a theoretical tool, and a phenomenon. By addressing Benjamin’s ambiguous and precarious treatment of the concept as well as the variety of readings and developments that media theorists have proposed thereafter and in response, I propose that aura be theoretically positioned to account for human-nonhuman relations in light of the posthuman condition, which acknowledges nonhuman entities as having agency and possessing a certain vitality or liveness. In turn, this interpretation of aura offers a lens through which aesthetically-oriented phenomena involving humans and robots might be analyzed as encounters of presence in which the robot, whether or not it is anthropomorphic in form (humanoid or zoomorphic), may be perceived not chiefly or solely as nonhuman technology but also as live performer. To this end, the case studies I present herein involve both witnessing and also interaction, situating humans and robots as being before, with, and in the presence of one another as co-subjects.

In aiming to demonstrate how aura becomes relevant again and in a renewed sense today, this thesis understands the past—that is, Benjamin’s aura—as part of the present. Aura is most often addressed in film and media studies as a ‘strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance [apparition, semblance] of a distance, however near it may be’ (or, ‘however close the thing that calls it forth’) (Hansen 2008, 339-340). The conceptualization I aim to unravel in the course of this thesis, however, has to do with aura understood as a form of perception that ‘invests’ or endows a phenomenon with the ‘ability to

[1] Following Max Herrmann (Fischer-Lichte 2007)—and, similarly, Jürgen Habermas and Chiel Kattenbelt (2010)—my use of the term *performative* describes the nature of the event that emerges from the shared, lived experience brought forth by the bodily presence of co-subjects. This will be further elaborated in Parts One and Two.

look back at us,' to open its eye or 'lift its gaze.' (ibid.).[2] Whereas the former is entangled in a historical moment understood as marking aura's decline, the latter—I argue—is oriented in the present. Posthumanism frames the contemporary situation in which the proposed reading of aura operates. Understood as a position or a program, posthumanism blurs the boundaries between the human and its others.

Since the mid-1990s, relations between humans and nonhumans have been rendered with increasing significance. Attempts to recompose their relations vary according to the discourses and representations in which they take shape. These range from rhetorics of posthumanism and the philosophy of science to instructional applications for robotics. In critical discourse, sociologist Bruno Latour (2005; 2010) and political scientist Jane Bennett (2010) depict our world as populated by bodies both human and nonhuman which form networks or assemblages in their ongoing interactivity. Among others, including Latour, Isabelle Stengers (2010), a philosopher of science, urges that a new attention to other species and types of agencies will result in a new vocabulary of politics, which she refers to as *cosmopolitics*. In her book *The Posthuman* (2013) feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti contextualizes this renewed interest in the subject as fully immersed in and immanent to a network of nonhuman relations as definitive of what she calls the posthuman condition (1).

As the starting point for her take on the posthuman, Braidotti adopts the need to approach nature and culture as existing on a continuum. She sees scientific and technological advances as having the effect of blurring the boundaries that would have once indicated binary opposition and presents posthuman theory as an affirmative way to account for these advances as categorical features of the present (ibid., 3-6). In Braidotti's view, the posthuman condition introduces the need for a monistic philosophy through which the relations between the human and its others can be radically rethought. Thus, for Braidotti, posthumanism enacts a fundamental aspiration to understand the human as constitutively entangled with its environment, both technological and biological (ibid.). Similarly, for cultural theorist Cary Wolfe, if the fundamental principle associated with humanism is that 'the human' is achieved by escaping or repressing its animal origins in nature and by transcending the bonds of embodiment altogether, then posthumanism is only such "in the sense that it opposes fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy" (Wolfe 2010, xv). In *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), Wolfe posits posthumanism as a historical development that is both the cause and effect of new paradigms of thinking, in which the human is decentered and such dichotomies as the human-animal opposition are traversed. Whereas Braidotti speaks of the process of "becoming-posthuman" in response to the pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns (2013, 1; 193), Wolfe takes a step in the opposite direction as well, purporting that posthumanism comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it identifies the human animal as coevolving with the technicality of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture) and after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in

[2] The concept of the gaze will be further elaborated in Part One.

which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical networks, among others is impossible to ignore (2010, xv-xvi).[3]

This thesis demonstrates that by placing emphasis on an anticipated reciprocity of some kind between the human and its others, aura stands out against and as interwoven in the backdrop of the new paradigms of thinking that posthumanism necessitates. The non-dualistic understanding of the human and its others put forward by Braidotti forms a red thread throughout this thesis, and it will come to the fore most prominently in Part Two. Presently and before articulating the significance of the research I present herein, it is worth amplifying Wolfe's understanding of posthumanism as coming before and after humanism to situate the historical relevance of this thesis to a greater extent, as the historical contingency of aura as a concept drawn from Benjamin is not insignificant in that regard. In fact, this excavation of aura should be understood as a media archaeological endeavor insofar as it is driven by an interest in excavating the past in order to understand the present which is framed by posthumanism.

Currently, the scholarship connecting the fields of media archaeology and posthumanism does not sufficiently account for human-nonhuman relations. Media and cultural theorists Jussi Parikka (2012) and Nicholas Gane (2005), whose research contributes to the field of media archaeology, identify elements of posthumanism in projects viewed as foundational to the field, particularly those of 'media materialists' Freidrich Kittler and Wolfgang Ernst. However, in focusing on how Kittler and Ernst mythologize the machine as completely outside of other temporalities (and materialities), including the human (cf. Parikka 2013, 10), media archaeology is in danger of narrowly interpreting posthumanism—some might say even wholly misinterpreting it—as having to do with that which exists completely outside of the human rather than as always-already bound up in ongoing relations with it. Attributing posthumanist thinking to the so-called media materialists whose work looks at the ways in which embodiment and human subjectivity are effaced by certain technologies, as though the material structures of technology can operate outside of the culture that uses them (cf. Gane 2005, 39), leaves a gap between media archaeology and the posthumanist approaches to rethinking the categorical distinctions imposed on the human and nonhuman put forward by Braidotti and Wolfe.

By looking to Gane's reading of Kittler in his article titled "Radical Post-humanism: Friedrich Kittler and the Primacy of Technology" (2005), the nature of this gap can be better defined. According to Gane, Kittler's basic position has to do with seeing the pre-programmed machine as taking control of the user (ibid., 37). He cites Kittler, who writes in his book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999), "The age of media…renders indistinguishable what is human and what is machine," making it so that, "[w]hat remains of people is what media can store and communicate" (146; xl). Noting this logic, Gane reasonably concludes that Kittler goes beyond what Gane describes as "simply an argument for the recognition of object-agency" (2005, 39). With reference to Mark B.N. Hansen's position on new media, what Gane suggests is that media, in Kittler's view, mediate the technical conditions that make possible

[3] This is not to say that the approach Braidotti puts forth is teleological or oriented toward progress. See Braidotti (2010, 37).

transcendental technicity (Hansen 2010, 180). It is from this vantage that Gane's understanding of posthumanism is at odds with Wolfe's, and its differences are a matter of kind rather than degree. Following Wolfe, what Gane amounts to be *posthumanism* in the work of Kittler can better be described as *transhumanism*, which posits the human associated with humanism as becoming *post*-human by processes of "triumphant disembodiment" (Wolfe 2010, xv). All of this is to say that there is a rift formed by media archaeology's treatment of the posthuman as "the post- of transhumanism," to borrow Wolfe's words. This treatment has its limitations.

This kind of posthumanism, if you will, governs N. Katherine Hayles's approach in her book *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Aside from conveying an idea of passage, which relies on an arguably humanist narrative of progress, Hayles's competing model for the posthuman which comes through in Gane's text, which is correctly signified by the hyphenation used in his title, and which Wolfe suggests is 'bad' posthumanism, can be distilled—albeit superficially, perhaps—in Hayles's use of the concept of mutation. As media theorist R.L. Rutsky suggests, Hayles's usage renders mutation as "a pre-existing, external force that introduces change into a stable pattern (or code), and into the material world or body as well," when mutation, by definition, cannot be seen as something external that imposes itself upon the biological world, the material world, or on the realm of culture (2007, 107). Instead, according to Rutsky, the word *mutation* names that randomness which is always already immanent in culture and in the material bodies both human and nonhuman that take part in its workings (ibid., 110-111). Moreover, as Wolfe explains by referring to Rutsky, "[T]o become posthuman means to participate in—and find a mode of thought adequate to—'processes which can never be entirely reduced to patterns of standards, codes, or information'" (Wolfe 2010, xviii). From this perspective, I wish to underscore what will be a major point of emphasis in this thesis: a posthuman reading of aura necessitates both acknowledging the relations that constitute the subject, regardless of whether that subject be human or nonhuman, and also opening how we distinguish self and other, animate and inanimate to change. Based on the argument that Rutsky makes in his book *High Techne: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (1999), this change is mutational, that is, unable to be rationally predicted. However, it can be figured through techno-cultural practices that are at once science-fictional and aesthetic (ibid., 22). As will be made apparent in Part Two of this thesis, the aesthetic orientation that characterizes performative situation necessitates that for aura to be perceived as the gaze reciprocated, subjectivity not be effaced but positioned in such a way that it becomes reflexive.[4] Through demonstrating how this could be enacted, it becomes apparent that the look of the aura, as will be proposed in Part One, "is not the look of the other, but a reflection of the same" (ibid., 26).

Therefore, it is in an ancillary manner that this thesis posits that new connections emerge between media archaeology and posthumanism when they are considered in light of a more complex understanding of Benjamin's aura and the actuality it holds for today. When aura appears on the side of the technological in

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[4] Following Chiel Kattenbelt, I understand an aesthetic orientation to be one which concerns a reflexive orientation toward one's own subjectivity within a staged situation that occurs relatively independently of the external world in which it exists (2010, 31). This will be further elaborated in Parts One and Two.

media studies, it tends to assume a negative valence, "which turns the etiology of aura's decline into a call for its demolition" (Hansen 2008, 337).[5] It is my inclination that drawing attention to the complexity of aura "understood as a form of perception that 'invests' or endows a phenomenon with the 'ability to look back at us,' to open its eye or 'lift its gaze'" (cf. ibid., 339-340) can serve to counter media studies' particularistic reading in favor of a more balanced reading which forges connections between the nuances of Benjamin's conceptualization and the important critical perspective of posthumanism which frames it today. Thus, this thesis, which takes its thrust from posthumanist—that is, 'more-than-human'—modes of thought that challenge the traditional anthropocentric worldview held in place by humanism, principally offers "a reversed perspective on historical thinking, starting with and in the present" (Bal 2002, 136).

Significance of the Research

If technological mediation is understood as largely responsible for shifting the parameters that used to define *anthropos* (cf. Braidotti 2013, 57; Wolfe 2010, xv), then the importance of enacting research that responds to this shift can be situated in and as representative of culture through consideration of technological advancements in cross-disciplinary areas including but not limited to creative robotics, which looks at human-robot interaction from a culturally-embedded perspective. Research in such areas investigates, for example, how "the affective kinesthetic potential of abstract robot morphologies" may lead to novel approaches "for socializing abstract, non-anthropomorphic robots" (Gemeinboeck and Saunders 2016). As robotic and virtual figures (whether familiar or abstract in representation) are increasingly accepted as functioning more—and to a greater extent—as actors than simply as props, the circuitry, so to speak, by which they form connections and feedback loops with human agents becomes of central importance for more theoretical discourses on mediation as well. Discussions in this sphere call for greater critical engagement with nonhuman agents for understanding the performative nature of interactivity and, similarly, the materialization of technologically-mediated interaction (Bleeker 2008).

Developments such as genetically modified food, reproductive technologies and advanced prosthetics have been highlighted as indicative of the posthuman condition (Braidotti 2013). This thesis, by contrast, does not critically engage with technologies physically blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies for purposes of enhancement or effacement. Instead, it engages with those that make themselves felt relationally, without ceasing to remain where they are as distinct subjects, even if they are only semi-autonomous. In particular, this thesis demonstrates that robots that behave in ways such that they resemble in some way or another something that is living—something that can 'look back at us'—afford encounters or interactions that ought to be described as relational and indicative of the posthuman condition. From the perspective of posthumanism, robots modeled after both human and nonhuman species can be included in this category. Taking this one step further, this thesis also contends that robots without any features that could qualify strictly as anthropomorphic can likewise emanate a sense of

[5] This meaning is drawn from "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935), which is often referred to less formally as 'the work of art essay.'

liveness that is based on an enactive perception of likeness and that can be called aura, after Benjamin's conceptualization.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I argue for a rereading of aura that displaces traditional humanist conceptions of subject and object and that points to liveness conceived of as a particular way of being involved with technology such that we accept the claims it makes upon us to perceive a likeness in it.[6] Thus, read against its historical contingency, aura (re)appears as a theoretical development whose meaning depends on the particular situation in which it is deployed. Reading aura in this way allows for aura to be reimagined as present in our contemporary experience of technologically mediated culture in the manner described above—as a perceptual dimension. Additionally, concentrating on the appearance of robots as live performers results in the figuration of a continuum—a monistic philosophy of sorts—as opposed to a dichotomy. The nonhumans that 'look back at us' appear as having an aura that has been reanimated to account for partiality, contingency, and hybridity as determinant factors of the posthuman condition (cf. Rutsky 1999, 149).

By taking up cases that uncover semblances of anthropomorphism, this thesis enables dialogue around the identification and interpretation of finer-grained distinctions—particularly those related to movement—that point to semblances of autonomy and, by extension, the significance of nonhuman agents for or in technologically-mediated interaction. Relative to contemporary takes on aura, this thesis stands apart by reanimating aura for critical engagement with aesthetically-oriented phenomena that shine a light on on how the corporeality of the body may be reflected in the mechanical animation of nonhuman objects.

A Note on Method

This thesis positions aura in such a way as to enable it to travel, and it is in this positioning that aura becomes a methodological starting point. Through a close reading, I reflect on what aura does in its original context(s), that is, in Benjamin's writing, and then I demonstrate what it can do when it is set into motion to travel within its own conceptualization as well as across disciplines and time. The first of these steps renders aura as a site of debate, the second as a theoretical tool. It is by way of mobilizing aura that I am subsequently able to afford encounters between aura and two case studies in conjunction with a number of additional theories so as to realize aura's posthuman potential insofar as the perception or projection of liveness is concerned. Given that I interpret them as partial and open (though also rigorous) rather than conclusive or fixed claims to knowledge, the theories in question could be more accurately framed as theoretical perspectives; they include social theorist Brian Massumi's thoughts on our capacity to see abstract dynamic with and through actual form (2008), philosopher Susanne Langer's articulation of gesture seen and understood as vital movement, drawn from her book *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953), and philosopher of mind Alva Noë's understanding of perception as a transaction (2004;

[6] This will be further elaborated in Part One.

2012). The theoretical perspectives of Massumi, Langer, and Noë will help to reanimate aura beyond what has already been thought and facilitate a comparative analysis of the case studies through which aura emerges as a phenomenon. Through enabling performative encounters with robots, the cases in question —Paul Segers's *Walking the Dog* (2016) and Ruairi Glynn's *Fearful Symmetry* (2012)—exemplify particular media art forms that animate a posthuman sensibility toward aura.

Accordingly, it should be noted that this thesis conducts a meeting between several methods, all of which are informed by cultural theorist Mieke Bal's take on cultural analysis. According to Bal, a sensitivity to the provisional nature of concepts is the key to a genuine practice of cultural analysis (2003), hence it is with the provisional nature of aura that this thesis begins. From a methodological standpoint, this thesis turns aura into what Bal has termed a 'traveling concept' (2009, 18-19). A concept travels when we gain insight into what it can do by way of "groping to define, provisionally and partly, what [it] may mean" (ibid., 17). Though aura is often used in the manner convolutedly articulated in Benjamin's work of art essay as though its meaning is made clear by that text alone, aura as a concept is only tenuously established there. Thus, I examine the concept of aura in Benjaminian thought through a close reading of a number of aura's appearances in his oeuvre. I also contextualize those appearances and discuss how scholars have interpreted them therein and adapted them thereafter. Ultimately, the fact that aura does not mean exactly the same thing for Benjamin at all times points to its potential to be rethought through so that it can take on the role of a miniature or shorthand theory which can help in the analysis of objects, situations, and other theories (cf. ibid., 18-19).

The intention of the close reading enacted in Part One is not to find or prescribe a purified use for aura, rather it is to gauge aura's possibilities and establish a foundation upon which aura can link the case studies in Part Two, which will demonstrate its potential as a traveling concept (Bal 2002, 36). In view of cultural analysis, I understand the purpose of close reading to be twofold: on the one hand it is to demonstrate the subtleties and nuances of the concept, and, on the other, it is to make clear statements about its programmatic nature. A microscopic view is just as important as the critical perspective which frames it (Bal 1999, 138).

The comparative analysis of the case studies, then, is informed but not overruled by theory, as Bal advocates (2003). Segers's and Glynn's works are taken up and analyzed in view of their existence in culture, which means that, as case studies, they are approached as holding the potential to reveal issues of cultural relevance. This thesis, more specifically, uses them to demonstrate how aura, when reanimated, may contribute to cultural debates having to do with posthumanism, mediation, and performativity, in general, and the liveness that can be associated with aesthetically-oriented robots, in particular (cf. ibid.). To this end, the aforementioned theories of Massumi, Langer, and Noë will be brought into play for the purpose of modifying aura to adequately account for the posthuman condition and challenging what can be referred to as the state of the art on aura after Benjamin—those theorizations that have been proposed since Benjamin and that are discussed in the second principal section of Part One. Importantly, the

analytical practice of Part Two reflects a keen awareness for what it means to be situated in the present (cf. Bal 1991, 1), as it is the cultural present from which I look back at aura to revive its potential for pointing to the liveness of nonhuman entities.

It is on this basis that I wish to provide a final note on method by reflecting on what may amount to a posthumanist approach to methodology. As Braidotti explains, "The posthuman method amounts to higher degrees of disciplinary hybridization" (Braidotti 2013, 169), and, by extension, "The monistic ontology that sustains the vision of life as vitalist...allows the critical thinker to re-unite the different branches of philosophy, the sciences and the arts in a new alliance" (ibid., 171). Methodologically, this thesis stands as a relay point between different moments in space and time as well as between many and varied configurations of thought. It presents a web of encounters with ideas by starting with aura and moving outward to encompass objects, situations, and other theories in its thinking process (cf. ibid., 166). By way of this methodological approach, this thesis thematically brings together branches of philosophy, science, and art to make observations about present-day relations between humans and technology. While it would be reductive to say that this alone amounts to what is needed for the nature of thought to become posthumanist, it is important to highlight that the attempt to participate in a mode of thought consistent with Braidotti's suggestions should nonetheless be considered a methodological response to the consequences that the posthuman condition presents to the humanities.[7]

Outline of the Thesis

Part One of this thesis justifies a rereading of aura and makes this position a methodological starting point for the analytical practice that follows. It begins by addressing aura as a site of debate through a close reading of Benjamin's mentions of aura and nuanced suggestions of such a faculty (most very brief), namely, a majority of those found in the following texts, all of which are referred to with abridged titles hereafter: "Protocols of Drug Experiments" (1930), "Little History of Photography" (1931), "Doctrine of the Similar" (1933), "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935), "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1940), and *The Arcades Project*, which Benjamin worked on from 1927 through 1940 but which was not published for the first time until after his death.[8] This close reading entails not only analysis of the passages themselves but also contextualization of the development of aura throughout Benjamin's career as well as an integration of interpretations of his profoundly ambiguous conceptualization. The secondary sources to be addressed include but are not limited to those by critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, philosopher and literary theorist Samuel Weber, and film scholar Miriam Hansen.

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[7] See Braidotti's chapter titled "Posthuman Humanities: Life beyond Theory" in *The Posthuman* (2013).

[8] "Doctrine of the Similar" is the first version of the essay that Benjamin later published under the name "On the Mimetic Faculty" (1933); See Appendix I for all citations in full; German translations for particular words are noted only when included in direct citations from the English translations consulted, as I am only fluent in English.

In addition to reviewing direct interpretations of Benjamin's development of aura, Part One will present a state of the art on aura after Benjamin for the purpose of addressing aura's place in the digital age and setting the stage for further indicating how the rereading of aura I propose may productively add to the field.[9] "A State of the Art on Aura," begins with a review of how the concept of aura has been reread relative to such developments as mixed reality and networked devices. Next, aura is positioned relative to the incorporation of technology in theatrical and performative events, because such events hold particular importance based on their functional proximity to what I call 'live art.' Finally, the concept of liveness and its affinity to aura is discussed. The influence of aura's mingling with contemporary technical practices in the media arts reaches a pinnacle here.

Part Two, then, demonstrates how the sense of liveness that robots can emanate in performative situations is not contingent upon anthropomorphism but upon movement. In addition, it argues for a conception of aura—reanimated using Massumi, Langer, and Noë's perspectives on the phenomenality of perception—that is bound up in the posthuman condition. Like Part One, Part Two unfolds in stages.

First, I offer descriptions of Paul Segers's *Walking the Dog* (2016) and Ruairi Glynn's *Fearful Symmetry* (2012) both from the perspective of an 'experiencer' and also from the perspective of the respective artists. Summarizing briefly, the former presents a parody of Boston Dynamics' 'BigDog' as a dancing entertainer and holds the original's potential for military application at bay in favor of drawing upon our tendency to anticipate the reciprocation of our gaze in companion species. The latter takes this capacity we hold one step further away from the anthropocentrism of humanism by replacing anthropomorphic figuration with more complex semblances of life. In *Fearful Symmetry*, our gaze is reciprocated by a luminous tetrahedron, designed by Glynn to interact in a choreographed manner. What will appear as shared in these cases is a sense of liveness premised on movement.

Next, I bring to bear the concept of aura to describe how both cases can be seen as bound up in the aesthetic orientation of the performative situation. The purpose of this short descriptive analysis is, on the one hand, to demonstrate how the encounters staged by Segers and Glynn make it possible for robots to be perceived not solely as nonhuman technologies but also as live performers, making their art live by extension, and, on the other, to provide a foundation upon which the rest of Part Two may build. It is within this chapter, then, that emphasis on the reciprocation of the gaze which characterizes aura shifts attention onto the reflexivity of subjectivity which, I suggest, makes room for the look of the aura to be perceived as 'a reflection of the same.'

Moving outward from there, the theoretical perspectives of Massumi, Langer, and Noë are discussed in detail and the relationships among them determined with aura in mind. By engaging with these perspectives to facilitate a comparative analysis of *Walking the Dog* and *Fearful Symmetry*, aura is

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[9] Field, as it is used here, refers to the state of the art on aura after Benjamin and also to media, art, and performance studies.

rethought through as a perceptual phenomenon that points to liveness as a transposition between mechanical movement and vital movement. It is also activated beyond what has already been conceived of its applicability for today. It is at this point that Rosi Braidotti's notion of *co-presence*, or "the simultaneity of being in the world together, [which] defines the ethics of interaction with both human and non-human others" is interpreted as immanent to a posthuman reading of aura (Braidotti 2013, 169). To account for human-nonhuman relations in light of the posthuman condition, Part Two affirms a recomposition of the relations that seem to distinguish performer and machine in an effort to enhance our sensitivity to our everyday dealings with technology and experiences of technologically-mediated interaction by way of the concept of aura.

Part One: Reading and Rereading Aura

Things see us; their gaze propels us into the future…

—Walter Benjamin, “The Metaphysics of Youth” (1913-1914)

Intertextual Connections

The number of references and the heterogeneity of the texts in which aura as a faculty or ornamental quality is suggested by Benjamin supplies the term with a veil of elusiveness. Consequently, the complexity of aura and the role it plays in Benjamin's writing makes it difficult for the concept to be used innocently (Hansen 2008, 357). While it is possible to trace a linear development of aura in Benjaminian thought, to account for the ways aura can attribute a sense of liveness to nonhuman entities, it is more productive to think through what can be described as the conflicts and resolutions made apparent by Benjamin throughout his continued attempts to theorize aura. Thinking through aura in this manner reveals that it is far from a rigid concept developed with an aim toward inviolable completion.

That considered, this first section of Part One is organized in the following way. To begin, the primary definitions of aura developed in Benjamin's writings are analyzed (albeit somewhat linearly) for the purpose of proposing that these definitions not be considered as opposing but, instead, as potentially interlacing conceptualizations. Next, in an effort to highlight what much of film and media scholarship fails to, the qualities of aura that suggest it is a faculty that blurs the boundaries between subject and object are discussed. Following this discussion, I contextualize the more well-known side of aura as an aesthetic experience which has supposedly declined as a result of mass-mediated modernity. In light of that historically-contingent characterization of aura, Benjamin's comments on the historical-contingency of aura as a mode of perception are reviewed. Finally, I offer a reading of aura which stresses the implications of Benjamin's emphasis on the reciprocity of the gaze. That reading will reiterate that the various definitions outlined at the onset of the close reading need not be read as separate at all; rendered as a site of debate, aura can reappear through and with connective potential.

Opposing Definitions

As noted above in the introduction, Benjamin's reputation in film and media studies is largely due to his 1935 essay on the work of art which defines aura as 'the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be' ("Work of Art," 15-16). Before attending to this later attempt to define aura, however, I wish to digress back in time to one of Benjamin's earliest attempts to delineate the aspects of aura in his records and recollections of his experiences with hashish, which were loosely organized into the form of "protocols" (Eiland, et al. 2006, vii).[10] Benjamin is outright in stating that these insights "bore no relation to the depth of intoxication," and so it could be argued that there is no reason to analyze them as anything but foundational to his development of the concept ("Protocols: Mar 1930," 57-58).

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[10] See Eiland, et al. (2006, 163) for a note on Benjamin's earlier mentions of *aura* and Hansen (2008) for a discussion of the lineages of Benjamin's conceptualization(s).

In the hashish protocol of March 1930, Benjamin recounts three statements he made concerning the nature of aura. These three statements yield three observations which allude to what follows in this close reading. "First," Benjamin writes, "genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine" (ibid., 58). Second, with every movement the auratic object makes, "the aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental" (ibid.). Finally, formulated in opposition to the mysticism of spiritualists, "[T]he characteristic nature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*Umzirkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case" (ibid.). The fact that Benjamin expands the boundaries of aura so that it may be understood as appearing in all things first and foremost sets aura on a trajectory which can be broadly described as tending towards monism; it is on this trajectory that the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze becomes a point of emphasis. The next observation to keep in mind for what follows in this discussion has to do with the changes that aura undergoes with 'movement.' It will become apparent that movement, in that sense, should be considered not only spatial but also temporal.[11] Thirdly, although Miriam Hansen asserts that these earlier comments appear to contrast sharply with the common understanding of aura as primarily aesthetic, this conflict requires closer attention (2008, 336); Benjamin finds his last statement on the nature of aura to be exemplified in Van Gogh's late paintings in which aura seems to have been painted into all objects ("Protocols: Mar 1930," 57-58), and taken together with the first two statements, the last suggests that the semblance of distance produced by the ornamental quality or encased presentation of aura can be present in all objects (including but not limited to traditional art) and that historical changes will impose such changes upon aura as frequency of presence as well as duration and intensity.

As for the unique appearance of a distance, then, it must be noted that the description of aura Benjamin puts forth in the work of art essay finds explicit precedent in the description provided in "Little History of Photography" (1931). Asking as he does in the later essay on the work of art, in "Little History," Benjamin inquires, "What is aura, actually?" ("Work of Art," 1935, 15-16; "Little History 1931, 518-519). In response, he describes a mode of experience—a phenomenon—in which aura's etymological connotation as an 'atmospheric substance' plays a indispensable part (Hansen 2008, 352). According to Benjamin:

> While at rest on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or hour become part of their appearance—this is what is means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. ("Little History 1931, 518-519)

Here, aura finds expression in breath, suggesting not only a signature of a certain kind of perception (cf. ibid.), but, more generally, an embodied mode of perception (cf. Hansen 2008, 352). In the work of art essay, this mode of experience is used to characterize a particular experience of art; nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the aesthetic experience is only one constellation in which aura presents itself.

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[11] In "Little History," Benjamin describes the unique appearance of a distance as "a strange weave of space and time" (518-519).

Leaving the familiar argument about aura's symptomatic decline for analysis under the heading "On Technological Reproducibility," it is significant to note at this time that the denigrating slant associated with photography in light of the work of art essay is problematized in "Little History" and, to an even greater extent, in Benjamin's writings on the French poet Charles Baudelaire. In the former, Benjamin remarks, "The first people to be reproduced entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact—or rather, without inscription...The human countenance had a silence about it in which the gaze rested" (512).[12] This was as much due to the shyness that the first subjects of daguerrotypes maintained before the camera as it was due to the distinctness of those first photographs. As Benjamin relays, the early photographer Carl Dauthendey expressed this by saying "[We] believed that the little tiny faces could see *us*, so powerfully was everyone affected by the unaccustomed clarity and the unaccustomed fidelity to nature of the first daguerrotypes" ("Little History," 512). Benjamin draws upon this sentiment nearly ten years later in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1940), where he cultivates the gaze as a defining feature of aura.

Leading into the statements that find aura in the gaze reciprocated, Benjamin stresses that what was felt to be inhuman about daguerreotypy was the process of its production, for one's prolonged looking into the camera was recorded, but the object did not return one's gaze. Benjamin writes:

> [L]ooking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met (which, in the case of thought processes, can apply equally to the look of the eye of the mind and to a glance pure and simple), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent. "Perceptibility," as Novalis puts it, "is a kind of attentiveness." The perceptibility he has in mind is none other than that of the aura. Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.[13] This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*. (These data, incidentally, are unique: they are lost to the memory that seeks to retain them. Thus they lend support to a concept of the aura that comprises the 'unique manifestation of a distance.') ("Baudelaire," 188)

This is arguably one of the clearest definitions of aura provided by Benjamin, and as it is articulated later in his career, the observation should perhaps come as no surprise. In the first sentence, Benjamin makes strides in blurring the categorical boundaries between human and nonhuman, substituting *someone* with *the object of our gaze*. This resolute parallelism is elucidated in what follows: the reciprocation of gaze that occurs between humans is transposed into a mode of experience or of perception which is projected by humans into or onto nonhumans, 'inanimate or natural.' This mode of perception involves a kind of

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[12] See also Appendix I ("Little History," 516-517).

[13] The variations of "to look at us in [re]turn" have also been translated as "to look up"; See Weber (1996, 99-100).

surrender to the object. However, as the proceeding sections will demonstrate, this surrender is not chiefly to the object "as other" as is suggested by Hansen (2008, 352), but to the aura of the object as 'a reflection of the same.' Moreover, what is indicated by Benjamin's mention of *mémoire involontaire* is that the auratic experience that is derived from this human-nonhuman relation is unique in that it appears to the subject but cannot be produced at will (cf. Hansen 2008, 352).

What is meant by that is more completely illuminated under consideration of *mémoire involontaire* as it formulated by Marcel Proust—a contemporary who Benjamin found to be greatly familiar with the problem of aura ("Baudelaire," 188). In Proust, aura is "a sensorily and and synaesthetically triggered embodied memory that can only be retrieved through actualization, not reflection," which here means a looking back in time (Hansen 2008, 344). Proust's formulation places the unique appearance of the object 'at a distance,' that is, anchored in time in space such that it gains a semblance of autonomy. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin refers to that distance as a kind of 'magic' that is opened up with "the look that awakens in an object perceived," (*AP* [J47,6], 314). Still this perception is not ordinary, it entails that the object perceived, with its newly found autonomy, "takes possession of us" (*AP* [M16a,4], 447), rather than the inverse, which is what occurs as a consequence of mass reproducibility.

Thus, the definition of aura defined as 'the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be' hinges upon aura defined as a form of perception that invests in an object the ability to look back at us. As outlined above, it is my intention to return to this matter in due time. Presently, it is worth disentangling aura as it appears in the texts selected for this close reading to a greater extent. Henceforth, of central concern are the questions: what role does man's faculty for seeing resemblances play in light of aura understood as the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze and what does this faculty have to do with liveness?

On Seeing Resemblances

Though it is brief at only four pages long, Benjamin's 1933 essay on the mimetic faculty, first published as "Doctrine of the Similar," composes a relationship between people and things that is by no means an aside but a fundamental part of Benjamin's theory of experience (Taussig 1993, 19).[14] It does not mention aura but can be seen as figuring into Benjamin's conceptualization, especially when taking into consideration that one's experience of aura 'rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man' (cf. "Baudelaire," 188). In a way, the essay can be said to provide the rationale behind why this transposition is possible.

[14] Though recent developments in critical theory have conceptualized the words *thing* and *object* as distinct (see Bill Brown (2001) and Graham Harman (2011) for instance), I use them interchangeably to refer to nonhuman entities that are not biologically alive. Benjamin seems to do the same; See Benjamin (*AP*, 182) and ("Protocols: Mar 1930," 57-58).

To chart this rationale, I introduce the opening lines of Benjamin's revised version of the essay, "On the Mimetic Faculty"[15]:

> Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role. ("Mimetic Faculty," 160)

Benjamin fundamentally associates the ability to perceive correspondences with nature. And if, as Habermas writes on the appearance of the aura, "Whenever nature is thus 'invested' so that it looks at us in return, the object is transformed into a counterpart" (1975, 49), then man's gift of seeing resemblances may be a primary source of the intersubjectivity suggested by aura. In other words, the activation of aura via the transposition of the way humans encounter one another to the way humans encounter objects seems to be made possible by man's capacity for perceiving similarities. According to Hansen, the concept of mimesis "envisions a relationship with nature that is alternative to dominant forms of mastery and exploitation" (1987, 195). The mimetic faculty, then, can be seen as "dissolv[ing] the contours of the subject/object dichotomy into reciprocity" (ibid.). It is such reciprocity that is key to the experience of aura. This considered, it is not illogical to assert that aura may very well be considered one of man's 'higher functions' codetermined by his capacity for 'producing' similarity by seeing resemblances.

There is also the relationship between aura and the perceived liveness of nonhuman entities that can be accounted for in a close reading of Benjamin's 1933 essay. The two additional components worth addressing to determine what the mimetic faculty has to do with liveness projected or perceived include the spectrum of 'mimetic objects' that Benjamin identifies and the connection Benjamin draws between language and the mimetic capacity.[16]

In taking care to explain that the everyday cases "unconsciously determined by similarity" far outnumber those "in which people consciously perceive similarities," Benjamin remarks that "one must recall that neither the mimetic forces nor their objects, i.e., the mimetic objects, have remained the same, unchanged over time" ("Doctrine," 65). While he begins his essay by citing nature as producing similarities, Benjamin immediately continues by identifying play as a developmental foundation for the mimetic faculty. He cites humans as well as nonhuman objects as stimulating and awakening the faculty in children:

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[15] I choose to draw upon both versions of Benjamin's essay, selecting quotations from one or the other based on the succinctness of Benjamin's language.

[16] Here, I use the terms *projected* and *perceived* interchangeably with the intention to clarify their correspondences in Part Two.

> To begin with, children's games are everywhere interlaced with mimetic modes of behavior, and their range is not limited at all to what one human being imitates from another. A child not only plays at being a grocer or a teacher, but also at being a windmill or a train. ("Doctrine," 65)

These particular choices may lead one to read into Benjamin's Marxist leanings. Curiously, in response not to the mimetic faculty but to aura, Benjamin's intellectual contemporary Theodor Adorno suggests that Benjamin's concept of aura might be more clearly elaborated as the "'trace of a forgotten human element in the thing,' that is, of reified human labour" (Hansen 2008, 346).[17] However, Benjamin insists that the 'forgotten human element' in auratic perception cannot be reduced as such. Hansen, referencing Benjamin, relays, "The tree and the bush that are endowed [with an answering gaze] are not made by human hands. There must therefore be a human element in things that is *not* founded on labor" (found in ibid.). The gaze of the other—human, animal, or inanimate object—must be experienced by the original seer as familiar to a significant extent as it rests upon the transposition of likeness described above. Moreover, it is in the child playing at being a windmill or a train, and notwithstanding his capacity to play as a tree if he so pleases, that we can identify a transposition of liveness as well; the child animates the object with the language of the body, perceiving in the inanimate object an animate element of liveness which is familiar to him. Thus, the image of the seer seen that comes through when the experience of aura is considered in light of the mimetic faculty suggests a type of vision that exceeds and destabilizes clear-cut hierarchical distinctions between subject and object, leading to 'a reflection of the same' (cf. Hansen 2008, 345).[18]

As for the connection Benjamin draws between language and the mimetic capacity, it cannot go without saying that a portion of the essay at hand is dedicated to the question of how one may establish an underlying meaning for the assumption that both individual words and also the whole of language is onomatopoetic ("Doctrine," 67). In lieu of delving into Benjamin's response to this question, which would steer this discussion off course, an interpretation provided by Habermas can be consulted.[19] Habermas explains that Benjamin combines language and animal extinct, which manifests in expressive gestures, with the mimetic capacity to perceive and produce similarities. He asserts that it is not the subjective condition which finds expression in linguistic physiognomy, "indeed in expressive gestures in general," but the connection between the human and surrounding nature (1979, 48). That is to say, "expressive movements are systematically linked with the redeeming qualities of the environment" (ibid.). As will become apparent in Part Two, aiming attention at expressive movements, more generally, widens the

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[17] Having established a parallelism between the two perceptual categories, if you will, the transposition of this citation gains legitimacy relative to both aura and the mimetic faculty.

[18] In addition to destabilizing the categorical distinctions between subject and object, the image of the seer seen additionally destabilizes traditional scientific, practical, and representational conceptions of vision, along with linear notions of time and space, as is suggested by Hansen. This will be further elaborated in the conclusion to this thesis.

[19] It is worth noting that Benjamin was influenced by the work of child psychologist Heinz Werner: "Werner's research tackles the question of how the face-to-face relation is analogous to an infant's perception of objects...In Werner's account a child's self-awareness is furthered when an external object is transformed into a subject and then responded to"; For more, see Ogden (2010).

potential relevance the mimetic faculty holds for instances that could be characterized as auratic phenomena, particularly those through which we endow an object with animation—that is, with the 'ability to look back at us,' to open its eye or 'lift its gaze.'[20]

Finally, let is be said that Benjamin expresses certainty that the mimetic faculty and the analogical patterns that stimulate it are subject to historical change ("Doctrine," 65; cf. Hansen 1987, 196). With this in mind, Hansen appropriately raises a question that is equally applicable to a study of the concept of aura. Should we be concerned with the decay of this faculty and with the auratic experience or with its transformation? Moving forward, I wish to demonstrate the usefulness of concentrating on aura's transformation. I side with Benjaminian historian Susan Buck-Morss who proposes that "mass culture in our times both stimulates and is predicated upon mimetic modes of perception in which spontaneity, animation of objects, and a language of the body combining thought with action, sensuousness with intellection, is paramount" (found in Taussig 1993, 20). Still, before the specifics of this position can be developed, the popular opinion that grants aura legitimacy only on the terms of its decay must be reconciled.

On Technological Reproducibility

Since the interpretations that address the decline of aura in the wake of modernity as well as the social determinants thereof are well documented and far outnumber those that address aura as a form of perception that invests a phenomenon with the ability to look back, I will keep my reading of the effects of technological reproducibility, otherwise termed as mechanical reproduction, focused. My aim here is to contextualize aura's fragility in order to give consideration to Samuel Weber's reading of aura, which insists on its transformation.

To reiterate, in Benjamin's "Little History," one finds an early indication of the detrimental effect Benjamin will more thoroughly associate with the technique of mechanical reproduction later in his work of art essay. Referencing photographer Eugène Atget, Benjamin asserts, "[H]e initiates the emancipation of object from aura, which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography" ("Little History," 518). From this point forward, it would seem, wherever aura appears on the side of technological media, it assumes a negative valence (Hansen 2008, 338). Indeed, in the work of art essay, the first version of which was published in 1935, aura is configured as a loss. "In even the most perfect reproduction," writes Benjamin, "one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence at the place at which it is to be found" ("Work of Art," 13). However, for the sake of distinguishing the aura which Benjamin conceptualizes as in decline from the aura which hinges on the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze, it is useful to read the aura of the work of art as assuming a trait which cannot be transposed onto most other kinds of objects—namely, authenticity.

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[20] The auratic experience of language is further articulated in "Baudelaire" (199); See Appendix I.

To summarize, Benjamin's argument goes as follows: by bringing out aspects only accessible to the lens of the camera but not to the human eye and by placing the copy of the original in situations the original itself cannot attain, technological reproduction devalues the here and now of the artwork (ibid., 14). On this point, Benjamin places a condition:

> And although this can apply not only to the work of art but, for example, to a landscape moving past the spectator in a film, in the work of art this process touches on a highly sensitive core that no natural object exhibits in this manner. That core is its authenticity. The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the history to which it testifies. Admittedly, it is only the historical testimony that is jeopardized; yet what is really jeopardized thereby is the authority of the thing, the weight it derives from tradition. (ibid.)

Authenticity is, in short, constituted by 'the here and now' of the original work of art. It is also founded on tradition, which passes down the original object as the same, identical thing. Thus, it is authenticity that eludes reproduction—especially technological reproduction, which substitutes one for many (ibid., 13). That is not to say that the quality of 'the here and now' cannot dually constitute aura insofar as it applies to all other objects, in the sense described in "Opposing Definitions." It is when aura is considered in the privileged sphere of aesthetic tradition and historicized as a phenomenon in decline (cf. Hansen 2008, 38) that the mass reproduction of the image becomes of overriding importance (*AP* [J60a,4], 337).[21] To reiterate a well-known point of Benjamin's essay: only with its autonomy in tact could art be oriented to individual enjoyment, and, lacking aura, it is oriented toward mass reception (Habermas 1979, 34).

For Weber, the word *mass* entails a dynamic element in Benjamin's writings. In his reading of Benjamin, he finds the notion of aura to be related to mass in spatial terms. "Mass movements are the result, or rather, the corollary of that movement of detachment, *Absölen*, that marks the decline of aura," and when aura is interpreted relative to its ornamental quality, which locates it in a setting or a case, then the multiplication and exhibition of copies changes the way artworks "literally *take place*" (Weber 1996, 85). As a spatially integrated or fixed work becomes part of a medium of mechanical reproduction, aura transforms from a singularity of place and time to what Weber calls "*the singular leave-taking of the singular*" (ibid., 104-105; Mclaughlin 1996, 1021). If the '*singular*' that Weber identifies is that of the unique work of art, then its '*singular leave-taking*' is the intimate effect of reproduction, which comes to pass as a fleeting encounter with eyes that see but that do not look back.[22] Therefore, the singularity of the work of art experiences an alteration; it is "no longer that of an original moment, but of its posthumous

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[21] I cannot elaborate on this, but it is worth noting that according to Hansen's reading, historicizing aura as a phenomenon in decline "was the only way the term could be introduced into Marxist debates at all, in an intellectual and political gamble that would legitimate it as a philosophical category" (2008, 338).

[22] See "Baudelaire" (188); For an alternative reading of the gaze of the camera, see Sobchack (2004, 301).

aftershock" (Weber 1996, 104-105).[23] To this I would add that singularity may be interpreted also as an event that occurs in response to the fantasy of a certain reciprocity being entertained, even in lieu of the decay of authenticity (cf. ibid.). According to Weber, such an event can only be fleeting like a falling star or a flash, and it is what this event leaves behind in its wake that Weber calls the *mediauric*—auratic flashes that are not only (re)produced by media but that are also themselves media, "since they come to pass in places that are literally inter-mediary," in the interstices of processes of technological mediation (ibid., 106). To borrow Weber's words, *mediauras* occur as "different elements collide with and glance off one another" (ibid.). Thus, they are intimately connected to not only the event conceived of as live encounter but also to partiality, contingency, and hybridity.

It should furthermore be noted that Weber's transformation of aura into the '*singular leave-taking of the singular*' does not stray very far from Benjamin's own sentiment. As Benjamin explains, the destruction of aura that comes with the shelling of the object from its hull "is the signature of a perception whose sense for sameness in the world has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique" ("Work of Art," 16). Consequently, the nature of the '*singular leave-taking of the singular*' as an instantaneous flash is tied to the perception of similarity which "seems to be bound to a time-moment (*Zeitmoment*)" ("Doctrine," 66). It is tempting to even go so far as to say that it reproduces the original effect of aura.[24] With this in mind, what is really at stake in the historical change introduced by technological reproducibility is changes to the attunement of our attentiveness and receptivity for reflections of the same (cf. "Work of Art," 15). Aura, in this view, is a capacity or capability that cannot simply be eliminated but that can surely be recomposed, even in the interstices of encounters with those media seemingly responsible for its decline (cf. Weber 1996, 101).

For the purpose of this thesis, there are three key takeaways to be gathered from the decay of aura in the face of technological reproducibility. First, what can more appropriately be condemned in the age of technical reproducibility is not the concept of aura but of art as a work "that would have its fixed place" (cf. ibid., 107). Second, aura is not an inherent property of humans, animals, or objects, but instead *pertains to the medium of perception* (cf. Hansen 2008, 342). Last but certainly not least, the recurring image of the eye that opens, blinks, looks up, looks back and so forth connotes a sudden moment of transference, one that is expected or desired to happen as an intersubjective experience with nonhuman nature or objects is actualized (cf. Hansen 1987, 188). In all of these summarizing points, the word aura

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[23] Prior to making his argument regarding the '*singular leave-taking of the singular*,' Weber cites Benjamin, who says, "The camera—*der Apparat*—imparts to the instant an as it were posthumous aftershock," and he explains that, "[i]n German, the word translated here as *instant* is *Augenblick*, that is, literally, *eye-look*. And it is precisely in the space, or time, of an eye-look, or as the word is often mistakenly but suggestively translated in English—in the 'blinking of an eye'—that the decisive transformations take place in the relations of picture and world, of original and reproduction, of mass and movement, and last but not least, in Benjamin's own theory of the aura itself" (Weber 1996, 98-99).

[24] As Habermas puts it, "The experience released from the ruptured shell of the aura was, however, already contained in the experience of the aura itself as the transformation of the object into a counterpart. Thereby a whole field of surprising correspondences between animate and inanimate nature is opened up, wherein even *things* encounter us in the structures of frail subjectivity" (1979, 46).

implies a phenomenal structure that is inevitably refracted by the particulars of the event—but also the historical moment—both of which enable a manifestation of the gaze.

The Historical Contingency of Perception

As the work of art essay clearly demonstrates, Benjamin leaves no doubt that aura is contingent upon the social and, therefore, also the historical conditions of perception. The impact of aura's decline, insofar as it pertains to the perception of the work of art, marks a particular historical experience. The experience of "changes in the medium of present day perception"("Work of Art," 23), understood narrowly through the work of art essay, is commonly read as being contingent upon "the representation of human beings by means of an apparatus" (ibid., 15). However, Benjamin's subtle ambivalence in this text should not go without attention.[25] He asserts, "Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their perception" (ibid., 23). This conviction is repeated elsewhere in Benjamin's oeuvre, specifically in his essay(s) on the mimetic faculty. It's re-appearance not only marks aura's underlying conceptual consistence,[26] which will be discussed in more detail under the next heading, but also register's aura's temporal sensitivity, which begins to render the concept as amenable to change in the contemporary moment.

As cited above, Benjamin theorizes that the perception of similarities seems to be bound to a time-moment, which slips past in a flash unlike other perceptions. Yet, despite its instantaneous disappearance and what, at first glance, seems to indicate its progressive decline or decay, Benjamin does not fail to acknowledge the possibility that the perceptual faculty of perceiving correspondences via the reciprocation of the gaze—that is, of auratic perception—has been and may very well continue to be subject to historical transformation. Situating the then-present against the possibility that in old traditions "human beings might have perceived manifest formations, that is, that objects had a mimetic character, where nowadays we would not even be capable of suspecting it," Benjamin inquires, "[I]s it the case that the mimetic faculty is dying out, or has perhaps a transformation taken place?" ("Doctrine," 66).[27] Benjamin expresses certainty that the perceived world of modern humans contains fewer "magical correspondences" than the world of ancient or primitive peoples (ibid.), and with his question he dually expresses that the capacity to anticipate the reciprocity of the gaze has a temporal dimension that is both retrospective and also reactive. It is retrospective in that it marks "the fleeting moment in which the trace

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[25] For more on the ambivalence recognized in Benjamin's treatment of aura, see Habermas (1979, 44), Weber (1996, 87), and Hansen (1987, 187; 2008, 350).

[26] That is not to say that Benjamin's conception of aura is wholly the same in every instance it is brought to bear. In fact, it's primary oscillation occurs between the conception of the gaze that is real and that which is phantasmic—in other words, "between a gaze that can return the gaze of an other and one that cannot" (Cadava 1997, 120 found in Hansen 2008, 343).

[27] In lieu of the question posed above concerning whether we should be concerned with the decay of this faculty and with the auratic experience or with its transformation, Benjamin's own positioning of the question likewise leans away from the former in the direction of the latter.

of an unconscious, 'prehistoric' past is actualized in cognitive image" (Hansen 1987, 188).[28] Additionally, and more significantly, it is reactive in that it is subject to the conditions of its own historicity, where *historicity* describes a human situation in flow, "where versions of the past and future (of persons, collectives or things) assume present form in relation to events, political needs, available cultural forms and emotional dispositions" (Hirsch and Stewart 2005, 262). That is to say that the perceptual experience of aura, as a historical situation, is a reflexive occurrence—a mutual conditioning that occurs between self and other, animate and inanimate (cf. ibid.).[29]

The historical contingency of perception thus reflects the temporally relational character of aura. Benjamin deploys the concept of aura "to catalyze the ensemble of perceptual shifts that define the present," as Hansen puts it (2008, 354). In doing so, Benjamin posits aura as a signature of both technological modernity and also of "the once powerful compulsion to *become* similar" (cf. Habermas 1979, 50), thereby opening up the possibility for aura to manifest in perceptual shifts defined as much by the technological as by the compulsion to become similar or experience the actualization of an intersubjective experience. Against a temporally stable conception of aura, Benjamin indicates—if not charts—the possibility of conceptualizing auratic experience as a 'work of passage' or historical transition (cf. Hansen 1987, 194). In Part Two of this thesis, I will reanimate aura by charting the historical transition that is catalyzed by the present moment as experienced through live art, which I contend is characterized as much by the technological as the enchantment of intersubjectivity. Presently, I offer a final reading of aura focusing solely on the reciprocity of the gaze to stress how aura's relational character allows it to travel within its own conceptualization. I then attend to how aura has traveled across disciplines in Benjamin's wake.

Reflections of the Same

Under the heading "On Seeing Resemblances," I proposed that aura be understood as a kind of vision that dissolves the categorical distinctions between subject and object, leading to 'a reflection of the same.' It is in view of this notion that Benjamin's concept of the gaze appears as pitched between auratic vision and the historical reorganization of subjectivity (cf. Hansen 1987, 214). Acknowledging the variety of backgrounds distinct from Benjamin's body of work that are associated with the concept of the gaze can help to explain the implications the gaze holds for a (re)conceptualization of aura that channels reflection to point to the liveness of nonhuman entities.

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[28] See Benjamin (*AP* [N2a,1], 461) for an illustration of how this occurs relative to the world of modern technology. Elsewhere in Benjamin, this actualization of the prehistoric past in cognitive image is thoroughly theorized as the dialectical image; See Pensky (2004) for more.

[29] In Benjamin's theory of experience, the correspondences that constitute this conditioning rest on the nature of the gaze and are categorized as *expressions* (Habermas 1979, 193).

The concept of the gaze is not a simple one to unravel. Still, a number of general usages can be briefly summarized for the purpose outlined immediately above. To premise, the *gaze* can be used as both an equivalent of and also in distinction from the *look*. When used as an equivalent, it indicates that there is a subject who does the looking, and when used as distinct, it implies a fixating, colonizing mode of looking (Bal 2002, 35). Paralleling the latter usage, 'the gaze' most commonly found in cultural studies is "the 'look' that the subject casts on other people and other things" in a play of power and/or pleasure (ibid., 36). These use cases of the *gaze* relative to the *look*, however, are not wholly mutually exclusive. Consider the conception of aura put forward thus far: for the reciprocation of the gaze to reorganize subjectivity in such a way as to empower rather than disempower the object, an originating gaze must indicate that there is an entity traditionally recognized as occupying the subject position. Zooming out, there is also the Lacanian gaze which is, in short, the visual part of the symbolic order in which the subject is 'caught.' In other words, "The [Lacanian] 'gaze' is the world looking (back) at the subject" (ibid.) or a cultural seeing-ness, if you will, in which the previous usages are inextricably entangled.

To hone in on the implications the gaze holds for the reorganization of subjectivity through which 'reflections of the same' come to the fore, it is again appropriate to cite Benjamin, who in "Baudelaire" explains that aura is endowment of poetry, not only on the level of the word but also on the level of nature. Benjamin writes:

> Wherever a human being, an animal, or an inanimate object thus endowed by the poet lifts up its eyes, it draws him into the distance. The gaze of nature thus awakened dreams and pulls the poet after its dream. Words too can have an aura of their own. ("Baudelaire," 199)

Benjamin's focus on words is included here to make explicit that the gaze of nature articulated in the preceding sentence is connected to aura. Being drawn into the distance, then, functions to dismantle the subject position associated with the gaze as a form of scopic mastery. Moreover, the imagery of 'the dream' as an enchanting force suggests that Benjamin finds the poet to be after a position in relation to vision and to the eye that has been traditionally been assigned to groups historically excluded from scopic mastery—the animal and the inanimate (as in *non-living*) object being most relevant for this thesis.[30]

Benjamin's own penchant for this position is echoed in *The Arcades Project*, where Benjamin notes, "A decisive value is to be accorded to Baudelaire's efforts to capture the gaze in which the magic of distance is extinguished" (*AP* [J47,6], 314). Previously, I explained that the distance associated with the object in the Proustian conception of aura grants it a semblance of autonomy. Now, to bring this close reading to an end, I wish to highlight that by seeking out the look that awakens in the object perceived, the subject or original seer, so to speak, calls into question the opposition between distance and proximity along with that of subject and object, both of which govern 'normal' vision, in the Lacanian sense (cf. Hansen 1987,

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[30] See also Appendix I: ("Baudelaire," 188-189).

215-216).[31] Calling these oppositions into question brings the brings the subject so close to the object (and vice versa) that in the object, the subject sees another subject enlivened with the capacity to look back. It is this transposition, which culminates in what Benjamin calls the perception of aura and which corresponds to 'a reflection of the same.'

Summary

Through this close reading, which has rendered aura as a site of debate not only within Benjaminian thought but also amidst the interpretative responses it has prompted, I have demonstrated that aura is a mode of perception based on the transposition of a mode of experience. Consequently, it is possible to say that aura is a corporeal or embodied capacity.[32] As a mode of perception, aura encompasses 'the unique appearance of a distance' and the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze as connected nodes. The 'transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man' is derived from man's compulsion 'to become and *behave* like something else.' As a child, man animates objects with the language of the body and, consequently, it could be argued that in seeking the reciprocity of the gaze—the eye's that look *up* or that look *back*—man continues to see resemblances where he projects his own capacity for expressive movement, even if only in the form of a glance. This visionary impulse, so to speak, makes it so that aura 'is not the look of the other, but a reflection of the same.' Moreover, in this reading, aura takes on the quality of an event or a live encounter that occurs in a non-iterative spacetime—a *time-moment*, as Benjamin would have it. It affords a sudden moment of transference in which different elements (human and nonhuman) collide. Against the backdrop of Benjamin's oeuvre, aura can be read as having a certain consonance—a consistency that does not culminate with an immovable definition but instead with a mobile conceptualization. Aura is fluid, not finite. It is caught up in the conditions of its own historicity.

With its emphasis on intersubjectivity and historicity, Benjamin's mobile conceptualization of aura can serve as a theoretical tool for analyses that are concerned with an alternative organization of human-nonhuman relations. After all, it is in a contrarian manner that Benjamin "undeniably participates in a patriarchal discourse on vision," (Hansen 1987, 215). Put another way, Benjamin's near preoccupation with aura understood as a form of perception that invests or endows a phenomenon with the ability to 'look back at us,' to open its eye or 'lift its gaze,' resonates with posthumanist thinking insofar as that thinking aspires to reconfigure the dualistic understanding of the human and its others in such a way as to account for their contingency and hybridization. The concrete manifestation of aura is necessitated upon

[31] In this configuration, *aura* as 'the unique appearance of a distance' becomes an embodied medium, that is, an in-between substance or agency that mediates intersubjectivity. Similar to Weber's conception of the *mediaura*, medium, in this sense, cannot be conflated with technological medium (cf. Hansen 2008, 342).

[32] In Part Two, *embodiment* will take on a more precisely delineated meaning in relation to technology such that it may foreground how the self is reflected and hybridized through technology; See Bay-Cheng, et al. (2010) for more.

interrelations, the fusion of self and other. The perception of likeness thus occurs when the affirmation of liveness is reflected.

The intertextuality of aura in Benjamin's body of work indicates, at the very least, a certain fascination held by Benjamin for the concept. Above signaling fascination, though, Benjamin's continued theorization of aura has left the concept open for revisionary impulses. With that in mind, the following section examines aura's development after Benjamin to theoretically position and gauge the distinct possibilities of the rereading of aura for which this thesis argues.

A State of the Art on Aura

Most rereadings of Benjamin's aura start with the notion of 'the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be.' If one errs on the side of criticism, one might say that they end with this notion as well; the majority fall short by not recognizing the possibilities offered by aura understood as a form of perception that 'invests' or endows a phenomenon with the ability to 'look back at us,' to open its eye or 'lift its gaze.' This understanding of aura is, for example, mentioned in only three of the thirty contributions to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan's edited volume *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age* (2003), and even in those instances, it is not examined with close critical scrutiny or for its forward-looking potential.

Still, the many and varied adaptations of aura that I will cover in this section highlight how aura is a productive concept for showing how traditional media theory can be read over through contemporary media practices. The value offered by these 'remediations' is a shared intent to affirm the recombinatory potential of digital technologies. Moreover, because current developments in theater and performance take place in a cultural landscape defined by technology, the realm of performance is essential to this discussion. Performance arts that incorporate new media raise some fascinating questions, such as: how, or in what ways, can the media incorporated into traditionally live art be considered live as well? Thus, this state of the art on aura systematically addresses the remediation of aura, the migration of auratic perception within contemporary performance practices, and the question of technological liveness.

The Remediation of Aura

Rereadings of Benjamin's aura can be recognized both by their adaptation of the concept and also by their appropriation of the semantics and/or syntax of the title of the work of art essay.[33] American artist and critic Douglas Davis's "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Recombination (An Evolving Thesis: 1991-1995)" (1995), the earliest rereading I will review, is illustrative of the latter. More a prescient

[33] It is also possible to identify remediations that do not adhere to either of these conditions, as is arguably the case with Berger's "Why Look at Animals?" (1980).

reflection than an adaptation, Davis's essay puts forward thoughts that are echoed by the other authors whose texts I will address in this concise overview, which is meant to be representative but not comprehensive of the state of aura today.

Writing at the time of the early web, Davis's chief insights read as follows. In the age of digital reproduction, there is no clear conceptual distinction between an original work of art and its reproduction, and, in this age, aura stretches into the realm of reproduction itself, where originality is being enhanced rather than betrayed (ibid., 381-382). Davis supports these arguments with examples, such as that of a Web-style hypertext exhibition—*The World's First Collaborative Sentence* (1994)—and VideoFusion software, which prompts a fine-grained sensitivity to the unique and variable qualities made possible by video copying (ibid., 382; 385). In each of the examples Davis cites, artist, audience, publisher, and so on embrace the individuating marks made possible by digital reproduction without hesitation. On top of this, they are not deterred by the erasure of presence that supposedly accompanies the 'copy' (ibid., 385). Therefore, Davis concludes that it is in the pause in the conversation on a chat line and "the twisted grain of a xeroxed photograph or videotape" that aura now resides—"not in the thing itself but in the originality of the moment when we see, hear, read, repeat, revise" (ibid., 386).

In the essay "The work of art in the age of digital recombination" (2009), Jos de Mul, a Dutch Professor of Philosophical Anthropology, articulates an important nuance that resonates with Davis's text: digital reproduction cannot simply be equated to mechanical reproduction (99). For this reason, de Mul prefers *digital recombination*, which implicates some of the medium-specific characteristics of the computer, in general, and databases, in particular. Because the elements of a database can be combined, decombined, and recombined, database ontology is dynamic and lends itself to the analysis of interactive artworks among more scientific applications like those having to do with genetics and digital imaging (ibid., 101-102). The following is central to de Mul's argument: just as Benjamin implies that an object once held in esteem for its cult value can later come to be recognized for its exhibition value, so too can it become a creation valued for the extent of its openness for manipulation, or digital recombination (ibid.). Thus, the "intangible totality of possible recombinations" brings about a return of the aura experienced through 'original, auratic copies,' a phrase de Mul borrows from Davis (ibid., 103).

"New Media and the Permanent Crisis of Aura" (2006), by Jay David Bolter, et al. similarly argues that aura is invoked by new media in new ways.[34] Specifically, the authors apply Benjamin's concept of aura to mixed reality (MR), a form of media production which layers computer-generated sensory information (aural, visual, etc.) onto the user's physical environment, making for an experience that is both immediate and mediated (ibid., 29). More so than the other authors referenced herein, Bolter et al. delve into Benjamin's concept of aura as it is articulated not only in the work of art essay but also in "Little History" and "Baudelaire" (ibid., 24-25). However, though they arrive at the worthwhile conclusion that aura as a

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[34] It is from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's book *Remediation* (2000) that the title of this section is drawn. The concept will be addressed shortly.

psychological state, attitude, or feeling can belong to natural phenomena and human faces or figures in addition to works of art, they still hold tightly to the narrow understanding of aura as the phenomenon of a distance, no matter how near (ibid., 26). They use the ambiguity of this definition as a premise for reasoning that any media—but especially MR—can enhance aura "by building a sense of distance-through-proximity" (ibid., 29). In other words, by enhancing the experience of physical presence, virtually or otherwise, media technologies can convince users that they are in the presence of the authentic, thereby generating a sense of aura. The authors explore the ambiguity in Benjamin's partial conceptualization even further by using concepts from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of remediation, which describes the interaction between older and newer media forms in any given cultural moment (2006, 32). Whereas transparency in remediation functions by asking the viewer to forget the process of mediation and aiming to evoke aura in the viewer, hypermediacy emphasizes the mediated character of experience and, consequently, calls aura into question. According to the authors, these two strategies can help us to understand aura's contemporary oscillation between decay and revival (ibid., 32-33).

Then, there are others who more directly speak to the potential Benjamin's aura holds for framing the challenge posed by technical progress for the contours that have classically separated humans and machines. Cultural anthropologist Samuel Gerald Collins, for instance, explores how aura resonates with this challenge relevant to the Internet of Things—the 'smart' world of objects that are networked to each other and digitally integrated into our lives (2015, 424). Collins's understanding of aura stands apart from those whose texts have been reviewed thus far. Unlike the others, Collins acknowledges that aura's critical power lies in its ability "to undermine a modernity that slots life into alienating dichotomies" (ibid., 429).[35] This allows him to bring aura to bear in the analysis of nonhuman things that seem agential and enter into complex systems of feedback with each other and with humans. In a media-archaeological fashion, Collins draws on the nineteenth-century séance—the animation of objects—to describe how "the uncanny world of objects seems to herald the world of the spirits" (ibid., 425; 433). He determines that at this critical moment, one phantasmagoria is replacing another (ibid., 434).[36] Smart objects and "the immediacy of their perceptible presence," to borrow Benjamin's words (found in Cohen 2004, 208) remain as occult to us today as do the séances we owe to the nineteenth century (Collins 2015, 434). To conclude, then, Collins asks a question that resonates with the concerns of this thesis, that is: "[C]ould the shift from one séance to another allow us the space to question the agency in all of these ghostly encounters?" Among those who have taken an interest in reanimating aura or components thereof in Benjamin's wake, Collins is not alone in curiosity of human-nonhuman relations.

Sherry Turkle, author of the essay "Authenticity in the age of digital companions" (2007), similarly shows interest in "'thinking' machines" (ibid., 501). Turkle explicitly channels Benjamin in her title, but

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[35] Collins arrives at this point not through a close reading of Benjamin, but through Hansen (2008).

[36] In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin cites the summary given by Otto Rühle of Marx's use of phantasmagoria, in which Rühle speaks of social relation as assuming "the phantasmagorical form of a relation between things" (*AP*, 182).

otherwise leaves all references to Benjaminian authenticity and originality for discerning eyes only. Yet, it is not difficult to imagine the analytical possibilities that aura understood as the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze might offer for Turkle's rather detached remediation of Benjaminian thought. At its core, Turkle's text deals with human-robot encounters and the ways they lead us to question "the human purposes of digital companions that are evocative but not relationally authentic" (ibid., 505). The digital companions Turkle refers to can otherwise be thought of as the computational toys including robots, that began, by the mid-1990s, to present themselves as 'relational artifacts' with feelings and needs (ibid., 501). Such relational artifacts as Furbies and My Real Babies display behaviors that signal they are showing interest in us, making people—children, especially—"feel as though they are dealing with sentient creatures that care about their presence" (ibid., 503). The relationships developed with these digital companions are simulated, says Turkle, but raise important philosophical questions about the significance of relationships that can, by contrast, be called 'authentic' (ibid., 505). For in the presence of relational artifacts like robotic creatures, people have feelings reminiscent of trust, caring, and empathy. However, because these benchmarks are typically reserved for relationships in which all parties are capable of feeling them (ibid.), the evocative nature of relational artifacts reveals "a shift from projection onto an object to engagement with a subject," a shift that, in Turkle's view, nonetheless lacks relational authenticity (ibid., 507). Invoking Benjamin with a bit more transparency as she nears the end of her argument, Turkle explains that in techno-cultures where children would prefer a robot turtle over a caged turtle who rests utterly still and whose "performance draws so little on its '*aliveness,*'" the idea of the original is in crisis (ibid., 513-514; emphasis mine).

As a final measure, it is worth considering how aura has been remediated in culture more broadly. R.L. Rutsky, whose conception of mutation was referenced in the introduction, offers a reading of this situation that is based on the aura that supposes the object we look at is invested with the ability to look at us in return (1999, 26). Rutsky describes how in popular science-fiction literature and films as well as in theoretical and scientific discourses, technological life is represented as emerging as a kind of mutation: —"the result of unpredictable, and often accidental, combinations or mixtures of elements" (ibid., 140). This uncontrollable and, accordingly, autonomous idea of technological life suggests that it emerges from a kind of movement that is beyond human mastery, thus incorporating into the technological an element of magic or spirituality that Benjamin designates as the aura and that Rutsky reads as "the projection of a kind of living presence or spirit onto the aesthetic object" (cf. ibid., 26; 142).

In many ways, such figurations of technology are fundamentally opposed to Western modernity's humanist way of thinking. As technology escapes its instrumental functionality, humans must relate to technology "not as a series of tools or objects, but as a host of autonomous forces or agencies" (ibid., 146). This complex situation leads us to question, for example, the relationship between nonhuman technologies and live performers. Additionally, it makes it so that the human-nonhuman relationship becomes "not a relationship between subjects and objects, but a relationship with others and among others" (ibid., 147). According to Rutsky:

> If, in this case, there is still a "hypnotic" sense of an aura, of something living, something that can "look back at us," this is an aura that is not based on a sense of wholeness, on eternal values. Rather, it is precisely a matter of partiality, contingency, hybridity, mixture. (ibid., 149)

In this posthuman reading of aura, the technological becomes a relational, intersubjective force that is indistinguishable from the unsettling processes of techno-culture, which exists as an immense gathering of cultural objects constantly being reproduced, mixed, altered, and recombined (ibid., 149-150). These processes and the ways in which they incorporate the auratic are key for opening how we distinguish self and other, animate and inanimate to change. As the following section makes apparent, performance and intermediality are two prominent areas through which the workings of techno-culture as such can be investigated.

Aura, Performance, and Intermediality

The difficulty Benjamin associates the work of art in the landscape of reproduction seems to evade the performance arts, where it is accepted that aura continually migrates and where we are less concerned with distinguishing between an original and a copy (Latour and Lowe 2010, 6-7). Nevertheless, this is complicated by intermedial hybrids made up of theater, performance, installation, film, exhibition, and media art that today continually emerge under and by way of the circumstances of digital culture. In this context, I use the terms *intermedial* and *intermediality* with respect to the conceptualization proposed by Chiel Kattenbelt, that is: "with respect to those co- or inter- relations between media that result in a redefinition of the media, which by impacting upon each other, provoke in turn a resensibilized perception" (2010, 35). Put another way, the mixing of media alters pre-existing medium-specific conventions (assuming such conventions exist at all) and allows for new dimensions of perception and experience to be explored (ibid.).

Philip Auslander, who is perhaps best known for his work on the topic of liveness which will be discussed shortly, brings up Benjamin relative to the changing conditions under which intermedial performance is perceived in the article "Liveness, Mediatization, and Intermedial Performance," (2000). According to Auslander, Benjamin's notion of "a mass desire for proximity" is useful for understanding the interrelation of live and mediatized practices (ibid., 6).[37] For example, when live performance is reproduced on video-monitors or televisually, we experience it "as [temporally] proximate no matter how away [the performers] may be in physical distance" (ibid., 7). Using a narrow reading of Benjamin, Auslander argues that intermediality contributes to the depreciation of live presence (ibid., 9). Though it is important to credit Auslander with changing his position on this over time (see Auslander 2016), this crude oversimplification is worth problematizing for the purpose of making a counter argument. Indeed, in many, but not all intermedial experiences, the mediated quality of the experience—its 'hypermediacy,'

[37] In Auslander, *mediatization* most often has to do with the televisual. See Auslander (2000, 5-6).

to borrow from the closely related theory of remediation—is emphasized over its 'immediacy' (Kattenbelt 2010, 35). This can especially be the case when that which is traditionally live is mediatized. Yet, when it is the performative aspects of other media (including performance as a medium in its own right) that are emphasized in situations in which performers and audience still share a spacetime as in traditional performance, presence appears—or reappears, if you like—with particular intensity.

With that in mind, relative to aura, performance, and intermediality, there are two multifaceted points worth critical attention, even if in an abbreviated manner. There is the role of the movement of the body and the influence and response that technical media have relative to the appearance of that movement. And there is the "radicalization of the performative aspects of art" which emphasizes the staging of the aesthetic situation as an "event taking place in the *presence* of the here and now" and which "intensif[ies] the aesthetic experience as an embodied experience" (ibid., 33).[38] Here, *performative* differs from *performance* insofar as it refers to an aesthetically oriented experience—that is, a staged experience that orients the perceiver as an experiencer who reflects on herself as being the subject of experience (ibid., 30). As will be proposed in the remainder of Part One and further developed through the analysis of Part Two, performativity emerges from the shared, lived experience brought forth by the bodily presence of co-subjects.

First, in the case of intermedial performance, the influence of technical media on the appearance of the movement of the performer and vice versa is increasingly important.[39] This in turn has consequences for how *presence*, *intersubjectivity*, and *interactivity* are conceptualized (Lehmann and Primavesi 2009, 4). In staged performances where media technologies play a prominent role, the co-presence of performer and audience and the role of the spectator are changed (ibid.). Moreover, the very distinction between human beings and animals or machines is radically questioned by these changes. In the article "Live Media: Interactive Technology and Theatre," for instance, David Saltz identifies twelve ways of defining the performer-media relationship in terms of interactivity, including virtual puppetry, which resonates most loudly with this thesis (2001, 124-127). Virtual puppetry describes how media can create a performer's double through technologies like motion capture systems, which are attuned to movement. According to Saltz, the virtual puppets staged are not perceived as tools performers use to express themselves but are instead perceived as performers in their own right (ibid., 126). The liveness of the puppet derives from the liveness of the flesh-and-blood performer who gesturally controls it in real time (ibid., 127). Interaction and intersubjectivity manifest between human and machine, as both can be observed as being before or in the 'presence' of the other, where *presence* is loosely defined as an act or practice of encounter (Giannachi, Kaye, and Shanks, 2012). In this way, media do not stand in opposition to live performance or live *performer*; they become a species of it (cf. Saltz 2001, 127).

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[38] Kattenbelt sees this as definitive of the performative turn (2010, 33).

[39] This subject is historically significant. The period of modernity, which held so much of Benjamin's attention, witnessed the beginning of the idealization of the body's performative power and of its mechanization or hybrid potential. For more, see McCarren (2003).

In addition, to repeat, intermediality makes ever more apparent the 'radicalization of the performative aspects of art' which emphasizes the staging of the aesthetic situation as an 'event taking place in the presence of the here and now' and which 'intensifies the aesthetic experience as an embodied experience.' Following German theater and performance studies scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, this can be understood according to the following logic:

> Through specific processes of embodiment, the actor can bring forth his phenomenal body in a way that enables him to command both space and the audience's attention...The spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present. To them, presence occurs as an intense experience of presentness. (2008, 96)

Hence, following Fischer-Lichte, one could argue that presence is an event characterized by the reflection of man as embodied mind. The experiencer perceives the performer and himself as one in the same. In due course, it will become very much apparent that the categorization of performer as 'man' is radically altered by what I call live art. For now, it is significant that aura understood as the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze emphasizes the transposition inherent to the transfiguration described immediately above, whereas presence stresses the becoming-conspicuous of the process of reflexivity experienced as an event (cf. ibid., 99-100).[40] In this model, the 'production' of presence is, as literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht posits in his book by the same name, "a bringing forth, a movement prior to subject and object" (found in Coonfield and Rose 2012, 200). Aura, furthermore, is not a quality possessed by the performer or any other entity staged in a performative situation but is instead a phenomenon that appears out of the production of presence. It is neither a "quality inherent to objects nor a power inherent to subjects," but is instead an experience, a kind of perception that happens in a moment of encounter (ibid., 199; 201). Before the subject-object dichotomy can be definitively polarized, it is transposed.

From a phenomenological point of view, the aesthetics of the performative are based on reflexive perception as it occurs in corporeal experience (Kattenbelt 2010, 34). The notion of corporeality is important insofar as the embodied mind is concerned; let us not forget Proust who described aura as 'a sensorily and and synaesthetically triggered embodied memory.' According to Maaike Bleeker, corporeality takes into account the impact various media technologies have on how our bodies perceive and make sense of the phenomena we encounter (2010, 39). From this vantage, subjectivity emerges from the interaction of human bodies with the outside and therefore with a variety of technologies, which "mediate how this interaction takes shape" (ibid., 41). Thus, the auratic perception of performative situations has a bodily or corporeal dimension. Moreover, the aesthetic orientation that characterizes the performativity of intermedial practices makes it possible "to bring to conscious awareness the facilitations, affordances, restrictions, and demands played out on the body" by different media (ibid., 42).

[40] Though it cannot be addressed here, Fischer-Lichte does offer her own rereading of aura relative to presence, though she too understands aura as 'the unique appearance of a distance, no matter how near'; See Fischer-Lichte (2008, 95-96; 99-100).

In sum, performative situations exist in the activity of the performer—human, animal, or machine—and in the perception of the experiencer (Kattenbelt 2010, 33). Whether aura emerges in the interaction between performer and technology, experiencer and technology, or experiencer and performer *as* technology or technology *as* performer, subjectivity is actively positioned by the different sensory modalities of perception, notwithstanding kinesthesis, and it is positioned in such a way that it becomes reflexive (cf. Bleeker 2010, 38).[41] Today, as performing arts historian Sally-Jane Norman argues in "Anatomies of Live Art" (2008), "Rather than staging the gestures of individual human protagonists as in traditional theatre, the networked anatomies of nascent theatres are relaying gestures and patterns of encounter that are at once multiple, collective, and complex" (ibid., 189). If the category of nascent theater is expanded to encompass the multiplicity of nascent intermedial practices, then those 'co- or inter- relations between media that result in a redefinition of the media, which by impacting upon each other, provoke in turn a resensibilized perception' can be conceived of with more focus as the "uncannily hybridized relations between human and electro-mechanical and informational resources" (ibid., 190). In other words, intermediality frames how aura can account for human-nonhuman relations and how the performative situations staged by live art can prompt the affirmation of the vitality or liveness of nonhuman entities.

In Defense of Technological Liveness

Continuing with Norman's take on live art, the question of technological liveness can be addressed. How, or in what ways, can the nonhuman technologies incorporated into traditionally live art be considered live as well? Though the answer to this question cannot possibly be covered in totality here, it is possible to chart a number of lines of thought, which can shine a light on what is meant by liveness and what is indicated by my act of qualifying aesthetically-oriented phenomena that stage robots as performers as live.

Let us begin with the following contention. That which makes a claim to liveness does not necessarily have to be biologically 'alive' or 'living.' Although Norman leaves open the possibility of considering networked anatomies of live art as inclusive of nonhuman entities as distinct entities, she pays particular attention to theatrical practices or processes "that endow all manner of living and pseudo-living entities with autonomy" (ibid., 190). Norman's interest primarily lies in the domain of conjoined biotechnological and artistic activity.[42] And because of this, her text resonates with approaches to the posthuman that illustrate human-nonhuman relations with the representation of man-becoming-cyborg. As explained in the introduction, this thesis opposes treatments of posthumanism that rely on redefining the human through

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[41] Bleeker draws from Noë, who points out that perception "is not a process in the brain but a kind of skillful activity on the part of the animal as a whole" (found in Bleeker 2010, 38) and whose work will be further elaborated in Part Two.

[42] Norman is also interested in how our sense of the constructs underlying live art as taking place in a shared physical locus is being extended to embrace geographically remote spaces, spectators, and actors (2008, 189). Though this is an important result of the hybridization of media and performance, it does not directly lend itself to my aim of opening how we distinguish self and other, animate and inanimate to change.

disembodiment or bionic transformation. To figure a performance paradigm that is posthuman, one need not only focus on the image of the posthuman as the human that makes an "evolutionary or morphological step toward a synthesis of the organic and mechanical/digital" as Ralf Remshardt suggests in his contribution to the edited volume *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (2010, 135). Posthuman subjectivity can also be take shape as distributed subjectivity, which Braidotti refers to as 'nomadic' (cf. Braidotti 2013). Put another way, staged technologies, like robots, that do not physically blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies for purposes of enhancement—or effacement—but that instead make themselves felt relationally, without ceasing to remain where they are as distinct subjects can also be figured as part of a posthuman performance paradigm. Moreover, they can be figured as making a claim to liveness without lending themselves to a marriage between body and machine or between software and wetware (cf. Norman 2008, 191).

If one were to alternately reach for an ontological description of live art over a biological one, one might substantiate liveness by referring to Peggy Phelan's "The Ontology of Performance" (1993), which insists that "performance's only life is in the present," and that it "becomes itself through disappearance" (146). Reading Phelan would lead one to conclude that liveness depends on the spatial and temporal proximity of living or alive bodies who share in a nonreproductive experience that leaves no visible trace (ibid., 148-149). However, for the purpose of this thesis, a purely ontological approach to liveness would be insufficient. The very fact that I can justifiably associate liveness with the technological and with human-nonhuman relations indicates that liveness is not "an ontologically defined condition but instead a historically variable effect of mediatization," as Auslander asserts (2012, 3). Auslander explains in numerous texts how, over time, we have come to use liveness to describe situations that do not meet the basic conditions outlined by Phelan, and so I will not go over them here. However, I do wish to convey how Auslander posits liveness to describe the connections and interactions between human and non-human agents, because it from this position that I draw my use of the word *live*.

Drawing from phenomenology, which premises that our experience of the things of the world begins with their disclosing themselves to us, as well as from Hans-Georg Gadamer's discussion of aesthetics in *Truth and Method* (2004), Auslander argues that some of the real-time operations of technology "make a claim upon us to engage with them as live events and others do not" (2012, 7). He writes, "In the case of interactive technologies, the claim to liveness can be concretized in a variety of demands," which include the demand to be perceived as filling a role traditionally filled by humans (cf. ibid.), such as that of a live performer. Auslander focuses on the aspect of Gadamer's construal of our experience of the work of art that has to do with "bridging a gap between self and other by rendering the other familiar" (ibid., 8). In doing so, he concludes that "an entity we know to be technological that makes a claim to being live becomes fully present to us when we grasp it as live" (ibid.). Liveness, in this schema, results from our

engagement with the technological artifact and our willingness to accept its claim to be perceived as live. It is not an intrinsic property, but a particular way of "being involved with something" (ibid., 10).[43]

My position, then, is that 'live' should be understood as a symptom of liveness, of a particular way of being involved with technology such that we accept the claims it makes upon us to perceive a likeness in it—in that which is other but reflected as the same. However, because my use of the term *performative* describes the nature of the event that emerges from the shared, lived experience brought forth by the bodily presence of co-subjects, I hold spatiotemporal presence as essential for the quality of liveness I wish to point to using aura. I do so programmatically, without the intention of pointing toward ontology, though the implication that there is an association, however tenuous, is perhaps unavoidable. My intention is, rather, both to stress the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze and also to render visible the transposition of subjectivity, both of which are more easily imagined when two entities share a common spacetime. It is in defense of this rendering of technological liveness—or digital liveness, as Auslander calls it—that I use the word *live*.

Summary

With this study of the state of the art on aura, I have evidenced how aura is continually rendered as a productive concept for bridging theory and practice. In Benjamin's wake, aura is remediated so as to stretch into the realm of reproduction itself. Still it can, in a more nuanced way, be reanimated based on the potential it holds for undermining a modernity founded on binary oppositions such as self and other, animate and inanimate. For instance, in staged performances where human bodies and nonhuman technologies come into being precisely by being in the corporeal presence of one other, auratic perception can be figured as contributing to the becoming-conspicuous of the process of reflexivity. This is because aura implicates presence, which "prompts questions of the character of self-awareness, of the performance and presentation of self and role"(Giannachi, Kaye, and Shanks 2012). Fundamentally, the sense of self is radically altered by performative situations in which the role of the performer is filled by technology. Moreover, what is fascinating about the interrelated phenomena of presence and of aura is that components of body and mind meet and interact. Consequently, both presence and also aura are not primarily physical but also perceptual phenomena (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008, 98-99). Additionally, because intermediality makes apparent the impact that various media have on the corporeal body, co- or inter-relations between media encourage the affirmation of the liveness of nonhuman technology that assumes the role of performer by affording a process of reflection that is based on redefinition, on transposition, and on hybridity.

[43] It is worth noting that relative to Benjamin's idea that auratic perception entails that the object perceived, with its newly found autonomy, 'takes possession of us,' Auslander's conception of digital liveness has the added requirement that the experiencer accept the object's claim to do so.

In performance arts, biological, organic, or human (a)liveness can be opposed to technological or non-organic liveness, but the liveness of the performative—that is, spatial and temporal co-presence—can also be opposed to the liveness of the mediatized which need only meet the condition of temporal proximity. Indeed, there can be live nonhumans (autonomously evolving, organic creatures, for instance) and nonhuman performers (semi-autonomous non-organic agents created by humans), but these things are fundamentally different based on the many and varied uses of the word *live* that now occupy the interlaced realms of media and performance. Together, liveness and live art, as I conceive of them in this thesis, are symptoms of partial, contingent, hybridized, and mixed relations between humans and nonhuman technologies. When staged as co-present subjects in time and in space, nonhuman technologies like robots can 'make a claim upon us to engage with them as live events.' As I will continue to argue in Part Two, in doing so, their phenomenal presence, on the one hand, and their movement, on the other, make experiencers acutely aware of their own presence and expressive gestures, which in turn lend themselves to the perception of likeness—an auratic perception which renders the other familiar.

Conclusion

Part One has demonstrated that aura is a reactive and fluid concept that assumes form in relation to the conditions of the historical moment in which it is considered and deployed. It is, therefore, apt for being rendered as both a site of debate and also a theoretical tool from within and without its original conceptualization by Benjamin. In Benjamin's body of work, aura transposes the reciprocation of gaze that occurs between humans into a mode of experience which is projected by humans onto nonhumans, 'inanimate or natural.' Aura thus pertains to the medium of perception, the historical contingency of which is defined as much by the technological as by the lingering compulsion to become similar.

In this short conclusion to Part One, I wish to reiterate that to reanimate aura beyond what has already been thought from without Benjamin's body of work, I propose that it be considered as a mode of perception that exceeds and destabilizes clear-cut hierarchical distinctions between subject and object. In many ways, this capacity has been inherent in aura all along. However, in the contemporary moment, which can be framed by posthumanism, aura can be rethought through to to understand the human as constitutively entangled with its environment, both technological and biological. It can be brought to bear in the analysis of phenomena that shine a light on the animation of nonhuman objects and the corporeality of the body, which has as much to do with action as it does with thought. And it can also emerge as a phenomenon in an of itself, where the interrelations afforded by techno-culture can lead to many and varied fusions between self and other, animate and inanimate on account of the performativity of interactivity. It is in these ways, that the reanimation of aura put forward in this thesis is to differ from and productively add to the state of the art on aura as it has been distilled herein.

Part Two: Objects Among Objects

In a world of objects, we become aware of ourselves as an object among objects, of our bodies in contradistinction to other bodies.

—Charles Whitehead (2001, 18)

Robots in Context

As acknowledged in the introduction to this thesis, robotic figures are increasingly accepted as functioning more—and to a greater extent—as actors than simply as props. Relative to this observation, Paul Segers and Ruairi Glynn's robots can be contextualized according to popular discourse about machine intelligence as well as critical discourse having to do with the ways technology or media have historically and actively participated in performance or with the sociality inherent in the materialization of technologically-mediated interaction.[44] While related to the aims of this thesis and certainly of great interest in that regard, these topics are secondary to the task at hand, that is, to set *Walking the Dog* and *Fearful Symmetry* in the context of an auratic perception which can account for the contemporary moment.

With that in mind, Part Two reanimates aura by looking into Massumi's thoughts on what it means to see abstract dynamic with and through actual form (2008), Langer's articulation of gesture seen and understood as vital movement (1953), and Noë's understanding of perception as a transaction (2004; 2012). I illustrate the forward-looking potential aura holds as a perceptual phenomenon by bringing it to bear as a theoretical tool renewed by Massumi, Langer, and Noë's insights, which support the perception of a transposition between mechanical movement and vital movement. Set into motion for one last time in this thesis, aura illuminates how the liveness of *Walking the Dog* and *Fearful Symmetry* is a liveness premised on movement and not wholly contingent upon anthropomorphism. As will be made readily apparent, this reanimation of aura is bound up in the posthuman condition, where 'the simultaneity of being in the world together' defines the ethics of interaction among humans and nonhumans. In their respective otherness, both sets of entities—of objects—reveal themselves to be bodies as predisposed toward reflection as they are toward contradistinction.

Part Two, then, begins with descriptions of Segers's *Walking the Dog* and Glynn's *Fearful Symmetry*. These descriptions are oriented in such a way as to show the primacy of expressive gestures in each. Next, I bring to bear the concept of aura to describe how both cases can be seen as bound up in the aesthetic orientation of the performative situation. This short descriptive analysis demonstrates how the reciprocation of the gaze which characterizes aura shifts attention onto the reflexivity of subjectivity which, as suggested programmatically throughout Part One, makes room for the look of the aura to be perceived as 'a reflection of the same.'

The next principal section discusses the individual theoretical perspectives of Massumi, Langer, and Noë as well as how they resonate with one another. By distilling the resonances among these perspectives into a process and by using this process to facilitate a comparative analysis of *Walking the Dog* and *Fearful*

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[44] See, for instance, such literature as Stern (2013) and Bleeker (2017a) as well as such cases as Michèle Anne De Mey and Jaco Van Dormael's *Kiss & Cry / NanoDanses* (2011) and choreographer Huang Yi's *Huang Yi & KUKA* (2013)—a duet between human and robot.

Symmetry, I rethink through aura as a perceptual phenomenon made possible by the vitality perceived in agentic movement. Rethought through in this way, aura points to liveness as a particular way of being involved with technology such that we accept the claims it makes upon us to perceive a likeness in it—in that which is other but kinesthetically and, to an extent, affectively reflected as the same.[45] Moreover, Part Two affirms a recomposition of the relations that seem to distinguish performer and machine by demonstrating how each robot's claim to liveness is premised on the demand to be perceived as filling a role traditionally filled by humans. In this way, Part Two activates aura beyond what has already been conceived of its applicability for today.

Dogs and Tetrahedrons

Before describing the works of Segers and Glynn, a number of matters must addressed. First and foremost, as a researcher interested in aesthetically-oriented practices that reflect the togetherness and reciprocality of media and performance in contemporary culture, I wish to pay due care and attention to my role in rendering perceivable those practices that I discuss. My role is that of a circulating entity who intends, through the medium of the text, to trace anew the movements, as I see them, of the associations that form between bodies both human and nonhuman in any given work of art. It should go without saying, but requires saying anyhow, that what researchers or scholars perceive in aesthetically-oriented practices is likely to be more than what is there. In other words, tracing anew the movements of a work is a re-composition, a form of documentation, a secondary mediation in which the scholar changes the very objects she analyzes.[46]

Moreover, because performing knowledge is a situated act, I wish to reflect on my situatedness not only as a part of a particular historical moment, which I have done in the introduction, but also as a subject of experience. What must also be noted, then, is that my own experience of each of the works I will discuss is distinct. While I experienced *Walking the Dog* at the exhibition HACKING HABITAT, which took place in Utrecht (NL) in 2016, I did not experience *Fearful Symmetry* first-hand. Therefore, to describe *Fearful Symmetry* in a way that maintains some amount of fidelity to an actual encounter, I rely on the descriptions provided by Glynn on his website as well as the audience reactions documented in a video produced by the BBC in 2012 when *Fearful Symmetry* debuted at the Tate Modern to inaugurate the London museum's new live art space, 'The Tanks.' Unlike Glynn, Segers does not elaborate on *Walking the Dog* on his website or elsewhere. Therefore, to compensate for the level of description provided by Glynn and the evidence of spectator experience documented by the BBC video, I also cite a personal conversation I shared with Segers over Skype in June of 2017 (subsequently cited as pers. comm.) as well

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[45] As Carrie Noland explains in the introduction to her book *Agency and Embodiment* (2009), "Kinesthetic sensations are a particular kind of affect belonging both to the body that precedes our subjectivity (narrowly construed) and the continent, cumulative subjectivity our body allows us to build over time" (4).

[46] Here, *secondary* should not imply the quality of being subordinate to but the state of being iterative of, in a mathematical sense.

as raw footage obtained by Segers's robot dog during its exhibition in Utrecht, which Segers was kind enough to share with me (subsequently cited as unpublished data). Unfortunately, Glynn's schedule did not allow for the same engagement. Hence, for reasons that will become clear in due course, I begin my descriptive re-composition of the cases selected with Segers's *Walking the Dog*, pictured in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1: *Walking the Dog* (2016), by Paul Segers

An anthropomorphic robot resembling a four-legged animal with a single camera for a set of eyes is set on a shabby platform—a stage of sorts—in what is staged as a gallery space. Emphasizing its purposeful but superficial staging as an entertainer is a plastic palm tree and an old film light. Next to its stage, on the right-hand side, sits an active boom box. The robot is attempting to dance to a song titled "Walking the Dog." This description resembles the one Segers provides to accompany his Youtube video of the work (See Figure Credits). We, the visitors or experiencers, are absent from the video as well as from Segers's description, however. As key actors in any performative situation, our bodily presence is nevertheless critical. Segers's robot dog dances to "Walking the Dog" for us and streams our reactions (or lack thereof) to a small video monitor on the opposite side of the room in real time.

Walking the Dog presents a parody of Boston Dynamics' 'BigDog' as a dancing entertainer (ibid.). Boston Dynamics develops robots that maneuver like animals for the purposes of perception, navigation, and intelligence. BigDog, specifically, was funded by DARPA, the agency of the U.S. Department of Defense responsible for the development of emerging technologies (Boston Dynamics 2017). *Walking the Dog* holds the original's potential for military application at bay in favor of drawing upon our tendency to perceive any resemblance of a dog as a companion species to our own.

A motion sensor triggers its performance, allowing us the space to question its capacity for reciprocation of some kind. The movement—the 'dancing'—of Segers's Dog, as I will occasionally refer to it, is engaging but also noticeably clumsy. Segers explains that upon first seeing publicized videos of BigDog, he realized that machines aiming to be as human or as animalistic as possible gain an advantage in being as mimetic as possible without aiming for gestural perfection; humans and animals are intelligent but also clumsy. Because of this, his intention was to replicate BigDog to make a more "humane" machine and, in part, to demonstrate how people immediately become fascinated by the fact that a machine can move in a way that is, in a sense, "too lifelike" (pers. comm.). We who encounter Segers's Dog are led to operate under the assumption that the Dog is, at the very least, monitoring us (ibid.). We see that the Dog looks back at us, that it is recording us so as to stream our image on the accompanying video monitor, so it is no wonder why we might imagine that it is, perhaps, reacting to us as well. Hence, notwithstanding the near limitless variety of responses experiencers may have in the presence of the Dog, we seem to opt for dancing in a similar or dissimilar fashion, standing back in distrust, or, alternatively, reaching out a hand in introduction as we might in the presence of an unfamiliar dog (See Fig. 2; unpublished data).

Fig. 2: Unpublished footage from *Walking the Dog* (2016)

My own experience of *Walking the Dog* emphasized the fact that Segers intentionally stressed the ambiguity inherent in the work's responsivity. I watched as one of my colleagues began to mirror the Dog's clumsy up-and-down movement, while another approached, observed the interaction, and reacted with glee because of what seemed to be a robot dog reflectively returning the choreography of our friend but what was effectively a robot dog puppeteering our friend instead (see Fig. 3). As my conversation with

Segers confirmed, the Dog only reacted to our first movement so as to know when to begin its song and dance. It did not change its dance—its mechanization—in response to the gestures presented to it thereafter. In the end, the suggestions of what we projected into or onto the machine were much greater than what the circuitry allowed for (pers. comm.).

Fig. 3: Interaction with Segers's Dog

At a very basic level, it seems, we project life into machines that move so that they become animalistic in our eyes (ibid.). *Walking the Dog* is very clearly anthropomorphic in its movement and its form, however.[47] Because of this, it serves as a base case for demonstrating how the sense of liveness that robots can emanate in performative situations may be but is not necessarily contingent upon anthropomorphism. This will be further elaborated in what follows. Presently, though, by describing *Fearful Symmetry*, I will illustrate how Glynn takes the perceptual capacity we hold to render the other familiar one step further away from the anthropocentrism of humanism by replacing zoomorphic figuration with more complex semblances of life. What will appear as shared in these cases, then, is a sense of liveness premised not on anthropomorphism but on particular qualities of movement.

The sole attraction of *Fearful Symmetry* (see Fig. 4) is a luminous tetrahedron. Inaugurating the Tate's cavernous live art space—which has lain dormant for decades—the robot tetrahedron resides above us and moves around the darkened gallery to interact with us in very specific ways. The glowing robot, which Glynn designed to be "primitive in appearance, to avoid figuratively inferring life," glides through the air, swoops down to play, and flees up and away if too many of us get too close (Glynn 2012). The more

[47] It is also anthropomorphic in its vision, which presents an interesting complication for further research relative to a posthuman reading of aura. This be further elaborated in the conclusion to this thesis.

gestural engagement we enact, the more enthusiasm the tetrahedron displays in response. Likewise, if we the experiencers are stationary instead, the robot hovers over us, slowly turning in a mechanical and abstract fashion, "almost mocking [our] inanimateness" (ibid.). Reacting to the encounter, we might say that the light appeared to follow us, that it knew where each of us was standing and where to go, and that its movements were, in a way, organic, which made it seem friendly, somehow (BBC News, 28 Aug. 2012). We respond this way, because, as Glynn puts it, the moment the mechanical puppet responds to us, it becomes a companion in the space (ibid.).

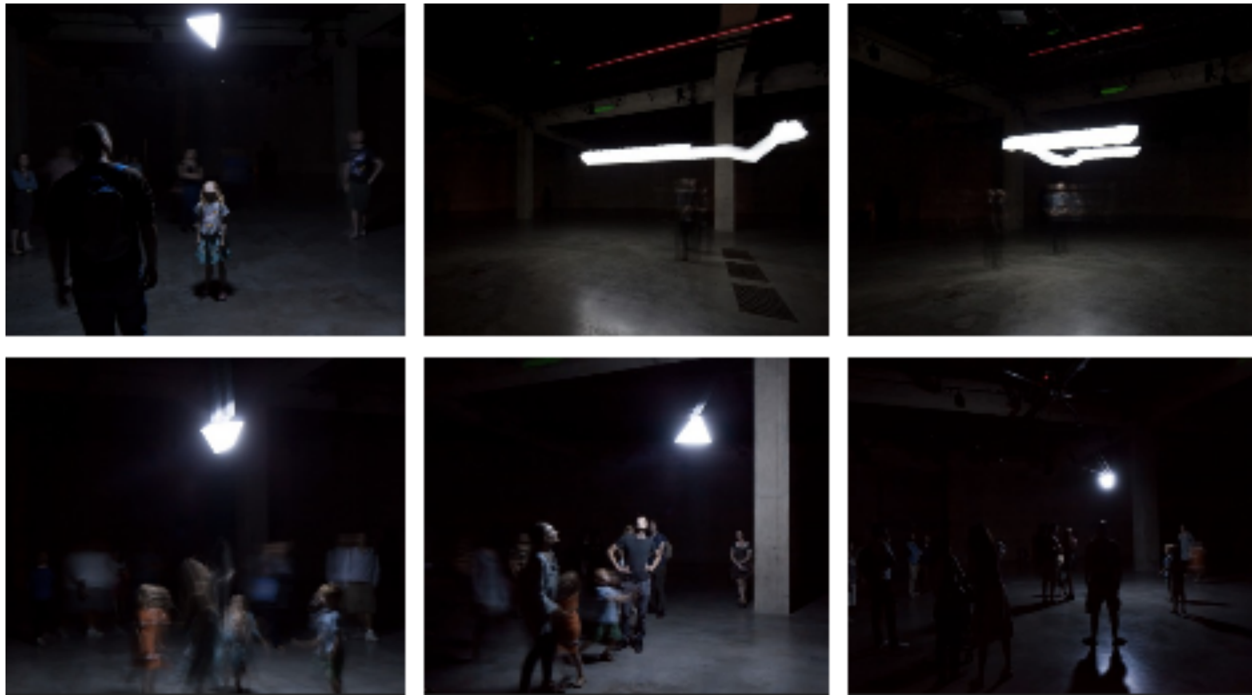

Fig. 4: *Fearful Symmetry* (2012), by Ruairi Glynn

Fearful Symmetry is inspired by a description of an encounter with a creature of the night found in a line of William Blake's poem, "The Tyger," from which *Fearful Symmetry* takes its title. It is also inspired by the question: "What part of us willingly projects life into things that in all common sense are not alive?" (ibid.). The visceral encounter that results from our experience of Glynn's work is made possible by the tetrahedron's interactivity. In the sense that I use it here, *interactivity* requires "not only the existence of a system and a recipient, but also the readiness of these to become active—in other words, their 'presence'" (Kwastek 2013, 108). Specifically, *Fearful Symmetry*'s readiness to become active is made possible by an array of Kinect sensors which are mounted on the traveling robot and which build a real time 3D point cloud of the local environment to detect the public and read their individual movements using gesture-recognition algorithms. In reciprocation to the readiness of the experiencers to become active in a similar way—that is, gesturally—Glynn writes, "the agile performer respond[s] with behaviours choreographed by the collaboration of a team of puppeteers" (ibid.). Those puppeteers monitor the public constantly with infrared cameras so that they may direct the robot to travel over to certain people. Once it

gets close enough, the puppeteers are able to see what the robot can see (see Fig. 5), and the robot can select people and direct its performance toward them (BBC News, 28 Aug. 2012).

Fig. 5: Footage of the behind-the-scenes infrared monitoring

As Glynn suggests, this to-and-fro exchange of movement gives the robot of *Fearful Symmetry* an uncannily human character, for “[w]ith the subtlest change from mechanical to smooth fluid motion, the work transform[s] from a lifeless platonic solid, to a living breathing performer” (Glynn 2012). Linked by a behavior that entails an act of communication, the behaviors of both parties or actors present in Glynn’s encounter evolve as a function of the movements that are brought to bear on one by the other and vice versa. This occurs in such a way that there is an emergence of unexpected properties in the nonhuman technology—qualities of grace and of liveness—that exceed those seemingly possessed by the robot before the interaction.

Additionally, in the video produced by the BBC, Glynn describes his work as bringing together elements of puppetry, cybernetics, interaction design, and robotics. The BBC, in response, calls Glynn’s technique “robot puppetry” (28 Aug. 2012). Still, what might already be apparent based on the functionality of the work and what becomes ever more apparent in considering that Glynn refers to the robot as a “marionette puppeteer” (Glynn 2012), is that the roles of puppeteer and puppet are not as clear cut as we might be primed to expect. And this makes their relationship a matter requiring further distinction.

The Reflexivity of Subjectivity

Continuing the descriptive analysis of both cases here, albeit in a more theoretical way, for the purpose of expanding upon how they are aesthetically oriented as performative situations, I pose the questions: how do the energetic or kinetic impulses enacted by both sets of bodies—human and nonhuman—in both cases shift attention onto the reflexivity of subjectivity? And how does auratic perception manifest in both encounters such that the nonhuman technologies are seen as live performers?

Certainly, both robots are staged in situations that occur relatively independently of the external world in which they exist. To be aesthetically oriented, subjectivity must also take on a reflexive orientation within these situations, which are performative by their very nature as events that emerge from the shared, lived experience brought forth by the bodily presence of co-subjects. The first question, then, concerns how the performativity of *Walking the Dog* and of *Fearful Symmetry* marked both sets of bodies or *objects*—human and nonhuman—as capable of enacting but also perceiving the 'physiological, affective, energetic, and motoric impulses' of one another, thereby making them both *subjects* in the other's eyes. In this schema, the subjectivity of the experiencer is oriented such that the experiencer becomes aware of herself as a corporeal subject of experience enacting certain impulses which can be seen as shared with another, who or which, seems to reciprocate her engagement kinesthetically or, at least, kinetically in ways that are not dissimilar from her own behavior. Consider how, in Benjamin, the child playing at being a windmill or a train, animates the object with the language of the body. The child thereby perceives in the object a sense of liveness with which he is intimately (kinesthetically) familiar. In anticipation of a reciprocated gaze, which is an affective impulse to the degree that it is perceived as charged with expression, experiencers react to both robots in ways that suggest they relinquish control to interaction. In this process, it is possible to observe a shift from separation to assimilation. In the robots, experiencers see another subject enlivened with the capacity to look back. In other words, their shared phenomenal presence which is actualized in movement makes experiencers acutely aware of their own presence and expressive gestures, which in turn lend themselves to the perception of likeness—an auratic perception which renders the technological other familiar.

How, then, is the other—the nonhuman technology—rendered familiar as live performer more specifically? In the case of *Walking the Dog,* our capacity to perceive a likeness in Segers' Dog as a companion species does not withstand or exclude our tendency to perceive those positioned on stage as live. That is to say, the Dog makes a claim to liveness by demanding not only to be perceived as a dog but also to be perceived as a live performer. The composition of the platform, the palm tree, and the film light draw attention to this, referring to the Dog as live performer so that the Dog may take up a critical position regarding mechanization. So too does its camera, which not only records our likeness but also, in a way, reciprocates our gaze by streaming it on a monitor for us to see. As for the case of *Fearful Symmetry*, our capacity to perceive a likeness in that which is other extends to that which is *not* anthropomorphic in figuration. The likeness we perceive, furthermore but nevertheless, manifests as a

living, animate force. The tetrahedron demands to perceived as filling a role traditionally filled by humans by oscillating between acting as puppet and as puppeteer, inviting the audience to gesturally engage in a reactionary manner for the show to go on. The mode of spectatorship set up by each case affords behaviors that suggest we do not behave toward each robot as if toward an object. Our particular way of being involved with the respective robots is as if they were live performers present in an unusually intense way. By accepting the claim of each to be seen as live, we fill them with agency and perceive a sense of aura in the process of doing so. In other words, we accept the claim to act on our self reflections and, in accordance, we demonstrate how the corporeal body may be reflected in the mechanical animation of nonhuman objects.

Summary

Through this analysis, I have described the cases in question, stressing the primacy of expressive gestures in each as well as the surprising non-importance of anthropomorphic figuration. I have also brought to bear the concept of aura to explain how both can be seen as bound up in the aesthetic orientation of the performative situation. In doing so, I have explained how the staged encounters make it possible for the robots of the respective artists to be perceived—to be 'grasped,' to borrow Auslander's words—not simply as entities we know to be technological but with more dimension as entities that can assume the role of live performer by way of our engagement with them. Through this process, which exercises the reflexivity of subjectivity, aura emerges as a phenomenon that demonstrates that the interrelations afforded by techno-culture lead to a fusion between self and other, animate and inanimate. Our compulsion 'to become and *behave* like something else' results in a reflection of the same. Thus, this descriptive analysis functions as an important turning point; it is upon this foundation that the rest of Part Two builds.

Reanimating Aura 'with and through' Massumi, Langer, and Noë

Moving outward from the foundation established thus far, the following sections discuss the theoretical perspectives of Massumi, Langer, and Noë. The ways in which these perspectives resonate with one another in regards to aura are subsequently addressed in place of a summary. Effectually, Massumi's thoughts on seeing abstract dynamic with and through actual form, Langer's articulation of gesture seen and understood as vital movement, and Noë's understanding of perception as a transaction will help to facilitate a comparative analysis of the case studies. To reiterate, this analytical practice serves the purpose of rethinking through aura as a perceptual phenomenon that points to liveness as a particular way of being involved with technology. Using the selected perspectives to reanimate aura underscores that it is the cultural present from which I look back at aura to revive its potential for pointing to the liveness of nonhuman entities.

Seeing Objectively

In terms of theoretical perspective, there is much that can be drawn from Massumi relative to movement and perception; his book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002) stands out as particularly appropriate in this regard. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I focus solely on an interview between Massumi and the Institute for Unstable Media, an interdisciplinary center concerned with art and media technology in Rotterdam (NL), that was published as "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens" (2008). The context for this "semblance of a conversation," as the text is subtitled, concerns the differences between the aesthetic experience of interactive art and that of more traditional arts such as painting and sculpture (ibid., 1). While it is possible and would not be entirely irrelevant to go into the technicalities of Massumi's position on interactivity with reference to this conversation, it is not my intention to do so. Suffice it to say that Massumi concludes that it is not enough to champion interactivity: "You have to have ways of evaluating what modes of experiences it produces, what forms of life those modes of experience might develop, and what regimes of power might arise from those developments" (ibid., 9). I will return to this point in the conclusion to this thesis. Presently, I am interested in Massumi's thoughts on aesthetic form and the dynamism of perception. Much of Massumi's argument relative to this twofold topic is drawn from Langer and Noë, therefore, many components of what is discussed immediately below will be articulated with more nuance throughout the remainder of this section on reanimating aura. Lastly, it is worth noting that the understanding of aura put forward thus far resonates strongly with Massumi's contentions. Those resonances will be emphasized in passing and truly attended to in the discussion of patterns of resonance among Massumi, Langer, and Noë as well as in the comparative analysis that proceeds from there.

In order to extract Massumi's thoughts on our capacity to see abstract dynamic with and through actual form while retaining the context that frames them, it seems most appropriate to follow closely the progression of Massumi's line of argumentation as it materializes in the conversation at hand. That said, Massumi's approach to the initial question of how to distinguish the interactive arts from the traditional is to return to the question of form. Interactive art complicates the question of form because each time it operates it produces a variation. However, as Massumi asserts, this complication does not render the question of form inapplicable. Instead, it provides an opportunity to contend with the idea that form and vision, by extension, can ever be fixed or stable (ibid., 2). Massumi proposes: "If vision is stable, then to make art dynamic you have to add movement. But if vision is dynamic, the question changes. It's not an issue of movement or no movement. The movement is always there in any case" (ibid., 2-3). The question, then, becomes a matter of making distinctions between kinds of movement (ibid.). Asked in what way there is movement in vision, Massumi confirms that he draws from Langer's theories of perceptual movement in art. According to Massumi, "Langer reminds us that we see things we don't *actually* see" (ibid., 3). Still, if we see movement in forms that are not actually moving, something is still happening. Massumi suggests that we not call this feature of perception an illusion, but distinguish it as an abstraction that supplements what is actually there. In other words, "We see *with* and *through* the

actual form" (ibid.). The "movement we can't actually see but can't not see either," as Massumi says, "*takes off* from the actual form" (ibid.). Thus, the actual form and the abstract dynamic are like two dimensions of the same reality—"We're seeing double" (ibid.).

Massumi explains this phenomenon, then, by tending to the nature of perception. He suggests that the form of an object consists of "a whole set of active, embodied, potentials," and that the potential we see in objects has to do with the way our body relates to the part of the world it happens to find itself at the particular moment. Potential, for Massumi, characterizes how, for example, vision can relay into kinesthesia or the sense of movement. The sense of movement is what we abstractly see when we directly and immediately see an object that embodies such potential. Massumi calls this "lived relation" and describes it as a life dynamic:

> We're seeing double again. But this time, we're seeing the actual form 'with and through' that set of abstract potentials...Seeing an object is seeing through to its qualities. That's the doubleness: if you're not qualitatively seeing what isn't actually visible, you're not seeing an object, you're not seeing objectively. (ibid., 4)

Massumi contextualizes this argument with reference to Noë, who proposes that that seeing is a kind of action. Massumi, in turn, adapts this proposition by saying the action is not actual, but appears in potential. That is, we see imperceptible or "virtual" qualities in every object. "We implicitly see a life dynamic, we virtually live relation," and because of this, an object's appearance is actually an *event*, "full of all sorts of virtual movement," which relationally activate the body for what may come (ibid., 5). Massumi contends, "[T]here's a sense of *aliveness* that accompanies every perception. We don't just look, we sense ourselves alive. Every perception comes with its own 'vitality affect' (to use a term of Daniel Stern's)" (ibid; emphasis mine). Vitality affects denote the passage of time, and, therefore, are inseparable from movement. Stern most often exemplifies vitality affects with terms like *surging*, *fading away*, *accelerating*, etc., which signify process and which need a successive string of singular elements to materialize, much like an event (Køppe, Harder, and Væver 2008, 169). Form poises the body for a certain set of potentials, of vitality affects, and the action of vision—as Noë would have it—or the perception of the event—as Massumi refers to it—involves a direct and immediate self-referentiality. It is an immediate thinking of perception in perception, as it is felt. This is what Massumi calls a *thinking-feeling* (2008, 6).

Massumi explains that 'thinking-feelings' occur in natural perception as well as in the perception of what Langer calls 'semblances,' those forms which abstract potential so purely that it has nowhere to go and can only exist in suspense (ibid., 5). In actual perception, "we orient ourselves toward the instrumental aspect of the actions and reactions that the perception affords," that is, "[w]e live out the perception instead of living in it" (ibid., 6). The vitality affect, which is a sense of relational aliveness, disappears into an actual chain of action. And the object appears with a certain "likeness" to itself, which Massumi—with unintentional irony—describes as "a qualitative fringe, or aura to use a totally unpopular word, that

betokens a 'moreness' to life" (ibid). Based on what has been proposed already, Massumi's aura can be interpreted as an ornamental halo of sorts that is not based on a sense of wholeness but one that is a matter of partiality, contingency, hybridity, mixture. The self-reflexivity of the experience—the thinking *about* perception—is backgrounded, and the likeness of the object to its virtual qualities, whose partiality, contingency, and so on derive from its supplemental quality as an abstraction, appears as an aura. The dynamic unfolding of life itself is brought to the fore precisely because we see abstract dynamic with and through actual form (ibid.). We see action in potential.

Just as I have suggested that opening the distinctions of animate and inanimate to change can be figured through techno-cultural practices that are at once science-fictional and aesthetic, Massumi proposes that art makes us see that we see life dynamics 'with and through' actual form. To summarize, when an object is doubled by its own 'likeness,' which is a semblance of a potential 'more,' as Massumi says, you have the experience of the single present thing, but that's not all (ibid., 10):

> You, at the same time, experience what it's like to experience its presence. That 'likeness' marks the object as a variation on itself. You perceive what it's like because in your life there have been other appearings 'like' this one, and you implicitly *anticipate* more will come. (ibid; emphasis mine)

Therefore, an object—an event—of interactive art also stands for difference *from* itself, because, over time, it appears under variation.[48] Moreover, "[i]t holds these variations-on in the present, which is why it is a kind of immediate, lived abstraction" (ibid., 10). The abstraction which has been compared to an aura, then, 'haloes' the object or situation with a genericness that affords that it be perceived as both itself and as "a place-holder in life's process for others like it" (ibid.). For the purpose of this thesis, the particularity of the mechanization of expressive movement, is haloed by liveness, the sense of *aliveness* that accompanies perception when that which we perceive as other is seen as looking back. As Massumi contends, how far the likeness between the thing itself and the life dynamic it represents goes is determined by the body's relation to the thing. It's both a matter of dynamic posture, "if you can call a disposition to moving in a certain style a posture," and also a matter of the extent to which the body explores its own living potential and strikes new postures which afford certain ways of seeing and of being involved with objects and with situations (cf. ibid., 11; 13).

Imagining Gesture

Holding Massumi's assertion that we see imperceptible or 'virtual' qualities in every object as a point of interest, I turn to the chapter titled "Virtual Powers" from Langer's *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953). Though this work is dated and perhaps no longer deserves the qualifier of a 'present-day perspective,' I maintain that it holds contemporary relevance. Langer's argument centers around the

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[48] According to Massumi, this is interactive art's strength—taking the situation as its 'object' (2008, 13).

question of what makes dance an independent art. To be distinguished as such, Langer determines that dance must have its own "primary illusion," which is something that is created "with the first motion, performed or even implied" (ibid., 174). In effect, Langer argues that all dance motion is motivated by the semblance of expressive movement. Put another way, the motion must undergo transformation, and, in dance, it is transformed into expression or *gesture*. To cite Langer and thereby reveal her influence on Massumi: "*Gesture* is the basic abstraction whereby the dance illusion is made and organized (ibid.).

For Langer, gesture is not simply physical movement but vital movement; "to the one who performs it, it is known very precisely as kinetic experience," and "[t]o others it appears as a visible motion, but not a motion of things, sliding or waving or rolling around—it is *seen and understood* as vital movement" (ibid.). That is to say, by virtue of its form, gesture is always seen as expressive, even if it is spontaneously so; "it is free and big, or nervous and tight, quick or leisurely," and this expressiveness is seen as corresponding to the psychological state of the person who is performing the gesture (ibid., 175). "Every being that makes natural gestures is a center of vital force, and its expressive movements are seen by others as signals of its will" (ibid., 175). For this reason, gesture is always at once subjective and objective, willed (or evoked) and perceived (ibid., 174).[49]

In addition, only when movement is imagined, so it may be performed apart from one's momentary situation and mentality, does it become an artistic element. Developing her argument further around this aspect of gesture, Langer asserts that the primary illusion of dance is not actual, physically exerted power but a virtual realm of power which consists of appearances of agency and of will (ibid.). In other words, in dance, the play of 'felt' power such as the power to receive impressions, apprehend the environment, and meet changes "is as different from any system of physical forces as psychological time is from clock-time, and psychological space from the space of geometry" (ibid., 176). To put this into context, dance, as an aesthetically oriented experience is a staged situation that occurs relatively independently of the external world in which it exists. Thus, it is *imagined feeling* that governs dance. Of course, as Langer is quick to admit, the movements of dance are real, physical movements, but "*what makes it emotive gesture*…is illusory, so the movement is 'gesture' only within the dance. It is *actual movement*, but *virtual self-expression*" (ibid., 178).

In response to this, there is a question worth raising here in anticipation of the analysis to come. That is, why would we understand the movement of the robots staged in performative situations as differing so drastically from the movement of dancers as to deny them the label of performers? Indeed, my contention is that we should not; robots too are capable of creating a semblance of self-expression through movement that is consequently willed (or evoked) and perceived as gesture. As Langer points out, it takes precision of thought not to confuse an imagined feeling or precisely conceived emotion with a feeling that is actually experienced in response to real events, and this precision of thought, one can argue, is forgone in

[49] Because this refers to manifestation and not memory, this transformative process should be distinguished from that of *mémoire involontaire* which appears to the subject but cannot be produced at will.

performative situations by the nature of their aesthetic orientation. This is why Auslander's conception of liveness works. Hence, paralleling Langer's support of Mary Wegman who conceptualized creative dancing as "the oscillation of a human being between two external poles of tension, thus transplanting the dancing body from the sensually existing sphere of materialism and real space into the symbolic supersphere of tension space," (ibid., 185), it is not impossible to conceive of the liveness purported herein as the perceived oscillation of a robot between the poles of machine and performer. This particular oscillation transplants the body of the other from the actual sphere of mechanical movement into the abstract sphere of vital movement.

I raise this matter here so as to have the opportunity to explain how Langer's text can, perhaps, be interpreted as ahead of its time. Langer explains that "the appearance of movement as gesture requires only its (apparent) emanation from a center of living force; strangely enough, a mechanism 'come to life' intensifies this impression, perhaps by the internal contrast it presents" (ibid., 181). Moreover, she expresses that great dance may be achieved "by creating the semblance of alien control" (ibid.). This is made apparent, Langer says, by the 'marionette' motif in all its varieties and derivatives (ibid.). After all, "imagined feelings, and portrayals of sentient subjects have long been recognized as ingredients in art" (ibid., 182). In further defense of this point, Langer cites art historian Konrad Lange who lumped all such feeling-elements that go into a work of art into the concept *Scheingefühle*. Lange, explains Langer, also interpreted the reaction of the spectator or experiencer as a process of make-believe, whereby she playfully treats the work as an actuality and pretends to experience the feelings represented or suggested in it (ibid.). Drawing on this premise, Langer concludes that the basic abstraction that makes dance an independent art involves *Scheingefühle*. The semblance of gesture must *seem* to spring from feeling, but this created dance element—a *Scheingefühle*—need not be attributed to the dance. It can also be attributed to some natural or supernatural power expressing itself through the dancer. "The conscious will that seems to motivate or animate him may be imagined to lie beyond his person, which figures as a mere *receptacle* of even *momentary concentration* of it" (ibid., 183; emphasis mine). As I have proposed thus far, the body of the performer can also figure as a reflection of conscious will or agency to the same effect. This is, in part, what it means to share a situation with what you perceive.

Sharing Perception

In his books *Action in Perception* (2004) and *Varieties of Presence* (2012), Noë puts forward the idea that we achieve perceptual experience by acting it out through our embodiment in the world, thereby sharing our encounters with that which we perceive (Noë 2012, 3). The introduction to the latter is the primary focus of this discussion. In it, Noë broadly addresses presence, which I have previously conceptualized as an act or practice of encounter that stresses the becoming-conspicuous of the process of reflexivity experienced as an event. Avoiding overly complex vocabulary, Noë simplifies presence by describing it as 'our access to the world.' From Noë's vantage, we bring the world into focus through skillful engagement

(2012, 2). The fact that every part of ourselves—eyes, arms, feet, and all—are at work in the field of play makes presence manifestly fragile, as Noë puts it. His point is that we access the world—we achieve presence—in every given situation in which we find ourselves (ibid., 2-3). Perception, says Noë, is a transaction. "We look at the world, yes, but *the world looks back*! We are always in the midst of making adjustments to the world around us. And we are always liable to be caught in the act!" (ibid., 4; emphasis mine).

An important aspect of Noë's argument is that presence cannot be achieved through remote contemplation, as classical humanism would have it. Interestingly but haphazardly, Noë uses the example of theater, in its dramatic and postdramatic forms, to contrast his preferred variety of presence from that of classical humanism. There is presence that is, on the one hand (in dramatic theater), based on a shared spacetime, and presence that is, on the other (in postdramatic), based on our supposed role as symbolizers. That is to say that presence, in its latter form, manifests as detached contemplation (ibid., 5). Of course, considering the spatiotemporal complexities of the contemporary moment, the contrary can be argued; these correspondences are not as unyielding as Noë makes them out to be. Though it is a matter for another discussion, presence can be achieved in postdramatic theatrical forms that deterritorialize the stage as well as performers and spectators (See Groot-Nibbelink 2015). That matter, however, eclipses Noë's central concern as well as mine, which is to say that presence and, likewise, perception—in their simplest forms, perhaps—result from being "in a causal-conceptual space that contains both you and that of which you think" (Noë 2012, 4). As already explained, my interest lies in the nature of the event that emerges from the shared, lived experience brought forth by the bodily presence of co-subjects. In short, I hold spatiotemporal presence as essential for the quality of liveness I wish to point to using aura (in part for argumentation's sake), and this makes Noë's central concern of particular concern here.

It is in a shared spacetime, then, that we achieve presence and we perceive based on the skills we possess (ibid., 10; Noë 2004, 1). Noë constructs this argument in his earlier book *Action in Perception* (2004), where he asserts that perceiving is a way of acting. "*What we perceive*," writes Noë, "is determined by *what we do* (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are *ready* to do...we *enact* our perceptual experience; we act it out" (Noë 2004, 1). Noë calls his approach *enactive perception*. Its central claim is that our access to the world and our perception of it not only depends on, but is constituted by, our possession of the sensorimotor knowledge we possess that makes it so that "[w]e spontaneously crane our necks, peer, squint, reach for our glasses, or draw near to get a better look at what interests us" (ibid., 2), and—I would add—at what we anticipate will look back. Therefore, to be a perceiver is to understand the effects of movement on sensory stimulation. According to Noë, this manifests in the thoughtless automaticity with which we move our eyes, head, and body in the ways just described (ibid., 1). This considered, it seems logical that Noë would assert that one implication of enactive perception is that only an entity with certain kinds of bodily skills, such as self-movement as well as the ability to keep track of one's relation to the world, can be characterized as a perceiver (ibid., 2). Upon first consideration, this implication might seem contrary to the argument I present in this thesis, as it seems to hold *anthropos* in

a privileged position. However, if we take our tendency to conceive of our own bodily skills as reflected in other entities that exhibit movement, it is possible to figure that our capacity to perceive movement as gesture can extend beyond that which is biologically alive. By extension, it is also possible to figure that, as a consequence of our self-reflexivity, we would perceive such semblances of gesture as indicative of self-consciousness, that is, as *liveliness* or *aliveness*. We share our perception with that which we perceive.

Indeed, Noë does not go without acknowledging our self-reflexivity. He asserts that we are now in a position to notice that the world shows up and that we ourselves show up in correspondence (2012, 12-13). As already suggested, we do so through "skills of access" and, by doing so, we not only achieve the world, "we also achieve *ourselves*" (ibid.). That is to say that by rendering the other familiar, we perceive a likeness that indicates we have polished a mirror to look for ourselves; thus, our encounter produces presence, but also aura. Significant to this observation, Noë, like Benjamin, contends that our perception is historically contingent. Using the perceptual process of reading as an example, Noë writes, "To be a reader is to be a participant in a reading pageant that has been going on for thousands of years. It is only against the background of these familiar practices that reading is even possible" (ibid., 11). Noë's point is that it is part of our nature to bring the world forth through practices of embodiment; it is "our inherited animal presence" (ibid., 14). If, as Noë argues, "[w]e are present in the world as persons and we are present as animals" (ibid.), then what is stopping our presence from extending to that which is *not* biologically alive but which exhibits certain kinds of bodily or embodied skills with which we can identify as vital affect or as gesture? My contention is that there is far less to overcome in this regard than we might initially expect. In fact, *co*-presence includes human-nonhuman relations and does not limit them to animal kinds.

Patterns of Resonance: A Summary of Sorts

This summary organizes the patterns of resonance between Massumi, Langer, and Noë in such a way as to illustrate auratic perception—the event of the gaze reciprocated—as a process. The framework of that process, which is hinted at at the very start of this thesis and which is implied intermittently throughout, is abstracted here so that it may be more concretely reconstituted in what follows.

Drawing from Massumi, the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze—which can be interpreted as movement, more generally—can be attributed to our tendency to see virtual qualities 'with and through' the form of the other; in movement's vital affects, we see embodied potential for *lived relation*—'we implicitly see a life dynamic' (Massumi). In Langer's terms, this means that both willed (or projected) and perceived, the movement of the other, which emanates from its form, is perceived as gesture. That gesture, which 'we see but don't *actually* see' (Massumi) has an expressiveness that makes it so that the other is seen as a center of vital force capable of willfully lifting its gaze (Langer). Therefore, a semblance of something more—a likeness—is perceived in the sense of *aliveness* that accompanies the perception (Massumi). In addition,

the virtual realm of power which replaces the physical makes possible an appearance of agency and of vitality (Langer).

On account of Noë's approach to perception, then, the very possibility that our gaze could be reciprocated hinges on the fact that we share our encounter with that which we perceive. It is, furthermore, proof that we are always liable to be caught in the act of enacting our perception; we notice that the automaticity of our movements are shared or, rather, *reflected* (Noë). Massumi might say that this process involves a direct and immediate self-referentiality, a thinking about perception as it is felt. We feel the capacity for perception in the other, because with that other we share a causal-conceptual space, as Noë would put it. When artistic elements make it so that the actions performed in that space are performed apart from one's momentary situation and mentality, following Langer we might suppose that the virtuality of the perception is intensified. However, that is not to say that reflexivity—our ability to think about our perception and the way it is enacted—does not become conspicuous through our encounter; it is evoked in the other as gesture through our capacity to see objectively (Massumi). With the three theoretical perspectives in mind, this capacity may be understood as deriving from our corporeal positionally or our dynamic posture (Massumi), which affords that we relate our bodies to those that we become involved with. Perhaps this is evidence of our animal presence, for whether they be persons or objects, machines or performers, we notice that they have shown up in correspondence to us showing up ourselves (Noë).

The Posthuman's Encounter with Live Art

When that which we perceive is a nonhuman technology filling the role of a live performer, the mode of experience that is produced can fittingly be described as posthuman. We encounter the other as existing on a monistic continuum rather than as occupying a category distinct from our own, because we have witnessed the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between ourselves and a nonhuman object. This ethics of interaction, as Braidotti calls it, is made possible by our sharing our encounter with that which we perceive, the simultaneity of our being in the world together, our *co-presence* (cf. 2013, 169). Co-presence, I maintain, should be understood as immanent to a posthuman reading of aura centered around human-nonhuman relations. In consideration of that, the patterns of resonance discussed above can be seen as further evidencing how aura can be rethought through as a perceptual phenomenon that points to liveness as a particular way of being involved with technology. This final analysis, in turn, brings the process I have just described to bear in a comparative analysis of *Walking the Dog* and *Fearful Symmetry*.

Relations in Consideration of Movement

This analysis presents a comparison of Segers's *Walking the Dog* and Glynn's *Fearful Symmetry*, both of which conceive of ways to do endow mechanical bodies with what may be perceived as vital movement. Placing Segers's and Glynn's works side by side invites an affirmative recomposition of the relations that seem to distinguish performer and machine. In light of the posthuman condition, this analysis also accounts for some of the ways human-nonhuman relations in live art can result from movement, as movement is the basis upon which humans and robots relate in the cases at hand. It additionally draws inspiration from a text by Maaike Bleeker which illuminates what the relationship between agency and behavior might comprise (2017b).

With all that in mind and considering the works in question have already been described in detail, I wish to base this analysis on an observation that is central to this thesis, that is: when compared to *Walking the Dog*, *Fearful Symmetry* can be conceived of as *more live* despite its lack of anthropomorphic figuration. I argue that this observation can be attributed to the relative fluidity of movement and unpredictability of each work. These are qualities of movement that play a role in the time-moments of transformation and of transposition that occur as a part of the process described above. To summarize, this process illuminates how the evocative nature of relational others can reveal 'a shift from projection onto an object to engagement with a subject.' And in this shift, aura is experienced to the fullest extent; in the robots, experiencers see another subject enlivened with the capacity to look back.

Which artistic elements of each of the cases, then, contribute to the perception of fluidity and unpredictability, or lack thereof? As already explained, in *Walking the Dog*, the movement of Segers's Dog was intentionally made to miss the mark of gestural perfection. The Dog is clumsy in its movement, and while this aspect may make it seem more zoomorphic, perhaps even more 'humane' as Segers says, it arguably detracts from the liveliness of the robot as a performer. The glowing tetrahedron of *Fearful Symmetry*, by contrast, moves in ways that can be described as organic, even graceful. It *hovers*, *swoops*, and *slowly turns*. Based on that description alone, it is possible to assert that in *Fearful Symmetry* aura more readily finds expression in breath, as it does in the writing of Benjamin. Here, it yet again suggests an embodied mode of perception on the part of the object. In sum, in *hovering*, *swooping*, and *slowly turning*, we see vital affects more fluidly than in clumsiness, which can be said to materialize as a successive—but discontinuous—string of movements.

Fearful Symmetry's gestures suggest expressiveness in more spontaneous ways as well, which lends a hand to its unpredictability. While Segers's Dog moves in ways that can, perhaps, only be described as nervous and tight, Glynn's tetrahedron moves in ways that can be described as free, big, quick, or leisurely. And the gestures that indicate such expressiveness are open to change. The behavior of the robot is modified as a function of interacting with another subject, making it both unpredictable and also fascinating. In *Fearful Symmetry,* as in dance, one experiences the play of 'felt' power such as the power

to receive impressions, apprehend the environment, and meet changes. The relatively closed nature of *Walking the Dog's* response, in opposition, can be quickly realized. It is not unlikely that my own colleague's interaction with it, which made the Dog's responsivity seem more ambiguous than did most other interactions, stemmed from her training as a dancer (cf. unpublished data). That is to say, it is possible that she saw its movements as mirroring her own because she has been trained to move in ways that give way to the emergence of unexpected properties. In other words, she is more attuned to how semblances of expressive movement may manifest. Indeed, the same could be said of *Fearful Symmetry*. The unpredictability its functionality afforded made the actualization of intersubjectivity apparent in a more diverse set of ways which could be sustained over a longer duration.

Only Glynn's robot could display dynamic posture. Yet, it is important to point out that the movements of both robots do not differ so drastically from the movement of dancers so as to justify denying either their status as performer. It should not be forgotten that *Walking the Dog* was created to be a parody of robots that are made with the intent to imitate biological life through humanoid and zoomorphic features. That fact remains to be part of its proposition. I cannot deny it its presence or aura, because, as I have argued throughout this thesis, aura is neither a "quality inherent to objects nor a power inherent to subjects," but is instead an experience, a kind of perception that happens in a moment of encounter. Rather, I can argue that its claim to liveness is not as strong, for the particular ways we can be involved with it are not as yielding to the corporeality with and through which we access it and perceive it as present.

To clarify, then, Glynn's design may seem *more live* because it is motivated (and modified) by behaviors that are perceived by humans as expressions of personality. Consequently, more so than Segers's design, *Fearful Symmetry* seems to position likeness "as an expression of private interior," which is understood "as [the] driving force behind public exterior behavior" (Bleeker 2017b, 5). Though it is rather Cartesian and, therefore, humanist that the behavior of both robots is "made to *appear as if* driven by desires similar to those of humans" (ibid.), there is an important distinction to be made relative to *Fearful Symmetry*. As a design that does not imitate naturally existing agents, it allows for the robot's behavior to be "the predominant factor for determining a person's attitude towards the machine without being biased by 'preconceptions, expectations or anthropomorphic projections…before any interactions have occurred" (Gemeinboeck and Saunders 2016). Therefore, though Glynn's robot is neither humanoid nor zoomorphic, it arguably emanates a sense of liveness with more intensity, where intensity is based on the distance, so to speak, between expectation and perceived reality (which includes the play of felt or virtual power). Paired with the kinetic impulse of movement the affective impulse that allows for us accept an imagined feeling over a feeling that is actually experienced in response to real events makes it so that our encounter with *Fearful Symmetry* is based more on a physical relation than a logical one.

In both *Walking the Dog* and *Fearful Symmetry*, humans relate to the movement of the robots on the basis of recognizing similarities between their movement and that other humans or animals (cf. Bleeker 2017b, 14). In the case of *Fearful Symmetry*, this does not immediately seem to be the case, as the body of

the robot has been designed to avoid indicating any humanoid or zoomorphic form. Effectively, *Fearful Symmetry*'s movements do not look much like those of a human or an animal (cf. ibid.). What makes them lifelike is a twofold matter, then. First, the experiencer treats them as she would the movements of dance; she playfully treats the work as an actuality and pretends to experience the feelings represented or suggested in it. Second, the movements of the robot change in response to the affordances of the environment which include the ongoing relations it forms with the humans who encounter it. Thus, the experiencer perceives its movements as she would the movement of other humans, which she perceives in a similar fashion—in other words, *enactively*. This part of the process of auratic perception can be explained by the fact that we see action in potential and understand our own self-movement to be a signal of our will. Movement, in other words, is "the basis for our understanding of the behaviour of other bodies as variations of possible movements of our own body" (ibid.). As Bleeker argues, "[U]nderstanding the movements of others or understanding others through movement does not mean that the movements have to be similar to those of the body interpreting them" (ibid.). Indeed, one need only think of mimicry to understand how nature creates similarities. In light of the posthuman condition, it happens that these similarities are hybridized, reciprocally reflecting both the human and its others, as well as contingent, appearing in reaction to the conditions of the contemporary moment's historicity. It is in this schema that aura appears as a mutual conditioning occurring between self and other, as the posthuman subject acknowledges the otherness that is a part of him (cf. Rutsky 199, 21).

Summary

This final principal section has demonstrated that situating aura amidst the theoretical perspectives of Massumi, Langer, and Noë reanimates aura such that it occurs in accordance with a transposition between mechanical movement and vital movement. Man, with his tendency to seek the gaze of that which is traditionally categorized as 'other,' recognizes the vital affects of the other looking back or lifting its gaze as a life dynamic but also as an expressive gesture. In witnessing the initial transformation of movement into gesture, man—the perceiver and experiencer—recognizes the look as familiar not only because of his inherited animal presence, but also because he experiences the kinesthetic or kinetic presence of the other through a momentary happening akin to reflection. He doesn't just look, he senses himself alive in perceiving the semblance of a potential 'more' in the object whose likeness to itself has been doubled by an ornamental halo—an aura—produced by what he has enactively perceived to be vital movement. He renders the other familiar because it has showed up with a corporeality not wholly unlike his own. Hence, in cases when he encounters robots staged in performative situations, he willingly accepts the machines' claim to fill the role of a live performer. He does so because his access to the world in the contemporary moment is mediated by networks of human-nonhuman relations. There have been other appearings like this one, between self and other in all the possible combinations of animate and inanimate, and so he implicitly perceives this encounter as a variation of experience that exists among those other types of experiences.

Conclusion

In view of the theoretical perspectives of Massumi, Langer, and Noë, Part Two has reanimated aura by illustrating how the present moment of posthumanism may be experienced through live art, which I maintain is characterized as much by the technological as the enchantment of intersubjectivity. By critically engaging with case studies representative of performative situations involving robots, I have demonstrated that a sense of aura can, on the one hand, be attributed to the hybridized relations that can form between human experiencers and electromechanical performers and, on the other, point to the liveness of their involvement with one another in a shared spacetime. In the multifold analytical practice of Part Two, aura reappears as both a perceptual and a physical phenomenon resulting from processes by which experiencers polish a technological mirror to look for themselves.

Thus, in consideration of live art, it is worth stressing that human bodies and nonhuman technologies come into being as corporeal objects as the process of reflexivity becomes conspicuous. Auratic perception could not be conceptualized as it has been here without acknowledgement of this matter, which enlivens objects as subjects, thereby creating monism between inanimate (that which is nonliving or mechanical) and animate (that which is living or perceived as possessing a certain vitality or liveness). Moreover, the sense of self is radically altered by performative situations in which the role of the performer is filled by technology. Recomposing the relations between performer and machine in effect recomposes the relations between experiencer and machine as well. The robot kinetically and affectively takes on the status of live performer not in place of but as a substitute to its status as nonhuman technology. The posthuman subject, then, in becoming aware of herself seeing a likeness in the robot, enters into an intersubjective and kinesthetic relation with the nonhuman technology as active experiencer. As this chapter has shown, movement plays a definitive role in this techno-cultural recomposition, for it affords an approach to developing new human-machine relationships that does not start from a gap to be bridged between human and machine but instead from a non-dualistic understanding of the human and its others (cf. Bleeker 2017b, 15).

Conclusion: Why Look at Robots?

This thesis has demonstrated how aura becomes relevant again and in a renewed sense today—a historical moment in which spontaneity, the animation of objects, and a language of the body that is understood as combining thought with action, sensuousness with intellection are all paramount (cf. Taussig 1993, 20). It has principally aimed to understand the past—that is, Benjamin's aura—as part of the present. In doing so, it has illustrated how objects, beings, and phenomena might be perceived as both themselves and something other than themselves as well as how they might give forth and receive powers, virtues, and qualities that afford relationality. Additionally, speaking with John Berger (1980), it has suggested that we might want to look at robots to see the virtues of technology in ourselves.

Of the many lines of thought that connected Parts One and Two, the proposition that Benjamin's mobile conceptualization of aura, with its emphasis on intersubjectivity and historicity, could effectively serve as a theoretical tool for analyses that are concerned with an alternative organization of human-nonhuman relations was most paramount. Secondary to this was the notion that auratic perception has a corporeal dimension. As has become apparent over the course of both chapters, but especially in Part Two, performative situations exist in the activity of the performer, whether human, animal, or machine, and in the perception of the experiencer. Furthermore, when performative situations stage robots as performers, they promote a non-dualistic understanding of the human and its others, largely because of their aesthetic orientation. Thus, in reading and rereading aura under the illumination of posthumanism, the inter-relations that constitute the subject are highlighted and the distinctions of self and other, animate and inanimate are opened to change. Ultimately, drawing attention to the complexity of aura understood as a form of perception that 'invests' or endows a phenomenon with the 'ability to look back at us,' to open its eye or 'lift its gaze' has forged connections not only between the nuances of Benjamin's conceptualization and the important critical perspective of posthumanism which frames it today, but also between the programmatic aspects of both and the variability of what *liveness*, *presence*, and *intersubjectivity* may mean when robots take the stage in intermedial phenomena.

Relative to performativity and mediation, in general, and liveness, in particular, a number of conclusions that have been drawn are worth reiterating as this thesis comes to a close. First and foremost, aura manifests in the fusion of self and other. That is to say, the perception of likeness occurs when the affirmation of liveness is reflected. Next, in the process of auratic perception put forward herein, the experiencer becomes aware of herself as an object among objects, including the performer itself. Indeed, because what I have conceived of as 'live art' radically alters the categorization of performer as 'man,' it is possible to say that media have become a species of live performer, where the label of *live performer* indicates that in the media (i.e., the robots) an abstraction of (a)liveness supplements what is actually there. Finally, it is our tendency to conceive of our own bodily skills in other entities that makes it logically possible for our capacity to perceive movement as gesture to be extended to encompass other forms of

‘*live*,’ so to speak. In such configurations, the act of ‘looking back’ in all of its variations can be generalized as movement. Even if the action is not actual, it can be virtual and similarly lend itself to auratic perception. It can, for instance, appear in potential as it might before an anthropomorphic robot begins to move. In ways that are no less superior to those of subjects, objects solicit us and make us move (Noë 2017, 230).

Equally important to the conclusions that have be drawn are the variety of topics for further research that have appeared between the lines as relevant to the aims of this thesis. The pertinency of these topics can be framed by a twofold interest in looking forward and looking back from the standpoint of the present.

Looking forward, it is worth considering present-day developments through which robots are made to be increasingly human-like or animal-like. Such progress begs the question of where the border between human and non-human begins to blur. It is worth attending to this question from a practical vantage, for research suggests there is an observable shift from felt relation to feelings of discomfort or uncanniness as robots become more anthropomorphic in figuration (cf. Bleeker 2017b, 6). In this thesis, I have chosen to focus on both an anthropomorphic robot and an ‘amorphic' one. Knowing that the the majority of research in human-robot interaction focuses on anthropomorphic robots (Gemeinboeck and Saunders 2016), I found it important to look at another kind of robot too. However, I wish to express that the observable limitation of uncannily lifelike robots should not be set aside in favor of beginning further research solely from forms that are non-anthropomorphic. Related to this are, of course, topics concerning machine or nonorganic intelligence and the sociality inherent in the materialization of technologically-mediated interaction, as suggested under the heading “Robots in Context.”

From the standpoint of the present, this thesis has sought to position the technological other as live performer. Looking back, there is, in addition, a rich history in viewing the live performer, especially the dancer, as technological other. In fact, the period of modernity, which held so much of Benjamin’s attention, witnessed the beginning of the idealization of the body’s performative power and of its mechanization or hybrid potential (see McCarren 2003). While it may be possible to simply locate aura in the traditional liveness of performances which thematically mechanize the live performer as technological other, based on the research presented herein, it would be interesting to consider how aura might be altered in such instances. Likewise, it would be fascinating to consider how the problematic of reversing this shift as such might be theoretically explored in consideration of Gilles Deleuze’s ‘subject,’ which is always in the process of becoming-other.

With the historical implications of the suggestion for further research just articulated in mind, I wish to point out that although this thesis draws on Benjamin, whose work is characteristic of modernity, it is possible to read further into Benjamin’s fascination with ‘pre-modern’ models “in which human beings are defined not simply by their status as active, controlling subjects, but by their connection to and participation in a world of ‘other’ forces and agencies” (cf. Rutsky 1999, 19). Drawing more broadly on

such pre-modern models could present novel opportunities for media archaeological research, which generally tends to focus on modernity. For if we are to continue our attempts to question modernity's positioning of 'the human' as solely deserving of the status of enlightened and enlivened subject, then looking back in a media-archaeological fashion in the manner just described (and, dually, in the manner advanced by Wolfe's take on posthumanism) offers an alternative approach by which we may figure how new relations to technology may be explored.

Nonetheless, the posthuman approach adopted herein can also be merited with opening the space for additional lines of research to be pursued in the name of media archaeology. I wish to address one in particular, which I see as directly inspired by this thesis, before offering some broad observations relative to the introductory section titled "Posthuman, Not *Post*-human," which will bring this thesis to a close.

This thesis demonstrates a renewed interest in the subject as fully immersed in and immanent to a network of nonhuman relations. It thereby productively adds to a growing interdisciplinary area of research, parts of which consider the active role of instruments for figuring a posthumanist understanding of knowing (see Bleeker 2017c). While I did not rely much on the unpublished footage recorded by Segers's robot, the opportunity to do so raised the question of how a posthumanist approach to methodology might benefit from the consideration of non-human modes of seeing. The filmic representations recorded by *Walking the Dog* but also the infrared readings captured by *Fearful Symmetry* offer the space to consider how the human-nonhuman relations forged by each work might be investigated through both the organic and the inorganic bodies involved in the performativity of each situation. Thinking through human-nonhuman relations in this way presents interesting complications when non-human modes of seeing, afforded by technologies such as motion detection systems, are combined with modes that correlate with the perceptual systems of human perceivers, as is the case in *Walking the Dog*, which anthropomorphizes the robot's vision through video. From my vantage it also raises the following questions. Might we be able to talk about robots 'seeing objectively' in the way Massumi describes? And what regimes of power might arise from foregrounding "the 'eyes' made available in modern technological sciences"? (Haraway 1988, 583 found in ibid.) In short, this line of research reveals what may be added to posthumanist approaches to methodology, even in the humanities, namely: "a reconceptualization of our very understanding of perception and experience from a non-anthropocentric perspective" (cf. Bleeker 2017b, 10).

Turning to the observations that may be gathered relative to the introduction, then, I wish to suggest how this thesis connects the fields of media archaeology and posthumanism in a way that productively adds to the field of current scholarship, which precariously aims to connect the two fields by treating the posthuman as the post- of transhumanism rather than as inextricably entangled in human-nonhuman relations. This thesis, to borrow Rutsky's words, presents the status of the posthuman not as "a matter of armoring the body, adding robotic prostheses, or technologically transferring consciousness from the body" but as a subject in the process of becoming unsecured through acknowledging the relations and

mutational processes that constitute it (1999, 21). This is reflected in my approach, which calls for an opening of the boundaries and categorical distinctions that have traditionally separated disciplines and entities.

It is important to add that framing this research with posthumanism does simply impose an extraneous framework onto Benjamin's work. Instead, informed by media archaeology, it insists that Benjaminian theory be read against the grain of its time period. For as Benjaminian scholar Beatrice Hanssen has noted in her book *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (2000), many of Benjamin's critical and philosophical writings deserve to be reinterpreted. Hanssen's book reinterprets Benjamin "in light of an aspect of his philosophy of history that, for the most part, has been left unexamined: the ethico-theological call for another kind of history, one no longer purely anthropocentric in nature or anchored only in the concerns of human subjects" (1), while this thesis more precisely shines a light on aura as a specific indicator of Benjamin's post-anthropocentric leaning. It likewise arrives at the conclusion that Benjamin's writings can be reinterpreted but also reanimated for the purposes of interrogating "the state and predominance of the human subject" and calling for "a renewed attention to what traditionally was considered to be less than human" (ibid., 107). The process of auratic perception that this thesis articulates appears as distinctly circular—as recurring in time but also as occurring between self and other in all the possible combinations of animate and inanimate. In this manner, it has been composed to encompass that which is not human but has come to be intersubjectively involved with the human.

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Appendix I: Benjamin on Aura

The following passages from Benjamin's oeuvre are either referenced in part or cited in full within the text. For ease of reference, additional lines of text which encompass those quotes cited are provided here.

"Since, in addition, contact with others is in dispensable for the intoxicated person if he is to succeed in formulating his thoughts in language, it will be evident from what has been said that on this occasion the insights yielded bore no relation to the depth of the intoxication and, so to speak, of the enjoyment. All the more reason to emphasize the core of this experiment as it appeared in Gert's statements and my own recollections. These statements concerned the nature of aura. Everything I said on the subject was directed polemically against the theosophists, whose inexperience and ignorance I und high repugnant. And I contrasted three aspects of genuine aura-though by no means schematically-with the conventional and banal ideas of the theosophists. First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine. Second, the aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura-wreathed object makes. Third, genuine aura can in no sense be thought of as a spruced-up version of the magic rays beloved of spiritualists and described and illustrated in vulgar works of mysticism. On the contrary, the characteristic nature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*Umzirkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case. Perhaps nothing gives such a clear idea of aura as Van Gogh's late paintings, in which one could s that the aura appears to have been painted together with the various objects" ("Protocols: Mar 1930," 57-58).

"It has been said of Hill's camera that it kept a discreet distance. But his subjects, for their part, are no less reserved; they maintain a certain shyness before the camera, and the watchword of a later photographer from the heyday of the art, 'Don't look at the camera,' could be derived from their attitude. But that did not mean the 'They're looking at you of animals, people, and babies, which so distastefully implicated the buyer and to which there is no better counter than the way old Dauthendey talks about daguerrotypes: 'We didn't trust ourselves at first,' he reported, to look at the first pictures he developed. We were abashed by the distinctness of these human images, and believed that the little tiny faces could see *us*, so powerfully was everyone affected by the unaccustomed clarity and the unaccustomed fidelity to nature of the first daguerrotypes" ("Little History," 512).

"The first people to be reproduced entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact—or rather, without inscription...The human countenance had a silence about it in which the gaze rested" ("Little History," 512).

"This picture, in its infinite sadness, forms a pendant to the early photographs in which people did not yet look out at the world in so excluded and godforsaken a manner as this boy. There was an aura about them,

a medium that lent fullness and security to their gaze even as it penetrated that medium" ("Little History," 516-517).

"Indeed, Atget's Paris photos are the forerunners of Surrealist photography—an advance party of the only really broad column Surrealism managed to set in motion. He was the first to disinfect the stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of decline. He cleanses this atmosphere—indeed, he dispels it altogether: he initiates the emancipation of object from aura, which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography...[Atget] looked for what was unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift. And thus such pictures, too, work against the exotic, romantically sonorous names of the cities; they suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship.—What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. Now, to bring things *closer* to us, or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative. And the difference between the copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the original picture is unmistakable. Uniqueness and duration are as intimately intertwined in the latter as are transience and reproducibility in the former. The peeling away of the object's shell, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose sense for the sameness of things has grown to the point where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness—by means of its reproduction" ("Little History," 518-519).

"Nature produces similarities—one need only think of mimicry. Human beings, however possess the very highest capability to produce such similarities. Indeed, there may not be a single one of the higher human functions which is not decisively co-determined by the mimetic faculty. This faculty, however, has a history, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. With respect to the latter, it is in many ways formed by play. To begin with, children's games are everywhere interlaced with mimetic modes of behavior, and their range is not limited at all to what one human being imitates from another. A child not only plays at being a grocer or a teacher, but also at being a windmill or a train" ("Doctrine," 65).

"It can still be maintained today that the case in which people consciously perceive similarities in everyday life are a minute segment of those countless cases unconsciously determined by similarity" ("Doctrine," 65).

"These natural correspondences, however, assume their decisive importance only in light of the consideration that they all stimulate and awaken that mimetic faculty which responds to them in human

beings. Here one must recall that neither the mimetic forces nor their objects, i.e., the mimetic objects, have remained the same, unchanged over the course of time" ("Doctrine," 65).

"At first glance, the direction might seem to lie in the increasing disappearance of this mimetic faculty. The perceived world (*Merkwelt*) of modern human beings seems to contain infinitely fewer of those magical correspondences than the world of the ancient people or even of primitive peoples. Yet this is the question: is it the case that the mimetic faculty is dying out, or has perhaps a transformation taken place?...For as inquirers into the old traditions we must take into account the possibility that human beings might have perceived manifest formations, that is, that objects had a mimetic character, where nowadays we would not even be capable of suspecting it" ("Doctrine," 66).

"The perception of similarity is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash. It slips past, can possibly be regained, but really cannot be held fast, unlike other perceptions...The perception of similarities thus seems to be bound to a time-moment (*Zeitmoment*)" (Doctrine," 66).

"The gift which we possess of seeing similarity is nothing but a weak rudiment of the formerly powerful compulsion to become similar and also to behave mimetically. And the forgotten faculty of becoming similar extended beyond the narrow confines of the perceived world in which we are still capable of seeing similarities. What the stars effected millennia ago in the moment of being born into human existence wove itself into human existence on the basis of similarity" ("Doctrine" [Addendum], 69).

"Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role" ("Mimetic Faculty," 160).

"In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence at the place at which it is to be found. The history to which the work of art has been subjected as it persists over time occurs in regard to this unique existence—and to nothing else" ("Work of Art," 13).

"The here and now of the original constitutes the concept of its authenticity, and on the latter in turn is founded the idea of a tradition which has, to the pre- sent day, passed this object down as the same, identical thing. The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological— reproduction" ("Work of Art," 13).

"These changed circumstances may leave the artwork's other properties untouched, but they certainly devalue its here and now. And although this can apply not only to the work of art but, for example, to a landscape moving past the spectator in a film, in the work of art this process touches on a highly sensitive

core that no natural object exhibits in this manner. That core is its authenticity...Admittedly, it is only the historical testimony that is jeopardized; yet what is really jeopardized thereby is the authority of the thing, the weight it derives from tradition" ("Work of Art," 14).

"One might summarize these aspects of the artwork in the concept of the aura, and say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. This process is symptomatic; its significance extends far beyond the realm of art. It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating that which has been reproduced many times over, the technology of reproduction substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence" ("Work of Art," 14).

"Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their perception...And if changes in the medium of present-day perception can be understood as a decay of the aura, it is possible to demonstrate the social determinants of that decay" ("Work of Art," 15).

"What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye while resting on a summer afternoon a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch. In the light of this definition, it is easy to grasp the particular social determination of the aura's present decay. It rests on two circumstances, both intimately linked to the increasing spread and intensity of the mass movements. Namely: the desire of the present-day masses to "bring things closer" and their equally passionate concern, the tendency to overcome the uniqueness of every reality through its reproducibility" ("Work of Art," 15-16).

"The shelling of the object from its hull, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose "sense for sameness in the world" (Joh[annes] V Jensen) has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique" ("Work of Art," 16).

"The representation of human beings by means of an apparatus has made possible a highly productive use of the human being's self-alienation" ("Work of Art," 23).

"If the distinctive feature of the images that rise from the *mémoire inlvolontaire* is seen in their aura, then photography is decisively implicated in the phenomenon of the 'decline of the aura.' What was inevitably felt to be inhuman, one might even say deadly, in daguerreotypy was the (prolonged) looking into the camera, since the camera records our likeness without returning our gaze. But looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met (which, in the case of thought processes, can apply equally to the look of the eye of the mind and to a glance pure and simple), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent. "Perceptibility," as Novalis puts it, "is a kind of attentiveness." The perceptibility he has in mind is none other than that of the aura.

Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*. (These data, incidentally, are unique: they are lost to the memory that seeks to retain them. Thus they lend support to a concept of the aura that comprises the 'unique manifestation of a distance')" ("Baudelaire," 188).

"Valéry's characterization of perception in dreams as aural is akin to this and, by virtue of its objective orientation, reaches further. 'To say, 'Here I see such and such an object' does not establish an equation between me and the object...In dreams, however, there is an equation. The things I see, see me just as much as I see them' ("Baudelaire," 188-189).

"This endowment is a wellspring of poetry. Wherever a human being, an animal, or an inanimate object thus endowed by the poet lifts up its eyes, it draws him into the distance. The gaze of nature thus awakened dreams and pulls the poet after its dream. Words, too, can have an aura of their own. This is how Karl Kraus described it: 'The closer the look one takes at a word, the greater the distance from which it looks back'" ("Baudelaire," 199).

"A decisive value is to be accorded Baudelaire's efforts to capture the gaze in which the magic of distance is extinguished. (Compare 'L'Amour du mensonge'). Relevant here: my definition of the aura as the aura of distance opened up with the look that awakens in an object perceived" (*AP* [J47,6], 314).

"For the decline of the aura, One thing within the realm of mass production is of overriding importance: the massive reproduction of the image" (*AP* [J60a,4], 337).

"Trace and aura. The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us" (*AP* [M16a,4], 447).

"Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modem technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology. Of course, initially the technologically new seems nothing more than that. But in the very next childhood memory, its traits are already altered. Every childhood achieves something great and irreplaceable for humanity. By the interest it takes in technological phenomena, by the curiosity it displays before any sort of invention or machinery, every childhood binds the accomplishments of technology to the old worlds of symbol. There is nothing in the realm of nature that from the outset would be exempt from such a bond. Only, it takes form not in the aura of novelty but in the aura of the habitual. In memory, childhood, and dream. Awakening" (*AP* [N2a, 1], 461).