Creating dramaturgies in the posthuman predicament

The provoking case of Julian Hetzel’s performance making

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*Devoted to all the present and future posthumans, including my beloved parents and sisters,*

*my caring boyfriend,*

*and my insightful academic supervisor.*

*Abstract*

This thesis explores the posthuman notion as a concept for reading, interpreting, and making contemporary dramaturgies in a world that is privileged by enormous technological advancements on the one hand, and hit by a significant number of crises on the other. The posthuman condition becomes more precisely the posthuman predicament, in which the notion of the human is questionable and the urgency for new ethics is stronger than ever. Within this context, performance making, hybridized by technological means, appears to be evolutionary and proves its efficacy in an era dominated by digital technologies.

The posthuman condition is illustrated based on academic literature and examples from arts, science fiction films, and computer games. It explores how different “posthuman” opinions oscillate between elation and awe, hope and despair, expectation and fear, while the main urgency is to re-compose failed social, political, and philosophical systems. Although the posthuman turn is enormous, the research focuses specifically on the re-position of the human being within the posthuman condition. The final purpose is to create a map of posthuman beliefs that can become a useful dramaturgical tool.

In order to use the map and demonstrate its results, the research analyzes a performance. In particular, the thesis focuses on Julian Hetzel, a contemporary theatre and performance maker, who is interested in creating provocative performances that can irritate, shock, and satirize not only the political and social systems but also art itself. The main performance that is examined as a case study is *The Automated Sniper*, in which the binary systems of composition and destruction, gaming and war, shooting and creating illustrate the posthuman predicament.

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# Introduction

“The human never was a universal or a neutral term to begin with.”

(Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 2013)

This thesis explores the posthuman notion philosophically and critically in order to create a posthuman map that can become a dramaturgical tool for making and interpreting posthuman dramaturgies. The exploration begins with the hypothesis that our world is in a posthuman condition. This world is a multifaceted environment of extreme contradictions in which the notion of the human being appears to be questionable and problematic. Contemporary philosophers, including Rosi Braidotti, give to this era the name “Anthropocene” which means “an age when the Earth’s ecological balance is directly regulated by humanity” (Braidotti 2013, 79). In this multilayered place, some people pay for In vitro fertilization, while other people are executed by drones. Parts of this world are wealthy, safe and clean whereas other regions suffer from overexploitation, deforestation and chemical pollution. Within such a contradictory environment, scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements, praised by Transhumanism, collide with the urgency for new ethics and affirmative practices demanded by Posthumanism. As a result of such a major philosophical debate, together with a long tradition of dystopian narratives developed in the 20th and 21st centuries, a sense of fear and anxiety towards the future emerges. What does it mean to be human today and what can we become in the future? Katherine Hayles clarifies that the posthuman “does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead to the end of a certain conception of the human” (Hayles 1999, 286). However, for now it seems that the human being is confused, trapped in a process of becoming. Overwhelmed by a huge amount of information, knowledge, theories, and critiques on everything new emerges, people lack space for contemplation. We need, perhaps more than ever before, to think not only about the future, but also about the past and the present.

In this world everything that happens is interconnected and includes each of us. We are the “creators” of the Anthropocene, whether we consider ourselves as human creatures or not. We must think collectively in order to re-compose what appears to be problematic and in many cases, even catastrophic. For this reason, we need a common space. As a visual artist, I support that art in general has the capacity to illustrate a global problem. However, as a theatre and performance theoretician, I strongly believe that in order to deal with global problems, we have to reflect on things collectively. We need a shared space, and performances can provide it to us. Thus, in this research, I aim to locate the posthuman philosophy in the performance space for a very specific reason: to reflect on the re-definition, advancement and survival of the human being in the posthuman condition.

Mapping the posthuman turn is a challenging process. It entails the collection of an enormous amount of knowledge and philosophical, critical and cultural insights, including different principles, values, critiques and objections. I must admit that I begin this map as a dramaturg but I leave it open for further modification in the future. For now, I intend to locate only three beliefs regarding the position of the human being in the posthuman condition.

## Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper is divided into three chapters with sub-chapters. In the first chapter, the purpose is to examine what does the “posthuman” mean and how does this notion relate to the human being? The research is conducted through a combination of academic literature, focusing on the visions and goals of Posthumanism and Transhumanism, and empirical research, exploring the posthuman notion as it appears in different types of culture, including photography, science-fiction cinema, and computer games. In particular, the research follows three, sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory, beliefs. The first one, derives from Rosi Braidotti’s illustration of the posthuman condition, and relates to the urgency of re-composition of the human being in the contemporary world. To examine the human being from this perspective, I use two books by Rosi Braidotti: *The Posthuman* (2013) and *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019) and the book *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019) by Francesca Ferrando. The second belief, supporting the idea human enhancement, is based on Nick Bostrom studies and, in particular, his essay “Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up” (Bostrom 2008, 107-137). The third belief derives from a summary of scholars who express their suspicion towards science and technology. It can be found in dystopian, post-apocalyptic films and computer games. To talk about this belief, I use Braidotti's terminology and insights.

In the second chapter, the focus is on posthuman dramaturgies. In particular, I use the knowledge of the previous chapter and create a posthuman map that can be used as a dramaturgical tool to interpret and create posthuman dramaturgies. By using academic literature, I clarify useful terms such as “posthuman dramaturgy,” “cyborg” or “hybrid” in order to prepare the ground for the analysis of my case study.

In the third chapter, the main method is dramaturgical analysis. In particular, the research uses Julian Hetzel's performance *The Automated Sniper* (2017) as a paradigm of posthuman dramaturgies. The aim is to examine how the creator challenges the human being within the “hypothetically” posthuman environment of the performance. The analysis is conducted with the usage of the posthuman map, created in the previous chapter.

To conclude, the thesis aims to answer the following research question: Ηow do posthuman dramaturgies question the position of the human being in the contemporary world?

In order to have a clear structure, the research poses the following sub-questions:

-What does posthuman mean today?

-How does this notion relate to the contemporary human being?

-How can a performance maker create or a scholar/spectator identify posthuman dramaturgies that challenge the position of the human being?

# Chapter I

# Exploring the Posthuman

## Introduction to the chapter

“Posthuman” is a complex word that consists of the prefix “post,” which basically means “after,” and the word “human.” The combination of the two may suggest the human being in a revised or altered version. It may also suggest a condition or a situation in which the notion of what is human has been challenged. Today, the “posthuman” concept, whether it refers to the posthuman as a being or the posthuman as a condition, constitutes a debatable topic in many contemporary philosophical, critical, and cultural discussions. Who are we now, and what can we become? These questions are at the core of any posthuman exploration. Keeping in mind the above, it is significant -not to say crucial- to acknowledge that the posthuman is an open notion that includes many perspectives from which the human might be examined and positioned. For this reason, I have to clarify which specific perspectives the thesis will examine. Hence, in the next subchapters, the posthuman notion will be explored and discussed as a condition from three main perspectives. The target is to create a posthuman map, a navigator that will present the human position in the contemporary posthuman world.

To begin with, the posthuman notion will be placed in the centre of a debate developing between Posthumanism and Transhumanism. Although both schools investigate the re-definition and re-composition of the human as a being and notion in the world, they disagree whether human beings are already posthuman beings or not. In particular, according to Posthumanism, we can become posthumans even now, in the present. For example, in the specific case of Francesca Ferrando’s *Philosophical Posthumanism*:

[…] in order to become posthuman, we need to reflect on our location in this material, dynamic, and responsive process, that is, existence. In so doing, a key move is becoming aware of our implicit and explicit biases and privileges, as they can only limit our existential perception. To reaccess our location as open networks requires undergoing a radical deconstruction of closed identities, including the human identity (Ferrando 2019, 185).

On the other hand, Transhumanism supports the idea of human enhancement. Ferrando defines human enhancement as “the attempt to overcome the biological limitations of the human body, and to challenge the borders of what the human species has historically been considered capable of, for instance, on a cognitive and physical level” (Ferrando 2019, 133). Becoming a posthuman for transhumanists, means becoming cognitive, healthy and emotionally stable. For Nick Bostrom this can be achieved through the usage of advanced technology. As a third perspective, I distinguish the posthuman fear and anxiety. This category includes scholars, philosophers, and artists who express their concerns about the posthuman future. Some of them are problematic, whereas some others are reasonable. In any case, posthuman fear and anxiety come as a series of critiques that it would be mistaken to overlook. To summarize the main points and eventually illustrate the posthuman condition, the chapter will explore each perspective separately.

## The posthuman becomes a predicament

The term “posthuman” appears to be an “umbrella term” (Ferrando 2019, 1) that includes many philosophical and critical schools of thought studying the position of the human being in the contemporary world. A clear and concise academic terminology is given by Francesca Ferrando, who says that:

“Posthuman” has become a key concept in the contemporary academic debate, to cope with the urgency for an integral redefinition of the notion of the human, following the onto-epistemological, as well as scientific and bio-technological developments, of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Ferrando 2019, 1).

“Post-humanism” in particular, as Ferrando defines it, “implies the understanding of the plurality of the human experience; the human is not recognized as one but as many, that is, human(s)—thus undermining the humanist tradition based on a generalized and universalized approach to the human” (Ferrando 2019, 54). The demand for a multi-perspective approach to the human notion is also the subject of Rosi Braidotti’s academic, philosophical explorations. As a posthumanist searching for affirmative practices, Braidotti elaborates the posthuman as a predicament that our world is currently facing and defines it “as the convergence of posthumanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other, within an economy of advanced capitalism” (Braidotti 2019, 8). At this point it is useful to add Ferrando’s clarification regarding post-anthropocentrism:

If post-humanism can be seen as the pluralistic symphony of the human voices who had been silenced in the historical developments of the notion of “humanity,” post-anthropocentrism adds to this concert the nonhuman voices, or better, their silencing amid what is currently defined as the sixth mass extinction—the ongoing extinction of species caused, directly or indirectly, by human actions (cf. Wake and Vredenburg 2008; Ferrando 2019, 103).

Braidotti’s starting point in her argument against European Humanism, is the notion of ‘Man’, “expressed by Protagoras as ‘the measure of all things’, and represented in Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*” (Braidotti 2013, 13). As she notably explains, this paradigm “implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism” (Braidotti 2013, 13).As a result:

[…] Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as ‘others.’ These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others (Braidotti 2013, 15).

In this sense, whereas Humanism gives people a precise depiction of what a human should be, Posthumanism reveals and supports the existence of multiple humans. If the idea of the human, derived from Humanism, will be demolished and the binary systems that divide life forms into superior and inferior, will collapse, then we as alive beings and inhabitants of this planet will enter the posthuman world. As a result, the posthuman predicament “in both the post-humanist and the post-anthropocentric sense of the term, drives home the idea that the activity of thinking needs to be experimental and even transgressive in combining critique with creativity” (Braidotti 2013, 104).

Far from simply being an advanced human being or a post-survivor in a linear historical understanding, the posthuman is an inhabitant of space in transition, in which contradictions are strongly recognized and require affirmative solutions. The human is dealing with a difficult situation named the posthuman predicament. Thus, the main belief derived from this is that the human being has to be re-defined.

## The posthuman in the context of Transhumanism

Transhumanists can be considered as ambitions scientists, dangerous minds and greedy entrepreneurs. However, to be a transhumanist can also mean to be a dreamer, craving to touch the sky, thinking of immortality, hoping to create a world without pain, misery or sadness. Transhumanists do not have bad intentions. They envision a utopia on Earth, although it is debatable whether this utopia will be accessible for everyone or not.

In contrast with Rosi Braidotti’s Posthumanism that rejects the human ideal of Vitruvian Man, Transhumanism, as Nick Bostrom claims, has its roots in European Humanism (Bostrom 2005, 1-30). Whereas Posthumanism calls for re-definition and decentralization of the human being, Transhumanism has a specific vision for the future. Bostrom explains that Transhumanism “promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology. Attention is given to both present technologies, like genetic engineering and information technology, and anticipated future ones, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence” (Bostrom 2003, 493-506).

In the essay “Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up,” Bostrom presents a more concrete picture of the posthuman and defines it as a being that has at least one posthuman general central capacity (Bostrom 2008, 107-137). In his essay he refers to three central capacities. The first one is “healthspan – the capacity to remain fully healthy, active, and productive, both mentally and physically.” The second one is “cognition – general intellectual capacities, such as memory, deductive and analogical reasoning, and attention, as well as special faculties such as the capacity to understand and appreciate music, humor, eroticism, narration, spirituality, mathematics, etc.” And the last one is “emotion – the capacity to enjoy life and to respond with appropriate affect to life situations and other people” (Bostrom 2008, 107-137).

There is no doubt that Bostrom’s vision about the future human being is impressive. However, it leaves the following question on the table: If according to Bostrom, we are not posthuman yet, then what is the human being nowadays? There is no doubt that the modified by science and technology, human beings, have already transcended many vulnerabilities of their human body. The intersection between human bodies and technology is a prominent practice of the 20th and 21st centuries. This era can be considered as an era of hybridization in which processes of becoming are not only beneficial or optional but also inevitable. Being a hybrid does not necessarily mean being half-human, half-robot or half-human, half-spider as it is generally depicted in popular culture (cinema, comic books, etc.) I suggest to use the word hybrid as it is simply defined in Cambridge Dictionary: something that is a mixture of two very different things (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.). Within the context of Transhumanism, a hybrid can be a transhumanist. It is a being that is not a posthuman yet, and simultaneously, is not a human anymore. Newton Lee argues our transhumanist nature in a very explicit manner:

Have you ever taken vitamins, antibiotics, vaccinations, or (for women) birth control pills? Yes indeed, everyone is using science and technology to enhance or to alter our body chemistry in order to stay healthy and be more in control of our lives. We are all transhumanists to varying degrees (Lee 2019, 5).

Although the crucial question of “otherness” posited by Rosi Braidotti in the previous subchapter remains, it is hard to overlook that Bostrom’s vision for the future comprises a technological utopia that promises to be beneficial for everyone. The core value of such a technological utopia is to have the opportunity to explore the transhuman and posthuman realms. Within this frame, several significant derivative values emerge. Those are, among others, peace, international cooperation, anti-proliferation of WMDs, and diversity (see Picture 2: Table of Transhumanist Values).[[1]](#footnote-2)

By using the theories of Nick Bostrom, this subchapter clarifies the definition of the posthuman being according to Transhumanism. It occurs that the posthuman being is a future vision. What is at stake for transhumanists in the present is the further development of technology and science. Technological and scientific progress is the only way to treat human weaknesses. As a result, transhumanist's urgency appears to be the following: the human being has to be updated.

**TABLE OF TRANSHMANIST VALUES**

*Core Value*

* Having the opportunity to explore the transhuman and posthuman realms

*Basic Conditions*

* Global security
* Technological progress
* Wide access

*Derivative Values*

* Nothing wrong about “tampering with nature”; the idea of *hubris* rejected
* Individual choice in use of enhancement technologies; morphological freedom
* Peace, international cooperation, anti-proliferation of WMDs
* Improving understanding (encouraging research and public debate; critical thinking; open-mindedness, scientific inquiry; open discussion of the future)
* Getting smarter (individually; collectively; and develop machine intelligence)
* Philosophical fallibilism; willingness to reexamine assumptions as we go along
* Pragmatism; engineering- and entrepreneur-spirit; science
* Diversity (species, races, religious creeds, sexual orientations, life styles, etc.)
* Caring about the well-being of all sentience
* Saving lives (life-extension, anti-aging research, and cryonic

Picture 1: Table of Transhumanist Values

## Posthuman Fear and Anxiety

The previous subchapters examined the notion of the posthuman through particular perspectives coming from Posthumanism based mainly on Rosi Braidotti’s and Francesca Ferrando's academic work and Transhumanism expressed by Nick Bostrom. As a result, two main beliefs regarding the human being within the posthuman condition have been illustrated. The first belief is that the human being has to be re-defined. The second is that the human being has to be updated. Although having their differences, both beliefs will be located in the posthuman condition. This subchapter however, focuses on fear and anxiety as dominant emotions in the posthuman condition. Those emotions are positioned as contradictory to the sense of hope derived from the idea of re-composition and the transhumanist enthusiasm and expectation regarding technological potential.

Thinking of a world in a posthuman condition, means dealing with controversial feelings. While Ferrando calls for “a radical deconstruction of closed identities” (Ferrando 2019, 185) and Braidotti assures that “the posthuman predicament enforces the necessity to think again and to think harder about the status of the human” (Braidotti 2013, 186), the sense of fear which appears to be dominant in the posthuman condition, prevents any kind of critical thinking. How does this happen?

“The scholarship of anxiety,” a term used by Braidotti in her lecture about “Posthuman Knowledge” at Harvard University (Youtube 2019) comprises a list of philosophers, scholars and thinkers who express suspicion and fear regarding the emerging technologies in our contemporary world. An example of such scholar could be the professor of ethics, Nicholas Agar, who, in his argument against Bostrom’s radical enhancement, supports that becoming a posthuman “may threaten valuable experiences of humans” (Agar 2010, 19). However, the predictions of an ominous future resulted from the usage of radical technology have been conducted years before Bostrom's essays. In fact, a significant number of academics, philosophers, and scholars argue the consequences of technological development in a very reasonable manner.

In 2002, Francis Fukuyama, in his book *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, remarks that soon “we are going to face issues about embryo selection and the degree to which all medical technologies can be used for enhancement rather than therapeutic purposes” (Fukuyama 2002, 19). Despite the fact that Bostrom’s vision promises immortality, technological practices of life and death control in medicine appear to be reasonably frightening. Let us connect Fukuyama’s prediction with a particular artwork project that raises questions regarding the usage of advanced medicine. In *Radical Beauty Project* (Radical Beauty Project n.d.) a series of photographs shot by art photographers, and created by creative director and choreographer Daniel Vais, the discussion about the consequences of advanced medicine, emerges from the paradigm of the people with Down Syndrome. All the photographs depict models with Down Syndrome. As Sirin Kale points out in a relevant article “this isn’t some uplifting charity coffee-table tome: creative director Daniel Vais wants to make high art. Which means the images are provocative, unsettling and, at times, difficult” (The Guardian 2019). She continues by explaining that:

Vais’s work may have a more enduring purpose: to document a community of people who could one day no longer exist: 90% of British people choose to terminate pregnancies when they find out the child has Down’s syndrome. And the methods by which we screen for Down’s syndrome have become more sophisticated. Since 2018, non-invasive blood tests have been offered on the NHS (The Guardian 2019).

Nowadays, technological tools used in medicine can provide detailed information about the fetus of a pregnant woman. By using the new equipment, doctors can define whether the future baby will be born healthy or not. The infants born after such selection are already involved in a “non-natural” practice. They come to this world after passing an unofficial exam. Such selection, aiming at the birth of healthy and self-sufficient babies, could be considered a method to enhance the human race, and thus, it can be a transhumanist method. From this perspective, this practice reflects exactly what Fukuyama has said about human enhancement. Moreover, it could resonate Nazi racial health policies (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum n.d.). Practicing the selection of infants that meet certain requirements, including not having Down Syndrome, means accepting a universal ideal compared to which anything else is not worth living. As we can see, the intervention of advanced technology in life processes can contribute to the birth of healthier and self-sufficient species. But on the other hand, it can perpetuate the idea of a specific human prototype. If such technologies would further develop, the selection will become narrower. More precisely, those practices can lead to the complete extinction not only of a particular group of people but also of the notion of diversity in general.

Abortions of fetuses diagnosed with Down Syndrome comprise a reality happening within the posthuman condition. Based on the above, extinction is a highly possible scenario for people with Down Syndrome. In this sense, their small community has the right to be concerned about the future. Hence, how can we deal with such questions of fear? A solution may come from the perspective of critical Posthumanism discussed in the previous subchapter. The models in *Radical Beauty Project* can be considered as posthumans because they do not reflect the ideal of Humanism. They belong to the marginalized “others” and their position in the world should be re-defined.



Picture 2: *Radical Beauty Project*

*Radical Beauty Project* is a good example of how art can address fear as an emotion provoked by the posthuman condition. Moreover, it is a good example to prove the urgency of human re-definition from the perspective of critical and philosophical Posthumanism.

As it was observed in Fukuyama's case, the scholarship of anxiety might be sound reasonable. However, this does not mean that Fukuyama raises concerns about all the forms of life. The scholarship of anxiety, together with examples from popular culture such as science-fiction/dystopian literature, create an enormous tradition of awe, suspicion, and fear about the future. Fear and anxiety seem to be appealing, especially within popular culture. We can think of a great number of Hollywood post-apocalyptic productions and futuristic computer games to illustrate this. Films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004),*Children of Men* (2006)**,** *I Am Legend* (2007), *The Road* (2009),*Snowpiercer* (2013) narrate great disasters in which humanity fights to survive. Moreover, computer games such as *Destiny* (2014), *Dying Light* (2015), *Mad Max* (2015), *Mutant Year Zero: Road to Eden* (2018) intensify the experience of survival in post-apocalyptic circumstances. As Braidotti aptly remarks “there is money in extinction” (Youtube 2019).This enormous tradition, mainly developed within the western culture, appears to be highly problematic because it concerns exclusively about the human race in an era when first, the human as a notion is questionable and second, other species struggle to survive. What kinds of human this does tradition include? It suffices to highlight that in most cases the Apocalypse begins from the United States. Moreover, this tradition reproduces the depiction of an ominous future that blurs the mind and confuses its audiences. How can a viewer of such a film, or a gamer of such a game remain neutral, after such an explosion of horrific predictions for the future?

It has to be clarified however, that this subchapter does not aim to argue against post-apocalyptic films or computer games. What is at stake now is to observe the topic of fear and anxiety from diverse examples and place it in the posthuman condition. Since fear and anxiety are very popular in cinema, television and digital media, it is difficult to overlook their impact on contemporary audiences. Fear and anxiety are primary connected with the concept of extinction. As a consequence, questions such as “what have we become?” or “What have we done as humans to deserve such a future?” come to the fore. Fear and anxiety comprise a huge part on the posthuman map. Within the posthuman condition, fear and anxiety produce to the following belief: The human being has to survive.

## Conclusion: Three main beliefs regarding the posthuman condition

As a result of the research presented above, it occurred that the posthuman condition illustrated in this thesis consists of the following beliefs:

1. The human being has to be re-defined and re-composed. The notion of human is troublesome. It is build based on a specific ideal, coming from European Humanism. It cannot be neutral or universal. We need new terminology and, most importantly, we need to accept complexity, diversity and multiple perspectives.
2. The human being has to be updated. The human body is weak, painful and mortal. It imposes restrictions to the human potentiality. For now, the human body can be enhanced by technology. Humanity should celebrate the technological and scientific achievements because they increase the quality of life in many ways. There are several negative aspects of technology as well, but we can work to overcome them. In the future, when nanotechnology will reach its peak, the human being will become posthuman; a completely healthy, super-intelligent and emotionally stable being. For now, we can praise technology and work towards a promising future.
3. The human being has to survive. Within the context of Posthumanism and Transhumanism, dystopian stories seem to thrive. They occur in popular culture and present a series of post-apocalyptic scenarios in which the human being is a survivor. Dystopian stories do not give practical solutions. But their presence in the posthuman condition is important. Those stories provoking fear and anxiety, motivate thinkers to find solutions. Artists seem to be among those thinkers.

Those three beliefs comprise the posthuman map which can become the dramaturgical posthuman compass for both performance makers and spectators/participants/scholars. The next chapter aims to explain how can a performance maker, a dramaturg, a scholar or a spectator use this compass in order to create or interpret a posthuman dramaturgy.

# Chapter II

# Exploring posthuman dramaturgies

## Introduction to the chapter

In the previous chapter, I concluded that the three main beliefs regarding the position of the human being in the posthuman condition or predicament (to use Braidotti’s terminology) are:

1. The human being has to be re-defined.
2. The human being has to be updated.
3. The human being has to survive.

Since the posthuman turn is a field in the expansion (Youtube 2015), we can expect many assumptions, insights, and conclusions regarding the posthuman condition in the future. Thus, it is indispensable to stress that apart from these beliefs, there could be multiple others. The purpose of selecting specifically those three was to create a map that presents the human being as a subject of exploration, re-composition, and agony within the posthuman predicament. This map aims to interpret and navigate the maker, the dramaturg, the scholar, the viewer and the reader in dealing with a posthuman dramaturgy. By dealing I mean both creating a posthuman dramaturgy and interpreting a dramaturgy as posthuman. However, this map cannot be considered as universal. On the contrary, it aims to provoke critical discussion and reflection. To be more precise, this map is a tool open to deviation, modification, and further extension. In the third chapter, I will apply the posthuman map in *The Automated Sniper*, a performance by Julian Hetzel. Before proceeding however, to the analysis of *The Automated Sniper*, I would like to make some last clarifications regarding the usage of the term dramaturgy, the specific case of the posthuman dramaturgy and the identities of the human beings participating in the case study.

## What does it mean dramaturgy?

Since the term “dramaturgy” can be used in many different ways, it important to clarify how it will be used in this particular analysis. Dramaturgy, as Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt have already pointed out, is a slippery term. To better illustrate this, the authors quote Marianne Van Kerkhoven:

It appeared… that dramaturgy involves everything, is to be found in everything, and is hard to pin down. Is it only possible to think of dramaturgy in terms of spoken theatre, or is there a dramaturgy for movement, sound, light and so on, as well? Is dramaturgy the thing that connects all the various elements of a play together? Or is it, rather, the ceaseless dialogue between people who are working on a play together? Or is it about the soul, the internal structure, of a production? Or does dramaturgy determine the way space and time are handled in a performance, and so the context and the audience too? We can probably answer all of these questions with ‘Yes, but…’ (Kerkhoven 1994, 8-10; Turner & Behrndt 2016, 21)

Further Turner and Behrndt point out that “although dictionaries, and encyclopedias offer apparently clear explanations, these are insufficient to address the multiple and complex uses of the word, which has, in contemporary theory and practice, become an altogether flexible, fluid, encompassing and expanded term” (Turner & Behrndt 2016, 21). Keeping in mind the above, I propose using the term dramaturgy openly. To be more precise, I define dramaturgy as the summary of philosophical, critical, and cultural research that is needed to elaborate the concept of a performance in combination with the organizing of the onstage performance practices, the choreography and the scenography. I also support the definition of dramaturgy as the summary of “ideas developed by chance, from 'mistakes', detours and free associations” (Turner & Behrndt 2016, 180).

In other words, I use the word dramaturgy as a term that includes everything that can contribute to making performances. In the third chapter, I will explore a very specific type of dramaturgy. I define it as posthuman dramaturgy. The target is to explore the possibility of an already applied posthuman dramaturgy in order to observe how it can work and how it challenges the position of the human being in the posthuman condition.

## Dramaturgies become “posthuman”

A posthuman dramaturgy in performances can be any practice that challenges the notion of the human body through a process of re-definition, re-composition or updating. It can work as a narrative (including metaphors) and a practice. It also can become an experience for both performers and spectators.

As a summary of practices in the posthuman condition, a posthuman dramaturgy can entail interaction with technology. Revealing the technological apparatuses to the audience and positioning them as equal to the human body is a prominent practice of such dramaturgy. We will see further how the machine in *The Automated Sniper* becomes a separate figure in the performance. If the posthuman condition questions the position of the human being, then a dramaturgy that follows the posthuman philosophy should do the same. As a result, the identity of the questionable body remains blurred and can become superior, equated or undermined by the machine. A posthuman dramaturgy should leave all of these options on the table.

The posthuman, whether it is used by Posthumanism or Transhumanism, appears to be a notion that works towards the altering of the human being. In order to think critically about the processes of re-definition, enhancement and survival of the human being in the posthuman condition, I suggest that we need a space for collective shared experiences. Hence, an interactive potential space in which posthuman narratives and practices can be located, is needed. Between theatre and performance, this type of creative space fits better in the realm of performance. In *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Marvin Carlson pointed out that “performance” or “performance art” as a new genre in the art and theatre world, “placed its emphasis upon the present body instead of on the absent text of traditional theatre” (Carlson 1996, 83). Carlson was referring to the emergence of Performance Art in the 1970s. Today, the intertwinement of theatre, performance, technology, and communication systems, moved the aforementioned emphasis from the human body to the digital being. The present body expands its understanding through the interaction with different digital technologies, machines and computers. To speak from the perspective of Transhumanism, technology in performance, as in any other field nowadays, enhances physical body’s skills and potentiality.

In “Mapping Posthuman” Ralf Remshardt claims that the term “posthumanism” can become an “interpretive matrix that resonates constructively with the multiplicity of intermedial performances and allows for a liberatory sensibility that can serve to reimagine the body, spectation, and performance” (Remshardt 2010, 135). As posthuman dramaturgies, I also define the summary of narratives and practices that can contribute in the self-realization and provoke reflection regarding the urgency of re-definition of our “human” self. Tools in this dramaturgy could be the technological means that can challenge the physical body and involve spectators in a process of hybridization and digitalization of the body.

Another point that I would like to remark, is the distinction of the spectator and the experiencer. Posthuman dramaturgies search for practices that can provoke rethinking. It was already said that this could be achieved through experience. In this sense, the spectator should become an experiencer. The notion of experiencer according to Robin Nelson “suggests a more immersive engagement in which the principles of composition of the piece create an environment designed to elicit a broadly visceral, sensual encounter, as distinct from conventional theatrical, concert or art gallery architectures which are constructed to draw primarily upon one of the sense organs – eyes (spectator) or ears (audience)” (Nelson 2010, 45). An experiencer becomes part of the performance space, whether it is physical or digital. In fact, both performers and spectators, experience the situation of being parts of a system. As a result, the boundaries between technological means and the experiencer’s body are blurred. A re-composition of the human body has been achieved.

I must clarify, I do not claim that the posthuman dramaturgies will explain the current human identities. Nor do I believe that this should be their target. However, they can and should contribute to the critical thinking of the participants. Both performers and spectators should have the opportunity to experience the multiple identities they can obtain in the posthuman condition. This is what I define as an effective posthuman practice of re-definition or in other words, a posthuman dramaturgy.

## Let’s assume that in the posthuman condition we are not humans anymore

Having the posthuman map as the main tool for dramaturgical analysis, we should agree, from the very beginning, that this performance has been created in and by a world that is in the posthuman condition. According to the map, when we enter the performance space, we as inhabitants of this world are the questionable human beings. We oscillate among the urgencies of re-composition, updating and survival. Hence, let’s agree for the sake of this particular “posthuman” examination that the creators, performers, spectators or participants[[2]](#footnote-3) of this performance are already more than or other than humans when the performance starts. Who are they? According to Posthumanism (the first belief on the map) they can be posthumans. They are involved in a process of becoming (Braidotti 2019). They also can be cyborgs. As Donna Haraway manifests “a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 1991, 149). From the perspective of Transhumanism, they are advanced humans. They enter the performance space as human beings that have already been involved with technology previously. It suffices to think that almost everyone in this space has a smartphone, and thus, people in this performance are familiar with practices of digital extension of the body, even if they do not realise it. As a result, they can be transhumanists. In agreement with the third belief, they are all inhabitants of a world that is dying. They are no humans anymore because technology and science has altered, not to say violated, their nature. They are dealing with climate change and ecological disasters. They live in a world that is dying because of a series of previous mistakes made by them. They are almost survivors, struggling to become humans again or accepting their fate.

To summarize, human beings entering *The Automated Sniper* are between utopian dreams and dystopian scenarios. They oscillate between their biological and advanced or altered bodies. The question is, whether they recognize it or not. And if they do, how are they coping with such situation? Posthuman dramaturgies can help in this situation as we will see further.

# Chapter III

# Identifying posthuman dramaturgies in *The Automated Sniper*

## Welcome to The Automated Sniper

In *The Automated Sniper*, we experiment and play; build and destroy; kill and create. The following analysis is a creative deconstruction, proposing to perceive the space, the systems, and most importantly, the people of the performance in accordance with the posthuman map, made in the previous chapter. Let us redefine ourselves through art and art through us.

*The Automated Sniper,* created by Julian Hetzel and premiered on the 8th of March, 2017, is, according to the description posted on Hetzel’s website, “a performative installation on militainment and warfare that explores the oscillating relation between the virtual and the real” (Studio Julian Hetzel 2017). Though performed in Frascati Theater in Amsterdam, *The Automated Sniper* expands its performing space through the digital systems and ends up in Iraq. The performance is a good example of the unlimited dimensions the human body may obtain in a contemporary performance space.



Picture 3: The white box in *The Automated Sniper*

The space in *The Automated Sniper* comprises many layers. In the beginning, the separation of performers and spectators is quite conventional: there is a dark flat space for the performative installation and an auditorium in front of it. Rather than choosing a gallery, a museum, or another, perhaps, more “intriguing” space, Julian Hetzel prefers to locate his performance in a theatre. Ironically, one may think that for the performance spectators of the 21st century, trained to any art “peculiarities,” unusual settings and alternative spaces, simply sitting in the dark while waiting for the performance to be unfolding is quite innovative.

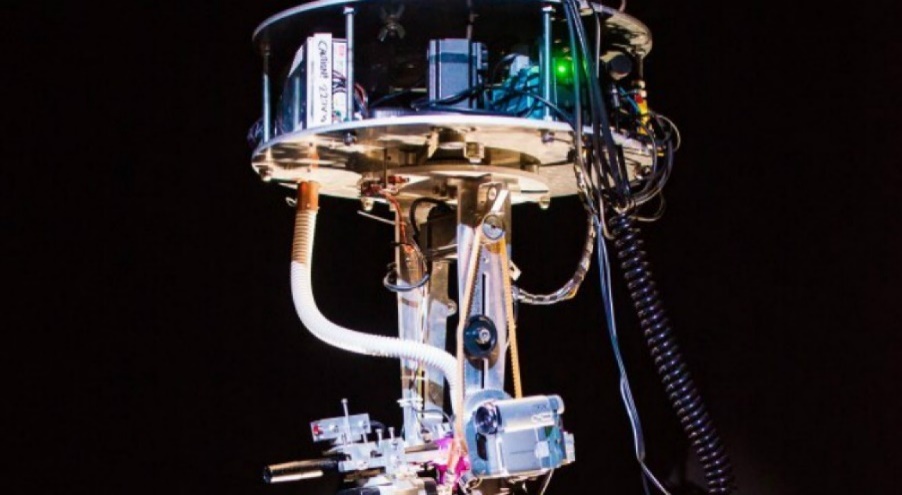
However, returning to theatre does not mean returning to obsolete ideas. *The Automated Sniper* begins with a remarkable visual contrast. A white open box has been placed slightly diagonally in the dark. Four ceiling lights illuminate the box. The spectators can distinguish different objects on its white floor: a metal box, a small bucket, pieces of fabric, foil, pipes, ropes, and other materials. The only sound they can hear is the discreet singing of some invisible birds, filling the space. Where are these birds? It seems that a discreet playing with the binary notion of absence and presence begins almost from the very first minutes of the performance. Aside from the objects, the white box “contains” two performers. They will remain enclosed within the box for the rest of the performance. Such reference to them is not pejorative but rather explanatory. If the aim is to analyze the performance following the posthuman map, the centralization of the human being should be avoided. For now, it suffices to say that the two performers are parts of a system; the performance system. Their positions are not determined. Therefore, the performer should be perceived not as a starting point but as *another* “component” interacting with the rest of the components, another material integrated into the whole of a construction. However, the following question remains: Who are those two men (if they identify themselves as men), and what is their purpose in the white box?

Let’s begin from facts. One of the performers, Bas van Rijnsoever is an actor who specialised in Physical theatre (New Heroes n.d.). The second, Claudio Rietfeld is an actor and musician (Academy of Theatre and Dance, Amsterdam University of the Arts n.d.). I am referring to them by their real names because they use those names in the performance. For practical reasons, in the next paragraphs, I will refer to them as Bas and Claudio.

Almost immediately the two performers appear to be engaged in a creative process. They start to explore and move the objects, cautiously combining different pieces, balancing them and eventually creating abstract sculptures. Bas van Rijnsoever creates the *Self Portrait*, whereas Claudio Rietfeld creates the *Monochrome still life* and the *Untitled*.

However, the whole construction seems to be fragile. It can collapse at any moment. In this sense, it can be considered a dramaturgical decision aiming to highlight the uncertainty of the posthuman condition. Hence the performance space can be fragile for two reasons: it implies destruction, and it promises re-composition. Soon, the spectators realize that the box has been transformed into an exhibition of three artworks. It could be a gallery, or a museum of contemporary art. The performers are notably explanatory regarding their work. They announce the title of each artwork, the materials they had used to create it, the name of the creator, and the year of making (which coincides with the year of the performance execution). On one hand they use their real names, which means that they appear in the performance as they are. On the other hand, they “pretend” to be visual artists. The borders between being an artist and performing to be an artist for the sake of *playing* are completely blurred. The bird singing starts to fade out when a gradually amplifying melody changes the atmosphere. It is the *Clair de Lune* by Claude Debussy. Suddenly the performers’ identities become more concrete. Bas, the creator of the *Self Portrait*, becomes a viewer, whereas Claudio remains an artist exhibiting his two artworks. The viewer looks very concentrated. He approaches each of the artworks very carefully. In parallel, a female voice welcomes the spectators. Nobody can see her but everyone can clearly hear her:

“Welcome to *The Automated Sniper*.”



Picture 4: The shooting device in *The Automated Sniper*

Her greetings inaugurate a more official start of the performance. In some way, this creates the impression that the performers had deviated from the original performance plan previously. Now they appear to be under the authority of the female voice. The voice introduces herself as the commander of the operations being performed in *The Automated Sniper*. These operations are parts of a game. The commander explains to the audience that they are going to be playing together. The voice belongs to Ana Wild. It is important to note that Ana Wild, as an artist beyond Hetzel’s performance, practices a type of art that is based on her physical absence. She describes herself as “an artist, a young girl, a graceful punk, a memorisation maven, interested in voice, in speaking, in words, in knowledge-structures, in anthropology, history, mythology, poetry, graphic design, electricity, in creation ex-nihlis, in musicality, learning, understanding, repetition, cyclicality, in Hebrew, English, French, Arabic, in translation, in print, in magic, in adventure, in friendship, in agency and in power” (Ana Wild n.d.).

When Wild intervenes in what happens in the white box, the performance obtains an intensive transhumanist feature. To be more precise, the performance reveals its most “transhumanist” figure. Ana Wild can become metaphorically the posthuman that Transhumanism envisions. Her mystery figure can invoke the imagination and present a way of existing in the future. Regarding the posthuman practice of making art, Ana Wild has already found a solution. She has decided to overcome her physical body and update herself. However, we certainly know that Wild did not upload her consciousness into a machine. Nor does she digitalized her body completely because such technology has not been invented yet. Thus, Ana Wild is not a posthuman. She can be however, the representation of a possible future posthuman and a present transhumanist. We can say that Hetzel gives “posthuman” space to Wild for applying her experimentations with the voice and the sounds within a performance space. As a figure appeared only through using her voice, it comprises a component that hybridized the physicality of the performance.

The commander in *The Automated Sniper*, resonates Scarlet Johansson’s performance in *Her,* a science fiction romance drama (IMDb 2013). In the film, the female voice of an operating system accompanies a depressed man in his personal struggles. While the plot of the movie is completely different from the context of *The Automated Sniper*, the idea of performing without using the physical body at all, is not just a way of acting but also an aesthetic position absolutely based on the intertwinement of the human with the machine. In Wild’s case, the invisible commander is not just a character to be performed in a specific performance. It is also the way Ana Wild decides to make performances in general, beyond the Hetzel’s production.

## Shooting games

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The commander gives a short speech in which she narrates the long history of playing as an act of interaction:

Since the early existence of mankind, we have been playing as a form of social interaction. Play contributes to a learning process. We play in order to exercise specific skills, or simply out of the desire to complete. Play is older than culture. Animals play just like men (Vimeo 2017).

She further expresses her excitement to present to the spectators the toy that they are going to use in the game. It is a remote-control paintball marker that aims at the stage, a robotic device made in Germany. The commander praises the machine, declaring it as a diamond. We can assume that the machine is a separate figure or a non-human character of the performance. It is also interesting to point out how affectionate the commander sounds when she describes the machine. As a possible transhumanist, she has many in common with the machine. They belong to the same group of “people.”

The white box transforms again. From a gallery, a place associated with high culture, silence, and sophisticated art lovers, it becomes a playground for shooting, painting, and discovering new forms. Meanwhile, the performers in the box are drinking champagne. The fact that the shooting machine targets the stage does not affect them. Their expressions continue to be neutral. It is time to test the shooting machine, or as the commander characterizes it, the “technological diamond.” The commander requests a volunteer from the audience. Soon the first volunteer appears, and the commander gives her directions to the gaming booth, a small room from which the participant can operate the shooting machine. The gaming booth is located out of the performers’ space. It is an extension of physical space which constitutes however, a space *between* the physical and the digital world. Apart from an operating room, it can be a laboratory for experimentation and transformation in which the human body extends its limitations.

Daniel Cermak-Sassenrath writes that “play means taking on a certain perspective. This perspective is the play spirit, a mood that the player willingly takes on and which simultaneously captivates him” (Cermak- Sassenrath 2015, 95). When we talk about shooting games, including the shooting machine in *The Automated Sniper*, we examine the gamers as shooters and thus, as potential murderers. Let's interpret this game following the posthuman map. The spectators who enter the gaming booth experience the extension of their bodies. They become experiencers. When they use the joystick in order to shoot, they can have an actual impact on stage. They can transfer or destroy the objects. They can hurt the performers. In this sense, they are extended physically. Within the safe gaming booth, they become invincible “transhuman” bodies because they can shoot without being shot. Moreover, they shoot the helpless performers who are strolling around on stage. The performance raises the question of making war by using drones. Therefore, it underlines the consequences of the contemporary technological progress. In this sense, the performance gives space to fear and anxiety, the emotions associated with the third belief on the posthuman map. The performance indicates a clear inequality between the ones who are privileged by technology (the shooting machine) and the ones who remain trapped, exposed and unarmed (the performers). How can human beings survive when such cruel technological practices take place? Except for fear and anxiety towards a future dominated by dangerous technologies, we can distinguish a posthuman concern as it was mainly expressed by Braidotti. The concern relates to the notion of “otherness” (Braidotti 2013, 15). The performance demonstrates that some people are safe, whereas others are condemned to be exposed and executed. The relationship between the ones who are hidden in the gaming booth and shoot the trapped in the box others, works as a metaphor for the relationship between the western and eastern populations of the world. If the shooters in the gaming booth are considered humans, then to be human means to be privileged. This is why posthumanists such as Braidotti insist that the human as a notion is highly problematic and we have to re-define it as soon as possible, together.

Nowadays, humanity is still divided. Regarding power, the world is divided to the ones who have advanced war equipment and the ones who do not. Putting the problematic of contemporary war in a white gallery with sophisticated people strolling pretentiously, is an attempt to violently strike the binary systems that privilege certain populations and exclude those others who cannot escape from their cruel reality. The privileged by technology hybrids may eventually achieve the perfection that Bostrom describes in his essay “Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up” (Bostrom 2008, 107-137) but, would it be an ethical achievement? Would it be accessible to everyone?

The shooting game can be examined through a more alternative posthuman perspective, however. We should not forget that a posthuman dramaturgy has to leave space for multiple perspectives. Thus, play in *The Automated Sniper* can also be an experimental process. It can develop imagination and contribute to new discoveries. Play can positively enhance our skills. It can reform both the body and the mind. When the spectators enter the gaming booth, they become, except for shooters, creators and creations. The connection established between the white box and the small booth allows the spectator to be visually and digitally present on stage, and at the same time to have a certain perspective of what is happening in the box. The usage of screens and cameras as tools for making dramaturgy in *The Automated Sniper*, is only a small example of an already established tradition. As Russell Fewster discusses:

Contemporary live performance of both scripted plays and devised practices, is increasingly influenced by screen cultures. Theatre now regularly incorporates digital media in the form of projection and television screens. As a consequence, theatrical presence is mediated, in part, by the intervention of the digital into the performance space (Fewster 2010, 63).

In the case of *The Automated Sniper*, when the volunteers sit in front of the camera, they extend their bodies to the digital space and their moving portrait appears on stage. The physical body of the participant and the technological equipment, including the shooting machine, are combined. Every spectator entering this room becomes an advanced *hybrid*, or to use Donna Haraway’s term, a cyborg. I am referring to them as advanced hybrids for the following reason. If we accept the posthuman condition as it has been discussed throughout this thesis, then we should accept that every human being entering the performance, was a hybrid from the very beginning.

Since the volunteer is visually exposed on the stage, the terms spectator, participant, or even experiencer cannot be sufficient anymore. Instead, the summary of all these terms seems to be more appropriate. Moreover, when the participant's projection appears in the white box, the performers start to observe it as a piece of art. The participant becomes another exhibit in the white box. Thus, the de-centralisation of the human being applies perfectly here. There is no one human identity. On the contrary, many identities can be possible. A performance that provides space for experiencing multiple identities can become a place for applying the re-composition of the human ideal. And of course, this relates to practices associated with the first belief of the posthuman map.

The analysis continues with the agreement that all of the participants are hybrids. However, not all of them are on the same side of the aforementioned toxic dualism. While the performance keeps unfolding, the spectators can see how Julian Hetzel transforms the curious or sometimes hesitant participants into potential shooters. Such dramaturgical strategy indeed may shock us to thought (van Alphen 2008, 20-30). Framing it as a game makes it less appalling but more provocative and satirical.



Picture 5: Becoming participant, experiencer, shooter, creator and creation in *The Automated Sniper*

## Creation and destruction: a satirical staging of posthuman contradictions

The game consists of several rounds. As a matter of fact, each round is different because each shooter is unique. However, during the rounds, the commander gives directions and thus, the shooters are not completely free. In the 2017 recording of the performance, the first volunteer was asked to draw with the shooting device a straight line in the box. Additionally, she was asked to make a self-portrait by aiming her own projection as it appeared in the box. After the completion of her tasks, the volunteer became spectator again and returned to her seat. The space between the shooting rounds is an intermedium art space for the performers. They observe carefully both of the spectator’s “artworks” on the walls and eventually, Claudio Rietfeld calls the one of them *Fragmented Love.* He presents the new artwork of the exhibition to the spectators while raising his glass filled with champagne like a true gentleman.

Once the first round is completed, Debussy’s song starts to play again and everything indicates that the concept of a gallery is re-established on stage. Ana Wild continues her hosting, whereas the two performers are strolling in the box in a sophisticated manner, as they did previously. ‘We play or compete “for” something’ explains Wild calmly. The space is filled with commander’s soothing voice again. One of the performers starts eating. It is time to relax. Meanwhile the commander introduces the play of war as a part of the human nature. She narrates the development of weapons -the tools of war. She explains that the main goal of such development remains the same for years. The central question is: how to increase the engagement distance of combat. Soon, the next volunteer expresses his will to participate. Now we can see that the creative participation of the first volunteer has been replaced by a harsh act of shooting. The second volunteer is asked by the commander to shoot the artworks on stage. According to the commander, the artworks on stage are monuments, infrastructures and communication towers of a city, and they have to be destroyed. This resonates with what Achille Mbembe calls the infrastructural warfare which is “an orchestrated and systematic sabotage of the enemy’s societal and urban infrastructure network” (Mbembe 2003, 29). The shooting begins, and the first infrastructure fails. Without losing any time, one of the performers starts to re-create it again. The volunteer targets the next artwork which appears to be a monument. In a couple of seconds, it collapses as well. It is worth noting that the performers continue to re-build things. They do not seem to be frightened by the attack. Once the shooting starts, they are “set in motion” such as machines, relentlessly moving towards a process of re-creation.

Dramaturgically, Hetzel’s ever-lasting reconstruction of the stage resonates with the notion of a scenography in flux, used by Mike Pearson in his analysis of Christopher Logue’s adaptation of Homer’s *Iliad*:

A choreography developed in appreciation of the properties, of properties: of their iconic and suggestive qualities; and of their intractability and unruliness; of the wobbling of tyres in motion; of the instability of heaped chairs… A scenography in flux, ever-changing in a volatile dramatic situation, created and reconfigured by a group of experienced performers, going about their business, using mundane materials in unexpected ways, making space for their activities” (Pearson 2019, 121).

Although completely different, both *The Automated Sniper* and *Iliad* share similarities regarding the re-construction of materials on stage. In *The Automated Sniper*, such dramaturgical strategy applies in a hybrid, inter-connected space, the posthuman space. The white box is an open laboratory of experimental applications, dramaturgical re-constructions, and playfulness. This type of moving scenography in which the human body acts like another material can constitute an affirmative posthuman practice. The moving process in such scenography is immanent with the idea of thinking through the ruins, or through what seems to be “ruins,” as materials that can make new forms. It is a practice resonating with the positive idea of a world that can be re-created rather than completely destroyed; it is a concept against dystopia. This might be the world of the posthuman, a world of potentiality, a place where hybrids, cyborgs, posthumans and transhumans can live together.

In the multilayered complex of the performance, the human body has been redefined many times. After a harsh shooting round, the performers appear more aggressive. This time, they change their sophisticated attitude. The practice of the scenography in flux becomes fierce and intensive. The performers create new compositions and name them with long names. The titles of the new artworks seem to be phrases of a fragmented dialogue conducted between the two men. The confrontation of the performers is rendered through violent art-making. When Bas creates a new combination, he decides to use Claudio as a material for making. Although Claudio seems to accept it, he violently explodes and destroys Bas’s composition. He seizes Bas and places his body in his own composition. The pattern repeats, and this time, Bas climbs on Claudio’s shoulders, and a walking double man, a combination made from fabric, pipes, and two human bodies, appears to move slowly on stage. Bas utters a monologue:

I think art is the only power. The only political power, the only revolutionary power, the only evolutionary power. I think art is the only power that can free mankind from all repression. I say not that art has already realized this. On the contrary. And because it is not, art has to be developed as a weapon (Vimeo 2017).

Once the word “weapon” is uttered, Claudio releases himself and the double man collapses. He is clearly incensed. Almost immediately, he recomposes the stage once again and makes Bas falling on his knees, laying his chest on a stool and placing a pipe on his back. The title of his new composition is *I like America and America likes me*. He also recites a monologue, supporting a kind of art that as he says “takes its form from the lines of life itself. It twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips.” This type of art is “heavy, and coarse and sweet and stupid as life itself.” Bas responses to this again. The next moving artwork, is a composition made on Claudio’s body. He covers Claudio’s face with fabric and hangs on him two stools and metal pieces. He also wears on his head a box. In the end he places a small ball between Claudio’s legs. A rope is dangling from this peculiar “breathing” sculpture. This creature is not Claudio anymore. It is a hybrid, a biomaterial combined with inanimate materials. Bas holds the rope and drags his composition. At some point the “composition” approaches him. When Claudio is close enough, he passes the set of materials to Bas and suddenly Bas becomes the sculpture. The unstoppable process of switching identities (from the creator to the creation and vice versa) implies also a switching of power and authorities. As a result, a blurring of identities has been achieved again. The issue of authorities returns once the commander’s voice reappears.

For a viewer familiar with Becket’s dramaturgy, a connection between the two performers and the characters from the theatrical play *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Vladimir and Estragon, seems to be intriguing. In Becket’s play, Godot, the unknown entity which is about to come and find Vladimir and Estragon, never arrives. In Hetzel’s performance, however, the unknown entity is present all the time, indicating to participants what to do and where to go. It is interesting to point out that the commander never speaks to performers directly. It seems that they are not worthy of being addressed. Nevertheless, they are clearly parts of a construction, and the purpose of their existence is to be creative in a space of repeating shooting rounds and destruction processes. Like Vladimir and Estragon, they are condemned to be trapped in circles, but in comparison to them, Bas and Claudio prefer to be active no matter what.

When the third volunteer enters the gaming booth, he is required to shoot one of the performers. Bas becomes the suspect, one of the main enemies, as the commander claims, and he should be executed. Meanwhile Claudio transforms himself to another composition, losing once again his “human” identity. The participant starts to shoot and the audience hear Bas’ screams. Aside from a shooter, the participant, the hybrid being sitting in the gaming booth, is also the exponent of the audience watching from the dark Bas’s struggles. In this sense, all of the participants become implicitly potential shooters. This could also apply to the passive western community that observes from the television and on the Internet all of the terrifying news regarding the war operations in the East, the overexploitation of the Amazon in South America, the humiliation of African people, etc. The shooting ends and the spectators hear Bas’s breathless announcement. Another artwork has produced, and Bas names it *Gernica*. It is impossible to overlook that the last artwork, made within a rough shooting round, seems to be a discreet reference to Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*. The scene can work as a metaphor of our posthuman world in which drone technologies target third-world countries. This is the dark side of technology. In the posthuman world, technology, like human beings, has many identities and purposes. In this specific case, technology aimed to transform people into cold, invisible murderers.

Nevertheless, the game continues. The commander’s voice remains calm and satisfied with the results. The next shooter is a guest from Iraq. Hetzel uses technology once again in order to transfer the projection of a real gamer from Iraq on the European stage of *The Automated Sniper*. The live connection provided by satellites, allowed the Iraqi man not only to be digitally present in the white box, but also to become the fourth shooter. His name is Akram and he lives in Bagdad with his family. The commander appears to be very polite as always while presenting Akram to the audience. When the round starts, the two performers are hidden in a shelter made of the ruins of the previous interaction. Akram shoots them cruelly. The scene closes with a frightening soundtrack. In parallel, the projection of a real shooting space appears on the walls of the box. Hetzel closes the gaming rounds with the most effective way. He demonstrates to his audience the notion of “otherness” by clearly indicating their position in comparison to the eastern people. He invites a real Iraqi who explains that he prefers to stay home and play games rather than go outside, because it is dangerous outside. They have war. These others that Hetzel invites, are the marginalized populations that Braidotti questions. Are they human enough to live in a safe place? Hetzel’s dramaturgy makes the audience to feel uncomfortable. He criticizes western artists and everyone who comes to admire their artworks or participate in their performances. Art can indicate the problem. It can represent a certain situation and aesthetically recompose it. But it appears to be ineffective when it is about to change the systems and save the world. We, as western people, can be activists, anti-racists and anti-capitalists, but we remain enclosed in our safe white boxes. The complexity of Hetzel’s dramaturgy, including the oscillation between satire and terror, creation and destruction, black and white, technology and biological bodies, reflects the complexity of the posthuman condition and reveals the problematic contradictions of our contemporary world.

The last scene could be a scene of hope. Though devastated, the two performers survive the shooting. Always tending to create, they stand up and start to paint on the walls with spays. The description “Make Art Great Again” written by Bas, is now the dominant element on stage. A dynamic musical piece starts to play. The previously proper, sophisticated gallery becomes a street “canvas” resonating Banksy’s work. The shooting marks on the walls are now elements of a beautiful composition. Bas draws Claudio’s circumscription on the wall and Claudio continues to modify it while the music beats are getting louder. Modifying a space that has been destroyed into a new one could be a way of staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016). To re-use “matter” is a process of re-composition, and thus, it can be interpreted as a posthuman practice or an affirmative way to continue existing in the world. Within this context, the performers have re-define themselves. They became hopeful creators and resilient survivors.

## Conclusion to *The Automated Sniper*

In *The Automated Sniper*, fixed forms, limited spaces and norms are broken. Instead, practices of reusing, rebuilding, redefining and extending bodies are applied from the very beginning of the performance. There are three types of posthuman beings that one may find in Hetzel’s performance. Two of them are switching from one identity to another. The third one remains as it is. The first one is the performer that becomes the creator, the creation and the victim. The second one is the participant, the hybrid, the invincible, the digitally exposed operator of the machine. The third one is the commander, the invisible authority. Since the spectators cannot see her, touch her or *shoot* her, the commander is the closest paradigm to what transhumanists envision as the posthuman. Similarly to the commander, some of the spectators have the opportunity to “digitalise” their bodies. In this sense, they can obtain a posthuman capacity as well. These spectators, who I named advanced hybrids, can be both subjects for experimentation and advanced by technology human beings. Apparently, the performers are the most exposed of them all. They are trapped in the white box which they never abandon. In this sense, they remind guinea pigs in a cold, white laboratory. Nevertheless, the performers, the ones who relentlessly move towards creation appear to be the closest to the first belief of the posthuman map that calls for affirmative practices and radical re-composition of the human as a notion. The performers have the capacity to recreate the world. They do not panic towards the possibility of an ominous future. Despite their body confrontations during the performance, they are still together. They continue to re-create the white box collectively until the very end.

Eventually, what makes us posthumans? Enhanced technologies, creative practices, transformation processes? And why is it important to contemplate these questions in the 21st century? Digitalizing bodies and hybrid forms are not the future anymore. We are all hybrids in the presence. This implies both advantages and dangers. Arguing such topics provokes the construction of new ethic codes. Within these debates, theatre and performance appear to work as mediums or spaces for experience and reflection. “Make art great again” could be mean “make it powerful in terms of impact.” At the end of the performance, it would be useful to pose the following question: “What remains of theatre when the show is over?” (Bala 2019, 187) Believing that art can save the world is naïve. However, trusting art power in producing experiences and providing space for rethinking, seems to be essential for our survival in the posthuman condition.

# Conclusion

In this thesis, the notion of the posthuman, which is an umbrella term including several schools of thought, was illustrated to be used as a dramaturgical tool for the creation and interpretation of contemporary performances. The goal was to examine how performances can become environments of experience and contemplation regarding the human being in the posthuman predicament. In particular, the goal was to discuss posthuman dramaturgies, focusing mainly on practices that can provoke further re-thinking about the specific urgencies of a world in a posthuman condition.

Within the posthuman condition, it was pointed out that not all human beings have the same rights in the world. Additionally, it was mentioned that the superiority of the human race over the rest of the species, entails catastrophic consequences to the future of any other form of life. Eventually, it was noted that there are many “others” and within this context, the posthuman appears to be a notion that attempts to go beyond the binary systems engendering the toxic inequalities among the living beings on Earth. All the above were presented by Philosophical and Critical Posthumanism. On the contrary, in accordance with Transhumanism, the possibility of becoming a posthuman being is a future target. As reported by transhumanists, the human race is already “trans,” which basically signifies the intertwinement of human beings with technology and science. Nick Bostrom in particular, envisions the posthuman as the future ideal human being; a super intelligent, completely healthy and immortal version of the human which will signify the fulfillment of the Enlightenment. A third belief, constructed in some cases out of fear and in other out of the need to enable the feeling of reconciliation with the forthcoming apocalypse, appear to be the most dystopian and significantly problematic for many reasons. However, highly influencing, this belief appears to be well-established in the posthuman predicament and thus, it is used not only by Hollywood productions, but also supported by well-known academics, philosophers and scholars.

Within this context, the purpose was to explore how contemporary performances may elaborate, challenge or reflect those insights and provide to their audiences’ space for re-thinking. It was recognized that art and performances, in particular, cannot primarily change the world. However, a suitably structured performance can enable, provoke and shock its audience to thought. More precisely, it was stated that simply representing the posthuman condition without providing experiences, appears to be insufficient. And thus, the main concern was how to create effective environments that can lead to fruitful conclusions, instead of simply besmirching the present and spreading fear and despair about the future. The target of this exploration was to create a posthuman map that can be used by theatre and performance creators interested in philosophical and critical exploration about the posthuman.

In the third chapter the posthuman map was used as a dramaturgical tool to analyze *The Automated Sniper*. While examining the performance, three different figures of the posthuman were identified. The first one was a mediated female figure, the second, a technological hybrid appeared sometimes as a creator and other times as a shooter, and the third, a creative being that against all odds continues to re-create the world. This being is the performer.

The performance provided a posthuman space for the application of transformation processes of the body, while in parallel was dealing with the mediated body and the interconnection of bodies through the networks. The main narrative part was about the history of playing in which the act of war was characterized as one of the oldest forms of play. As a consequence of such narrative, in combination with the shooting practices taking place on stage, issues around the otherness emerged. It was pointed out how through the practices of the *Automated Sniper*, the spectators were provoked to reflect on their current position in the world in comparison with other populations, mainly non-western.

Julian Hetzel’s interest in bodies and materials as embodied practices can be found more intensively in other art projects, such as the *Self- Human Soap* (Studio Julian Hetzel 2019). The *Self- Human Soap* is a type of “cleaning” practice taken place in an ordinary shop in which customers come to buy soap. The specific attribute of this soap is that is made of human fat. The *Self- Human Soap* can be considered as a radical application of de-centralization of the human body and its equation with other-than-human fat of which originally a soap is made. If *The Automated Sniper* is a theatrical version of posthuman dramaturgies, *The Soap Project* is a posthuman experience beyond the theatre or performance space, in which the human body becomes a material in the most direct way. *Self- Human Soa*p is a radical practice that can be examined separately in order to enrich the posthuman map. A posthuman dramaturgical practice should be effective in revealing the polyphonic, tremendous and extraordinary condition of our era. For this reason, the practice must be a shocking experience that will lead to further re-thinking and reflection on questions such as: “how to become a posthuman?” and “which ethical path one should follow in order to become a posthuman.” The *Self- Human Project* is not only another case study for further examination. It is another way of making practices with the human body within the posthuman condition.

Mapping the posthuman predicament was an attempt to help theatre and performance makers to obtain an overall view of the human position in a world of contradictions, enormous achievements and dying ecology. Hope and creativity, ambition and expectation, fear and nostalgia are all parts of the posthuman predicament. For theatre and performance creators who are interested in making effective and comprehensible experiences, it is significant to work on all of these elements. Only by combining them, one could achieve a condition that breaks dualistic thinking and enables collectivity. The map continues to be uncompleted. It should remain open in order to be filled with new experiences and knowledge.

As a visual artist and dramaturg, I was always skeptical regarding the impact of art on the world. We want to change the world, and, simultaneously, we recognize the weakness of theatre and performance in achieving such change. I understand and agree that indeed we “need to think of the impact of art in less quantitative or effect-based and more qualitative and affective terms” (Sruti Bala 2019, 189). But this does not mean that we should dismiss the possibility of becoming more interconnected with less qualitative and effect-based kinds of culture. Instead, I propose to communicate with them, to build fruitful connections. Creating or understanding a dramaturgy that challenges topics derived from a major philosophical and critical turn such as the posthuman turn, becoming open to explore and extract knowledge from any kind of source. I would like to conclude this thesis with one last suggestion: let’s follow the Deleuzian principle of affirmation and selection: “keep only what increases connections” (Rajchman 2000, 13).

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1. The table was copied from “Transhumanist Values”, Nick Bostrom, accessed August 6, 2021 <https://www.nickbostrom.com/ethics/values.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Spectator or participant? I will clarify in the next paragraphs the importance of this distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)