

Post Human Theatre: Artificial Intelligence as a Dramatic Agent of Modern English and American Drama

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Abstract—This paper aims to discuss radical transformations that have occurred in the shape of theatrical action in the English and American literature in the light of the advent of artificial intelligence as dramatic agent that no longer fulfils its technical function, but instead becomes a potent force in controlling theatrical discourse. The post humanist approach employed in the study is to examine how such fundamental concepts as theatrical character, dramatically agent and the writing self are being re-constructed in the context of the complex relationship between humans and machines.

The paper also considers the effects of this presence on reformulation of narrative and dramatic structure and the subversion of the traditional hierarchy of author, actor and audience.

The research is carried out through the prism of a cultural-critical approach and textual analysis and is premised on theoretical constructs mentioned in the works of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault and recent studies of digital theatre.

The research finds that post-human theatre is not the continuation of a technological advancement in the instrumentation of performance, but it is a re-negotiation of knowledge, which alters the view of the creative, identity and agency in the theatrical space. It also establishes new ways of looking at the relationship of literature with technology and proposes a critical framework by which theatrical texts in the digital age can be viewed as a product of an elaborate and multidimensional human-machines interaction.

Index Terms—Post humanism, Artificial Intelligence, Contemporary Drama, Digital Theatre, Dramatic Agency.

I. Introduction

The English and American theatre transferred radical alterations in aesthetic structure and functions of expression, preconditioned by the intellectual and technological environment of each of its epochs, throughout the centuries of its history. Since the primary dramatic agent was the human being, and the primary dramatic agent was the human being, and the modernist theatre started to question the stability of the human being, and the reconstruction of the composition of the narrative and character, and the last and most significant Artificial intelligence in modern theatre cannot be confined to a technological device that helps to enhance the lighting, sound effects, or the construction of the set. Instead it transcends it to become an element of the drama and an active element of the meaning production. Artificial intelligence has already started to be reflected as a dramatic person-character in English and American literature, as well as in theatrical performances (Causey 78). The change prompts the re-evaluation of the conventional concepts of

theatrical theory, including character, dramatizing actors, agency and presence. It necessitates new critical practices capable of thinking of this multiple association between the human and the technological.

Both Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault works are critical and have been used to disrupt the traditional notion of the writer and object of writing. Barthes declared the demise of the author as a hegemony of text (Barthes 142) and Foucault theorized of author-function as a differentiation cultural formation (Foucault 101). For these reasons, artificial intelligence would be considered as the continuation of these evolutions, which give rise to new questions, who is the one to create the text, the human being, the machine, or the interaction of the two? It also transforms the very notion of creativity which is no longer considered to be a process at which a human and non-human factors are involved.

The theatre as an art form is particularly problematic in this digital transformation, which, unlike the presence of the actor tied to the physical body, loses its anchoring in the physical body of the actor, and finds new versions of digital and virtual presence. It has given rise to the creation of new forms of theatrical performances that make use of the technologies of artificial intelligence and digital interaction to alter the essence of interaction between the actor and the audience. This makes the audience participants in the production of meaning, and not passive consumers (Auslander 56). The same changes result in redefining the very notion of a stage that will no longer be associated with a concrete physical location but a multidimensional virtual space that will traverse the traditional geographical space and time zones.

Alternatively, the issue of artificial intelligence in the theatre generates not only ethical concerns but also aesthetic concerns pertaining to the ideas of authenticity and identity. And will such a text be real enough to be counted as an authentic text to the extent that a theatrical text is created with the assistance of algorithms capable of generating language and a story? The issue in the case is who is the real author? And has a machine the so-called intention or purpose which is a prerequisite of artistic production? These questions do not occur in the theoretical plane; This is transported to theatrical practice as such in which the role of writer, director and actor is mixed with intelligent systems which can learn and communicate (McCarty 89).

It is against this context that this paper seeks to explore the manifestations of artificial intelligence as dramatic agents in contemporary English and American theatre, critically based on the concept of post-humanist and using textual and cultural analysis tools. The paper is aimed at exploring how artificial intelligence is represented in theatrical texts and acts, what role it plays in the dramatic action and what are the consequences of the restoration of the relationship between the different elements of the theatrical process. It tries to investigate the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of this change, too. In this paper, the role of post-humanist theatre in re-defining such key concepts as creativity, identity and agency is realised.

II. Chapter One: Theoretical Framework - From Human to Post-Human

Transformations of Dramatic Actors in Contemporary Theatre.

The dramatic actor is a vital feature of the study of the theatre as it determines the type of dramatic structure that it is and the relationship between the characters, events and theatrical space. The concept of dramatic actor has long been closely linked with how humanity has been perceived by the society and its role in the world. The human character was brought to the centre of dramatic action in the classical theatre as the centre of the event, and the primary source of interaction. This strongly mirrored in Elizabethan tragedy where the hero was psychologically mature and possessed moral and ethical issues which were representative of intellectual attitudes of the day (Williams 52).

With the beginning of modernity in the twentieth century, theatre questioned the primacy of humanity. It was necessary to portray the tragedy of a modern man, who is living in the world of contradictions and chaos. The period brought detached dramatic characters, and they were becoming alienated and psychologically anxious, as the human race was going through a crisis in opposition to social and political upheavals. Such shifts resulted in the redefinition of the text of the theatrical itself and the openness of the text to multiple interpretations, and transforming the audience into an active co-producer of meaning, rather than a passive recipient (Williams 56).

Modern critical analysis served to re-model our understanding of the dramatic agent, and in particular through the structuralism and post-structuralism approaches. Roland Barthes proclaimed the death of the author and said that it is not exclusive to its author, it is a system of cultural allusions and meanings

In his turn, Michel Foucault came up with the concept of the author function which presupposes that the author is not a fixed object, but is a cultural phenomenon which evolves in the light of historical and social context (Foucault 113). In this regard dramatic actor can be considered as a functionality of the discourse of the text as a part of the creating meaning process with other variables, human and non-human. This impression creates a possibility to add technological elements, such as artificial intelligence, as a force that produces the creation of the text and theatrical performance (Dixon 12).

Post humanism has ushered in an extreme change in the notion of the dramatic agent in the theatre. Catherine Hayles considers post-humanism, as not the end of humanity, but the rebranding of humanity as that which is at work with technology and non-human systems (Hayles 5). In such a way, the dramatic agent ceases to be a human character, but now involves digital creatures and programs involved in the creation of the theatrical event, whether in textual or performance sense.

The implementation of the artificial intelligence in the contemporary theatre is not simply a technical event, such as the improved lighting or sound effects, but also on the aesthetic and philosophical levels. Human and non-human energies relate to the theatrical text to form meaning and make it a communal area. Modern English and American literature has created pieces of writing and stage performances that assume artificial intelligence is a separate entity, an under textual voice, or an interactive algorithm that dominates the action (Causey 78).

These transformations re-define the main concepts of character, agency, and presence in the theatre theory. A theatrical character is not a one-dimensional object, but a multidimensional one, which can be a person, or an object, physical or virtual. Agency, the ability to manipulate the flow of events and create meaning is now no longer a prerogative of humans but may be distributed among actors, machine and algorithms in such a way that a machine may play a leading role in the production of the text or performance (McCarty 89).

This too has re-configured theatrical presence which is no longer the physical presence of the actor on stage in front of a live audience. In digital theatre, a virtual presence, which plays dramatic functions similar to those of physical presence, is now achievable. In the opinion of Philip Auslander, presence was not negated by digital media, but was instead multi-layered in a way that blended the real and the virtual thereby creating a new interactive experience between the audience and the theatrical performance (Auslander 60).

The contemporary theatre may take many shapes including interactive theatre, digital theatre and hybrid theatre (reality and vitality). These forms include the algorithms and intelligent systems in the structure of the performance, and dramatic action is the consequence of the constant interaction between the human and machine. Such shifts are philosophical and ethical in their nature as well and raise questions of identity, authenticity, limits of control over dramatic action and ethical responsibility in the case of non-human agencies at work in the theatrical process (Dixon 25).

In the case of theatrical criticism, in which the dramatic agent is defined as the one embracing the concept of artificial intelligence, there is an opportunity to introduce the use of new analytical means based on the post humanism and cultural criticism and textual analysis concepts. These tools allow to be aware of the division of agency between the various elements of a theatrical performance. No longer does dramatic action seem to be a process of a man, but a system of forces that interact and re-create the text and the performance.

These perspectives expand the definition of artistic creation that is no longer an act of the human being, but a shared process in which human and non-human forces are brought into existence, to formulate meaning.

The creation is related to the design of a multidimensional theatre, which is able to adapt to the technological, intellectual, and social shifts and preconditions the emergence of new studies that mention the correlation of art and technology in diverse cultural contexts (Dixon 35).

In addition, the contemporary theatre is witnessing the alterations in relationship between the text and the performance, between a writer and actor and between the audience and the theatrical scene. The machine is no longer an instrument, but a collaborator in the creative process, and such things as artistic ownership of the text, artistic decision-making role and interaction with the audience must be rethought. Therefore, research in this area is required in order to understand the new developments in the English and American theatre (Causey 84).

III. Chapter Two: Applied Analysis- Artificial Intelligence and Dramatic Action in Contemporary English and American Theatre.

The digital age is a decisive point in the history of theatre as the technology, in particular, artificial intelligence, began to redefine the nature of dramatic agent. Theatrical agency is no longer a concern of the human character and actor, but has been projected out to digital characters, interactive algorithms, even the audience as an element of affect in creating meaning. The next chapter attempts to address these transformations of English and American theatre as well as a closer examination of their artistic, ethical, and technical implications and to explore how the relationship between text, performance and audience has become a multi-layered network of interactions (Hayles 14).

1. Artificial Intelligence as a Dramatic Agent.

The fact that it is possible to incorporate the aspect of artificial intelligence as an active component into the theatre is one of the most significant things about the modern theatre and it can even communicate with the human characters and direct the plot. The Nether by Jane Working in the English theatre demonstrates that the digital world may be a character with a certain impact on the conversation and the events. Here, the human and digital character are not independent and human and machine possess dramatic agency, and the audience is also a spectator of a complex battle between virtual and physical reality (Dixon 28).

It is possible to trace this in American theatre with such plays as the one by Michael Ward, Speak, the scripts of which are determined by the real-time communication between the digital characters and the audience, thus, the events can be fluid and change in real time. This dynamic transforms the text in the theatre into a living creature which can develop during the performance, thus rebalancing the agency among the author, the actor and the machine (McCarty 95).

Another observation made is that artificial intelligence is the intermediary in the development of human persons. The characters presented on screen not only influence the action but also transform it into the psychological and philosophical level and allow the play to explore the concept of human identity and morality and the conflict between humanity and technology (Dixon 33).

2. Redefining Theatrical Presence

The use of artificial intelligence has radically changed theatrical presence. Presence in classical theatre is founded on the physical presence of the actor in the presence of a real audience whereas in the new digital theatre, it is possible to create a multi-layered virtual presence where digital characters can interact with the audience. This presence gives the audience an enriched experience and creates the different levels of artistic perception (Auslander 72).

An example is the scripts and dramatic decisions in works such as *The Interface* by the Royal Court Theatre are generated in real time as a consequence of the audience action, and the drama viewer experience becomes the drama building experience. This way the audience becomes a passive audience to an active participant in the creative process (McCarty 102).

3. Polyphonic Texts and Theatrical

The amalgamation of artificial intelligence has produced polyphonic theatrical pieces with multiple layers of meanings. These writings can no longer be regarded as grounded on the traditional linear narration but are characterized by flexibility wherein by integration of digital voices and virtual movements can be integrated into a weaving that is indicative of the networked feature of dramatic agency (Hayles 18).

Moreover, real time texts are now interactive to allow the machine to modify dialogues and the control of events with interaction with audience or real time information. This allows the researcher to study the distribution of power between the author, the actor and the machine and how dramatic meaning is produced in real time (Dixon 45).

4. Multi-layered Dramatic Agent

In contemporary theatre, the dramatic agent has been altered into a system of forces interacting: human personalities, computerized elements, algorithms, and viewers. In English theatre, the problem of human identity and the right to act is also the subject of interest of directors who are concerned with the philosophical and ethical sides of such relationships. Technology innovation and experimentation in theatres

in the modern theatre in America is concerned with integration of digital media and real time communication with the audience (Causey 96).

5. Artificial Intelligence-Ethical Aspect

AI is not merely a tool that arrives in the theatre, but as an ethical agent. Such situations as those in Francisco Romero in *Slaughterbots* also contain algorithms which influence the action and are engaged in the process of generating moral conflict. This raises the question of responsibility where decisions of events that must happen are made between machines and man (Dixon 33).

The ethical component is also manifested in the relationship between the viewers and online characters. Even non-human characters may be emotionally connected to the audience, and they reconsider the connotation of empathy and dramatic conflict in the modern theatre (Hayles 21).

6. Text-Performance-Audience Interaction

Artificial intelligence is being introduced into modern theatre in a way that it puts text, performance, and audience into a single interactive network. Algorithms of live theatrical texts can generate dialogues or plot during the performance process in such a way that the text becomes dynamic and flowing and provides the directors and actors with the opportunity to create a unique and immediate experience with every performance (Causey 100).

This interaction redistributes dramatic agency between the actor, the playwright, and the machine and creates a dynamic and creative experience, which depends on the circumstances of the play and the audience- the so-called interactive digital theatre.

7. English vs. American Theatre

The attitude to the application of artificial intelligence to the English and American theatres is clearly different:

- English theatre: is philosophical in nature, moral, and challenges the human identity and the responsibility to act (Dixon 37).
- American theatre: is more technologically creative, its experiments with theatricality, experiments with the possibilities of multimedia and interactions with the audience in real time (Causey 96).

Nevertheless, these two genres have one thing in common: the element of artificial intelligence is applied to provide dramatic effect and rethink the texts and the performances of the contemporary theatre.

8. Aesthetic and Philosophical Analysis

The introduction of artificial intelligence introduces new aesthetic elements, including the interactive quality of the audience and the text in real-time, the multidimensional quality of being in the present and the impact of digital characters on the audience. It also raises philosophical issues, i.e. the essence of the human being, agency, and creativity too, and consequently, contemporary theatre is a fruitful field to investigate the relationship between art and technology (Auslander 85).

9. Theory and Practice

These shifts suggest the importance of using advanced theoretical tools to understand dramatic agency that involves cultural criticism, digital text analysis, and post humanist theory. Using these technologies, scholars can explore the agency of human/machine relations, the aesthetics/philosophical effects of such relations, and how the text, performance, and audience relate (Dixon 42).

IV. Chapter Three: Future Dramatic Effectiveness Changes - Artificial Intelligence and Post-Human Theatre.

Technology and in particular the evolution of artificial intelligence has completely changed the modern theatre as it has not only become a tool but a self-sufficient agent, capable of influencing the plot and narrative (Hayles 30). This chapter explains the future changes, which are most likely to take place in the English and American theatre, how dramatic effectiveness is being re-defined, the human-machine interactions, and how theatrical text, performance, and audience has new horizons.

The integration of artificial intelligence in theatrical performances redistributes artistic power between the author, the actor and the machine, and creates new theatrical experiences never before witnessed and raises important ethical and philosophical issues regarding the concepts of creativity and human identity (Dixon 48). This chapter is also intended to provide us with a holistic picture of the way theatre will develop in reaction to these technological and cultural changes, the difference between the English and American approach, the renegotiation of dramatic agency, the interaction of humans and machines and new horizons of the theatrical text, performance, and audience.

The artistic agency between the author, the actor, and the machine redistributed through use of artificial intelligence in theatrical performances create theatrical experiences never witnessed before and raise important ethical and philosophical questions about the concept of creativity and human identity (Dixon 48). The other intention of this chapter is to arm a general picture of future of theatre in the perspective of such changes in technology and culture and to indicate the difference between English and American attitude towards handling of these things.

1. AI as an Autonomous, Future-oriented Agent

Artificial intelligence has also become an independent component of the contemporary theatre capable of generating scripts, modifying dialogues, and even influencing the course of the events in real-time. Artificial intelligence has been demonstrated in the English theatre with productions like the play *The Nether* by Jane Working where autonomous and digital characters can be used to interact with real human characters and therefore become co-authors of the drama story (Dixon 50).

Theatrical productions such as *Speak and Slaughterbots* in the American theatre show that a machine can make live decisions that can modify the script to make the dramatic action an interactive exchange changing each time it is performed and a shared dramatic agency between a human and a machine (McCarty 110).

In addition, artificial intelligence has become the tool of developing human characters as it can generate complex situations that may encourage actors to take emerging performance decisions and allow viewers to experience a range of emotions and intellectual stimulation (Dixon 53).

2. Theatrical Text Reimagining

The contemporary theatrical text is not a fixed one anymore but a multi-layered and dynamically changeable medium, which is determined by the audience interaction and the machine. Digital dialogue, sound and visual effects and even communication with the audience through smart devices are being used in modern text (Hayles 33).

An example is the performance of *The Interface* at the Royal Court Theatre, which recreates the text based on the real-time audience behaviour, and provides a distinctive experience of the performance, reallocating power between the author, the performer and the machine. The given movement rethinks the traditional artistic production and poses the questions related to the limits of the human agency in the theatrical setting (Dixon 53).

3. Audience as Central Agent

Digital theatre currently has placed the audience in the creative process and able to direct the process, mild characters and even alter the direction of the script. In the modern interactive performances, such as with augmented reality, artificial intelligence, the viewer, in their turn, chooses the different ways the events might unfold or takes part in the interactions with virtual characters, which makes the viewing process a personal and unique experience to a particular viewer. The concept of dramatic agency is expanded in this interaction into a whole network of relationships between the human, the text, the actor and the machine (McCarty 115).

4. Ethical and Philosophical Dimension

Artificial intelligence is not a device that will enter the theatre, but an actor, which raises ethical and philosophical issues. The English theatre performances revolve around issues of human identity, agency, and responsibility of action (Dixon 37).

In American theatre, more emphasis is made on technological invention and experimentation of theatricality, which attempts to reach to the border of the human-machine contact and creates new dramatic situations that can make the audience think critically (Causey 103).

Another problem that can be brought up by artificial intelligence is the question of empathy and human communication as digital characters can evoke extremely vivid emotions, hence, altering the nature of the classic theatrical experience (Hayles 36).

5. Multi-Layered Digital Theatre

The multi-layered composition of modern performances is characterized by the interactions of human, digital, algorithmic and audience elements within the dynamic network to generate the dramatic meaning (Dixon 56).

Such a setting helps us to view theatre as a place of direct interaction, in which things take place in reaction to the performance of the actors and the audience, and this is what makes up a theatrical experience whenever an audience goes and whenever a performance is being put on (Auslander 90).

6. Technical and Creative Issues

The adoption of artificial intelligence is a large issue among directors and writers. They ought to be familiar with the technology and how to integrate it in the script and the performance and make sure that aesthetic and moral value of the work are not lost (Causey 107).

It also requires a set of various skills, including programming, interaction design, and close dramatic planning to ensure that all the digital theatrical elements are aligned with the script, the actors, and the audience (Hayles 40).

7. Future Trends

Studies indicate that the future of theatre will increasingly be more synergistic with artificial intelligence, and the development of interactive shows, personalization to each customer, and additional study of how to integrate algorithms into theatrical material, re-defining the notion of agency and creativity (Dixon 60).

In addition, the emergence of entirely autonomous digital actors with moral and artistic decisions capable of influencing plot and spectacle must be expected and theatre becomes more alive and multi-dimensional (McCarty 120).

V. Conclusion

The present paper has contributed to developing a comprehensive and profound vision of contemporary shifts in the English and American theatre in terms of the redefinition of dramatic efficacy in the context of a technological shift and artificial intelligence. Contemporary theatre is no more a fixed space where one can only provide the text and the performance, but a multi-layered space that includes the human element, the text, the actor, the audience and technology to create a unique theatrical experience on the performance and on the audience.

The study has in its analysis of the three chapters revealed that English theatre is skewed towards philosophical and ethical facet of human identity, agency and the moral responsibility of theatrical action to pursue core questions. American theatre, in its turn, tends to experimentation in terms of technologies and theatrical innovation and employs digital tools and algorithms to develop dynamic and interactive texts.

Among the most significant findings of the research, the notion that the contemporary theatrical text is no longer a stable object, but a moving, living object, interacting with the audience and the machine in real-time and, thus, shifting the agency between the author, the actor, and artificial intelligence needs to be mentioned. The alternations offer new possibilities to the theatrical creativity and expand the field of dramatic agency to embrace all its elements. This includes the audience that has become a first-hand participant in creating meaning and influence upon the course of events.

This study also reported that the integration of artificial intelligence into the theatre is a highly contentious area with significant ethical and philosophical concerns that challenge the limits of artistic creativity, the concept of empathy, and the impact of interactive decisions on the performance in the theatre. The device

does not only start being a tool anymore, but a living being that is able to change the plot and scene, which demands a reconsideration of such ideas as agency, ethical responsibility, and aesthetic innovation.

Applying it to the critical analysis, it was clear the multi-layered digital theatre is one of the possible futures of theatrical performance where human, digital and technological elements interact to produce a new meaning and new experience of performance to each audience. This shift gives filmmakers, playwrights and actors greater freedoms to be creative, but it also imposes tremendous technical and ethical burdens which can only be solved by having a clear notion of what the relation between humans, machines and the play text is all about.

It was also highlighted in the paper that there is a necessity to develop new academic approaches to studying digital theatre, including the analysis techniques of dynamic texts, real-time interaction skills, and theories of how to distinguish the relationship between humans and machines as a single system of dramatic agency. The dialogue between the author, the actor, the audience, and the artificial intelligence opens up new perspectives to view theatre as a source of critical thinking and search of philosophical, moral, and aesthetics aspects simultaneously.

In comparing the English and American theatre it is possible to note that they have much different priorities: the English theatre is concerned with the philosophical and ethical elements of the digital experience in the act, the American theatre with technological innovation and theatrical experimentation. However, the two strategies assist in redefining dramatic efficacy and expanding the theatrical texts to encompass multiple aspects of interactions.

As demonstrated in the paper, there are infinite opportunities to be innovative and creative when applying technology and artificial intelligence to theatre, but simultaneously, they offer creators new challenges to preserve aesthetic and moral values and offer the audience a complex and meaningful theatre experience. The latter transformations suggest that post-human theatre is a field of active relations between all the elements of theatrical performance, and artificial intelligence is an actor capable of making its own decisions that can influence the plot and the scene.

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