Cybermimetics:

Corporeal Mime as a Model of Posthumanism

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Introduction

> Postmodernism is the explanation of how society has become consumed by mass media; how we are becoming the media. . .we are media itself. (Dixon 153)

Theatre has typically existed as a composite art form, combining the arts of acting, directing, writing, set design, costumes, makeup, props, and so on. In the digital age, theatre has naturally developed to incorporate digital technology. Corporeal mime, a style of physical theatre first developed by Étienne Decroux (1898–1991) in the early twentieth century, sought to extract the multimedia elements from theatre so that only one art remained, the art of the actor. The remedy for theatre, he boldly proposed in 1931, is to remove all auxiliary arts from theatre for a period of thirty years, and to forbid vocal sound for the first twenty years. Slowly, after this period of purity, theatre could begin to reassimilate other art forms so that the art is no longer "suffocating under a heap of rubble" (*Words on Mime* 26). Although this remedy has yet to be enacted, it characterizes the ethos of corporeal mime. While the related art of pantomime prioritizes the hands and an expressive face, corporeal mime is instead rooted in movement of the trunk (head, neck, chest, waist, pelvis) and a neutral face (see Figure 1). Corporeal mime primarily relies on the unmediated presence of the actor, but how does the mime use the human body as a form of media? With no external media to rely on, how does corporeal mime invoke a cybernetic system? In order to examine these notions, I discuss interrelated ideas posited in the fields of cybernetics, posthumanism, body art and corporeal mime. Referring to Decroux and the posthumanist theorist N. Katherine Hayles (b. 1943), I explore how the central tenets of corporeal mime interact with concepts of posthumanism. Although there is not a strong pre-existing relationship between the fields of corporeal mime and media studies, I argue that media,

in the form of the human body, is integral to corporeal mime. I advance arguments for why embodiment remains integral to theatre and consider ways in which corporeal mime can explore and express cybernetic relationships.

This paper is organized into three sections: “Cybermimetics,” “Body as Media,” “and “Corporeal Mime as a Model of Posthumanism.” These three sections are designed to mirror the historic progression of cybernetic theory. As I discuss in the first section, cybernetic history is divided into phases, the first of which understands cybernetic feedback-loops as closed systems. Cybernetic feedback-loops refer to a cyclical system of interactions between three entities–humans, animals and machines–in which each entity affects and is affected by the others in the system. In the first section of this paper, I relate these closed systems to the analogous systems that are implicit in corporeal mime performance. I begin by recounting a brief history of cybernetics. Then, I extend the central characteristics of this history to the system of relationships in a corporeal mime performance. To articulate this system of relations, I analyze Juan Downey’s work, *Plato Now* (1973), as a case study of a cybernetic model of performance.

The second phase of cybernetics, characterized by the idea of reflexivity, interrogates the influence and positionality of the observers of cybernetic systems. The second section of this paper similarly investigates the role of observation. Analyzing the human body as a form of media, I consider the performer as both an observer and the observed in a mime performance. First, I examine Amelia Jones’ (b. 1961) conceptualization of the human body as a form of media in the field of body and performance art. Then I apply this lens to corporeal mime. Finally, I examine the relationship between embodiment, prosthesis, and performance to emphasize how media can be appropriately assimilated into corporeal mime performance.

The third phase of cybernetics, characterized by the concept of virtuality, considered the ways in which computers and humans either merge or diverge as beings in cybernetic systems. The third section of this paper uses Hayles' concept of the posthuman to examine how machines and humans are consolidated (or distributed) within the cybernetic system of corporeal mime. Posthumanism is a broad philosophical framework that understands humanity as moving beyond the notion of an individual human subject, and towards a new historical period of humanity. First, I define the posthumanist paradigm under which I am operating. Then, I apply this framework to a section of Decroux's book, *Words on Mime* (first published in French as *Paroles sur le mime* in 1963), which discusses the machine as an inspiration for corporeal mime. I conclude with an argument for why embodiment remains integral to corporeal mime and look to the generative possibilities that emerge from this notion.

Section I: Cybermimetics

> It is the thesis of this book that society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it; and that in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between man and machines, between machines and man, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part. (Wiener, *Human Use* 16)

A Brief History of Cybernetics

The study of cybernetics was first formally introduced in 1948 when the influential mathematician and philosopher Norbert Wiener (1894-1964) published *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Wiener, *Human Use* 16). In this book, he

argues that the theory of messages is inextricably linked with systems of communication and control. The term cybernetics, derived from the Greek word for "steersman," was inspired by "the fact that the steering engines of a ship are indeed one of the earliest and best developed forms of feed-back mechanisms" (Wiener, *Cybernetics* 11). Wiener developed cybernetics as a conceptual framework to better understand the ways in which "three powerful actors–information, control, and communication–were now operating jointly to bring about an unprecedented synthesis of the organic and the mechanical" (Hayles, *Posthuman* 23). Since 1948, the field of cybernetic theory has continued to develop in order to consider the widespread effects that technology has had in organizing systems of communication and control.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles examines the history of cybernetics by organizing it into three distinct waves. The first wave, spanning from 1945 to 1960, characterized cybernetic systems as homeostatic, self-regulating feedback-loops. In their effort to interpret the relationship between humans and machines, the idea that humans essentially function in a similar way to machines first began to emerge. This idea remains vigorously contested. Since Wiener, a significant amount of cybernetic theory has been developed on the premise that humans are no more complex than intelligent machines. According to Hayles, equivocating humans and machines began the posthumanist deconstruction of liberal human subjectivity. The first phase of cybernetic theory has acted as the foundation for multiple strands of posthumanist thought. Hayles is quick to argue that Wiener only meant to demonstrate that machines behave like humans, not that humans can be replaced by machines. Hayles challenges the theorist Hans Moravec (b. 1948), who instead proposes "that human identity is essentially an informational pattern rather than an embodied enaction" (Hayles, *Posthuman* 13). Hayles firmly

rejects the idea that humans can be replaced by technological apparatuses. Instead, Hayles argues that humans are defined by their physical, embodied forms.

The second wave of cybernetics, which lasted from approximately 1960 to 1980, considered the idea of reflexivity. Theorists of the first wave were able to identify a system of interaction, but they were only able to observe the system from within its boundaries. They failed to consider their own positionality within systems of communication. For example, in the period of first wave cybernetics, Claude Shannon's (1916–2001) information theory defined information as a function of random message probabilities, separating information from context and consequently from any associated meaning. By following the premise of information theory, Moravec argues that "the human brain is nothing but an informational pattern that can be represented in any medium" (Hayles, “Cybernetics” 146). Humberto Maturana (b. 1928) and Francisco Varela (1946–2001) were theorists from second wave cybernetics who, in developing autopoietic theory, began to reconnect information with meaning. Hayles explains this perspective:

> In the autopoietic view, no information crosses the boundary separating the system from its environment. We do not see a world "out there" that exists apart from us. Rather, we see only what our systemic organization allows us to see. The environment merely triggers changes determined by the system's own structural properties. Thus the center of interest for autopoiesis shifts from the cybernetics of the observed system to the cybernetics of the observer. (*Posthuman* 11)

Autopoietic theory began to consider how the theorist themselves is not exempt from the system of interaction that they analyze. Second wave cybernetics is therefore defined by these moves toward reflexivity. Reflexivity can be understood more generally as “the movement whereby that

which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates" (Hayles, *Posthuman* 8). In other words, second-wave cybernetics was concerned with understanding how observers of systems are implicated in the systems themselves, as both observers and as subjects.

The final wave that Hayles designates, ranging from 1980 to the book's publication in 1999, is concerned with the concept of virtuality (*Posthuman* 22). Technologies that utilize artificial intelligence, computational universes, or virtual and augmented reality, all raise the question: are computers autonomous entities? By extension, can computer-generated environments be considered real? Hayles defines virtuality as "the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns*" (Posthuman* 13-14). Virtual worlds are often portrayed in art and literature as simulated realities that run parallel to the real, or physical world. Therefore, Hayles argues that virtuality is a cultural perception that is "constructed within social and linguistic environments" ("Cybernetics" 149). These computer simulations are often mischaracterized as abstract flows of information that don't exist as a material entity. However, the relationship between materiality and virtuality should not be understood as dualistic or binary. Hayles articulates this succinctly: "It can be a shock to remember that for information to exist, it must *always* be instantiated in a medium" (*Posthuman* 14). All material objects are permeated by information, whether that information is DNA code or the coded structure of the internet.

Hayles stresses the importance of understanding cybernetics as a seriated history. Each wave of cybernetics does not replace the last–instead, each wave builds upon prior knowledge. She includes a diagram which illustrates the seriation of the first three waves of cybernetics, shown in Figure 2. Hayles later argues that a fourth wave of cybernetics has begun since *How*

We Became Posthuman was published; however, this fourth phase is beyond the scope of my paper ("Cybernetics" 147). Therefore, my analysis of cybernetic performance will consider how homeostasis, reflexivity, and virtuality can all be simultaneously present in corporeal mime performance. Hayles argues that from

> the three major contributions of cybernetics–joining information with feedback, creating a framework in which humans and machines can be understood in similar terms, and creating artifacts that make these ideas materially tangible–we may conclude that contemporary media studies would scarcely be conceivable without the contributions of cybernetics. ("Cybernetics" 155)

Cybernetics and media studies are deeply intertwined, but where does this leave corporeal mime? In order to extend cybernetic theory into the realm of corporeal mime, it is necessary to examine corporeal mime's various systems of interaction.

Corporeal Mime and Cybernetics

While Wiener was inspired by the feedback-mechanisms present in the steering engine when he named cybernetics, Étienne Decroux was interested in the human body operating as a similar feedback-mechanism in developing the art of corporeal mime. Wiener and other cybernetic theorists were concerned with discussing systems of information, communication and control. Decroux did not explicitly use the language of feedback-mechanisms, but his work evokes similar ideas. Corporeal mime reveals an implicit cybernetic framework that exists between the performer and the audience.

The corporeal mime is the initial site of control at one end of the feedback-mechanism. They communicate to the audience at the other end, who receives information (often interpreted as having meaning) by observing the performance. Jean Dorcy, who acted as master of

ceremonies for Decroux's mime performance at the Maison de la Chimie in Paris on June 27, 1945, described corporeal mime as a reflexive system to a local newspaper: "With corporeal mime, we no longer read known forms, we decode, reassemble, and appreciate according to our knowledge and our emotional state: the passive observer becomes active. Could one dream of a more fecund meeting of actor and audience?" (Dorcy in Leabhart, *Mime* 48). The parallels between Decroux's philosophy of corporeal mime and the reflexive systems of cybernetics are found throughout Decroux's writing. In *Words on Mime,* Decroux writes, "I am inclined to believe that if harmony returns to us it will be owing to machines. Partially" (83). Decroux recognizes that machines are not meant to displace humanity, but rather an element within a larger system of interaction. Later, he describes the spectator of a play as "being part author and part actor" (102). Decroux, although not a cybernetic theorist, managed to articulate exactly the same ideas that govern cybernetic systems in his description of mime. The audience generates information as the author, communicates meaning as the actor and receives information as the spectator. Corporeal mime's cybernetic framework is integral because it serves as the foundation on which corporeal mime as a model of posthumanism can be built.

Decroux claimed that one of the first things that he wrote about mime was that "the part of the body that is the first concerned is the first to act" (*Sourcebook* 70). If a performer were to be demonstrating the art of listening, the ear would be the first to move. Because the ear is attached to the head, the head would move along with it, and so on. This idea exemplifies the role that causality plays in corporeal mime. In mime, objects (or the idea of objects) exert influence on the performer, and the performer must react in a reflexive manner to how they are affected. It is important to note that corporeal mime does not intend to depict or reproduce material objects (which is the primary objective of pantomime). Instead, Decroux developed an

art form that, like other 20th century art forms, *evoked* materiality. This is particularly evident in the title of the first part of his performance at the Maison de la Chimie in Paris: *Evocations d'actions materielles*, which translates to "Evocations of Material Actions" (Leabhart, *Modern Mime* 49). This section of his performance was divided into three parts: *Le Menuisier* ("The Carpenter"), *La Lessive* ("The Washerwoman"), and *La Machine* ("The Machine"). Thomas Leabhart (b. 1944), a student of Decroux's from 1968–1972 and Professor of Theatre at Pomona College, describes how Decroux derived his performances from the materiality of these professions/actions, writing that

> an audience member might not, without the title, have any more notion that Decroux had begun with these actions than an observer of a cubist painting would, without the title, be able to identify the subject of the painter's work. These corporeal-mime studies are, however, like the best cubist painting, the result of careful study of the object or action in nature before the transposition into art. (*Modern Mime* 49-50)

Before a corporeal mime engages the audience in a reflexive system, they must first understand their role in a system of relations with materiality in the natural world. By carefully examining his own causal relationship with objects and actions, Decroux was able to interpret this materiality and express it in a way that allowed for active observation.

If Decroux's relationship with material objects and actions is an enclosed feedback-loop, his relationship with the audience is what renders the performer as an observer and makes this system reflexive. The innovative theatre director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999), at a lecture at the International School of Theatre Anthropology in Copenhagen in 1995, articulated the communication between performer and audience using an electro-mechanical analogy: "the principle of induction, whereby an electrical wire, attached to an energy source, runs parallel to

another unattached wire in which one can detect a lesser energy, [demonstrates the way in which] a receptive audience can absorb a measure of energy from actors who are charged through their technique and rehearsal process" (*Sourcebook* 6). Decroux's technique and rehearsal process "charged" his own body with its relationship with the material world. The performances that he created then took this individual relationship with materiality and expressed it in a way that engaged the rest of humanity.

"The Carpenter" is a particularly demonstrative example of the cybernetic system of communication, information and control in Decroux's work. Before studying theatre, Decroux worked for some time as a carpenter (among several other manual labor jobs). The performance of "The Carpenter" (photographed in Figure 3) exemplified a progression which, as Decroux referred to in his teaching, "is like the corporeal mime who struggles first with his own thought; then with matter – the inertia of his own body, wood, rock, earth; then with one other person; then with the group" (Leabhart, *Modern Mime* 53). This progression demonstrates that Decroux understood the corporeal mime as participating in a system of relationships. First, he considers the self, then materiality, then, perhaps, the audience; and finally, the entire world. It also mirrors the structure that Hayles uses to explicate cybernetic theory. In the same way that Hayles explains cybernetics as a seriated history that builds on each previous phase, Decroux begins with discussions of self-enclosed feedback-loops within the performer, and then gradually incorporates the material world and observers into the system.

The relationship between cybernetics and corporeal mime is reinforced by the inextricable connection between corporeal mime and life itself. Eugenio Barba (b. 1936), founder of the Odin Theatre and the International School of Theatre Anthropology, emphasized that "for [Decroux], technique and ethics were one, so, whenever he illustrated some of the

principles of mime art, he seemed to indicate a way to position oneself not only on the floor, but also in relation to life. In other words, for him, mime art and the art of living were one and the same" (*Sourcebook* 32). One of the most profound and compelling quotations about corporeal mime comes from Decroux's wife, Suzanne Decroux, who proclaimed, "The Corporeal Mime does not *pretend,* he *does*" (*Sourcebook* 6). The ideas that corporeal mime communicates do not exist in a vacuum. There is no concrete vocabulary or narrative that can or should be attached to corporeal mime performance. Instead, corporeal mime allows for a multitude of "diffuse yet intense feelings in the spectator" (Leabhart, *Modern Mime* 51). Corporeal mime strives to evoke reality in a way that moves beyond the restraints of language rather than replacing it. Corporeal mime does not seek to simply replicate or reproduce real life; however, it does take material reality as its primary source of inspiration. Its foundation in material reality and lived experience, as observed from the human body, is what situates it within systems of communication, control, and information. Information occurs in the form of evocative thoughts, feelings, and abstracted ideas. Communication occurs in the various transmissions of this information between performer, material reality, and audience. And control occurs in the rigorous technique that informs and guides the practice of corporeal mime. Under this lens, it becomes impossible to divorce corporeal mime from the systems that Wiener and others were discovering at roughly the same time as Decroux developed this art form.

Case Study of a Cybernetic System: Juan Downey's *Plato Now* (1973)

Juan Downey (1940–1993) was a Chilean architect and artist whose interactive installation and performance work in the 1960's and 1970's concerned cybernetic systems. His work modelled the reflexive relationships and feedback mechanisms that exist between

technology and humanity. Michael Valinsky, a writer for *Hyperallergic*, describes Downey's work, *Plato Now* (1973):

> Nine performers wearing headphones face a wall, with their backs to audience members, who come and go anonymously. Each performer is connected to a biofeed that monitors brain activity. When the performer enters a clinically meditative state, excerpts from Plato's *Timaeus*, *Theaetetus*, and *The Republic* are transmitted through the headphones. These texts address in one way or another the physical world, social life, and the nature of knowledge. While the performers are under Plato's spell, their faces are broadcast on television monitors behind them, which the viewers can see. The only trace the performers have of the viewers are their shadows on the wall. (2017)

Plato Now (illustrated in Figure 4) engages the audience as a collective participant in the performance. In doing so, Downey moves toward reflexivity, implicating observers within the system itself. The spectators' shadows on the wall both communicate their presence to the performer and mark their presence as being a part of the performance. The performers, facing away from the audience, initially seem to be isolated from their environment. This isolation is necessary to activate the system, because it allows them to reach the meditative state that then broadcasts their face to the audience. Television monitors and headphones mediate the transfer of information, but the embodied presence of both the audience and the performers play a critical, reflexive role.

The spatial proximity of bodies in the performance is arranged in a way that highlights the relationships between the embodied performers and their mediated selves. The mediation is not just taking place through the technology of headphones and monitors; the audience is also mediated by the light projecting their shadows onto the wall. These shadows can be understood

as partial representations of the audience. The audience can only see the faces of the performers when they are performing meditation; otherwise, their presence is obscured. Although the performers have some control over their meditative state, the biofeed monitor ultimately has control over their virtual presence on the monitor. The installation fragments the performer/audience relationship into a distributed system of subject/object relationships. Instead of the performer having the ultimate individual agency within the performance, the performance itself exists as a system of communication that transfers information throughout the space.

Juan Downey's work represents the same model of reflexivity that exists in corporeal mime performance, albeit without the presence of mediating technology. Instead, the corporeal mime uses their body as a comparable form of technology within the mediated system of performance. The art curator and critic Julieta González characterizes the cybernetic system of performance in Juan Downey's work as centered "around the act of observation and a calling into question of the place of the observer–that is, the discussion that enabled the shift from first-order to second-order cybernetics" (González 91-92). The corporeal mime, performing as both subject and object, similarly calls into question the role of the observer. The artist and media theorist Ming-Yuen S. Ma writes that *Plato Now*'s "complex circulation of energies exemplifies Downey's interest in what he called 'invisible energy' and 'invisible architecture'" (152). This 'invisible' materiality is integral to corporeal mime performance as well. Barba analyzes the idea of theatrical presence in his book *The Paper Canoe* (1995). He cites Decroux, who writes that "the arts resemble each other because of their principles, not because of their works" (15). Barba extensively writes about the recurring principle of energy in performance. He argues that bodily tension generates "an extra-daily energy quality which renders the body theatrically 'decided', 'alive', 'believable', thereby enabling the performer's 'presence' or scenic bios to attract the

spectator's attention *before* any message is transmitted" (9). In corporeal mime, the materiality of daily life is rearticulated, using bodily tension, through the same form of energy that Downey's work reveals.

While in *Plato Now,* the observer's presence is signaled by their shadow, in a corporeal mime performance, the role of the observer is enacted through the audience's experience of and presence at the live performance. The act of experiencing the work engages them within the performance. The visual culture theorist Jonathan Crary uses the example of the camera obscura to illustrate the architecture of an environment constructed for spectatorship:

> What is crucial about the camera obscura is its relation of the observer to the undemarcated, undifferentiated expanse of the world outside, and how its apparatus makes an orderly cut or delimitation of that field allowing it to be viewed, without sacrificing the vitality of its being. (34)

When audiences both create and obscure vision, sounds, movement, light, and various other observable reactions in a performance space, they become a part of the performance itself. *Plato Now* demonstrates the system of communication that takes place during a performance. Downey uses external media, in the form of monitors, headphones, and projected light, to make the exchange of information sbetween the performer, the audience, and the performance itself visible. In the next section, I examine how performance artists use their body as implicit media before applying this notion to corporeal mime.

Section II: Body as Media

> Body art proposes the art 'object' as a site where reception and production come together: a site of intersubjectivity. Body art confirms what phenomenology and psychoanalysis

have taught us: that the subject "means" always in relationship to others and the locus of identity is always elsewhere. (Jones 14)

The Body as Media in Body and Performance Art

Before examining the specific qualities that make corporeal mime distinctly posthuman, it is beneficial to briefly examine how body art uniquely functions in treating the human body as a form of media. As an art form, corporeal mime is situated within the realm of theatre and performance. However, the broader ways in which mimes use their body as an artistic medium can be accurately conveyed through the lens of body art.

In her book *Body Art: Performing the Subject,* Jones challenges body art's place within postmodernism, arguing that body art is "a set of performative practices that, through such intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism" (Jones 1). Here, the classic liberal humanist, which Hayles argues is being replaced by the posthuman, is identified as the Cartesian subject of modernism. In Jones' theorization of body art, a work's meaning is derived through intersubjectivity. There is never objective interpretation; instead, meaning is an exchange that takes place between the artist, the work, and the audience. This system of communicative interpretation is evocative of second-wave cybernetics, in which the observer (the audience) of a system (in this case, the artist-artwork relationship) is implicated within the system and affects its processes (by interpreting its meaning).

Jones supplements intersubjectivity with the idea of interobjectivity. Interobjective works emphasize the idea that performers are both subject and object. In a move that is reminiscent of different elements collaborating in a cybernetic system, Jones argues that "the interrelatedness of subjects and objects, our inevitable simultaneous existence as subject and object, our

interdependence with our environments asserts the necessary responsibility of the multiplicitous and dispersed, but fully embodied, social and political subject" (Jones 18). Body and performance art exhibit the interrelated systems of interpretation and perception in the world. Both the audience and the artist retain agency as both subject and object in a complex exchange of perception and interpretation.

In body art criticism, interpretive meaning also draws interesting parallels with the concept of information in cybernetics. To further her argument for how body artists mediate their art by using their body as a material, Jones challenges ideas like those of art historian Ira Licht (b. 1938), who in a catalog for the 1975 Chicago *Bodyworks* exhibition asserted that bodyworks avoid "intermediary" mediums such as painting and sculpture and instead "deliver. . .information directly through transformation" (Jones 33). Licht's sentiment is echoed by the artist, curator and critic Catherine Elwes (b. 1952), who in 1985 wrote that performance art "offers women a unique vehicle for making that direct unmediated access [to the audience]. Performance is about the 'real-life' presence of the artist. . . . She is both signifier and that which is signified. Nothing stands between spectator and performer" (Jones 33). Jones explicitly rejects the notion that body and performance art evade mediation. Jones writes, "the self is inexorably embodied, yet. . .this does not mean that the performed body/self is ever completely legible or fixed in its effects" (Jones 34). Jones cites the intrinsic incoherence of the body/self as the reason that meaning is not directly transferred between the artist and the audience. She refers to the performance studies theorist Peggy Phelan (b. 1959), who articulates the audience's experience of this incoherence: "For the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the scenario in which her own desire takes place" (Jones 34). Observing a performance does not grant a spectator complete access to the consciousness of the performer, in the same way that the experience of a virtual

event is not isolated from the electronic, material forms that facilitate such an event. If the performance somehow could evade mediation by the body, then the information from the artist's consciousness would be directly and accurately conveyed to the audience. Yet, the body is always present. The fundamental conclusion is that all forms of communication are inherently mediated, including body and performance art, even though these art refrain from relying on any external media beyond the corporeal form.

The Medium of Corporeal Mime

Corporeal mime as an art form distinctly recognizes the role of the body as a form of media. Decroux recognizes that by shedding all extraneous arts, corporeal mime made it difficult to distinguish between the self of the artist and the self of the performer. In *Words on Mime*, Decroux writes, "Movement distracts from form / The actor is one with his creation. . . . What differentiates the actor's art from the others, / is that [their] medium is [their] unchangeable body" (86-87). The art of mime lies in the movement of the performer's embodied form. He later claims that the most difficult part of acting is the interference of the "real" identity of the actor. He acknowledges the distinction between the author of a work and the medium, but also stresses the importance of preventing the self from contaminating the performance. In a 1960 article, Decroux writes, "if creating means making something out of nothing, [body parts] are quite troubling, for they are not nothing" (*Sourcebook* 54). The personal identity of a corporeal mime is inseparable from their body in many ways. How they move and act in performance is both augmented and limited by the characteristics of their embodiment. This is why corporeal mime does not seek to literally depict material things, instead evoking the ideas of materiality. The illegibility of the body, which Jones argues always exists between performer and audience, is the

strength of corporeal mime. Decroux reinforces the strength of incoherence, proclaiming, "I think an art is complete only if it is partial. . . . Our mime, which tries to suggest the life of the mind by using only the movement of the body will be, if it succeeds, a complete art" (*Words on Mime* 28-29). By organizing his technique around the power of suggestion, rather than depiction, Decroux succeeds in using the mediation of the body as an advantage.

While the audience is the most obvious observer in the reflexive system of a corporeal mime performance, they are not the only observer. When an artist paints a painting, the painting is a separate object from the body of the artist. Observers can encounter the painting without the artist being present. In this instance, the observer engages in a system of interaction with the artist as object, rather than subject. In corporeal mime, the artist is always present. They embody their own creation, and consequently, operate as the observer of their own system. Hayles emphasizes this idea in her discussion of reflexivity in cybernetics, "When the system recursively interacts with these representations, it becomes an observer. . . . The system can then recursively generate representations of these representations and interact with them, as when an observer thinks, 'I am an observing system observing itself observing'" (*Posthuman* 143-144). This can be said of all body, performance art. What distinguishes corporeal mime, however, is that there is a strong emphasis on communicating general truths rather than literal identities or characters. Decroux writes, in his characteristic poetic prose, "we will only see the general through the particular, the abstract through the concrete, the future and the past through the present, the hidden via what is shown, thought via the thinker" (*Sourcebook* 54). His work engages universal concepts of life, struggles, and emotions. The particular, expressed with the corporeal movement of the trunk, is used to communicate these general ideas, whose meanings are constructed by the audience.

Embodiment, Prosthesis and Performance

Hayles challenges the posthumanist view that understands the body as “the original prosthesis that we learn to manipulate” (*Posthuman* 3). The fault in understanding the body as prosthesis is that it establishes a hierarchical divide between body and mind. Hayles asks, “how could anyone think that consciousness in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection with embodiment?” (*Posthuman* 1). She is emphasizing the importance of recognizing how materiality influences the flow of information. If the human body is a prosthesis, it is a prosthesis that is firmly rooted in how we navigate and perceive the world on a day-to-day basis. For people with disabilities, artificial prosthetics often become a part of this lived experience, to a similar extent.

Alice Sheppard, a choreographer and dancer with disability who performs in a wheelchair, exemplifies how prosthesis is not hierarchically divided from embodiment. In an interview with broadcast journalist Laura Flanders, she emphasizes that “if you are not looking at the wheelchair and the wheelchair's movement in the same ways [that] you are looking at my hands and my arms, you're missing half the work” (Sheppard 00:05:15). Prosthetics are an intrinsic extension of the body, not simply an attachment but something that maintains the energy, or presence, that Barba argues is inherently expressed by a performer. In the same interview, Sheppard rejects the common narrative journalists try to investigate when discussing people with disabilities– the question: what happened? The problem with this line of thought is that it “sets disability up as a medical situation, something that is wrong, a deficit. . . and never actually allows for an understanding of disability as an embodied, whole experience that just *is*” (Sheppard 00:12:30). Decroux reflects on the idea of something that just *is*, writing that “the

intimacy of the verb 'to be', is greater than all the others" (*Sourcebook* 70). The inherent existence of the body cannot be ignored in performance. The honesty of simply existing in front of an audience is an attempt to remove the boundary between performer and observer. This boundary cannot be nullified, as Jones argues; however, it reveals the way in which the system of communication between performance, audience, and performer is always mediated. This mediation is not a result of prosthesis. Instead, prosthesis, as an attribute of embodiment, recognizes the degree of fluidity that exists between interactive elements within cybernetic systems.

What is the difference between Alice Sheppard (shown performing in Figure 5) and the work of performance artists like Orlan (b. 1947) or Stelarc (b. 1946), who also employ prosthesis and embodiment in their work? The primary difference is in the media's attachment to daily life, or the relationship between prosthesis and the artists' lived experience of embodiment. I believe one of the strongest elements of corporeal mime that connects embodiment to a cybernetic system of performance is that the mime's subject matter is the materiality of daily life. Orlan's performance is in a continuous state of flux; she constantly alters her body for each individual work. Although these alterations are technically permanent, they are also temporary in that Orlan's oeuvre has changed over time (see Figure 6 and 7). Her work is effective in that each alteration builds on the previous one. However, it is important to consider that her embodiment itself is not external or abstracted; instead, she still has the privilege of being able to alter it at any time. Comparing Orlan's work to Genesis P-Orridge (1950–2020), a performance artist and member of the band Throbbing Gristle, is also generative in understanding the importance of embodiment as an intrinsic medium. In 1996, P-Orridge and Lady Jaye (1969–2007) began their "pandrogeny" project (see Figure 8), in which "they underwent numerous surgical and

pharmaceutical techniques including breast implants and hormone replacement in order to resemble and ultimately become one another, a single pandrogynous being" (Pearl 172). Sharrona Pearl argues that the important distinction between Orlan and P-Orridge is that "for P-Orridge, surgery is the means to an end. For Orlan, the surgery itself is the point. And there is no end" (Pearl 172). The means surpassing the end is also inherent to the work of Stelarc (see Figure 9), who continuously finds new ways to alter his body in order to "amplify" and "augment" its capabilities. His art is rooted in a state of indefinite change which causes the types of embodiment in his work to appear less genuine (Stelarc.org).

Both Sheppard and P-Orridge exemplify an attachment to lived, corporeal experience in their art that is not troubled by the use of prosthesis. On the contrary, Orlan and Stelarc's work typify a privileged use of media that becomes detached from embodiment. This detachment is dangerous because it becomes removed from material reality and supports a version of posthumanism that devalues and diminishes the importance of embodiment. Decroux's vision of corporeal mime explicitly rejects this move, instead promoting the importance of materiality through its emphasis on embodiment. In "Disability and Access: A Manifesto for Actor Training," theatre scholar Victoria Ann Lewis (b. 1946) writes that in her experience as a student and teacher of Decroux's technique, corporeal mime "worked well with a variety of disabilities;" however, not in the case of an actor with cerebral palsy, for example (191). While Decroux's corporeal mime techniques and exercises are not completely accessible to people of all body types and abilities, I firmly believe that many of the concepts driving his work can be extended to all people. Ideas that are inherent to the corporeal mime conceptual framework–drawing from the inspiration of quotidian life, communicating through the medium of the body, the importance of the verb "to be"– are not exclusive to any particular way of existing in the world.

Section III: Corporeal Mime as a Model of Posthumanism

> My dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles, *Posthuman* 5)

The Body of the Posthuman

There are a variety of definitions of posthumanism that consider the diverse ways in which technology and other contemporary factors are dramatically altering how the human subject is constructed and perceived. In this paper, I am specifically referring to the posthumanist perspective that Hayles offers in her book *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Hayles argues that humanity has already entered an era of posthumanism. Her argument is contingent on both cybernetics and the field of literature, which is a valuable framework for understanding posthumanism in the context of corporeal mime. While literature has various inherent qualities that make it distinct from corporeal mime, it mirrors corporeal mime in that it is also an art form. Hayles uses posthumanism as a literary phenomenon to advance her argument, and I would like to similarly examine posthumanism as a phenomenon of corporeal mime. In doing so, I not only consider mime as an artistic practice, but as a philosophy and conceptual framework as well.

Posthumanism is a way of describing humanity as being part of a distributed cognitive system. For example, when a human being uses a computer, they do not retain ultimate agency. Instead, they become part of a cybernetic system. Posthumanism defies the idea of the

"individual modern human subject," introduced by Descartes' declaration: "cogito ergo sum," or "I think therefore I am" (Ramachandran 11). Hayles challenges a particular brand of posthumanism that is characterized by four assumptions: first, that informational pattern is privileged over material instantiation; second, that consciousness is an epiphenomenon, that is, it is the core identity of human identity; third, that the human body is a prosthesis that the mind learns to control; and fourth, that the human being can be performed and articulated by intelligent machines. Hayles summarizes this paradigm: "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (Ramachandran 3). With this in mind, the posthuman can be understood as a composite being, existing in the flux of material reality and informational reality and constantly being reconstructed.

Contrary to these four assumptions, Hayles argues that the posthuman instead should be constructed according to a different set of arguments. First, Hayles asserts that the primary characteristic of the human is their corporeal form. Hayles writes, "human being is first of all embodied being and the complexities of this embodiment mean that human awareness unfolds in ways very different from those of intelligence embodied in cybernetic machines" (*Posthuman* 283-284). In other words, consciousness, cognitive function, and perspective are specifically derived from a person's embodied state. This is why the human being cannot be performed by intelligent machines that do not exist in an organic human body. Second, Hayles reminds us that the concept of reflexivity and a long history of evolutionary biology informs human perception. She points out that the human has been constructed according to our own observation of our selves over time, writing,

> the body itself is a congealed metaphor, a physical structure whose constraints and possibilities have been formed by an evolutionary history that intelligent machines do not share. Humans may enter into symbiotic relationships with intelligent machines. . . they may be displaced by machines. . . but there is a limit to how seamlessly humans can be articulated with intelligent machines, which remain distinctively different from humans in their embodiments. (Hayles, *Posthuman* 280)

The primary distinction between humanity and intelligent machines–embodiment–is erased in the construction of posthuman ideology that claims that human existence and computer simulation are equivalent. When posthuman theory makes this move towards computer simulation, it privileges informational pattern over material instantiation. It reinforces the idea that the body is secondary to the mind, and that consciousness exists in a vacuum rather than being a characteristics of embodied being. Hayles constructs the semiotics of virtuality using two dialectics: pattern/randomness, and presence/absence (see Figure 10). Hayles is essentially arguing that posthumanism should not be understood as the end of humanity and the start of an era controlled by robots and artificial intelligence. Instead, she uses posthumanism to signal a new perception of humanity. In this version of posthumanism, there are distributed systems of cognition (made up of humans, animals, objects and technology) and reflexive systems of constructed meaning. Embodiment is understood as innate rather than secondary to consciousness. Hayles emphasizes the benefits of this conception of posthumanism, writing that "when the human is seen as part of a distributed system, the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to *depend* on the splice [between material and virtual reality] rather than being imperiled by it" (*Posthuman* 290). The definition of posthumanism remains in flux, as we enter a period of history where humans and machines interact on an unprecedented scale.

However, Hayles' argument demonstrates that if we carefully construct the posthuman with respect to embodiment, the prospect of humans and machines seamlessly coexisting remains plausible.

Corporeal mime is an intimate art that challenges the need for augmented, mediated or virtual performance. Consequently, corporeal mime epitomizes the importance of embodiment in the digital age. The posthumanist interpretation of the relationship between machines and humans considers information to be a separate entity from embodied reality. Hayles confronts this reality, articulating her vision of a posthuman that acknowledges the role that the human body plays in shaping our perception of the world. Technology has not severed our relationship with the material world; instead, it has affirmed the physical, material conditions that dictate human life. Corporeal mime intrinsically recognizes this materiality, as an art form that relies solely on the human body. As a result, corporeal mime is a powerful response to the fragmentation of information and materiality that is occurring in both digital and physical environments.

The Harmony of the Machine: A Posthuman Analysis of *Words on Mime*

Decroux's construction of the corporeal mime models Hayles' idea of a composite human being interacting in a distributed cognitive environment of humans, animals, and machines. Throughout this essay I have identified hints of the posthuman throughout Decroux's writing. In his 1962 essay "Precedence of the body over the face and arms," published in *Words on Mime,* Decroux articulates one of the most explicit references to the role that corporeal mime plays within larger cybernetic systems. He examines the efficiency of the machine and how corporeal mime can either replicate or contrast the efficiency and energy of a machine in performance.

Before introducing the concept of machines, Decroux discusses the way that the body is a grouped construction of several individual parts. Decroux often compares the human body to inanimate objects to explain how its movement is articulated in mime:

> My innovation is to consider the human body as a keyboard. Obviously, this is an analogy, because we know very well that the human body can't function exactly like a keyboard. We can always, on a keyboard, isolate one note from another, whereas we can't isolate the chest from the head. If the chest moves, that means the head is doing something." (*Sourcebook* 72)

He understands the body as a collection of individual parts that continually exert and receive influence from the rest of the parts. The basic technique of corporeal mime is founded on the idea of scales designed for the human body. Leabhart describes that

> these scales – inclinations of head, hammer (head plus neck), bust (head plus neck plus chest), torso (head plus neck plus chest plus waist), trunk (head plus neck plus chest), torso (head plus neck plus chest plus waist plus pelvis), with a conform or contrary axle, and so on and so forth – are just the beginning of a technique that includes counterweights (physical and moral), figures of style, figures of sport, walks, arm and hand techniques, mobile statuary, and so on" (*Modern Mime* 58).

This vocabulary of movement is the technical framework that posthumanist ideas emerge from.

In *Words on Mime*, he explicates the relationship between body parts: "Movement is contagious: wanting to move only the head, we move the neck without knowing it. It is thus not enough if the head agrees to tilt; the neck must refuse to" (*Words on Mime* 79). In order to divide the body so that, for example, the head can tilt while the rest of the body remains stationary, a corporeal mime "must be able to move mechanically" (*Words on Mime* 79). Explaining further,

Decroux writes, “One must be capable of going from one point to another on a route that is a succession of simple designs. This is how the machine works, according to our spontaneous imagination” (*Words on Mime* 79). Conceptualizing the body as a distributed system of mechanical parts, Decroux is asserting that humans must recognize the difference between their own embodiment and that of the machine in order to succeed in corporeal mime.

Hayles reminds us of the illegibility of human performance, writing that “meaning is not guaranteed by a coherent original rather, it is made possible (but not inevitable) by the blind force of evolution finding workable solutions within given parameters” (*Posthuman* 285). By privileging randomness over pattern, it is easier to understand “randomness not simply as the lack of pattern but as the creative ground from which pattern can emerge” (Hayles, *Posthuman* 286). This is reminiscent of Jones’ concept of intersubjectivity. Corporeal mime’s movement is not random; it follows a carefully developed logic of movement. However, to the uninitiated audience, the abstracted generalizations of quotidian movement, rooted in the body rather than the face and hands, have the quality of randomness that allows for meaning to be projected. Corporeal mime retains the option of representing the seamless efficiency of the machine; however, they must also portray the imperfections of humanity. These imperfections are often random and inexplicable, yet deeply recognizable to a human observer.

Later in *Words on Mime,* Decroux writes that “the ability to imitate a machine enables one to represent work that does not require strength. . . . In the living body of a man there is a certain proportion between the strength and the weight of a limb. And this proportion does not apply to the machine. The latter’s strength is theoretically indefinite” (*Words on Mime* 79). Once again, Decroux extends corporeal mime technique into the realm of cybernetics. Just as Hayles argues that posthumanism must not erase the difference between informational pattern and

material instantiation, Decroux emphasizes that the human body is limited in ways that machines are not. Yet, the implications of these limitations are generative in the art of corporeal mime. "To the uninitiated, a machine has no perceptible harmony," writes Decroux, "its harmony is not that which we know from birth. In relation to the body, it is monstrous" (*Words on Mime* 79). Positioning the machine as "monstrous" reinforces the idea that machines are inherently antithetical to humanity. However, this distinction does not make Decroux anti-machine. First, he describes the lack of emotional expression in a machine-like movement. "The mime who has to portray the effectiveness of a man's body against a heavy and solid object cannot take a machine as his model," Decroux asserts, "it will not inspire him to incorporate a spontaneous emotional reaction, for this is an act of economic production" (*Words on Mime* 79-80). However, he then examines what humans can learn from how machines operate in relation to life. He argues that the mime can take the machine as a model when the actor wishes to perform work that does not require strength. Decroux uses machines as inspiration in order to evoke qualities such as "indifference, disdain, stateliness, serene wisdom, self-control, determinism, law, justice, duty, logic, paradise. / That is to say, everything that excludes: Man's struggle against matter, or a problem, or free will" (*Words on Mime* 80). The harmonious efficiency of mechanized movements acts as a sort of pattern, which, as Hayles argues, can be used in opposition to random, imperfect movements for creative effect. However, the crucial factor that allows an audience to feel indifference, disdain, and so on, is the corporeal mime's ability to perform a machine-like movement. Decroux summarizes his conception of the machine in relation to corporeal mime: "I regard the machine as the incarnation of mobile geometry. Being able to imitate it means knowing to what extent one fails to imitate it" (*Words on Mime* 80). Corporeal mimes incorporate machine-like quality into their own embodied movements in order to

articulate aspects of humanity. Although not a literal cyborg, the influence of the machine helps construct corporeal mime performance as a cybernetic system. The presence of the body in relation to the machine remains critical. Under this posthuman framework, corporeal mime helps refute the idea that machines can articulate what it means to be human without considering embodiment.

Posthuman Mime in Practice: *Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive*

Corporeal mime epitomizes Hayles' depiction of posthumanism. Avoiding the use of external media, corporeal mime instead focuses on the inherent medium of the human body to convey its meaning. Hayles writes of the posthuman, "it is not a question of leaving the body behind but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis" (Hayles, *Posthuman* 291). Corporeal mime does not reject the incorporation of media into corporeal mime performance. Countless students of Decroux have gone on to create performances that incorporated costumes, makeup, lighting, props, sound, and so on. Yet, the critical lesson ingrained in corporeal mime is that embodied awareness is paramount. Media can and should be assimilated into the performance, but only if it acts as an extension of the embodied actor. To carelessly add external media to a performance is to disrupt from the embodiment of the actor and the acting itself.

According to Decroux, theatre exists as a "synthesis of all the arts;" but at its core, "theatre is the actor art" (*Words on Mime* 26). Decroux was determined to distinguish corporeal mime as a distinct, self-sufficient art form, arguing that "every art enjoys the privilege of expressing the world in its own way, without calling on any other art" (*Words on Mime* 23). Theatre in its most commonly recognized form often involves a variety of multimedia features.

All of these elements can be examined as forms of external media that contribute to constructing and controlling a theatrical world. But when these elements are removed from theatre, all that is left is the performer.

However, Decroux did not entirely forbid the use of external media. Decroux described a way in which incorporating props is permitted in corporeal mime:

> The manipulation of properties and the act of going toward them or leaning over them should, instead of interrupting the action's affective current, provide it with a further opportunity, and the best, to take place. Feeling is better demonstrated when applied to a concrete action. . . . The property, like iron, conducts heat. (*Words on Mime* 125)

Leabhart has taken this description and extended it into an exercise called "still-moving research." By interacting with an object in a way that complements the actor's action rather than imposes on it, this style of mime composition represents one of the first steps mime can take toward interacting with media. Still-moving research can be simplified into two parts. First, the mime creates a primary text: a series of gestures that interact with the object in a variety of ways. For *Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive*, a performance installation that I created for my fall capstone project, I used a theatrical rehearsal cube (a 2x2x2 wooden cube) to develop a still-moving research composition under the guidance of Leabhart. I experimented with gestures that included pushing, pulling, grabbing, stepping, sliding, spinning, and rotating the cube. Then, I created my secondary text: a change of level (height) and geometric plane (corridor) in my body that was inspired by each gesture (see Figure 11). Leabhart describes the implementation of the secondary text:

> Suddenly, your first composition (the primary text) has begun to wrestle with the body; it has pushed and pulled the body into an extraordinary and theatrical way of moving, but one which is still honest and authentic vis-à-vis the original task. (*Etienne Decroux* 135)

Pushing the cube, I felt the weight of the cube pushing back against me. This was the beginning of a system of interactions between me and the cube. Each movement that the cube inspired in me was an extension of the cube's affective current, and the cube was influenced by my own affective current. The resulting composition is meant to show how the cube and my body act as a single entity composed of two parts that are in constant conversation with each other–a sort of feedback-loop. In accordance with Hayles' vision of the posthuman, the cube acts as an extension of my embodied awareness. While the cube is not electronic prosthesis, it represents the first step towards extending corporeal mime into the world of electronic media.

Situating live performance and archive as intertwined experiences, *Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive* draws from elements of corporeal mime and cybernetics. The installation is designed to exist as a fragmented, paradoxical archive of a live performance. To achieve this, I chose to locate the installation in the same space where I would devise and rehearse my corporeal mime performance: Pomona College's Small Studio (a black box theatre). The installation space is designed to present an oppositional relationship between a live performance and the documentation of this performance, while recognizing the liminal, reflexive and entangled qualities of the relationship between live performance and archive. Additionally, the space is designed with careful consideration of the role of the audience as active participants within this relationship.

I chose the rehearsal cube as my object particularly due to its conventional function within a theatre studio: a multi-faceted prop designed to fill in for blocking out stage directions

during the early phases of the rehearsal process. The cube is designed for performances that are in a state of development, unfinished and evolving. The composition itself was devised by exploring how each gesture of touching, lifting, pushing, pulling, spinning and dropping the cube could cause a secondary change of level and plane within my body. Breaking each of these gestures apart and assigning a change of level and plane to each one resulted in an approximately three-minute long corporeal mime composition.

Once this performance was finalized, I created three separate video documents of the performance. These videos were created to document the performance prior to the "live" event occurring. Each document was created from a different perspective, to give autonomy to the three primary components of my performance: the audience, the performer, and the object (see Figure 12). The first video was taken from a master shot perspective–a familiar cinematic shot that traditional audiences could identify with. I then recorded the performance with a GoPro camera attached to my head, to represent the performer's perspective as an autonomous participant within the space. Finally, I recorded a version of the performance from the perspective of the rehearsal cube, by attaching the camera to the center of one of its six sides (see Figure 13). This video is included to give the object in the performance an embodied perspective in relation to that of the human performer. While this cinematic decision represents my own interpretation of the performance as the archivist, I also intend for it to represent an objective performance documentation that is situated in neither the performer nor the audience's field of view. In doing so, I imitate what Hayles describes as "abstracting information from a material base [so that it becomes] free-floating, unaffected by changes in context" (*Posthuman* 19). The cube, once removed from its connection to my corporeal movement, no longer takes on the same embodied significance that is integral to liveness. It becomes an abstracted prop, a form of

extraneous media that has no place in corporeal mime. Additionally, despite this apparent move toward an objective perspective, I included a quick crossfade that stitches two "takes" of my cube video together. This was partially for practical reasons, as the camera would be crushed if it was not moved to a different side of the cube at a certain moment in the piece. But it also was intended to make audience members suspicious of the document. They would have to cycle through each of the other perspectives before seeing the video again, which they could not pause, rewind, and playback. The fade represents one of the many subjective cinematic tools involved in manipulating documentation.

These three videos were projected sequentially onto a large screen facing a corner of the Small Studio. In addition to the technical reasons for using projection, it was also a particularly appropriate medium in relation to corporeal mime. Corporeal mime compositions, especially still-moving research, are not meant to be literal. Instead, they are abstract in the sense that they allow the spectators to project their own imaginary interpretations and narratives "onto" the mime's movements. The projection screen was placed at a 45-degree angle to two walls. One of these walls in the room has large mirrors that are found in most theatre or dance studios. The other wall was covered by a large black curtain hanging from the ceiling. The result was an installation space shaped as a right triangle, in which each surface faces the other two surfaces (see Figure 14). My performance was intentionally designed to use as little external performance media (other than my cube) as possible. However, I lit myself with a spotlight for the sake of visibility and wore the same clothes in both my document and my live performance for the sake of continuity.

I seriously considered a suggestion to incorporate music or amplify my live performance. After some experimentation, I realized that this would sacrifice corporeal mime's resistance to

media as well as the liveness of my performance. Auslander articulates how electronic amplification "mediatizes" a performance, "what we actually hear is the vibration of a speaker, a reproduction by technological means of a sound picked up by a microphone, not the original (live) acoustic event" (*Liveness* 25). I experimented with adding in atmospheric sounds or room tone during rehearsals. While it did contribute to the performance environment, it was an element that did not derive from my corporeal action. I ultimately chose to exclusively amplify the diegetic sounds of the performance videos, so that audiences could hear the discordant rhythm between live performance and digital document. My close proximity to the audience meant that they could hear the sounds of my movement and breathing without any need for artificial amplification.

This installation setup was designed to be conducive to active, variable spectatorship. Audience members enter the installation space and find themselves to be a part of a ternary system of performance. Although the system exists as a constant feedback-loop between projection, performer and mirror, I was inspired by Crary's writing on observation: "There is never a pure access to a single object; vision is always multiple, adjacent to and overlapping with other objects, desires, and vectors" (20). There is no way to view the performer and the document concurrently, unless it is filtered through the reflective perspective of the mirror. The mirror also signals to the audience that they are present within the space. I added three chairs that are lined up parallel to and in front of the projection surface for increased accessibility. These chairs also facilitate a point of view that faces both the performer and the mirror, to challenge the conventional tendency for audience members to directly face a live performance. The videos are rear-projected; however, I did not cordon off the projection area to allow the opportunity for spectators to disrupt this element of the performance. As the performer, I wanted to observe how

audiences autonomously navigate the space, even if it meant they were obscuring the performer or projections from other audience members.

I performed my corporeal mime composition, which was about three minutes long, repeatedly for a duration of about 30 minutes while projected documents of the performance played simultaneously around me. After each cycle of master shot, performer perspective, cube perspective, the projection would cut out for three minutes and the audience could only see the live performer and a blank projection screen. This was to isolate liveness from documentation and emphasize the idea that the archive of this performance isn't enacted until the moment of live performance in front of this audience. At times, the illusion of synchronous live and documented performance existed, aided in part by the audience's inability to view all three sides at once. However, each time I repeated my performance I grew more fatigued. I wanted to show that my performance accuracy and precision were constantly in flux, while the video documents remained constant throughout every loop.

The performance installation was presented to the public two days in a row, each for a period of thirty minutes. I limited the room capacity to ten people at a time for two reasons. First, to exaggerate the exclusive accessibility that is inherent to live performance, and second, to allow audience members the spatial flexibility to wander around the room as they pleased. At the second performance, I had a videographer enter the space with a camera to create a video archive of the performance installation itself. His presence had three functions. First, it provided me with footage of the live event to use along with my pre-recorded performance footage so that I could complete an archive of the performance installation to display in Pitzer College's Kallick gallery after the live event ended (see Figure 15). Second, it implicated the performance of audience members as observers into this cybernetic system, who were aware that their actions and

behavior as an audience would be permanently documented. Third, it affected how other audience members interpreted the space by making people hyper aware that an archive of a performance was being created in real time.

Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive represents the contrast between live embodiment and disembodied virtuality through the lens of liveness and archive. The positioning of the digital documents, projected onto material surfaces across from the embodied performer, evoke the polemic relationship between Hayles' construction of the corporeal posthuman and the dangerous implications of abstracted information. The primary objective of this performance installation is not to demonstrate the ideal use of technology in a corporeal mime performance. Instead, the project is designed to make its cybernetic system of interaction transparent to its audience, with an emphasis on the importance of embodiment. The performance installation warns against the ramifications of a posthuman that is characterized by conscious agency in a strictly computational universe. At the same time, it welcomes the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between corporeal mime and digital media, and, as Hayles suggests, humanity and technology.

Conclusion

> If [Corporeal Mime] survives, the world will survive. (*Etienne Decroux* 36)

Hayles' offers the possibility of an optimistic perspective of the convergence of humanity and technology. Rather than being displaced by this technology, humanity has entered various cybernetic systems of exchange. The human body remains essential to this system. Decroux, fiercely determined to "save" the art of theatre, developed corporeal mime based on a similar

premise of embodiment. In doing so, he managed to create an art form that models the ideals of posthumanism. Taking the machine as a source of inspiration, Decroux discovered a vocabulary of movement embedded in the core of the body. Hayles provides a way of thinking about humans and technology in which "human functionality expands because the parameters of the cognitive system it inhabits expands" (*Posthuman* 290-291). The corporeal mime, just like the posthuman, is a part of a distributed cognitive system that extends beyond the boundaries of consciousness. However, both the human and the corporeal mime do not transcend the boundaries of embodiment. The philosophical framework of corporeal mime rejects disembodied virtuality, instead upholding a harmonious relationship between humans, animals, objects and machines that is made possible through embodiment.

Despite being less than a century old, corporeal mime has a nuanced history of theory and praxis. Possible avenues of further research into posthumanist mime are plentiful, including but not limited to: sound as an extension of embodiment, still-moving research's function as a type of algorithm, case studies in the field of digital performance, and the role of narrative in corporeal mime. As theories of posthumanism become more and more of a reality, it will be generative to consider how the current, fourth phase of cybernetics interacts in the corporeal mime ecosystem. Writing this paper in the context of a global pandemic (COVID-19), has made the possibilities of the internet as a tool of connecting humanity virtually incredibly relevant. Live performance is currently being adapted for virtual platforms in a variety of ways. While it is not yet certain if these changes are permanent, it is more important than ever to preserve embodiment during this tumultuous period.

This paper is meant to encourage the possibility of a harmonious relationship between digital media and corporeal mime. I, like Hayles, do not reject the idea of technology as a means

to augment or enhance experience. Instead, I affirm that in order to reach for utopian ideals of the posthuman era, we must carefully balance technology with corporeality. Although mime's aversion to media is part of what makes it so distinct, the possibilities of using it to express the phenomenon of the posthuman are potent and enticing. Decroux's students may continue to adapt, expand, and reinterpret his technique; however, the core philosophy of his work remains. Corporeal mime is more relevant than ever in a cybernetic world. I firmly believe that corporeal mime has the optimal means to create work that concerns the relationship between technology and humanity, without sacrificing human embodiment.

Figures

Figure 1. Étienne Decroux performing Sport *(c. 1948). This is an example of an early corporeal mime performance, in which the face is entirely covered. Later, Decroux performed with a neutral facial expression rather than a mask. Photograph by Etienne Bertrand Weill.*

Decroux, Étienne. The Decroux Sourcebook. *Edited by Thomas Leabhart and Franc Chamberlain, Taylor and Francis, 2008. P. 37.*

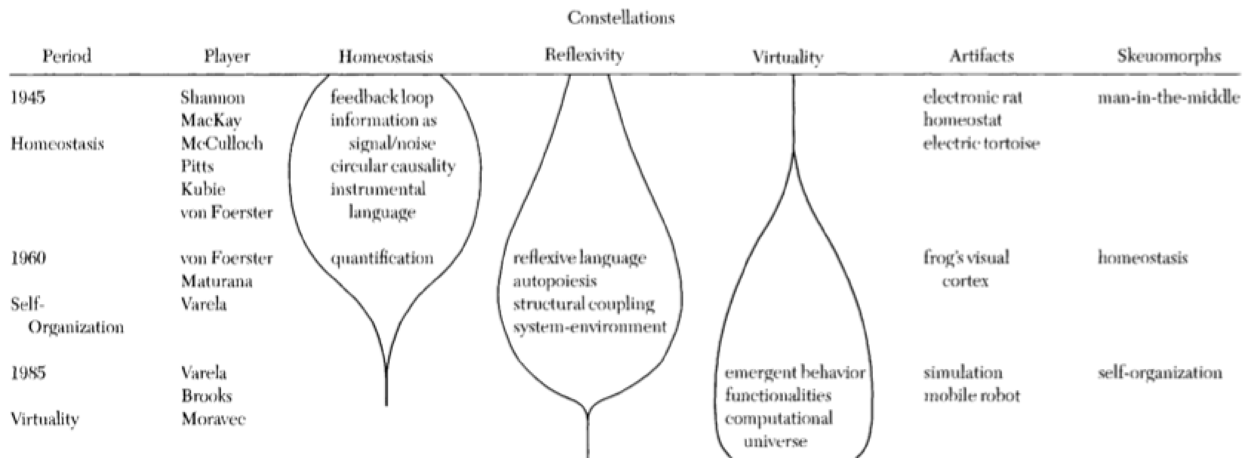

Figure 1. Diagram of the three waves of cybernetics.

N. Katherine Hayles. How We Became Posthuman. *Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999. P. 16.*

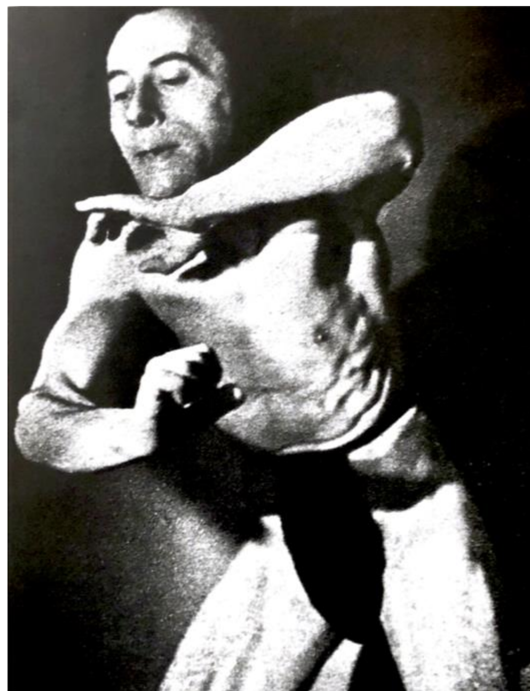

Figure 2. Étienne Decroux performing Menuisier *(*The Carpenter). *Photograph by Gaston Paris.*

Étienne Decroux. Words on Mime. *Translated by Mark Piper, Mime Journal, 1985. P. 41.*

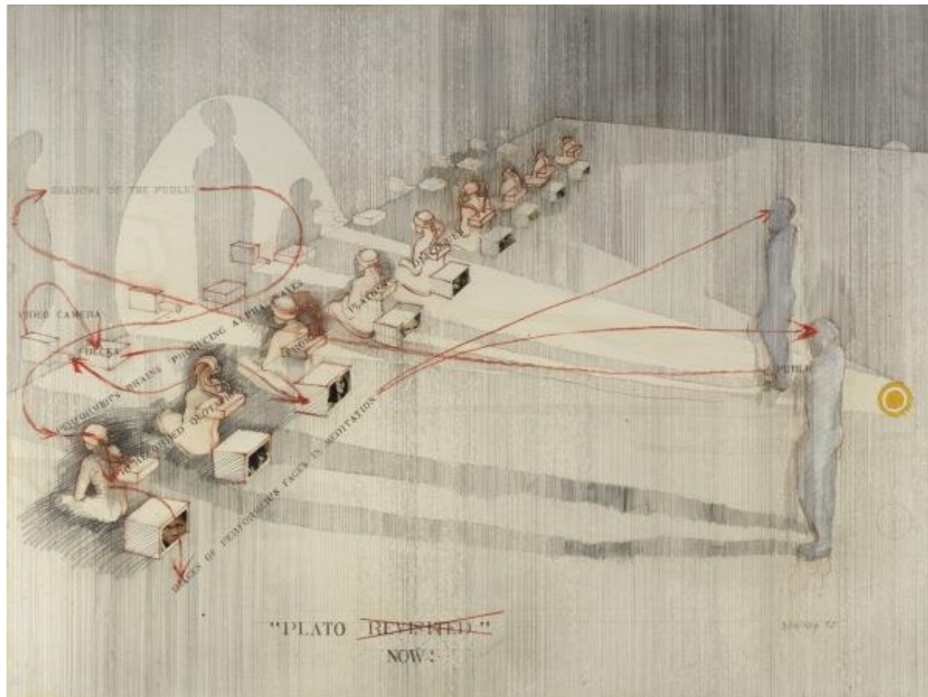

Figure 3. Diagram of Juan Downey's Plato Now *(1973).* Juan Downey: Radiant Nature*, edited by Robert Crouch and Ciara Ennis, Pitzer College Art Galleries, 2017. P. 113.*

Figure 4. Alice Sheppard performs So, I Will Wait. *KevinIrvineChi. Wikimedia Commons, 19 Sept. 2015, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alice_Sheppard_performs_%22So,_I_Will_Wait.%22.JPG.*

Figure 5. A portrait of Orlan taken by Fabrice Lévêque in 1990. Fabrice Lévêque. Wikimedia Commons, 1990, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Orlan_par_Fabrice_L%C3%A9v%C3%AAque_1990-1a.jpg.

Figure 6. Portrait of Orlan by Fabrice Lévêque in 1997. Fabrice Lévêque. Wikimedia Commons, 1997, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Orlan_par_Fabrice_L%C3%A9v%C3%AAque_1997-1.jpg.

Figure 7. Lady Jaye (left) and Genesis P-Orridge (right). Leber, Laure A. Untitled*. Laure A. Leber Photography, 2006, www.laureleberphoto.com/portfolio/jackie-genesis/xv8ggcneix67wuhn9xgrjx3tyy5ryf.*

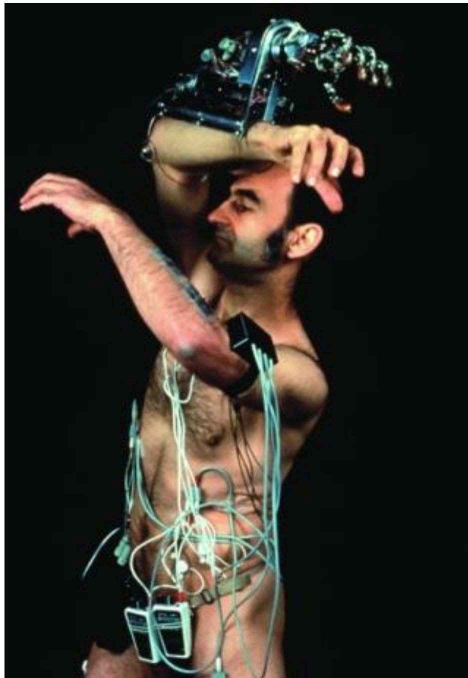

Figure 8. Stelarc with his work The Third Hand *(1980).*

Stelarc. "Images." STELARC, Stelarc, 2020, stelarc.org/?catID=20290.

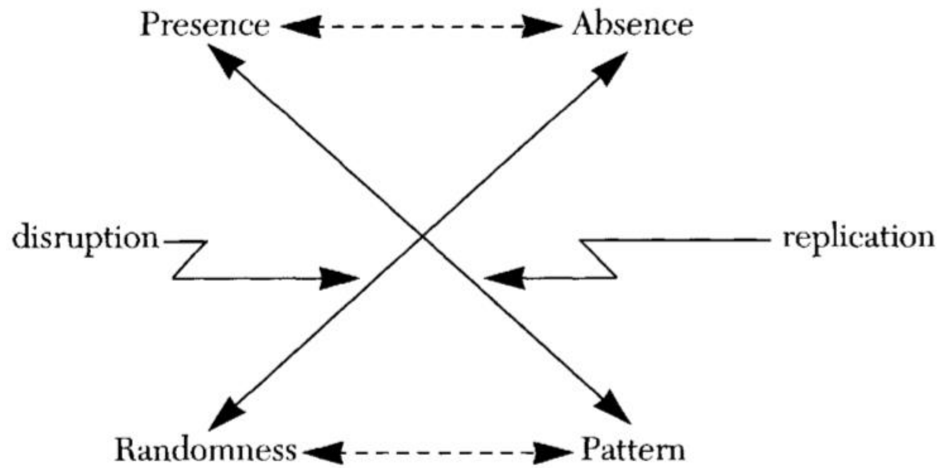

Figure 9. Diagram of the semiotics of virtuality.

N. Katherine Hayles. How We Became Posthuman. *Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999. P. 248.*

Figure 10. Eric Culhane performing a still-moving research composition with a rehearsal cube. Still from Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive. *2019.*

Figure 11. Creating digital documents for the audience and performer in Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive. *2019*.

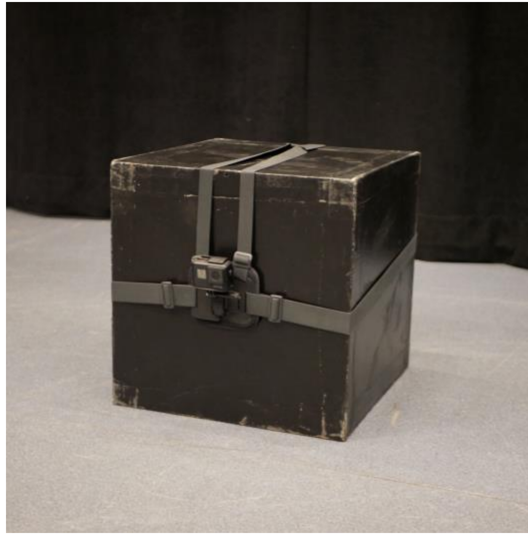

Figure 12. GoPro attached to rehearsal cube, used to capture the object's perspective in Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive. *2019.*

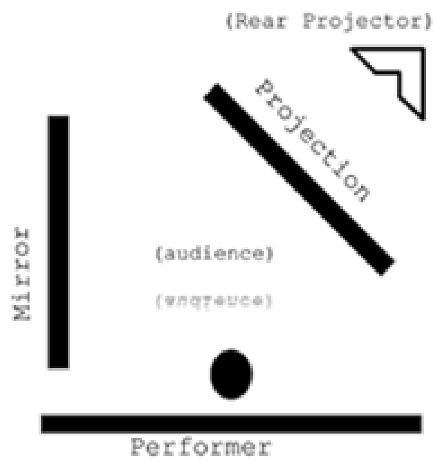

Figure 13. Diagram of installation space for Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive. *2019.*

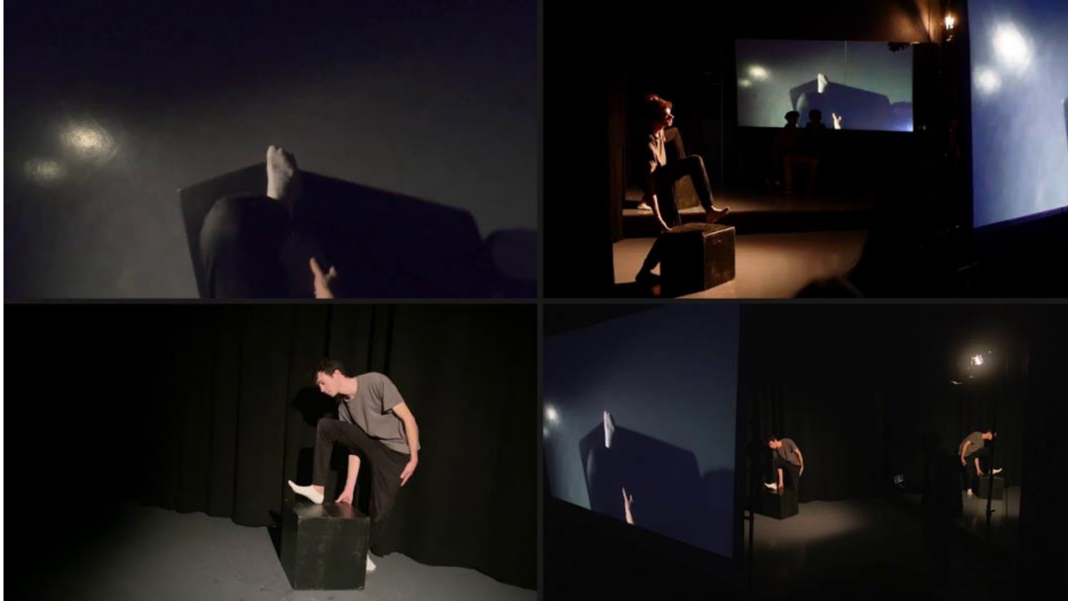

Figure 14. Still from gallery video of Cybermimetics: Live Performance Archive. *2019.*

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