ANIMA EX MACHINA: MEATSUIT REALNESS AND TRANSFORMATIVE REENCHANTMENT

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Well I call your name / but it's not the same as having you here / as having you here / as knowing you're near / as feeling you there / as knowing you care / as whispering in your ear / as my hands in your hair / as knowing you're there. —κτ Tunstall, "Boo Hoo"

In 2017, I FaceTimed into my grandfather's funeral. I had previously been assured that my presence was not required, but at the last minute my dad felt he needed me there after all and this was the solution at which we arrived. While he and the rest of my family found my presence important, my distant, trans body was a dramaturgical issue with the potential to completely disrupt the ceremony. Here was a collision of two inconvenient bodies—one a corpse, the other a trans émigrée—and as the corpse takes precedence at a funeral, it was my body that needed to be modified to fit.[1] It is not accurate to say that I didn't attend his funeral: I put on an appropriately mournful gender-neutral outfit, interacted with my family, and sat through the service before going to the tombstone with my mother. Granted, I was a shiny brick transmitting a

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1   Which is of course not to say that my grandfather's body did not also undergo modifications in preparation for his posthumous performance. There's an interesting question here about whether corpses perform "live," raising similar concerns to those of Wagner (127). Then again, in this case "the live and the [still as] stone are inter(in)animate and the liveness of one or deadness of the other is ultimately neither decidable nor relevant" (Schneider 7).

collection of pixels and sound waves across an international border via satellite, but the arrangement of those waves and pixels was an indexical marker of my real-time, "live" co-performance of funereal witness (Popat 139). And according to my grandmother, to whom I hadn't spoken in eight years, it was great that I could make it there.

In media such as film and television, there is an uneasy triangulation of intersubjectivity between performer, spectator, and technological apparatus that seems to disrupt the enchantment that presence in live performance generates. I propose that perhaps a notion of electric theology can return the enchantment and the ritual lineage of live performance to these media. I wish to explore this question in relation to "meatsuit realness," the queer-borg performance of human/oid subjectivity by the technological apparatuses themselves. Not only do screens perform and act as an unreliable messenger between audience and performer across temporal and spatial distance, but given that our bodies themselves are technologically extended, we ourselves perform meatsuit realness through real-time technologies. This allows for a disidentificatory deployment of proximity to create a variety of performances. José Muñoz's concept of disidentification is a useful explanation for the strategies performers take toward technology in ergodic (immediately responsive to user input) performance: "disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). It is "a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (Muñoz 5). The performatic "melancholia and ambivalence" inherent in disidentification certainly underpins the webcam interactions with my mom discussed below, as well as my grandfather's funeral, but it is also the condition upon which the queer worldmaking of transformative reenchantment relies (Muñoz 58).

TRANSFORMATIVE REENCHANTMENT

From what I can tell, "enchantment" is not often consistently used as a critical concept in performance literature. In *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Marvin Carlson ties together Roger Caillois's *ilinx* ("vertigo"), Johan Huizinga's passing mention of "enchantment" or "captivation," and Victor Turner's "flow":[2]

> the emphasis here is upon subversion, the destruction of "stability," the turning of "lucidity" to "panic," brought about by a foregrounding of physical sensation, an awareness of the body set free from the normal structures of control and meaning. [. . .] Reflexivity is swallowed up in a merging of action and awareness, a focus upon the pleasure of the present moment, and a loss of a sense of ego or of movement towards some goal. (20)

Jane Bennett defines enchantment as being "struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" (4). She goes on to specify that "contained within this surprise state are (1) a pleasurable state of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and (2) a more uncanny feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition" (5). In his introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Carlson identifies "the striking convergence between the enchanted performances of Fischer-Lichte and the utopian performances of [Jill] Dolan" (10). I absolutely agree that there is a convergence; however, I would argue that the utopian performative converges instead with *re*enchantment, which I will distinguish from enchantment in a moment.

Central to the generation of enchantment in performance is what I am calling the "intersubjective feedback loop" (IFL), a portmanteau of

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2 I might also consider Fischer-Lichte's exploration of ecstasy to be a component of enchantment.

Fischer-Lichte's "autopoietic feedback loop" and Dolan's articulation of "inter-subjectivity." Intersubjectivity in Dolan's usage "extends beyond the binary of performer-spectator (or even performers-audience) into an affective possibility among members of the audience" (31). The autopoietic feedback loop is most succinctly described as the process by which "whatever the actors do elicits a response from the spectators, which impacts on the entire performance. In this sense, performances are generated and determined by a self-referential and ever-changing feedback loop. Hence, performance remains unpredictable and spontaneous to a certain degree" (38). For Fischer-Lichte, this autopoietic feedback loop—and therefore performance—is only possible when "two groups of people, one acting and the other observing, [. . .] gather at the same time and place for a given period of shared lifetime" (38). It is this definition I wish to unpack in this essay. As I'm using the terms, the IFL, while it can certainly involve affect, is more about co-presence and inter-activity/immersion, whereas enchantment is about co-presence and affect. Fischer-Lichte is ambiguous about the precise relationship between the IFL and enchantment;[3] at the end of chapter six, she says of enchantment, "When the ordinary becomes conspicuous, when dichotomies collapse and things turn into their opposites, the spectators perceive the world as 'enchanted.' Through this enchantment the spectators are transformed" (180). But at the onset of chapter seven, she reverses the directionality: "by transforming its participants, performance achieves the reenchantment of the world. The nature of performance as event—articulated and brought forth in the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, the performative generation of materiality, and the emergence of meaning—enables such transformation" (181). To me this implies a circulation of energy and that enchantment and reenchantment might be different processes.

At any rate, I see reenchantment as transmersing the audience and performers into the intermedial "space of the in-between" (Chapple and

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3   It should be noted that I am clearly reading Fischer-Lichte in translation and the actual relationship between the end of chapter six and beginning of chapter seven as she intends it might be very different from the model I propose.

Kattenbelt 12). This little-used word "transmersion" (Latin: *trans*, across, beyond; *mergere*, to sink, flood, drown, engulf) mostly appears in the natural sciences in reference to fluids,[4] however it does have some precedent in intermedial theory. Robin Sullivan documents one coinage of the term ("transmersion = combining immersion and transmedia") while Roland Haring independently arrives at a similar understanding: transmersion as "transforming the interface itself to the main element for the player's connection to the physical and social environment" (6). Birgit M. Schneidmueller indirectly takes up these usages and describes "trans-mersive environments" as "environments that provide immersion across (trans) media and that allow for seamless re-immersion in the same storyworld" (102). I see this lineage as simply a rearticulation of immersion to account for the multiple media operating simultaneously and divided attention in a digital world, one that does not move away from the individualizing experience of immersion. "Transmersion" to me, while referencing immersion, moves toward a more relational understanding specifically grounded in performance and intersubjectivity instead of immersion's "assum[ption of] a unidirectional dive of human subjectivity into a containing vessel" (Calleja 222). Instead of a focus on stimulation and virtual engagement implied by "immersion as transportation" (Calleja 229), I prefer the imagery of the performance engulfing us across the boundaries of realities, diffusing us into the permeable space between simultaneous realities (see Popat 134). I see transmersion as related to, yet distinct from, Gordon Calleja's understanding of incorporation in virtual gaming; whereas incorporation centres the individual player's "absorption of a virtual environment into consciousness, yielding a sense of habitation, which is supported by the systematically upheld embodiment of the player" (232), transmersion emphasizes the intersubjectivity of performance and the utopic (or dystopic) merging of realities that manifests through transformation of the relationship between agents in the performance.

When I think of transformative reenchantment—the process Fischer-Lichte describes by which reenchantment arises in a performance through

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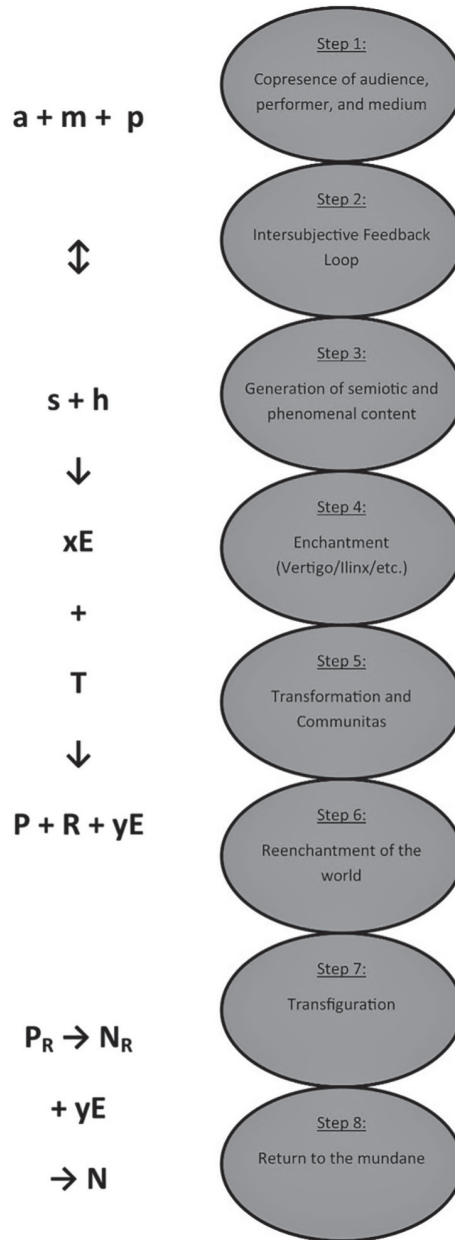4   E.g., Forsyth; Heim and Gansser; "When Narabeen Lake Rushed Out to Sea."

the IFL occasioned by co-presence—I don't immediately jump to tradi-
tional performance but to FaceTiming my mom to help me with a recipe,
which will be my exemplar performance event to illustrate my model of how
I understand this process (see figure 1). When I FaceTime my mom, we
are co-present (#1, *pace* Fischer-Lichte) and—through the IFL wherein we
intra-act (see Barad) with each other and performatively generate the mate-
riality of the conversation and the dish (#2)—there emerge meanings and
experiences/sensations that mutually engage each other (#3). Enchantment
(#4), the "struck and shaken" feeling (Bennett 4), involves circulations of
ilinx/uncanniness and pleasure (or other affects); here I argue that the tech-
nology/medium (in this case the camera), which is a third subject also
present during the IFL, creates meanings and experiences as well that in
this moment generate the pleasure of proximity and the uncanniness[5] of its
mediation (a.k.a. "meatsuit realness," discussed in the next section).
Enchantment unseats participants from the mundane and invites a mag-
ical consciousness (see Greenwood) to herald the arriving transmersion
as our relationship is transformed (*communitas*; #5) by bringing us closer
and "mov[ing us] towards some goal," i.e., completing the dish (Carlson,
Performance 20). The world is reenchanted (#6) as my mom and I cook
together once again, a "small but profound [moment] that lifts everyone
slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be
like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous,
aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense" (Dolan 5). The dish itself
materially transforms into the completed product in this transmersed liminal
space, wherein conflicts are resolved and statuses change (#7). Ultimately,
however, the performance and the call must end, and I am alone again in my
apartment with my food (#8).

What makes this scenario of my mom and I cooking over webcam a useful
performance to analyze? I use the word "scenario" here deliberately to mean
not just "example" but also "includ[ing] features well theorized in literary anal-
ysis, such as narrative and plot, but demand[ing] that we also pay attention

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5   See Popat 132–33.

to milieux and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language" (Taylor 28). The archival[6] material of the family cookbook has long been on my hard drive (after I digitized my mom's typed version of my maternal grandmother's recipe cards), but the transmission of the repertory knowledges of these recipes (i.e., what the recipe means in practice) requires embodied learning and teaching. For as long as I can remember, my grandmother was the first call made when anyone had a cooking question, and there was almost always a stepstool placed in front of her oven so she could supervise as my mom or aunt cooked. After she died, my mom surrogated[7] into my grandmother's former role as keeper of the recipe repertoire, and I have surrogated into the role of cooking daughter, an especially poignant surrogation given its recognition of my transgender identity. Here the use of the webcam does not efface my

$a + m + p$

$\updownarrow$

$s + h$

$\downarrow$

xE

$+$

T

$\downarrow$

$P + R + yE$

$P_R \rightarrow N_R$

$+ yE$

$\rightarrow N$

Step 1:
Copresence of audience, performer, and medium

Step 2:
Intersubjective Feedback Loop

Step 3:
Generation of semiotic and phenomenal content

Step 4:
Enchantment (Vertigo/Ilinx/etc.)

Step 5:
Transformation and Communitas

Step 6:
Reenchantment of the world

Step 7:
Transfiguration

Step 8:
Return to the mundane

Figure 1: Diagram of the author's interpretation of Erika Fischer-Lichte's transformative reenchantment in the performance event. Diagram by author.

6   See Taylor.

7   See Roach.

transgender experience as in the funeral, but instead celebrates it by continu-ing the repertory transmission of the recipe through telematic performance (see Popat). My fleshly body in this moment is not something to be explained away or artfully disguised by the camera but something to be nourished and moulded by the cumulative body knowledges of my foremothers that the camera transmits.

While in this particular example there is a product at the end, Fischer-Lichte takes pains to point out that this also applies, if not more so, to process-based and non-teleological performances (e.g., 17). Representational performances are also of course included in this framework. This process happens to a greater or lesser degree depending on the performance and the agents involved; the more the audience's response unifies (or at least har-monizes) and unites with the experience of the performers, the more likely it is for reflexivity to fall away and transformation to occur—for better or worse. Conversely, the more disinterested or resistant the participants, the less likely they are to experience an appreciable transformation or reenchantment. Enchantment still contains a layer of reflexivity, which is what generates the "struck and shaken" disconnect between the pleasurable and uncanny ele-ments of the performance. It is this reflexivity that allows for the perception of the approaching reenchantment to which one can surrender during the transformation, which is the point at which reflexivity is stripped as one enters the limen. This transformation of Fischer-Lichte's is not transfiguration, which can only occur in the limen; it is actually more akin to establishing Turner's "spontaneous communitas": "during this liminal time/place, *communitas* is possible—that levelling of all differences in an ecstasy that so often charac-terizes performing [. . .]. Then and only then can the exchange take place" (Schechner 128). Richard Schechner is referring here to one specific ritual, but I believe the performative transfiguration of a ritual, or at least any per-formance that results in the kind of change Fischer-Lichte is interested in, can only occur from this liminal space.

Reenchantment is neither the effect of liveness nor an awareness of enchantment but is the world again enchanted as opposed to mundane. In the enchantment phase, the participants are enchanted, but in reenchantment the

world is enchanted, hence the lack of reflexivity in that phase due to restored planar contiguity between world and participants. Some performances do not accomplish much of permanence in this transmersed space of reenchantment due to weak performative fidelity. For example, the main sustained status change in Aristotle's tragedy is the purgation of pity and fear; in a BDSM scene, the roles facilitate jouissance, a release of erotic energy. More ritualistic events such as rites of passage require a greater strength of reenchantment to accomplish the performative goals. What then governs the level of performative output of reenchantment? The appropriate levels of enchantment are only generated in proportion to the strength of the first three steps (Fischer-Lichte 181), but more attention is now needed on the back half of the reaction—to playfully invoke chemistry—and what constitutes an appropriate level (see figure 1).

Let E be the amount of enchanting energy being generated by the performance, and T be some event that triggers the transformation, with R being reenchantment:

$$E+T\rightarrow R$$

Reflexivity is consumed in this reaction. At this point, R can be thought of like water, the site of any number of transfigurations. If P is the previous state and N is the new state:

$$pR\rightarrow N$$

While the appropriate quantity of E for a given T will generate R, a remainder of E is necessary to prevent complete detachment from the mundane:

$$2E+T\rightarrow R+E$$
$$pR\rightarrow NR$$
$$R+N+E\rightarrow N$$
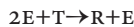
Thus the excessive remainder of enchantment is what delimits the scope or spread of the reenchanted world. Enchantment, because it retains the reflexive

component, neutralizes the reenchanted world at the return to social order after the necessary reactions have been completed. On the ecstasy/trance model articulated below, enchantment is what facilitates the bridges both into and out of the limen.

MEATSUIT REALNESS: PRESENCE AND PRESENCE EFFECTS

To return to Fischer-Lichte's argument, "live" performance might be characterized by higher amounts of transformative reenchantment compared to, say, film, which as a non-ergodic (not immediately responsive) medium has a low amount of transformative reenchantment. The question is whether or not technological performances are capable at all of the transformative reenchantment Fischer-Lichte claims, quite convincingly, to be so vital to live performance (68). Of course, Fischer-Lichte does not ignore that synchronous technologically mediated intra-actions occur; however, she characterizes them as presence *effects* instead of presence proper:

> While presence brings forth the human body in its materiality, as energetic body and living organism, technical and electronic media create the impression of human presence by dematerializing and disembodying it. The more refined the techniques for dissolving the materiality of the human body, objects, and landscapes, the more intense and overwhelming the impression of their presence will appear. [. . .] The illusion created by the technical and electronic media is often even more successful than illusionistic theatre in triggering strong physiological, affective, energetic, and motor reactions in the spectators. (100)

It is this aspect of mediatized presence that I have elsewhere termed "meatsuit realness"; because of the uncanny and often threatening nature of the cyborg body, "the cyborg, to be allowed to exist by the dominant culture, [. . .] relies on [realness] to accomplish its drag project. The success of

this project relies on the ability of a cyborg to pass as human, or to give the illusion that there is an unmediated body ('meatsuit') performing: 'meatsuit realness'" (Publius, "Meatsuit"). But while the point of meatsuit realness is precisely this illusive impression, the cyborg screen itself *is* present through Fischer-Lichte's "weak concept of presence" (94). Moreover, in the gaming world, "the idea that one can experience presence in both ergodic and non-ergodic media is now common enough [. . .] that it is generally taken as a given" (Calleja 226). Accordingly, I argue that the screen is also capable of the strong concept of presence—on a different time scale perhaps, but nevertheless capable of the IFL.

Three questions emerge here: Who or what is the actor, what is a human body, and how close is "present"? The more subjectivity the camera has, the more pressing the question of the nature of its subjectivity, its status as a performer. Not only is meatsuit realness about drag in terms of physical proximity, but it is also invested in "temporal drag" so that "the past can simultaneously be past—genuine pastness—and *on the move*, co-present, not 'left behind'" (Schneider 15; emphasis in original). The stronger the illusion—the stronger its adherence to "the logic of transparent immediacy" (Bolter and Grusin 21)—the stronger the presence effects, and the more likely the performance is to be accepted. However, I believe the amount of subjectivity granted the camera as separate from the actors/spectators determines the ratio of presence-to-presence effect. I must hasten to make a distinction between subjectivity and agency. Subjectivity implies a subject with an identifiable perspective, whereas agency involves the capacity of that subject to act on its own behalf. I hesitate to attribute agency to these technologies, although the thought is not outside the realm of possibility, especially as technology advances. For the purposes of my specific examples, a non-agential understanding of subjectivity is more useful, because it is not the case that the performing technology controls its input or output; in film, the director, cinematographer, and editor compile the subject position of the viewing screen, creating both the illusion of agency and the disappearing and masked subjectivity of the I/eye (Phelan 76). While this is nothing new in film studies, I'm interested in this subject's position in the IFL between (other) performers and the audience during a performance.

Here it becomes necessary to separate my argument into two points:

1.   digitally mediatized ergodic performances allow performers and audiences to disidentificatorily use meatsuit realness as a strategy of embodiment in live performances, enabling transformative reenchantment, and

2.   even non-ergodic performances, through meatsuit realness, can create a form of transformative reenchantment, though this mode is more susceptible to interference from presence effects due to the technology's increased subjectivity.

In both cases, proximity becomes an important component of presence that determines the level of transformative reenchantment. "But," notes Sarah Bay-Cheng, "the notion of proximity is complicated by the use of digital technologies since the physical and the virtual are imbricated within each other in such a way that the experience of presence is no longer determined by 'an absolute ontological condition'" (27–28). A central concern in Freya Jarman-Ivens's work on queer vocality has to do with this issue of technology and bodily contact: "Recording, of course, has its own function of dissociation and of disembodiment, but even when the singing or speaking body is present, the voice still comes and goes, from the speaker/singer to the listener. It thus links two bodies together; it is of my body but it must penetrate yours to be heard, and thus to happen at all [. . .]" (2). Building off of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, Jarman-Ivens identifies elements of geno-song, which are sonic signifiers that communicate the physical body of the performer instead of conventional semiotic information (5). Ironically enough, the epigraph at the beginning of this article is missing the geno-song, the meaning-less vocal grain that makes it such a poignant comment on presence in its evocation of longing. The physical vibration of sound waves in my direction is not currently present, just as the tactile elements of the person's body aren't present with the singer, and the affect that travels through those missing mechanisms is both the meaning and the phenomenon. Cooking the family recipes helps

me feel close with my grandmother and my mother, but one is dead and the other is two time zones away behind a pandemic-closed border. To transmit these knowledges, my mom needs to be present with me. And since her fleshly body cannot be here, she uses meatsuit realness to perform with me remotely, and still our bodies connect and we achieve a level of transformative reenchantment. As a telematic performance, "the real/virtual distinction is unimportant when both participants invest in the embodied communication" (Popat 137). It's not the same, but it'll have to be close enough.

But who exactly are the actors in such webcam performances? Here, the camera maps relatively neatly onto the meatsuit allowing for the performer's body (e.g., my grandfather's corpse or my mother) to engage with the spectator's body (e.g., me). However, in non-ergodic media—indeed, what might distinguish non-ergodic media—is the necessary addition of a third subject to the IFL: the medium itself. While media are inescapably part of this loop regardless of the type of performance due to the nature of a medium, the meatsuit realness in non-ergodic technological performances is performed not (just) by the performer or the spectator but the medium. Precisely that presence effect that Fischer-Lichte identifies, meatsuit realness as performed by the medium relies on the fleshy element of the performer for credibility to mask its own subjectivity.

My argument for a strong concept of presence in digital interactions rests on the extended cyborg body. "The body" is not a neutral, static thing but "the result of the successful learning process of a specific 'technique of the body'" (Ramírez Ladrón de Guevara 29). But while media and technologies change our physical bodies, do they *become* the body? I want to avoid making substantive claims about the human body in a misguided attempt to secure a difference between humans and technology (Midson 28). Not only do many bodies already incorporate (in both senses) technologies, but in an increasingly digital age, technologies become more than a stand-in or representation of the body (McLuhan 4–5; Popat 138). Here I extend Meike Wagner's work on puppetry: "if we follow [Judith] Butler's notion of the body as being more than a corporeal manifestation, which is constructed through discursive formations; then *the theatrical body* also is not a *given materiality* but emerges

as a result of *performative acts*" (128; emphases in original). Meatsuit real-
ness requires a sloughing off of the points where the body intersects with the
present, because to achieve authenticity/realness the cyborg needs some form
of flesh (Auslander 82). It also needs this flesh for the feedback loop. But it
is not the case that this sloughed off portion is no longer part of the body
(Wagner 135). While detached from my three-dimensional body, a recording
of me is still part of my four-dimensional body (Houstoun 35; Popat 139).
The contiguous space of the performance, while weak and disjointed, is still
a contiguity (Schneider 9). True, it might not be possible for a co-performer
or audience to engage the meat performer's energy directly in real time, but I
posit that recorded performers are still part of an IFL—albeit temporally dis-
placed and thus weakened—because of their awareness of and building off of
the camera (Remshardt 43). The camera is a notoriously bad scene partner, but
it still alters the performance, and it carries with it an implied audience that,
depending on the makeup of that audience, both imagined and actual, can also
shape how the piece is performed (Pitches and Popat 11). This is especially
true if the performer becomes aware of the camera in the middle of filming.
I argue that Anna Fenemore's seven "qualities of physical engagement" are
just as true for the cyborg body as for the conventional meatsuit body (47).
Most obviously, "the thrill of being witness to the other's transformed [. . .]
body," "the sensory immersion/sensual experiences of other-than-visual com-
munication," "the thrill of the unknown," "the acute awareness and presence
of our own bodies to us," and "the understanding that [. . .] there is a social
contract" occur in these webcam performances (Fenemore 47). As for poten-
tial and anticipation, these aspects hinge on proximity, and it is the notion of
proximity that I wish to dwell on for a moment.

Proximity operates in degrees; while it's often useful to have a binary
understanding of presence/absence, the distance implied by that axis is
often more important to our perception of proximity. When my mom and I
FaceTime, "it's not the same as having [her] here," but her meatsuit realness
makes her close enough that I feel present with her—it's (ap)proximate. Hans
Gumbrecht's four modes of "world-appropriation" in the production of pres-
ence might here also be considered modes of world-approximation; the more

in line with one of these modes the Other is, the closer (or farther) it is to the appropriate amount of proximity (86). When he notes the fears these modes generate (e.g., 87), he opens up the possibility that sometimes complete presence is not the goal, such as my grandfather's funeral; the appropriate amount of distance is to be close enough.[8] Ethically, a careful balance of detachment and commitment, identity and difference, is necessary in engagement with other bodies (Conquergood 70). And even if one were to come to a desired, more intimate proximity, to co-perform "in the flesh," there is no guarantee that the memory of previous intimacy invoked by this desire will be replicable, for, "as anyone involved in the theatre knows, performance, however highly controlled and codified, is never exactly repeatable [. . .]. Th[e] evocative phrase *something like* not only admits the inevitable slippage in all repetition but at the same time acknowledges the congruence that still haunts the new performance [. . .] through the embodied memory of the theatre" (Carlson, *Haunted* 4). This simultaneous congruence and slippage is the enchantment of proximity, of "something like" what one desires, close enough to perform the desire(d) function though never quenching it (Hamera 307).

These proximate intra-actions become more likely in the presence of the phenomenal body and its immediacy, although again I consider the webcam to be part of this body because it shares this property. Of course, we must pause at "immediacy," "the sense of a continuous perceptual experience unfolding in real time," and note its similarity to the hopeless search for the unmediated, although immediacy is often considered a crucial element of presence (Auslander 20). To borrow Fischer-Lichte's example of *Coyote*, performed by Joseph Beuys and a coyote locked together in a fenced-off room for three days, the close, enforced proximity and its duration allowed for random and immediate interactions and intra-actions between the two performers. The overall frame of the performance notwithstanding, the body of the performer is not engaged with the other performer's body in a planned way but in a way that arises spontaneously out of their co-presence, and it is this incidental

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8   This is a pun on the two senses of "close enough": close enough as in "at the appropriate distance" and close enough as in "an acceptable substitute."

quality of the coyote's body that I emphasize here. To return to the webcam, the initial act of me calling my mother facilitates the collision of our phone/bodies, thus forcing a wrinkle in the time-space continuum, but once co-present, to the extent we leave the line open, we can not only interact in planned ways but in incidental ways, such as if I were to leave my mom in the kitchen on an errand in the next room and she were to yell that the oven's ready so I could return. I have several friends who will skype with their partner and work silently with the connection still running, interrupting each other at will. That knowledge of shared space-time allows for the incidental interaction of phenomenal bodies, which increases the chances of a strong amount of transformative reenchantment. The presence of this incidental quality is what Fischer-Lichte considers the defining factor allowing "performance [to remain] unpredictable and spontaneous to a certain degree" (38), but I don't think its absence necessarily disqualifies something as a performance.

The distant presences of telematic co-performers aren't any less *real* or intra-active, and in a binary understanding of presence, they aren't any less *present*—though in a spectral understanding they certainly can be (Boenisch 109). They are instead more or less satisfactory (*satis* being the Latin word for "enough"), because these technologies surrogate[9] the flesh body in "the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins" (Roach 3). The amount of transformative reenchantment is what is at issue (Popat 138). Gumbrecht references this issue in regard to intensification of presence: "the concept of intensification makes us understand that it is not unusual, for presence cultures, to quantify what would not be available for quantification in a meaning culture: presence cultures do quantify feelings, for example, or the impressions of closeness and absence, or the degrees of approval and resistance" (85–86). The phone is contiguous with my (fleshy) body. While this could highlight the distance instead of the proximity, space in this model is no more linear than time is. I am simultaneously far away and in the room;

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9   This doesn't mean these technologies are not the body or are necessarily inferior, nor are they a representation of/substitute for the body, they are simply one element of the assemblage body (see Harris).

I am effectively in two places at once. Fischer-Lichte emphasizes how presence effects mask the distance that is accentuated by the use of technology (100), but presence effects can also mask the person's proximity by emphasizing their distance, such as the trope where someone is talking on the phone to someone only to realize their meatsuit is right next to their interlocuter's. As evidenced by these descriptions, the meatsuit realness of a technology is analogous to the acting techniques of a performer, both in terms of creating a convincing proximity between technology, actor, and spectator and creating a convincing distance to facilitate the level of performative felicity desired.

ANIMA EX MACHINA

I move now from ergodic to non-ergodic performances. According to Fischer-Lichte, "Mediatized performances [. . .] sever the co-existence of production and reception, [. . .] invalidat[ing] the feedback loop" (68). I clearly have qualms with the "theatrical exceptionalism" of this claim (Kruger 238), but if we assume this division, an important question still arises: How exactly is this loop severed, and how do non-ergodic media create presence effects without the feedback loop? Fischer-Lichte takes issue with Auslander's claim that "to the extent that live performances now emulate mediatized representations, they have become second-hand recreations of themselves as refracted through mediatization" (Auslander 158), asserting that "the examples mentioned so far in [her] book seem to diametrically contradict Auslander's [. . .] argument" that "live performance has long been assimilated by mediatized performance" (Fischer-Lichte 68–69). Certainly the assumed superiority of mediatization is of concern, but in my reading of the passage Auslander is not denying the importance of liveness, but rather showing how the relationship between live and mediatized modes operates in such a way that "live performance can[not] remain ontologically pristine or [. . . operate] in a cultural economy separate from that of mass media" but is always haunted by other performances from other media (Auslander 40).

Carlson's main argument in *The Haunted Stage* is that both bodies and places are haunted by all other previous performances, and that the "elemental

spatial dimension of theatre participates in or contributes to ghosting as it impacts upon reception" (131). He notes that mass media are not exempt from the ghosting process, however he seems to gloss over the potential for mass media, by nature of their *recording*, to dominate as ghosts, stating almost as an aside that "in the twentieth century television has largely taken over this aspect of popular theatre [. . .]" (*Haunted* 70). And yet, because such performances have strong archival documentation, they might overshadow the repertoire of embodied knowledges and dampen the ability of other, non-archivable ghosts to haunt the performance (Remshardt 41). Perhaps this is the argument against which Fischer-Lichte is pushing back, because liveness is not so fragile that these mediatized ghosts inevitably take centre stage, and, as Auslander notes, authenticity often relies on the interplay between the live and the mediatized to mutually construct the authentic image (160). That is, liveness and mediatization, as discourses, afford and preserve different aspects of a performance from each other, so that their utilization is not a competition of live vs. mediated to see which is superior, or a case of media overtaking liveness, but rather a matter of which elements of the performance are most salient for one's purposes. This is a syncretic approach that recognizes "ways live art and media of mechanical and technological reproduction [. . .] cross-identify, and more radically, cross-constitute and 'improvise' each other" (Schneider 7).

Carlson, through the idea of theatre being a memory machine, posits "[theatre] is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts" (*Haunted* 2). Theatre, and performance in general, still operate as this memory machine, but media technology such as film and television have birthed another form of "memory machine"; in this case, both words gain an extra layer of signification given the centrality of computer memory to digital technologies. And again, these machines are by no means separate, but circulate between live and mediatized modes of memory generation. The difference is perhaps in *what* gets remembered. While both machines are capable of archival, repertory, and other modes of memory recording, non-ergodic media have a much easier

time archiving details just as ergodic media have an easier time recording the elements of repertory in the body.

The severance of the feedback loop in non-ergodic media might then be the detaching of one part of the body, the performing body, from the others; this piece is relatively easy to preserve/observe, but is frozen while the rest of the body follows its trajectory through linear time-space—Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in practice. Fischer-Lichte identifies this dismemberment as the source of the presence effect, and by extension the rupture of the feedback loop, because of the requirement of the body to authenticate the perception of presence (100). However, in performance, linear time is not the only timeline with a claim to reality. Instead, "in the syncopated time of reenactment, where *then* and *now* punctuate each other," through the diffuse assemblage of the cyborg body, currents of shared time-space appear in myriad contexts and operate at varying levels of proximity (Schneider 2; emphasis in original). While distance affects the degree of transformative reenchantment in these performances, and performance effects might interfere in the process, it is still possible. I believe an electric theology can encapsulate this; after all, "within digital performance practice, [. . .] time is commonly seen to operate within a new and dynamic relationship between modern understandings of progressive, chronometric time and its contrasting ancient, theocratic, cyclical conception: between the secular and the sacred" (Dixon 90–91). In this project, I am not trying to reconcile the cyborg with already existing theologies, but am instead asking, "What spiritual practices might a machine have?" The portmanteau of the title—*anima ex machina*—references both *deus ex machina*, the theatrical/narrative technique of a god swooping in (sometimes literally, hence the machine in the name) to resolve the production, and the "ghost in the machine" (Latin: *anima in machina*, my translation), a critique by Gilbert Ryle of mind/body dualism that culturally has often been taken up literally by putting ghosts in machines (20–21). I too will take this strategy to turn his argument on its head: if the separation of mind and body is not a marker of the human/meatsuit but of a machine, then the diffuse and simulacral cyborg body is already ghosted. In order to effect transformative reenchantment across long distances of time and space,

the ghost of the machine must swoop in and come out to perform the role of messenger. Granted, this messenger is unreliable in the meatsuit realness of its presence effects, but it is still a subjective participant in the IFL.

An electric theology, then, must account for how (or if) machine ghosts mourn: how they make themselves present with the living, how they inhabit circuits and possess mind-bodies, what levels of reenchantment are necessary to transmerse their plane with ours. I must clarify that I'm using "theology" in the lay sense of "study of religion" and not in a specifically Christian framework; that said, kenosis[10] provides an intriguing lens for viewing theatrical embodiment and an important contrast between electric and human theologies. Here I will make extensive (mis)use of Richard Schechner's ecstasy/trance wheel (202; see figure 2). The x-axis of Schechner's wheel is the neutral, mundane person, the "unified"—i.e., one/1—subject. Zero represents total transparency/kenosis[11] via ecstasy, and two represents total possession via trance. The subtractive move to 0 is the realm of the holy actor/ecstasy, with increased effacement creating increased ecstasy. The additive move to 2 is the character actor/trance, with increased immersion creating increased trance. In a wheel model, such states are defined, reachable, and ultimately a peak after which the actant returns to singleness. He also notes that "in this state [of ecstasy] a performer may suddenly 'drop into' his [sic] role because the vulnerability of ecstasy can be suddenly transformed into the totality of trance possession" (Schechner 202, figure 5.6).

Two related problems with this model present themselves. One can never reach kenosis (hence why it's divine), nor full possession (Schechner 197). However, a wheel seems to suggest these are reachable, even inevitable states. Not only that, but the nature of the drop from 0 to 2 implies that the evacuated body is free for a possessing spirit to claim, a notion that rests on a body/mind split. Since I'm attempting to attribute the body/mind split to the realm of machines, it is fitting that this wheel (itself a machine) become an electric paradigm for the motion of ghosts through the memory machine. Technology/

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10   The emptying or sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth's will (ego?) in favour of the divine will.

11   I am emphasizing the ontological dimension of kenosis instead of the ethical dimension.

media evacuate and make themselves transparent (meatsuit realness) and/or add themselves through presence effects as the medium/messenger interfering with the body being transmitted. The wheel then does not describe the rituals or actions of the meat performer but of the *technology* as co-constituting subject. The sloughed-off piece of the four-dimensional body allows for the body/mind split narrative to operate as a technique of (battery?) power.
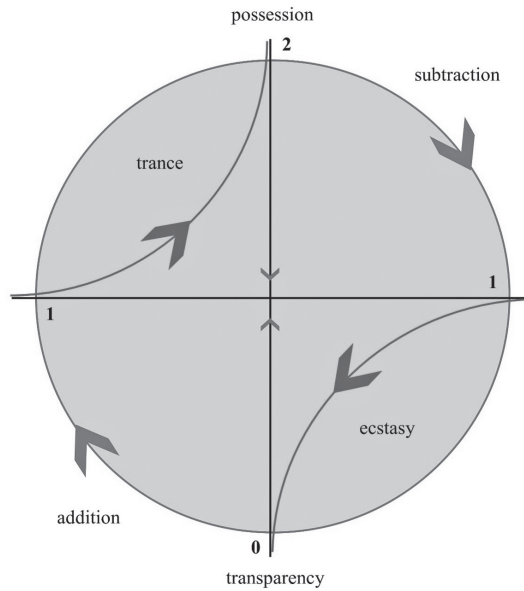
Figure 2: A modified version of Richard Schechner's ecstasy/trance wheel superimposed on a hyperbolic model of ecstasy and trance. Diagram by author.

I propose a model based on a different conic section, the hyperbola (figure 2). Schechner's original model moved counter-clockwise, but here I drew it moving clockwise; at any rate, one reads this hyperbolic graph in the same circular direction as the wheel, *not* left to right. There are asymptotes preventing the Y-axis from reaching 0 or 2 (here I may be stretching the Cartesian coordinates metaphor too thin) and the X-axis from reaching 1. The unreachable 0 and 2 are quantum states with a direct contiguity between them such that complete emptying or complete fullness destroys the self and replaces it with divinity, which is simultaneously nothing, everything, and something. This is a relational model; a person is never fully separated (1, a universe), nor is one completely proximate (in the infinite transmersed plane of the divine), but more or less proximal in relation to the other. As the actant approaches 2/0,[12] the ecstasy or trance can get one closer and closer to this infinity, increasing

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12   A math pun; division by 0 is what creates asymptotes in the first place.

enchantment until transformation, the crossing of the asymptote, transmerses into the reenchanted infinity. At the return to social order, the actant resurfaces at (approximately) 1 as the mundane individual.

Of course, the entire point of the asymptote is that such a crossing is impossible, so then how does Fischer-Lichte's transformative reenchantment happen? Scott Midson reminds us that a cyborg fusion with technology is "a fundamental part of being human" (123–24). As such we need both models to trace the pathway. If we stack them on top of one another, the wheel creates bridges across the asymptotes. The meatsuit realness/presence effects short-circuit and transform the participants into beings of the reenchanted realm, then deposit them back at 1. The wheel delimits and operationalizes what a given performance's standards of transformative reenchantment will be. The smaller the wheel—the more technological control/subjectivity (e.g., non-ergodic media)—the less one experiences transformative reenchantment. Nonetheless, the (movie) magic is still there, and sometimes you're not visiting with other actors or spectators, per se—sometimes you just want to visit with your ghostly friends in the machine.

One of the many poignant lessons of the pandemic for performance has been the "melancholia and ambivalence" of these disidentificatory performances of meatsuit realness, this simultaneous presence and absence afforded by webcams (Muñoz 58). Under the impossibility of a desired level of fleshy proximity, the camera ghosts swoop in to facilitate the transformative reenchantment of performances of intimacy. My cyborg body performs meatsuit realness as I bid farewell to the corpse of my grandfather, as I compare notes for feeding my flesh with my mom, as I confine my corporeal range to my apartment and cyberspace. In a time where social distance is imperative, this will have to be close enough.

"But come the evening when the shadows fall / well I call your name / but it's not the same as having you here."

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