Artificial Intelligence in Simon McBurney's The Encounter: A Post-humanist Analysis of Agency and Identity

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Abstract

This paper examines the connections between post-humanism and cyber-theatre in Richard Foreman's Lava and Caryl Churchill's Love and Information by utilising the lens of Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory. Each play interrogates notions of identity, embodiment, and human consciousness engaging with a world in which technology and artificial intelligence increasingly mediate human life. The study asserts that these plays explore the fragmentation and reconstitution of human identity in the digital age casting characters as cyborg-like beings who traverse a reality in which organic and technological boundaries dissolve into one another. The plays' treatments of theatrical form and narrative techniques are investigated to show how these two works convey post-human subjectivities. It focuses on the following questions: How do these plays explore the cyborg condition and post-human identity? How do theatrical techniques consolidate or oppose the binaries between human and machine? What is it about Haraway's Cyborg Theory that assists with analysing the plays' representations of technological mediation, surveillance, and information overload? Methodologically, the study relies on close reading and comparative textual analysis with an emphasis on exploring the structural, linguistic, and performative dimensions that provide a framework for post-humanist concerns. The theoretical underpinning is twofold. Comprising Donna Haraway is a Cyborg Manifesto (1985), which positions the cyborg as a hybrid being that resists stable identities, and critical approaches to posthumanism, digital subjectivity, and cybertheatre. This paper examines how the plays challenge traditional theatrical conventions, showcasing aspects of cybernetic aesthetics through nonlinear narratives, identity glitches, and the incorporation of the audience. These profound anxieties and possibilities for alternative ways of being human emerge in digital critiques that posit an epistemic break, conferring upon the audience new perceptual and memory practices that extend beyond the essentialist model of the human as a biological organism within an industrial-centric worldview.

ما بعد الإنسانية والمسرح السيبراني في مسرحية ريتشارد فورمان لافا ومسرحية كاريل تشرشل الحب والمعلومة: منظور دونا هاراواي السيبورغي

نور رافع طالب * أنسام رياض عبد الله **

المستخلص:

تبحث هذه الورقة في الروابط بين ما بعد الإنسانية والمسرح السيبراني في مسرحية*لافا* لريتشارد فورمان ومسرحية*الحب والمعلومة* لكاريل تشرشل، وذلك من خلال عدسة نظرية السيبورغ لدونا هاراواي. كل مسرحية منهما تتناول إشكاليات الهوية والتجسد والوعي الإنساني، منخرطةً في عالم تتزايد فيه هيمنة التكنولوجيا والذكاء الاصطناعي على مجالات الحياة الإنسانية. تؤكد الدراسة أن هاتين المسرحيتين تستكشفان تفكك الهوية الإنسانية وإعادة تركيبها في العصر الرقمي، حيث تتجسد الشخصيات ككائنات سيبورغية تعبر واقعاً تذوب فيه الحدود بين العضوي والتكنولوجي. كما تركز على دراسة أساليب الشكل المسرحي والتقنيات السردية في المسرحيتين من خلال كيفية نقلهما للهويات ما بعد الإنسانية. وتطرح الدراسة الأسئلة الآتية: كيف تستكشف المسرحيتان حالة السيبورغ والهوية ما بعد الإنسانية؟ كيف تُسهم التقنيات المسرحية في ترسيخ أو مقاومة الثنائيات بين الإنسان والآلة؟ ما الذي يجعل نظرية السيبورغ عند هاراواي أداةً مساعدة لتحليل تمثيلات المسرحيتين لوساطة التكنولوجيا، والمراقبة، وتشبع المعلومات؟ تعتمد الدراسة منهجياً على القراءة الدقيقة والتحليل المقارن مع التركيز على الأبعاد البنائية واللغوية والأدائية التي توفر إطاراً لمناقشة قضايا ما بعد الإنسانية. وترتكز على أساسين نظريين: أولاً، *بيان السيبورغ* (1985)لدونا هاراواي، الذي يطرح السيبورغ ككائن هجين يقاوم الهويات الثابتة؛ وثانياً، مقاربات نقدية لما بعد الإنسانية والذاتية الرقمية والمسرح السيبراني. توضح الورقة كيف تتحدى المسرحيتان التقاليد المسرحية الكلاسيكية، مبرزةً جوانب من الجماليات السيبرانية عبر استخدام السرد غير الخطي، والخلل في الهوية، وإشراك الجمهور في العملية المسرحية. وتكشف هذه المسرحيات عن قلق عميق وإمكانات بديلة لطرق جديدة في أن تكون إنساناً، من خلال نقد رقمي يطرح قطيعة معرفية ويمنح الجمهور ممارسات إدراكية وذاكرية أوسع من النموذج الجوهري للإنسان ككائن بيولوجي في إطار رؤية تتمحور حول الصناعة.

الكلمـــات المفتاحيـــة : مــا بعــد الإنســانية، المســرح الســيبراني، ريتشــارد فورمــان، كاريــل تشرشــل، دونــا هــاراواي، الحــب والمعلومة، لافا.

Introduction

In an era shaped by rapid technological acceleration, artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance, and digital hyperconnectivity, the very notion of what it means to be "human" is undergoing fundamental redefinition. Imagine a world where a person communicates through a smart lens that overlays information in their visual field, merging digital and physical realities. As a conversation flows, snippets of knowledge prompt real-time responses, blurring the line between human intuition and machine augmentation. Questions surrounding subjectivity, embodiment, cognition, and agency are no longer confined to philosophy or science; they have permeated literature, media, and performance. Within this shifting landscape, post-humanism has emerged as a powerful theoretical framework that critiques Enlightenment humanism's legacy of the rational, autonomous, and self-contained subject. (Ebrahim, Abdullah, & Almaaroof, 2025) Instead, post-humanism posits the human as relational, hybrid, and technologically entangled, a subject co-produced by machines, information systems, and ecological

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environments (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999). (Braidotti, 2013) One of the most provocative conceptual tools within post-humanist theory is Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory, articulated in her seminal essay A Cyborg Manifesto (1991). (Haraway, 1991) The cyborg, for Haraway, is not merely a science fiction trope but a political and epistemological figure that disrupts binaries human/machine, male/female, natural/artificial, and opens new pathways for thinking identity, embodiment, and knowledge in a technologized world. Haraway's five central concepts, boundary breakdown, hybrid subjectivity, post-gender identity, situated knowledges, and anti-essentialism form the conceptual backbone of this study. (Haraway, 1985) While these theoretical developments have been richly explored in philosophy and cultural studies, their implications for contemporary theatre remain underexamined. Theatre, as a live, embodied, and multisensory medium, offers a unique space to stage the disintegration of stable identity and to perform the tensions between human and machine. In this context, cyber-theatre, which incorporates digital aesthetics, simulation, fragmentation, and audience interactivity, becomes especially relevant (Causey, 2006; Dixon, 2007). (Causey, 2006) By integrating digital aesthetics with dramaturgy, it allows playwrights and directors to create works that not only comment on post-humanism but also enact it formally, aligning theatrical techniques with theoretical insights. This study investigates how post-human subjectivity and cyborg identity are performed in two key examples of post-dramatic theatre: Foreman's Lava (1989) and Churchill's Love and Information (2012). In *Lava*, Richard Foreman uses disorienting sensory experiences and recursive language to embody the breakdown of boundaries between human cognition and external data, a core aspect of Haraway's Cyborg Theory. Caryl Churchill, in *Love and Information*, employs a modular text structure and depersonalised dialogue, mirroring the fragmented identities and algorithmic processes suggested by Haraway's ideas. (Churchill, 2012) These plays were selected for their radical experimentation with form, language, and character, as well as for their thematic exploration of information overload, perceptual fragmentation, and the erosion of coherent identity. This approach creates a rich dialogue between theoretical concepts and theatrical techniques, allowing for a deeper understanding of how theatre can reflect post-humanist themes. Both plays reject traditional theatrical conventions, linear narrative, psychological realism, and fixed characters, instead creating post-human performance texts. ("Love and Information – review", 2012) However, they do so through different aesthetic strategies: Foreman emphasises sensory disruption and ontological recursion, while Churchill employs brevity, modularity, and cognitive compression. This comparative dynamic allows the research to analyse not just how each play stages the post-human, but what kind of post-human subjectivity each one makes possible. Despite the growing interest in post-humanism and digital performance, a critical gap remains in scholarship that brings together Haraway's Cyborg Theory, cyber-theatre, and contemporary experimental drama in a sustained and comparative manner. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions: How do the plays explore the condition of the cyborg and the fragmentation of identity in the digital age? What theatrical techniques are used to dismantle or challenge the binaries between human and machine, body and mind, male and female? How does Haraway's Cyborg Theory illuminate the plays' representations of technological mediation, surveillance, and information saturation? To address these questions, the research adopts a comparative, qualitative methodology grounded in close textual analysis and post-humanist theory. Through this approach, the study demonstrates that both plays are not simply about post-humanism; they are post-humanism in performance.

Literature Review

The new discursivity of post-humanism transforms the classical humanist model by destabilising the boundaries between human, machine, and environment. Key to this transformation has been Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), with its recasting of identity as hybrid, connected, and fluid —a necessary underpinning for making sense of the disintegration of subjectivity that characterises technologically mediated societies. This conception also fuels current engagements with literature, drama, and digital arts, particularly in works that challenge the ethical, ontological, and aesthetic implications of the human-technology relationship. Almaaroof (2020) frames post-humanism in literary and artistic contexts, suggesting that it is not merely a futuristic abstraction but rather our current state, shaped by digital information operations, surveillance capitalism, and biotechnical concatenation. She argues that rethinking the human is vital in understanding identity production in the age of digital mediation. This perspective supports the exploration of 'identity glitches' in the plays by highlighting the tension between a stable human identity and the fragmented, cyborgian selves that emerge. This study builds on Almaaroof's insights by demonstrating how characters in the plays become sites of identity experimentation and technological interaction, underscoring the fluid nature of selfhood in a digitally saturated world.

In conversation with Haraway's paradigm, Almaaroof and Abdulrazzaq (2024) examine the complexities of cloning and memory transfer in Churchill's A Number, drawing attention to how textual stage drama provides distinctive performative spaces for investigating the trauma of technology and the ethical breakdown of the individual. Their scrutiny draws attention to how Churchill's rhetoric of repetition and multivocality "makes manifest that the psychic breakdown produced by post-genetic reality is projected outwards," a process replicated across Love and Information, as discrete scenes dissolve fixed character and identitarian orbits. Likewise, Almaaroof's 2024 analysis of Pynchon's Bleeding Edge helps round out an understanding of the affective aspects of posthuman literature. She identifies recurring obsessions with digital surveillance, sensory saturation, and the erasure of stable subjectivities in hyper-networked socialities. This concern is evident in *Lava*'s disorienting stage direction and Love and Information's fragmented narratives, which engage the audience in decoding fragmented information in real time. As she observes, "technological culture alters not only who we are, but what we feel and how we make sense of the world" (Almaaroof, 2024, p. 6). Recent studies engage this same discourse in relation to digital theatre and post-dramatic performance. In mapping this shift, many scholars have noted how we are moving from representational (created) theatre towards experiential or immersive digital dramaturgies, where the interface, a screen, an algorithm, or a live feed, is the primary site of meaning-making (Bode, 2022; Angelaki, 2019). Woman One: Love and Information Script does not exist. Churchill's hybrid form, with its modular pacing, discontinuous telling, and data-heavy content, is consistent with what Bode (2022) refers to as "posthuman dramaturgy", a practice that enacts the systemic flattening and remaking of the human into information flow. Richard Foreman's Lava has gained considerable attention in post-dramatic and post-structuralist-oriented theatre studies. Consider, for instance, Foreman's writing in the 2001 manifesto: "I want to make theatre that overloads the senses and shatters the mind's linear craving," which, by its outright opposition to stable cognitive structures, displays a Harawayan investment in the dismantling of such structures. His sensorially saturated stagecraft, his jarring shifts, and his heavy reliance on multimedia dovetail with post-humanism's central critique of anthropocentric subjectivity. Haraway's discussion of "situated knowledges" and "partial perspectives" may resonate with Foreman's intentional destabilisation of coherent narratives. (Haraway, 1988) There are a few exceptions to this general paucity: formally and thematically comparative work

between the cyborg genderbody and the posthuman play is scarce. This is especially the case when considering that the plays do not merely present a challenge to the content of human representation, but also to the structure of human representation itself. Although many other academics use Haraway to read science fiction or performance art, only a handful consider her ideas through the lens of mainstream or post-dramatic theatre texts. This essay fills that gap by explicitly connecting Haraway's cyborg to the hybrid, anti-essentialist, non-linear subject that Churchill and Foreman raise, and to the formal innovations and ontological issues they raise. Although previous studies isolate their treatment of post-humanism in theatre or literature, this study synthesises Haraway's cyborg theory, post-human identity, and experimental theatre form to present an integrated framework for reading the disestablishment of stable subjectivities in both plays. It informs under-investigated cyber-theatre studies in live performance, which go beyond screen-based analyses of post-humanist thinking.

Theory: Post-humanism, Cyborg Theory, and Cyber-Theatre a. post-humanism:

Decentering the Human Post-humanism challenges the foundational tenets of Enlightenment humanism, which positioned the human as a rational, autonomous, and superior being. (Landgraf, 2018) In response to developments in artificial intelligence, environmental crises, and critical theory, posthumanism argues for a decentered, interconnected conception of subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999). (Braidotti, 2013) The post-human subject is not bound by biology or consciousness but is shaped through systems of information, technological interfaces, and ecological entanglements. Hayles (1999) describes the transition to post-humanism as a shift "from presence to pattern, from being to doing, from essence to code" (p. 286). (Hayles, 1999) In this framework, embodiment is not erased but reconfigured as a dynamic interface; subjectivity emerges not from essence but from relational networks. Rosi Braidotti (2013) expands on this idea, asserting that the human is "a historical construct caught in webs of power" (p. 15) and that posthumanism offers an ethical and political horizon that accounts for nonhuman agency and technological life. (Braidotti, 2013) Additionally, Almaaroof (2020) affirms that post-humanism reshapes the boundaries of literary and artistic creation by destabilising fixed categories of identity and allowing for hybrid, non-essentialist forms of expression. *("Posthumanism in Art and Science: A Reader"*, 2020) Her work emphasises that post-humanism is not a denial of the human, but a conceptual expansion that redefines what it means to be human in a world mediated by machines, networks, and systemic entanglements. Cyber-theatre refers to a mode of performance that incorporates digital technologies, media interfaces, and non-linear structures to challenge the aesthetics of realism and presence. It is not simply a use of multimedia but an ontological shift in how theatre constructs space, time, and the human figure.

According to Causey (2006), cyber-theatre "disrupts the naturalistic presence of the actor, embedding the performance within digital aesthetic(s) that complicate the boundary between the real and the simulated" (p. 102). Steve Dixon (2007) similarly describes digital performance as a medium that fragments identity and displaces continuity, creating a stage that mirrors cybernetic consciousness. (Dixon, 2007) In *Lava*, these principles manifest through overlapping soundscapes, recursive speech, and sensory saturation that overwhelm linear perception.

In *Love and Information*, the script's modular structure, rapid scene transitions, and data-like dialogue create an experience akin to digital browsing or algorithmic scrolling. Both plays exemplify how cyber-theatre can enact post-human subjectivity not only in theme but also in form. Taken together, post-humanism, Haraway's Cyborg Theory, and cyber-theatre provide a robust conceptual lens through which

the selected plays may be analysed. The plays do not simply depict the crisis of humanist subjectivity; they stage it through linguistic, spatial, and sensory mechanisms. The cyborg, as an epistemological and performative figure, enables a deeper reading of how theatre can deconstruct and reimagine identity in the digital age. This framework now prepares the ground for a focused application in the subsequent theoretical and analytical chapters. This study is grounded in the interdisciplinary discourse of post-humanism, particularly through the lens of Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory, with complementary insights from theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti.

Post-humanism arises as a response to Enlightenment ideals that upheld the human as a rational, autonomous, and superior subject. Instead, posthumanism asserts that identity is relational and co-constructed through interactions with nonhuman agents, including machines, code, networks, and ecosystems (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999). N. Katherine Hayles (1999) argues that in the posthuman condition, consciousness is no longer the core of human identity. It becomes a fluid process shaped by informational feedback and system flows. The human, she contends, is a "material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction." (Hayles, 1999) In this framework, the body is no longer stable but becomes a site of mediation, fragmentation, and simulation. Central to this theoretical shift is Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory, outlined in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. The cyborg, a fusion of organism and machine, fact and fiction, serves as a metaphor for resisting essentialist definitions of identity. Haraway (1991) famously describes the cyborg as "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (p. 149). (Haraway, 1991) The figure challenges dualisms such as human/machine, nature/culture, and male/female, proposing instead a world of entanglement, hybridity, and situated knowledge. Haraway's concepts are particularly relevant to the field of performance and experimental theatre, where identity, embodiment, and structure can be radically reimagined. In this context, cyber-theatre becomes not just a medium, but a critical aesthetic. As Causey (2006) notes, cyber-theatre "complicates the boundary between the real and the simulated," embedding the actor within digital interfaces and media systems. (Causey, 2006) Dixon (2007) extends this argument, suggesting that digital performance displaces the authority of the live actor, creating a hybrid stage where presence and simulation coexist. (Dixon, 2007) Both plays embody these concepts. Foreman's *Lava* utilises looping monologues, disembodied voices, and spatial disorientation to evoke a consciousness saturated with technological and sensory excess. Churchill's play presents a modular text composed of fragmented scenes, each reflecting the algorithmic breakdown of emotion, memory, and communication. Neither play offers a unified subject or a resolved narrative. Instead, identity is presented as unstable, partial, and performed through interaction with data and control systems. Thus, the theoretical framework constructed here allows the study to interrogate not only the content of the plays but their very form. The plays are analysed as cyborgian performance texts that do not simply depict the post-human condition, but perform it through structural, linguistic, and dramaturgical innovation. The Harawayan cyborg is a persuasive project for deconstructing essentialist identities. However, critics have suggested that such an ideal entails serious liabilities, which will become relevant to this reading of the theatre. Indeed, Hayles (1999) warns that the enthusiastic celebration of the posthuman could risk the "erasure of embodiment," and, given theatre's foundational emphasis on meaning emerging from live bodies endowed with breath, the consequences are especially dire. (Hayles, 1999). Inside the gut-wrenching experience of watching *Lava* and the information overload effect in *Love and Information*, one can ask whether these techniques free subjects from predetermined biology or essentially risk reproducing capitalist techno-culture's intensified disembodiment. Indigenous scholars like Zoe Todd (2016) make a similar framing to argue that many

notions of the cyborg have been fixated on what she describes as a "techno-utopianism" in which technologies are presented as means for overcoming the body, a premise premised on erasure of the violence inherent in Western (or more broadly white/Western) conceptions of technology that erase its colonial and racialized forces. (Todd, 2016) When the comment is applied to Churchill's work, however, important questions arise: can the disruption of identity in the play duplicate cultural dislocation so that making such a claim would only blinker us? This places different pressures on the cyborg as an agent of revolution, to insist that post-human theatre occur between those points, equidistant or unmeasured. Donna Haraway's A Cyborg Manifesto (1991) is a critical intervention into feminist theory, science studies, and post-humanist discourse. (Haraway, 1991) Haraway introduces the cyborg as a hybrid figure that disrupts dominant binaries such as human/machine, male/female, and nature/culture. She defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction", arguing that it embodies a politics of contradiction, fragmentation, and constructed identity. This research draws on five conceptual tools from Haraway's theory:

Boundary Breakdown in which the cyborg erases distinctions between categories such as organism and machine, allowing new, fluid subject positions to emerge.

Hybrid Subjectivity, which refers to the idea that Identity is fractured, partial, and assembled from multiple standpoints rather than unified or natural; Post-Gender Identity, in which the cyborg challenges gender essentialism, opening space for identities beyond the binary; Situated Knowledges, in which Haraway rejects claims of universal objectivity, instead emphasising knowledge as partial, contextual, and relational; and Anti-Essentialism holds that Identity is not fixed by nature but is shaped through interaction with cultural and technological systems.

These concepts are especially relevant to the plays under analysis, both of which feature fragmented characters, decentered narratives, and mediated embodiment. Haraway's cyborg becomes not only a metaphor for identity but a dramaturgical principle that shapes theatrical form. ("A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s", 1985) Haraway's Cyborg Theory, though it helps us deconstruct binaries and critically rework alternative hybrid subjectivity, is not without detractors. As scholars such as Katherine Hayles (How We Became Posthuman, 1999) argue, the cyborg's techno-optimism can be seen as a problem of negating materiality in the flesh; this is significant for theatre, where the primary anchor of meaning is usually the live body. (Hayles, 1999) On the other hand, Indigenous and postcolonial theorists (see, for example, Todd 2016) argue that Haraway's framework is deeply bound up with a Western worldview and techno-utopianism, while it subtends historically embodied histories of colonisation or ecological violence. In the case of *Lava* and *Love and Information*, for instance, data-driven vignettes might end up replicating the very neoliberal detachment Haraway is out to critique by turning life as we know it into aestheticised fragments. Thus, this analysis tempers Haraway's hopefulness by acknowledging, on the one hand, the tensions between the potential for the cyborg's liberation and its material blind spots, and, on the other, whether post-human theatre might destroy hierarchies or perpetuate them in a new, technological guise.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in close textual analysis and comparative reading. It investigates how *Lava, Love, and Information* stage post-human subjectivities through their dramatic form, language, and structure. The methodology draws from performance theory,

post-humanist critique, and literary analysis, with Haraway's Cyborg Theory functioning not merely as background but as a critical interpretive tool. To provide methodological clarity, the study identifies specific dramaturgical variables for comparison. These include scene duration, which assesses the pace and rhythm of performance; sensory channels, which evaluate the use of auditory and visual elements to create disorientation or focus; and audience address, which examines how each play interacts with its audience to generate engagement or detachment. By explicitly stating these variables, the study enhances transparency and facilitates replicability of its analytical approach. The research also employs a comparative methodology, examining convergences and divergences in the plays' treatment of technological mediation, fragmentation, and surveillance. While Foreman emphasises disorientation and overload, Churchill leans into modularity and data saturation. Their differences reflect distinct strategies for engaging with posthuman concerns, thereby enabling the study to identify aesthetic and philosophical patterns across genres. Although the study focuses on the published texts, it integrates insights from cyber-theatre theory to understand how these plays would function in performance. Drawing from Causey (2006) and Dixon (2007), the analysis interprets how sensory interruption, fragmented space, and technological imagery enact posthuman aesthetics on stage. Overall, the methodology aims to integrate theory with practice, reading the plays not only as literary texts but also as performative systems that generate meaning through structural disruption. This enables a deeper understanding of how contemporary theatre portrays the dissolution of the human and envisions new configurations of identity, memory, and agency in the digital age. Performance

Analysis: Staging the Posthuman

These plays embody the post-humanist, cyborg nature of subjectivity, reflected not only in a theoretical framework but also in radical, actual pathways to their staging. Lava and Churchill's Love and Information: two performances that deconstruct conventional theatrical gender roles on stage, utilising different yet complementary performance strategies whose synthesis enables them to embody the cyborg condition in live space.

1. Lava-Sensory Overload and Mechanical Embodiment.

Where the simple act of staging enables Foreman to concretise a post-human way of being disoriented by Recurrent Audio-visuals, which may flicker text and abstract clips in montage. At one point, a projected digital clock rapidly counts down, visually conveying urgency and the fleeting nature of time. Simultaneously, overlapping whispers of past conversations envelop the space, creating a tangible sense of dislocated memory and confusion. This combination of visual and auditory elements forms a pertinent "data storm" of ever-looping stimuli that floods rational perception, in keeping with Haraway's conception of a symptomatic boundary breakdown. (Ontological-Hysteric Theatre archives, 1989). Actors slide and grind like 'clockwork automata' (Foreman, 2001, p. 72), gestures are mechanical and repeated in the representation of a hybrid subjectivity. (Foreman, 2001) The audience as cyborgian processor occurs when, in this milieu, house lights remain up, so that the audience must "compile" sense from sensory snippets —a kind of literal staging of situated knowledges. Reviews note that these techniques "short-circuit the brain's craving for narrative" (The Village Voice), leaving audiences "alternately exhilarated and numb" (Savran, 1992), a tension that reflects Hayles' concerns about post-human disembodiment. (Hayles, 1999) 1. Love and Information: Algorithmic Theatre The mode of staging that Churchill uses to tell her story parallels the digital interfaces in: Modular scenography, when scenes are underscored by blackouts and level changes, with set pieces/ screens resetting like a browser tab (Royal Court Theatre,

2012). Translucent casting occurs when actors exchange roles on a scene-by-scene basis and are "cast" anew in each situation, a performative form of unessentialism. Algorithmicism is whimsically rendered in Data-Driven Rhythm through vignettes of 2-6 minutes, mirroring the duration of scenes in the algorithmic attention economy. "It's theatre as feed refresh," says director James Macdonald (The Guardian, 2012). ("James Macdonald: 'It's theatre as feed refresh'", 2012) The cyborg resonates with emotion only as uncanny digital fatigue (The New Yorker), yet lacks an affective spark, trying but failing to deliver genuine feeling (The Telegraph). ("Pixel Perfect", 2014) However, where Lava plonked them into turbulent embodiment, Love and Information pulped the grist of its audience members through abstract data processors. Nevertheless, importantly, both employ staging to collapse the human-v humanist spectator-actor-actor distinction in the first place; theatre as cyborg (as Haraway would have it). 1. Analysis and Discussion: a. Richard Foreman and Lava Richard Foreman is a foundational figure in American avant-garde and posttraumatic theatre. Founder of the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre in New York, Foreman has consistently rejected traditional narrative, psychological realism, and linear character development. (Davy, 1978) Instead, he focuses on theatrical forms that disrupt audience perception and reflect the fragmentation of modern consciousness. His work is heavily influenced by philosophy, particularly phenomenology and structuralism. It often draws attention to the theatrical event itself, asking viewers to remain self-aware of their own perceptual and interpretive processes (Foreman, 1989). (Davy, 1978) In Lava (1989), Foreman constructs a theatrical landscape of sensory overload, recursive language, and visual clutter. There is no conventional plot; instead, Lava presents a collage of voices, projections, disconnected gestures, and philosophical musings. The leading "figure" in the play, often referred to as the "Character" or "Agent," operates more as a symbol or node in a semiotic network than as a psychologically coherent person. Foreman (1989) described the piece as an exploration of the "wobble of thought," with the stage functioning as a space in which language and logic collapse into loops, stasis, and repetition. This structureless structure is the plot: a representation of consciousness breaking down under the pressure of modern systems of information and representation.

1.1. Caryl Churchill and *Love and Information*

Caryl Churchill is one of the most influential British playwrights of the 20th and 21st centuries, known for her radical experiments with form, her feminist politics, and her exploration of language and power. ("Caryl Churchill", 2025) Her works often focus on issues such as identity, surveillance, gender, and technology, employing fragmented, nonlinear storytelling to reflect the complexities of contemporary life. Churchill's plays break theatrical conventions, refusing traditional narrative arcs in favour of disjointed scenes and ambiguous characterisations that require active interpretation from the audience (Churchill, 2012). *Love and Information* (2012) comprises over fifty short scenes that portray anonymous characters navigating data, relationships, and emotional uncertainty in the digital age. There are no fixed characters or settings; the scenes jump rapidly across themes such as memory, secrets, identity, knowledge, and artificial intelligence. For example, one moment we witness a couple debating whether a memory is real, while in the next, someone reveals a personal trauma to a stranger. The play lacks a traditional plot, but its structure becomes its narrative: a mosaic of modern existence filtered through the lenses of emotional distance and informational overload (Churchill, 2012). The viewer becomes an active processor, assembling meaning in the same fragmented way we process newsfeeds or online interactions.

Both plays operate as theatrical interventions into the philosophical crisis of the human subject in the digital age. Anchored in Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory and informed by post-humanist thought, these

plays stage a radical reimagining of identity, language, and embodiment by undermining the core assumptions of humanist drama. Instead of coherent narratives and psychologically motivated characters, both works present fragmented structures, algorithmic speech, and depersonalised performances that reflect the collapse of stable subjectivity. This section offers a comparative analysis organised around Haraway's five conceptual anchors: boundary breakdown, hybrid subjectivity, post-gender identity, situated knowledges, and anti-essentialism.

1.2. Boundary Breakdown

Foreman's *Lava* confronts the spectator with a recursive barrage of fragmented statements, visual clutter, and sound distortions that intentionally blur the line between inner cognition and external data. The phrase "I am the man who said I am the man who said I am…" (Foreman, 1989, p. 5) loops endlessly, disrupting linear meaning and illustrating the disintegration of language as a vessel for truth or identity. In this, the play mirrors Haraway's (1991) assertion that cyborgs exist in systems where the boundaries between human and machine, mind and code, dissolve (p. 152). In Love and Information, the breakdown of boundaries is formalised through structure. With more than fifty disjointed scenes, often unanchored by character names or context, the play creates a theatrical architecture that mimics internet browsing or an algorithmic feed. In "Memory," a character says: "What if the memory isn't mine? What if it was given to me?" (Churchill, 2012, p. 38). The question precisely articulates posthuman anxiety about the artificiality of memory and subjectivity, highlighting how identity can be constructed from inputs rather than experience.

1.3. Hybrid Subjectivity

Both plays refuse stable character identity, presenting subjectivity as fragmented and assembled rather than coherent. In Lava, the characters, if they can be called such, are abstract entities without names, defined instead by phrases, postures, and external stimuli. The stage directions refer to them as "machines of consciousness" (Foreman, 1989, p. 18), reinforcing the idea that identity is produced through interaction with symbolic systems rather than internal selfhood. Similarly, Love and Information treats identity as a modular concept. The same actor can play multiple roles across scenes, and the dialogue often lacks emotional or biographical depth. In "Affair," a character responds to a breakup with: "I don't think it matters." "It matters to me." (Churchill, 2012, p. 26) The exchange is minimal, noncommittal, and stripped of psychological realism. The subject here is hybrid, transient, and procedural, echoing Haraway's notion of the cyborg as an assemblage of contradictory standpoints (Haraway, 1991).

1.4. Post-Gender Identity

Both playwrights challenge traditional gender representation. Churchill achieves this by writing characters that are gender-neutral in dialogue and casting, thus removing gender as a stable identity marker. The director is free to assign any gender identity to any role. This dramaturgical choice aligns with Haraway's (1991) vision of a post-gender world, in which the cyborg is "not afraid of permanently partial identities". It is free from the limitations of binary constructs (p. 154). Foreman's strategy is more abstract. His characters are dehumanised to the point where gender is irrelevant; they are symbolic entities, linguistic loops, and behavioural fragments. Their gestures and utterances do not correspond to recognisable social or gendered norms. Gender, in both plays, is thus decentred, replaced by function, pattern, and systemic interaction.

1.5. Situated Knowledges

Haraway's idea of "situated knowledges" critiques the illusion of universal, objective truth. This is reflected in the fractured epistemologies of both plays. In Love and Information, knowledge is presented as scattered data, partial insights, or fragmented memories. In the scene "Secret," a character says, "I had to tell someone. It was too much" (Churchill, 2012, p. 31), revealing the emotional weight of private knowledge in a world where the boundaries of privacy and exposure are collapsing. In Lava, disembodied voices issue contradictory instructions or philosophical riddles that conflict with what is seen or heard on stage. The audience is forced to negotiate multiple perspectives without resolution, and knowledge becomes relational, fragmented, and unstable.

1.6. Anti-Essentialism Finally

Both plays embody Haraway's (1991) anti-essentialist stance, which posits that there is no fixed or original human identity to recover or protect. In Lava, the recursive structure and sensory overload render any sense of progression or transformation obsolete. The play ends where it began in a loop, suggesting that identity is not a journey but a recursive process of decoding and disorientation. *Love and Information* ends not with resolution, but with repetition. The last few scenes mirror earlier moments, suggesting that emotional and epistemological states repeat across different data configurations. The absence of narrative arc or character development reinforces the view that identity is generated by system inputs rather than by intrinsic traits. Although both plays share a commitment to post-human aesthetics, their strategies diverge. Lava is more immersive and chaotic, prioritising affective disorientation and sensory assault. It draws heavily on cyber-theatrical forms to destabilise the audience's perceptual field. Love and Information, by contrast, is quieter, more cerebral, and mimics the interface logic of digital life, characterised by compressed attention, hyperlinked thought, and information fatigue. Both plays, however, perform the cyborg condition not through exposition, but through form. They collapse narrative certainty, challenge embodiment, and disrupt linguistic logic. In doing so, they make visible the ideological and aesthetic consequences of living in a post-human world. As Haraway (1991) argues, "The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics", a truth both plays embrace by offering performances in which the human is no longer the centre, but a node in an ever-shifting network.

1.7. The more disorienting shapes of *Lava* and *Love and Information*

On the other hand, it elicits a wide spectrum of audience responses that oscillate between cyborgian immersion and visceral alienation (a tension that both plays address in their respective interrogations of posthuman subjectivity). As Lava fans highlight in their reviews of the company's original productions, it's a sensory assault (Savran 45), plunging viewers into what one critic described as hyper-awareness and dissolution (The Village Voice, 1989), in which circular dialogue and multimedia inundation force spectators to raise their voices above those of machines. (Gorlin, 1989) This is the "boundary breakdown" so important for Haraway but regarded as degenerating to "dehumanising detachment" by some critics (The New York Times, 1990), an insidious state that Hayles expresses concern might threaten embodiment. ("The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", 1990) For similar reasons, *Love and Information*'s modular structure has been lauded for reflecting "digital-age consciousness" (The Guardian, 2012), with audiences describing their engagement with the show as akin to browsing, as one would on an algorithmic scrolling website (Theatre Journal, 2013). ("Love and Information - review", 2012) Nevertheless, its emotional ascetism is also

isolating, as one reviewer comments, "We reach out for relationships not unlike glitching AI" (The Telegraph, 2012). Such responses reflect the cyborg's dual possibility: while some viewers arrive at an emancipatory "post-human empathy" (Bode, 2022), others are confronted with the alienation of identity as data.

Conclusion

This research has examined how Lava, Love, and Information enact post-human identity and the cyborg condition through radical experimentation with form, structure, and theatrical aesthetics. Using Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory as a conceptual lens, supported by the broader frameworks of posthumanism and cybertheatre theory. The study demonstrates that both plays transcend traditional dramatic conventions and challenge essentialist conceptions of the self. Both plays dismantle binary logics central to Enlightenment humanism: human/machine, body/mind, male/female, presence/absence. Through their respective dramaturgical strategies, Foreman's sensory and ontological disruption, and Churchill's modular, non-linear textuality, the plays express the fragmentation and hybridity of contemporary identity. Characters function as nodes in networks rather than unified individuals. Language, gesture, and presence become performative artifacts of informational systems rather than expressions of internal emotion or psychological realism. The analysis, grounded in Haraway's five conceptual pillars: boundary breakdown, hybrid subjectivity, post gender identity, situated knowledge, and anti-essentialism, has revealed how Lava and Love and Information not only represent the post-human condition but perform it formally. Both plays demand active decoding by the audience, placing them within cyborgian systems of meaning-making, simulation, and sensory engagement. The viewer is not a passive observer but a co-processor within the post-human apparatus of the performance. This study has also emphasised that cyber-theatre, as a mode of performance and a critical aesthetic, enables theatre to remain relevant in an age in which digitisation, surveillance, and data overload shape human perception. Both Foreman and Churchill demonstrate that theatre can confront the epistemic and ontological shifts of post-humanism not only in content but in structure. Ultimately, Lava, Love, and Information function as theatrical laboratories for staging what it means to be human after the human. They offer not resolutions but ruptures, forms of engagement that reflect the instability, contradiction, and possibility of post-human subjectivity. In doing so, they reaffirm theatre's capacity to participate in and critically reflect on the reconfiguration of identity in the 21st century.

Finally, if theatre stages the "death of the human," what replaces it? Can cyber-theatre foster empathy in a post-human world, or does it mirror digital alienation? Looking ahead, an intriguing research provocation might be: as cyber-theatre continues to evolve alongside technological advancements, how might these performances further disrupt or redefine the experiences of identity and community? What new forms of hybridisation in performance could emerge that challenge current post-human paradigms, and how will these innovations influence audience engagement and societal narratives? These questions invite further inquiry into the potential of theatre to navigate and reshape the boundaries of identity in our increasingly digitised future.

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