

## ***What performs?***

What might our discipline gain from decentering the human as theatre's actor, author, and agent? What else *performs*? How does placing non-humans center stage expand our historiographic imagination, putting new pressure on familiar methods, and breathing new life into objects/subjects long dismissed as the inert material from which performance, and performance history, is fashioned? What new understandings of performance emerge from this effort? And how might they enrich discourse in other disciplines where "performance" is an oft-cited but little understood concept?

Contributors could consider:

- performance's human proxies and prosthetics, such as puppets or avatars
- spatial performance: theatres, sites, landscapes, environments, and architecture as actors
- the performative and historical agency of things – objects, props, or other forms of material
- animals and other non-human theatrical presences that challenge our understanding of rights, cognition, affect, and empathy in theatre
- super- and supra-natural actors, on or beyond the stage
- para-theatrical genres in which the "stars" are things, places or other non-human entities (museums, heritage sites, medical demonstrations, for instance)
- theatre history as a site for analyzing the performance of systemic entities: institutions, companies, networks, economies, or ecologies, even everyday life itself
- the performance of speech, sound, silence, and language, their travels, actions, and effects
- the autonomous lives of texts, documents as historical actors, digital animacies, or the agency and efficacy of ideas themselves
- theatrical sensations and sensoria, memory, embodiment, or affect, considered as material, but not necessarily or exclusively human attributes
- performance traditions and phenomena rooted in alternative modernities that don't rest on humanist foundations

This conference theme invites theatre scholars to entertain post-human perspectives on an art form and institution that has historically been understood as the crucible of humanism. It asks participants to prioritize methodological experimentation, and to actively engage with emerging interdisciplinary fields of theory, from new materialism to political ecology, network theory to affect studies. Theorists in these fields confront the inadequacy of liberal humanism in engaging urgently contemporary realities such as global techno-capitalism or climate catastrophe. Yet they have also stood accused of high-handed theoretical idealism, of a lack of attention to geographical, historical, or economic specificities, and of indifference to the hard-won gains (especially for minorities) of humanist critiques

centered on identity, rights, and representation. If theatre is a machine of political imagination, can it help us imagine a truly *just* post-human politics?