Editorial

This issue of *Platform* takes as its theme representations of the human, a topic that developed out of a symposium hosted by Royal Holloway's Department of Drama and Theatre in 2011 entitled 'Who Do We Think We Are: Representing the Human'. The question underpinning that symposium, the question of who 'we' are as humans, affects many areas of human (and nonhuman) concern: politics, ethics, history, religion, economics, the environment, science, technology and, of course, literature, drama, theatre, performance and dance, to name only a few. Who or what humans are thought to be and the stories that locate them shape how people behave, treat others, construct laws, inflict punishments, educate and so on. Representations of humans in the arts thereby offer rich and, potentially, influential repositories of ways in which humans have been, and are, conceived and reconceived. Catherine Belsey explains that although '[f]ictional texts do not necessarily mirror the practices prevalent in a social body', they do articulate 'the meanings its members understand and contest' about 'the human' (5). This being so, Belsey takes the view, as do we, the editors, that fictional representations of humans in literature, theatre and performance constitute possible places 'from which to begin an analysis of what it means to be a person [...] at a specific historical moment' (ibid).

'The human' in this edition's title nods towards the twentieth century's liberal humanist subject and to its corresponding European critical tradition. This tradition had dominated literary discourse up until the rise of (primarily Francophone and poststructuralist) theory in the 1960s and '70s, when writers such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and later commentators such as Elinor Fuchs announced the death of 'the human'. Roundly and rightly vilified by its antihumanist critics (feminists, postcolonialists, gender theorists, poststructuralists, etc.), the liberal humanist subject was revealed as denoting nothing more universal than a historically privileged and ideal form of 'the human': specifically, a white, educated, logocentric,

and European male subject. Towards the end of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first, the posthumanists came to prominence as they worked to move beyond 'the human' as conceived in liberal humanist terms. Building upon the political indignation and theoretical insights of the antihumanists, writers and researchers such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, and Cary Wolfe focused their work, variously, on the political and ontological implications of technology for the human species, as well as addressing ethical concerns pertaining to the ontology and status of animals.

The critical tradition has demonstrated a shift, then, from (white male) anthropocentrism towards accounting for multiple and polyvalent representations of the human. Advocates of this shift have looked to decentre the idea of 'the human' as some unified and autonomous individual; instead, discourses of obsolescence, adaptability, mutability and enhancement have emerged which work to reveal the human's intimate kinship with animals and machines in a landscape that is resistant to anthropocentrism, essentialism and immutability.

And yet, despite all these theoretical attacks, 'the human' seems to persist as a subject of representation in theatre and performance. This is not to suggest that human representations are not changing forms, behaviours, and identities, but that identifiable individual agents nonetheless appear to endure on our 'stages'. In this sense, 'the human' of this edition's title serves as a provocation, challenging its writers and readers to characterise, reflect upon and evaluate what it is to be human, what it *means* to be human, and what it takes to *represent* the human both on and off the stage, page, screen and gallery wall.

The edition opens with a transcript of a conversation between Tim Crouch and Dan Rebellato exploring the nature and form of the human as represented in Crouch's work as a contemporary dramatist and performer. Speaking last year at 'Who Do We Think We Are: Representing the Human', Crouch reveals himself to be deeply critical of the traditional conception of the human as a rational and unified origin of meaning. Reacting strongly against this model, which underpins conventional

acting approaches in the tradition of psychological realism, Crouch speaks about the ways in which his formal and performance-based experiments with representing characters posit a human that is provisional and fundamentally connected to its given circumstances. In Crouch's insistence upon the creative potential of its audience to construct meanings and identities in performance contexts that aim to be democratic, his representation of the human reveals itself to be a fluid and participatory matter and, in this sense, may be called political.

In her article, 'Tearing and Wearing the Skin: Negotiation Beyond Genders', Yu-Chien Wu engages with current issues surrounding gender, sexuality and performance. The article examines ways in which conceptualisations of gender are mediated through the skin, which is conceived as a tool of sensation, representation, and misrecognition. Charging the work of gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam with neglecting the skin as a gender mediator, the author brings much needed attention to the ways this organ functions as an image, a screen and a mirror: all ripe concepts with exciting implications for the fields of theatre and performance studies to apply and expand. In 'Prosthetics Imagery: Negotiating the Identity of Enhanced Bodies', Maria Neicu picks up on comparable discourses of the body, but instead of addressing the skin she takes as her subject the enhancement of human limbs. Her case study examines a series of portraits by Howard Schatz of the athlete and model, Aimee Mullins, focusing in particular on the viewer's encounter with prosthetics. The article refigures notions of disability and 'lack' in the context of technological enhancement. In many ways, then, the article might be understood to pick up on the work of the Frankfurt School, in particular the notion of aesthetic space functioning as a potential catalyst for social change. In this light, we might understand the author's 'invitation' for the reader to re-consider the *status quo* which impacts upon and defines understandings of beauty, lack and otherness.

In 'The Duality of Heroic Identity in Fielding's Tom Thumb', Máire MacNeill addresses precisely the kind of 'rich

repository' we spoke of earlier concerning how representations of the human in the arts – in this case, on the eighteenth century stage – are relationally bound to a particular historical and socio-cultural milieu. Her subject is the genre of heroic tragedy, and her point of departure the satirical burlesquing of this genre in Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb*. The archival research evident in this article is both valuable and compelling; in excess of this, though, the article unearths a number of themes pertinent to this edition, particularly through discussing how notions of heroism and masculinity are constructed and deconstructed via the protagonist's encounters with highly stereotyped caricatures within the play. These encounters are rendered all the more pertinent in the context of a representative system turned in on itself through the satirical wit of the dramatist. It is not just the representation of a fictionalized human which is analysed, then, but the representational system itself.

The 'Performance Documents' section includes two articles documenting performance practice. In 'Multiplied Trajectories – A Traveller's Dinner', Molly Beth Seremet uses performative writing to continue in the same explorative vein as the practice-as-research event she looks to document. Her cross-cultural practice engages with themes of cosmopolitanism and ethnicity by means of cooking and eating the national dish of Jordan, *mansaf*. Anne-Pauline van der A introduces us to her clown persona and alter-ego Annot in 'Becoming Annot: Identity Through Clown'. This 'document', with the help of visual aids, focuses on the tension between the supposedly coherent and contained self and the formation of a clown persona. Her practice evidences both an examination of the self in relation to representations of the self (or the human in relation to a representation of itself as a human) as well as a ludic means of playing with and against a social context.

As ever, and especially so in the context of financial pressures under which so many within the academy are currently straining, *Platform* would like to offer a special note of thanks to the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, for their ongoing financial

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Adam Alston (Editor) and Louise LePage (Guest Editor)

Works Cited

Belsey, Catherine. *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London: Methuen, 1985.