

Kristof van Baarle

PhD Researcher

Ghent University (Belgium)

The performer is absent: human absence in nonhuman performances (Paper)

In this lecture I would like to focus on how the decentering and possible disappearance of the human is reflected upon in the contemporary performing arts by focusing on absence as a performative strategy. Adopting a posthumanist perspective, the disappearance or withdrawal of the human from the stage is interpreted as a critique on anthropocentrism and an investigation into a post-anthropocentric conception of the world. Artists like Mette Ingvartsen, Kris Verdonck, Romeo Castellucci and Andros Zins-Browne have created performances with nonhuman performers reflecting on the absence of their human antagonists. The human absence in the performances discussed in the lecture leads to a haunted space in which the human remains present in a spectral state of being. Drawing from Giorgio Agamben (*Nymphae*, 2004), Jacques Derrida (*Spectres de Marx*), Timothy Morton, Freudian Uncanny and Mary Luckhurst, several performances will be analysed as critiques on the relation and tension between the human and technology, ecology, and its position in the performing arts, i.e. on stage or as unique bearer of a role. I will develop three typologies of how human absence is staged and presented in nonhuman performances today, each with their different political, economic and ecological references. Holographic projection generates a presence of the performer while being absent. Both Kris Verdonck's *M*, a reflection and Andros Zins-Browne's *The Lac of Signs*, make use of holographic projection which replaces the live performer for the virtual image-actor. Machinic replacement leaves the physical human body out but within the scope of absence, refers to this body having been there. Romeo Castellucci's version of *Le Sacre du Printemps* presents a complex machinic installation performing this classic physical choreography, but reminds of e.g. Pina Bausch's iconic version. A third typology is characterised by the human withdrawal from a performative landscape, such as in Mette Ingvartsen's *Evaporated landscape*. The landscape as hyperobject or Beckettian grey in-between location will be analysed as what remains after human presence. This presentation is both part of my doctoral research as well as the dramaturgical research for a new performance of Kris Verdonck concerning this subject.

Kristof van Baarle holds MA degrees from Ghent University (Art studies) and the University of Antwerp (Theatre Studies). Since 2013, he is a research scholar at Ghent University with a Ph. D. fellowship of the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO). His research focusses on critical posthumanism, Giorgio Agamben and Kris Verdonck. Kristof has published in several journals (*DOCUMENTA*, *Performance Research*, *Etcetera* ...) and book chapters about these topics. He also works as a dramaturge for Kris Verdonck/ A Two Dogs Company and is an editor of the Belgian theatre journal *Etcetera*.