Trans Cyborg Theatre: Digital Technology & Media in Performance

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TRANS CYBORG THEATRE:
Digital Technology & Media in Performance

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Abstract

Trans cyborg artists use digital technology to expand their identity beyond the confines of their physical form, to carve out a new space for themselves within a cis-heteronotmative theatrical society, and to protect themselves and their communities from danger. Through the use of trans cyborg figures, trans cyborg theatre artists challenge traditional notions of gender, subjectivity, and narrative in the present mediatized world by integrating digital technology and the human body on stage. This disruption of the gender binary creates a new form of theatre, trans cyborg theatre, that emphasizes the co-presence of the performer and digital technology.

There is a small but mighty community of trans artists working within cyborg theatre who merge their bodies with digital technology in performance in a myriad of different ways. From Lu Yang’s DOKU (2023), a massive avatar created though motion capture technology, to Evan Silver’s identity blurring projections on their body in Creep, to micha cárdena’s Local Autonomy Networks (Autonets) that creates autonomous safety networks for women, people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community through electronic clothing, trans artists are using body integrated digital technology to create trans cyborg theatre.
Introduction

Cyborg theatre is a form of performance that focuses on the integration of digital technology and performers on stage. While technology has always been an integral part of theatrical performances, cyborg theatre concerns itself with a fusion of digital technology and the physical human body. This is a marked shift from the way in which technology’s usage has traditionally been viewed. In Aristotle’s hierarchized elements of drama, technology is seen as a means to support the performance--lighting actors, flying in scenic elements, projecting scenic backgrounds--and create spectacle (Parker Starbuck 5). In cyborg theatre, technology serves a dramaturgical purpose and takes center stage, literally and figuratively, as it creates a third being--the cyborg through the fusion of digital technology and human form on stage.

There is a small but mighty community of trans artists working within cyborg theatre who merge their bodies with digital technology in performance in a myriad of different ways. From Lu Yang’s DOKU (2023), a massive avatar created through motion capture technology, to Evan Silver’s identity blurring projections on their body in Creep, to micha cárdena’s Local Autonomy Networks (Autonets) that creates autonomous safety networks for women, people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community through electronic clothing, trans artists are using body integrated digital technology to create trans cyborg theatre. Through the use of trans cyborg figures, trans cyborg theatre artists challenge traditional notions of gender, subjectivity, and narrative in the present mediatized world by integrating digital technology and the human body on stage. This disruption of the gender binary creates a new form of theatre, trans cyborg theatre, that emphasizes the co-presence of the performer and digital technology.
Digital Technology & Trans Artists

The term “digital technology” encompasses an incredibly vast category of tools, software and mechanized objects. For the purposes of this paper, the term digital technology refers to digital devices, hardware and software used in performance that functionally create a change in the performer. This can range from Isadora Troikatronix¹, QLab², projections, AI generated images, wireless transmitters, and Arduino³ boards. These forms of digital technology are crucial to the creation of trans cyborg theatre as they enact the transformation from human to cyborg in real time.

Transgender, or trans, is an umbrella term for “a range of gender diverse identities” for “people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth” (Williams 232; “Glossary of Terms”). A transgender person does not identify with the gender binary: being either a cis-man or a cis woman⁴. The term, in its current definition, came into common circulation in the United States during the 1990s at the same time when the internet became more readily accessible (McCann et al. 166). The internet gave rise to a new form of community that was no longer restricted by geographic location, for transgender people (166). They were able to connect online with other transgender people to discuss shared experiences and more deeply explore gender identity for the first time.

A cyborg is the resulting entity of the fusion of digital technology and human form. The term has evolved significantly in its sixty three years of existence and has been used to describe

¹ Isadora Troikatronix is a web-based software used by performers and designers alike to create video and media to incorporate into their performances. Designed by Mark Coniglio, Isadora offers real-time video and media manipulation (“TROIKATRONIX”).
² QLab is “powerful macOS software for designing and playing back sound, video, light, and show control cues. It’s a flexible, reliable, and user-friendly tool” (“QLab”).
³ Arduino is an open-source electronic prototyping platform enabling users to create interactive electronic objects (“About Arduino”).
⁴ Cisgender is a “term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth” (“Glossary of Terms”).
interactions between “the organic” and the technological (Parker-Starbuck 18). Donna Harraway fine tuned her definition of cyborg to steer its meaning from a mechanical and militaristic descriptor to that of a feminist eco-political lens through which to view the world (19). When applied to theatre, its definition expands further. Jennifer Parker Starbuck uses the term cyborg theatre as a way of analyzing multimedia performance and its reflection of the shift in relationship with technology as well as its creation of a triangulation of performer, audience and technology (3-4). While Parker-Starbuck is primarily interested with bodies and interactions with screens, this paper is concerned with the effect technology has on trans bodies when trans artists incorporate digital technology in performance.

The concept of a cyborg breaks a speciation binary by including digital technology, the human, and the human-techno form. It is in the intersection of the first two that creates the third point, therefore moving past the binary and creating a triangulation. The same can be applied to trans existence: by breaking the binary, a third point is created which in turn also creates a triangulation of concepts, forms and existence. With the existence of any third point along a linear binary, a third form is created through the triangulation.

In their article “The transgender cyborg: an inexhaustive primer”, J.E. Cook discusses the various reasons why transgender people may be drawn to cyborgs. Cook states, “…we have the idea that a cyborg is trans because a cyborg is often conceived of as taking autonomy over a “natural” human body and choosing how to live in it. Being trans becomes a matter of personal autonomy in this metaphor” (Cook). Cook points at the paradoxical duality of trans artists using cyborgs as a metaphor for their lived experience in a cis-gendered heteronormative world. Being drawn to the metaphor of a cyborg and becoming one on stage through digital technology is both liberating and expansive while it can also be viewed as dehumanizing and alienating. A cyborg is
by definition not fully human, so when trans artists cyborg their bodies on stage, they are both pointing at the dehumanizing effect that being called “unhuman” or “unnatural” in the media while simultaneously becoming unnatural and unhuman as a radical act of subversion and reclamation. It is in this space of subversion and reclamation that joy and expansion can be found. Trans artists are drawn to mixing media with their performing bodies and do not shy away from inhabiting the unknown space created by this fusion of human and machine. Trans cyborg artists exist in liminality where new art forms can be made that fit their needs rather than adjusting themselves to fit the needs of a predetermined artistic form.

Artist Examples

Lu Yang (he/she) is a Shanghai based agender multimedia creator who blurs the lines of the digital and the organic through the use of avatars, motion capture technology\(^5\) and the creation of sci-fi worlds (see fig. 1). She has stated that she ‘lives on the internet’ and strives to maintain a life of anonymity (London 251). She has created a kind of rift in her identity by placing the majority of her being online through a digital avatar. In discussing her choice to focus so much of her work on this digital avatar, Yang stated in an interview for Artnews, “…there is no essential difference between the physical body and the digital body, for both are restricted by our conception” (Perlson). The connection between her two dimensional and three dimensional self is slippery and calls into question the limits of the interdependence between her identity and the digital technology she employs. She created a series of online pieces that revolve around her “digital reincarnation,” Doku (Young). Doku was created using motion capture technology that

\(^5\) Motion capture technology, or mo-cap is a type of technology that records or captures people or object’s movements and translates them into photorealistic 3D models that can be used in virtual spaces. The physical characteristics are not captured through mo-cap, only the movements of the actor or object (“Motion Capture | an Introduction to Mocap | Adobe.”). However, Lu Yang chose to make DOKU’s face appear very similar to her own.
recorded Yang’s body and his facial expressions. Doku, who towers above skyscrapers, dances around cityscapes to thumping hyper pop music and shoots lasers out of his eyes (see fig. 2-3). He is placed in a variety of sci-fi worlds that Yang has created that incorporate cutting edge technology and ancient mythology. Gigant DOKU – LuYang the Destroyer (2021) is the third in his DOKU series. This piece is able to exist both online and offline as Yang’s mocap suit is on tour throughout the world for real time motion capture performances. These performances simultaneously exist in 2D and 3D space as dancers perform in front of a live audience while Doku performs behind them on screen mirroring their movements in a virtual world.

Yang pushes the limits of his body in this piece by exploring how far the digital version of himself can exist without its host’s corporeal form. He also poses the question “where does my body end and Doku’s body begin?” Without the original motion capture mapping of Yang’s form, Doku would not exist and yet Doku is able to “live” online without connection to Yang’s physical body. Yet Doku is not “alive” or animated online without being attached to a host body that is wearing the motion capture suit. Additionally, because of the specific motion capture technology that was used, Doku looks incredibly similar to Yang and his face moves in the same way as Yang’s. It’s this slipperiness between the live human form and the digital avatar that creates this cyborgification of Yang and Doku in their online forms.

Evan Silver (they/them) is a New York based non-binary multidisciplinary artist working within the mediums of song composition, drag, puppetry and video art. They have adopted the performance personae of Tiresias, who, in Greek mythology, was a blind future telling prophet who lived as both woman and man (Cavanaugh 1). Much like Tiresias, Silver straddles several binaries in their life and in their work which makes the Greek prophet the perfect avatar for their performance personae. Silver’s work grapples with questions of identity and the ways in which
the human body and mind converge with the digital. They use intricate projection mapping, AI generated imagery and monster-esque costume design and makeup to achieve this.

In their video *Creep* (2023), they worked with Alfonso Ordosgoitia who created AI generated image-based video to project onto Silver’s body, or more specifically, onto their costume made by Asato Kitamura. The costume serves as a projection surface. It consists of large swaths of bright white fabric that covers Silver from the neck down, and has six large arms attached along the sides of their torso, making them appear larger than life and otherworldly (see fig. 4).

Throughout the music video which features Tiresias singing a cover of Radiohead’s infamous song *Creep*, images of harsh animated faces and contrasting soft colored shapes are projected onto Tiresias’s face and body (see fig. 5-6). The viewer is confronted with images of a monstrous version of Tiresias which mirror the lyrics of the song: “I’m a creep / I’m a weirdo / (...) I don’t belong here” -- a beautiful moment of reclamation over the terms that have been used in the media to alienate and demonize transgender people (Radiohead 1:01-1:20). The animated faces are perfectly overlaid upon Tiresias’s facial features which obfuscates their appearance. The layering of all these elements creates wonderful confusion, and the viewer is left trying to differentiate Tiresias’s face from their make-up and from the projection. There is a blurring of the self as well as a blurring of the boundaries of body and digital technology.

When speaking about the music video for *Creep*, Tiresias discussed the connection between the work and queer agency as a means of “reclaiming the body as our own canvas to do what we will with that and define what beauty is for us and who we might be (...) projection in particular, as a mode of transforming the canvas.” At the end of the piece, the quality of music shifts from deep bassy synths to a high pitched xylophone reminiscent of a lullaby. During the
lullaby portion, a larvae is projected onto Silver’s body and is lined up so that Silver’s head is fused with the body of the larvae in a moment of animal - human fusion through digital technology. Combined with the soft lullaby music, the viewer experiences this striking image of transformation and rebirth.

micha cárdenas (she/her) is a first generation Colombian trans artist, Associate Chair and Associate Professor of Performance, Play and Design, and Associate Professor of Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she directs the Critical Realities Studio (cárdenas). While Silver and Yang’s work focuses on the transformation of the individual self, micha cárdenas uses hardware to create transformation on a community level by connecting people via wearable networked devices as a means of protection against identity based violence. Her piece Autonets (2013) creates wearable clothing and jewelry that is made out of fabric and a Lilypad Arduino that allow communities to autonomously communicate and support each other without the involvement of corporate or governmental infrastructures. The project was made in response to gendered violence cárdenas witnessed during her time in Latin America and was influenced by the structures of anti-racist and prison abolitionist groups (cárdenas).

While Autonets is still in the prototype phase, the goal is for protestors, sex workers, trans folks, women and any other group of marginalized people who face the fear of violence on a daily basis to use these garments. The project resurfaced in the media in June of 2020 amidst the George Floyd protests. In a KQED article, Theodora Walsh noted how cárdenas’s Autonets is “a digital tool that empowers people to make collective decision-making to combat not just emergencies, but a larger sense of alienation caused by forces like capitalism, white supremacy and neo-colonialism” (Walsh).
*Autonets* garments are made of Xbee wireless transmitters, Lithium batteries, LED lights and a conductive fabric pressure sensor or button all connected to a Lilypad Arduino (see fig. 7). If a person is in danger, they can press the sensor or button on their garment and members of their group who are wearing an *Autonets* garment will be alerted to the situation by their LED light turning on. All members will be notified as to where the person in danger is located and the distance in miles they are from them.

Through the networking of humans through these garments, the individuals are plugged into a virtual interface that tracks the data of the wearer of the device. While this is similar to that of the tracking functions in the smart devices we wear or carry every day, this garment differs from those devices in that the data is not being shared with larger corporations--the tracking and communication aspects of the device are solely for community tracking and communication. When the garment is placed on a body, that body is immediately changed from being one singular being to becoming a portion of a greater community. It is the interaction with the body that makes the *Autonets* garments cyborg the body of the wearer and the community of wearers.

**Conclusion**

The dawn of the internet digitally connected people across the globe, and in turn, informed the way in which trans artists use digital technology in trans cyborg theatre today. The internet allowed for the creation of digital avatars that have become fused with our identities. It allowed the creation of virtual space where versions of ourselves exist separately from our identities limited by our corporeal form. It allowed for communities to become digitally connected which is recreated on performance platforms whether they be stages, websites, videos or in public spaces.
Trans cyborg artists are using digital technology to expand their identity beyond the confines of their physical form, to carve out a new space for themselves within a cis-heteronormative theatrical society, and to protect themselves and their communities from danger. It’s no coincidence that the use of the term transgender came to rise during the dawn of the internet in the United States. The internet has provided technology and a means of access for transgender artists to make new forms of performance that fuse the body with technology to better explore and communicate their lived experiences.
In Conversation with Evan Silver aka Tiresias

Interviewed by Marisa Conroy

Evan Silver aka Tiresias (they/them) is an interdisciplinary artist whose work explores themes of transformation and transcendence through the lens of ecology and mythology. They are a composer, writer, drag performer, video artist and director whose work has been featured at Ars Nova, The Brick, HERE Arts, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and beyond. They are a 2023 artist-in-residence at MacDowell and hold a BA in Literary Arts with a focus in Writing for Performance from Brown University and obtained an MA in Devised Theatre Practice from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and an MA in Classical Reception from King’s College, Cambridge. They sat down and spoke with me in Brooklyn on March 18, 2023.

Marisa Conroy: So how about you tell me a little bit about yourself. Can you talk about the type of theatre that you make, and how you arrived at the medium in which you are working?

Evan Silver: I grew up in a very creative household. My mother is a printmaker, and folk musician. My dad is an architect. I think I was very fortunate to be encouraged to be creative from a very early age. And I think that always felt innate. I think I've always been pretty omnivorous with my tastes and interests and desires. And I think there was a certain point, in which I realized that theater was a space where so many of my interests could converge. I could do music and performance. I could write and I could incorporate visual art and visual sensibilities. So I think what brought me to theater was that I saw it as an inherently interdisciplinary medium. And, you know, I think sometimes I felt that that was at odds with the kind of theater I was seeing, you know, the kind of like drunk, white people arguing in living rooms, quote, unquote, naturalism, which does not interest me. But you know, I think from the beginning, theater was a space where I could test out relationships between all kinds of different things and seek out edge lands and borderlands and in betweens, and yeah, spaces of convergence. So I think that was a kind of foundation, maybe makes sense of a lot of what I'm doing now, which is that it's never felt foreign to me to incorporate video and projection into performance. I have written music for most of the work that I have developed since I was a teenager. And, you know, I think it took me a while to like, call myself a composer. But at a
certain point, I looked at what I was doing, I said, “Okay, I'm writing music for everything I'm doing, so I think I need to start claiming that as a part of my practice, too.” And I try not to hold too tight to these categories and labels and identities. Like, frankly, I'm not that interested in identity. And I am, like, more interested in, for example, queer as a verb, like queer as, like, a way of doing, a way of being, a way of practicing, a way of thinking like, at odds with the forces of centering, rather than a static identity. And I think I feel the same way about my relationship to discipline. I'm aware that I'm at the edges of so many different things. I was having this conversation with my roommate last night about, “Are you a performance artist? Are you a drag artist? Are you this? Are you that?” And it's worth asking those questions, but to me, they're not even very interesting questions because they have only very simple binary responses, which are yes or no. And yeah, I'm interested in my creative life being anything but static, you know?

MC: Yeah. You mentioned convergences and intersections, and I really appreciate the kind of shifting of that focus to edges and edge lands. It provides a beautiful image of an ecosystem.

ES: All about ecosystems.

MC: All about ecosystems.

ES: Love an ecosystem.

MC: Speaking of ecosystems, can you talk about birds in your work?

ES: Oh my god, absolutely.

MC: As I was looking through all of your work, I noticed that birds come up in all of these different places. And I would love it if you could just talk about what it is about birds, your relationship to birds, and you know, what it's doing for you in your work.

ES: Yeah. This also begins as a family story. So my brother, who is on the autism spectrum, his long time obsession and particular genius is animals. And so he's an encyclopedia, you know?
And it's been like that for a long time. He studied Animal Behavior and Ecology in college, but long before then, he would go to the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago every weekend. And he knew all the names of all the animals and everything about them. And he still has that. So I think early on one of the few things that we realized we could all enjoy as a family unit was going on hikes and seeing wildlife. My brother would do the identification, my dad is like the hawk eyes who spots things that nobody else sees. My mother and I are more like poetic souls. For us, every bird is a metaphor as well as a beautiful creature. So he did a science fair project in like, I don't know, second grade or something, and it was called “How Birds Fly and Why Boys Can't.”

**MC:** Talk about poetry.

**ES:** Yeah, I know. He, like, got a pair of fan blades, stood up on the table, like, did this (*Evan flaps their arms like a bird*) for a while, and then got down and was like, “boys can't fly.” But like, did the experiment. My mother saw that, and for her, the immediate first thought was like, “I just want him to find his wings.” Right? Like being on the autism spectrum is not always easy in this world. And so birds started to appear in all of her work as I was, you know, single digits as a child like growing up figuring out my own world, and I think maybe by osmosis, maybe by I don't really know what it was, but they started to appear in all of my work, too. So it sort of goes all over the place. But a lot of it had to do with birds becoming both a fascination with things that can fly, and I think that the metaphor of flight is also really recurrent in my work. It is like the desire to be able to move or exist in a way that is beyond my physical capabilities. This is, I think, the part that also starts to link into my more recent work and to the part of it that is kind of like queer, trans cyborg etc, which is this idea of like the bird almost can become a proxy or prosthetic for our own grounded being. In *cryptochrome*[^6], the central invitation is like, “you are a hawk.” It's this imaginative gesture to say, “what is it like to be a hawk? Close your eyes and put yourself in the world of the hawk, you are a hawk soaring over the wine dark sea, the salt wind in your wings,” you know, etc, etc. And like, that is a gesture at imagining what it's like to become a hawk, but it's also like the process of becoming a hawk and being able to fly. So, I also am

[^6]: *cryptochrome* is a performance piece by Evan Silver aka Tiresias which has been performed at La MaMa E.T.C., LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, & We Are Here (Exponential Festival). “cryptochrome is a ritual meditation and sonic odyssey across the animal kingdom to reflect on how and why we voyage. Named after a photoreceptor believed to be responsible for the ability to navigate using the Earth's geomagnetic field, the work explores forms of perception and intuition beyond the limited scope of the visible” (cryptochrome).
visually impaired, I'm in the process of losing my sight. That's also a part of my practice, and
definitely a part of my practice I would put in cyborg terms. And I think this awareness of bodily
or physical limitation, this awareness of like biology, genes of these circumstances that can feel
static, that can feel like obstacles, that there are these ways to transcend those limitations through
the creative act. There are these ways to like, yeah, transcend physical, bodily, biological
limitations through the transformation that's possible in art.

**MC:** Totally. Big time. You seem like a real cyborg theatre person. And one of the things I was
going to ask you about was the transformation of artists and performers on stage specifically
through the use of digital media. And we can talk more specifically about the *Creep* video, if
that feels right. For me, I view that project and the way projections and “the digital” are working
in two separate ways. In one way, I view it as your body as a canvas, which speaks volumes, and
in another as like a true integration of digital and, you know, your carbon based being. I was
wondering if you can maybe talk a little bit about that?

**ES:** Yeah, I think both of those are absolutely at play. I think the notion of “body as canvas” is
very exciting to me. You know, even the way I put on my makeup, I don't know how to do
beauty makeup, so I paint my face white and I experiment. You know, thinking of the body as
something that so often, our society imposes so many different kinds of associations and
expectations on a body, right? And so what is queer agency, but like, reclaiming the body as our
own canvas to do what we will with that and define what beauty is for us and who we might be.
You know, projection in particular, as a mode of transforming the canvas, it's obviously already
kind of ripe with metaphor to project, to choose what you project onto a canvas is ripe, with
metaphor, I guess is all I'll say. And so I think in that particular video, we were thinking about
the augmentation, transformation of the self, also the kind of like disintegration, or like
dissolution of the self. One of my favorite moments in the video is the sort of shape shifting
faces on my face. My friend Alfonso, who’s this amazing animator, created those using artificial
intelligence, which also is like this really interesting incorporation of a new technology that
raises all these very difficult questions about consciousness and creativity. But recognizing that

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*Creep* is a music video by Evan Silver aka Tiresias and Naomi Saito featuring Tiresias covering the song *Creep* by Radiohead. I talk about the specifics of this project on pages 7-8 of this paper.
those images are actively shifting the relationship between the viewer and my face, which is like, where we place so much weight in terms of the perception of identity. Yeah, and then in terms of, I mean, I think I'm already sort of taking us into the relationship between the organic and the digital, but, you know, I think we now live in a society in which we have all already become cyborgs. You know, we are augmented by our relationships to our phones, to social media, to vast networks of data that we may or may not have consented to participating in. And so I think we have some choices. There are some choices I think we don't have, but we have some choices about how we relate to those technologies. And I'm less interested in pretending like they don't exist or rejecting their effects on us than asking, “Okay, how can we actually use or implement these technologies as part of our own transformation, liberation, creative practice and creative process?” And yeah, all those explorations feel quite nascent in my own practice but also quite generative. And yeah, there's a lot still to be explored.

MC: Yeah, fully. I agree. And a lot of, you know, these different cyborg theories that I've been reading about are really talking about, like, the extension of self beyond the corporeal confines that we have which, again, can be viewed in so many ways. It can be, you know, my phone as an extension of myself and all of the various avatars that I provide or consented to or not consented to. But also like there's part of that that also feels actually in a tangible real world of like existing beyond the bounds of this body, and in viewing myself in a certain way other than the way in which I'm tangibly presenting myself, and I think projections are a huge way to achieve that and I think that's also why I am so drawn to that in my work as well as that form of transformation and an immediate incorporation of something. Aside from gaining access to whatever technology you need in order to make the projections and to a projector, like, it's right there, other than something else that takes years, months, whatever to develop.

MC: I do want to talk more about your triptych. And about how and why you were drawn to Tiresias.

ES: The ultimate cyborg.

MC: Yes, love them.
ES: Yes. Well, so I started losing my sight. I have always come back to mythology as a source of inspiration that has been present in my work for a very long time. And so who else to turn to but the blind visionary, the embodiment of, you know, that apparent paradox between sightlessness and vision. So immediately that felt very generative to me, and the further I dug, the more rich that became because (...) [Tiresias is] arguably [the] most transgressive figure in all of Greek mythology. [They are] this figure who has lived as a man and a woman, and coordinates between the Land of the Living and the Land of the Dead, between gods and mortals, represents this contradiction or paradox between seeing and not seeing. [They] foretold the future in birdsong, and scholars believe that they were the first augurer. So, all of that I'm like, “Okay, this is clearly the persona, the archetype, the figure that I can explore, explode, exploit for my own creative purposes. I can become Tiresias.” And in doing so, I can become a cyborg version of myself by allowing there to be a whole new dimension of my identity, which is very much in conversation with the ancient past, very much in conversation with this archetype that exists across cultures, across time, who, in their very nature embodies this kind of trespassing across and between binary categories. I was like, “oh, that's rich.” Yeah, so that is how I've become Tiresias.

MC: Yeah, I was reading up on this character. I was like, “Oh my God, of course this is their avatar!” And as I was going a little deeper, you know, just realizing that there's so many different takes on the actual story of it, and so much debate as to whether or not this character started as a woman or as a man and when they were or weren't switching. I just love the confusion.

ES: We love a contested narrative.

MC: We love a contested narrative and a gender question mark.

ES: Right.

MC: It's amazing. It’s also just wonderful that mythology was a part of your practice, and a part of your life that you could have this figure to really connect with as you're going through this.
ES: Yeah, I think I'm increasingly honing in with greater specificity with what it is that my work is doing, what it is that I do as an artist, what it is that I have been doing? And I keep coming back to mythologies and ecologies. These are the two kinds of systems that I'm coming back to over and over and over again which are entire frameworks for thinking about the world and the universe, and I’ve become especially excited about finding fusions and hybridities between mythologies and ecology. Tying back to, “we love an ecosystem,” and mythology is a kind of ecosystem.

MC: Yeah, yeah. I like that. Yeah, actually, when you were talking about what your brother studied--what did you say that they studied?


MC: Right. I was actually an ecology major for a hot second in undergrad. So I realized that focusing on how ecology works and how ecosystems work is a really great blueprint for making theatre, you know? Noting the connections, noting the ways in which things affect the other, what is the keystone species? Is it tramping down? Or is it actually keeping things in check?

ES: Right? I also think that I like the exploration of ecologies, of ecosystems, of mythologies, by nature of the emphasis and focus on the collective over the individual. That feels really important to a practice that is genuinely queer. I think there's a utopian dimension to my work. I'm less and less interested in the discrete bounded individual as even a reality. So let's talk about bacteria and mycelium, you know? And cyborgs.

MC: Totally. And again, that's why I really want to send you this other Jennifer Parker Starbuck piece⁸ that’s about how as humans, when we move closer to technology, we're actually harkening back to our animal selves. And she kind of talks about this like, it's that interstitial/liminal space in which the animal appears through that transformation of human to digital self.

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ES: I love the liminal interstitial hybrid space.

MC: Same! Now, I'm wondering if you can also talk about where you are in the development phase of the piece you’re currently working on, *cryptochrome*.

ES: I feel like I can tell you a little bit about the other two shows [in the trilogy], so I'll start at the beginning, which is *HYPERFANTASIA*⁹. *HYPERFANTASIA* is that first attempt, I think at fusing ecologies and mythologies. And the attempt is really to create a kind of miniature epic, which is a mythology defined by the stuff of science. So it begins at the Big Bang. It takes us to planet Earth. It's a sort of, you know, revision of the evolutionary story, which takes the case against the survival of the fittest paradigm towards like an ethic of experimentation, and extravagance. And so that's really an attempt to take ecological and scientific themes and transform them into a frame that feels fantastical and fabulous. And then, *UNDERWORLD*¹⁰ is really, I think, the most community oriented project I've ever developed. I think this is one that's really clearly oriented towards queer community, towards the freaks and the weirdos. It is a ritual celebration of monstrosity and otherness of the subterranean. Creating a space, a kind of, even like Dionysian rite in the queer nightclub. It's really meant to be a kind of revelry and a celebration of togetherness and wildness and weirdness, but things that might be seen by society as monstrous or freaky or unwelcome. And then, in pretty stark contrast to the ritual celebration of *UNDERWORLD*, which is this Thursday [March 23, 2023]. This one is carnival theme--specifically drawing on like, Bakhtin's conception of the carnival-esque-- this like, revolution of the ordinary world through humor, camp, play, pageantry. It's meant to be the sort of disillusion of dominant order. It will be exuberant. So *cryptochrome*, in contrast, is a ritual

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⁹ "HYPERFANTASIA is a sci-fi fantasy cabaret about the proliferation of matter in the universe and life on planet Earth. Featuring original music and projections, this miniature epic draws on new evolutionary theories and ancient queer wisdom to dismantle the survival-of-the-fittest paradigm toward an ethic of abundance and extravagance. Hosted by Tiresias, the blind prophet of the Underworld, HYPERFANTASIA includes a reenactment of the Big Bang as a celestial orgasm, a heartfelt ode to our prehistoric unicellular bacterial ancestors, and a dance choreographed using movements of birds-of-paradise during mating rituals. HYPERFANTASIA is the first in a triptych that includes CRYPTOCHROME and UNDERWORLD." ("HYPERFANTASIA")

¹⁰ UNDERWORLD is a performance piece created by Evan Silver aka Tiresias. It “is a ritual celebration of monstrosity and otherness designed for queer nightclubs.” It was the winner of the September 2022 Awesome Foundation NYC grant (“UNDERWORLD”).
meditation. It's an invitation to the audience to embark on an imaginative journey across the animal kingdom. Beginning with this hawk. And it's really a meditation on how and why we voyage with an emphasis on diverse forms of perception, and navigational strategy. Like how do we move through the world and through time and through our lives, beyond our own limited faculties, and specifically, in my case, beyond the realm of sight. So you know, there's echolocation. There's star-nosed moles navigating pitch black tunnels through touch. It's all original music. It's much more free flowing.

[Edited for length and clarity.]
Transcribed by https://otter.ai
# Selected Artists Exploring The Field Of Trans Cyborg Theatre

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Figures.

Fig. 1 Principle diagram of active optical motion capture system (Keijan).

Fig 2. Still from DOKU - LuYang the destroyer @GarageMuseum (Yang).
Fig 3. Still from DOKU - LuYang the destroyer @GarageMuseum (Yang).

Fig. 4. Still from Creep | Radiohead (Cover) by Tiresias (Silver).
Fig. 5. Still from *Creep* | Radiohead (Cover) by Tiresias (Silver).

Fig 6. Still from *Creep* | Radiohead (Cover) by Tiresias (Silver).
Fig. 7. micha cárdenas. Diagram of components of prototype for *Autonet* bracelet and garments (cárdenas).
Works Cited


“QLab.” *QLab*, https://qlab.app/.

Radiohead. “Creep.” Spotify. https://open.spotify.com/track/70LcF31zb1H0PyJoS1Sx1r?si=e327f8f6591b4e0e


