

PSYCHIC



PREFACE

The art of puppetry lies in breathing life into the inanimate — in becoming, in a sense, a creator of life, by projecting a soul (the psyche) into an object. This act, both poetic and symbolic, raises fundamental questions: Where does this ancestral need to transfer life into lifeless things come from? What invisible thread links the shadows cast on the walls of prehistoric caves to our most advanced artificial intelligence technologies? What does this evolution reveal about our culture, our relationship to reality, to myth, to the past — and to what we imagine of the future?

Since the dawn of humanity, the symbolic object has held a central place. It has taken on many forms and has always been at the heart of rituals. The object was seen as a link between humans and the divine, with deities perceived as being intimately connected to everything around us. Over time, the object evolved, and even in ancient imaginations — from Plato to Homer — we find projections into animated objects. The role of the animated object has continued to evolve, both in our imagination and in society, shaped by technological progress.

The Industrial Revolution marked a turning point, revealing a rupture between nature and humankind, and profoundly altering our expectations of animated objects. The rapid advances of the 20th and 21st centuries — from autonomous vehicles to intelligent systems — have transformed our daily lives. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) brings about a digital revolution that reshapes our understanding of creativity and life itself, raising fundamental questions about the boundary between the living and the artificial.

My interest lies in the philosophical, political, and poetic implications of artificial life, particularly in its relation to puppetry and animated objects. These themes are rooted in ancient myths like Talos or Pygmalion, as well as stories such as the Golem, literary works like *Frankenstein*, or representations of robots in Karel Čapek's writings and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. These narratives challenge our understanding of what it means to be 'alive' by breathing life into the inanimate, and they question our relationship with these beings and their environment.

In a world increasingly populated by 'intelligent' objects — where industries and the workforce look to replace humans with androids or robotic war machines — we are experiencing a new upheaval in our relationship with objects.

Through art, philosophy, and poetry — which emerge as counterpoints to this trend of animating the inanimate — what responses and relationships can we imagine to redefine our connection with technology today?

BUILDING

WHAT GOES BEYOND US

« When I was around ten years old, in the 1980s, like many of my peers, I lived with the prospect of the year 2000 approaching. More than just the end of a century, it was the transition to a new millennium that stirred the wildest fantasies—provoking fear in some, hope in others, and rekindling the most deeply buried beliefs.

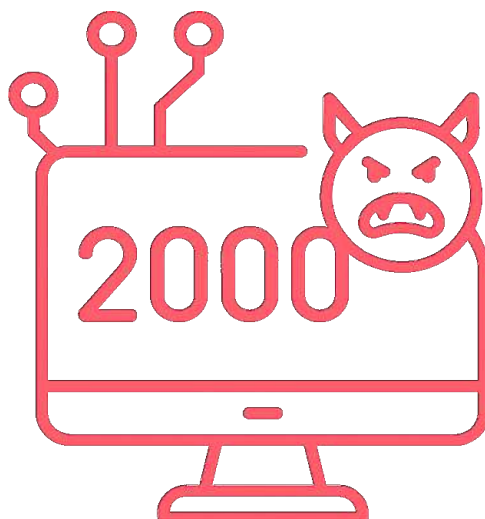
I particularly remember the fear of a computer meltdown at the fateful stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999. Midnight—the hour of crime, the hour of monsters. The digital tool that humanity had been developing for years—was it not about to become the monster that would absorb us, escape our control, we, poor little humans?

For the past twenty years, we've been living through a digital revolution. And like any revolution, it brings its share of uncertainty and hope: its share of losers, cast aside by a system that ignores the weakest, and its share of winners, driven daily by the desire to push forward the machine we're still building.

This text will speak of that revolution—of the monsters we feverishly build and end up fearing, even hating.

As I write these lines, I don't yet have a clear dramaturgical thread. I couldn't summarize the story in a few words. What I do know is that I will reread the two volumes of *The Obsolescence of Man* by Günther Anders, and I know that one phrase haunted me back in the 1980s, when I was a child: to live in the jungle or the zoo »

-Sylvain Levey



THE ART OF PUPPETRY AS A TOOL FOR REFLECTION

« The puppet is not merely a theatrical form or language, nor simply an art object, but also an entity that, in nearly every culture, has embodied fundamental questions about the origin of life, death, and the relationship between the visible and the invisible, between spirit and matter.

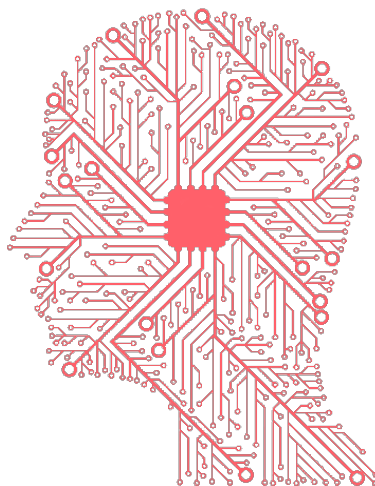
Many myths are linked to the puppet — from Pygmalion to Plato's cave. The wide variety of religious and theatrical practices in which puppets play a role — from Nativity scenes to carnivals — in vastly different cultural contexts, both in the East and the West, shows how the puppet has served as both a concrete and metaphorical vessel for religious beliefs, philosophical theories, and specific aesthetic ideas. It has continually renewed and reinterpreted myth, allowing the ideas it carries to be woven into the most diverse content, across time and space.

A central idea seems to run like a thread through the myth of the puppet: that life includes the inanimate (and vice versa). In traditional cultures, the resemblance between humans and artificial beings — between man and puppet — reflects a kind of magical thinking about the porous boundary between material reality and spiritual or imaginative ritual.

As for contemporary society, in speculating about its possible (and sometimes unsettling) futures, it places the puppet at the heart of technological and cybernetic concerns — as seen in the novels of Philip K. »
Dick, which offer striking and provocative visions.

Brunella Eruli,
« Penser l'Humain »,
Puck n°14, Editions L'Entretemp

As a tool for poetic reflection, the art of puppetry allows us to revisit the evolution of the relationship between humans and the inanimate, and to question how this relationship has transformed over time. It offers imagined and experiential responses to the contemporary era and to the growing presence of artificial life in our daily lives.



FRANKENSTEIN OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

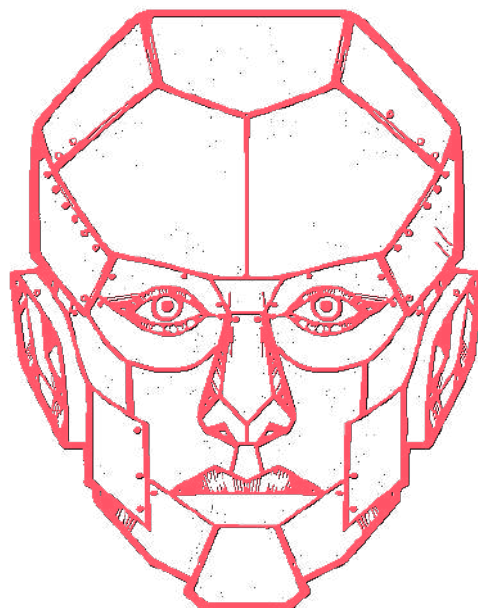
Let us use the character of Frankenstein, one of humanity's most well-known myths, who embodies defiance against nature and the struggle against death to give a soul, a consciousness, and to animate inert matter.

The character of Frankenstein, as depicted in Mary Shelley's story, seeks to resurrect inert matter but ends up creating a 'creature' that finds no place in society. This creature then becomes a mirror of humanity—a living witness to our own limits, to our capacity for empathy or its denial.

This allegory of animated matter serves as a mirror, one that recurs throughout human history in our relationship with objects we breathe life into. It raises poetic and philosophical questions about the manipulation of matter, the nature of life, and our power to create it.

At first, the doctor's quest—to animate matter and then grant it autonomy—can be seen as a metaphor for our desire to master life. However, this pursuit can also become a threat, a boundary that we may not be able to cross.

Today, the question of artificial life—the creation of living forms from inert matter—surpasses our abilities and limits, becoming a true allegory of our relationship with technology and artificial intelligence, which overwhelms and surpasses us.



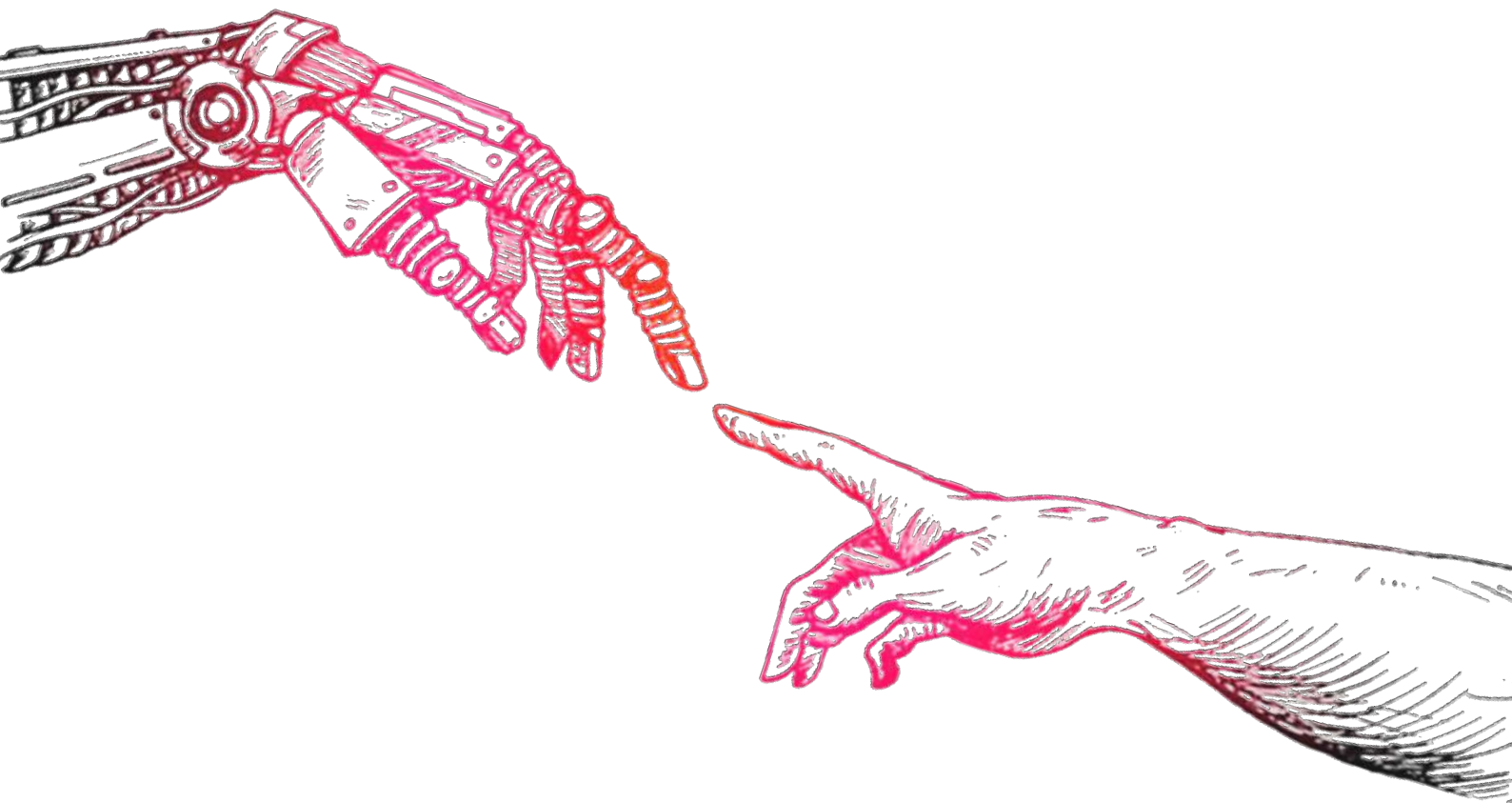
ENGAGING WITH ROBOTS, PUPPETS, AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES

The art of puppetry forms a bridge between life and death, between the living and the inanimate. It is precisely this quality that, throughout its history, has made it a ritual object as well as a source of persistent fascination on the contemporary stage — as evidenced by the works of Tadeusz Kantor, Edward Gordon Craig, and Romeo Castellucci.

Rich in meaning and symbolism, the puppet, when faced with an 'intelligent' machine, deeply questions the very notion of what it means to be 'alive.' On stage, I aim to provoke this confrontation, much like Frankenstein confronted the existential questions posed by his own creation.

Through scenic exploration, the goal will be to create the conditions for this dialogue, to bring forth questioning, or at least to hold up a mirror between these two forms of 'life.'

The staging will incorporate robotic elements manipulating puppets, as well as interactive sessions between artificial intelligence and puppets, alongside other evolving and automated devices.



COLLABORATIONS

COLLECTIVE REFLECTION

For several years, I have aimed to open the creative period to multiple encounters in order to nourish the reflection, aesthetics, and writing around the project. This allows for an exchange of ideas and practices that grounds the project's purpose in its various realities, which are meant to be challenged and confronted.

I call upon a team to reposition the issues raised by this reflection on the animated object:

- | **Sylvain Levey** / Author, actor
- | **Mélissa Blanchard** / CNRS researcher
- | **Michaël Cros** / Puppeteer, choreographer
- | **Naoyuki Tanaka "Nao"** / Performer, robot creator
- | **Yragaël Gervais** / Videographer and AI operator»

RESEARCH PHASE

In February 2025, Yiorgos Karakantzas and Alma Roccella conducted several workshops focused on the arts of puppetry, exploring themes of hybridization and the intersection between puppetry and new technologies. These workshops were carried out in collaboration with various faculties at the University of Michigan — including the School of Architecture, Social Studies, Dramatic Arts, and Fine Arts.

This collaboration will continue in October 2025. A residency application is currently underway at Villa Albertine to extend this research around the figure of Psyche, in partnership with the University of Michigan at Chicago, as well as through workshops conducted with artists based in Chicago.

A new phase is planned for March 2026, with the Fine Arts School of Aix-en-Provence, in collaboration with the artist Abraham Poincheval.



CALENDAR

- | January 2025 – Research residency “Robotics and Puppetry” with artist “Nao” at La Friche la Belle de Mai (Marseille)
- | February 2025 – Research labs “Hybrid Body” with students from the University of Michigan
- | September 2025 – Research and construction residency at Théâtre Sémaphore
- | February 2026 – Residency at Villa Albertine (Chicago / Ann Arbor / New York) – Application in progress
- | March 2026 – Residency at Scène 55
- | September 2026 – Residency at Étang de l'Aune – Application in progress
- | January or February 2027 – Residency at Plateau du Vélo Théâtre
- | Dates to be determined – Residency (writing, research, stage work)
- | 2027 – Creation of the show

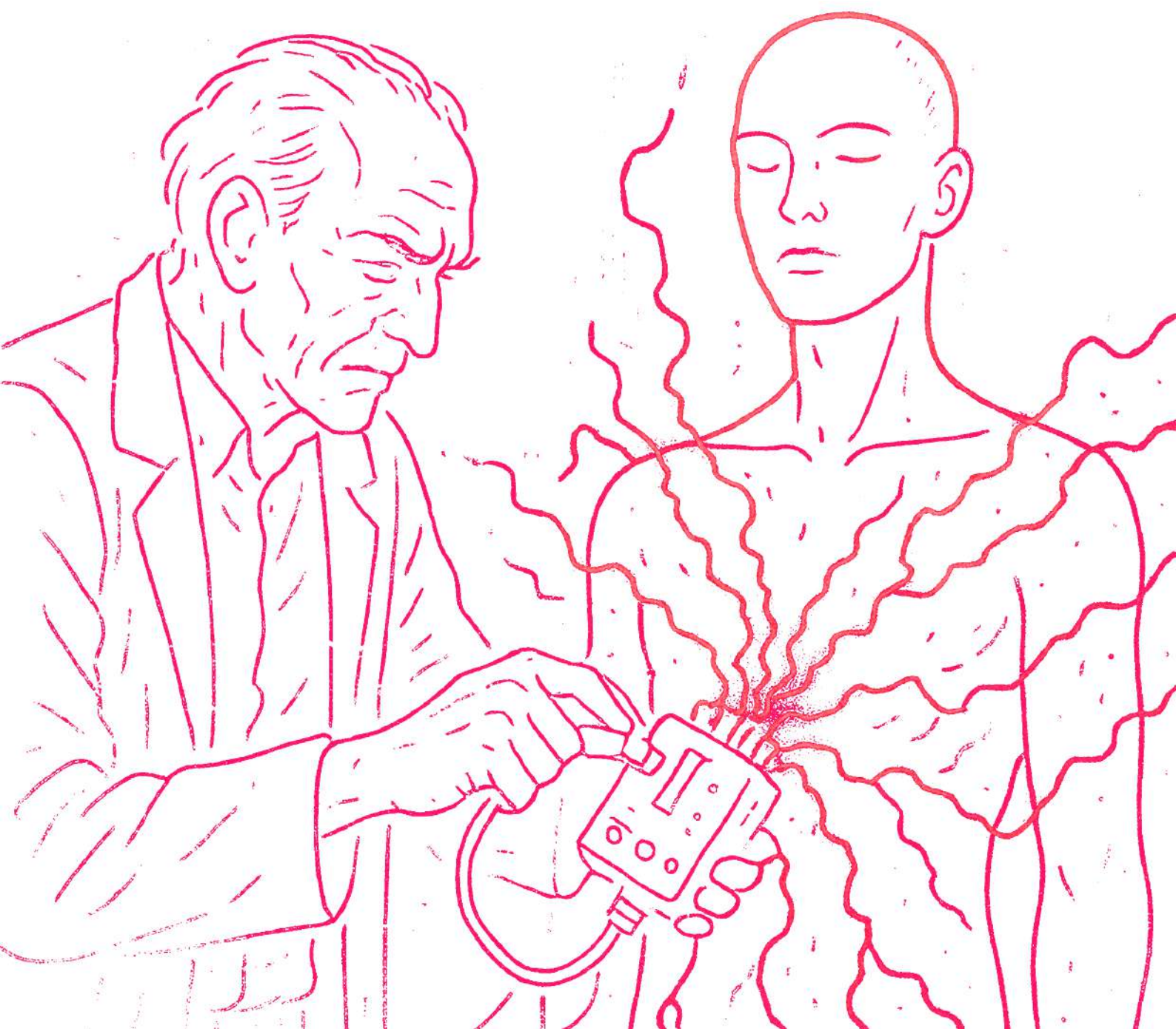
« PSYCHE » A CREATION BY ANIMA THÉÂTRE

Based in Marseille, the company forges its path through the art of puppetry. Beyond creating shows, Anima Théâtre strives to raise awareness of puppetry through outreach activities: workshops, training sessions, events, and meetings. Since 2013, Anima Théâtre has also ventured into programming by organizing Le Marché noir des Petites Utopies, a biennial festival dedicated to small-scale puppetry and object theatre.

For the coming years, Anima Théâtre aims to continue developing its activity around four main focuses:

- | Productions and their distribution at regional, national, and international levels, relying on a loyal network as well as new partners.
- | International outreach: Anima Théâtre particularly seeks to expand abroad through the development of visual forms within international networks, as well as concrete initiatives such as registering for Erasmus for young entrepreneurs to support emerging foreign artists in their professionalization within the company.
- | Audience engagement through a rigorous and specific puppetry pedagogy targeting school groups, audiences in constrained environments, adult amateurs, and more.
- | Programming through Le Marché Noir des Petites Utopies, with upcoming editions centered around new partnerships to gradually expand the festival across several cities in the region (for example, Cavaillon) while broadening its audience.

APPENDICES



THE TEAM

The artistic team

I Yiorgos Karakantzas

Trained as a director at the Prague Theatre Academy in the Czech Republic, and later at the National Superior School of Puppet Arts in Charleville-Mézières, Yiorgos Karakantzas founded the Anima Théâtre Company with Claire Latarget in 2004. Based at La Friche Belle de Mai in Marseille, he develops a visual and symbolic theatre blending puppetry, storytelling, and visual arts. Since 2002, he has created around ten shows, including *Le Cabaret des âmes perdues* (2002), *Yéti, Yéti pas?* (2006), *Mr H ?* (2008), *Zombie* (2009), *Le Rêve de la Joconde* (2011), *Gojira* (2015), *Mécanique* (2017), *Rebetiko* (2020), *Engrenage* (2021), *Laterna* (2022), and *Mythos* (2024).

I Sylvain Levey

Sylvain Levey began his career as an actor before becoming a playwright. Since 2004, he has written nearly thirty highly acclaimed plays, for children, teenagers, as well as adult audiences. Most of his texts have been published by Éditions Théâtrales. Prestigious venues in France and internationally have staged productions of his works. He frequently works in residence and takes on commissioned writing projects, during which he enjoys engaging closely with organizations and their audiences. His texts have received numerous awards and distinctions within both the performing arts community and the national education sector. In 2017, he wrote *Gros*, a play about the birth of his writing vocation, which he began performing solo on stage in 2020, directed by Matthieu Roy. His theatre, marked by commitment and uplift, appeals to both the sensitivity and intelligence of the audience.

I Naoyuki Tanaka «Nao»

Japanese artist residing in France, Nao creates performances combining sound, visuals, and programming within a noisy and interactive universe. His work draws from the unconscious zones of emotion to explore, with a cynical gaze, the contradictions of daily life and society. He also develops performative robots, at the intersection of art and technology.

I Yragaël Gervais

Videographer and visual artist, Yragaël Gervais designs visual and interactive installations within the collective La Station Magnétique. He creates sensitive and mechanical devices in collaboration with visual artist Sarah Grandjean and contributes to projects in the performing arts. He is particularly interested in holographic forms and image animation related to artificial intelligence.

The Contributors

I Méliissa Blanchard

Researcher at the CNRS, Méliissa Blanchard explores the relationships between performing arts, digital practices, and heritage transmission. Her work examines contemporary forms of memory, knowledge, and artistic hybridization through a sensitive approach to gesture, tools, and creative processes. She is actively involved in collaborative projects that combine research, artistic creation, and cultural outreach.

I Michaël Cros

A puppeteer, visual artist, and choreographer based in Marseille, Michaël Cros develops transdisciplinary work combining puppetry, digital arts, and environmental humanities. As co-founder of La Méta-Carpe, he creates immersive and interactive installations driven by collective experimentation. He is involved in several professional networks and is actively committed to artistic transmission among young audiences.

The Administrative Team

I IN'8 CIRCLE / Anne Rossignol, Carla Vasquez, Max Delattre

In'8 circle is a production company based in France, specializing in the administrative, financial, and strategic support of artistic companies. Since 2022, it has been collaborating with Anima Théâtre to support its structural development and the networking of its projects. Backed by a qualified permanent team, In'8 circle operates throughout France and internationally, bringing expertise drawn from diverse backgrounds and a practice rooted in continuous training and personalized support.

I LES GOMÈRES / Nadine Lapuyade

Since 2010, Nadine Lapuyade has been developing the production and distribution of Anima Théâtre. This long-term collaboration in a key role supports the company's structuring and visibility. Through Les Gomères — recognized within puppet and young audience networks in France and internationally — she works on partner outreach, the distribution of three to four productions per year, and the development of cultural initiatives.

I Gatien Rimbault

Gatien Rimbault is in charge of communications for productions, tours, and the festival Le Marché des Petites Utopies. He is also responsible for production and touring logistics, thereby contributing to the management and organization of Anima Théâtre's projects.

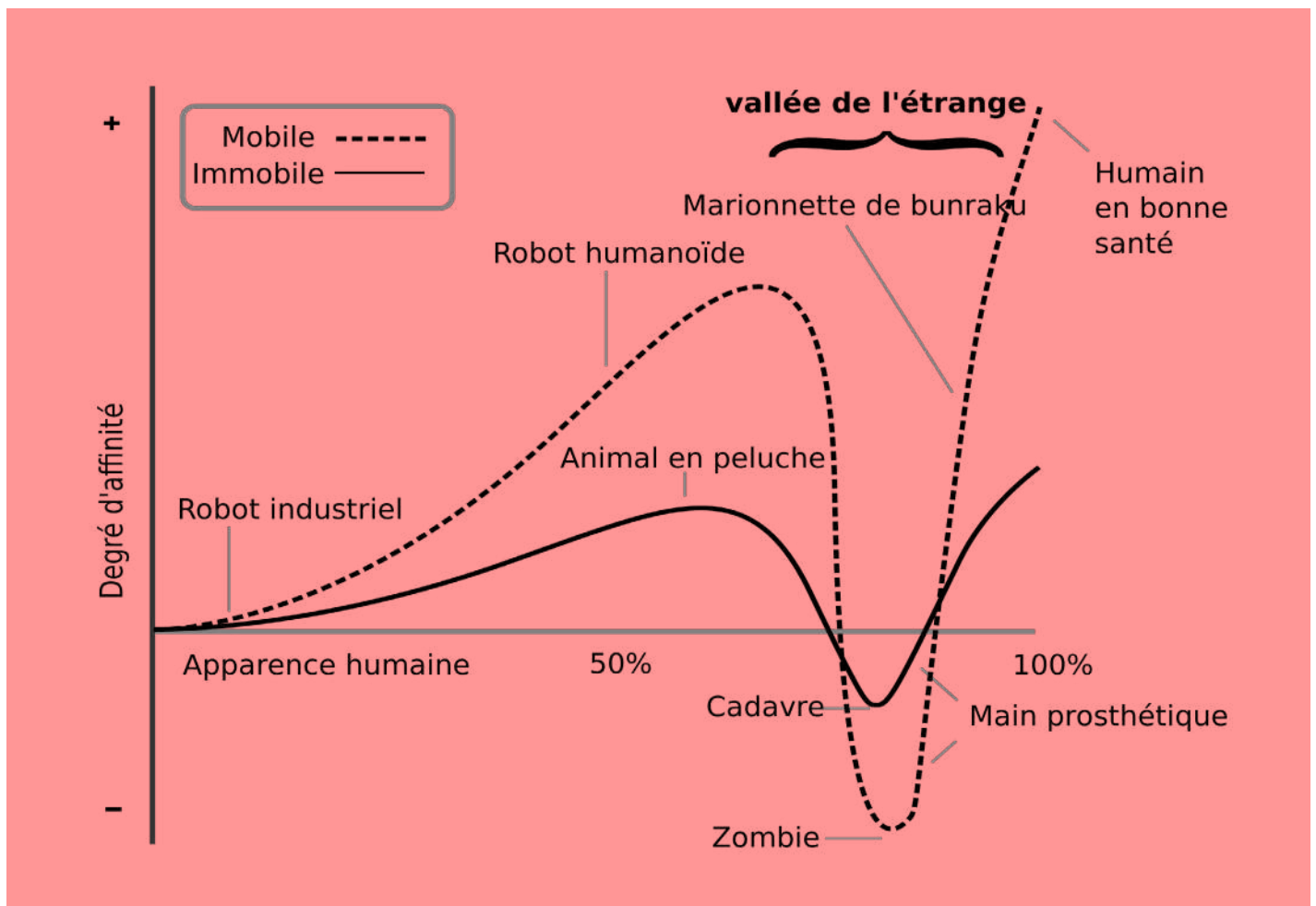
ROBOTICS AND BUNRAKU

The encounter between the art of Bunraku and robotics began in Japan in the 1970s. In 1970, Mori Masahiro, a professor of engineering at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, wrote a groundbreaking essay on the aesthetics of the human form. In it, he demonstrated how an artistic representation such as Bunraku—where puppets appear strikingly human—can evoke deep emotion and attachment in the audience.

This essay inspired a wave of experimentation, notably by Hiroshi Ishiguro, who continues to explore the interactions between Bunraku and robotics today. At a time when the limitations of the body were matched by those of the mind, science, technology, and art were seen as tools to transcend the dualism between these two realms.

Today, in an increasingly technological world, everything seems driven by the idea of control. The boundary between the natural and the artificial is dissolving, creating a continuum between human beings and their creations.

The Bunraku puppet, like the Noh theatre mask, becomes a powerful metaphor for this concept. For Mori, Bunraku puppets perfectly illustrate what he coined the «Uncanny Valley» theory: the more a robot resembles a human, the more we tend to like it—but if it becomes too human-like, that familiarity becomes unsettling, causing a sudden drop in sympathy.



In April 1991, the Bunraku master Kanuro Kiritake was invited by Hiroshi Ishiguro and playwright Oriza Hirata to Osaka University. His role was to advise on the staging of a humanoid actress, Geminoid, endowed with an extremely realistic appearance. This major advancement in the construction of humanoid robots, controlled by teleoperation, now serves as a research platform to explore tasks supporting individuals. Kanuro Kiritake suggested movements and postures to give more grace to this humanoid in the portrayal of the female role in the work Sayonara.



Geminoid in «Sayônara», Kôji Fukada

Presented on September 30, 2010, at the Aichi Triennale, Sayonara is a 25-minute dialogue between a humanoid and an actress. At the dawn of a new era of robotics, these ningyo (puppets), capable of dancing, loving, and crying, remind the audience that they always have the freedom to believe in this illusion or not.

Ultimately, whether in bunraku or robotics, the same question is asked: everything depends on the quality of the performance, whether it is that of a puppet or a machine, and on our perception of it.

Like a musician with their instrument, the manipulation of the ningyo plays with illusion, creating and revealing it simultaneously. But above all, the manipulation aims to exercise control and to stage the process.

NOTES AND IDEAS

INFLUENCING 'PSYCHÉ'

I *Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto*

Dans son Manifeste Cyborg, Donna Haraway propose que les cyborgs, en tant qu'hybrides de l'organique et du machinique, brouillent les frontières traditionnelles : nature et culture, humain et non-humain, sujet et objet, tout en remettant en question les dichotomies de genre et sociales. Cette idée centrale se retrouve dans **Psyche**, où l'intersection entre humain et machine (robots, cyborgs, marionnettes) reflète la vision de Haraway, qui défie les distinctions entre l'organique et le technologique.

Haraway affirme que le cyborg est à la fois un symbole de l'imagination et une réalité matérielle qui redéfinit l'humanité. Cette idée de transformation est présente dans l'exploration des robots et des marionnettes, qui redéfinissent les limites du corps et de l'esprit, tout comme dans la question des dualismes science/nature, humain/machine, abordés dans le texte. Haraway voit également le cyborg comme un outil politique, en opposition aux systèmes patriarcaux, offrant une nouvelle forme d'identité qui transcende les rôles de genre traditionnels.

I *The Social Life of Things by Arjun Appadurai*

Appadurai explores how objects, such as commodities, acquire social life through interactions with humans. His work aligns with *Psyche*, where puppets and robots are seen not only as performative objects but as active agents capable of blurring the boundaries between life and non-life. Puppets and robots, like Appadurai's commodities, become carriers of social and emotional meanings.

In *Sayonara*, for example, the performance between humans and robots illustrates the idea that these objects are not passive but actively participate in shaping human and social relationships. Appadurai's concept that material objects are dynamic and socially embedded reinforces the notion that technology, represented by these puppets and robots, is constantly evolving in its relationship with humans.

I *Summary of Ideas*

The works of Haraway and Appadurai resonate with the analysis of the human/non-human relationship in *Psyche*. Haraway blurs the boundaries between humans and machines, while Appadurai shows that non-human objects are social agents. Together, these ideas help us understand how puppets, cyborgs, and robots—far from being mere artifacts—actively participate in the construction of social meaning and challenge the very nature of autonomy and life.



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The Anima Théâtre Association

Abraham Poincheval, President
Janie Cianferani, Treasurer
Jérémy Gautier, Secretary
Alain Vigier, Active Member

Our Partners

Théâtre du Sémaphore, co-producer
Scène 55, Nationally supported stage "Art and Creation", residency support
Le Safran, Nationally supported stage of Amiens Métropole, pre-purchase under discussion

Anima Théâtre company is officially recognized by the Ministry of Culture (with a two-year agreement) and regularly receives support for its productions and the Marché Noir des Petites Utopies festival from the Région Sud, the Department 13, and the City of Marseille. Anima Théâtre is also regularly supported by the Institut Français, Spedidam, Adami, and FONPEPS.

Anima Théâtre shares office space with the Théâtre de Cuisine at the Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseille.