

**Ifá and Wayang as Posthuman Knowledge Machines: Veridiction,
Distributed Agency, and Added Value**

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Abstract

This article develops a conceptual-comparative reading of Yorùbá Ifá divination and Javanese *wayang kulit* as posthuman knowledge machines. It asks how both practices redistribute epistemic agency beyond the human, including what counts as an authoritative speaker, and how they produce veridiction that turns narrative into binding guidance. Rather than treating Ifá and *wayang* as folklore, heritage objects, or symbolic performances alone, the article argues that both function as structured apparatuses for authorizing knowledge through corpus, procedure, material mediation, and communal uptake. Ifá is examined as a divinatory and normative system in which guidance is routed through corpus, consultation, and interpretive authority, while *wayang* is read as a performative machine that transforms spectacle into *tuntunan*, or moral guidance. The article concludes that their added value lies in epistemic-ethical surplus: the capacity to produce accountable guidance through distributed agency and more-than-human relationality.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Ifá divination; Wayang kulit; Veridiction; Distributed agency

Introduction

The critique of human exceptionalism now carries a broader epistemological consequence: it asks how knowledge, authority, and value are produced when the human can no longer be treated as the unquestioned centre of meaning. Posthumanist theory is useful here not because it merely adds animals, objects, technologies, or ecological relations to an existing human-centred framework, but because it disturbs the framework itself. Braidotti's account of posthuman knowledge and Ferrando's philosophical posthumanism both question the assumption that the human subject can remain the sovereign centre of epistemic authority (BRAIDOTTI 2019; FERRANDO 2019). Susen gives this shift a concise formulation when he argues that “the posthuman” compels us to account for the profound interdependence of human and non-human forces” (SUSEN 2022, 79). Once interdependence is taken seriously, cultural practices can no longer be read only as expressions of human belief or as heritage objects whose value depends on preservation, market circulation, or institutional recognition. They may also be understood as procedures through which communities organize truth, distribute agency, and cultivate obligation under uncertain conditions. Correa and Holbert approach the same issue from the side of material practice

when they write that “our delusions of control over our tools, technologies, materials, and nature are continually contradicted by social and planetary unraveling” (CORREA and HOLBERT 2023, 192). The displacement of mastery therefore requires a corresponding revision of value: what a practice adds is not exhausted by beauty, identity, symbolic richness, or cultural prestige, but includes its capacity to generate accountable orientation within relations that exceed the human.

This question becomes sharper in more-than-human rights discourse, where law and moral theory increasingly attempt to acknowledge nonhuman agencies while still depending on institutional languages of recognition, evidence, and governance. Rodríguez-Garavito identifies the difficulty directly: “legal thought and practice, including human rights, remain largely anthropocentric” (RODRÍGUEZ-GARAVITO 2024, 15). The problem is not simply that legal thought has ignored nonhuman life, but that nonhuman life often becomes legible only when translated into frameworks still shaped by human rights, state recognition, scientific evidence, or policy administration. These frameworks remain necessary in many political contexts, yet they can also narrow the imagination of what counts as knowledge and how guidance becomes binding. Posthuman discussions of value frequently concentrate on technoscience, artificial intelligence, climate governance, ecological law, and abstract rights discourse as privileged sites where nonhuman agency becomes philosophically visible. Those sites are important, but their dominance can leave ritual and performance arts in a secondary position, as if they only illustrate relationality rather than produce rigorous ways of knowing. Escobar’s account of relational ontologies helps clarify what is at stake because it refuses to treat relation as a secondary link among entities that have already been constituted as separate (ESCOBAR 2020). From this perspective, ritual and artistic traditions matter philosophically because they make relation operational. They gather bodies, objects, narratives, sounds, gestures, places, and interpretive communities into repeatable forms through which guidance becomes publicly intelligible and socially consequential.

Yorùbá Ifá divination and Javanese wayang kulit are significant in this context because both traditions organize knowledge through distributed forms of authority. Ifá has long been discussed as divination, oral literature, sacred corpus, ethical reasoning, and religious practice. Bascom’s foundational study presents Ifá as a complex system of communication between human beings and divine knowledge, while Hallen’s work on Yorùbá value discourse shows that moral concepts emerge through culturally embedded practices of judgment, speech, and evaluation rather than through detached abstraction (BASCOM 1969; HALLEN 2000). Olupona’s study of Ilé-Ifè further demonstrates that Yorùbá religious imagination is inseparable from sacred geography, historical memory, and the organization of authority (OLUPONA 2011). More recent legal and religious scholarship reinforces the status of Ifá as a corpus and normative archive: “This body of knowledge is the sacred text of the Yorùbá religion and all its branches and denominations around the world. The corpus is made up of 256 Odù” (OLOMOJOBI and YERIMA 2022, 32). This description prevents Ifá from being reduced to private belief, decorative spirituality, or a symbolic residue of tradition. It is a knowledge arrangement in which Odù, divination instruments,

ritual speech, diviner, client, memory, interpretation, and communal recognition jointly shape what can count as authoritative guidance. The authority of Ifá is not housed in the diviner alone; it is produced through the relation among corpus, procedure, operator, cosmological agency, and uptake.

A comparable but distinct arrangement appears in *wayang kulit*, which has been studied through performance studies, Javanese aesthetics, pedagogy, heritage discourse, and theories of personhood. Keeler's study of Javanese shadow plays shows that *wayang* cannot be reduced to narrative content because its meaning emerges from the interaction among *dalang*, puppets, audience, social occasion, and Javanese understandings of selfhood (KEELER 1987). Mrázek's phenomenological account strengthens this insight by attending to the technical and sensory conditions of performance, including screen, lamp, puppet, sound, movement, and timing as constitutive elements of the theatrical event (MRÁZEK 2005). Recent philosophical work continues this orientation by presenting *wayang* as a medium of guidance rather than entertainment alone. Muhtar and Mai write that "the *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppet theater, serves not merely as entertainment but also as a source of moral and philosophical guidance" (MUHTAR and MAI 2025, 135). The claim matters because it frames *wayang* as a public apparatus for forming judgment. The *dalang* does not simply transmit a story to passive spectators; he works within a performance ecology made of puppets, screen, lamp, gamelan, inherited plots, improvisational commentary, audience expectation, and ethical memory. Guidance emerges through the event as a whole, and the event becomes authoritative because its mediating forms are socially recognized as capable of producing reflection, instruction, and moral orientation. *Wayang* therefore distributes authority beyond a single human speaker, although it does so through performance rather than divinatory consultation.

The term knowledge machine names these distributed arrangements of corpus, operator, media, procedure, and uptake. It should not be read as a claim that Ifá and *wayang kulit* are mechanical, lifeless, or reducible to modern technological systems. The term points to their repeatable capacity to process uncertainty into intelligible and actionable guidance through structured mediation. A knowledge machine formats who or what may speak, how an utterance becomes authoritative, and how narrative, divination, or performance becomes socially consequential. It also clarifies the meaning of added value in this article. Added value does not refer primarily to commodification, institutional prestige, or heritage branding. It refers to epistemic-ethical surplus: the capacity of a practice to generate guidance that is publicly recognizable, normatively forceful, and accountable to more-than-human relations. This surplus is closely related to veridiction, understood not simply as truth but as a procedure by which truth is produced, authorized, and attached to conduct. Villadsen's reading of Foucauldian veridiction is useful because it warns that when scientific veridiction monopolizes the intelligibility of conduct, conduct risks "losing its ethical and political dimensions" (VILLADSEN 2024, 308). Ifá and *wayang* disclose other mechanisms for producing guidance without reducing truth to detached explanation. Ifá foregrounds corpus, consultation, and divinatory counsel; *wayang*

foregrounds performance, mediation, and public pedagogy. Both show that guidance becomes binding through structured procedures that distribute authority beyond individual intention.

Two questions guide the discussion. First, in what ways do Ifá and wayang kulit function as knowledge machines that redistribute epistemic agency beyond the human, including the question of what counts as an authoritative speaker within each practice? Second, how do these knowledge machines produce veridiction, and what added value does this yield for decolonial posthuman epistemology when value is approached as epistemic-ethical surplus rather than exchange value alone? The discussion is conceptual-theoretical and comparative, rather than an empirical qualitative study based on interviews, sampling, or field observation. It draws on scholarship that describes the procedural, textual, performative, and mediating features of Ifá and wayang. The analysis reconstructs each practice as a knowledge machine, reads its mediators and procedures as sites where authority is produced, and compares the two cases to clarify how veridiction works differently in each. The comparison is defensive rather than assimilative: it does not require Ifá and wayang to become equivalent systems, nor does it treat either tradition as a romantic alternative to modernity. The more limited claim is that both practices disclose forms of knowledge production that posthuman theory has not sufficiently theorized, especially practices in which authority is mediated, agency is distributed, and value is produced as binding guidance rather than as cultural representation alone.

Posthuman Value, Veridiction and the Problem of Knowledge Machine

The phrase knowledge machine requires caution because it may sound as if Ifá and wayang kulit are being forced into the vocabulary of modern technology. That reading would weaken the argument, since it would make African and Indonesian arts appear philosophically valuable only after they are redescribed through Euro-American technical metaphors. The term machine is used here in a more restricted sense. It refers to an organized, repeatable, materially supported, and socially authorized arrangement through which knowledge is generated, interpreted, transmitted, tested, and made binding. Paul Smart's account is useful because it describes knowledge machines as systems in which "human and machine elements are jointly involved" in knowledge-relevant processes (SMART 2018, 3). Yet Ifá and wayang kulit require a wider posthuman specification of that idea. Their machine-like quality does not depend on computation or automation. It lies in the coordination of bodies, objects, gestures, voices, inherited narratives, ritual procedures, aesthetic forms, and communal recognition. What makes them knowledge machines is therefore not mechanical efficiency but their capacity to distribute epistemic production across human and more-than-human mediators.

Posthuman value begins from this redistribution of epistemic agency. Ifá and wayang kulit do not become valuable simply because they can be used to illustrate posthuman theory; rather, they put pressure on the assumption that knowledge begins with an autonomous subject who observes, judges, and represents the world from a stable position. Karen Barad's account of apparatuses is helpful here because it refuses to treat apparatuses as passive instruments.

Apparatuses are “specific material reconfigurings of the world” that participate in the production of phenomena rather than merely recording them (BARAD 2007, 142). Ifá and wayang kulit may be read through this apparatusial logic, although they should not be absorbed entirely into Barad’s scientific-philosophical vocabulary. The divining chain, odu, verses, consultation, babaláwo, client, memory, sacrifice, and interpretive situation do not simply transfer a message from a supernatural source to a human receiver. In wayang kulit, the screen, lamp, puppets, gamelan, dalang, narrative cycle, audience, and performance temporality likewise do more than dramatize a fixed moral lesson. Knowledge appears through events in which materials, bodies, voices, and inherited forms participate in the making of truth, authority, and obligation.

This is where posthuman value differs from cultural value in the conventional heritage sense. The value of Ifá and wayang kulit does not rest only on antiquity, beauty, sacredness, or communal function, although none of these should be dismissed. Their added value for posthuman philosophy lies in the way they make visible a form of intelligence that is neither purely subjective nor purely objectified. Brian Massumi argues that “to take back value is to revalue value, beyond normativity and standard judgment” (MASSUMI 2018, 4). In the present comparison, this means that Ifá and wayang kulit should not be evaluated only by asking whether their utterances correspond to external facts or whether their performances preserve cultural identity. They ask a more practical question: how does guidance become livable, actionable, and ethically weighty within a world of relations? Value, in this sense, is not an abstract property attached to a tradition after interpretation. It is produced in the orienting force generated by the knowledge machine itself: a client is directed toward action, a community is invited to reconsider conduct, an audience is placed inside a moral field, and narrative becomes a practical arrangement for negotiating uncertainty.

The concept of veridiction sharpens this issue because it moves the discussion from truth as static content to truth as an authorized procedure of saying, showing, and binding. Michel Foucault defines critique not as the simple denunciation of something as false or the celebration of something as true, but as the study of “under what conditions and with what effects a veridiction is exercised” (FOUCAULT 2008, 35). This formulation helps explain why Ifá and wayang kulit should not be read merely as symbolic systems. Their epistemic force depends on veridictive arrangements: who may speak, under what conditions an utterance becomes authoritative, what materials support the speech act, what forms of repetition stabilize it, and what kinds of action are expected to follow. In Ifá, guidance becomes authoritative through odu and its interpretive activation in consultation. In wayang kulit, ethical and political knowledge emerges through the dalang’s orchestration of inherited narrative, improvisation, sound, shadow, comic interruption, and audience recognition. Neither case treats truth as private opinion. Truth becomes effective because a knowledge machine creates the conditions under which an utterance may be heard as more than ordinary speech. A likely objection is that this framework over-philosophizes cultural practices by imposing posthuman terminology on traditions that already possess their own internal categories. The objection is necessary, but it does not defeat the comparison. It

requires a more disciplined comparative method. Boaventura de Sousa Santos reminds us that the epistemologies of the South concern knowledges “anchored in the experiences of resistance” of groups harmed by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy (SANTOS 2018, 1). The task, then, is not to remove Ifá and wayang kulit from their historical and cultural locations and convert them into examples of an imported theory. It is to allow them to test the limits of posthumanism itself. A decolonial posthuman reading should not ask only how African and Indonesian traditions fit posthuman theory; it should also ask how these traditions unsettle posthumanism when it remains too dependent on Euro-American debates about technology, embodiment, ecology, and materiality. Kyle Whyte’s warning against crisis epistemology is relevant here because such an epistemology involves knowing the world so that “a certain present is experienced as new” (WHYTE 2020, 53). This presumption of novelty and urgency can permit colonial responses to suspend relational accountability (WHYTE 2020). For that reason, Ifá and wayang kulit should not be hurried into modern conceptual respectability. They should be read through the slower and situated ways in which they organize knowledge, relation, and responsibility.

The problem of knowledge machines is finally a problem of authority. Once agency is distributed across persons, objects, media, spirits, stories, instruments, and environments, truth can no longer be secured by human intention alone. This does not mean that anything can count as knowledge, nor that human judgment becomes irrelevant. It means that judgment is relocated within a wider apparatus of mediation. Jonathan Chimakonam’s conversational method is useful here because “African philosophy”, in his account, advances through “critical and creative engagement” rather than through the simple preservation of inherited claims (CHIMAKONAM 2017, 116). The comparative reading of Ifá and wayang kulit should follow that discipline. It must defend the epistemic seriousness of both traditions while still asking how their authority is organized, how their guidance becomes binding, and how their distributed agencies can be described without romanticizing them. Posthuman value, then, is not the claim that Ifá and wayang kulit are automatically posthuman because they include nonhuman entities. It is the more precise claim that both traditions force philosophy to rethink knowledge as an event of veridiction generated through relational machines of speech, materiality, performance, memory, and obligation.

Authoritative Speakers beyond the Human: Diviner, Dalang and Mediating Media

The question of authoritative speakerhood in Ifá and wayang kulit cannot be settled by pointing to the human specialist who speaks most visibly. The babaláwo and the dalang are indispensable figures, but neither stands as a sovereign origin of knowledge. Their authority depends on materials, signs, repertoires, instruments, bodies, remembered forms, and communal uptake that make their utterances recognizable as guidance. A speaker, in this sense, is not only the person who produces a voice. It is the relational position from which an utterance becomes authorized, interpretable, and consequential. A human mouth may pronounce the message, yet the force of the message comes from the authorized media ecology in

which it appears. Ifá and wayang therefore require an account of speaking that separates vocalization from epistemic authority. Speech becomes authoritative because a human specialist is placed within procedures that allow nonhuman, more-than-human, and mediating entities to participate in the production of meaning. The diviner and the dalang remain responsible agents, but their agency is shaped by the very arrangements that enable them to speak.

In Ifá, the babaláwo is not a narrator who simply turns private intuition into advice. He occupies a trained interpretive position within a system where signs, instruments, corpus, deity, and client together organize the production of guidance. Ogunleye describes Ifá's operation as relying "on the system of signs that are interpreted by a diviner known as Babalawo" (OGUNLEYE 2019, 70). The formulation is useful because it places the sign system before the diviner's speech. The babaláwo speaks after the signs have been produced, and his authority depends on his capacity to read them within a recognized procedure. The inscriptional character of this procedure becomes clearer in Adéèkó's account of Ifá as a graphic and hermeneutic system: "The foundation of analysis in Ifá is a systematized graphic translation of the results of the random presentation of the divination objects" (ADÉÈKÓ 2010, 286). The divination objects are not ornamental additions to human wisdom. They generate visible patterns that constrain, authorize, and direct interpretation. The babaláwo's authority emerges from his ability to activate a signifying event whose force cannot be reduced to personal invention.

The distribution of speakerhood becomes even clearer when the client's role is considered. In Ifá consultation, the client's problem is not merely reported to the diviner as ordinary information; it is inserted into the divinatory apparatus through gesture, whisper, offering, and expectation. Adéèkó notes that "the client's whispering of his or her desires and concerns into the divination object brings the past of the client to the presence of the priest and the attention of the divination God's representative" (ADÉÈKÓ 2010, 291). Authoritative speech is therefore assembled through a relation among client, priest, divinatory medium, and the cosmological authority of Ọ̀rúnmìlà and Odù. This does not mean that the babaláwo has no interpretive creativity. It means that creativity is exercised within the discipline of signs, verses, stories, and ritual obligation. Adéèkó's observation is useful here: the diviner "invents solutions, but these are not original to the diviner" (ADÉÈKÓ 2010, 292). Ifá's posthuman significance lies in this disciplined tension between invention and non-ownership. The human specialist articulates guidance, but the authority of that guidance is co-produced by corpus, deity, material signs, divinatory instruments, and the client's situated demand for orientation.

Wayang kulit organizes authoritative speakerhood through another configuration. The dalang is more visibly central than the babaláwo because he voices characters, narrates transitions, controls puppets, cues music, and manages the rhythm of the performance. Yet this centrality does not make him an autonomous master of meaning. Heins observes that in wayang kulit, "Stageing, directing and conducting are all done by one person: the dalang" (HEINS 1970, 103). The sentence may seem to restore the dalang as a single commanding subject, but Heins's own description complicates that impression. The dalang's

cues to the gamelan are “expressed by the dalang either musically, visually or verbally” (HEINS 1970, 103). He speaks through voice, but also through puppet movement, the beating of the kotak, the placement of the gunung, the timing of silence, the activation of musical codes, and the audience’s recognition of conventional signs. Marajaya and his co-authors reinforce this mediated structure when they describe wayang kulit as “total theatre presentations encompassing at least seven arts: Drama, Literature, Visual Arts, Sound, Dance, Music, and Style” (MARAJAYA n.d.n. 2025, 52). The dalang’s authority is therefore theatrical, technical, and relational.

The mediating media of wayang kulit do not merely support a message that belongs to the dalang. The puppet constrains gesture through shape and character type; the kelir turns carved leather into shadow; the lamp establishes the visual condition of appearance; the gamelan organizes mood, transition, and dramatic anticipation; the inherited lakon provides the narrative grammar that makes improvisation intelligible. These elements do not speak in the same sense as a human performer, but they participate in producing authoritative utterance. Heins’s discussion of wangsalan cues shows that even the dalang’s verbal signs are embedded in inherited convention. The cues are “announcements in the form of riddles spoken by the dalang, but not invented by him” and are “part of the standard requirements for each dalang” (HEINS 1970, 112). The distinction is important. The dalang becomes authoritative not by replacing the media arrangement with private expression, but by mastering the conventions through which that arrangement can speak. Wayang’s speaker is therefore not the dalang alone, but the dalang-screen-puppet-light-gamelan-narrative-audience assemblage through which performance becomes guidance.

The comparison clarifies two different models of authoritative speakerhood beyond the human. Ifá produces authority through inscriptional consultation: a sign appears, an Odù is identified, stories are recalled, and counsel is articulated in response to a situated problem. Wayang produces authority through performative mediation: the dalang animates inherited figures, modulates sound and shadow, and turns narrative movement into public reflection. In Ifá, the diviner’s speech is disciplined by a divinatory trace; in wayang, the dalang’s speech is extended through theatrical media. This difference prevents the comparison from collapsing both traditions into a single model of nonhuman agency. Ifá foregrounds the authority of sign, corpus, and consultation, while wayang foregrounds the authority of performance, mediation, and audience recognition. Both, however, unsettle the humanist assumption that knowledge becomes authoritative because a human subject possesses and transmits it. In both traditions, authority emerges from a distributed apparatus that includes trained human specialists but exceeds their individual control.

This distributed account also helps avoid romanticization. To say that Ifá and wayang authorize speakers beyond the human is not to claim that every utterance produced within them is automatically just, true, or immune from contestation. Authority is structured, but it can still be misused, overextended, hierarchized, or appropriated. A babaláwo may misread or manipulate the force of Odù; a dalang may reproduce dominant norms under the appearance of inherited

wisdom. A posthuman account must therefore distinguish distributed authority from uncritical sanctification. The argument is not that Ifá and wayang guarantee pure truth, but that they relocate the conditions of authoritative speaking. Guidance is produced through media, instruments, signs, bodies, memory, repertoire, and uptake. The authoritative speaker beyond the human is not a mystical substitute for human agency. It names an epistemic arrangement in which the human voice becomes binding only because it is mediated by forces, forms, and procedures that the human does not fully own.

Veridiction in Action: Making Guidance Binding through Knowledge Machines

The preceding account of authoritative speakerhood has shown that Ifá and *wayang kulit* do not authorize guidance through the isolated force of an individual voice. The issue that follows is how such distributed authority becomes binding. Veridiction names this movement from utterance to force, from a statement or performance into socially consequential guidance. A veridictive arrangement does not only decide whether a proposition is true or false. It establishes the conditions under which a statement can be heard, repeated, followed, contested, or institutionalized as truth-bearing. Villadsen's discussion of Foucauldian veridiction remains useful here because it shows that truth is never detached from conduct; when a regime of truth becomes the framework for action, conduct is reorganized through what is accepted as intelligible, proper, and obligatory. His warning is that conduct may lose "its ethical and political dimensions" when one mode of veridiction monopolizes how truth is recognized (VILLADSEN 2024, 308). Ifá and *wayang kulit* matter because they hold truth and guidance together. Their force lies not in abstract truth-claims alone, but in the way signs, stories, performances, and mediating forms are made to orient conduct.

In Ifá, guidance becomes binding through a movement from consultation to prescription. The divinatory event does not simply offer information about hidden causes or future possibilities; it directs action through counsel, sacrifice, avoidance, moral correction, or communal decision. Olomjobi and Yerima describe the social extension of this structure when they note that "Kings and their high councils would consult Ifá to figure out how to help the society develop, and based on the answers received, they would make laws for the society and help create societal orderliness" (OLOMOJOBI and YERIMA 2022, 34). The point is not that Ifá should be reduced to law, but that its guidance can move beyond private spirituality into norm-making. A consultation becomes binding because it is situated within a recognized procedure whose outputs can be translated into counsel, decision, and order. Adéèkó's description of the client whispering desires and concerns into the divination object gives a useful illustration of this process: a personal problem is not merely narrated to the priest but inserted into the divinatory apparatus, where signs, objects, priestly interpretation, and the authority of Ifá jointly reshape the problem into actionable guidance (ADÉÈKÓ 2010, 291). Ifá processes uncertainty by routing a situated problem through divinatory media, Odù, interpretive expertise, and communal recognition until guidance emerges as something that can be acted upon.

The binding force of Ifá also depends on the fact that its utterances are not treated as ordinary speech. Olomjobi and Yerima note that Ifá may refer to “powerful prayers or incantations that when uttered, reveal truth in the sense that whatever is stated comes to pass” (OLOMOJOBI and YERIMA 2022, 32). This formulation should not be reduced to magical literalism. Its philosophical force lies in the way it locates truth within performative and ritual conditions. Speech becomes veridictive because it is uttered inside a sanctioned configuration of corpus, diviner, deity, instrument, problem, and obligation. The binding effect does not come from the sentence alone; it comes from the conditions that make the sentence efficacious. Such a structure complicates modern epistemology because truth is not separated from performance, and performance is not separated from responsibility. Ifá’s veridiction can therefore be described as counsel-to-rule translation: a passage from divinatory articulation into practical order, where the knowledge machine authorizes not only what is said, but also what must follow.

Wayang kulit produces binding guidance through a different mechanism. It does not usually convert consultation into direct prescription in the same way as Ifá. Its veridictive force works through public pedagogy, affective rehearsal, and repeated moral recognition. Aryanto’s recent study of Partadewa in *Serat Centhini* states that “Javanese people regard wayang stories as a guide and a way of life” and that this guidance is reflected “through the puppet characters” (ARYANTO 2025, 16). The statement matters because it locates *wayang*’s truth not in doctrinal assertion but in character-mediated orientation. The Pandawa, Semar, Bima, Kresna, and other figures do not merely represent values; they become templates for interpreting action, failure, restraint, desire, and responsibility. The *Bima Suci* or *Dewa Ruci* narrative offers a clear example. Bima’s search for sacred water is not received simply as an adventure plot, but as a staged movement through obedience, trial, inwardness, and self-knowledge, allowing the performance to turn narrative action into moral-philosophical reflection (MUHTAR and MAI 2025, 135). A *wayang* performance binds by habituating spectators into a shared field of evaluation rather than by issuing a single command.

This pedagogical binding is strengthened by the relation between *tontonan* and *tuntunan*. Marajaya and his co-authors note critically that contemporary *wayang kulit* performances sometimes emphasize “spectacle (tontonan) over moral-spiritual guidance (tuntunan)” (MARAJAYA n.d.n. 2025, 63). The anxiety expressed in that observation confirms the normative status of *tuntunan* itself. *Wayang* is expected not only to entertain but to guide, and a performance is judged partly by whether it sustains that guiding function. The screen, puppet, lamp, music, voice, scene sequence, and inherited *lakon* organize attention so that aesthetic experience can become moral orientation. Trihapsari, Darajat and Zami make this contemporary pedagogical function explicit when they conclude that *wayang kulit* has “great potential as a contextual and effective character education medium in shaping the moral awareness of the younger generation” (TRIHAPSARI, DARAJAT and ZAMI 2025, 87). *Wayang*’s veridiction can therefore be described as counsel-to-habitus formation: a passage from performed narrative into dispositions, recognitions, and shared criteria for judging life.

The difference between Ifá and *wayang kulit* must be preserved because their veridictive operations are not interchangeable. Ifá binds by making a problem pass through consultation and by allowing the answer to authorize action. *Wayang* binds by making action visible through narrative exemplarity and by allowing performance to cultivate moral perception. The first is more explicitly consultative and prescriptive; the second is more performative and habituating. Yet both reveal that guidance becomes binding only when a knowledge machine produces uptake. Uptake should not be imagined as passive acceptance. It occurs when a divinatory answer, narrative scene, or performative cue is received as relevant enough to orient conduct, but it can also be partial, delayed, refused, or misread. In Ifá, uptake succeeds when counsel is treated as a basis for action; it may fail when the diviner's interpretation is distrusted, when the counsel is ignored, or when the prescription is detached from its ethical context. In *wayang*, uptake succeeds when performance becomes a framework for moral judgment; it becomes thin when the event is consumed only as spectacle, political entertainment, or cultural branding. The point of uptake is therefore also the point at which posthuman mediation becomes ethically consequential.

This account clarifies the added value of both traditions without romanticizing them. Their value does not lie only in cultural preservation, religious continuity, or aesthetic complexity. It lies in their capacity to produce epistemic-ethical surplus: guidance that is intelligible as knowledge and compelling as obligation. Ifá produces this surplus by linking signs, Odù, divination, and social order. *Wayang* produces it by linking performance, character, affect, and moral habituation. Neither tradition offers a simple alternative to modern truth regimes, and neither is automatically emancipatory. Each can be misused, simplified, commercialized, or made to serve hierarchy. Even so, both demonstrate that veridiction can be generated outside a purely technocratic model of explanation. They show that truth becomes socially meaningful when it is mediated through forms capable of binding knowledge to conduct, and when guidance remains accountable to relations that exceed the individual human speaker.

Objections and Replies: Comparison, Mechanism and Romanticization

One possible objection concerns the comparison itself. Ifá divination and Javanese *wayang kulit* come from different cosmological, linguistic, ritual, aesthetic and institutional worlds, so placing them within one analytic frame may seem too ambitious. The concern is justified, especially because comparative work can easily flatten distinct traditions into examples of a concept that has already been decided in advance. The comparison proposed here does not require that Ifá and *wayang kulit* share an origin, a metaphysics, or a social function. It works more modestly by asking how two different traditions authorize guidance through distributed media. Comparative philosophy is useful precisely when it keeps difference active rather than dissolving it into sameness (CONNOLLY 2022). Ifá foregrounds divinatory signs, Odù, ritual consultation and prescriptive counsel, while *wayang kulit* foregrounds performance, shadow, sound, narrative exemplarity and public pedagogy. The term *knowledge machine* is therefore not

used to claim equivalence. It provides a limited analytic frame for examining how distinct practices generate authority, organize mediation, and make guidance socially consequential.

A second objection concerns the word *machine*. The term may appear too technical for living traditions whose force depends on sacred inheritance, performance discipline, cosmological relation and communal memory. This objection matters because the argument would fail if *machine* implied automation, computation, or an industrial model of culture. The term is used in a narrower sense: an organized arrangement that produces recognizable epistemic effects through roles, media, procedures and uptake. In this respect, *knowledge machine* is closer to apparatus, practice, and system than to engine or computer. Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya's decolonial reconstruction of African metaphysics and epistemology is helpful here because it shows that indigenous intellectual resources can be philosophically developed without being reduced either to ethnographic description or to Western conceptual dependency (CHIMAKONAM and OGBONNAYA 2021). The machine concept is not meant to modernize Ifá or *wayang kulit* from outside. It names their procedural density: their capacity to coordinate signs, bodies, materials, memory, performance and recognition into repeatable conditions for guidance.

A third objection concerns romanticization. A posthuman or decolonial reading can too easily turn ritual and performance arts into pure alternatives to modernity, as if non-Western traditions were automatically relational, ethical, or resistant. That temptation has to be resisted. Decolonial scholarship itself has warned against romanticizing the Global South or treating it as an untouched source of epistemic purity (LEE 2023). Ifá and *wayang kulit* are not morally innocent systems. A babaláwo may misuse interpretive authority, and a dalang may reproduce dominant norms through the prestige of inherited wisdom. A knowledge machine can make guidance binding, but binding does not automatically mean justice. The argument, then, is not that these traditions produce flawless truth. It is that they show how authority can be generated through distributed mediation rather than through the isolated agency of a human speaker. Their added value lies in this epistemic form: they disclose situated mechanisms of veridiction while remaining open to contestation, misuse, revision and historical change.

Conclusion

The comparison between Ifá divination and Javanese *wayang kulit* leads to the conclusion that authority is better understood as an effect of mediated relations than as the possession of an individual speaker. The babaláwo and the dalang remain central, but their authority is never theirs alone. It is produced through corpora, instruments, gestures, inherited narratives, ritual or performative procedures, and the recognition of those who receive the guidance. This finding refines the posthuman claim about distributed agency by showing how such distribution works inside concrete epistemic practices. In both traditions, the human specialist does not disappear; rather, the specialist becomes authoritative byworking within arrangements that exceed individual intention. Ifá and *wayang*

kulit therefore disclose a form of speakerhood in which voice is inseparable from mediation, and mediation is inseparable from responsibility.

The second conclusion concerns how guidance becomes binding. Ifá and *wayang kulit* do not produce bindingness in the same way. Ifá moves from consultation toward counsel, prescription, and possible norm-making, while *wayang kulit* moves from performance toward *tuntunan*, moral habituation, and shared judgment. This difference matters because it prevents the comparison from turning both traditions into the same model of knowledge. Their shared significance lies instead in showing that veridiction is not only a matter of truth-claiming, but also a process of making guidance actionable through uptake. Such uptake may succeed, fail, remain partial, or be misread, which means that these knowledge machines should not be romanticized as pure alternatives to modernity. Their added value lies in something more specific: they produce epistemic-ethical surplus by making truth, guidance, and obligation socially recognizable through distributed mediation. In that sense, Ifá and *wayang kulit* expand posthuman epistemology by showing that knowledge becomes consequential when it is embedded in practices capable of binding communities to forms of accountable orientation.

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