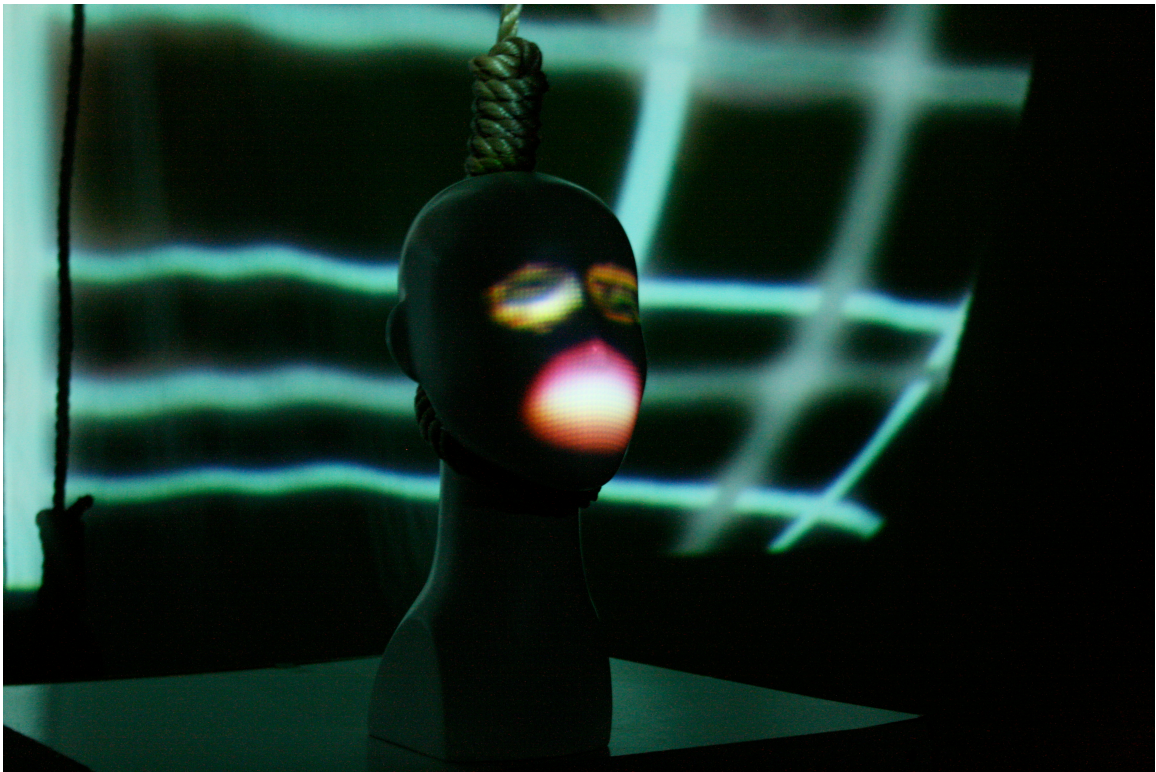


Exploration of Bioscenography In Chronos of A Dead Machine

Parjad Sharifi



Abstract:

Human actors and anthropomorphized performative objects known as puppets have been the agents and the bodies of dramatic characters in majority of theatre performances. With the rise of post humanism and fragmentation of representational body and identity, there has to be more adaptable methods to post human condition for the creation of dramatic characters in cybernetic staging. I propose 'Bioscenography' as a scenographic method emerging from traditional scenography, animation and formalist cinematic montage for fabrication of synthetic and cybernetic characters with the agency of lights, sounds and videos. In the current study 'Bioscenography' has been explored in the production of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* that performed on September 2010 at Artuad Theatre, Brunel University in London as part of DRHA Sensual Technologies Collaborative Practices of Interdisciplinary. Primal questions regarding character agency is explored through historical samples in the first section and 'Bioscenography' as an emerging design method is studied in the case study of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* in the second part.

The discourse of agency and character embodiment in theatre:

To save the theatre the theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague.... They make art impossible." (Symons, 1906)

Aristotle , Greek Philosopher, one of the pioneers of dramaturgy , identified the structure of drama, tragedy and comedy. In Aristotle Poetics (Bert.O States,1985) character as the derivative of dramatic plot or narrative is operated by an agent who is capable of doing action and controlling character by different means. The relationship between an agent and a character is similar to the relationship between a puppeteer and a puppet. A puppeteer can influence the expression of a puppet by configuring different actions and movement possibilities of the puppet. Furthermore, the relationship of a computer user and a digital interface can come to this conclusion. Production technology and materials are the prominent factor for shaping the relationship between agents and characters. A close study of the historical relationship between agents and characters in ancient Greece 500BC and 20th century examples and the production of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* lead us to argue for a scenographic method for creating characters

which have been constructed by different means in theatre history sometimes by human actors, opera singers , puppets and animations.

The first embodiment method of character in early dramas of ancient Greece 500 BC was the chorus, a group of singers consisted of twelve and fifteen members. Chorus was the welcomer of Dionysus(Brockett,1950), the god of happiness, by wearing goat skins and singing dithyramb, poems for celebrating Dionysus. Each tribe of Athena became a chorus competing for receiving awards as part of "City Dionysia" festival, which were hold for each season of a year. Originally Chorus was responsible for narrating a story. By appearing the first individual agent embodying a character the role of chorus eventually changed to anticipating the story, advising the lead character and sometimes illustrating the lead character's inner thoughts. Chorus unlike individual character agents were not a single person enacting a character, but they were a group of people with different voice tones and frequencies. Thus the appearance of an individual character agent in ancient Greece was the invention of acting related to Thespis(Gaster,1950). An actor was a person excluded from the chorus became the leading agent of drama. Actor was responsible for representing different characters by holding masks of characters in front his face and saying their words.

Greeks by enrolling human actors established individual humans as prominent agents of characters of drama until early 20th century when artists began questioning effects of non-human agency and other styles of agency as performing techniques . Acting became a discourse between newcomers in the beginning of twentieth century. The naturalistic theatre of Andre Antovan and realistic acting system of Konstantin Stanislavsky (Roose-Evanse, 1984) were the pioneers of new experiments in theatre. In the new movement so-called 'experimental theatre' majority of theatre artists questioned the role of directors and actors, however a minority of theatre artists defined theatre not only by actors audience relationship(Brook,1996) but regarding theatre as painting canvas in which actor's role defined to be compositional element (Appia, 1960). Moreover, human actors were no longer considered as true artists in the eyes of Edward Gordon Craig(Craig, 2008). The British theatre designer along with Adolph Appia, Swiss stage designer, were the first revolutionaries shifted the agency of storytelling from human actors to theatre ambience. In other words both artist realized the potential

of embodying characters with scenographic tools.

Edward Gordon Craig, the British stage designer in his radical article *The Actor And The Uber-Marionette* writes: "Acting is not an art. It is therefore incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist. For accident is an enemy of the artist. Art is the exact antithesis of pandemonium, and the pandemonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents. Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of this materials."(Craig, 2008)

Although Craig had several reasons for his statement against actors, his rejection is not the main concern of this argument, but the three notions of 'Uber-Marionettes', 'Movable Screens' and 'Calculable Material' are the useful points for this argument because Craig's notions are inspiring for investigating new potentials for scenography as a tool for constructing dramatic characters. In this new analogy Craig's 'Uber-Marionettes' and 'Movable Screens' can be character agents for deriving a dramatic plot. For example, a character can be represented as a combination of rhythmic movable screens and a human actor, also the movable screens by differentiating special position and rhythms can show different emotional state of the character. The closest example to Craig's movable screens embodying character was *Rasa Dance* a production at School of Contemporary Arts at SFU, 2009 (Fig 1&2) Created by Steven Hill and Rob Kitsos ,inspired by a research paper on *RASA aesthetics* (Schechner, 2001). This project was the exploration of emotion embodiment with lighting. The production scenographer, Parjad Sharifi, designed nine equal squares of lights distributed evenly on stage. Each square was identified by a colour presenting an emotional state. Throughout the performance, dancers were identified by these emotional states, which become intensely dynamic in the climax, as a result each dynamic lighting square was similar to a movable screen acting and deriving a plot.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Appia the second revolutionary designer was a Swiss architect and theorist of stage lighting. He was looking for a harmonious whole collaboration in a theatrical production. He was influenced by Wagner's theory of 'Total Work of Art', believing theatre must be Synthesis of all art forms. According to Appia, music was a direct expression of man's inner being, therefore approaching this harmonious whole in a theatrical production actor, playwright, director and stage designer must be unified with the power of music. Appia says: "The art of staging can be art only if driven from music." Appia similar to Wagner's 'Total work of Art' proposes 'Word-Tone-Drama', which suggests mutual subordination of music, language, actor and lighting. In other words it suggests democratization of expression between theatrical elements. Appia's 'Work Tone Drama' (Rogers, 1967) was to shift the focus of drama spectacle from human actors to the whole experience of theatre, in other words Appia shifted the agency of drama from only actors to lights and sceneries.

The historical examples can prove that character can derive drama without being dependent on the type of agency, in other words, stories can be told not only by human agents but also by a group of human agents such as chorus, puppeteers or singers, so embodying of characters is not necessarily depend on individual human actors as people believe today in mainstream media. Chorus as group of people can play a singular character by different qualities of voices. They can make different compositional configurations leading to the variety of character expressions and emotional states. For example, if some of chorus have tenor voice with higher sound frequency can embody a woman character and the rest of chorus with lower frequency can sing chorals or ambient sounds such as the blow of wind or waves.

The techniques of character representation and embodiment can be depending on mediated tools of body and technology independent from human agency. Since technology and mediated tools in drama are in the hands of scenographers, there is a need for a design solution in dramaturgical process of mediating and embodying dramatic characters. The production of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* leads the direction towards 'Bioscenography', a design method for designing and implementing synthetic and cyborg characters with mediated tools of scenography.

Introduction to Bioscenography:

Surely there are different definitions of scenography . Jroslav Malina, Czech scenographer defines it as " dramatic solution of space" (Howard,2002). This definition includes the most possible functions of scenography. Not only the definition explains traditional functions of scenography such as lighting for providing visibility, creating mood, location and time but also it can explain how lighting can be part of a semiotic system to be the primary engine of a dramatic action. His 'Action Design' theory has contributed as another function of scenography and expanded the territories of the discipline considerably (Christilles & Unruh, 1996).

The reason for mentioning Malina's definition is that scenography has been considered historically as designing visual and audible aspects of performing arts. In the 20th century, the role of scenographers, mostly in Europe, has changed from the traditional responsibilities for only creating visuals and sonics to the new task of design dramaturgy. Therefore, the functions of scenography have been expanded to designing dramatic vision and action.

As new media and interaction design integrate into other artistic disciplines, the potential for dramaturge scenographers become apparent. A scenographer dramaturge not only can design for actions but also s/he can design 'scenographic characters' (see artificial character) as the derivative of actions. Therefore, Malina's "Dramatic solution of space" can even explain further concepts in new media/scenography phenomena that has never been created in drama before, and that is 'Bioscenography', a method for scenography for designing characters that can derive dramatic plot similar to human actors. The term 'Bio' refers to giving life to artifacts, those are imitating to be alive and have anthropomorphized actions.

Description of the story:

Chronos of A Dead Machine is a performance piece performed in DRHA 2010, Sensual Technologies, Collaborative Practices of Interdisciplinary in London on September 7th, 2010. The production is directed and scenographed by Parjad Sharifi, acted by Manual Schulte and composed by Johann Strauss in one of the fragments. *Chronos of A Dead Machine* shows the moments of hanging of a political prisoner (Fig 3). The

short moments of hanging are expanded into twenty minutes to give audience different possible experience of moments before death. The experience is constructed based on Artuad's Theatre of Cruelty (Artuad, 1958), which invites the spectator to experience non-temporal time stripped from causality. *Chronos of A Dead Machine* engages body with total and non-differentiated experience of time. As Artuad says(Loayza,2010) : "In this theatre, let's undo space, new notion of space which we will multiply by tearing it, by undoing it thread by thread, by digging it down to the cord." *Chronos of A Dead Machine* is the story of a stateless citizen and unidentified body who has been stripped from his citizenship and basic human rights. Giorgio Agamben defines this phenomena as 'Homo Sacer'(Agamben,1998) a civilian without citizenship.



Figure 3

Technical aspects:

The production is a multimedia theatre. It has a head mannequin acting as a human head strangled by a hanging rope and a huge projection surface in its behind. The show is operated by Isadora and one projection accurately scaled and mapped on to head mannequin and the projection screen.

Some of the video images such as eyes and an interactive mouth are mapped onto head mannequin (Fig 4) and the rest of images are projected onto projection screen. The 'scenographic character' (see artificial character) of the prisoner is the product of an assemblage of components of this character. The components of the character are created onto the head mannequin and the projection surface. The assemblage is the result of the method that I call 'Bioscenography', in which the juxtaposition of scenographic components creates the sense of a live creature that I call 'scenographic character'. In this sense, the experience of time and space is connected with the experience of body. In this sense space and time becomes body, while body becomes pure present.

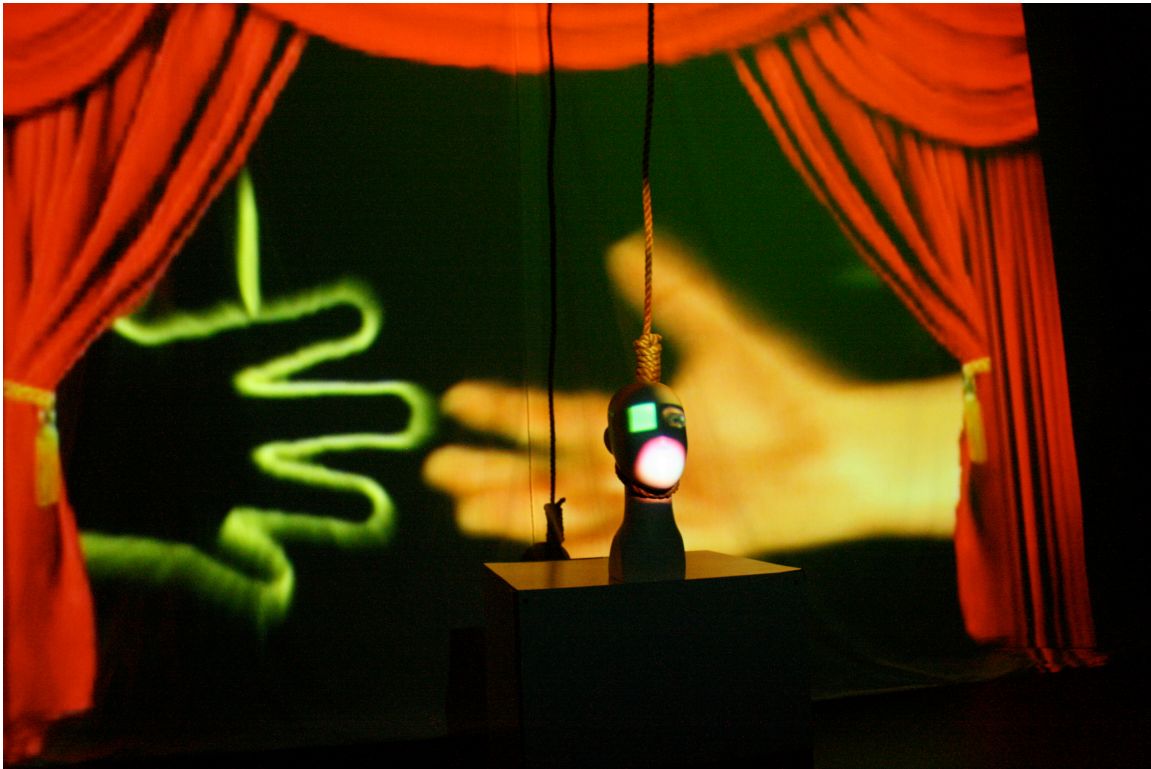


Figure 4

The case study of Chronos in discourse of Bioscenography

1- Bioscenography as a method for object performance

A theatrical event can happen with human actors and non-human actors. In the second method of producing theatre, a mediator must be either a puppet or an object replaced by an actor for deriving a character and story. Human actors in this case having the role of puppeteering and operating

puppets and objects but they don't represent characters of the story as in the human centered drama. Although in the former case non-human actors can be autonomous independent from human real time operation. 'Bioscenography' holds a responsibility for designing the characters of theatrical events in which human actors are not the primary agent of the characters. *Chronos of A Dead Machine* can be categorized as the second method of theatre in which the character of the condemned person is not derived by any real human agent(Fig 5). The agency of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* is a collage of one interactive mouth and few video images of face features that are precisely mapped on to a head mannequin in addition to projected videos on the screen. The assemblage of videos and juxtapositions of eyes, hands, gloves and head mannequin creates the character of condemned man. Audience experiences the character by the collision of video images without sensing the character as one body as experiences in human centered drama.

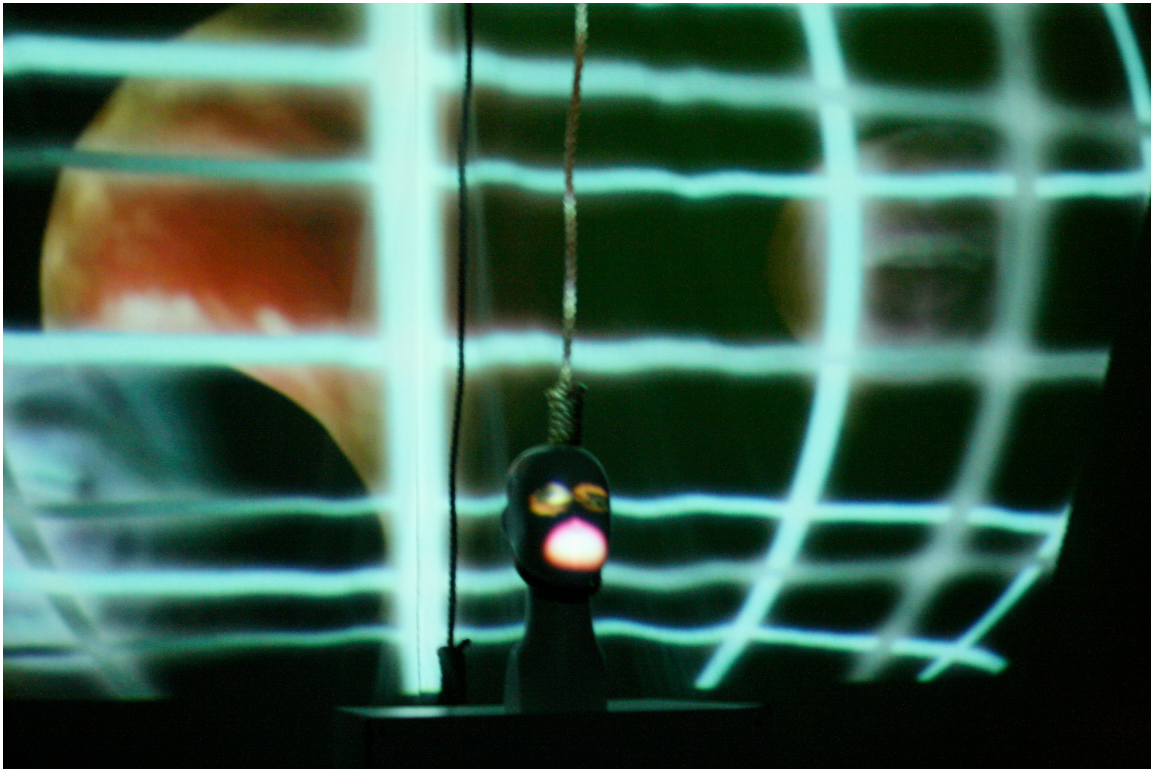


Figure 5

2- Bioscenography develops a rhizome structure

In the most practices of drama as in Aristotle's definition drama has antagonist and protagonist. Their whole story is defined around a core character that peruses a destination.

Although in many cases of postmodern drama such as Samuel Beckett's there are nonlinear, flat and episodic structures but in the phase of production there have to be 'bodies' on stage in order to represent and embody the characters. 'Bioscenography' in contrast to many theatrical productions create the characters with 'no body'. Some might argue that a digital representation of a human image as in films acted can be 'Bioscenography'. Although 'Bioscenography' uses cinematic techniques to reveal 'scenographic characters' but 'no body' means realizing the idea of a character without sensing the 'actual body' of a character in unity. The realization of the idea of 'Bioscenographic character' can be comparable to Deleuze's notion of virtual versus real. The virtual in Deleuzist perspective never constitutes a body, therefore it continuously is in the state of becoming and not in the state of being as it is a 'tree production' of 'bodies'. For example in producing Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* a director usually thinks of five characters. Without concentrating on the play in literary level but the production level, the 'bodies' of Veladimir and Estragon are the on the superior level of the spectacle and narrative compare to other constructive element of the spectacle and narrative. In contrast to the former exposition, the work of 'Bioscenography' in *Chronos of A Dead Machine* creates a character without a definitive 'body', so any cut from the character apparatus still cannot ruin the functionality of the condemned character. Therefore, the 'Bioscenographic character' survives in the rhizome structure of production and at the same time it suggests a rebellion message against organizations, 'bodies' and constitutions that try to inject identities and construct unified character 'bodies' for people in order to create power and hierarchies.

3- Bioscenographic characters are assemblage (Temporal and Spatial Relationships)

Characters of 'Bioscenography' are complex entities. They are made out of parts called 'character components'. In the first scene of *Chronos of A Dead Machine*, before the head mannequin starts talking, there is a rectangular form projected on the screen synchronized with a breathing sound expanding and closing like a lung(Fig 7). The abstract form and the sound are each 'character component' and they form a 'character assemblage' when they are synchronized. The character components form a temporal relationship (Synchronization) in order to form an assemblage. Another

form of assemblage for constructing character is spatial relationships. For example in *Holy Abjection* fragment, there are five character components acting on screen; two dead bodies one covered in fabric, one half live, one plate of chicken with a hand cutting the chicken to pieces and eating mouth projected on head mannequin. The total image of the five components shows that the condemned character suffers and eats his flesh(Fig 8).

The hand cuts the chicken on the first dead body makes a spatial relationship with the second screaming body and the mouth which eats chicken. Although in the former example of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* the 'character components' were representations, but Bioscenographic character components are not necessarily representational images, they can be abstract components made from lighting, sound, pieces of sculptures and etc.



Figure 7

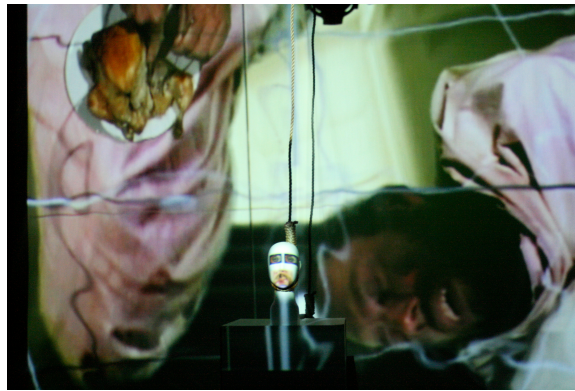


Figure 8

4-Bioscenography is a Body without Organ(BWO)

Body without organ is a term in *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze,1990) created by Deleuze borrowed from Antonin Artuad in the radio play, *To Be Done With The Judgment of God*. The concept of BWO appears in following one of the dialogues(Artuad,n.d.):

"When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom".

According to Deleuze there is no single entities or bodies in the world. Mountains, rocks, plants, animals and mater are in constant flux, transformation and disposition from one to another, so the human reception for realizing any phenomena as single entity or body (being) is wrong rather any actual entity or body has a virtual dimension to connect to other entities (Becoming)(Deleuze,2008). Virtuality of the body is the potentials and conditions of becoming another. The virtual is not representational but it is an idea(Parr,2005). 'Bioscenography' is a BWO because 'Bioscenographic characters' are not single entities or 'bodies', the characters are in constant flux for example in *Chronos of A Dead Machine* the character of the condemned person is composed of a big eye, a small eye mapped on to head mannequin and holy scriptures from Quran, Old and New Testament and a sound of a person mumbling the scriptures (Fig 9). The character as an assemblage is not fixed as the entity or the body of the character but the assemblage transforms in the next fragment. The assemblage in the second fragment is a hand acting as human head and a mouth projected on head mannequin.

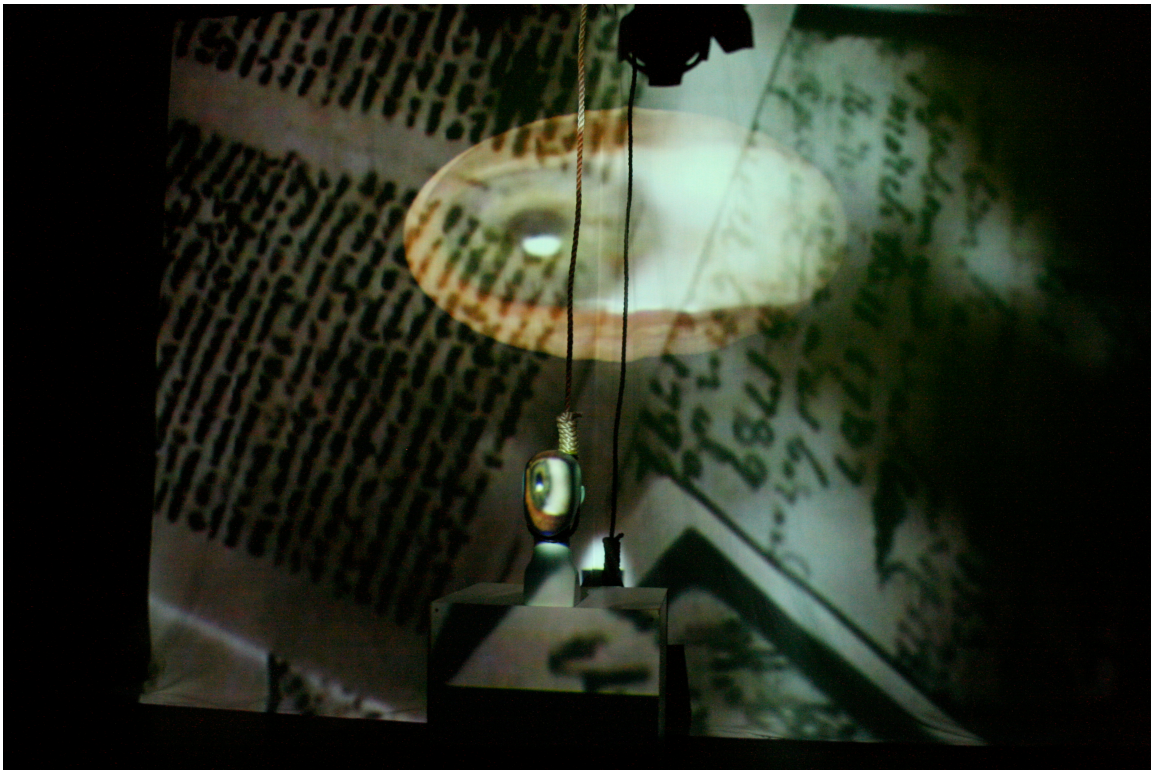


Figure 9

5- Bioscenography and 'The Virtual Dimension'

By interruptions of newer medias into their older counterparts such as interruption of photography to painting, newer medias by approaching photorealistic approaches has diminished the recent media the virtual dimension. According to Deleuze 'the virtual' is an idea and it is neither abstract nor actual but it is 'real'. The virtual is not what people usually refer to as virtual reality. Hence, it is the state of 'becoming' or possibilities of actual experience. In the painting example, the media has the potential of becoming any virtual experience of audience yet representational photography created less of virtual because the experience of audience has been already actualized.

'Bioscenography' is the apparatus of 'virtual character'. The virtual character is neither representational nor an image. The 'Virtual Character' is an idea that is neither real nor abstract. Thus it is not actualized on stage. The character of executtee in *Chronos of A Dead Machine* is composed of a hand (character component) acting as executtee's head(Fig 10). At the same time, another component is the projected mouth on head mannequin. The components in the different scenes are different, thus they create reconfigured assemblage. The hand wears a glove in the first fragment, *Prologue*, but the glove continues the story without the hand in *Blasphemy* (Fig 11). Therefore the idea of a character that is going to be executed is constructed in the minds of audience but it is never actualized due to its virtual dimension and non representational. The virtual aspect of 'Bioscenography' gives audience more possibilities for imagination as reading novels and listening radio plays.



Figure 10

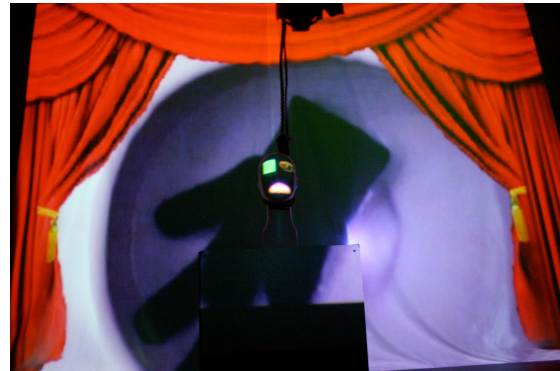


Figure 11

6- Bioscenography and Morpho

'Character components' can be human and non human. In the second condition when objects act as character components, the object becomes anthropomorphized object transforming to 'character components'. Thus the final assemblage can be the composition of human and non-human components. Not only the assemblage of characters are in constant reconfiguration but also the content of a 'Bioscenographic character' is in flux. The 'character components' of executive in *Chronos* become child, mother, urine, hand, feet and eyes(Fig 12&13).



Figure 12

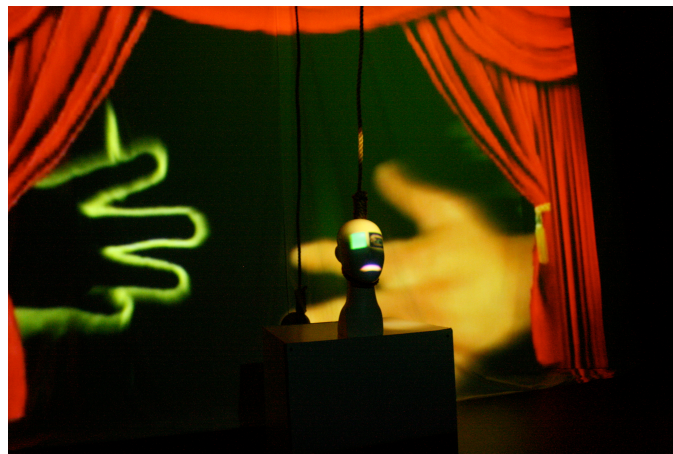


Figure 13

7- Bioscenography as a semiotic system (Eisenstein and collision of images)

Character components are in dynamic semiotic relationships. In other words any component in relationship with other components produces meanings. The original idea comes from Eisenstein's film theory claiming that(Eisenstein,2010) any unrelated image can collide and form a meaning with the temporal juxtaposition. He also was inspired from ancient ideograms that produce meanings with placing them in a sentence (next to each other). Eisenstein in a formalist and philosophical sense suggests dialectic of images where the two images form an idea. He makes an example of the image of a woman wearing black and a grave creating the idea of widow. In an analogy 'character components' being

videos, lights, sounds and physical artifacts can be compared to Eisenstein's images that can be juxtaposed temporal or spatial to form meanings. The head mannequin in *Blasphemy* talks about transforming from a green glove to a black glove(Fig 11). At the same the black glove is flushed out in a toilet. In a symbolic level some of the colors suggest some political and cultural meaning. For example, a rectangular shape colored green has been used in *Blasphemy* as the right eye of head mannequin. The color green also repeats in other fragments appearing as a plant and glove(Fig 14). Green symbolically and politically suggests the green movement of Iran and the color black suggests darkness. Although these character components have symbolic meanings, the main intention of 'Bioscenography' is not constructing such meanings but it tends to produces meanings through an assemblage.

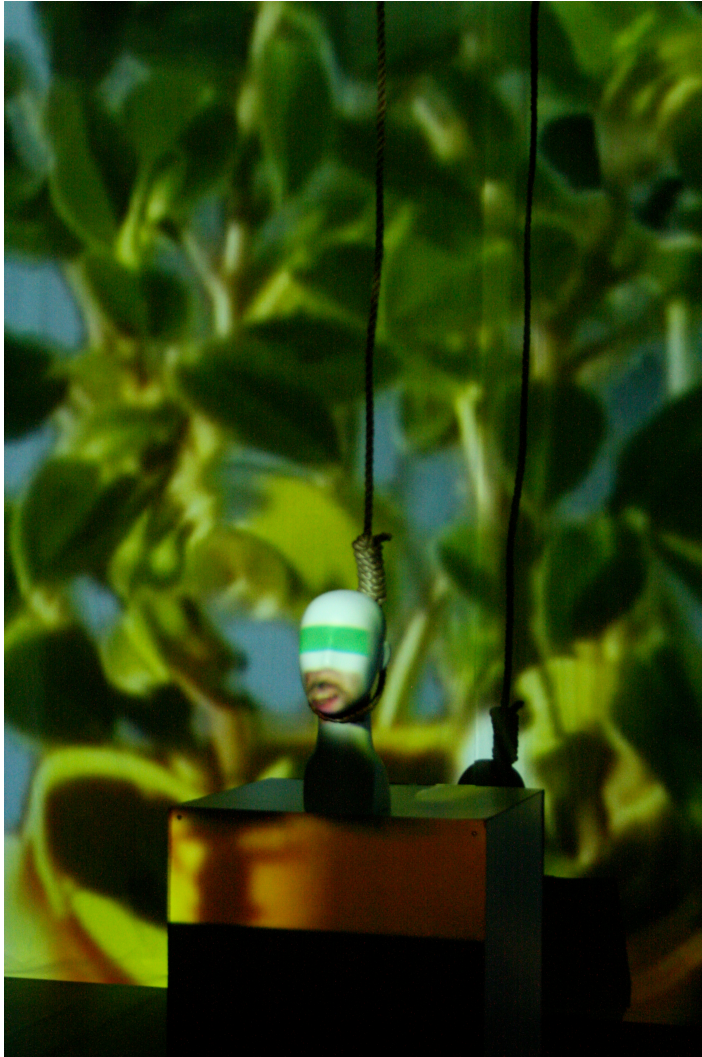


Figure 14

8- Bioscenography and The Uncanny

Based on Masahiro Mori's 'uncanny valley and familiarity' (Mori, 1970) 'Bioscenography' is able to design performances that can be considered as weird, grotesque and uncanny. In the case of *Chronos of A Dead Machine* 'Bioscenography, designs the uncanny character of executive. The head mannequin and a hanging rope are the only three-dimensional elements of stage. These elements are considered as semi puppets since the mouth of the mannequin is an interactive feature that is controlled in real time by an operator or a puppeteer (Fig 15). The character of the condemned person is in between dead and live. John Bell in *Death and performing objects* (Bell, n.d.) explains how puppets and performing object can create the sense of uncanny for audience:

"The elevation of an object from the status of prop to active agent provokes anxiety, because it appears that focus on the object will reduce focus on the human body. This anxiety is in fact justified, because performing object Theater de-centers the actor and places her or him in relationship not to another actor or to the audience, but to a representative of the lifeless world. But the lifeless object speaks profoundly when manipulated by its performer. And the profundity of the object, because it is part of the dead world, reaches different, deeper levels of signification than live actors can."

It is a hypothesis still to examine the practicality of Bioscenography in 'familiar' dramas. It will be future explorations to examine the functionality of the method on familiar dramas rather applying the method on only uncanny, black comedy, grotesque and absurd style.

Conclusion:

'Bioscenography' offers a designing method for performance enhancing the integration of technological tools with the creation of dramatic characters. This method can interact with dramaturgy as one of the primal factors of character dramatization, which have been heavily based on writing and directing before 'Bioscenography'. In the post human condition when technology becomes the extension of body (cyborgs), when human and her/his representation become identity such as virtual network systems, the process of character creation must be changed and a dramaturge must think of ways to fabricate the post humanist characters;

surely traditional ways of character realization with only the use of human agents are not possible to convey post human characters. Therefore 'Bioscenography' becomes a major actor in dramaturgical process offering a method from the ideation phase to fabrication. Some may argue that film and animation have offered similar character creation processes because of their similarities in the use of tools, but unlike cinema and animation 'Bioscenography' is moving away from re-presentation in order to expand the territories of audience perception.

Chronos of A Dead Machine as the first production that have used such a method has shown 'Bioscenographic' techniques in practice. Bioscenography is an evolving method becomes it comes from a practice based research, so by future productions, more techniques of Bioscenography will be explored and evaluated. For further studies, this method will be applied to a theatre production with the combination of human agents and non-human agents so that 'Bioscenography' can create assemblage of a character with the combination of live and 'artificial character' components.

Definitions:

Character: Character is an entity in a dramatic plot driving events by causal effects. Character according to Aristotle is a major object of tragedy along with two other objects, plot and reasoning. "Character is the fuel that drives the plot and a kind of exhaust or emanation given off by the plot." (O.States, 1985)

Artificial Character: Artificial character is either non human character or cyborg character (partly human and partly non human) which is produced in three dimensional space by the composition and juxtaposition of character components. For instance animated footprints can be composed by sound of breathing and rhythmic transition of lighting intensity, therefore by meaningful composition of the three character components an artificial character can be constructed.

Bioscenography: Bioscenography is a design method proposing the construction of characters with scenographic tools such as lights, set pieces, video footage and sounds. The term Bio refers to creation of artificial characters. Bioscenography is also a method for creation of cyborg characters with biometric data.

Character Component: Character component is the smallest part of an artificial character. With meaningful composition and juxtaposition of character components artificial characters are produced.

Character in Flux: Throughout a narrative, a single artificial character is appeared in different configuration of medium components. For instance artificial character 'A' first is composed by two moving lights and high pitch sound, hereafter 'A' appears with different mediums of video and dynamic set pieces. Consequently the total image of an artificial character appears in flux.

Becoming: "One of Characterising becoming is the following schema: Virtual/real <> actual/real <> virtual/real. What such a diagram points to is that becoming is not a linear process from one actual to another; rather it is the movement from an actualized state of affairs , through a dynamic field of virtual/real tendencies to the actualization of this field in a new state of affairs. This schema safeguards the reversible nature of virtual and actual relations." (Deleuze, 2005)

Tree production: It is a mode of production that holds a hierarchical structure. This mode is in contrast with a rhizome mode that is democratic in collaboration of entities.

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