

Aphotic Dream

by

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Abstract

One hour and ten minutes theatre production of *Aphotic Dream*, written and directed by Fay Nassiroghli. The production took place at Studio T at SFU (Goldcorp Campus). *Aphotic Dream* was a multidisciplinary piece combining dance, text, lighting, surround audio system and music. *Aphotic Dream* included a cast of eleven people from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds as well as 4 major collaborators in the areas of lighting, sound and audio design, dramaturgy and directing. The audience were brought into the room by the ushers individually in the dark and were sited in their individual sits on the stage where the action of the play was also taking place. They were surrounded by six channels speakers in their close proximity. All of the music and the audio cues were built from the scratch specifically for the show to accompany the text and the conceptual ideas of the project. The majority of the play was in the dark as the artist's intention was to enhance sensory responses for the audience. *Aphotic Dream* consisted of three acts focusing on a political, sexual and social aspect of the lives of three people within the marginalized groups linked by theme of betrayal. *Aphotic Dream* was a combination of dance and theatre exploring erotic spaces and the interstitial spaces within the realm of human condition.

Keywords: Theatre directing/writing and dance; erotic; Interstitiality; embodied experience and sensory stimulation; darkness.

This is dedicated to my family and Diana.

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Figure 1. Inspired by *No Exit* and the final scene of *Aphotic Dream*.

1. Artist Statement

My MFA thesis project Aphotoc Dream was a theatre piece I wrote and directed in September of 2012. The Project was a continuation of my theoretical interest in the notion of sensory stimulation through darkness. What I investigated in Aphotoc Dream was the potential of darkness for creating a sense of anticipation. I hoped to use the notion of darkness physically as well as conceptually as a tool of familiarization and de-familiarization, thematically and visually, to further explore the space between what is visible and what is invisible, the space of anticipation.

“Aphotoc” refers to the zone underwater, where there is no more than 1% of light, therefore, nothing is visible except bioluminescence. The characters in Aphotoc Dream are all, in a sense, under water, trying to fight for their visibility through the moments the lights appeared.

I was born in 1984 during the war between Iran and Iraq. As a result of the war, I have experienced numerous electricity shortages. Despite the fear and the terror of the time, I found peace in darkness because it protected us from being seen. It was also a space of togetherness and solidarity. Even though I was very young, I still feel the sensation of those events in my body. Accordingly, I became interested in playing with darkness with the hope of increasing sensory stimulation and visceral effect.

In 2010, my play Phobia presented a realistic fragment of life in Iran during the events of Green Movement in the summer 2009. By using darkness, I hoped to create a space where the audience could take part in an event and viscerally embody the experience. In the dark, the audience acted as voyeurs “witnessing” through their senses: a couple making love, a casual gathering, a political debate, and finally an invasive arrest by revolutionary guards. The pitch black room was effective in creating a psychological affect as well as enhancing the sensory responses.

Going back to my childhood memory and experience of darkness, I remembered that most intriguing aspect about darkness was the anticipation, the return of light. Similarly, the appearance of light was liberating. In theatre, I was always the most intrigued when the room was dark before the stage light appeared. The unknown was erotic. By erotic I mean that it was a space of anticipation and excitement. As Dr. Laura M. Marks describes in her essay "Touch": "What is erotic? The ability to oscillate between near and far is erotic. In sex, what is erotic is the ability to move between control and relinquishing, between being giver and receiver. It's the ability to have your sense of self, your self-control, taken away and restored – and to do the same for another person" (Xvi 2002).

In my effort to translate Mark's definition of erotic to my theatre practice, this ability to move between "control" and "relinquishing" between being "giver" and "receiver", I began to experiment with the interplay between dark and light.

As a result, In *Aphotic Dream* unlike *Phobia*, I did not want to use darkness only to create a psychological effect, but also as a space of anticipation between what is invisible and what is visible. This is anticipation occurs in *Aphotic Dream* when action is taking place on one side of the stage and our expectation is for the light to arrive but instead a candle is being lit on the other side of the stage which re-directs our attention to where the action is not taking place. By bringing these unexpected lights at various points, I hoped to keep the audience actively involved and curious. Furthermore, the transition from the first act (the arrest by revolutionary guards) to the second act (the sadomasochism play) was another attempt in keeping the audience in a space of not knowing and anticipation. By prolonging the darkness and using the diegetic and non-diegetic sound I hoped to create a relationship between political violence and torture to the pain and pleasure with sexual play. This juxtaposition was a hope to highlight the difference between actual torture within the dynamic of victim and torturer in political violence whereas thus the space of anticipation is filled with terror, versus the sexual play where the receiver is participating in the space of anticipation that leads to liberation.

The progression from darkness to light was my way of exploring three different modes of reception. Starting with *Farsi* in pitch-black space, I hoped to create an

imagined architecture in which the audience could rely on their non-visual senses to follow the narrative. Even if they could not follow the literal meaning of the words, they could follow the sonic expression of the language. The second act was in English with moments of light; therefore, the majority of the audience received information through language. The final act was portrayed mostly through movement and the stage was fully lit, consequently the audience was mostly dependent on visual reception moving the whole piece through the progression from the unfamiliar to the most familiar.

Aphotic Dream, was inspired by Sartre's No Exit, a play which I directed 7 years ago as part of my directed studies at UVIC. However, I wanted to write a new script in order to further investigate the relation between darkness and erotic space while keeping the structure of No Exit. Seeing things through the lens of being an Iranian-Canadian, a queer and a genderqueer woman, I often have found myself in a space of interstices; not having a defined identity or in fact having multiple identities. In No Exit, Sartre introduces us to three characters who are trapped in hell. Each character acts as a mirror for the other; it is in the reflection through the gaze of the "other" that they begin to see different shades of their existence. Technically, in order to see, light is required but also metaphorically being "in the dark" suggests the state of not knowing (a lack of awareness). I bridged the technical aspect of light with the metaphoric aspect of light from the beginning of Aphotic Dream, when the Iranian man confronts the audience in pitch black saying "stop looking at me...eyes, judging eyes...I'll tell you everything, you will see". This opening was meant to foreshadow two definitions of seeing: seeing through the presence of light and seeing as understanding and awareness. I tried to use the progression of darkness to light as a way of revealing the story both physically and conceptually. By keeping the action often isolated from where the light was present, I hoped to keep my characters in the shadow linking the space of the stage metaphorically to their marginalized standing in the society due to their culture, sexuality and gender. I decided to use the information and the characters in Sartre's play and imagine them in three different times, places and locations prior they arrival in hell.

Thematically, the concept of betrayal in No Exit became an interest to me. All three characters in No Exit have betrayed their partners in one way or another despite the difference in their social and political backgrounds; ultimately what linked them is their desires and their temptations which resulted in their suffering. Often, betrayal

functions in dramatic structure as a way to increase the audience's connection to the victim of the betrayal. However, in *Aphotic Dream* by having the victims of the betrayal in the play often in the dark (visually and metaphorically) I hoped to enhance the audience's desire to discover more about them. Secondly, in the same way that darkness was an attempt to increase the audience's anticipation of light, by keeping the victims of the betrayal in the dark and the act of betrayal in the light, we may have been left with the action without the subsequent release of a reaction. The audience may have felt frustrated for not having their expectations met nor achieving any concrete conclusion other than the immediate experience of witnessing betrayal.

Aphotic Dream was created through four major phases: Writing; rehearsals though devised process; re-writing and production.

The process of creating the play from conception to production took eight months. As I discussed earlier in this paper, I hoped to imagine the three main characters of *No Exit* before they ended up in hell and within three different time periods, geographical locations and situations. In order to bring my own contemporary and personal narrative in to the story I used three sources in writing each different act: research on Islamic Revolution in Iran and the history of the Tudeh Party; personal email exchanges and letters and the adaptation of *No Exit*.

Originally, I wrote the whole text in English. However, through the workshop with actors, I realized I wanted to continue to include Farsi, but to keep the audience still invested the narrator would say a sentence or two in English to describe and locate the scenes for the non-Iranian audience. However most of the dialogues and discussions were delivered in Farsi. This was a directorial decision as I felt the importance of remaining authentic to the overall mood of those days in Iran as well as continuing with the concept of reception through sonic expression rather than the literal meaning of the language.

In the past two years I have been interested in creation through a devised process. However, my goal was to have a script ready as a departure point and a road map to explore other ideas through the rehearsal. While being interested in the devised process and working with collaborators I still wanted to make the final decision in

keeping with my conceptual and theoretical aspects of the play. The relationship between writer and a director is a delicate one, especially when one body occupies both positions. Writing is a very internal process; it is private and unapologetic; whereas directing is an external process managing a group of people within a creative structure. In order to be able to separate these two positions I treated the rehearsals in August as workshops and remained in the room as a writer. In September, I was present in the room as a director and made decisions through the lens of the director. This allowed me to be flexible with script changes and re-arrangements of the scenes. Through discussions, experimentations and dramaturgy, the script went through several changes and remained fluid until the production. Some of the scenes were partially improvised and in fact changed slightly every night. The underground Iranian meeting in act one and the fight between Sarah and Chris in act two, were partially based on improvisation as I asked the actors to follow their emotional impulse in doing the scenes knowing the gist of the argument and the objective.

Furthermore, lighting and sound were as important as the text and acting in *Aphotic Dream*. In order for the actors to get used to performing in the dark, we rehearsed mostly in pitch black from the beginning of the rehearsals. Most of the audio was made by the second week so the actors could rehearse with the sound. In the same way that the text went through changes the audio and lighting went through changes as well due to artistic and practical challenges.

The major aspect of lighting for me was based on projection mapping; my goal was to create a very specific light in a sporadic way on different elements on the stage. For example in act one when Mehran and the Woman are having their intimate scene, a quick and sharp light was supposed to appear on the objects on the floor (shoes, condoms, socks and belt...). This kind of lighting is only possible with projection mapping as it can light a very small surface in a very specific way. Unfortunately, due to the lack of resources and practical issues I made the decision to let go of the projection mapping ten days before the opening. As a director, my main priority was to create a safe and creative environment for my actors and other collaborators therefore, I had to let go of my original vision in order to have a solid production. However, as a result of these challenges I ended up with much more light than I had intended to begin with. For example, for the third act of the play (the dance scenes) my intention was to have the

dancers move in and out of the light and to project light on certain areas of their bodies. In a sense, the intention was to place emphasis on the bodies, not the faces (for examples feet, arms, neck and ect...) depending on how each dancer would move through the space. My goal was to keep the interplay between ambiguity versus visibility through the lighting and the exposure of the specific body parts. Since we formed the play around the original concepts of the lighting, from the beginning the choreography was created according to those visual concepts. However, since the lighting changed, the choreography no longer held the potential of holding the tension of the play. Now, looking at the play in retrospect I am aware that erotic element of the play which was based on the interplay between visibility and invisibility was reduced by the third act. If I was going to remount the play in the future I would either use the same choreography in respect to the projection mapping or if I had the same lighting, then I would change the choreography accordingly. I believe one potential for the choreography was to use the actual space in creating tension. For example: the dancers could physically stay more isolated and work with the distance in order to increase the erotic potential. The same way that the darkness was an attempt to keep the audience in anticipating the arrival of light, the dance also needed to stay in isolation, to keep the audience in anticipating the arrival of touch and intimacy. I believe that there needed to be an oscillation between isolation and intimacy in the dance in order for the play to avoid becoming too lyrical or romanticized.

What I learned in my exploration of darkness is that it is in the interplay between light and dark and the interplay of distance, between near and far there exists an erotic potential. Too much visibility can reduce the element of mystery and too much darkness can become stagnant and passive in the same way that too much distance can create alienation and too much intimacy can reduce the tension of active spaces. I would like to continue exploring elements that may enhance the possibility of erotic spaces through the creation of active interstices.

References

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2. *Aphotic Dream Photos*



Figure 2. *Aphotic Dream Act 1: first moment of visibility*



Figure 3. *Aphotic Dream Act 1: underground political party*



Figure 4. *Aphotic Dream: Jazz Bar*



Figure 5. *Aphotic Dream Act 1: Mehran's betrayal*



Figure 6. *Aphotic Dream Act 2: bathtub scene*



Figure 7. *Aphotic Dream Act 2: opening scene*



Figure 8. *Aphotic Dream Act 2: the victim of betrayal in the shadow*



Figure 9. *Aphotic Dream Act 2: Chris and Anna intimate scene*



Figure 10. *Aphotic Dream Act 2: transition to Act 3 (Sarah's nightmare)*



Figure 11. *Aphotic Dream Act 3: opening scene: the bride*



Figure 12. *Aphotic Dream Act 3: the end of wedding scene*



Figure 13. *Aphotic Dream Act 3: Maxine's agony*



Figure 14. *Aphotic Dream Act 3: Maxine's delivery*



Figure 15. *Aphotic Dream Act 4: Final Scene 1*



Figure 16. *Aphotic Dream Act 4: Final Scene 2*

Appendices

Appendix A.

The Visibility of the Invisible: Toward a Phenomenology of Darkness in the Theatre

Presence

The first time I went to a live performance, I was five years old. My aunt, who is an actress in Iran, took me to the children's theatre festival at "City Theatre" in Tehran. I do not remember the play or what it was about however; I do remember that it was a production from Tajikistan. It was the first time in my life that I was witnessing people speaking in a foreign language in front of me. I do not remember much about the play, but I can still feel every second of it in my body. I can feel the sensation of waiting in the line-up, looking up at adults standing like big towers beside me. I can still sense the excitement of going into an indefinable space. I can still sense the uncomfortable fear as we sat in a room amongst strangers and suddenly the lights went off.

I was born during the war between Iran and Iraq. During the first seven years of my life and throughout my childhood, there were many times that I experienced a shortage of light. Sometimes the lights would go off suddenly. My mom would say to my sister and I, "Just don't move, Daddy is going to bring the lantern". No matter how many times it had been proven that my dad would successfully find a lantern and all would be fine, we nevertheless always felt terrified that the lights would never come back on. Other times, people would turn off the lights on purpose so the bombing planes would not be able to see our building. During these times, my parents would take my sister and I to a corner and pretend that we were playing hide and seek. We would have to stay very quiet. As a child I loved those latter incidents. During these times the darkness was comfortable and playful. However, sometimes, we had no electricity for hours and my sister and I would get very bored and frustrated. There was a melancholy in the room, a thick air of sadness that I did not know how to define but I could sense. My father would know how to cheer us up by making shadows on the wall and inventing stories. Soon after, my sister and I would become excited and submerge ourselves in the new reality that was created for us. Sitting in the dark theatre at the age of five, I

was unsure about my feelings toward this new form of darkness. This space that we stepped into, this darkness had a very different color from all that I had experienced before. This darkness was active. It was waiting to become. I still remember the transition of having the light on us and looking at a pitch black stage to the few minutes of being in the dark and then suddenly the light appearing in front of my eyes. I did not know how to define what I was feeling; I still cannot find any academic or grown-up terms for it, except 'magic'. This magic was so strong that I did not ask my aunt about the story. I did not feel the need to know the language; I was watching live people moving around, laughing, doing things, and telling us a story in a space that was lit. I accepted it. I enjoyed it. Ever since that day, I became a fan of theatre. I grew up going to plays every week, sometime three or four plays per week. No matter how familiar the world of theatre became to me, that space of transition from light to dark on the audience and dark to light on the stage, remained as the most mysterious and tantalizing sensation of my life. It makes me wonder: What happens to us and to our consciousness in those few seconds between dark and light? In my exploration of darkness, I came across a book by a neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio entitled *The Feeling of What Happens*. In this book, Damasio describes the same sensation that I felt in the following terms: "I sense that stepping into the light is also a powerful metaphor for consciousness, for the birth of knowing mind, for the simple and yet momentous coming of the sense of self into the world of the mental" (Damasio 3). If stepping into the light can be a metaphor for consciousness, can we say that staying in the dark is a metaphor for the subconscious mind? If so, how does our way of seeing change from conscious "seeing" to "subconscious seeing"?

This brief introduction highlights some of my personal interests in the notion of light and dark as well as the potential that lies in darkness for creating an embodied experience. I wish to examine the potential of darkness in creating intimacy, expression over meaning and sensation over logic. Richard Schechner writes in his essay *Rasaesthetics*, "By etymology and by practice theatre is a "place of/for seeing", seeing requires distance; engenders focus or differentiation; encourages analysis or breaking apart into logical strings; privileges meaning, theme, narration. However, in contrast to Western theatre practice, historically, in many Eastern practices, theatre was a place for ritual and religious ceremonies; theatre was a place of togetherness and a potential for

an embodied experience both for the performer and the audience. For example, in Indonesia Sanghyang is a genre of trance dance in which the men become 'possessed' by animal spirits. They may be possessed by horses, pigs or snakes. In a sense the performer embody the movement of these animals through the ritualistic trance dance.

I would argue that the transformative nature of theatre goes beyond its etymology of "a place to see". I am interested in increasing other sensory stimulation through visual. I am interested in a theatre that creates an opportunity for a visceral and embodied experience both for the performers and the audience.

In this paper I will analyze five different aspects of theatre: Actors/bodies, objects, language/sound, and space, in light of phenomenology and related thinking on semiotics, cognitive neuroscience, synesthesia, and affect, all in respect to the relationships between light and darkness in the theatre. I will be talking about my own practice and will be referring to my work last year, Phobia which was an experiment with keeping the audience and the actors in the dark and bringing the moments of light at various points by using limited practical sources on the stage. Through this and similar practices, I hoped to explore new possibilities to enhances emotional and intellectual engagement.

Actors/Bodies

In Plato's *Ion*, Socrates argues that the famous performer of Homer's poetry, Ion, has no real skill, but is like a prophet in being divinely possessed. Socrates offers the metaphor of a magnetic chain to explain how the rhapsode (performer) transmits the poet's original inspiration from the muse to the audience. However, he questions the honesty of the act by the performer since he or she is only imitating an imitation and embodies part of the reality. The actor cries but he has not lost anything; he pretends to be a doctor, a lawyer, a poet without having any skills in those areas. Knowing that actors only imitate parts of reality, what is it that still draws us to them? We pay to sit in a dark room beside strangers and look at people who are playing what they are not. How can an actor feel what he or she is saying and believing it after weeks and months of rehearsal, repeating the same imitation?

Going back to the moment that light goes off on the audience and it appears on the stage, a certain hierarchal value is created on the live bodies on the stage. The live bodies are now responsible to 'entertain' or 'provoke'. Through the distance that separates 'us' from "them", through the juxtaposition of darkness in the room and light on the stage, 'they' become actors and 'we' become spectators.

Peter Brook explains in his book *The Open Door*, That the actors are supposed to feel the emotions as much as they need to observe the actions of their characters. "For the actor's intentions to be perfectly clear, with intellectual alertness, true feelings and a balanced and a tuned body, the three elements-thought, emotion, body-must be in perfect harmony" (Brook 19). What Brook puts forward is the attention to the 'live body', which comes with all complete senses. The communication between the actor on the stage and the spectators can be at its best when the actor masters all three aspects in his or her craft.

In my practice, I came across an interesting observation while working with actors. I noticed that the actors were able to capture the rhythm and the emotion of their character more easily when the lights were turned off toward the end of the rehearsal period. Even though, the "live body" is conscious and therefore aware of the gaze of others, through my rehearsals I observed that by removing the pressure of the gaze through darkness I could further investigate the phenomenological possibilities in relation to actors and spectators.

Theatre has been described as a mirror where the performer and the spectators are mutually reflected. The actor sees himself/ herself through the gaze of the audience and the audience identifies with the actor and their circumstances. The question remains what might be the trigger for the audience to invest in this phenomenological role play.

One of the most prominent similarities between theatre and film is the unspoken contract between the spectators and the medium that allows an illusion to reach its maximum potential. The multi-disciplinary aspects of both art practices create a space where the spectator is not only viewing art but a fragment of life. Vivian Sobchack, in her book, *The Address Of The Eye*, discusses film and its relationship to the spectators. She provides theoretical analysis through Merleau-Poenty's phenomenology as a way of

connecting the spectators to what they view in front of their eyes. I think it is a fair comparison to draw in regard to theatre as well:

A film can't be seen outside of our act of viewing it, and a film can't be outside of its own act of viewing. We must see a film for it to be seen, and a film must constitute an act of seeing for us to be able to see it. Therefore, it is the act of viewing that links the spectator film and the film as spectator. (Sobchack 103)

Sobchack challenges the assumptions that film is an object of vision and the spectator is a victim of a constructed image. Sobchack considers the cultural-historical aspect of both the spectator and the film, and argues that cinematic experience depends on two "viewers" viewing: the spectator and the film, each existing as both subject and object of vision.

Now, what happens if the light never comes on the actors? What phenomenological transition occurs when the actors and the spectators are both in the dark? The "spectator" is no longer a spectator where sight is privileged but now might be considered an audience with its etymological link to the act of hearing. By having the performance in the dark I hope to break the hierarchy of the "magnetic chain" described by Socrates as well as to allow the actors to feel the emotions without the phenomenological pressure of being seen. I would like to argue that in such an arena, the audience sees through imagination and the actors feel the sensation of their emotions. "The flow in the mind is reflections of the interaction between the organism and the environment. The mind exists for the body, is engaged in telling the story of the body's multifarious events, and uses that story to optimize the life of the organism." (Damasio 206) Therefore, the mind manages to create a new reality and a new way of seeing even in the dark.

Rhonda Blair explains in her book *The actor, image, and action: acting and cognitive neuroscience*: " Psychic images - whether they are of authentic past experiences or of an imagination of our self in fictive situations, are always of the body, since they are generated only within and by a body". (Blair 77) Actors use their bodies and personal episodic images to embody the characters and the audience imagines such sensation through an empathetic embodying of the actor's emotions. Sitting in the

dark room, the audience is no longer distracted by the gaze and gesture of the actors but rather the sensation of their bodily movements. After all, the actors are present on the stage, they breathe, they walk and they embody all range of emotions. This is when the “actor” is no longer an “actor” but a “live body” on the stage and the audience are no longer spectators but “live bodies” experiencing the performance.

Objects

We can argue that in theatre, everything that is on the stage has the quality of an “object.” This can even be said for the actors themselves, since everything on the stage has a semiological quality. As Bert O. States address in his essay, *The Dog on the Stage: Theatre as Phenomenon*: “All that is on the stage is a sign”. (Bert O. States 371) Therefore, the stage is a space where every element is representing something outside of its practical quality. “In the theatre light is brightness pretending to be other brightness”. (Bert O. States quoting Peter Handke) Therefore, anything that is on the stage already exists within a set of a constructed vocabulary. The audience associates with these objects through pre-existing contracts. This contract allows the audience to see a chair not as a chair but as a something else, a prop that is being used in one way or another “...as long as there is pretense, or playing, there is pretense of something. And this “of” constitutes a bridge between signifier and signified”. (States 372)

Furthermore, every object is constantly in relation to the other objects on the stage. Therefore, not only is a chair not a chair on the stage but it is also defined via its relationship to the rest of the objects. How each object is presented within the given *Mise-en-scène* is how the object is going to be perceived. Once again referring to the moment when the light appears on the stage, the audience right away examines the materials on the stage with their eyes. Each person fixates on a different piece of a prop based on his or her own personal association with the given signifiers. Each object on the stage remains as a separate sign until it becomes part of a bigger picture. For example, as soon as the light is on the stage we notice a vase in the corner filled with flowers. The vase is a sign, it cannot escape its own semiotics. Since the vase is part of a set, it does not stand alone as a sign, it becomes part of an image. “Unlike the sign,

the image is unique and unreproducible, whereas the sign is of no value unless it repeats itself". (376 States) States further argues:

In reading, the eye is an anesthetized organ, little more than a window to the waiting consciousness on which the world of signification imprints itself with only the barest trace of the signifiers that carry it. In the theatre, however, the eye awakens and confiscates the image. What the text loses in significative power in the theatre it gains in ontological presence in which there is extraordinary phenomenal satisfaction; hence, the need for rounding out semiotics of theater with a phenomenology of its imagery; or if you will, a phenomenology of its semiology.

Linking State's argument to my practice and the potential that darkness may have in creating such phenomenology, I wondered what would happen if the audience were to walk into a dark room unaware of the objects placed in the room? What would happen if these objects never existed within their given semiotics but rather were presented as an image by strobe lights? For example, in my previous piece *Phobia*, the audience entered into a dark room not able to see anything. As the play began and progressed they could hear the sound of certain objects but were unable to locate them. For example, they could hear the sound of the typewriter, and perhaps by hearing the sound they were picturing the object. However through the use of strobe-lighting and manipulating light against the darkness, they were confronted by the image of a typewriter as a pillow or a chair. Back to the dark, the object was now having other signifiers added to its original one. By defamiliarizing these objects I was hoping to loosen the objects from their original semiotics. Such an image might have a potential of becoming reinvigorated.

As the phenomenologist would say, the object becomes "self-given" and: something can only become self-given only if it is no longer given merely through any sort of symbol: in other words, only if it is not "meant" as the mere "fulfillment" of a sign which is previously defined in some way or other. In this sense phenomenological philosophy is a continual desymbolization of the world. (O. States 377)

What I argue is that if the object never gets defined within the theatre set then it can also lose its definition according to the vocabulary existing outside of the theatre.

Subsequently, the object has the freedom of being and becoming anything. It gains subjectivity and by having the ability to constantly construct and de-construct its own “signification” it can create a new sensation, a rawness of quality, which might lead to the creation of an affect.

Language and Sound

I have put language and sound in the same category in order to discuss the sound of language. I will examine whether the expression of language might have a separate potential for communication and creating a visceral effect as well as the literal meaning of the words. Again as Bert O. State’s suggest, “Sound is not consumed in its sense: sound simply gives in to language, as marble gives in to the chisel”. Similarly, Antonin Artaud’s view on language was very radical, for his time. In fact, his approach to the deconstruction of language and the semiotics of the stage can be looked at through a post-structuralist lens. He argues that the language of theatre is, in effect, the language of the stage, constructed through objects, shapes, attitudes, and meanings. But only to the extent where all these elements arrange themselves in the process and are cut off from their immediate meaning, and endeavor, indeed, to create a true language based on the sign, rather than based on the word. Things will be stripped of their immediate meaning and will be given a new one. (Artaud 133) By deconstructing language, Artaud hoped the audience would hear the expression of the words rather than trying to comprehend the meaning of the language and might immerse themselves in the action rather than analyzing the text. Going back to my childhood experience, seeing the play from Tajikistan and hearing a foreign language, the audience seemed to not have any difficulty watching the play and enjoying it. The language became like music; we were following the action through the sound of the language. The expressions were indicators of the emotion underlying the action and might not follow the specific narrative. Perhaps certain information was lost, but, on the other hand, we were able to create our own narrative.

Kenneth Burke in his book: language as symbolic action: essay on life, literature, and method, describes linguistic consciousness in five different stages. He calls his theory five dogs: 1. The primordial dog, we associate the word dog to our first memory of

the first dog we have known, 2. The jingle dog, the rhyming words, songs through one's mind when we think of the word dog, 3. The lexical dog, the definition of dog in the dictionary, 4. Entelechial dog, this is the ideal dog, the perfect dog, and 5. The tautological dog, associations or what goes with the word (leash, toy...). By looking at Burke's theory we can see that even when we "think" we are communicating through language our way of association to each word is related to our personal memory and background. This already creates some question around the ways we communicate but to even problematize the matter of language and linguistic consciousness further we should bring the notion of culture and linguistic diversity into the discussion. With respect to the word "dog", we can argue that the definition of the perfect dog varies from culture to culture. However, we still can engage in a conversation unaware that what we are saying with our set of associations and signifiers may have a completely different set of definitions and signifiers for the person listening. To further complicate the issues of verbal communication, Damasio suggests "Even when the observed subject speaks, emotional aspects of the communication are separate from the content of the words and sentence spoken" (Damasio 92).

By prolonging the darkness on the stage, I was hoping to examine the relationship between sound and expression. Through the deprivation of sight, one needs to rely on one's other senses in order to imagine and feel the story. Whether the actors speak in English or any foreign language, the vibration and the expression of the language will carry a set of sensations that may be transferred to the audience. This often happens with music where the melody that creates the visceral sensation. What I tried to explore with my previous piece Phobia was to see how the actors could find the emotional core of what they are saying by giving them the scenario of a given circumstance but not allowing them to rehearse the words. For example: if the circumstance was a debate on war, and one person agreed with using weapons to stop corruption and the other person believed that peaceful protest is the way to deal with such situations, I would give them a set of different scenarios to agree and disagree on through the rehearsal in order to get deep into the root of the emotion but I never would give the specific case or words until the day of the performance. Therefore, the actors were aware of their emotional stand on the topic but the particular dialogue would occur in an unrehearsed manner. My actors performed in the dark in Farsi, the audience could

not see anything, nor, could they identify the language, for the most part, but they could tap into the intensity of the situation by hearing the sound of the language. As Damasio describes in his book, *The Feeling of What Happens*:

The continuity of the melodic line of the background emotion is an important fact to consider in our observation in a normal human behavior. When we observe someone with intact core consciousness, well before my words are spoken, we find ourselves presuming the subject's states of mind. Whether correct or not, some of the presumptions are based on a continuity of emotional signals available in the subject's behavior. (93)

Further it could be argued that hearing a foreign language we still create a set of presumptions whether correct or incorrect based on the emotional signals from the speakers on the stage. By removing the light we are left with a limited number of signifiers reduced now to pure sounds like the sound of whispering, crying, laughter, screaming and so on. I was also experimenting with the effect of a surround sound system that was broadcasting low frequency audio in order to locate a specific environment for the audience. For example, the sounds of busy streets, rain, a train and so on. Once again I hoped to give an opportunity to each audience member to connect to these sounds in a very personal way, they located themselves in their own internal worlds in relation to these sounds, places they have been to or places they have imagined. Furthermore, by alienating the majority audience from the language spoken on the stage, I was hoping that they would rely on their other senses to feel the event rather than analyzing or observing it. By keeping the original language of the event (Farsi) instead of translating it to English, I hoped to create an imaginary but yet an embodied experience for the audience. I was not interested in creating political sympathy for my non-Iranian audience but rather an emotional empathy. Furthermore, I found that in translation the inherent power of the original language which was charged with raw and powerful emotion was reduced to a method of delivering information. In *The Feeling of What Happens* that empathy is what connects mind and body and emotion through a complex set of systems. He argues that cognition is an ever-unfolding process in which the mind operates against the conditioning backdrop of embodied and unconscious brain-level functions, which are themselves conditioned by bodily states. Within this scenario he argues that emotions, far from being bracketed from reason,

actually frame what we think of as rationality, providing an embodied context to all kinds of mental activity. (P 59-79).

Therefore, by relaxing the logic and analytical aspects of language, I hope to allow the audience to feel the intensity of the event.

Space

“In this theatre let’s undo space” (Antonin Artaud)

In thinking about space I started wondering about why the space of transition between light to dark and dark to light has remained as my favorite moment in theatre. The excitement that I feel in those few moments never seems to be the same after the light is fully on the stage. I become eventually indifferent. Why is that?

Laura Marks beautifully writes in her book, *Touch* about what is erotic:

What is erotic? The ability to oscillate between near and far is erotic. In sex, what is erotic is the ability to move between control and relinquishing, between being giver and receiver. It’s the ability to have your sense of self, your self-control, taken away and restored—and to do the same for another person. (Xvi *Touch*)

What I find erotic is the liminal, the space of transition; the space between reality and fantasy; the space between “actual” and “virtual” the space between being and becoming. It is that space that allows me to lose control of myself and give in to a new form of reality. However, most often, that erotic sense dissolves as I sit back passively in my seat for the rest of the performance and the space becomes a theatrical representation. Therefore, by prolonging the darkness on the stage my intention was to increase the anticipation for the appearance of light. It seems that in this interplay between darkness and light may exist the potential of erotic space. In removing the privilege of sight and then re-introducing it the space becomes an active participant in an erotic interplay between the action of the play and the audience’s expectation.

Milton Loayza writes about Artaud’s theatre in his article *Strobe light Consciousness and body technology in the theatre of Antonin Artaud*:

Artaud tries to move out of the chain of succession in time. He seems to think that what maintains us fixated in the movement of a successive time is a concurrent perception of a continuous space. Continuous space may create a universe of causality and language that alienates the body and the senses from a truer and non-deferred experience of time.

In *Phobia* by having the audience enter a pitch-black room, I was hoping to create the sense of “continuous” space, not defined by its walls, angles, geometry or its physical limitation. This “continuous” space could be unlimited as it is actively being shaped by every person’s imagination. The audience was sitting on the same stage as the actors and could sense every movement. The actors were at times in close proximity to them and other times further away, playing with the notion of time and space. “In this theatre, let’s undo the 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.” (Artaud 127). Therefore, in this space there was no notion of the structure of the set and no notion of the architecture of the space but instead unlimited and multilayered architectural forms created in the audience’s imagination. This black space can become a signifier for many different signs, an ontological structure, a space of transition, and a space of possibilities.

Brian Massumi discusses the description of virtual by Deleuze in his essay “Sensing the Virtual” as follows:

Although the virtual, Deleuze explains, cannot itself be seen or felt, it cannot not be seen or felt, as other than itself. What he means is that in addition to residue in static form, the formative process leaves traces still bearing the sign of its transitional nature. These are not virtualities, but populations of actual effect that more fully implicate changeability and the potential for further emergence than self-enclosed forms or ordered agglomerations of forms realizing a rigid combinatory logic to produce citations, associations, or most ubiquitously, stock functional cues--formal compositions following laws of perspectives and resemblance designed to awaken habitual patterns of recognition and response.

Although the virtual structure that Massumi talks about is the generative and computerized process as opposed to the actual building. I would argue that theatre often functions within a virtual form of reality. This form becomes “actual” by the use of set and space. For example, the thrust theatre functions within certain construct different from proscenium or theatre in the round, however, the function of these spaces may become enslaved by their form. I was interested to explore darkness as a virtual space that has the potential to relax our logic about form and function and allows the audience an embodied possibility of the space rather than an observation of a concrete form. Through the visual deprivation darkness creates a population of actual effect on other senses. It has an effect on the actual physical body since the eyes cannot determine the proximity of the objects and the performer, the physical body can only use its relational understanding of the space in order to feel its actuality. Ultimately the space oscillates between virtuality and actuality depending on how each person interacts with it.

Conclusion

Darkness is not just a technique, a technical effect; but might have the ability to provoke emotion, sensation and memories within itself. Just like my childhood where I found peace, fear, sadness, excitement, and playfulness in darkness, I believe different ways of using darkness in theatre can hold both conceptual and emotional possibilities. By looking at the above aspects that I have discussed in this essay: darkness, intimacy, expression over meaning, sensation over logic, one can argue that theatre has a potential beyond its traditional definition as “place of seeing”. I believe that darkness has the potential to expand the space of anticipation and the unknown. Not seeing changes our phenomenological experience with the space that we occupy. When our awareness of ourselves changes, how we relate and respond to the world around us changes as well. In a sense while the play is happening in darkness, there is an inter-play between the self as an object and the self as a subject. The self as a subject is aware of its existence but the self as an object becomes disoriented as it can no longer see who is viewing it. Yet, the audience is aware of the fact that they are in a room together yet they cannot view themselves or others. I hope to create a sense of being alone “together”. While the inter-play between darkness and light is a hope to enhance anticipation, I believe the inter-play between the objective self and the subjective self has a potential

for erotic sensation. My hope is to further explore these potential spaces and to play with the notion of expectation and anticipation. What happens when our expectation of ourselves and the space around us are not met? I believe the relationship between anticipation and expectation in darkness can lead toward a unique phenomenology in theatre that heightens our senses and troubles our cognitive analysis of theatre.

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Appendix B.

Script: *Aphotic Dream*

Written by Fay Nass. Copyright 2012.

Director/Playwright's Notes

As a grad student in the SFU School for the Contemporary Arts, I have been researching notions of perception and sensory embodiment for the past three years.

To conduct this research in a practical manner, as a theatre writer and director, I have focused on the notions of darkness and audience reception. I have practiced and examined how the lack of light can enhance one's sensory experience, as well as invite other ways of "seeing" through imagination, audio semiotics, and motion.

Inspired by Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, I have bridged an imagined story of three different people, in three different times and locations, with my own personal stories.

The First act of the play was written and delivered in Farsi for theoretical and conceptual reasons. However, the attached copy is the production copy in English. The play is heavily dependent on the sound cues and therefore, it is important to follow the stage directions.

The majority of the play is in pitch black. The word "blackout" in stage direction is mainly a technical use of the word meaning defining the "transitions" between scenes/acts.

The play was created through devising process and therefore all the scenes and dialogues were subjected to change.

Dramatis Personae

Mehran

Sepideh

Jamshid

Woman

Sarah

Anna

Chris

Maxine

Roger

Husband

Ghosts X6

Interrogator

Torturer

Guests X 4

Cast of 11

Act 1: Scene 1

Sound: Cars, streets...phone rings 3 times. Mehran answers.

Mehran: Hello?...didn't I tell you to not call here? They caught him?...ok, ok...if you hear anything tell Jamshid to tell me...don't call me here again..He hang up. Smokes his cigarette intensely.

ELMER: *(from his room)* is that you?

Black out.

MEHRAN is sitting on a chair facing the audience. He is breathing heavily.

Mehran: I shouldn't be here.... Stop looking at me, please stop it...eyes, eyes. eyes everywhere...judging eyes...I tell you everything... you will see.

Act 1: Scene 2

We hear the sound of the crickets, Mehran is typing on the type writer. He lights a candle.

Mehran: December 20th, 1977 Tehran: I was writing a new journal for the left party newspaper when my wife Sepideh Knocked on the door and interrupted me...

Sepideh opens the door. She is in her early 30's. She is Mehran's wife; she has a soft and warm voice.

Sepideh: Mehran! Mehran: Yes!

Sepideh: You have been working all night I brought you some tea.

Mehran: Thanks.

Sepideh: What are you doing?

Mehran: Writing; can't you see?

Mehran is not in the mood and wants to get rid of Sepideh.

Sepideh: Yes I can see. I wanted to share my new poems with you and hear your opinion.

Mehran takes a deep breath, tries to control his nerves.

Mehran: I can't right now, I am busy, but...

Phone rings and interrupts the conversation. We can hear the sound of a motorbike from the street. Mehran answers the phone.

Mehran: Hello? (beat) oh, and how are you? (beat) what time? (beat) Ok, I see you there.

Mehran hangs up.

Sepideh: What's happening? Another meeting? Mehran: yes.

Sepideh: For God's sake. please be careful.

Mehran: My dearest, it had nothing to do with God's sake. Everything is calm right now and I am careful; I promise.

Sepideh: I know, I just feel anxious all the time.. Anyways, I go to bed.

Black Out

Mehran is sitting on the chair facing the audience again.

Mehran: Things were escalating; the political climate was intense; it was important to act intelligently. Two more members of Tudeh (the communist party of Iran) were arrested...

Mehran blows off the candle.

Act 1: Scene 3

We can hear the sound of crickets. We see the image of a bed by a candle light. Sepideh is sleeping. Mehran walks in. We see the silhouette of him in the dark. He grabs his jacket and his hat. Bends over Sepideh, kisses her forehead and puts the blanket on her and blows off the candle.

Act 1: Scene 4

We can hear the sound of a busy coffee shop on the stage: people discussing, talking and laughing in Farsi. The sound of cups and glasses, spoons and plates, are also broadcasted from the speakers.

Mehran faces the audience.

Mehran: We organized a meeting on December 22nd to discuss our next move. Our major mandate was to fight against imperialism and protecting our natural resources from international forces. We were never for an Islamic revolution, we were fighting against dictatorship and we believed that anything will be better than imperialist regime.

Jamshid: Ok, ok, everyone, if you are all ready we should start the meeting.

Mehran: Where is Mohammad?

Jamshid: He couldn't make it, his mother is ill or something. Mehran: ok, I'll talk to him later.

Jamshid: Maybe his mother is actually sick.

Mehran: This is not the first time that he is bailing on the meeting....ok, Jamshid please begin.

Jamshid: Before I start the meeting I would like to acknowledge that Pouran wanted to address some issues in regard to women's right and fight for equality and the possible fear that the new regime has plans to make the hijab mandatory...regardless, I personally thought that these issues become secondary in the scheme of things that we need to be discussing today. However, if anyone else thinks we need to put the women's issues in motion today then we can go forward with that.

Someone says from the crowd: why not! we can at least talk about it.

Mehran: Well, Pouran why don't you briefly bring into the table the list of your concerns.

Pouran is a woman with a deep voice and strong voice. When she talks she is passionate and moves her hands a lot to cross her point.

Pouran: I think it is important to take a stand against making hejab mandatory for women at early stages because if we don't we come short in terms of our mandate for human equality. It just doesn't make sense to force clothing ideologies on half of the society based on the gender. I feel the new regime with all their socialist promises is really in full force to oppress women.

Jamshid: So you think it was better when the fucking monarchs were walking around in their American bikinis and making poor village girls by the beach envious of what they can't have??

Pouran: Dear Jamshid. I'm talking about liberty and equality. We are having a logical conversation. Bring a counter argument and we listen;

Jamshid: Counter argument???

Mehran steps in to calm the conversation.

Mehran: Jamshid wait a second. It is true that we are fighting for liberty and equality but it is also important to keep our priorities in order. Right now our main mandate is to fight against imperialism and support people and the socialist movement. We are not for the Islamic laws but right now we may have to accept the Islamic needs of the society and then we can move forward step by step with what we are all about.

Jamshid: Exactly, we can't forget our priorities in the primarily stages.

Pouran: If we compromise to this degree all our values will be demolished.

Mehran: Everyone, everyone, I do understand all of your concerns but at the moment the order from the Tudeh leader is to not take a stand on this regard and I agree with the reasoning behind it. And right now considering the time limit it is important to get to the main issues on our agenda. If we had time after the meeting we can further discuss other matters.

The actors play with the volume and continue the conversation in low volume.

The actors stay in tableau.

Mehran: We had to stay focused on the main thing, which was getting rid of Reza Shah...we were hoping for a socialist regime. The meeting was intense, I needed a drink.

Black out

Act 1: Scene 5

Mehran is smoking a cigarette. A tall and beautiful woman with a sexy figure and a confident demeanor walks toward him.

The woman is wearing high-heeled shoes and, while walking toward Mehran, she is socializing with others behind the bar.

Mehran is staring at a painting that is hung behind the bar.

Woman: May I have a light? Thanks. It's a strange piece. Mehran: and a strange artist.

Woman: Did you know him?

Mehran: Yes, he was super talented...too bad. Woman: are you an artist yourself?

Mehran: Do writers count as artists? Woman: if he feels like one.

Mehran smiles

Mehran: And you? What do you do?

Woman: I am a painter, but I don't think you have seen any my works before, I just came back to Iran recently.

Mehran: Where from?

Woman: London, I couldn't stay there in such an important time, I wanted to be here and witness this historical moment.

Mehran: That's good to hear. It's good to know that there are Iranians who live aboard and still feel Iranian.

They smile and cheer.

Mehran: Can you speak Farsi?

Woman: No unfortunately I can't. I left Iran when I was a child.

Mehran: That's a bad excuse. You just lost a point. Those Brits are destroying our country. They have been taking our oil and forcing us to lose our culture. They have a Shakespeare that they are proud of, but look at us: we have Hafiz, Khayyam, Rumi, Saedi...We are the first civilization of the world and we drawn because of them.

Woman: You speak English very well though.

Mehran: I know, it is not something that I am proud of. No I am just joking. It is important to speak the language of your enemy... I used to translate articles.

Woman: I would like to read some of your stuff. Mehran: you should improve your Farsi. Woman: I need a good teacher?

Mehran: That can be arranged.

Act 1: Scene 6

We can hear two people making love. The sound is quite rough. We see glimpses of this by the appearance of the sporadic lights.

We see Sepideh, Mehran's wife, sitting outside by the door, listening to them having sex. She starts singing. Post sex, Sepideh walks about stage, picking up the shed articles of clothing.

Black Out

Act 1: Scene 7

Mehran gets up. Dim light appears on him.

Mehran: I do love my wife.

Black out

Act 1: Scene 8

Mehran is standing between his lover and his wife. Dance begins. 5 rotation with the sound of the type writer they move.

Act 1: Scene 9

Sepideh gets up, goes to the typewriter, starts writing a poem. She finds a letter under the type writer.

She reads it:

"Today 2 more members of the Tudeh were killed. The situation is getting out of control. 3 people are still missing and through the reports we have they have been sent to another prison and are badly Injured from the

tortures. They are shutting down publication companies whom have had any association to the left party. We are still hopeful and fighting. Blood must be shed in order to make a change.”

Sepideh starts crying, Mehran walks in to the room. Mehran approaches Sepideh from behind. Grabs the paper. Kisses her neck and takes her hand. Whispers in her ears:

Mehran : Don't worry my dear, it's nothing. Everything will be fine.

Act 1: Scene 9

Mehran and Sepideh are sleeping. It is dark. We hear aggressive knocking on the door.

Mehran and Sepideh get up and start running to find a place to hide. The guards break the door and start running after them. We see the light from the flashlights. The scene ends with scream and struggle and back to darkness.

Black Out

Act 2: Scene 1

It is pitch black. We hear the sound of moaning; it is hard to tell if it is from pleasure or from pain.

Anna: Are you enjoying yourself.

Sarah doesn't reply, just heavy breathing.

Anna: I am addicted to you. I can play with you for hours. Tell me what you want. I just want to please you.

Sarah: Why do you like to please me?

Anna: Because I love you and your pleasure pleases me.

Black out

While the sex scene is going on in darkness we see Chris sitting on a couch behind the door watching TV. He keeps bringing up the volume as he obviously is bothered by the sound of Sarah and Anna lovemaking.

Blackout

Act 2: Scene 2

Anna and Sarah are sitting by the fire place. Anna is holding Sarah from behind, they are both wrapped in towels.

Anna: Tell me how we met!

Sarah: Come on! You know. You know the story. Anna: I don't get tired of it. Tell me.

Sarah: I walked in to the restaurant with Chris. It was about 10pm, I didn't want to go out but Chris...How much detail do you want? Anna: you know that I am a sucker for details, give it all to me baby.

Throughout this scene Anna is playing with Sarah, caressing her breasts and her thighs, and between her legs. Sarah has a hard time concentrating on the story from arousal.

Sarah: I remember it was snowing that night. We walked in to the bar, we grabbed a table. I needed to go to the washroom and I saw you sitting at the bar alone, smoking a cigarette.

Anna lights one.

Sarah: You looked at me. Anna: I couldn't resist.

Sarah: I walked to the bar...I don't smoke, but I felt like I wanted to talk to you so I asked for one.

Anna: I am glad you did.

Sarah: I remember you gave me one and before I had a chance to reach for the lighter you lit it for me. You looked at me straight in the eyes.

Anna: You squeezed your legs unconsciously and it turned me on.

Sarah smiles.

Anna: I love it. ...and then?

Sarah: You put your hand on my knee, I was burning in fire...and you said:

Anna and Sarah: "I don't know why but I would like to make love to you tonight"

Sarah: That was the most unexpected sentence I have ever heard in my life.

Anna: You didn't seem to mind.

Sarah: I was shocked by your assertiveness. Anna: by the absurdity!

Sarah: I said I am married and pointed out Chris to you. And you looked at me and said to me: "I didn't ask you if you were."

Anna: And then.

Sarah: You know the rest. Anna (jokingly): remind me.

Sarah: I wrote my number on the back of your cigarette pack. I got up and left. Then within 5 min you called me. I was sitting beside Chris and you were looking at me across the room.

Anna: You sounded nervous and I liked that. Sarah: I was very nervous.

Anna: It only made me desire you even more.

Sarah: You said: "I will see you tonight, write down my address". I wasn't sure. If I should hang up or to just follow your instructions. I couldn't hang up. I moved away from Chris and pretended that it was a business call. I wrote your address down on a piece of napkin.

They both smile.

Sarah: I was hypnotized, I felt I had no ability to stop; I went home with Chris and thought of you the entire time. Chris fell asleep and I got up and left. I still can't believe I did that.

Anna: I can.

Sarah: I came to you, you seemed so calm and so sure, and as if you had no doubt that I would be there.

Anna: I didn't have any doubt.

Sarah: I was so nervous, my brain was exploding. Anna: I loved how vulnerable you were. Keep going.

Sarah: We walked to the living room; you kept a distance between you and me... You were staring at me the entire time...as I was going to sit down you said: "take it all off." I said: "excuse me?" And you were staring at me like I was already naked. I felt like an object of your pleasure and ...I liked it.

Anna starts playing with her even more, moving her fingers toward Sarah's inner thighs.

Anna: and then? Sarah: and then...

Suddenly there is a knock on the door. It is Chris.

Chris: Sarah. Can I talk to you for minute? Anna: he always has the worst timing.

Sarah: Can you wait?

Chris: No I need to talk to you now. Sarah: is it very important?

Chris: I want to talk to you.

Black out.

Act 2: Scene 3

Sarah: What?

Chris: You know. I miss you... I wished we never did this, I wished we never brought her...

Sarah: I don't...

Chris: Why can't we go back..to when we were good and happy, when we bought the house and we had nothing but we had everything, why can't you see us anymore, we used to be happy, why did you replace me with a toy, how can you betray me like this....

Sarah: It was supposed to be an open relationship, you found it attractive too, it was an agreement.

Chris: The agreement was sex. That was the agreement.

Sarah: And that's what it is now Chris, you are just acting insecure. You can't expect me to stop anytime you feel like. Why did you start such a thing when you couldn't handle it?

Chris: Because I love you, because you wanted it so bad. Because I trusted us and because I didn't know she was a malicious fucking bitch.
Sarah: stop swearing Chris. It's not attractive.

Chris: It was supposed to be fun...Why do you choose her? I am the one who is in love with you...

Sarah: I am not choosing anyone... not everything is always about you.

Chris: Fuck you.

Black out

Act 2: Scene 4

Chris is watching TV. Sarah is sleeping. Anna walks to the living room topless.

Anna comes to Chris trying sexually seducing him.

Anna: How are you my dear? Chris: stop it...Go away stop it.

Anna: Come on we used to have fun. We can all have fun.

Chris: I hate you.

Anna: I don't understand, are you jealous of me or of Sarah. Chris: I can't believe you are doing this to me. Why?

Anna: I am not doing anything. You are taking everything too seriously. I care about both of you.

Chris: I beg you...Just leave us alone. Please.

Anna: Chris, you know that's not possible. She wants me. I am trying to help her. Poor woman hasn't felt sexual for years...she is in love with me...

Chris: No she is not, she is in lust with you...

Anna: Chris, she hasn't desired you for years, she has strong feelings for me, and you can't stop it...she will only resent you.

Chris: I hate you, you are a monstrous woman...

Anna: How old are you Chris? Doesn't matter if you hate me or not; I am the one who is satisfying your wife and you feel jealous...You feel your penis is not big enough (meanwhile she is trying to play with him in an abusive way)...Let me make it big for you. Maybe eventually she will be attracted to you.

Even though Chris is struggling and doesn't want to give in, He finally does.

The scene ends with the sound of Chris cumming.

Black Out

Act 2: Scene 5

*Sarah (looks at Anna with a cold impression): I can't believe he is gone!
Anna: we have each other now.*

Sarah: Strangely I feel relieved; I think he scared me by loving me too much.

Sarah: He needed me, I didn't want to be needed like that. Anna: he was weak.

Sarah: He never gave up, it fascinated me.

Sarah: I want you to hurt me: I want to feel something. Why can't I feel anything?

Anna: I'm consumed with the urge to mark you like it's a signature and watch you, feeling the pain I give you.

Heavy breathing.

Black out

Act 2: Scene 6

In the scene, we see the passage of time and the cold and cruel way that Anna treats Sarah. In fact this coldness is an emotional and a psychological torture and there is no evidence of sexual encounter. We see this through choreography Anna keeps playing with other girls while Sarah is behind the door crying. Sex tableaux.

Sarah: Why don't you see me anymore? Your gaze was once full of desire and you were thirsty to own me. Now you have me...what has changed? What do you want from me? Cane me, mark me, choke me, slap me—but see me. I'll take anything over this cruel silence.

Sarah starts crying and in a psychotic way she is trying to hurt herself while Anna just looks at her without stopping her.

All we hear is her crying in a hysteric way while Anna is laughing and having a fun play.

Black out

Act 3: Scene 1

The stage right gets lit. The entire piece is through dance with isolated lighting.

Maxine, is in her mid-20's. She lives in Turkey. She is from a upper class and quite a wealthy family. Today is Maxine's engagement party with a man 30 years older than him. She had never seen him before, until a week before the engagement. They have nothing in common. However, he is very rich and from a very good family. Maxine has no choice, since her father has already approved this. Maxine tells us the story.

Maxine: I went for a trip to Paris; this was the first time that I was travelling alone after two years of marriage. I was sitting in a café when I met Roger. He was young, almost my age, handsome, and interesting

Maxine: We became lovers. He had a wife and I had a husband. It seemed like a perfect situation, except he wanted to leave everything behind and run away with me. His wife could not get pregnant and he wanted a child with me. It could all be wonderful, except he was poor and I had a reputation to keep.

Unfortunately, the baby did come. I stayed in Japan for 5 months; Roger was there when she was born. He was so pleased. It didn't please me.

I was filled with guilt, I was dead inside. As if my love died for him as soon as I knew we may have a future.

When the light appears we see her pregnant.

Maxine: A life was being formed inside me at the time that I felt completely dead. I find this paradox quite confusing and strange. How could I form something alive inside me when I was incapable of loving? I tried all the possible ways to kill this living being inside me and yet it was desperately forming to become.

We see few images of her trying to kill the baby.

Maxine: There was a balcony overlooking the lake. I brought a big stone. He could see what I was up to and he kept on shouting: "Maxine, for God's sake don't!" I hated him then. He saw it all. He was leaning over the balcony and he saw the rings spreading on the water. I came back to China and he did as he wished.

We see the image of the man in the wall that blows his head off this also can be choreographed. (Devise)

Maxine: It was absurd, really. My husband never suspected anything. Some people are born to be unhappy. I am one of them.

Blackout

Act 4: Scene 1

Stage left:

Mehran and Sepideh are in two different interrogation rooms. The scene is performed with no words through gesture with one lamp on each of their faces.

Mehran is crying, holding Sepideh's photo in her hand. He begins reciting a poem in Farsi. He repeats reciting the poem through-out this act.

Sepideh is in the other room getting tortured.

Black out

While there is no more light on the SL, we can hear Mehran whispering the poem on repeat.

Centre stage:

Sarah is smoking a cigarette looking at the audience. She seems a bit out of her mind.

Sarah: It is impossible to know the moment.... The moment that you lose yourself...when you give everything to somebody else. The moment that you become a stranger to your own and suddenly you wake up and you are not you anymore, in fact, you hardly exist. The mind, the mind, the mind, the mind is a tricky thing. What is worse than having your mind as your worst enemy? Your very worst ENEMY...And love...Love exists to feed your crazy mind, to torture you just a little bit more.

Sarah is looking at Anna. Anna is sleeping.

Black out

While stage left and centre are in black, the monologues are still going on repeat with different volumes. Other audios are added. For example, we do hear the sound of a prison door opening and footsteps, and we hear

The sound of matches after matches being lit.

Stage Right:

Maxine is in a wheelchair, coughing hard.

Maxine: What is to regret? It means nothing when you don't know what it is that you exactly wished you could change. And what good changing things does. You can't change who you are. You can't change your destiny. I remember looking at her and I couldn't love her. She was so fragile. Love was not an option.

Black out

All three stages are lit. We see the shadows of all the actors on the wall. They keep repeating the above monologues. They build a crescendo.

Black out.

Red light appears, we see the shadows on the wall. The moment is very quick. The scene is frozen. All we hear is the sound of gunshot, scream, and cough.

Mehran is sitting. The guard shoots him in the head. Sarah chokes Anna to death.

Maxine coughs to death.

We hear the sound of a door opening. We see a crack of a red light. We hear footsteps.

Light appears on the stage.

Maxine, Mehran and Sarah are sitting on individual chairs staring at each other.

Black out.

THE END