

## Sustainable Scenography in The Octopus: A Play Design Inspired by E.M. Forster's The Machine Stops

**Neveen Abdellatif Mohamed Omar**

Associate Professor, Cinema, Theatre & TV, Décor Department, Faculty of Fine Arts,  
Alexandria University, Neveen.Abdellatif@alexu.edu.eg.

### Abstract:

This research examines the cyclical nature of civilizations, which rise, decline, and ultimately collapse due to complex social, economic, political, and cultural factors. In the 21st century, digital technology has made civilization more intricate than ever. It references E.M. Forster's novella "The Machine Stops," a prophetic work from the early 20th century warning about overdependence on technology and emphasizing the importance of human uniqueness. Building on this, the study hypothesizes that the disappearance of modern technology—whether rapid or gradual—could push society toward sustainability and resource recycling. The research proposes a theatrical performance titled "The Octopus," inspired by Forster's themes, to be performed on a modular mobile stage using recycled materials for scenic elements and giant puppets, promoting sustainable scenography.

The author showcased the proposed designs at the Ahmed Osman Exhibition Hall (Small Hall) at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Alexandria University, Egypt, on April 26, 2025.

Utilizing descriptive, analytical, inductive, and deductive methods, the study concludes that adopting sustainability in arts and theatrical scenography is crucial for preserving humanity and civilization. It emphasizes the need for a balanced relationship with technology and highlights the importance of investing in human potential, asserting that sustainable artistic practices are vital for humanity's future.

### Paper History:

Paper received April 20, 2025,, Accepted June 16, 2025, Published on line September 1, 2025

### Keywords:

Sustainable Scenography; The Machine Stops; Recycling.

### References:

- 1- Al-Hamidani, Abdul Latif, 2017, The Rise and Fall of Civilizations: Ancient and Modern, with the Views of Ibn Khaldun, Al-Obeikan Publishing, First Edition, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- 2- Adami, Luca & Schiavon, Marco, (2021), From Circular Economy to Circular Ecology: A Review on the Solution of Environmental Problems through Circular Waste Management Approaches, Sustainability 2021, 13, 925. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020925>.
- 3- Albu, Gabriela, (2024), Eco backstage and its sustainability in terms of design, material or technology, MATEC Web of Conferences 396, 10001
- 4- Alfred, Randy (1 November 2010). "Nov. 1, 1909: 'The Machine Stops'". Wired. ISSN 1059-1028. Archived from the original on 22 July 2014. Retrieved 23 March 2024.
- 5- Banal Fernández, Marta, (2023), Material sustainability on scenographies for theatre performances, Sustainability assessment for scenographic activities, Stockholm University of the Arts, master's degree, 30 ects MA Performing Arts, Course codes: SC150A + SC193A + SC194A VT2023.
- 6- Beer, Tanja, (2021), Eco scenography An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance, Queensland College of Art Griffith University Southport, QLD, Australia, ISBN 978-981-16-7177-7 ISBN 978-981-16-7178-4 (eBook) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-7178-4>.
- 7- Burton, S. H. (1970). Modern short stories. Longman Heritage of Literature Series. Longman Group Ltd. (First published 1965; sixth impression 1970)
- 8- Chase-Dunn, Chris, (2006), Upward Sweeps of Empire and City Growth Since the Bronze Age, Powered by the California Digital Library, University of California, eScholarship.org.
- 9- Christopher J, Garthe, (2023), Sustainable Scenography. A Manifesto. studio klv, Berlin. [www.studioklv.de/sustainable-scenography-manifesto.pdf](http://www.studioklv.de/sustainable-scenography-manifesto.pdf)
- 10- Dillon, Paddy, (2019), the theatre green book Co-Ordinator, Sustainable Productions Issue 01 Education Edition.
- 11- E. M. Forster, (1909), The Machine stops, Published in The Oxford and Cambridge Review, England.

- 12- Gompertz, Will , (2020), "The Machine Stops: Will Gompertz reviews E M Forster's work". BBC News. Retrieved 30 May 2020.
- 13- Gröndahl, Laura, (2012), Scenographic Strategies and Communication, Space–Event–Agency–Experience: Open Access E.Publication of the DREX Project Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre, Univ Tampere 2012 – <http://t7.uta.fi/drex>.
- 14- Hann, Rachel, (2024), Scenography is not set; scenography happens, Published in a2 – 21/2024, from 9/10/2024 <https://www.advojka.cz/archiv/2024/21>, <https://pq.cz/news/rachel-hann-scenography-is-not-set/>, accessed May 14, 2025.
- 15- Helder Jorge, Maia, (2022), Sustainable Scenography Practices, Published Paper In Architecture, Artistic Practices And Cultural Heritage. Contemporary reflections, from theory to practice, 1st Edition , Riode Janeiro, October 2022 ISBN: 978-65-89587-53-8.
- 16- Leontief, Wassily, (1991), The economy as a circular flow, Structural Change and Economic Dynamics, Volume 2, Issue 1, June 1991, Pages 181-212.
- 17- Pitches, J., & Popat, S, (2011), Performance perspectives: A critical introduction, 1st published, Palgrave Macmillan, UK.
- 18- Margaret Robertson, (2021), Sustainability Principles and Practice, 3rd Edition, Imprint Routledge, Pub. Location London, DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429346668>
- 19- Walsh, Chad (1972). From Utopia to Nightmare. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press. pp. 83–5. ISBN 0837163250.
- 20- Yang, Mingyu and Others, (2022), Circular economy strategies for combating climate change and other environmental issues, published paper in Environmental Chemistry Letters (2023) 21:55–80 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10311-022-01499-6>.
- 21- 2050 long-term strategy: Striving to become the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050, [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-strategies-targets/2050-long-term-strategy_en) , accessed May 14, 2025
- 22- ArchDaily Team, 2020, The Humanitarian Works of Shigeru Ban, Published on May 12, 2020, <https://www.archdaily.com/489255/the-humanitarian-works-of-shigeru-ban>, accessed February 23, 2025.
- 23- How Modular and Portable Buildings Can Benefit Sustainability, by EcoMod Modular Buildings | Apr 5, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/59wzu2nw> , accessed February 23, 2025.
- 24- cape town, 2004, 4th international entertainment education conference, INTRODUCTION TO SIMPLE PUPPETRY TECHNIQUES, Participatory Puppet Projects for Classroom and Community Activities, arepp:Theatre for Life., accessed January 12, 2025.
- 25- Us Newssper, published article, March 20, 2024, Save Our Planet: The Electronic Waste Crisis and How We Can Help, [https://usnewssper.com/2024/03/save-our-planet-the-electronic-waste-crisis-and-how-we-can-help/?feed\\_id=386791&\\_unique\\_id=65fba902b035b](https://usnewssper.com/2024/03/save-our-planet-the-electronic-waste-crisis-and-how-we-can-help/?feed_id=386791&_unique_id=65fba902b035b) accessed February 23, 2025.
- 26- Mollenkamp, Daniel, (2023), What is Sustainability? How Sustainabilities Work, Benefits, and Example, Reviewed by Je Freda R. Brown , Fact checked by Timothy Li , <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/sustainability.asp> , Accessed April 10, 2025.
- 27- Harvard Business Review, 2025, Sustainability, <https://tinyurl.com/579ceke3> , accessed April 16, 2025.
- 28- The report from the latest Salzburg Global, (2016), Seminar session in the Culture, Arts and Society series – Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability – <https://culture360.asef.org/resources/beyond-green-arts-catalyst-sustainability-report/> accessed January 12, 2025.
- 29- cattywampus Puppet Council, (2017), <https://cattywampuspuppets.org/> accessed January 12, 2025.
- 30- Charles Hutchinson, (2021), The Machine Stops starts again, now online from York Theatre Royal and Pilot Theatre, CHARLES HUTCH PRESS, The art beat of YORKshire, <https://charleshutchpress.co.uk/the-machine-stops-starts-again-this-time-online-from-york-theatre-royal-and-pilot-theatre/> accessed May 11, 2025.
- 31- Hussein M. M. (1985). The theory of successive cycles according to Ibn Khaldun and Vico. The Arab Journal of Humanities, 5(19), 128–143.<https://doi.org/10.34120/ajh.v5i19.939>
- 32- Imam, Heba, 2024, Recycling used tires for a sustainable future, published article, May 5, 2024 <https://tinyurl.com/556nna4a>, accessed February 23, 2025.
- 33- Toynbee, Arnold J, (1987), A Study of History, Vol. 1: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI New Ed Edition, Oxford University Press, UK, ISBN-10 : 0195050800, ISBN-13 : 978-0195050806.

#### CITATION

Neveen Omar (2025), Sustainable Scenography in The Octopus: A Play Design

