

SAMUEL BECKETT'S 'PLAY', *diffused*

Exploring the Theatre Of The Absurd through Spatialised Sound

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Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was an Irish playwright and theatre director at the forefront of a European-wide movement in the late 1950s known as the 'Theatre Of The Absurd'. Exploring existential themes through a fine balance of comedy and tragedy, these plays were an echo in themselves of the post-WW2 era, embodying the meaninglessness that lies behind the disintegration of structure and order.

Perhaps best known for the plays *Waiting For Godot* and *Not I*, Beckett's work is often considered challenging to stage. Sparse but specific script directions frame endless, meandering yet rhythmic conversations, requiring great skill and precision from the performers. In Beckett's later works (such as *Play*), the spoken text begins to transcend notions of character and narrative entirely, as the overwhelmingly banality of the narrative begins to be experienced less like a story and more like a percussive score.

If Beckett had access to the sound technology we have today, perhaps he would have managed to make the actor disappear entirely. This Artistic Research Project aims to practically explore this hypothesis. Beckett's work *Play* is 'performed' without actors, using the immersive sound system in Klubscenen to simulate characters, lighting and stage directions. The result is a looping, layered reconstruction of the text that additively builds into a cacophony, exploring the line between spoken narrative and rhythmic sound.

After recording a series of complete readings of the play from an international cast of volunteers, the text's stage lighting cues (such as 'blackout') have been sonified with filtered noise, the brightness of which pertaining to the indicated brightness of the lighting. The recordings were then arranged onto a timeline as parallel performances of the play, starting at different times and therefore overlapping. Using the software Reaper, the 'actors' are placed around the performance space using Ambisonics encoding.

Play's hyperactive world of information overload may have seemed existentially absurd in 1962, however in 2022 one can't help but notice a parallel emerging in the narration of the media we consume. Youtube tutorials, digital advertisements and vocal recordings in pop music are all precisely edited to such impossible efficiency as to seem hyper-realistic.

This emergent juxtaposition is explored in this interpretation of *Play* by employing production techniques from these profit-driven worlds, for example close-micing, the aggressive application of compression, and the removal of as much silence from the recordings as possible.

This approach was an intrinsic part in the creation of a digital work that is sonically reminiscent of classic Beckett theatre productions. The vaguely comprehensible narrative solidifies its meaning through repetition and spatial immersion, and the inhuman speed of the narrators' speech inspires a Beckettian sense of alienation and absurdity, as the listener scrambles to organize their understanding of the story being told.

Featuring Vocal Performances From: Sebastian Edin, Frederik Degrér, Matt Lockwood, Nancy West, Isabella Ennes, David Dimitriou, Alexandra Kouris, Tanis Harald Degn Nielsen, Annie Elkington, Sophie Harris and Merlyn Perez-Silva