SAMUEL BECKETT'S 'PLAY', diffused

Exploring the Theatre Of The Absurd through Spatialised Sound Merlyn Perez-Silva, Assistant Professoer, The Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus/Aalborg

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.

onder if I were not accusing him unjustly. Yes. V. as about to offer me violence I rang for Erskine and had her sta not forgotten, coming and going on the earth, letting people in, show, nfess this did alarm me a little, at the time. She was not convinced. I might have now as sittle, at the time. She was not live without her. I meant it, also me. Judge then of my astonishment when one fine morning, as I was sitting stricken in efore me, buried his face in my lap and . . . confessed. She put a bloodhound on me, but I had a money. Why don't you get out, I said, when he started moaning about his home life, there is c Or is there? I confess my first feeling was one of wonderment. What a male! Anything between us, h thing machine? And of course with him no danger of the . . . spiritual thing. Then why don't you ge ie was not living with her for her money. The next thing was the scene between them. I can't have her cra take my life. I must have looked incredulous. Ask Erskine, she said, if you don't believe me. But she thre urs? she said. No, I said, hers. We had fun trying to work this out. Then I forgave him. To what will love to celebrate, to the Riviera or our darling Grand Canary. He was looking pale. Peaked. But this was not p imitments.She came again. Just strolled in. All honey. Licking her lips. Poor thing. I was doing my nails, b ne all about it, she said. Who he, I said filing away, and what it? I know what torture you must be going through In to say I bear you no illfeeling. I rang for Erskine. Then I got frightened and made a clean breast of it. She w perate. She had a razor in her vanitybag. Adulterers, take warning, never admit. When I was satisfied it was all to tack to a common tart. What he could have found in her when he had me When he came again we had it out. I felt why he had to tell her. Too risky and so on. That meant he had gone back to her. Back to that! Pudding face, p vls, no neck, dugs you could He went on and on. I could hear a mower. An old hand mower. I stopped him a ... sel I had no silly threats to offerbut not much stomach for her leavings either. He thought that over for a bit. wen I saw her again she knew. She was looking [Hiccup.] wretched. Pardon. Some fool was cutting grass. A little rush em was how to convince her that no . . . revival of intimacy was involved. couldn't. I might have known. So I toc! . I could not go on living without her. I don't believe I could have. The only solution was to go away together. He swr , he had put his affairs in order. In the meantime we were to carry on as before. By that he meant as best we could All mine. I was happy again. I went about singing. The world At home all heart to heart, new leaf and bygones byga , she said one night, on the pillow, you're well out of that. Rather uncalled for, I thought. I am indeed, sweetheart. nat vermin women. Thanks to you, angel, I said. Then I began to smell her off him again. Yes. When he stopped cou r less. Finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer Before I could do anything he disappeared. That mean ouldn't credit it. I lay stricken for weeks. Then I drove over to her place. It was all bolted and barred. All grey with ack by Ash and Snodland simply could no longer I made a bundle of his things and burnt them. It was November All night I smelt them smouldering. W 1: Mercy, mercy To say I amWhen first this change When first this char thought, It is done, it is said, now all is going out Mercy, mercy, tongue still hanging out for mercy. It will come. u will. Then it will come. To say I am not disappointed, no, I am. I had anticipated something better. More restf wn, all going down, into the dark, peace is coming, I thought, after all, at last, I was right, after all, thank God, v. onfused. Less confusing. At the same time I prefer this to . . . the other thing Definitely. There are endurable mome out and I go out. Some day you will tire of me and go out . . . for good. Peace, yes, I suppose, a kind of peace. er been. Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else. On the other hand It w no future in this. On the other hand things may disimprove, there is that danger.Oh of course I know now Is it that that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth? You might ger of my wits. Mightn't you? I know now, all that was just . . . play. And all this? When will all this Is that it? Mightr we been \dots just play? I can do nothing \dots for anybody \dots any more \dots thank God. So it must be someth s still! But I doubt it. It would not be like you somehow. And you must know I am doing my best. Or do friends. Perhaps sorrow But I have said all I can. All you let me. All I Perhaps sorrow has brought the e mistake as when it was the sun that shone, of looking for sense where possibly there is none. Perhar reen tea they both so loved, without milk or sugar not even a squeeze of lemon. Are you listening to bothering about me at all? Is it something I should do with my face, other than utter? Weep? we that all danger is averted. That poor creature. I can hear her that poor creature. Bite off my to that all danger is averted. t placate you? How the mind works still to be sure! Meet, and sit, now in the one dear place, r 1 compare pardon happymemories. If only I could think. There is no sense in r creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose? I can hear h 's. And that all is falling, all fallen, from the beginning, on empty air. Nothing being asked it even feel sorry for me, if they could see me. But never so sorry as I for them. I ce^{-r} ompare my lot with theirs, however blessed, and I can't. The mind won't have go out? Shift? Am I hiding something? Have I lost She had means, I fancy حتانه day. The strain . . to get it moving, momentum coming Kill it and str why go And you perhaps pitying me, thinking. Poor thing, she needs a rest. Per Thy go down? Why not I don't know. Perhaps she is sitting somewhere, by Jown out over the olives Why not keep on glaring at me without ceasing? I might start to Gazing down out over the olives, then the sea, wondering what can be keeping him, growing Yes. To think we were never together. Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already? Poor creatures May morning, the first to wake to wake the other two. Then in a little dinghy Penitence, yes, at a em to be the point either. Is ay, AmInotperhapsalittleunhingedalre and darkness were all I craved. Well, I get a certain amount of both. They be linghy, on the river, I resting on my oars, they lolling on airpillows in the In the head, Just a shade, I doubt it. We were not civilized. Dying

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 hyperrealistic.

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 it's 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