

A note: This paper is the result of a 6 month rehearsal and subsequent performance of Play (5.10.73) by the New Music Choral Ensemble IV, during its residency in the Center For Music Experiment, UCSD, La Jolla, California; 1972-1975.

Footnotes:

1. PLAY, Faber & Faber, 24 Russell Square, London; p.24
2. In the sense of a make-believe world of imitation of action.
3. In the sense of a final revelation or occurrence which clarifies the nature of the outcome of the plot.
4. In the sense of ultimate justification, enlightenment in forces which "change the status-quo in a character's or societies destiny"; (cf. J.Gassner: Producing the Play, p.37; Dryden Press).
5. cf. this paper, p.8: Notes On Word-Meaning.
6. cf. PLAY. Also: herein, text refers to the structural, physiological, acoustical attributes of language; word refers to meaning (semantics).
7. Bracketed terms are the author's.
8. The spot "swivelling at maximum speed" elaborates the performer instruction: "rapid tempo throughout". In my opinion, conventional theatrical spots are cumbersome and constrain performance tempo. In the NMCE IV production, optical engineer John Forkner designed a special spot with switching controlled by a manual keyboard thus allowing for extraordinary mobility and speed.
9. cf. PLAY: p.21, (M).
10. ibid., p.11, (M).
11. ibid., p.13, (W2).
12. What we actually observe are word-signs, but generally read them as-if we know, contextually, what they describe, a priori, in each instance. However, meaning does not exist a priori, even though its signs, via words, may appear familiar and therefore: "meaningful".
13. cf. PLAY: p.17, (W2).
14. In the context of this paper, and the production to which it refers, Play is regarded as a composition. I assume impeccable performance with instructions followed faithfully. I do not refer to improvisational, indeterminant, or random processes.

*The Beauty of Inrelevant Music*

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EXTRACTION

A NON-SGAT **OLO** GICAL SET *f* PRELIMINARY REMARKS *f* or NMCE IV



**THE MUSIC IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S:**

PLAY In Beckett's: PLAY, music, by conventions and explications  
 AS usually associated with its domain, is not a given. Liter-  
 MUSIC ally there are no notes, harmonies, counterpoints, etc.,  
 nor is there music in the sense which Beckett prescribes it  
 elsewhere (e.g., Words & Music). Nevertheless, Play exhibits  
 characteristics, which, if viewed from music's domain, suggest:  
 "music". That these might qualify as givens, ...certainly on a fore-  
 ground level, SEEMS plausible. Following are some:

- (1) Voices either perform as a group or singly (call this: chorus/  
solo; therefore: antiphonal);
- (2) The order of successive individ-  
ual utterances is not constant, i.e., not always W2/M/W1, W2/M/W1,  
according to actor lineup (L-R), but changing, e.g., W1/M/W2, W1/  
W2/M (call this: permutation);
- (3) Text elements recur, and the  
entire text is repeated (call this: ritornello, cyclic);
- (4) Voices  
are toneless (call this: parlando);
- (5) Tempo is rapid (call this:  
allegro);
- (6) Timed moments (blackouts) occur without text (call  
this: silence);
- (7) A spot provokes voice articulation (call this:  
conductor, and "watch the conductor"; call the text: a score);
- (8) Verbal (narrow-band) utterance is continuous except at blackouts  
(silences), (call this: word-ostinato; call blackouts: rests).

To consider performing Play based on sensibilities such as these is  
to interpret Play in the light of music, and to impose "music" on  
Play. Even though such properties are exhibited, does Play, as-per-  
formed, need or want them? I think not. To proceed in this manner,  
however seemingly plausible, would trivialize Play, ...particularly  
so if such analysis was to precede, and therefore, to determine (in-  
fluence) actual doing (performance). For instance, neither Play, nor  
one's conceptualization of it is advanced by regarding the spot as a  
conductor, since it interrogates; or by regarding rapid speech as a  
parlando, since it supports, perhaps is: "unchanged continuity"<sup>1</sup>.

The Music in Samuel Beckett's: PLAY  
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PLAY In Beckett's: PLAY, theater, by conventions & explications  
 AS usually associated with its domain, is not a given. Liter-  
 THEATER ally there is no mimesis<sup>2</sup>, denouement<sup>3</sup>, causality<sup>4</sup>, etc.,  
 nor is there theater in the sense which Beckett prescribes  
 it elsewhere (e.g. Waiting for Godot). Nevertheless, Play  
 exhibits characteristics, which, if viewed from theater's domain,  
 suggest: "theater". That these might qualify as givens, ...certainly  
 on a foreground level, SEEMS plausible. Following are some:

- (1) There are 3 characters: first & second woman, man (call them:  
actors);
- (2) On stage are 3 urns and a spotlight (call these: the  
set);
- (3) Actors utter words. The words describe a situation, con-  
vey a sense of emotion, intensity, explosiveness, emphasis, con-  
flict, excitement (call words: the script);
- (4) Blackouts divide  
(separate) dramatic situations conveyed by words (call the word/  
situations, so-separated by blackouts: scenes);
- (5) Actors are not  
elsewhere than from urns in which they are always positioned, e.g.,  
not SR, SL, downstage, upstage, enter, exit (call this condition:  
static; non-movement);
- (6) There are no props, costumes, masks,  
make-ups (call Play: minimal);
- (7) The spot is the only light in  
Play (call it: illumination);
- (8) Play's language is rhythmic,  
metered, unnatural in tempo, ...therefore, make-believe, and seem-  
ingly artificial (call it: poetic; verse).

To consider performing Play based on sensibilities such as these is to  
interpret Play in the light of theater, and to impose "theater" on  
Play. Even though such properties are exhibited, does Play need or  
want them? I think not. To proceed in this manner, however seemingly  
plausible, would trivialize Play, ...particularly so if such analysis  
was to precede, and therefore, to determine (influence) actual doing  
(performance). For instance, neither Play, nor one's conceptualization  
of it is advanced by regarding the performers as actors, since they are  
consistently referred to as "voices"; or by regarding words in the  
light of their meaning<sup>5</sup>, since transmission rates are so rapid as to  
generally null this attribute, ...certainly as a function of real-time  
perception.

(TRANSITION) If the presence of Play's words makes it implausible that it be regarded as "music", and if the presence of "theater" as above-noted could not play: PLAY, then what? Do these implausibles rule out music and theater in Play? I think not. Because of their foreground presence (however implausible otherwise), one can sense a more appropriate domain in which each could be operative: ...a domain in which both music & theater generally reside; ...a domain which includes Play; ...a domain, not by analogy, metaphor, interpretation or assumption, but one of: that which is the case, ...one of actual givens. Such a domain I call : LANGUAGE. To put forth Play in the light of language requires that conventions by which performance in music and theater are traditionally approached would have to give way to a more experimental-conceptual view. In this regard the following would be crucial attributes; each is to be viewed as intrinsically linked with the other (i.e. not as separable, isolable entities):

- (1) Approach Play linguistically, i.e., in terms of its physiological, acoustical, structural (including syntactical) attributes;
- (2) Approach Play contextually, i.e., as a bounded space, ...a state, condition, environment, in which context influences membership, and membership influences context;
- (3) Approach Play inferentially, i.e., not by what seems to be there, but by what is there, ... that which it contains, and is contained thereby;
- (4) Approach Play by assessing its attributes, not by defining them.

PLAY AS In Play, the givens are text<sup>6</sup> and a collection of explicit LANGUAGE instructions (set, technical, textual, performance), grouped and abridged as follows<sup>7</sup>:

(1) Instructions (SET)

Front, centre, touching one another, 3 grey urns about 1 yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The heads are those from left to right as seen from the auditorium of W2 (second woman), M (man), & W1 (first woman).

(3) Instructions (TEXTUAL)

1. grammatical: (a) words; (b) punctuation: comma (,); dash, ...varying lengths (—); dots (...); period (.); question (?); exclamation (!).
2. verbal expression: (a) "vehement" (used only once by W1); (b) "hopefully" (used only once by W2).
3. non-verbal-acoustical: (a) W2: "faint wild laugh" (used only once with chorus); (b) W2: "wild low laughter" (interrupted, used twice, solo); (c) M: "hiccup" (once within chorus, 4 times, solo).
4. non-verbal, non-acoustic, action directed: (a) W2: "pause" (i.e., short silence, used twice, solo); (b) M: "opens mouth to speak" (M gets spot, but no vocal utterance; gesture is interrupted); (c) group silences (timed); (d) blackouts (timed).

(2) Instructions (TECHNICAL: LIGHT)

The source of light is single & must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims.

When exceptionally 3 spots are required to light the 3 faces simultaneously, they should be as a single spot branching into 3.

Apart from these moments a single mobile spot should be used, swivelling at maximum speed from one face to another as required<sup>8</sup>.

(4) Instructions (PERFORMANCE)

(the performers) face undeviatingly front throughout Play. Their speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone. Transfer of light from one face to another is immediate. The response to light is immediate. Faces impassive throughout. Voices toneless except where an expression is indicated. Rapid tempo throughout.

The interaction between the instructions (collectively termed: Set/Setting) and the text is as follows:

PLAY AS LANGUAGE: The SPOT always "provokes" (initiates) "speech" articulation; verbal action follows. The transfer of SET/SETTING the SPOT from face to face is immediate; response to the SPOT is immediate; the SPOT moves at maximum speed. Concomitantly, speech transmission is rapid. Performers face undeviatingly front throughout. Faces are impassive. Voices are toneless excepting: (a) expressions as indicated, (b) prescribed intensity levels: normal, lower, faint strength (which intersect with similar SPOT levels). Voices appear from urns, one for each performer. From each urn a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. This collection of content features are what they are. There can be no doubt about them. They are not subject to interpretation.

The above features reflect the set/setting of Play. This state acts (operates) on the physiologies of the performers in or out of verbal articulation, and influences their particular physiological responses (e.g., a voice can only do so much "acting" if the face is to remain impassive and undeviatingly forward throughout). In turn these responses, insofar as actual vocal utterance goes (physiological linguistics), qualitatively influence the sound-transmission (wave-form) of text (acoustical linguistics), and therefore, the perception of language (including its syntax) carried by them (structural linguistics).

PLAY AS LANGUAGE: What has been said above with regard to Play's language TEXT in the domain of its set/setting, may also be said of its text domain.

In general, Play's 'whole-text', as a linear continuity, exhibits three sub-texts, one for each voice. If extracted, each voice-text makes a kind of linear sense in itself. However, these sub-texts are interwoven in such a manner as to cause continual interference (interruption) of each other's linear sensibility; i.e., each text is linear, but non-adjacently so. Interference of sub-text sensibility (comprehensibility) is manifest

in a complex network of compositional techniques. Here are some:

(1) blackouts; (2) differentiated punctuation: (,) (—) (.) (?) (...) (!); (3) group vs. solo; (4) group noise (simultaneous speaking) vs. imbedded non-verbal, focused sounds (e.g., hiccup, laughter); (5) the Spot; (6) expressive speech (e.g., vehement; hopefully) vs. toneless voice transmission; (7) stage directions (e.g., p.12: "spot from W1 to M. He opens his mouth to speak. Spot from M to W2"); (8) transformations, e.g.:

M: p.10 (in chorus): (text)...come—(hiccup)—pardon,

M: p.10 (solo): (text)...throat—(hiccup)—pardon—

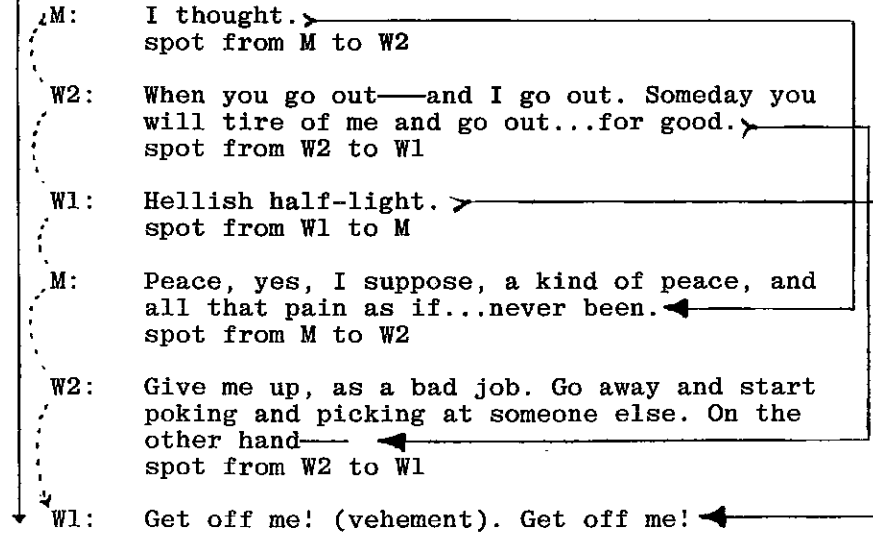
M: p.13 (solo): (text)...looking—(hiccup)—wretched.Pardon.

M: p.18 (solo): (text)...compare—(hiccup)—pardon—

M: p.20 (solo): (text)...rave and—(hiccup)—bring it up for  
you. Par—  
W2: No.  
M: —don.

Moreover, there are text locations in which: (1) a given voice completes a thought (e.g., a comprehensible sentence), before another voice is provoked into speech (resulting in an actual shift of thought); (2) a given voice does not complete a thought before another voice interrupts; (3) a linear 'whole-text' aggregate of successive sub-text elements makes no sense; (4) a linear aggregate of successive sub-text elements makes sense (but sub-text elements do not); (5) a linear 'whole-text' aggregate makes sense at the same time as do non-adjacent sub-text elements:

(cf. text, p.16)



This collection of content features are what they are. There can be no doubt about them. They, too, are not subject to interpretation. The complex network of interferences on text, by text, generate a language structure which is: (1) at least syntactically bi-functional in its adjacent, non-adjacent text-sensibility; (2) physiologically jolting in its array of disjunct text-fragments, abrupt transferences, comings and goings of bits of language; (3) acoustically vibrant in its shifting text-densities, non-verbal utterance, and vocal timbre which is governed by a narrow voice-band frequency spectrum.

The articulation of text does not initiate action. The SPOT does. Play's dramatic sense, thus provoked, is contained by the set/setting in which the performers actually (not representationally) find themselves. This state operates on text-articulation, which in turn, reflexively, influences the performer's dramatic sensibility. The loop, thus closed, exhibits intrinsic interaction between and within set/setting and text. This is the context in which Play must be assessed, understood, and heard.

NOTES ON WORD-MEANING It is at least a miscalculation to perform Play in the light of word-(semantic)-meaning. Here, the words are not unique entities somehow divorced from the elaborate linguistic states which operate on them. It is not that words lack meaning. Surely no one has any problem with: "Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me"<sup>9</sup>. However, the spot provokes those words (that's what it does). And, the words are there to be so-provoked (that's what they do). Without the spot Play wouldn't happen, no matter what the words were. With the spot Play can happen, no matter what the performers or spectators think the words mean. So it is, even more complexly, with deeper Beckett symbolologies, such as: "I smell her off you"<sup>10</sup>, (smell=proof); or "I hear a mower"<sup>11</sup>, (mower=((the)) cycle). Performer utterance has to be made in the light of given linguistic states. Word-meaning is not a given<sup>12</sup>. Word-meaning cannot advance performance, nor can it, even if acquired prior to performance, directly initiate it.

That Play's words mean something, however, I do not deny; but performance is not the location for their assessment. Furthermore, performance meaning cannot be confused with reader meaning or observer questioning under any condition. One cannot explain the other since they are different ontologies. Beckett provides a clue: "of looking for sense where possibly there is none"<sup>13</sup>. Play's words afford a conceptual background, ...a referent, ...another resonance. Play, then, is bi-functional, ...actual and conceptual. Meaning takes place in the mind. It takes place by study, reflection, recursion, (consider who or what the spot as "unique inquisitor" is). Meaning takes place sometime, somewhere, ...out-of-performance context; ...and then if, and only if, it is linked to and consistent with the conditions of Play's instruction/text linguistic (and thus linked in the light of its perform-ability).

However in Play, ...during its performance, there is little, if any, room for acting or thinking: ...for playing on the words, or thinking them out; ...for "acting" tempo or "thinking" tempo, based on, or, with regard to, interpretation. Outside of its performance it is legitimate to ask whether previously acquired word-meanings have any bearing on words recognized in Play. During Play, however, such activity is impossible. In Play, meaning follows; it cannot precede, or occur during its action.

THE MUSIC IN (In PLAY: what happens when instructions and text, as given  
SAMUEL ens, operate on WORDS?14)

BECKETT'S:

PLAY The set is the location of the instruments (e.g., voices).

Vocal articulation is influenced by the physical presence of the set in which the bodies are found. From the bodies, sound is issued forth. PLAY'S performers are in the context, aspects of which, they, themselves, exhibit: they are not talking about something, they are of it. The presence of WORDS-as-semantics will not result in 'hearing' PLAY. Vocal inflections (nuance), and attending apparatus (e.g., the vocal tract), influence, and are governed by, imbedded properties (e.g., transitional frequencies) which WORD-languages exhibit while in transmission; e.g., "toneless" cannot signify: monotone. Voices speak in normal, moderate, and faint strength. PLAY is composed language.

In PLAY, intelligible transmission cannot obtain if WORDS are sloppily articulated, ...a possible consequence of utterance at rapid tempo. Contrarily, articulation is intelligible if WORDS and all of their sub-elements are well-formed. But tempo, continuity, structure, perception, et alia, generalize these into broader acoustical events without WORD loss. Syntactical distinctions such as between (,) (—) (...) (.) (?) (!), so crucial to PLAY'S intelligibility, must be so-distinguished in performance. If so, then discrete envelope-shaping(s), micro-breathing(s), and near-imperceptible inflection(s) result.

Nevertheless, WORDS first appear generally unintelligible to most observers, although WORDS are surely recognized as "WORDS". The repeat of PLAY (i.e. WORD elements which recur as well as subsequent repeats of the entire work), ...over time, permits the assemblage of intelligible language; but not in any linear, WORD-ordered sense, nor necessarily at all levels of its complex structure simultaneously. Phrases leap out. PLAY becomes clear/ER by the actual process of its cyclic unfolding. Intermittently, however, PLAY'S WORDS may be mere 'noise' (e.g., the simultaneous voice speakings, rapid linear transmission, the shifting of 'non-connected' WORD utterances), distinguished, in itself, not by WORD-sense but by sound-sense. WORDS are inscribed linearly, but we need not (in this case: cannot) apprehend them linearly. Non-adjacent (spatial) connections make intelligible what local WORD-ordering cannot. Moreover, PLAY'S contextual motion between

intelligibility and non-intelligibility, ...on all levels of its complex structure, provides a clue to one significant feature of language in general: i.e., how could such motion, however intentional, or inadvertent, not result in the dissolution of WORD-meaning as one might previously have assumed it to be?

More so in performance: PLAY is now in its time. Its conditions won't give an observer, nor performer, time to dwell (reflect) on meaning (think). One either gives in and becomes physically caught up in the whole transmission, ...in PLAY'S time; ...bombarded by WORDS, sound, spot, motion, WORD-densities, literal/actual continuous WORD-sound drones (with traces of sensibility) at rates where WORDS lose their intelligibility, and act as carriers of an acoustic, ...OR: becomes lost. PLAY either performs as a composition performs, ...with fluid motion, and without indulgence, caprice, para-sentiments, OR: does nothing. If one pauses, even for an instant, to meditate on a transmitted expression, a very large number of others will have passed by unnoticed. It is in the kind of attempt to fix meaning, or fix on meaning, ...as PLAY unfolds, which will cause it to forever be unintelligible (incomprehensible). But, if one lets go, PLAY is abundantly rich in sonority, and alive with human expression and circumstance. If we take meaning (in its narrow, usual semantic sense), out of WORD/PLAY, ...so difficult because we seem unable to dismiss the notion that WORDS are present, and WORDS presumably have definitions, ...that they mean something other than what they are, where and how they are, then PLAY generates another language. In this language meaning may be found. PLAY generates its own language-sensibility because it is composed. Comprehension, on any level, has to obtain in its light.

(N.B.: Before proceeding, please perform the following instruction: re-read the above text-portion, pp.9-10, entitled: The Music in Samuel Beckett's: Play. For every occurrence of the word: PLAY, substitute the word: MUSIC; for every occurrence of the word: WORD, substitute the word: NOTE.)

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