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The Fantastic Presences-Absences in *The Chairs* by Eugène Ionesco

Abstract: This study is an analysis of Ionesco's play The Chairs, as a complex theatrical metaphor of the existential void and nothingness. It is an attempt to reveal the imaginative energies of this play, mainly about playing games and storytelling, and its intricate machinery of the dream. The drastic lack of identity is staged by a literal obliteration of the corporal presence of most of the actors, symbolically replaced by empty chairs. The paradigm of proliferation is now applying to vacuum, in an ingenious attempt to battle against the ossified linguistic and theatrical conventions, and to explore the endless expressive possibilities of the theatrical performance. This kinetic scheme acts like a cobweb in which the two protagonists move like helpless insects caught into this deadly texture. Their anguish is thus materialized into a visual projection of their inner labyrinth, as not only the conscious level is addressed, but also the unconscious one. Essentially built on symbolic images, the play allows the audience to become part of this mobile architecture of the scenic space invaded by the ballet of empty chairs, in the search for a new theatrical language, based on different types of perception and aiming to redefine the sensibility of the audience. The deaf and dumb Orator hired to deliver the non-existent message is emblematic for the severe crisis of theatrical forms of expression, and for Ionesco's search of a new language, non-linguistic, able to express a different type of message. It is a firm intention to reinvent theatrical communication.

Key words: theatre, communication, nothingness, chairs, games

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