Happy Days

A THEATRICAL INSTALLATION OR STAGING BECKETT WITH 11 MOTORS

A MASTER PROJECT BY
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INTRODUCTION

Happy Days is an installation based on a narrative. We are setting our idea between stage design in theatre and installation by taking a certain drama and staging it without human actors or conventional (verbal) dialogue. We think that the idea of stage design being sufficient as a theatre play seems interesting and significant when combined with digital media.
A theatre play *Stifter's Things* by Heiner Goebbels was an encouragement to reach into this ambiguous field. His mechanical pianos posing as actors and many other elements in the play such as dry ice and projection were sufficient enough to tell a story.

The theory of Graham Harman and the third table underlines this idea of seeing objects as things in themselves. Harman’s third table finds its place with the artists, since they try to see objects further from the components of which they are made of and allude to those that may not be present. From objects and actions around us that we encounter in our daily activities to those we see on stage as props and choreography or directed movements, they all construct a certain narrative and from this perspective they are all aesthetic objects and actions. Applying or translating human behaviour through these inanimate objects is one of our interests. This behaviour implies the daily rituals as well as the general themes of human existence. How inanimate are we compared to these objects? Or how animate they are compared to us?

1. *Stifter's Things* by Heiner Goebbels
2. *The Third Table* by Graham Harman
3. *The biting beauty acid of the starts* by Isabel Nolan, 2009
In relation to the field between theatre and installation we came across Geoffrey Farmer work *Let’s the Water Turn Black*. It was an installation with a lot of theatrical elements and a combination of media such as sculptures, sound, lights, kinetic movements and motors. It was set in a gallery and spectators could walk around it. Maywa Denki’s *Naki Series /32 Absurd Objects* were inspiring since absurdity is in a close relation to our project and the play that we chose to stage.

4. *Let’s Make the Water Turn Black* by Geoffrey Farmer
5. *UKE-Tel* from the *Naki Series* by Maywa Denki
6. *Pachi-Moku* and *Koi-beat* from the *Naki Series* by Maywa Denki
Among a few plays we were considering, *Happy Days* by Samuel Beckett was our choice due to his absurd approach to drama. Even though language was one of the most important element of Beckett’s work, we took another element, absurdity, and decided to focus on this. *Happy Days* is a play in two acts, with only two characters, Willie and Winnie, man and wife. They are set in a landscape of sand and scorching heat, and Winnie is buried up to her waist. Willie is set in a hole, free to move but ironically not moving. The beginning and the end of the day is marked by a bell ring. Winnie wakes, goes about her day using objects she took out of a black bag next to her. These objects are helping her to go about her daily routine. She is constantly talking enthusiastically, despite her miserable condition. Whereas Willie is mostly silent, except for the occasional newspaper title he reads out.

7. *Happy Days*, from the 1972 Samuel Beckett Festival in The Forum Theatre at Lincoln Center
8. *Happy Days* a play in two acts. Published 1961 by Grove Press in New York
As performing a ritual overshadows the performer, the object of the ritual can survive on its own. It transforms the performer into a static existence but, not having a sense of time itself, the object does not mind the repetitive cycles of time. We took this as our starting point and concentrated on these props from the play, making them the actors. This repetitive actions related to daily routine became our focus. We chose to emphasise the contrast of chaos and order. Order, in form of repetition of daily routine, is something we construct to make sense of our time. Whereas chaos takes over when repetition dries out sense. As does Winnie in Happy Days, humans still find a way to go on despite this variations of reason and absurd.

We translated this concept by presenting various absurd behaviours of these props through changing their usual location, sound, quantity, and speed, from orderly repetition to chaotic behaviour. By using light, sound, timing and speed of our actors, we constructed the narrative.

“...things have a life. Take my looking-glass, it doesn’t need me.”

_Happy Days, Samuel Beckett_
After analysing the play, we turned to a more random approach using a processing sketch to randomise subjects, verbs, and objects from the play, giving us an interesting result of sentences that make no sense. This seemed fitting to our intentions, but only later we decided to incorporate this into our objects. We limited ourselves to a few numbers of “actors”, and proceeded with sketches, prototyping, construction, programming, scripting and rehearsal.
METHODS & PROCESS

Sketches
METHODS & PROCESS
Prototyping / Construction
METHODS & PROCESS

Programming

With 9 actors in total we needed to control 11 motors, consisting of servos and one dc motor. For that purpose we learned the program VVVV, a live programming environment with which we could translate the script into a 5 minute loop where we could precisely control our actors in a keyframe based manner.
METHODS & PROCESS

Rehearsal
THE ACTORS

Solo Spin
THE ACTORS

Killing Time
THE ACTORS

Pearl Medicine
THE ACTORS

Sun
We had the opportunity to place our installation in Städtische Galerie. Since we were looking for a non-theatrical space, this is a perfect space for our project. The duration of the play is 5 minutes and we decided to play it every hour.