

Algorithmic Absurdism: Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and the Age of Digital Inscrutability

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Abstract

This article examines Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) through the lens of digital culture and algorithmic governance, arguing that the play's historical narrative strategies reflect today's "algorithmic absurdism." Many of the absurdist moves that critics have traditionally read as characteristic of the postwar European aesthetic, existentialist complications of subjectivity and metatheatrical reflexivity, resonate in the contemporary digital moment, whereby individual users navigate opaque, unpredictable systems. Through comparative attention to the play and digital structures, I articulate a continuity between two seemingly separate loci of contemporary existence, highlighting algorithmic governance's perceived illegibility to underscore the absurdist legacy of Martin Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* and Albert Camus's philosophy. While scholars have extensively analyzed the play through existentialist and metatheatrical frameworks, no study has systematically connected its absurdist features to algorithmic control, identity fragmentation, and systemic powerlessness. This gap forms the central **research problem**. The paper identifies four formal elements that map onto contemporary digital experiences of waiting: ninety-two consecutive coin tosses (as a metaphor for black-box decision making), the collapse of language (as a model of fragmented digital identity), the sealed letter (as a figure of unaccountable authority), and the Player's performative agency (as a precursor to performative assembly). The method combines a close reading of Stoppard's text with a deductive typology derived from Camus's theory of the absurd and Safiya Noble's critique of algorithmic oppression. The analysis demonstrates that the play's depiction of passive waiting, enforced opacity, and the erosion of agency maps directly onto the experiences of users navigating search engines, social media feeds, and automated decision systems. By contrast, the Player's theatrical resistance gestures toward a form of collective, embodied action that Noble later calls "the right to become anonymous." Ultimately, Stoppard's play captures the nuances of the absurdist legacy in the age of algorithmic governance, wherein the discourse of reason is corrupted, rendering the consequences of power unaccountable.

Keywords:

Tom Stoppard; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; absurdism; Albert Camus; algorithmic opacity; digital identity; performative assembly.



Introduction

In the shadows of invisible systems, unspoken rules, and opaque hierarchies that pervade the literature of digital culture exists the cynical loneliness of characters who dwell in the liminal space distorted by those shadows. Such characters have emerged as a dominant force in contemporary posthuman literature, most notably in Tom Stoppard's 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. As Martin Esslin writes, "The Theatre of the Absurd shows the world as an incomprehensible place" (Esslin 5). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who appear as little more than footnotes in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, are tortured by the irony that they cannot act on their predicament. Like Sisyphus, condemned to roll his rock up a hill only to have it roll back down, they are condemned to repeat the same actions without the will to escape. As Albert Camus writes, "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus 28).

The baseline irony of their existence is represented through the rapidly escalating absurdity of their circumstances. They toss a coin ninety-two times in a row and always get heads. Out of nowhere, they start a game - only questions allowed, never answers. This odd rule stretches into something deeper once viewers notice how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fade without warning. Their exit isn't marked by speeches or drama; instead, silence swallows them whole. Offstage, a document gets altered - no words spoken - and just like that, their fate seals shut. Home to our generation's greatest examples of invisible systems and opaque hierarchies, digital culture imposes the same dehumanizing absence of agency as tragicomic theatre. In *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Umoja Noble describes search engines as reflections of epistemic violence that facilitate the subjugation of billions of people. She writes that "mathematical formulations to drive automated decisions are made by human beings. While we often think of terms such as 'big data' and 'algorithms' as being benign, neutral, or objective, they are anything but" (Noble 1). She also asserts that "the individual user of information communication technologies always exists in the context of myriad other social, political, historical, and cultural factors that collectively shape access to those technologies and their content" (Noble 1).

Digital users engage with power and privilege that position them as ciphers within the corporate structure of internet search providers, a massive



opaque hierarchy that renders personality, ambition, and individuality as mere “analytics.” As one reviewer notes, those with power and privilege can see and challenge algorithmic systems while marginalized users absorb the harm (Fitch 2). Digital personas operate through a performance of multiple contradictory selves, a phenomenon that merely enhances the absurdity with which digital culture expresses uneasiness about the incarceration of individuals in a repressive epistemology of power.

The function of the actor as a social symbol in Stoppard’s play is relinquished by the Player early on. He offers Guildenstern a paradigm for an alternative style of communication. “We’re actors, we’re the opposite of people!” the Player exclaims when Guildenstern expresses disbelief (Stoppard 25). The Player’s tirade reveals a similar trepidation toward the grotesque nature of abstract power: participation in systems, whether economic, social, or political, requires a transformative erasure process, a shunning of human experience in favor of an alternate form designed to attract capital. As Judith Zivanovic argues, “the Player is Camus’ actor par excellence: he knows that his life is a performance, that his deaths are temporary, that meaning is something he creates rather than something he finds” (Zivanovic 12). This erasure of identity parallels the existential absurdity of modernity through a fear of the inescapability of a Sisyphean intersection with invisible systems of power.

Decades of criticism have analyzed Stoppard’s play through existentialist, metatheatrical, and deconstructionist prisms, but have overlooked a crucial aspect of its context. Michael Hinden observes that the coin toss functions as an objective correlative for the absurd (Hinden 357). Yet the linkage of its repeated patterns of waiting, opacity, linguistic breakdown, and unaccountable authority yields a reading that resonates with the existential conditions of digital networks rampant with algorithmic governance, identity fragmentation, and systemic powerlessness. No study has systematically connected the play’s absurdist features to algorithmic governance and digital opacity. This study fills that gap. The analysis employs a comparative close reading methodology, mapping the dramatic structures of the play onto analogous phenomena in digital culture. The present article pursues three objectives: First, to examine how the four defining features of the play map onto algorithmic feeds; second, to explore the relationship between digital conditions and online identity fragmentation, passive consumption. and



automated decision-making. Third to extract a more pronounced sense of agency from a play whose content has often been regarded as depicting passivity and powerlessness.

Though set in uncertainty, the play draws on Camus to explore how action can emerge even when purpose seems absent. Waiting defines Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who justify inertia by deferring to authority. Instead, the Player acts - crafting narrative where none may exist, mirroring Camus's vision of defiant creation amid emptiness. Happiness, according to Camus, belongs to those who push forward despite futility; thus, "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 123). I argue that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is not a relic of pre-digital culture but a critical tool for revealing the erosion of autonomy in the age of digital opacity and unaccountable power. Connections made across sections suggest digital networks mirror what Camus called the "unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus 28). Instead of following scripts handed down, the Player steps forward like the defiant figure Camus admired. As Moon Young Chung notes, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern follow orders passively, refusing to choose, and thereby choose death (Chung 245). The analysis is organized into three sections: Opacity, Drift, and Unaccountable Power (the coin toss, the letter, and the boat); Broken Language, Fragmented Identity, and the Refusal to Choose (the "Questions" game and bad faith); and Performing Resistance (the Player as the Camusian hero).

Literature Review

The premiere of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at the 1966 Edinburgh Festival Fringe was hailed by Harold Hobson as "the most important event in British professional theatre in the past nine years." He called it "a masterpiece" (Nadel 34). The play received four Tony Awards within a year, including Best Play (Nadel 45). Despite its success, the work remains daunting to many audiences. Its roots in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* do not save it from being at the same time as obscure a tale as one can find.

Judith Zivanovic posits that the absurd hero need not refuse to act. She acknowledges that while the Player conforms to the philosophy of Camus's *The Rebel*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not. Sculpted by the acceptance of their fates, Zivanovic interprets the two friends as Camus's actors eternally rehearsing, with the Player as an absurd actor free to hold a detached gaze from the stage. She writes that "the two friends most evidently



register the burden of Camus' indictment" and that "they are strengthened and undone by their knowledge" (Zivanovic 12). Michael Hinden describes the play's precision in choreographic terms (Hinden 355).

Martin Esslin, in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, described the post-war world as one marked by "the decline of religious faith" and "a world without faith, meaning, and genuine freedom of will" (Esslin 6). Critic C. J. Gianakaris focuses on the relationship between characters and their author, stressing disaffection with dependence on the playwright of a fictional narrative (Gianakaris 218). Sayyed Rahim Moosavinia and Fatemeh Raeisi implicate absurdism in the imaginary "duel" between reality and illusion, presence and absence, and the correlating dyad of "life/death" (Moosavinia and Raeisi 189). Neslihan Şentürk Uzun defines hauntology as "the existential and political anxiety that arises out of the disembodied notion of the never returning or already returned of contemporary society" (Şentürk Uzun 112).

Moon Young Chung argues that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "do not make any choice and take action. They just follow the things as they are told, comforting themselves, until things happen to them" (Chung 243). Their mindset is "fate-born fatalism" deadlocked on mere "conformism" (Chung 244). Hidden rules shape how ordinary people move through digital spaces, shaped by unseen systems. Not just search engines but also social networks enforce patterns without clarity or consent. Drifting along, decisions seem open but move within hidden paths. Not decided by will, this pause grows from systems working out of view. What happens on stage pulls these forces into light: silent pressures suddenly clear. Smooth surfaces hide a stiffness most struggle to describe.

Inside the machinery they support, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fall - not only due to structure, yet because of how it is applied. Yet conversations about digital oversight and identity online tend to overlook this looping damage. Stoppard's play reveals that a political virtue of the 1970s, faith in the eventfulness of history and the individual's capacity to influence it, has collapsed. What Stoppard presents delay, confusion, fractured speech, power without answerability mirrors closely what researchers on internet life have recorded. No existing study has systematically connected the play's absurdist features to algorithmic governance, identity fragmentation, and systemic powerlessness and answerd qouestion: How do the absurdist mechanisms of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* to be more specific



the coin toss, the “Questions” game, the sealed letter, and the Player’s performance reflect the experience of ‘algorithmic governance’, digital opacity, and fragmented identity in contemporary digital culture, and what forms of resistance does the play suggest?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Looking at things through Camus’s view of the absurd, alongside Noble’s analysis of biased algorithms, shapes this work. What happens when people expect meaning, yet face a silent universe? That tension sits at the core of Camus’s idea. He writes about it clearly - our longing meets cold indifference (Camus 28). Instead of giving up, those he sees as heroes push back with clear eyes. Take Sisyphus, or Don Juan, even the stage performer - they do not surrender. In Stoppard’s drama, one figure stands out - the Player. “We’re actors, we’re the opposite of people!” rings like a motto (Stoppard 25). Defiance shows up here not as shouting, but as performance. Again he stands, having played out dying, aware all along it was act. Such power - shaped by choice within illusion - can challenge forces that answer to none. Camus’s framework, however, was developed before the age of digital automation. Here Noble’s work provides a necessary supplement. Noble shows that search engines “are anything but” neutral (Noble 1) and that “the invisibility of algorithmic processes is not a bug; it is a feature of how platforms shape behavior without accountability” (Noble 22).

Combining Camus’s lucid defiance with Noble’s critique of opacity yields an analytical lens: the play’s absurdist mechanisms dramatize algorithmic governance, and the Player’s performative resistance models digital disobedience. Limitation acknowledged: this synthesis does not claim that Stoppard anticipated computing; rather, the formal structures of absurdist theatre (repetition, opacity, unanswered questions) are structurally homologous to the experience of interacting with black-box algorithms. The analysis proceeds through a deductive typology derived from the theoretical framework. Based on Camus’s characteristics of the absurd and Noble’s features of algorithmic oppression. I constructed four formal elements in the play. First, the coin toss (opaque probability). Second, the “Questions” game (broken language), Third, the sealed letter (unaccountable authority), Fourth, the Player’s performance (performative resistance). Each element was analyzed through close reading of the play’s dialogue and stage directions. Focusing on how Stoppard represents waiting, uncertainty, and the absence of



explanation. Then, each element was mapped onto a contemporary four digital phenomena. First, search engine rankings, Second, automated chat interfaces, Third, content moderation, Fourth, collective resistance movements. This design ensures the analysis is systematic, transparent, and grounded in both absurdist theory and digital criticism.

Literary Analysis

Opacity, Drift, and Unaccountable Power

The opening coin toss lays the foundations of the play's central absurdist notions. Two men toss coins. The coins come up heads. "Again. Again. Again." By the time Guildenstern says "Seventy-six-love," the odds are astronomical (Stoppard 9). Guildenstern tries to think his way out. He offers explanations: "One: I'm willing it. ... Two: time has stopped dead... Three: divine intervention... Four: a spectacular vindication of the principle that each individual coin spun individually is as likely to come down heads as tails and therefore should cause no surprise that each individual time it does." (Stoppard 9-10) He builds syllogisms, spins theories, and tries to force randomness into a rational cage. His frustration is clear: "A weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least in the law of probability" (Stoppard 12). Rosencrantz feels nothing. He is "nice enough to feel a little embarrassed at taking so much money off his friend" (Stoppard 1). But he experiences no existential vertigo. Camus would say they confront the "unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus 28). I see this scene as a metaphor for 'algorithmic governance'. Noble writes that "mathematical formulations to drive automated decisions are made by human beings" (Noble 1). The coin toss is aligned with Noble's term the "black box" of algorithmic decision-making. She writes, "The invisibility of algorithmic processes is not a bug; it is a feature of how platforms shape behavior without accountability" (Noble 22).

Patterns emerge without apparent cause. A person guessing at why videos appear acts much like Guildenstern chasing reasons in chaos. Silence follows each guess; the machine stays blank. No signal tells them they are right or wrong. Uncertainty piles up without warning. Eventually, many give up probing; scrolling replaces thinking.

Noble observes that "the public is minimally aware of these shifts in the cultural power and import of algorithms" (Noble 51). A 2012 Pew study found



that “73% of search engine users say that most or all the information they find as they use search engines is accurate and trustworthy”. Yet “38% of searchers are aware of a distinction between paid and unpaid results; 62% are not.” (Purcell). Flipping the coin makes that risky faith suddenly visible. Probability is what Guildenstern leans on. Rosencrantz, instead, pins his hope on the metal discs themselves. The setup goes unchallenged by either. Trust runs deep, even when unseen.

A sealed letter heightens the sense of helplessness. Offstage, Hamlet slips away while holding the original scroll meant for England’s ruler. A rewritten version now travels in its place. This altered note shifts the fate; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern face what was meant for another. Unaware, they transport the very order that seals their lives. Hidden edits shape the letter’s dread. Without being told, a choice happens elsewhere. Such changes echo updates in automated tools or shifts in rules behind closed doors. Upon learning what occurred, Guildenstern offers an excuse, small figures like them grasp neither details nor hidden layers (Stoppard 66). This refusal to embrace freedom counts as bad faith. Destruction of the letter, flight, or defiance remain possible. Yet they act as though none do. Chung observes that their stillness is not balance; rather it sides with harm; avoiding a decision becomes itself a fatal pick (Chung 245).

What occurs within this space follows unseen patterns, similar to how Noble describes technological redlining? Once tied to racial bias in housing and loans, redlining now lives inside software systems, quietly steering outcomes (Noble 1). Though invisible, these digital barriers function just as rigidly. A message arrives closed off, its contents shaped before it reaches them. Someone else has already judged, decided, excluded; all without explanation. Power moves through hidden logic, leaving no room to respond. As Noble puts it, oversight by ordinary people rarely reaches closed digital systems built by companies (Noble 26).

Drifting occurs again during the third act, shown through a boat journey. Between Denmark and England, movement stops, caught mid-path. Rosencrantz stays, unable to step off. Guildenstern reflects: “We have not been cut loose. Our truancy is defined by one fixed star, and our drift represents merely a slight chance of angle to it” (Stoppard 78). This picture of motion without purpose reflects how people move through online spaces.



Though users tap and browse, each step is shaped by coded rules. Freedom feels absent. Instead, they float inside paths already drawn.

On a boat, direction feels less like a decision. Guildenstern leans into that ease: “You don’t have to worry about which way to go, or whether to go at all, the question doesn’t arise, because you’re on a boat, aren’t you?” (Stoppard 79). Much like code shaping daily habits, the current carries without asking. Choice fades behind quiet automation. Drifting becomes routine. The cost shows up as diminished control, fading identity, then silence. According to Noble, “the very notion that technologies are neutral must be directly challenged as a misnomer” (Noble 108).

Disappearance closes the performance. One by one, they slip away. A message arrives; the words form the title. No scene shows their dying. Guildenstern had named it: “Death is not anything ... it’s the absence of presence, nothing more ... a gap you can’t see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound” (Stoppard 75). This quiet vanishing reveals helplessness at its core. Without warning, accounts disappear online. Forgetting overtakes them. Absence begins before any obligation arises.

Broken Language, Fragmented Identity

Language shapes the play’s absurdist edge. A sharp instance appears in Stoppard’s “Questions” game. One restriction shapes speech: it must take question form alone. At first playful, the exchange tightens into a web of words where escape grows hard. The actual dialogue is rapid and repetitive: “GUIL: Statement! ROS: Cheating! GUIL: How? ROS: I hadn’t started yet. GUIL: Statement. Two-love. ROS: Are you counting that? GUIL: What? ROS: Are you counting that? GUIL: Foul! No repetitions. Three-love.” (Stoppard 42-43)

Spinning out of control, the conversation folds back on itself. One query repeats what came before it, without adding clarity. Through anadiplosis, Stoppard traps dialogue in repetition. Suddenly, Rosencrantz steps outside the pattern: “You’re not going to play the game, are you?” prompting Guildenstern to seize him and yell, “Who do you think you are?” (Stoppard 45). Rosencrantz responds with a puzzled “What?”

Identity wavers under shaky words. Names slip. Rosencrantz claims he is Guildenstern, only to backtrack: “My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz” (Stoppard 8). Because of such slips, Moosavinia and Raeisi suggest meaning unravels when language loses fixed points (Moosavinia and



Raeisi 191). Noble's analysis of how search engines shape identity is relevant. She writes, "The very notion that technologies are neutral must be directly challenged as a misnomer. The people who make these decisions hold all types of values, many of which openly promote racism, sexism, and false notions of meritocracy" (Noble 1-2). The "Questions" game models how arbitrary rules produce confusion and erode stable identity.

Screen displays tend to follow concealed structures. Algorithms rank user replies without showing how. What appears as free exchange often follows hidden blueprints. As Noble observes, digital environments tend to boost dominant players (Noble 48). This pattern stays visible in the "Questions" exercise. A single participant defines the rules. The rest respond within those bounds. Meaning bends where authority arrives early. Focus shifts toward blind compliance where meaning matters less than following form. Left hanging, Rosencrantz whispers "What?" a hollow echo of anyone grown up online meeting confusion they cannot fix.

Then Guildenstern speaks again: "We have been spinning coins together since I don't know when, and in all that time (if it is all that time) I don't suppose either of us was more than a couple of gold pieces up or down. ... Then a messenger arrived. We had been sent for. Nothing else happened. Ninety-two coins spun consecutively have come down heads ninety-two consecutive times. ... and for the last three minutes on the wind of a windless day I have heard the sound of drums and flute..." (Stoppard 14-15). Rosencrantz cuts in: "Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard" (Stoppard 15). This detour barely touches why things feel off. When unease hits, small details absorb focus instead of deeper sense. As Noble notes, such shifts gain traction because platforms profit from them. Endless swiping replaces reflection.

Nowhere more clearly does evasion surface than in Guildenstern's excuse about the letter. When Rosencrantz asks, "What's the first thing you remember?" (Stoppard 17), he finds nothing. Across scenes, characters sidestep choice by pretending they have none. Noble explores how "people who rely on Google accept algorithmic outcomes by simply keeping on using it, even though stepping away feels impossible because institutions like schools and libraries embed these tools deeply into learning" (Noble 36). This habit of waiting hides a quiet lie we tell ourselves. Excuses creep in softly, similar to how Guildenstern insists they're just small pieces on a board moved



by others. From stillness grows a slow turn inward; that outlook forms when eyes refuse to see. A refusal to act shapes what feels true later.

Playing Against the System

From stillness steps forward the Player. Following close behind moves a troupe fixated on dying scenes. Weight fills the air as he speaks: “Tragedians, at your command” (Stoppard 13). What he does shapes who he is. His best-known words show what he stands for: “We’re actors, we’re the opposite of people!” (Stoppard 25). Out of doing, not finding, does purpose take shape. With every new beam that touches the floor, time resets itself. Inside every act, the Player states, a poorly faked death makes it difficult to trust, “There’s nothing more unconvincing than an unconvincing death” (Stoppard 62). People do not seek real harm but they want form, the curve of a fall and the slump that echoes grief. Meaning emerges not despite acting, but because of it.

When Guildenstern stabs the Player, he falls, dies convincingly, then stands up and accepts the applause (Stoppard 89). As Zivanovic argues, “the Player is Camus’ actor par excellence: he knows that his life is a performance, that his deaths are temporary, that meaning is something he creates rather than something he finds” (Zivanovic 12). He is Sisyphus rolling his rock, aware of futility but choosing to struggle. The Player skips permission, authoring moves without approval. Faking disappearance, he reappears later, changed. Quiet defiance grows in hidden spaces, where stepping back means surviving...

Nowhere is it written that staying visible matters most. He slips out whenever he likes, timing each exit like a planned pause. Reappearing happens only on his terms, shaped deliberately. This motion isn’t about vanishing - it matches what Noble names the right to disappear: control over presence itself (Noble 128). As Noble observes, “the right to become anonymous, to make a fresh start by destroying almost all personal information, is as intriguing as it is extreme” (Noble 125-26). Onstage, the Player’s exit unfolds with clarity. Still, such absence does not last forever. Resistance takes shape when one stops accepting silence. According to Noble, realizing that algorithms carry authority, not fairness, sparks defiance (Noble 89).

Insisting on active doing rather than just watching, the Player Mirrors Noble’s statement that “we need public search engine alternatives, united with public interest journalism and librarianship, to ensure that the public has access



to the highest quality information available” (Noble 152). Behind him stands a small crowd. What he accomplishes takes form through collective effort. According to Noble, “the lack of a diverse and critically minded workforce on issues of race and gender in Silicon Valley impacts its intellectual output” (Noble 163). The people near the Player reflect inclusion paired with sharp thinking. Power emerges from their joint moves, not individual force; it grows out of how they act together.

Death, when rehearsed, becomes a script the body learns early. Through mimesis, performers prepare not for applause but for inevitability. Without collaboration across fields, the risk grows: automated systems might override subtle human judgment. As Noble observes, “we need experts in the social sciences and digital humanities to engage in dialogue with activists and organizers, engineers, designers, information technologists, and public policy makers before blunt artificial intelligence decision making trumps nuanced human decision making” (Noble 13). The Player reveals mechanisms of control through silence, yet observation too often replaces action.

The play does not offer comfort; it poses a question instead. Movement comes before waiting, every time. Noble urges a complete rethink: what happens when corporations running ads also control our access to knowledge? (Noble 5). The Player becomes an example of how such thinking might take shape. Instead of waiting on approval, he crafts his own path forward. Still, he shows how choice remains, how acting, creating, stepping forward stays possible even without clear guidelines. Rolling his burden uphill, that was Sisyphus. Out of stillness, the Player stirs, standing once more after pretended collapse. Perhaps we find ourselves ready to act, not alone but alongside others, stepping forward even though the setting was never ours to shape; yet somehow, briefly, it holds space for us.



Conclusion

This study has argued that Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is not merely a mid-century absurdist play but also a prescient model of algorithmic governance. One way the play models contemporary digital experience is through the apparent randomness of the coin toss. Though language breaks down, meaning gradually erodes. A sealed letter arrives without explanation because accountability evaporates. Instead of clarity, performance takes shape on stage. What remains is not control but delay. Waiting unfolds when systems withhold response. Power fades where outcomes feel arbitrary. Meaning dissolves while actors follow scripts they did not write.

The analysis yields three findings. Though chance seems involved, the coin toss reflects how search engines operate: outcomes appear arbitrary, yet commercial interests shape them through opaque ranking algorithms. Instead of free exchange, the "Questions" game reveals how digital systems fragment identity, constraining responses within predetermined formats. Hidden power appears again in the sealed letter, standing in for opaque decisions like banned posts or biased algorithms. Here, the Player fights back not alone but with others, moving together, a form of protest that echoes Noble's idea of claiming invisibility (Noble 125).

Putting theatre into dialogue with digital studies marks new ground here. A fresh lens emerges, one linking Stoppard's stagecraft to hidden algorithms through affective experience. Instead of jargon, it offers ways to articulate the subjective experience of opacity within automated systems. Structures on stage turn out to teach something practical: how people learn to navigate opaque technologies. Not every path gets taken; others remain open. Beckett's aesthetic of waiting or Ionesco's parables of transformation may reveal further layers of machine logic. Then again, watching performers respond as a group suggests the ethical contours that future AI designs could adopt. Still, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* holds steady importance today. Waiting while confused does not mark where nonsense stops; rather, it shows where it starts. One thing lingers: will we stay idle, expecting a message like they did, or shape our own story, much as the Player chooses?



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