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The body in parts

rethinking agency in Samuel Beckett's theatre

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Corinna Guthrie

The Body in Parts: Rethinking Agency in Samuel Beckett's Theatre

**Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD at King's College London,
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Abstract

It is a paradox noted by S. E. Gontarski among others, that Beckett on the one hand revels in the materiality, the ‘concreteness’ of the body in performance, whilst at the same time continually working to undermine and subvert it.¹ In doing so, as Gontarski implies, Beckett problematises traditional notions of the autonomous ‘individual’ as the seat of subjectivity, of the actor’s body as the centre of theatrical representation, and of character as a unifying principle within a narrative which exists in an analogous relation to reality. I examine these tendencies in terms of what I call ‘the body in parts’, in relation to a range of theoretical reference points including the aesthetics of puppetry (with reference to Kleist’s ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ among other sources) and the post-phenomenological philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy. My analysis is divided into four chapters, each of which takes a specific body part, eye, hand, ear, and mouth, as a point of entry, drawing on Beckett’s own critical and theoretical writings in order to re-think the question of subjectivity in his work, and re-position agency beyond the boundaries of the integrated, self-present human body.

¹ S. E. Gontarski, ‘The Body in the Body of Beckett’s Theatre’, *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd’hui*, Vol. 11, 2000, pp. 169-177, p.p. 169-170.

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My interest in Beckett was sparked as an undergraduate at the University of Sussex, where I was imbued with a sense of the importance of theatre as a space of meaning making, a space for thinking through issues and debates that have an impact in our contemporary world. Two lecturers who profoundly shaped my approach at this stage were Dr Sara Jane Bailes and Dr Ben O'Donohoe, both of whom were influential in my ambition to pursue further study.

I owe special thanks to the Departments of French and Theatre and Performance at King's College London, notably to my MA supervisor, Dr Kéline Gotman who guided me through the early stages of postgraduate research. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Patrick French, for his guidance, encouragement, understanding and insight. My secondary supervisor, Dr Johanna Malt also provided generous and helpful comments as a reader.

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Introduction: Rethinking Agency in Samuel Beckett's Theatre

This thesis examines the status of the body in Samuel Beckett's theatre, spanning from the 1950s to the early 1980s. It offers a distinctive reading of these works via the notion of the 'body in parts', which draws on a range of theoretical reference points including the aesthetics of puppetry, and the post-phenomenological philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy. The vocabulary of rupture and discontinuity which Nancy's philosophy of the body puts into play, disclosing existence in a very specific kind of interrelation between discourse and matter, facilitates a new approach to Beckett's works, addressing the disruption of presence and of identity as well as the autonomy of the theatrical or filmic event from an alternative perspective. Both Heinrich von Kleist's essay 'Über das Marionettentheater' (1810) and the work of the seventeenth-century philosopher Arnold Geulincx (1624-1669) are used here to complement and expand this perspective, introducing, through a particular understanding of the relationship between movement and reflection, a decisive dislocation with the phenomenological, embodied subject, partitioning and redistributing it.

This approach both builds on and diverges from recent scholarship in the field of Beckett studies, which, in emphasising embodied experience, has tended to draw upon phenomenological accounts, locating meaning in a primordial or pre-reflective realm which precedes language, thought and the abstract system of scientific knowledge. In response to an initial neglect of the subject, with early critics such as Hugh Kenner and Martin Esslin focusing on interiority and adopting a broadly Cartesian framework of analysis, the last two decades have seen the proliferation of theoretical readings of embodiment in Beckett's oeuvre.² In the 2009 volume *Beckett*

² See for instance, Hugh Kenner, 'The Cartesian Centaur' in Hugh Kenner ed., *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Guide* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 117-132.

and *Phenomenology*, Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman state that 'phenomenological themes such as consciousness, embodiment, perception, nausea, immaturity, enunciation, shame and sleep,' are central to an understanding of Beckett's work.³ Through an analysis of the wartime novel *Watt*, Matthew Feldman's opening contribution to the 2009 volume *Beckett and Phenomenology* observes in Beckett an attempt to 'write phenomenologically' in the sense that he seeks to ground meaning and inquiry in primordial experience, reducing objects and individuals to their very essence prior to the world of linguistic utterance.⁴ In doing so, Feldman makes a case for Husserl's brand of phenomenology as a provisional response to Beckett's concern with the subject-object division and its implications for an understanding of subjectivity and meaning in his works.⁵ Feldman's working method, guided by a methodological adherence to the principle of 'theorising from a position of empirical accuracy', assumes the importance of archival research and material evidence gathered around Beckett's artistic development.⁶ His 2006 work, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'*, undertakes the preliminaries for this approach, assessing unpublished notebooks and transcripts released by the Beckett International Foundation archive in order to analyse their utility in relation to key Beckettian paradoxes, with special emphasis on the author's relation to 'ignorance and impotence' and what Feldman calls his 'fidelity to failure'.⁷

Lois Oppenheim's 2000 work *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* takes a similar approach, drawing on Beckett's early critical writings and

³ Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman eds., *Beckett and Phenomenology* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁶ Matthew Feldman, *Falsifying Beckett: Essays on Archives, Philosophy, and Methodology in Beckett Studies* (Stuttgart: *ibidem* Press, 2015), p. 19.

⁷ Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of the Interwar Notes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 117.

examining these alongside Merleau-Ponty's works on painting in an effort to shed light on the author's approach to the relation between the body, the senses and the self. Acknowledging the debate over Beckett's place with regard to modernism and postmodernism as her starting point, Oppenheim aims to reposition Beckett in light of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'l'entrelacs-le chiasme', a kind of originary reversibility or reciprocity which underscores the relationship between language and the physical world, describing a continuous process of interpenetration between signification and the sensible, that is, the body as material object.⁸ Using this idea of 'le chiasme' the originary intertwining as an anchoring point, along with a number of other Merleau-Pontean themes such as *la chair* or the flesh, Oppenheim aims to show a complementarity of purpose between Beckett and Merleau-Ponty that resides in a mutual 'preoccupation with the visual as paradigm' of creativity.⁹ In doing so, she rethinks questions of meaning, agency and identity in Beckett's work as being 'modelled on the sensory perspective of the eye' or 'the overlapping of vision and bodily movement (where the body is both seer and seen)'.¹⁰

Ulrika Maude develops Oppenheim's thesis specifically in the second chapter of her monograph *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009), where she underlines the similarities between Beckett's views on vision and painting, as expressed in correspondence with his friend Thomas McGreevy, and Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the non-representational landscapes of Paul Cézanne. She uses this connection as the basis for her analysis of *Film* (1965), demonstrating how the Beckettian eye is enmeshed in and bound up with bodily deterioration, and how this undermines

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible: suivi de notes de travail par Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 307.

⁹ Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 142.

traditional models of disembodied spectatorship. Maude's study offers a response to what she sees as the habitual masking of embodiment under the guise of linguistic figures, or the 'curious mutation of the significance of the body into the problem of the body as signification' in Beckett criticism.¹¹ Distinguishing between differing phenomenological standpoints, she likens Beckett's approach to that of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty rather than Husserl and Sartre, calling for 'a reorientation from the transcendental to the phenomenology of everydayness'.¹² Demonstrating the ways in which, throughout his *oeuvre*, Beckett exploits the corporeal modes characteristic of the particular medium in which he is working: from the narrative voice of the fiction producing a series of textually invoked bodies, to the materiality of sound and voice coming out of the dark in radio, the visually mediated bodies of television and film or the live body in performance, she uncovers a pre-reflective realm within the author's work, which allows us to think of sense as incarnate, and to think of the sensible and the intelligible as fundamentally intertwined.

Although, as Maude acknowledges, there are fundamental differences between Merleau-Ponty's agency-oriented philosophy and Beckett's varying depictions of the embodied condition, the lens that the former's work offers continues to provide a reference point for scholars wishing to focus on the body as pivotal to the construction of identity, and to the process of making-sense in Beckett's work. In *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2010), Anna McMullan states that Beckett emphasizes, 'however ironically or self-deprecatingly, the labour of making', in the same way that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the 'labour' of perception

¹¹ Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 12.

and articulating.¹³ As Beckett's 'subjects struggle with the words available to tell their stories', she writes, 'his artistic practice increasingly focuses on a phenomenological scrutiny of the embodied process of articulation (a self, story or image) and the intercorporeal relations that this involves'.¹⁴ For Trish McTighe, it is the 'intouchness of the body and world' which Beckett's works enact that brings him into dialogue with Merleau-Ponty. Her recent monograph, *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2013) addresses the importance of the figure of touch specifically in the late works, arguing for the importance of physical contact in approaching not only the material but also the philosophical and ethical forms of Beckett's late works, in particular the notion of failure, the disruption of representation and the uncovering of the limits of linguistic communication. McTighe highlights an important point insofar as she acknowledges Beckett's tendency to stage bodies as material presences which often deny or problematise the possibility of their own materiality. As she sees it, Beckett's aesthetics of touch also implies rupture and separation, whereby the body conceived as flesh, although a site of contact and association, is also a site of discontinuity:

'Haptic', in Beckett's work, does not only indicate contact and connection, it also describes disruption of space, time, and bodies, imaged in the formal structures that surround them.¹⁵

¹³ Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Trish McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 8.

In other words, as McTighe sees it, the touch of flesh as manifested in Beckett's work, is a touch which also implies distance or an absence, not in the sense of the separation of distinct identities or properties such as mind and body, spirit and matter, but rather the acknowledgment of a gap which always already describes the relation between the touching and the touched, even as they enter into contact. Although McTighe draws out this gap with reference to post-phenomenological thinkers such as Nancy and Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty's assessment of touch remains a key reference point in her argument. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Toucher et se toucher (se toucher + touchant-touché). Ils ne coïncident pas dans le corps: le touchant n'est jamais exactement le touché. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'ils coïncident 'dans l'esprit' ou au niveau de la 'conscience'. Il faut quelque chose d'autre que le corps pour que la jonction se fasse: elle se fait dans l'intouchable.¹⁶

In what follows, I want to move away from this implicit reliance on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and more specifically on the notion of incarnation which I suggest underscores the images of inherence, reversibility and intermingling in his work.¹⁷

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible: suivi de notes de travail par Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 307-308.

¹⁷ Such images are particularly prominent in the *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (1945). See for example the chapter entitled 'Le corps comme expression et la parole' in which he uses the example of the fireplace to outline our encounter with things in the world via perception in terms of our identity with them: 'l'identité de la chose à travers l'expérience perceptive n'est qu'un autre aspect de l'identité du corps propre au cours des mouvements d'explorations, elle est donc de même sorte qu'elle: comme le schéma corporel, la cheminée est un système d'équivalences qui ne se fonde pas sur la reconnaissance de quelque loi, mais sur l'épreuve d'une présence corporelle.' (p. 216.) He then goes on to associate this description with the idea of the incarnate subject: 'Je m'engage avec mon corps parmi les choses, elles coexistent avec moi comme sujet incarné [...]'. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 216. However, an engagement with disjuncture also emerges early on in Merleau-Ponty's thought, indicating possible instances of overlap between his and Nancy's work. One such instance is Merleau-Ponty's description of the 'Phantom Limb' or 'membre fantôme' as in the example of 'le bras fantôme' as 'un ancien présent qui ne se décide pas à devenir passé.' (See *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, p. 101.) Here Merleau-Ponty

Approaching Nancy's philosophy through the lens of Derrida's reading in *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy enables me to emphasise on the one hand Nancy's indebtedness to the phenomenological tradition, in particular to Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of touch in *Le Visible et l'Invisible*, whilst at the same time demonstrating how he departs from this.

The above quote, cited by McTighe in her book, marks perhaps the moment of greatest proximity between Merleau-Ponty and Nancy, insofar as it outlines a relation of non-coincidence between seer and seen, touching and touched which correlates in many ways with Nancy's description of the relation between sense and matter.¹⁸ The last line in particular suggests a possible engagement with or approach to the untouchable and thus also the ineffable in Merleau-Ponty's thinking. With this in mind, one could argue that Nancy is situated at the outer edge or limit of the phenomenological tradition, ambiguously both belonging to and set apart from it. Derrida's ultimate irresolution in relation to Nancy's work is rooted in this instance of closeness to the phenomenological tradition, and specifically to Merleau-Ponty's work. As Derrida sees it, Merleau-Ponty reaffirms a certain *haptocentrism*, which, like Derrida's earlier description of *phonocentrism*, becomes a means to designate a metaphysics of presence. To break with such a metaphysics, he suggests, requires that we think of existence in terms of its heterogeneity, its multiplicity, its originary technical supplementarity insofar as this can be said to mediate our relation to the world and to others.¹⁹

uncovers two distinct and interdependent bodily layers, that of the 'corps habituel' or habit-body and the 'corps actuel' or present body. (p. 97) It is the incongruity between these two layers that makes the body in Merleau-Ponty a vehicle of non-coincidence.

¹⁸ See for example his theorization of touch as contact-in-separation in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: Essai sur la levée du corps* (Paris: Éditions Bayard, 2003).

¹⁹ As I will demonstrate later on in this introduction, this notion of the technical is fundamental to Derrida's reading of Nancy and is referred to by the latter variously as '*techné*', '*l'écotechnie*' or '*la création écotechnique des corps*.' See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 2000), pp. 77-78.

Recent performance histories evidence the incorporation of a wide range of different sources, media and methods in Beckettian performance, revealing a need to reconsider the vocabulary and theory surrounding his work. The strategies adopted by contemporary performance groups such as *Forced Entertainment*, *Goat Island* and *Elevator Repair Service*, which build on Beckett's concern with stagecraft and the workings of theatrical machinery, have in turn filtered back into more recent productions of his works. Groups such as Pan Pan Theatre, Mabou Mines and Company SJ, have worked directly with Beckett's texts in an attempt to relocate and re-contextualize his works within the contemporary political, social and historical landscape. Choosing specific works from the Beckett canon, they stage their reception in a variety of contexts and environments, focusing on the encounter between audience, actors and place and thus generating multiple interpretations.

The work of such companies builds on what Bonnie Marranca has called a process of 'deterritorialization' in the theatre, apparent in the work of companies such as The Wooster Group, where the incorporation of different technologies such as film, video or voice recording with methods such as painting, drawing, coding and writing 'changes the very nature of the way we think of art and authorship, composition and interpretation [...] highlight[ing] process - the artwork and the work of art', rather than narrative or psychology.²⁰ This approach, as Marranca puts it, is 'based on the cutting up, quoting, redistribution, and recontextualization of [an] archive of accumulated texts, images, and sounds.'²¹ The focus in other words is on 'texture', or, to use a Nancean term, *timbre*, 'rather than text'.²² Dramatic tension arises out of the juxtaposition of competing forms of media, live performance and mediated presence.

²⁰ Bonnie Marranca, 'The Wooster Group: A Dictionary of Ideas', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May, 2003), pp. 1-18., p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Body, text, image, sound and environment are pieced together in a manner that suggests new ways of looking, seeing and spectating.

A consideration of how Beckett's drama has been reconfigured in contemporary interdisciplinary performance and translated into different media,²³ raises questions around the relationship between the body and the text, the live and the mediatized, the recorded or the documented and the ephemeral, that are central to the argument of this thesis.²⁴ The piecing together of multiple sources and methods in recent performances calls into question one of the most common apprehensions that has come to be applied to Beckett's theatre, one that is embedded in those phenomenological readings referred to above, and usefully summarised by Paul Sheehan as 'the notion that the appearance of the live actor onstage automatically furnishes the performance with an immediate and unambiguous presence.'²⁵ Such a reading has its origins in the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, who, writing in response to early productions, comments on the lack of external coordinates such as props, distinctive setting and even plot in *Waiting for Godot* (1953), in other words, the *mise-en-scène* which normally provides the actors with a kind of framework or

²³ I am referring in particular to recent work by Sarah Jane Scaife and her Company SJ, which include the staging of *Act Without Words II* alongside *Rough for Theatre I* as part of the 2013 Dublin Fringe Festival. Scaife chose to set this double-bill in a disused yard adjacent to the Ulster bank offices on the banks of Dublin's Liffey river. These performances, along with an installation based on the collection of short prose pieces published in the mid-1970s, *Fizzles*, and another site-specific production made up of four works (*Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* and *Come and Go*), *The Women Speak*, comprise the project *Beckett in the City* (begun in 2009), a body of work that places Beckett's narratives and characters in conversation with the contemporary urban landscape, using the aesthetic tools of the body, sound, site, movement, architecture and projection to explore the relevance of his works today, to flesh out the issues that his work points to within contemporary society. Scaife sets out her intentions in an article entitled: 'Practice in Focus: Beckett in the City' *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, ed. by Trish McTighe and David Tucker (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 153-168.

²⁴ For useful discussions of mass media's influence on contemporary approaches to theatrical performance, see Phillip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2008) or Amy Pettersen Jensen, *Theatre in a Media Culture: Production, Performance and Perception Since 1970* (London and North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2007).

²⁵ Paul Sheehan, 'Beckett's Ghost Drama: Monitoring a Phenomenology of Sleep', *Beckett and Phenomenology*, Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman eds. (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 158-177, p. 158.

apparatus to support their interactions. Without this framework, as Robbe-Grillet suggests, we experience the unmitigated presence of the theatrical encounter, the actors equally as exposed and devoid of external indicators as the audience. We see them, as he puts it, ‘seuls en scène, debout, inutiles, sans avenir et passé, irrémédiablement présente’.²⁶ Robbe-Grillet deploys a vocabulary drawn from phenomenology when he states that Beckett’s theatre embodies the Heideggerean notion of *Dasein* or primordial being-there:

la condition de l’homme, dit Heidegger, c’est d’être là. Probablement est-ce le théâtre plus que tout autre mode de représentation du réel qui reproduit le plus naturellement cette situation. Le personnage de théâtre *est en scène*, c’est sa première qualité: il est *là*.²⁷

As Gontarski suggests, however, Robbe-Grillet’s reading does not sufficiently account for ‘the dramatic character’ who is not ‘on stage’ but nevertheless integral to the structure of the work.²⁸ In Gontarski’s terms, ‘Godot himself remains unembodied yet omnipresent, exercising a stranglehold on the other, embodied figures’.²⁹

Beckett’s occasional remarks about his plays appear to encourage such a reading, in so far as he points to their ‘extreme simplicity of dramatic situation’.³⁰

Michael Haerdter, Beckett’s directorial assistant at the 1967 Schiller-Theater *Endspiel*

²⁶ Alain Robbe-Grillet, ‘Samuel Beckett ou la présence sur la scène’, in *Pour un Nouveau Roman* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1963), pp. 121-142, p. 132.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁸ Gontarski, ‘The Body in the Body of Beckett’s Theatre’, p. 169.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Samuel Beckett in Ruby Cohn ed., *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 109.

(*Endgame*), recalls Beckett's statement that, 'Theater for me is first of all recreation from work on fiction. We are dealing with a given space and with people in that space. That is relaxing'.³¹ Comments such as this are often used to support claims about Beckett's turn to the theatre, as 'the expression of a longing for an art of visibility and tangibility',³² a break from the vast intellectual labour required for the writing of the Trilogy which Beckett described in a 1956 interview with Israel Schenker as – 'no "I", no "have", no "being", no nominative, no accusative, no verb'.³³

Yet, as scholars such as Gontarski have argued, there is much in Beckett's fascination with the theatre that plays against the so-called presence of the actor, having the audience question what it thinks it sees, offering figures that are not fully perceptible, like the pacing May of *Footfalls*, and Bam in *What Where*. As indicated in my first chapter, *Play* (1962) brings this ambiguity into the foreground, the three protagonists: man (M), wife (W1), and mistress (W2), each encased in an identical grey urn with heads protruding, their speech provoked by a harsh spotlight which suggests an invisible inquisitor. A key moment in this process occurs when W2 addresses the audience directly with the question: 'Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?'³⁴ As the situation described by W2 in the narrative, that of being looked at and listened to, and the situation of the performer (trapped in an urn, speaking to an audience under the conditions imposed by the spotlight) are brought together in near-identification, we paradoxically become aware of the gap that persists between the two, that is, the

³¹ Samuel Beckett, quoted in ed, S. E. Gontarski, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), p. xiii.

³² Steven Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2007), p. 129.

³³ Samuel Beckett in Interview with Israel Schenker, 'Moody Man of Letters', *New York Times*, Sunday (6 May 1956), Section 2, p. 3.

³⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 314.

actor and the character, the performance and the narrated fiction. We are thus reminded of the incommensurability that underscores the theatrical event, the insurmountable distance between a representation and the thing it wishes to communicate, a gap which nevertheless drives the action of the play.

I want to exploit this gap in revisiting Beckett's plays through the lens of these more recent performance histories in an attempt to rethink the relation between the body and the text, the live and the mediated. Taking Gontarski's statement as a starting point, I examine the fictional, filmic and radiophonic methods of elicitation which interrupt and dilute the 'present' of the stage presentation in Beckett's works, keeping the phenomenologically immediate and the virtually conjured in constant tension. As previously suggested, I explore these methods via the motif of puppetry, and in relation to 'the body in parts', a notion rooted in the post-phenomenological philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy.

In doing so I build upon the writings of theatre theorists such as Stanton B. Garner, Bert O. States and Herbert Blau, whose works contain substantial chapters on Beckett. Drawing mainly on Husserl, Bert O. States discusses Beckett's plays in terms of theatre phenomenology in *The Shape of Paradox: An Essay on Waiting for Godot* (1978), and *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (1985). States' concept of a 'bifocal' approach to performance analysis which negotiates between sensory, phenomenal experience and semiotic interpretation is particularly relevant to a theatre which, as said of *Not I*, should act upon the audience's nerves rather than the intellect, whilst at the same time provoking pages of critical reflection.³⁵ States describes his critical project as 'phenomenological in the

³⁵ See Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theatre* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 23.

sense that it focuses on the activity of *making itself* out of its essential materials: speech, sound, movement, scenery, text, etc'.³⁶ Through an analysis which includes examples from Shakespeare, nineteenth-century realism and expressionism, he underlines the 'unique ontological confusion' of the theatrical medium, which he suggests relies on the continual coexistence of the illusory or the mimetic and the 'actual', that is, the fact of 'having something before one's vision'.³⁷

Stanton B. Garner equally foregrounds this complexity or doubleness of the theatre, with its layering of presence and illusion, presentation and representation, the actual and the virtual. As he puts it:

Beckett's is a performance image with conflicting perceptual inclinations, caught between a theatre of human figures in personalized settings and the depersonalizing outlines of abstract shape.³⁸

Garner foregrounds an important aspect of Beckett's theatre, namely the progressive de-centering of the theatrical image which occurs in particular in the late works, and which, he says, 'forces the elements of visual field into a [...] dynamic relationship'.³⁹ As Garner sees it, Beckett's late performance images are administered by a logic of the 'almost' and 'not quite'; vulnerable to intrusion, refraction and modification from the outside, 'they inhabit the unstable region of the "slightly off"'.⁴⁰ The visual field here is volatile and insecure:

³⁶ Bert. O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of the Theatre* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), p. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 47, 46.

³⁸ Stanton B. Garner, 'Visual Field in Beckett's Late Plays', *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Winter 1987-1988), pp. 349-373, p. 352.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

figures poised between character and object, switching back and forth like the twin images of an optical illusion; illumination caught between light and darkness; color warped into the black-and-white continuum; movement and depth subordinated to the two-dimensional fixity of the frontal plane; the elements of that plane charged with the tensions of imbalance and off-centre.⁴¹

This shift in late Beckett towards the tension of the ‘slightly off’ is paralleled in the relationship between visual image and verbal text. As they abandon the unities of time and space which traditionally provide for continuity between an actor’s theatrical presence and a character’s discourse, Beckett’s late plays problematize any straightforward relationship between language and the performance field.

Increasingly the linguistic components of the plays – monologue, narration, description – are displaced, gesturing only marginally towards the actual scene of performance. As S. E. Gontarski observes, ‘the dislocation between narrative and stage image’ in Beckett’s late works ‘creates a permanently unresolved and shifting set of relationships’.⁴² The discrepancies between narrative and visual field contribute additional instability to the performance image and heighten its perceptual tensions of ‘almost’ and ‘not quite’.⁴³

While Garner acknowledges the ‘radical complications of corporeal self-presence’ inherent in Beckett’s staging of the body, complications which increase and multiply throughout his oeuvre, Beckett’s theatre remains for him a ‘theatre of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² S. E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett’s Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 175.

⁴³ Stanton B. Garner, ‘Visual Field in Beckett’s Late Plays’, p. 370.

perception, guided by the eye and its efforts to see'.⁴⁴ The indeterminacies and discontinuities which he discerns in Beckett's 'theatre of perception', occur against a background of pre-reflective continuity, for perception, as he puts it, 'is also characterized by a presubjective level of involvement with the world of things, an entanglement with the "nonself" that subjectivity supposes and on which it is contingent'.⁴⁵

This analysis is equally true of Garner's thesis in *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* in which he introduces the relevance of contemporary phenomenology, in particular Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body, to the study of Beckett's drama:

To enter the experiential field of the lived body as this has been described and elaborated by contemporary phenomenology is [...] to discover a landscape whose contours powerfully resemble those of Beckett's theatre. Like its philosophical analogues, the body in Beckett's drama constitutes a field that is simultaneously Other and *troué*, in which any presence-to-itself is doubly foreclosed by principles of estrangement and absence (not I, not here) that lie at the heart of embodiment.⁴⁶

According to Garner, Beckett's presentation of the body represents a radicalization or 'deepening' of the paradox that underscores Merleau-Ponty's thinking of embodied agency, 'a drawing out of what one might think of as the deconstructive possibilities

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁴⁵ Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

inherent in the phenomenological stance itself”.⁴⁷ Approaching this ‘deepening’ through the lens of Beckett’s interest both in Kleist’s analysis of the puppet theatre in ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ and Geulincx’s work on the nature of causality and human experience will enable me to draw out these deconstructive implications, and furthermore, with reference to Derrida’s analysis of the haptic in *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, address the play of Beckett’s theatre from the point of view of the disruption, rupture and the occlusion of presence. To clarify this connection further, Beckett’s theatre sets up multiple layers of perception and communication, complicating the status of the theatrical image through such techniques as magnification, blurring, splitting and duplication. This is coupled with an investigation into what one might call, to recycle Garner’s phrase, the ‘split mode-of-presence’ typical of the actor-performer himself, whose relationship to the character-narrative is equally subject to continual modification or play, infiltration and division from within.⁴⁸

As both James Knowlson and Anthony Uhlmann have argued, Beckett showed a particular regard for Kleist’s essay ‘Über das Marionettentheater’ (‘On the Marionette Theatre’), signalling his intention to incorporate some of Kleist’s insights into his own theatre and acting practice.⁴⁹ According to Uhlmann, Beckett visited Kleist’s grave in 1969, and was able to recite parts of Kleist’s play *Der Prinz von Homburg* (*The Prince of Homburg*). Both Knowlson and Uhlmann write about how Beckett quoted Kleist’s ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ during rehearsals for the 1971 production of *Happy Days* at the Schiller Theater, Berlin, and then again in 1975, when assisting in the production of the television play *Ghost Trio*. According to both

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁹ See Anthony Uhlmann, ‘Staging Plays’, *Samuel Beckett in Context*, Anthony Uhlmann ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 173-19, p. 176.

writers, Beckett had extensive conversations with the principle actors of these works, highlighting the importance of Kleist's remarks on movement and gravity, arguing that 'precision and economy would produce the maximum of grace'.⁵⁰ In speaking to Ronald Pickup for example, during rehearsals for *Ghost Trio*, Beckett emphasised the last part of the essay concerning the fencing bear. For in Kleist's terms, the latter 'represents, symbolically, the creature without awareness of self', and which, as a result, possesses the ability to 'respond naturally and unselfconsciously', with more grace, symmetry, harmony and intuition than the self-conscious human might.⁵¹ As Uhlmann goes on to suggest, Beckett's emphasis on 'precision' and 'economy' of movement, coupled with a lack of self-consciousness in the performer, has had profound effects on the production of meaning in his works.⁵² It is part of a broader move away from psychology or method acting, and indicates Beckett's break with a Stanislavskian approach to performance practice. While the Stanislavskian method actor 'crave[s] "motivation"', in Uhlmann's terms, that is, he needs to be able to interpret the character's actions, 'to make sense' of them, in order to portray them accurately, Beckett's actor is rehearsed in order to perform a particular gesture at a particular moment, to modify the rhythm, pace, pitch and volume of his voice in order to produce a particular effect, to relinquish control, in other words, to the director's instructions.⁵³

In Kleist's essay, as I will show, this relationship between actor and character can be seen to be articulated in terms of the connection or disconnection between movement and thought. In Terence Cave's terms, 'the relationship between the reflective and the unreflective modes of cognition is dramatised by the intervention of

⁵⁰ See James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 584.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 632-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 584.

⁵³ Uhlmann, 'Staging Plays', p. 176.

the puppet figure as a constructed affordance (an instrument of the possibilities of extended cognition).⁵⁴ This leads to a number of questions, all of which are relevant to my analysis: what is the relationship between thought, in this case the intentions of the puppeteer or ‘mover’, and the actions performed by the puppet? Or as Cave puts it, ‘who is dancing, the puppeteer or the puppet?’⁵⁵ Furthermore, one might ask, where does the movement originate? Does it occur within or outside the puppet itself? How does this predicament, the consortium of puppet, puppeteer and movement, suggest new ways of understanding the relationship between the body and thought, the animate and the inanimate, the human individual and what, sticking to a more traditional vocabulary one might call inorganic matter? Such questions are implicit within the ‘occasionalist’ philosophy of Geulincx, which considers humanity’s impotence, ignorance or in David Tucker’s terms, man’s ‘total lack of agency’⁵⁶ as the basis for an ethics or a set of moral principles, which in turn suggests the omnipresence of God, whose powers, by contrast are limitless:

Nothing ever happens to me, properly speaking, because I will it, but rather because the true Mover wills what I will, just as He sometimes does not will what I will [...] And here we reach the estuary of the moral river, where the coastline broadens out into Ethics: for it follows from what I have said, that when it is not our human destiny to have power to do anything, neither should we will anything. And because it involves the whole of morality, this principle is the first, the best, and the broadest foundation of Ethics, and the one most

⁵⁴ Terence Cave, ‘Dancing with Marionettes: Kleist and Cognition’ *German Life and Letters* 70:4, October 2017, pp. 533-543, p. 536.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ For an in-depth discussion of Beckett’s relationship with, debt to and treatment of Geulincx’s philosophy throughout his life, see David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing ‘a Literary Fantasia’* (London: Continuum, 2012). p. 16.

easily known to us by the light of nature: *Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will* [*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*].⁵⁷

As Tucker has shown, this fundamental principle of Geulincx' *Ethics* was cited by Beckett on various occasions in written correspondence.⁵⁸ In addition to this, Beckett's 'Philosophy Notes' demonstrate what Tucker refers to as a 'nuanced understanding' of Geulincx's entire system and in particular the axiom '*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*' to which the author repeatedly refers.⁵⁹ The inevitability of man's ineffectiveness in relation to the limitless powers of the 'Mover', the divine spirit constitutes for Beckett a valid ethical principle and a route into action rather than a prerequisite for withdrawal or retraction from the outside world into the mind.

My focus on puppetry, and more specifically on the marionette, serves then as a way to rethink not only the status of the body in Beckett's plays, but also the relationship between the body and mind, the body and agency. In a manner that recalls Derrida's description of the tension between play and presence, the figure of the puppet can be seen to disrupt bodily presence through principles of difference, repetition and doubling, through the extension and partitioning of theatrical space, and the dispersal of centres or points of identification.⁶⁰ While on the one hand, it foregrounds the 'concreteness' or the 'thereness' of the performing body, a physical object in space, it simultaneously and repeatedly subverts it, playing against the idea

⁵⁷ Arnold Geulincx, *Metaphysics*, translated by Martin Wilson (Wisbech: Christoffel Press, 1999), p. 44, as cited in Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx*, pp. 6-41.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ I am referring specifically to what Derrida calls the 'tension [...] du jeu avec la présence', where play or 'le jeu est toujours jeu d'absence et de présence', and 'la présence d'un élément est toujours une référence signifiante et substitutive inscrite dans un système de différences et le mouvement d'une chaîne.' See Jacques Derrida, 'La Structure, le signe, et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines', *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967) pp. 409-428, p. 426.

of the innate, individual body.⁶¹ This recalls Gontarski's description of the body in Beckett as 'both figure [and] figment, visible [and] invisible, on [and] off stage, corporeal [and] incorporeal, and in the later teleplays, real [and] electronic',⁶² or McMullan's assessment of 'embodiment in Beckett's dramaturgy' as 'no naïve return to the "authentic" or "natural"'.⁶³ In McMullan's terms, the body in Beckett is problematic and multifaceted:

Beckett's work insists on the specifics of a particular historical, embodied existence, while refusing the conventions of narrative or corporeal coherence that usually define the representation of an individual life and body.⁶⁴

With this refusal of the 'individual', that is to say of the proper, integrated body, comes the disruption of traditional notions of character. In Beckett's work, as I will argue throughout, character does not exist as a unifying principle or essence, that is to say, in a clear one-to-one relation with the actor. Rather it emerges across a range of elements, both animate and inanimate, highlighting the instability of selfhood without however abolishing this altogether.

Recent years have seen a surge in the number of theories and conversations surrounding the medium of puppetry. In order to examine the ways in which Beckett's understanding of the body resonates with such conversations, it is useful to recall Elinor Fuchs's notion of the postmodern theatre, as one in which 'the human figure is no longer the single, perspectival "point" of stage performance.'⁶⁵ This idea

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

⁶² Gontarski, 'The Body in the Body of Beckett's Theatre', p. 169.

⁶³ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 12.

has been developed by theorists such as Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrice Pavis, who both argue that character, and by extension subjectivity, has become ‘polymorphous and difficult to pin down’ in postmodern theatre.⁶⁶ While I hesitate to situate Beckett’s theatre within an exclusively postmodern arena, there is nevertheless much in his body of work which enables what one might call a postmodern approach to subjectivity, meaning and representation. In Lois Oppenheim’s terms, ‘Beckett continually throws into question the viability of a pure subjectivity, exposing consciousness as an entity in and of itself while simultaneously renouncing it through the repeated dissolution of the ego.’⁶⁷ In short, the artificiality or constructedness of the process of self-articulation is continually foregrounded in Beckett’s work through an engagement with the conditions of performance, and an uncovering of the necessary and formative division between actor and character.⁶⁸ The puppet theatre equally foregrounds these questions, highlighting in particular, the ‘split between the performer and the character.’⁶⁹ While the spectator of a puppet show may be focused primarily on the body of the puppet, which evokes the experience of a particular character, the latter necessarily comprises two bodies: ‘the actual body of the puppeteer and the apparent body of the puppet.’⁷⁰ In separating ‘the actor from the character’ it includes ‘both a live performer (the puppeteer) and a conventionalized one (the puppet)’ in the construction of identity on stage.⁷¹ As Dawn Tracey Brandes puts it, to reinforce a point made earlier, ‘the division of character across so many

⁶⁶ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 52.

⁶⁷ Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett’s Dialogue with Art*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ For a detailed discussion of Beckett’s position with regard to Modernism/Postmodernism see Oppenheim, *The Painted Word*, pp. 13-28.

⁶⁹ As quoted in Paul Piris, ‘The Co-Presence and Ontological Ambiguity of the Puppet’, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, pp. 30-42., p. 31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Dassia N. Posner, ‘Contemporary Investigations and Hybridizations’, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 225-227, p. 225.

elements,' in puppet theatre, 'has the potential to challenge the illusion of character as something that is unified and coherent, and yet the subject or character is not done away with entirely in this model.'⁷² It simply exists in a different dimension, determined by its ties to what it is not.⁷³

What comes to the fore both in the most recent discussions of Beckett's work and in the conversations surrounding the medium of puppetry is the attempt first to displace and then to reposition subjectivity outside the boundaries of the individual, that is to say, beyond the parameters of the independent, self-regulating body. As Samuel Weber puts it, the puppet does not conform to 'modern conception[s] of the autonomous individual' primarily because it has no 'inside', no 'one soul.'⁷⁴ The interior space known as the subject or self, no longer functions as a foundation within puppetry, but is exteriorized, and emerges across a range of objects and materials, encompassing actors, puppeteers, puppets and other scenic elements. The puppet, furthermore, 'is defined, not by its resemblance to the puppeteer, but by the threads that tie it to and remove it from the source of its movement'.⁷⁵ In this way, it lays bare the mechanisms that underscore the materialization of the theatrical event, the irreducible gap between performer and character, reality and fiction. Puppets, Weber argues, do not 'take place' or '*embody*' anything like a soul or an incarnate subjectivity.⁷⁶ Rather they 'repeat, respond, react', never accomplishing self-presence.

⁷² Dawn Tracey Brandes, "A Total Spectacle but a Divided One" Redefining Character in Handspring Puppet Company's *Or You Could Kiss Me*, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, pp. 245- 254, p. 249.

⁷³ Samuel Weber, 'Being...and eXistenZ' Some Preliminary Considerations on Theatricality in Film', *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), pp. 313-325, p. 320.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 319

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

These properties of the puppet can be used to further elucidate Beckett's interest both in Kleist's crucial essay 'On the Marionette Theatre', and in what he called the 'fascinating guignol world' of Arnold Geulincx.⁷⁷ Both sources have been cited by Beckett as useful indicators of his intentions in the theatre, and, as suggested previously, can be used to suggest new ways of thinking about movement, character, interiority and the repositioning of agency in his plays. As I hope to demonstrate with reference to these sources, Beckett's work articulates a thinking of the body that exceeds the self-enclosed, individual subject, moving towards an understanding of agency as emerging across a range of heterogeneous phenomena outside or in excess of the finite human body. This thinking, as I suggest, corresponds in significant ways to Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of the *corpus*, and of the subject as divided or shared across multiple agencies which reveal the essential technical impermanence of the world and therefore interrupt any stable notion of the incarnate self. In keeping with this standpoint, it does not conform to the Christian doctrine of spirit made flesh nor does it allow for a Cartesian separation of mind as thinking being or, *res cogitans* from body as extended matter or substance (*res extensa*). Rather it articulates a version of what I am calling 'the body in parts', a body that is divided, exposed, spaced out and separated from itself.

Nancy's thinking of the body, complex and multifaceted as it is, has attracted much scholarly attention across a range of different disciplines. Perhaps the most detailed and comprehensive engagement with his thought, in particular that of touch, is Jacques Derrida's aforementioned *Le Toucher*, Jean Luc Nancy, a work which examines Nancy's position within a broad tradition of European philosophy, thus

⁷⁷ Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider, 15 October 1956. Cited in Maurice Harmon, ed., *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, MA.: Garvard University Press, 1998), p. 12.

offering indirect considerations of other key thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Husserl. While Derrida emphasizes the ways in which Nancy departs from the phenomenological tradition, he simultaneously acknowledges the latter's indebtedness to it, placing him in dialogue with the aforementioned philosophers. More recent studies include Ian James' *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* and Christopher Watkin's book *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy* to which I refer on occasion throughout this study. James makes a significant point in the introduction of his book when he writes that: Nancy's philosophical project 'unfolds as a decision to respond to the demand imposed by the multiple and the fragmentary'.⁷⁸ Most evidently, Nancy's thinking of the 'singular-plural,' as James proposes, turns steadfastly around 'the demand imposed by a thinking of being in which any possibility of unity and identity is withdrawn, and where the multiple demands to be thought without reference to any overarching unity or totality'.⁷⁹ By focusing on the theme of puppetry, and by mobilising the notion of the 'body in parts', I hope to show that this demand of and for a fragmentary thought, where the multiple origin of sense exceeds any one particular meaning, also traverses Beckett's writing, making ethical demands on the spectator, and determining our attitude to broader questions of subjectivity and representation.

Watkin's aim, though he draws on a range of Nancean terms in order to communicate his position, is to move beyond those readings of Nancy's work that focus purely on the question of the political or 'community'.⁸⁰ With this in mind he

⁷⁸ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ See Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction? The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 137.

mobilises two principle themes or motifs in Nancy's work, namely sense or 'sens',⁸¹ and plurality, dedicating a chapter of his book to each in turn. Like James he suggests that what is at stake in Nancy's rethinking of existence, what sets him apart as a thinker both from the phenomenological tradition and from Derrida's line of deconstruction, is his particular approach to and handling of the relationship between 'coherence and fragmentation'.⁸² This approach, as Watkin suggests, is encapsulated in a number of key terms to which Nancy consistently returns, namely *Mitsein*, (a term derived from Heidegger), *corpus* and the 'singular plural'.⁸³ Through these denominations, as Watkin suggests, Nancy is able to subvert the residues of Christian dogma that, in his view, underscore the metaphysical tradition via the myth of incarnation, to deconstruct the notion of spirit or word made flesh and to reconfigure the relationship between figure and ground, between the body and space. In what follows, I clarify this point further with reference to Nancy's own *Être singulier pluriel* (1996).

Borrowing a vocabulary derived from Heidegger, Nancy characterises his own project in terms of a rewriting or re-crafting of the ontological foundations of thought: 'il faut refaire l'ontologie fondamentale [...] *à partir du singulier pluriel* des origines, c'est-à-dire à partir de *l'être-avec*'.⁸⁴ Summoning Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* or being-there as originary or preceding existence in all its various forms, Nancy proposes to think the *Mit-* of *Mitsein*, the 'with' of being-with, as co-equal with *Dasein*.⁸⁵ In other words, 'to be there' in Nancy's view is to be always already in

⁸¹ See for example, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Sens du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 1993)

⁸² Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, p. 159.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 45.

⁸⁵ Heidegger articulates the nature of being in terms of 'Dasein' in his 1927 work *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*]. It is here that he describes the structure of *Dasein* as containing within itself 'the determination of a pre-ontological understanding of being' and furthermore 'the ontic-ontological condition of the possibilities of all ontologies.' [Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University Press, 1993), p. 12] The structure of *Dasein* is, in short,

relation to others and to being itself. Indeed to 'be' requires that I have something to be 'in-common' with, share or to differentiate myself from. As Nancy puts it, 'l'être, absolument, est être-avec, voilà ce qu'il nous faut penser'.⁸⁶ Furthermore, he writes that 'aucun [...] n'a radicalement thématiqué l'avec comme le trait essentiel de l'être et comme sa propre essence singulière plurielle'.⁸⁷ It is in this way that Nancy's ontology is fundamentally one of sharing, of exposure and of the in-common, the *with* establishing 'le régime propre de la pluralité des origines en tant qu'elles s'originent, non pas les unes des autres, ni les unes pour les autres, mais les unes en vue des autres ou à l'égard des autres'.⁸⁸ What is at stake here, then, is not merely the critique of an epistemological hierarchy, but rather, as Watkin puts it, Nancy's project is an 'attempt to think the essence of being [as] co-essence', away from the notions of substance, continuity and fusion implicit in Heidegger's model and carried forward by Merleau-Ponty among others.⁸⁹ This in turn constitutes a radical rethinking of the distinctions between the individual and the collective, the singular and the multiple, a shift which will become significant in the course of my analysis of Beckett's work.

Another facet of Nancy's thought that will play an important role in what follows is the idea of *techné*, *l'écotechnie* or what is sometimes called in English technicity. It is this aspect which Derrida isolates in *Le Toucher* as key to an understanding of the way in which Nancy goes beyond phenomenology, inaugurating

constitutive and contains within itself the structure of all relations between self and self, self and others, self and world. It is in chapter four of *Being and Time*, that Heidegger introduces the concept of *Mitsein* or *Mitdasein* which emerges as a particular (and as Nancy sees it, secondary) facet or characteristic of *Dasein* in its primordial status as being-in-the-world. [p. 111]. Heidegger uses the term *Mitsein* to disclose the existential structure of *Dasein* as being *for-the-sake-of-others*, that is to say, as disclosing significance or the meaningfulness of the world in and through our relations with others. [p. 120]. This, in turn, paves the way for Nancy's argument, and in particular his thinking of the singular-plural.

⁸⁶ Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, p. 83-84.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁸⁹ Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, p. 178.

a thinking that acknowledges dislocation, exteriority and exposure rather than simultaneity, reversibility, intertwining or intentionality as central to an understanding of the relation between body and world, discourse and matter. This is how Derrida summarises Nancy's position in *Le Toucher*:

on reconnaît une insistance croissante sur l'inadéquation à soi, sur la non-coïncidence, sur la déhiscence, la fission, l'interruption, l'inachèvement, et la béance du corps visible, le hiatus, l'éclipse, l'inaccessibilité de cette plénitude ou de cette réversibilité, de cette pure réflexité sensible qui reste toujours *imminente*.⁹⁰

For Derrida, then, *techné* is something like an irreducible disturbance or dislocatory impulse at the heart of being which simultaneously undercuts any notion of essence such as 'la chair' or the flesh and allows for a reconfiguration of the 'corps propre', the onto-theological foundations of the body proper.⁹¹ Through principles of technological substitution, prosthetics or transplantation for example, it opens a gap and creates a space of non-contact at the heart of contact. He quotes the following passage from Nancy's *Corpus* in order to clarify this point:

le corps est toujours au pluriel -, alors le corps est la matière plastique de l'espace sans forme et sans Idée. Il est la plasticité même de l'expansion, de l'extension selon laquelle ont lieu les existences. L'image qu'il est ainsi n'a pas rapport avec l'idée, ni en général avec « une présentation » visible (et/ou

⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 2000), p. 239.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

intelligible) *de* quoi que ce soit. Le corps n'est pas image-*de*. Mais il est *venue en présence*, à la manière de l'image qui vient à l'écran de la télévision, du cinéma, venant *de* nul fond de l'écran, étant l'espace de cet écran, existant en tant que son étendue – exposant, étalant cette aréalité, non pas comme une idée donnée à ma vision de sujet ponctuel (encore moins comme un mystère), mais à *même* mes yeux (mon corps), comme leur aréalité, eux-mêmes venant à cette venue, espacés, espaçant, eux-mêmes écran, et moins « vision » que *video*. (Non « video » = « je vois », mais *la video* comme un nom générique pour la *techné* de la venue à la présence. La *techné* : la « technique », l'« art », la « modalisation », la « création ».)⁹²

The example of the video or television screen here demonstrates how Nancy is trying to think our relation to existence, to sense and to the world as somehow always already integrated in and mediated by technology. As James suggests, the word *techné* in Nancy, alongside *l'écotechnie*, refers first and foremost to 'the world of technical apparatus or of tools', and more broadly 'to scientific and technical discovery'.⁹³ It is, for Nancy, a way of undercutting a calculative system based on linear development and the attainment of final goals, substituting these for what he calls: 'différences locales, bifurcations nombreuses.'⁹⁴ The body that comes into existence via its various technologies, is a body that is never fully 'there' or 'finished', but rather always already fragmented, coming (and going), on the threshold or limit between appearance and disappearance.

⁹² Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 57.

⁹³ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 117.

⁹⁴ Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 78.

This technical articulation, extension and spreading out of the body or existence, what one might call, its originary artificiality, can be approached from a number of different angles. In what follows I explore this first and foremost through an interrogation of the motives, devices, apparatus, in short, the mechanics of the theatrical event, an explicit concern for Beckett throughout his dramatic career. As previously suggested, certain critics have already touched on this notion insofar as they have sought to emphasise the metatheatrical or self-reflexive dimension of his work, demonstrating how the progressive collapse of the representational contributes to a re-conceptualisation of the status of the subject as fundamentally dislocated, disconnected or at odds with its environment, hinting at its inability to achieve specific goals within its surroundings. Daniel Albright, for example, suggests that Beckett's method is to 'foreground the medium, to thrust it in the spectator's face, by showing its inadequacy, its refusal to be wrenched to any artistic purpose'.⁹⁵ The late works in particular reflect what Albright refers to as 'an art of non-representation', an art of 'estrangement' in which the failure of representation is continually played out in the break-down of those modes and methods which the characters use to tell their stories.⁹⁶ Sara Jane Bailes extends this claim by highlighting Beckett's 'ability to perceive the productive tensions that arise through the ambition of representation and the perceived failure of that ambition', which, she suggests are perceptible in multiple and various configurations throughout his literary and dramatic oeuvre.⁹⁷ Bailes sees 'failure as a category or shape of thought', dynamically expressed in Beckett's works

⁹⁵ Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island and Elevator Repair Service* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 29.

as ‘a mode of sensible embodied doing; [...] the staging of (in)action’, rather than its objective description.⁹⁸

This idea of failure as a ‘category or shape’ which pervades the very essence of the form of Beckett’s theatrical works is essential to the particular understanding of agency, mediated via the aesthetics of puppetry, that I wish to postulate here. To acknowledge the Beckettian theatrical subject as somehow fundamentally incapacitated, a ‘non-knower’ or a ‘non-can-er’ to use Knowlson’s phraseology, helps to unground or extricate that subject from a tradition which privileges interiority, introspection and the logic of cause and effect, repositioning the origins of movement outside or in excess of the individual body, and advocating the relinquishment of a fully integrated relation between actor and character. It is in detailing the sixth of seven ‘ethical obligations’ for instance, that Geulincx describes this kind of relinquishment in terms of ‘drunkenness’ or a ‘loss of control’, proposing this to be the ideal state for uncovering and testing the essence of the ‘ethical self’.⁹⁹ Beckett’s particular regard for Geulincx’s philosophy, as well as his various comments about Kleist’s ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ over the years that he directed his own plays serve here to complicate the notion of a self-affirming, agency-oriented relationship between the body and movement, the body and reflection which persists, as I have suggested, in those aforementioned phenomenological readings of his works. By taking the already always split relation between puppet and puppeteer, the actor and the ‘mover’ as a starting point, I introduce a first and decisive dislocation with this approach, mobilising what Nancy refers to as the constitutive ‘with’ of existence and thus radically rethinking the relations between the individual and the collective, the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁹ David Tucker ed., *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing ‘a literary fantasia’* (London: Continuum 2013), p. 21.

singular and the multiple. Before moving on to discuss this predicament in four consecutive chapters, each of which groups together three short plays via a focus on a specific body part, I am going to look at two of Beckett's earlier works through the perspective of puppetry. This will help to set up the key questions and concerns, both in relation to the theatrical and the theoretical, which will then be developed in subsequent chapters.

Introduction: Part 2

The Puppet Perspective: A Preliminary Reading of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*

While Beckett's plays are often divided into two phases corresponding in many cases to two distinct styles, my aim in focusing on the motif of puppetry is to subvert this distinction and to uncover certain tendencies in the so-called early works which foreshadow the 'late style'. Courtney Massie has written about *Endgame* in this guise. In an essay which calls attention to Beckett's engagement with sound in this play, she establishes 'musicality as a foundational vehicle' for the author's 'scepticism of discursive language' throughout his career.¹ Establishing points of comparison between *Endgame* and *Play*, the work that is often associated with a shift in Beckett's style, Massie shows how Beckett uses repetition and verbal patterning in order to prioritize 'language's non-semantic elements', allowing meaning to become subordinate to form.² While Massie's focus remains the verbal or the spoken, she argues that the prioritization of 'non-semantic elements [...] magnifies the tension between the failure of language and its ultimate inescapability', my intention is to focus on the patterns of movement in the play, and in particular, the way that Beckett reconfigures theatrical space in order both to resist mimicry and refuse psychological interpretation.³ Attending to what I call 'the body in parts' in both *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, via the motif of puppetry, will therefore further complicate any supposed separation between the early and late plays, illuminating the authors ongoing interest, not only in foregrounding the limits of linguistic meaning, but also

¹ Courtney Massie, "'Something is taking its course': *Endgame*'s Frustrated Musicality and the Evolution of Beckett's late Dramatic Style', *Modern Drama* 61:1 (Spring 2018), pp. 41-58, p. 43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

in recognizing the theatre as a place of repetition and dislocation, splitting and multiplication, a place rooted in the spatiality of a divided, heterogeneous body, and in the possibilities and limitations that this offers.

Waiting for Godot (1952)

Waiting for Godot, translated from French in 1953, was first performed in England in 1955. The first version of the play, *En Attendant Godot*, had been rapidly written between October 1948 and January 1949, the first production taking place under the direction of Roger Blin in January 1953. Having attended rehearsals for Blin's first production in the final months of 1952, Beckett went on to advise him for a further production in Paris in 1961. In 1964, he took part in rehearsals for Anthony Page's Royal Court production, and subsequently assisted Deryk Mendel to stage the play in German with the Schiller-Theater company the following year.⁴ It is perhaps these early experiences of co-directing that led Beckett, when it came to directing his own version of *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller-Theater Berlin in 1975, to make substantial changes to the script. He made these changes, primarily in two copies of the 1960 Suhrkamp Verlag, where he developed and altered many of the stage directions and edited some parts of the dialogue. The Suhrkamp texts have subsequently been incorporated into two directorial notebooks which in turn have provided the basis for a revised English text. This revised text, compiled from notes taken by Beckett during rehearsals for *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin, March 1975, is the one that I refer to here.

⁴ Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot*, Volume 1 (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p. xi.

The setting of *Godot* is evoked through the stage directions: ‘*a country road. A tree. [A stone] Evening*’.⁵ There is nothing in the text to indicate how these features should appear, and it is clear from Beckett’s involvement in the Schiller Theater production that he wanted the location to remain as ‘unspecific’ as possible, the bareness of the stage being the priority.⁶ This lack of scenery, that McMullan refers to as a lack of ‘spatial and temporal coordinates’, is important for a number of reasons. It is, as I hope to demonstrate, the first of a number of techniques Beckett uses in order to defer narrative content, and foreground, in its place, the movements of the actor’s body. Vladimir and Estragon are bound by their inability to move from the particular spot assigned for their meeting with Godot. This inability to move derives in part from their uncertainty about the exact time and place of the meeting. Godot, as Gontarski has suggested, remains ‘unembodied, yet omnipresent’, exercising a ‘stranglehold’ over the two principle protagonists, who remain both ignorant of his whereabouts and impotent in relation to their own destinies.⁷ They are defined, in other words, in terms of their lack of agency, at odds with causality and the logical sequencing of events. ‘Waiting’, in this context, is not merely the subject of the play, represented or illustrated through the actions of characters on stage. Rather it is a kind of driving force for the action, manifested both at a fictional and a concrete level, in the rhythmical movements of bodies on stage. The tramps not only wait insofar as they delay each other’s actions, hold each other up and consistently postpone their simultaneous departure. ‘Waiting’ also provides the stimulus for all their movements and relationships, continually willing them into action in the absence of coherent law

⁵ Samuel Beckett in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. 9.

⁶ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, p. 32.

⁷ S.E. Gontarski, ‘The Body in the Body of Beckett’s Theatre’, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui*, Vol. II (2001, pp. 169-177, p. 169.

or logical explanations. This is the same for the audience, who lack any sense of progression towards an end or resolution and are thus held in a state of perpetual uncertainty.

My intention in focusing on the patterns and sequences of movement in this play is to suggest that there is something in the motion of the bodies on stage, often banal and clumsy, yet always meticulously choreographed, that resembles the peculiar behaviour of the puppet or the marionette. This has to do with limitation, but also, more pivotally, with a repositioning of the origin of a movement, that is to say, its source. Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' stages an imaginary dialogue between two men in a park on a winter's evening in 1801. The discussion that takes place between the narrator and Herr. C, the recently assigned lead dancer at the Berlin Opera, can be read as an attempt to pinpoint this source, the marionette's curious and other-worldly grace, outside the individual, self-enclosed and therefore self-conscious human subject. Through a series of anecdotes carefully chosen in order to demonstrate the particular power of the marionette, Kleist develops a kind of vocabulary of puppet motion. The peculiar 'grace ('Grazie', 'Anmut')' of the puppet, as Hilda Brown argues, 'is anatomized [...] as the product of forces interacting upon a body in movement', as Herr C. sketches out the 'physical principles' which govern the marionette's movements: the significance of the centre of gravity, the need for the puppeteer to understand the laws of gravity, as well as knowing the exact gestures he must undertake in order to trigger the production of certain geometrical figures and curves.⁸ The word that Kleist uses in order to describe this sense on the part of the puppeteer is 'Empfindung'.⁹ This, as Terence Cave has argued, is not to be translated

⁸ Hilda Meldrium Brown, *Heinrich Von Kleist: The Ambiguity of Art and the Necessity of Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 83.

⁹ Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Vol. 3. ed. Klaus Müller-Salget (Frankfurt a. M: 1991-7), pp. 555-63, p. 557.

as ‘feeling’ in the sense of an emotion or sensation, but rather suggests a kind of intelligence, awareness or sensitivity on the part of the puppeteer, closer to the French word *sensibilité*. In Kleist’s terms, it stops the movement of the puppet from becoming pure mechanical reproduction.¹⁰

Each of the examples that make up Kleist’s essay, the young man’s fall from innocence as he becomes aware of his own image in the mirror, the bear who is able to conquer even the most accomplished fencer because of his unaffected instinct, build on this initial explanation of the marionette’s unpremeditated grace. As Brown puts it, the argument, though not presented in a linear way, may be summarized via a simple quasi-mathematical inversion: ‘the greater the degree of consciousness, the less capable is the subject of achieving grace.’¹¹ This is further evident if we consider another essay published by Kleist in the same year as ‘On the Marionette Theatre’, entitled ‘Von der Überlegung’ or ‘On Thinking Things Over’.¹² Here, as Cave suggests, a similarly paradoxical principle is expressed through the central example of the wrestling match.¹³ In Kleist’s terms, there is only one way for the wrestler to guarantee his success in the ring, and that is by not thinking about what he is doing. If he considers carefully each configuration of the limbs, each movement of the muscles, he is most likely to lose. Such consideration or reflection must occur before or after the match so as not to inhibit the force of the action.

What is offered here is a reconfiguration of the relation between thought and movement. In the aforementioned examples, the impulse or thought which triggers a

¹⁰ Terence Cave, ‘Dancing with Marionettes: Kleist and Cognition’, *German Life and Letters* 70: 4, October 2017, pp. 533-543, p. 536.

¹¹ Brown, *Heinrich Von Kleist: The Ambiguity of Art and the Necessity of Form*, p. 83.

¹² Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, pp. 554-5.

¹³ In ‘Dancing with Marionettes: Kleist and Cognition’, Cave examines these two essays in relation to theories drawn from ‘modern cognitive neuroscience’ (533). He uses Kleist’s insights in order to probe the distinction between so-called ‘automatic’ or ‘unreflective’ and ‘reflective response’, reading the dual relation between the puppet and the puppeteer in terms of the ‘coexistence of two functions within a single living individual’ (pp. 533, 541).

movement occurs outside, prior to or after the movement itself. This brings to mind one of the central arguments put forward by Geulincx for whom, as suggested above, the idea of ‘not-knowing’, or ‘nescio’ in Latin, plays a key role in the attempt to rethink the problem of mind-body dualism inherited from Descartes.¹⁴ To rehearse Geulincx’s argument again here, the incapacity of human beings to effect their surroundings, their so-called ‘impotence’ or ‘ignorance’ with regard to causality, constitutes the basis for a kind of practical ethics, the establishment of a set of obligations or principles to which Beckett repeatedly refers. As Geulincx sees it, the things that humans appear to do and think are not, as humans believe them to be, the direct result of human will or agency. Indeed, for Geulincx, no human being can properly speaking be said to ‘cause’ an action to occur in the physical world, nor a thought to occur in another person’s mind, because, as he sees it, all human activity is subject to the will of God. If the will of a human being to perform an action appears to coincide with the occurrence of that action in the physical world, this is only because his or her decision to perform that action has accorded with the will of God. In other words, only God has the capacity to cause actions to happen in the real world.

The axiom cited earlier which Beckett transcribed from Geulincx’s *Metaphysica Vera*, summarizes this point aptly:

Nothing ever happens to me, properly speaking, because I will it, but rather because the true Mover wills what I will, just as he sometimes does not will what I will [...].¹⁵

¹⁴ Samuel Beckett as quoted in David Tucker ed., *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Arnold Geulincx, *Metaphysica Vera*, as cited in David Tucker ed., *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx*, p. 17.

This poses, as previously indicated, a useful starting point for a discussion of the body in Beckett's theatre, specifically in *Waiting for Godot*. Alongside Kleist's insights about the puppet, those passages which Beckett cites from Geulincx suggest an attempt to rethink and reposition the origin of movement outside the parameters of the individual body, the 'Mover' in Geulincx's philosophy operating in a similar way to the puppeteer in Kleist. This move in turn undermines a theoretical or practical world-view based on the idea that humans possess some form of inner-life or stable interiority, a characteristic which distinguishes them from both animals and inanimate objects. In doing so it resonates with Nancy's position idea of the self, his foregrounding of notions of exteriority and exposure as a means to break down the integrity and propriety of the *corps propre* or the ontotheological body, undermining traditional Christological conceptions of the body as incarnation of a soul.

With this in mind, I return to *Waiting for Godot*, demonstrating how the geometrical partitioning of the stage space (and the actor's movements within it) shifts attention away from representational or symbolic associations, making way for 'the elaboration of spatial forms' and the creation of a 'higher formal pattern' which exceeds the psychological and social conflicts enacted by the characters.¹⁶ This development of a 'higher' order, which is at the same time a process of de-centring, a dispersal of points of identification, resonates in striking ways with both Kleist's understanding of how the puppet moves, and Geulincx's thought on causality and the human predicament. This, in turn, suggests a new way of thinking about the notion of 'waiting' in the play insofar as it centres on the relationship between an impulse and an action or occurrence in the physical world. Vladimir and Estragon are a pair of tramps bound by their mutual urge to await the arrival of Godot. Over the course of

¹⁶ Thomas Cousineau, *Waiting for Godot: Form in Movement* (New York: Twayne, 1990), p. 94.

the play, they meet Pozzo and Lucky, another double act, whose relationship may be said to provide a literal example of the relationship between puppet and puppeteer. While William Hutchings, among others, discovers the significance of their relationship within an evocation of the master-slave dialectic, I want to read this relationship primarily in terms of a re-articulation of the link between thought and movement.¹⁷ Like that of Vladimir and Estragon, the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is played out first and foremost in physical terms. Though their appearance is not specified in the stage directions, ‘Lucky has tended to be of slight build but not notably small... Pozzo has tended to be portly but not obese’.¹⁸ While Pozzo’s movements are extravagant and melodramatic, and he self-consciously refers to himself as a performer, Lucky’s, by contrast, are weak and shaky. Adding to the physical discrepancy between them, Lucky has long white hair which ‘*falls about his face*’, while Pozzo is ‘*completely bald*’.¹⁹ Their costumes, as Ulrika Maude has argued, both ‘highlight the connection between the two characters’, whilst at the same time, ‘accentuating their differences.’²⁰ In the Schiller Theater production, for example, ‘Lucky’s shoes are the same colour as Pozzo’s hat, his checked waistcoat matches Pozzo’s checked trousers, as his grey trousers do Pozzo’s grey jacket’.²¹

Addressing him as ‘pig’, Pozzo orders Lucky to look, to listen, to dance and to think, cracking his whip and jerking the rope which binds them, should his instructions fail to bring about the desired effect.²² While Lucky appears to follow

¹⁷ See for example William Hutchings, *Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group 2005), p. 65.

¹⁸ McMillan and Knowlson eds., ‘Textual Notes’, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, pp. 87-179, p. 88.

¹⁹ Beckett in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks*, Vol. I, p. 33

²⁰ Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 107.

²¹ Walter Asmus, ‘Beckett Directs *Godot*’, *Theatre Quarterly*, 5 (1975), pp. 19-26, p. 21, as cited in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. 88.

²² Beckett in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. 38.

instructions without question, he frequently dozes off in a standing position, thus provoking a heightened reaction from Pozzo:

POZZO: [...] Ah yes! The night. <> (*He looks at the sky.*) Look. (*All look at the sky except LUCKY who is dozing off again.* <>) Will you look at the sky, pig! ²³

Towards the end of the first act, Lucky is ordered first to dance, and then to think, the two activities being presented as separate events:

POZZO: [...] What do you prefer? Shall we have him dance, or sing, or recite, or think, or –

[...]

ESTRAGON: Perhaps he could dance first and think afterwards, if it isn't too much to ask him.

[...]

POZZO: Dance, misery!

(LUCKY *puts down [bag and] basket* <> *turns to* POZZO. LUCKY *dances.*

He stops.)²⁴

Interestingly, Beckett does not stipulate the exact nature of this dance. We are merely told that, after Pozzo's cry of 'Encore!', Lucky '*executes the same movements, stops.*'²⁵ A significant hint is given, however, in the dialogue that follows, where

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Pozzo describes the dance as: ‘the Net. He thinks he’s entangled in a net.’²⁶ This is all the more noteworthy in the French version where the dance is referred to as: ‘la danse du filet, Il se croit empêtré dans un filet.’²⁷ The word ‘filet’ can be translated both as net and string or thread. This is further suggestive of the motif of puppetry.

It is clear from the production notebooks, and from testimonies of those who have worked with Beckett, that movement, patterning and the body in its relation to space are of principle importance in *Waiting for Godot*. Many of the most substantial changes made by Beckett in the course of directing the Schiller Theater production, concern the stage directions. While the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon remains ambiguous: they appear interchangeable in their mannerisms and verbal habits, this ambiguity is articulated above all in concrete, material terms. In one of the Schiller-Theater notebooks, Beckett writes: ‘establish at outset 2 caged dynamics, E. sluggish, V. restless. + perpetual separation and reunion of V/E.’²⁸ Thus, in Beckett’s own production, even more so than in the original script, each character embodies a distinctive energy and tempo. Vladimir looks ‘wildly about him’ and moves ‘hurriedly’, taking off his hat, peering into it, feeling about in it, and putting it back on again, while Estragon, with some notable exceptions, stays seated, frequently ‘falls asleep’, and shows from the outset, a preoccupation with his boots.²⁹ Walter Asmus reports Beckett as saying that: ‘Estragon is on the ground; he belongs to the stone. Vladimir is light; he is oriented towards the sky. He belongs to the tree.’³⁰ The stone, added in the Schiller Theater production, replaces the mound referred to in the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, *En Attendant Godot* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1952), p. 52.

²⁸ Beckett, ‘Schiller nb’ as cited in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. xvii.

²⁹ Beckett as in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, pp. 14-15.

³⁰ Walter D. Asmus, ‘Beckett Directs *Godot*’, p. 21 as cited in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. xiv.

original English stage directions, and was insisted upon by Beckett in order to emphasize a series of contrasts: ‘earth, sky; mineral, vegetable; material, immaterial; horizontal, vertical; aspiration up, impulsion down.’³¹ The tree, it is suggested in the Schiller notebook, should have had only two branches, creating a visual echo, and as Beckett put it, the ‘3rd couple’ of the play.³² In general, Estragon returns more frequently to the stone, sitting down or standing near it, never leaving room for Vladimir to sit beside him. Vladimir, in contrast, is never by the stone except when Estragon is with him. Instead he gravitates towards the tree.³³

The movement of the characters, as Cousineau has argued, is ‘highly geometrical’, based around a network of shapes which, in turn, undergo ‘innumerable transformations’ throughout the play.³⁴ Asmus describes how Beckett sought to demonstrate ‘the principle of Didi and Gogo’s relationship’ in rehearsal.³⁵ He separates movement from speech, taking a step forward, then speaking the words, and calling this ‘the step-by-step approach’, ‘a physical theme’, which should occur seven times in the play.³⁶ He compares the effect of movement to a ‘rubber band’ which stretches out, reaches its maximum length, then returns to its original shape. It should be clear throughout that Didi and Gogo are ‘inseparable’ and there should be no need to resort to imitation or naturalistic gesture.³⁷ Indeed, Beckett refers to the whole play as a ‘game’

³¹ McMillan and Knowlson eds, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. xiv.

³² Beckett, ‘Textual Notes’ in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, p. 89.

³³ Asmus’ notes on the 1975 Schiller-Theater production illustrate how Beckett sought to highlight the discrepancy between them through costuming: ‘As the chief of the costume department comes up to talk to him, he stands up to explain details about the costumes from the designs. Vladimir is going to wear striped trousers which fit him, with a black jacket, which is too small for him: the jacket belonged originally to Estragon. Estragon, on the other hand, wears black trousers which fit him, with a striped jacket which is too big for him: it originally belonged to Vladimir. In this way, the differing physiques of the two actors, Bollman and Wigger, become part of the whole conceptual consideration.’ See Asmus, ‘Beckett Directs *Godot*’ in S. E. Gontarski ed., *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), pp. 209-217, p. 210

³⁴ Cousineau, *Waiting for Godot: Form in Movement*, p. 91.

³⁵ Walter D. Asmus, ‘Beckett Directs *Godot*’ in *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, p. 213.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

which should ‘become clear and transparent [...] a game in order to survive.’³⁸ The artificiality, and the peculiar stiffness with which the characters walk, serve to highlight the network of shapes referred to above, laying emphasis on the body’s spatial arrangement rather than its social or psychological positioning.

One of the principle revisions to the Schiller Theater production, which was also incorporated into subsequent versions, concerns the opening of the play. Whilst in the original published text, there is no curtain, and we see Estragon, ‘*sitting on a mound, [...] trying to take off his boot*’ before Vladimir enters ‘*advancing with short, stiff strides*’, to join him.³⁹ In the revised Schiller-Theater text, Estragon is seated on a stone, ‘*downstage left, still, bowed*’, whilst Vladimir ‘*stands upstage right by the tree, half in shadow, listening*.’⁴⁰ In the latter, therefore, both characters are onstage when the work begins. This alteration is repeated at the start of the second act, where Estragon, positioned ‘*midstage left*’ watches Vladimir, ‘*downstage centre*’ as he sings ‘*loudly*’ the song about the dog.⁴¹ The second change is that the opening moment consists in a ‘tableau’ or a ‘still’, which is held for a considerable moment before the action begins: ‘*Long silence. Spell broken by Estragon [...] trying to take off his [left] boot.*’⁴² This still is classified in the notebooks as ‘W1’, the first of a series of twelve ‘waiting points’ or *Wartestellen* introduced by Beckett in order to underscore the motif of waiting, as both a theme and an attribute, to be felt by the audience.⁴³ Prior to any dialogue, our attention is thus already drawn to the diagonal line created by the stone (downstage right) where Estragon is seated and the tree (upstage left), where Vladimir stands, partly

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Beckett in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I., p. 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³ Beckett, *Schiller Notebook*, p. 75, as cited in McMillan and Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks*, Vol. I., p. xiii.

in shadow. As Vladimir crosses the stage, advancing towards Estragon, he follows the diagonal line, which, though invisible, is nevertheless palpable, halting as he reaches Estragon's side. Throughout this opening section, and in general in the revised text, Beckett is careful to stipulate the actor's movements left and right, upstage and downstage, creating a series of exact echoes, with minor alterations. Estragon, for example, only ever takes off his left boot. As he rises, '*painfully*', he goes '*limping [upstage] to extreme left, halts, gazes into distance*', then, as Vladimir follows, he '*turns [...] and goes to extreme right*', thus inscribing a vertical and a horizontal line which complete the 'most persistent geometrical figure' in *Godot*, according to Cousineau, namely 'the triangle.'⁴⁴ This clockwise movement sequence occurs a total of four times throughout the play. As Cousineau suggests, the characters' repeated back and forth movement along these lines has no naturalistic function within the play. Rather, in a similar way to the movement of later works such as *Quad*, it serves 'to diminish the role of interpretation in *Godot*.'⁴⁵ By foregrounding 'geometrical configuration' on stage, Beckett is able to highlight the theatricality of the stage space, extricating the movement from any straightforward logical or interpretative framework, a gesture which one might usefully describe as exteriorising.⁴⁶

This process, which is further complicated when Pozzo and Lucky appear on stage, results in a rearrangement of the relations between figure and ground, between surface and background elements.⁴⁷ Rather than focusing our attention on the symbolic

⁴⁴ Cousineau, *Form in Movement*, p. 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93

⁴⁶ As previously suggested, the notion of exteriority plays an important role in Nancy's philosophy, pointing out how he thinks the body in terms of touch or co-exposure. See for example Laura McMahon, *Cinema and Contact: The Withdrawal of Touch in in Nancy, Bresson, Duras and Denis* (New York: Legenda, 2012), pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷ As the second pair enter, '*upstage right*', Pozzo '*drives Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck*', so that Lucky reaches the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears. Vladimir and Estragon, '*huddled together, shoulders hunched*,' thus form the third point in a triangle with Lucky, carrying a '*heavy bag*' and a '*folding chair*', and Pozzo, with '*a whip*.' An additional triangle is then formed when

content of the play, the director seeks to transcend linearity, reordering the stage space outside the traditional, positivist unities of time and place. The tensions and conflicts which arise here are spatial rather than social or psychological, that is, they occur between motion and stillness, choreographed and arbitrary movement, contraction and expansion. In what follows, I want to further clarify this shift with reference to two films starring Buster Keaton as protagonist, *The Navigator* (1924) and *The High Sign* (1921). Alex Clayton's analysis of these films is useful here insofar as it demonstrates how, through a particular handling of 'Buster's body' within its environment, the director 'liberates geometrical form from its previously established societal associations to draw upon its formal power as such.'⁴⁸ Apart from serving as a preamble to my analysis of *Film* in Chapter One, (also starring Buster Keaton) this analysis will help to establish some of the key tendencies that are fundamental to my reading of Beckett's approach to the theatre, and which centre on the author's 'capacity to reveal the world [...] as a physical arena'.⁴⁹ These in turn serve as a prerequisite for my rethinking of the relation between thought and movement via the medium of puppetry.

Keaton's world, as Clayton suggests, is one of reduction and contrast:

[His] slight frame is consistently set against the bulky builds of urban bullies, dwarfed beside giant machines and other outsized objects, within extensive landscapes whose sparse, uncluttered planes stretch laterally across the screen and in depth to the distant horizon.⁵⁰

Lucky places the stool down at a point designated by Pozzo. This is composed of the stone, the tree and the stool. (See Beckett in McMilland Knowlson eds., *The Theatrical Notebooks*, Vol I. p. 21)

⁴⁸ Alex Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2007), p. 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 46.

Using specific camera cropping techniques, whilst filming across vast uninhabited landscapes, Keaton's films achieve the sense of an expansive 'off-screen' space, one that is full of potential difficulties and hazards, and which no single human being could possibly grasp or appropriate.⁵¹ Clayton shows how, in one scene of *The Navigator*, a huge abandoned ocean liner is presented on a vast grey sea, as the protagonist (Keaton) tries with the help of a small rowing boat and a rope, to pull the enormous vessel back to land. The ineffectiveness of his attempt is indicated by the camera's cut to an 'extreme long shot, parallel to the length of the ship', in which the rowing boat is visible, a tiny speck on the horizon, alongside the ocean liner.⁵² As Clayton argues, the 'futility' of human endeavour, has already been established as a theme earlier in the film, when Keaton and his sweetheart try and repeatedly fail to find each other on the deck of this enormous ocean liner. Here again, the camera moves to medium-shot, and we see the boat move away from the shore, the tiny walkway connecting it to the harbour falling uselessly into the gap between the vessel and the wharf. The next shot, a medium close-up of the girl's fearful face, demonstrates her vulnerability or helplessness within this vast anonymous landscape. Clayton likens the position of these characters as they rush around the deck of the boat, to 'the intricate activity of a mechanical toy'.⁵³ His description of the action in Keaton's film seems to me to strike a note with Beckett's approach in *Waiting for Godot*, in particular his attempts to foreground geometrical shape in a way that fundamentally alters the relationship between his protagonists and the space that they occupy. Clayton summarizes his investigations in the following useful way:

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

In reducing through scale the body to a figure, and placing it within a vast impersonal locale composed with geometrical precision, Keaton's comedy is tinged with a certain fascinating coldness that is not found, for instance, in Chaplin's rendering of body-world relations.⁵⁴

What Clayton refers to as 'coldness' here could also be interpreted as a kind of detachment or disengagement which characterizes the perspective of the protagonist, placing him at odds with his environment. As Clayton puts it: 'to see the world as an intricate configuration of shape and movement is to see it at one remove', and this is a principle, I argue, which can equally be identified in Beckett's theatre.⁵⁵ While I return to this principle in a later chapter, notably via the work of theatre practitioner Vsevolod Meyerhold, I want to establish from the outset a fundamental distinction between Beckett's approach to the construction of the performance space, and in particular, how the actor is to engage with character, and that which one might find in a naturalistic performance, rooted in a Stanislavskian approach to acting.

When one of Stanislavski's method actors is asked to portray a character, another human being, he is told to look to his own experience in order to generate and elicit the same emotions which that particular character might illustrate. In other words, he works from the inside out, his goal being to justify and authenticate all his actions through recourse to a personal emotional history. When a method actor portrays a character, in other words, there is no physical gap or separation between himself and that character. Performer and performed constitute an entity, a single unit while the body of the actor becomes the pivot around which a world turns. In Beckett's theatre,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

however, this process is complicated. The director works closely with the actor, composing or moulding the performance image from the outside and focusing on gesture, volume, tone of voice, and facial expression. The actor, in other words, is no longer the subject or the centre of the emotional landscape, but merely a component within an environment over which he or she has little personal control. Ed Hooks demonstrates this difference in light of the relation between animation or puppetry on the one hand, and human-character acting on the other:

An Actor does not ‘become’ a character. He does not stop being himself and becomes somebody else. He experiences the process of acting as if the emotions of the character are his own and of course they really are. The animator doesn’t work like that because there is a physical distance between him and the character he is creating.⁵⁶

The ‘physical distance’ between actor and character articulated here, is pivotal to an understanding of the way *Waiting for Godot* alters our perception of the theatrical encounter, resisting phenomenologically informed readings of the embodied subject. By separating movement from thought, underlining the fundamental detachment that characterises the actor’s relation to his role, Beckett rethinks the relation between interiority and exteriority, the inner workings of the mind and the actions to which they are traditionally linked in the outside world, presenting a kind of puppet-subject which does not ‘take place’ or ‘embody’ a soul or mind in the traditional sense.⁵⁷ In the following section, I identify a similar process in *Endgame* (1957), thus paving the way

⁵⁶ Ed Hooks, *Acting for Animators* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 49.

⁵⁷ Samuel Weber, ‘Being...and eXistenZ’, p. 319.

for further investigation into the fragmented, dislocated nature of Beckett's bodies, laying the foundations, through an emphasis on self-reflexivity or the meta-theatrical, for the deconstruction and redistribution of the embodied agent.

Endgame (1957)

Endgame was first performed in Great Britain in French as *Fin de Partie* on 3 April 1957. Intended to have its world premiere in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, the opening was postponed when, as Beckett writes in a letter dated January 14th 1957, 'the theatre suddenly backed out of its engagements, preferring to my black act a commercial play with film stars and financial backing.'⁵⁸ The premier therefore took place at the Royal Court Theatre, London where it was performed alongside the mime *Act Without Words*. As with *Waiting for Godot*, it was the Schiller Theater production, this time in 1967, that Beckett took full directorial responsibility for. This was then followed by an English version, which Beckett also directed twelve years later, at the Riverside Studios in London. The notes for these productions, as with *Godot*, provide evidence of substantial revisions which, in turn, are the basis for new revised texts. The revisions, as S. E. Gontarski puts it, chart 'Beckett's rethinking of the work in more theatrical or visual terms.'⁵⁹ Of key importance here, is 'shape', as the author goes about erasing inessential material and sharpening the visual motifs in order to establish a pattern of echoes both scenic and verbal.⁶⁰ As Beckett is reported

⁵⁸ Samuel Beckett, 'Letter to Alan Simpson, Pike Theatre, Dublin', 14th January 1957, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 14.

⁵⁹ S. E. Gontarski in James Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol II (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p. xvi.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

to have said to his cast in 1967, 'we have to retrench everything further, it's got to become simple, just a few small precise motions.'⁶¹

While an original typescript entitled '*Avant Fin de partie*' includes details which locate the action and the characters in a distinctly naturalistic post-World War I landscape, '*détruite progressivement dans l'automne de 1914, le printemps de 1918 et l'automne suivant, dans des circonstances mystérieuses*', these details are obliterated early in the creative process.⁶² They are replaced by a non-descript '*bare interior*' illuminated by a '*grey light*' throughout.⁶³ The space constitutes 'a limbo', as Richard Eastman has suggested, 'without calendar date or specified locale.'⁶⁴ Although there is mention of the sea, it is not clear which sea is being referred to. The only details within the room are '*two small windows*', curtains drawn, which punctuate the back walls, left and right.⁶⁵ At the front, stage right, is a door through which Clov, an inferior, will enter and exit at various points throughout the play. The '*hanging*' picture, '*its face to the wall*', found in early versions, is equally cut.⁶⁶ At the centre of the room is '*an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet*'.⁶⁷ Two ashbins, similarly covered in an old sheet, are to be found '*front left, touching each other*'.⁶⁸

A '*brief tableau*' at the start of the play, figures Clov standing, '*motionless*', staring in the direction of the armchair.⁶⁹ As the action begins, he moves arduously around the room, between the room and his kitchen (backstage), using a ladder to open the curtains, removing the sheets from the armchair and the ashbins. The

⁶¹ Beckett as cited in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. xvi.

⁶² Beckett as cited in Knowlson ed., 'Textual Notes', *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Richard Eastman, 'The Strategy of Beckett's Endgame', *Modern Drama*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1959, pp. 36-44, p. 37.

⁶⁵ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 92.

⁶⁷ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

occupant of the armchair is thus revealed to be Hamm, a blind hypochondriac who cannot walk, so relies upon Clov to move him around in a wheelchair. The two ashbins are inhabited by Nagg and Nell, an elderly couple, who, it is hinted later in the play, are probably Hamm's parents. Nagg and Nell appear to have no legs: they refer to each other's 'stumps', and remain confined to the dustbins throughout. All four characters lack personal histories. Whilst Nagg and Nell speak of past experiences, these do not extend beyond their present predicament, that is, their confinement to ashbins. With no particular goal or attachment to the outside world, a significant portion of the dialogue is dedicated to material, bodily concerns and the characters frequently express hunger, soreness, irritation, stiffness among other things. When Hamm asks Clov, for example, 'How are your legs?', Clov says 'Bad', to which Hamm replies 'But you can move', underlining the principal difference between them in somatic terms.⁷⁰ Unlike the other three characters, Clov moves fairly constantly throughout, the suggestion being that he is unable to sit down.

The notebooks for the 1967 Schiller Theater production, as for the later production at the Riverside Studios, London, demonstrate Beckett's preoccupation with the opening of the play. In the original version Clov, and Hamm, when he appears, have 'very red' faces, in contrast to Nagg and Nell who each have a 'very white face'.⁷¹ However, in both the Schiller Theater and Riverside Studios productions, Beckett eliminates these details, writing simply: 'Red faces: cut', and giving the reason that 'C'était trop recherché'.⁷² Another change to the opening is Clov's position. He appears '*motionless*' as before, but this time at 'A (a point midway between the door and the chair', or as Gontarski puts it 'midway between

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷¹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 92.

⁷² Beckett as cited in Knowlson ed., 'Textual Notes', *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 44.

obligation and relief”, thus further articulating his relationship to Hamm in spatial terms.⁷³ Furthermore he is discovered with a ‘*bowed head*’,⁷⁴ in what the Riverside texts refer to as a ‘perplexed position’,⁷⁵ before he looks up and moves his head in a clockwise motion around the room, from Hamm, to Nagg and Nell (the ashbins), to the window upstage left, here described as ‘*sea window*’ and finally to the window upstage right, the ‘*earth window*’.⁷⁶ This movement sequence culminates in another tableau, where we see Clov again with ‘*bowed head*’.⁷⁷ As is clear from the theatrical notebooks, Beckett treats such movement sequences in isolation. Speaking to his actors during rehearsals for the Berlin production, he says: ‘Never let your changes of position and voice come together. First comes (a) the altered bodily stance; after it, following a slight pause, comes (b) the corresponding utterance’.⁷⁸ This separation of ‘bodily stance’ from ‘voice’, serves to extricate the so-called ‘changes of position’ from any kind of illustrative function, elevating them to the status of dramatic material.⁷⁹ In this way movement becomes a principle driving force for the action, which, like *Godot*, is punctuated by tableaux or stills rather than unfolding as a continuous narrative. As Michael Haerdter puts it: ‘over and over, he [Beckett] has them [the actors] freeze for seconds at a time into a tableau which is to achieve its effect through repetition’.⁸⁰ The phrase that Beckett uses to describe these instances in the Riverside notebook is ‘frozen postures’.⁸¹ Like *Godot*, *Endgame* is punctured by

⁷³ Gontarski in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. xviii.

⁷⁴ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II., p. 3.

⁷⁵ Beckett in Knowlson ed., ‘Textual Notes’, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II., p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Beckett in Michael Haerdter, ‘Über die Proben für die Berliner Aufführung’, as cited in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. xix.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

⁸⁰ Haerdter, ‘Über die Proben für die Berliner Aufführung’, as cited in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. xix.

⁸¹ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. xx.

these ‘frozen postures’, culminating in the final picture: Clov ‘*dressed for the road*’, poised to leave, yet ‘*impassive and motionless*’, Hamm at the centre of the room, in his armchair, struggling to move it but nevertheless persisting, and the two ashbins, now closed, downstage left.⁸²

That repetition of movement is pivotal to *Endgame* is clear from Beckett’s instructions to the actor who plays Clov; Clov’s movement between the kitchen and Hamm, towards and away from the centre of the room, is one of the principle visual motifs of the play, and meticulously choreographed by Beckett in rehearsal. For the Schiller Theater production, Beckett fine-tunes this principle, altering the number of steps taken by Clov between the kitchen and the armchair from ‘nine to eight’, stipulating that the actor should always adopt the same position offstage, starting with the same foot so as to produce as close a repetition as possible.⁸³ As he puts it in the Schiller Theater notebooks: ‘it’s almost like an exercise in dance [...] equal number of paces, rhythm kept equal.’⁸⁴ His efforts to produce exact visual echoes on stage is repeated in the Riverside notebooks, where he writes that ‘C’s entrances identical – same number of steps to A, same half turn away.’⁸⁵ Here, he organizes and choreographs Clov’s so-called ‘thinking walk’ into a pattern of ‘6 + 4 + 6 + 4’, describing this as a ‘Pythagorean’ arrangement.⁸⁶

Clov’s opening sequence, like all movement in the play, is meticulously choreographed. With a ‘*stiff, staggering walk*’, and as Beckett adds in the Riverside notebook, ‘moving painful[ly], as economical as possible’, he goes about the bare

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸³ Gontarski in Knowlson ed., ‘Textual Notes’, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 50.

⁸⁴ Beckett as cited in Knowlson ed., ‘Textual Notes’, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 50.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

room, climbing a step-ladder, opening windows, removing the sheets that cover both Hamm in his armchair, and the ashbins.⁸⁷ In the original English version, this movement sequence is much more extensive than in subsequent versions. After fetching a step-ladder from his kitchen, Clov carries it over and sets it down under the left window, climbs up, draws open the curtains. In order to repeat this action on the right, he gets down, takes ‘*six steps*’ towards the right window, realizes he has forgotten his ladder, goes back for it, then repeats the movement this time with the ladder towards right-hand window.⁸⁸ Having opened both sets of curtains, he comes down from the ladder, takes ‘*three steps*’ towards the left-hand window, realizes he has forgotten the ladder, goes back for it, and carries on, climbing up, looking out and giving a ‘*brief laugh*’ before he comes down.⁸⁹ He repeats this action on the right hand side, this time only taking ‘*one step*’ before going back for the ladder and subsequently carrying it over to the right window.⁹⁰ Turning his attention to the ashbins, he starts out, stops, realizes he still has the ladder with him, returns it to the right window, then moves again towards the ashbins. The traces of slapstick comedy here, which derive from a sense of Clov’s clumsiness or incompetence, as he repeatedly forgets his step ladder, are radically reduced in later versions, as Beckett begins to favour economy of movement whilst adhering as closely as possible to set geometrical forms. The revised text, based on Beckett’s notes for the Schiller Theater production appears as follows:

[...] *Moment still with bowed head. Then suddenly off[.]*} *Stiff, staggering walk. Comes back immediately with a small step-ladder, carries it over and*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 92.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

*sets it down under window left, gets up on it, draws back curtain {,} <> looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, <> carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, {draws back curtain,} looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, <> goes to ashbins, removes sheet covering them <>.*⁹¹

As previously stated, *Endgame* was first produced in the same year (1957) as the two mimes, *Act Without Words I and II*, and thus most likely written around the same time. This is significant for a number of reasons. While focusing on movement, both works thematise puppetry or a theatre of marionettes, in the sense that they foreground the gap or separation between actor and character, repositioning meaning and therefore subjectivity beyond the boundaries of the individual. In *Act Without Words I*, the performer, ‘man’, ‘is flung backwards on stage’ under a ‘dazzling light’, the setting, a ‘Desert.’⁹² As he ‘gets up [...], dusts himself, turns aside, reflects’, a whistle sounds from behind the left-wing curtain.⁹³ After a moment of reflection, he responds by following the sound off-stage left, and is immediately tossed back on stage such that he falls to the ground. He gets up, reflects, and then goes off left again before being tossed back on stage. As the short play progresses the performer is presented with a ‘tiny carafe’ with a ‘huge label’ marked ‘WATER’.⁹⁴ This object ‘descends’ from the ‘flies’ coming to rest about ‘three yards’ above floor level, just out of reach.⁹⁵ Prompted by the whistle and the appearance of a series of tools from the wings: ‘a little tree’, ‘a pair of tailor’s scissors’, three ‘cubes’, and a ‘rope’, the performer/man tries in

⁹¹ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 3.

⁹² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 203.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

vein to reach the carafe as the objects in his environment refuse to comply with his intentions, continually goading him into submission.⁹⁶ Like a puppet, the actor is dependent upon one or more off-stage forces which in providing various stimuli, provoke a series of reactions.

Endgame is, as has often been noted, a play that concerns itself with the theatre. The name Hamm recalls both Hamlet, one of the most highly acclaimed tragic roles, and ‘ham actor’, the name for a low-grade performer who exaggerates his role to the point of absurdity.⁹⁷ The name Clov makes one think of a vaudevillian clown, while Nagg and Nell, in their dustbins, recall scenes of nineteenth century street theatre or Punch and Judy puppet shows. When Hamm begins his first speech, he says: ‘Me – [he yawns] – to play’, drawing a connection between the interior world of the stage and the outside world of the theatre in which he appears as a performer.⁹⁸ His dialogue with Clov contains references to theatrical conventions such as asides and soliloquys, as well as entrances and exits. As Hamm says: ‘[*Angrily*] An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before? [*Pause*] I’m warming up for my soliloquy’.⁹⁹ In an early version of the first act, Clov turns a telescope on the auditorium, and claims to see ‘a multitude... in transports... of joy’, and even in the revised texts both Hamm and Clov repeatedly refer to themselves as being observed, even when alone on stage.¹⁰⁰ The opening of the curtains and the removal of the old sheets which cover the armchair and the dustbins at the beginning of the play, adds to

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

⁹⁷ See entry for ‘Ham actor’, Oxford English Dictionary online, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/83690?redirectedFrom=ham+actor#eid2249373>, consulted 25th January 2020.

⁹⁸ Beckett in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. II, p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 106.

the sense that we are watching a play within a play, reinforcing the connection between the fictional space and the space of the theatre.

This concern with the theatre as form or what is sometimes called meta-theatricality, once again shifts attention away from the represented story or narrative, that is, from a world in which actors pretend to interact as characters in fictional space, towards the conditions of performance, creating spaces of tension and overlap between those circumstances borne by the performer, the spectator and the imagined characters. In the same way that physical movement drives the dramatic action, taking the place of psychological conflict and disturbing the unities of time and place, these metatheatrical devices contribute to the effects of dissonance or perceptual disunity which fundamentally alter our perception of the embodied agent in Beckett's work. They do so, in Cousineau's terms, by conferring upon the stage 'a double, contradictory identity, as both stage' and fictional world.¹⁰¹ As he goes on to explain: 'we perceive the stage as two different and, from the rational point of view, irreconcilable things'.¹⁰² This process is particularly pronounced when, as is often the case in both *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, characters perform for each other, an act which draws into view not only the relationship between actor and spectator, but also the wider frameworks in which this relationship occurs, the institutional structure of the theatre and of those systems of exchange in which it participates, all of which are fundamental to the manner in which Beckett approaches and exploits the boundary between the actual and the illusory or the fictitious. All these factors, in turn, organise and determine my interpretation of Beckett's theatrical works, triggering both the refutation of character and the dissolution of narrative as defining

¹⁰¹ Cousineau, *Waiting for Godot: Form in Movement*, p. 122.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

features of the theatrical event, articulating the reconfiguration of identity via the division, extension, expansion, dislocation and sharing of agency across multiple dramatic elements. In establishing this particular approach in subsequent chapters I move forward chronologically into the 1960s and beyond, delineating tendencies, features and movements in Beckett's later works that might loosely be described as techniques, and that contribute to an understanding of the 'split-mode-of-presence' which I see as fundamental to the author's approach to the body, to character and to subjectivity.¹⁰³ In doing so, as previously suggested, I draw on a range of different theoretical approaches and conversations around the theme of puppetry, bringing into relief the principles of division and fragmentation that characterise Beckett's particular handling of the body and setting up a productive exchange between his work and that of the post-phenomenological thinker Jean-Luc Nancy.

In keeping with my aim to examine the body in Beckett's plays as a 'body in parts', each of the four chapters that follow takes a particular body part as its focus: the eye, the hand, the ear and the mouth. Beginning with the eye, Chapter One groups together the three works *Play* (1962), *Film* (1965) and *Catastrophe* (1982), thus enabling me to situate my approach in relation to current criticism relating to Beckett's handling of vision and embodiment. Chapter Two builds on this discussion through close analysis of the three plays *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), *Quad* (1982) and *What Where* (1983). The theme here is the hand, which more broadly speaking equates to gesture, and it is here that I begin to advance a theory of movement technique as it relates to the actor in Beckett's work, notably through comparison with the work of early twentieth-century theatre practitioner Vsevolod Meyerhold. Chapter Three deals with the ear and broadens the scope of the analysis to include a focus on

¹⁰³ Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, p. 39.

three works: *Ghost Trio* (1975) *Footfalls* (1975) and *Rockaby* (1980), in all of which sound is particularly prominent. Emphasising the effects of dislocation or disjuncture between sound and image in these works, this chapter draws on a range of theories including Steven Connor's analysis of the Ventriloquial, in order to articulate the importance of the 'itinerant' voice in Beckett's work, a voice which further undermines any notion of the incarnate subject.¹⁰⁴ Finally, Chapter Four takes into account those works in Beckett's corpus in which the mouth figures prominently, thus enabling a more detailed examination of the boundary between language and the body. This includes the works *Not I* (1972), *That Time* (1975) and the perhaps lesser-known, *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), close analysis of which reveals both the limits of linguistic signification and the plural origin of sense. The 'body in parts' is here mobilised through an emphasis on both the disruptive and the creative capacities of the mouth, which I suggest has the ability to interrupt, suspend and continually unsettle the foundations of the fully present, ontotheologically informed body-subject.

¹⁰⁴ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 217.

Chapter One: Eye

Techné, Spacing, and the Body as Image in Play, Film and Catastrophe

This chapter traces a progression from the fragmentation of the body in *Play* (1962), through the re-articulation of the body as a form of spacing or sharing which actively derails the identity and propriety of the subject, in *Film* (1965), to a more overt critique of representational forms in *Catastrophe* (1982), where the body is pictured in a seemingly insentient materiality, arranged and rearranged as though it were an inanimate object, but which nevertheless shows the potential to become animate. It builds on the previous chapter by articulating further the notion of subjectivity as emerging both prior to and in excess of the individual subject, taking place across multiple agents, both human and non-human. Here, the bodies encountered are visibly dependent on their ‘ties’¹ to other bodies, to apparatus and tools, such that they appear ‘as the product of [external] forces’ which interact upon them.² Movement here equally springs from outside the individual body, an effect which radically undermines the notion of the unified self as interior realm, the starting point for the outward expression of a psychologically complete character. Drawing again on Samuel Weber’s analysis of the puppet theatre, one could argue that Beckett’s bodies as they are portrayed here do not ‘take place’ or ‘embody’ in the traditional (phenomenological) way.³ In this sense, they do not function as the pivot or locus for movement, for meaning or for the encounter with an always already integrated and cohesive character. Rather, through a process of exteriorisation where movement and meaning are shared across a range of objects and materials, encompassing actors,

¹ Weber, ‘Being...and Existenz’, p. 318.

² Brown, *Heinrich von Kleist: The Ambiguity of Art and the Necessity of Form*, p. 83.

³ *Ibid.*

manipulators, technicians, technology and other scenic elements, Beckett develops an understanding of the body and of the actor's relation to his body as always already divided, ungrounded and shot through by difference.

As well as the shape and structure of puppetry as described in the previous chapter, which I pursue further here with reference to Roland Barthes' consideration of the Japanese *Bunraku* puppet theatre, the works *Play*, *Film* and *Catastrophe*, all engage with issues of vision and visual representation. All three works combine this focus with an interest in the tactile, plasticity of the body, an element which manifests itself in a number of different ways: through the eerie faces of *Play*, 'so last to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns',⁴ the 'creased, reptilian' eye of *Film*, magnified and viewed in close-up, and the mute body of the Protagonist in *Catastrophe*, reduced to the status of animal tissue.⁵ Each play is seen to explore vision within a particular mode of theatrical or cinematic minimalism, a process which invites comparison once again with Nancy, specifically his foregrounding of 'the limits of the ontotheological body' through 'notions of exposure and exteriority,' as well as his attempts to move beyond both psychologically and phenomenologically informed theories of viewing.⁶ Pursuing these intersections, I raise a number of questions specific to Beckett's works when placed in dialogue with Nancy, tracing a three-way exchange between cinema, theatre and puppetry, and philosophy, looking at the ways in which the three aforementioned works can be said to probe and test out Nancy's model of corporeality. Alongside this, I also introduce Derrida's substantial reading of Nancy in *Le Toucher* – Jean-Luc Nancy, as a further philosophical

⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 307.

⁵ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 524.

⁶ McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 5.

supplement, which places Nancy in conversation with the phenomenological tradition, and foregrounds certain aspects of his thought such as exteriority and technicity.

It is a paradox already noted in the previous chapter that Beckett on the one hand revels in and seeks to articulate the irreducible materiality of the concrete body, whilst at the same time continually finding new ways to undermine and subvert it. In doing so, as previously stated, he collapses traditional notions of the 'individual', notions of the actor's body as the integrated centre of theatrical representation, and of character as the unified focus of a narrative which exists in an analogous relation to reality. As such, there is much in his body of work which both echoes and perpetuates a postmodern approach to subjectivity, if, as Dawn Tracey Brandes suggests, the latter is comparable 'to a series of masks under which no essential core can be found.'⁷ The postmodern character, as Brandes argues, is 'one of division and construction, surface and masks', which, rather than striving to produce coherence, revels in its own multiplicity and the layering of its fictions.⁸ Taken to its extreme, this may be seen to involve the eradication of character altogether. However, the intermediary form, which Brandes finds in certain kinds of contemporary puppet theatre, and which I seek to uncover in Beckett's work, involves the presentation of 'an unstable but identifiable notion of character while retaining the same level of fracture and fragmentation' characteristic of the postmodern aesthetic.⁹ Rather than appearing as the focus of a scenic whole, the body here emerges as merely one element among many, including lighting, sound, props, make-up and masks, that are separated out and foregrounded in a way that prioritizes the plastic, artificial or technical in performance.

⁷ Dawn Tracey Brandes, "'A Total Spectacle but a Divided One'" Redefining Character in Handspring Puppet Company's *Or you Could Kiss Me*, p. 248.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

A useful example of this predicament can be found in Barthes's analysis of Japanese *Bunraku* puppet theatre. Barthes is interested in the *Bunraku* insofar as it poses an alternative to the anthropomorphic tendencies inherent in the Western art spectacle. As he puts it 'le *Bunraku* pratique [...] trois écritures séparées: la marionnette, le manipulateur, le vociférant', while the Western theatre attempts to amalgamate all aspects of performance into a single homogenized illusion: 'le fondement de notre art théâtral est en effet beaucoup moins l'illusion de réalité que l'illusion de totalité.'¹⁰ From the Greek *choreia* onwards, Barthes suggests, the Western spectacle has been organised in terms of the interrelatedness and continuity of forms: 'la simultanéité de plusieurs expressions' is amalgamated around a single, indivisible origin, 'le corps', which in turn is thought as 'l'unité organique'.¹¹ Barthes emphasises the division and distance at the heart of the *Bunraku* theatre, showing how each gesture is the manifestation of a three way split or separation, between the puppet, the manipulator and, in some cases, the speaker, a split which is entirely visible in the performance. He shows how the *Bunraku* achieves something akin to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* through an emphasis on what he calls 'le discontinu des codes', and the limitations imposed upon the different elements of performance ('cette césure imposée'), which are isolated and assembled rather than becoming submerged within an emotionally fuelled narrative.¹² The spectacle which Barthes sees as 'total' in the sense of having a single effect, but also 'divided' insofar as it is shared out across its different agencies is one in which the copy or the quotation and the 'original', appear alongside each other, forming what Joseph Roach refers to as 'mutually exclusive possibilities', rather than a single homogeneous whole.¹³ Within

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *L'Empire des signes* (Genève: Editions Albert Skira, 1970), p. 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹³ Joseph Roach, 'It', *Theatre Journal* 56 (2004), pp. 555-568, p. 559.

the *Bunraku* theatre, in short, everything is visible, including the relation between puppet and puppeteer, actor and role, life and artwork.

Echoing Kleist's insights, Barthes sees the *Bunraku* puppet as capable of accomplishing an equilibrium, an elegance of movement, to which the Western (naturalistic) actor can only aspire: 'l'acteur occidental (naturaliste) n'est jamais beau; son corps se veut d'essence physiologique, et non plastique.'¹⁴ Unlike the naturalistic actor, the *Bunraku* actor does not seek to conceal his own status as performer, but appears, in black, alongside the puppet, seemingly exempt from sense: 'son visage est offert à la lecture des spectateurs; mais ce qui est soigneusement, précieusement donné à lire, c'est qu'il n'y a rien à lire.'¹⁵ The performer offers nothing to read, at least not in the same way as the occidental actor, whose facial expressions and actions are interpreted as a gateway to his thoughts and thus his character. As Barthes puts it, 'les agents du spectacle, dans le *Bunraku*, sont à la fois visibles et impassibles [...] colorés de ce mélange de force et de subtilité.'¹⁶ Like the puppets themselves, their significance lies in their material, choreographic relations to the other components of performance. This is how the *Bunraku* theatre can be said to blur the boundaries between the inanimate and the animate, between inside and outside. As Barthes suggests, *Bunraku* refuses 'le concept qui se cache derrière toute animation de la matière, et qui est tout simplement "l'âme"'.¹⁷ In other words, the *Bunraku* performances resist the idea that there is a soul within each human being to be animated and communicated via the individually expressive body. While the task of the Western naturalistic actor is to learn how to express the inner emotions, feelings and conflicts of a particular character, whilst endeavouring to hide the very fact of his

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *L'Empire des signes*, p. 78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

status as performer, to make the audience forget the fact that it is in the theatre, *Bunraku* fundamentally alters both the relation between character and performer, and the relation between performance and spectator. The *Bunraku* actor focuses all his attention on the puppetry, and gives himself up entirely and without pretension to the operations required for the collaborative manoeuvre of the puppet.¹⁸ In this sense, he does not ‘animate’ the puppet, or bring it to life in the traditional sense. Rather he *works with* it, inhabiting a limited frame of reference, a component within a carefully codified space. As Barthes suggests, there is no way of forgetting the presence of the puppeteers (‘la présence des manipulateurs’) in the *Bunraku* theatre.¹⁹ Neither hidden nor expressly foregrounded, they are transitive beings, taking on the attributes of their surroundings, whilst radically altering our perception of the relations between actor and character, body and soul, inside and outside.

To accept the theatrical spectacle as a fixed totality which is modelled in turn upon the body’s indivisibility, requires that we think in terms of interiority and depth, metaphor and hidden meanings. The function of the actor within such a system is to provide access to the thoughts and feelings of a particular character, to act as a gateway to a particular viewpoint or soul. To rethink the theatre as the disconnected assemblage of disparate parts, then, is to think in terms of surface, exposure, exteriority, to think, in short, in terms of an outside no longer ruled by an inside. With Nancy’s reconfiguration of the thought of incarnation in mind, one might suggest that the *Bunraku* puppet theatre unsettles the embodied subject by undermining notions of essence, completeness and continuity inherent within the Western theatre tradition, inserting fragmentation and collage into the process of composition. In what follows,

¹⁸ As Barthes suggests in his essay, these puppets are at least three feet tall requiring three visible men to support and accompany them. See Roland Barthes, ‘On Bunraku’, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, *Theatre in Asia* (Spring, 1971), pp. 76-80, p. 76.

¹⁹ Barthes, *L’Empire des signes*, p. 83.

I explore this very process in *Play*, the first of the three works I want to analyse in this chapter. In Barthes's terms, 'le travail se substitue à l'intériorité', and this same principle, as I hope to demonstrate, operates in Beckett's theatre.²⁰

Play (1962)

Written between 1962 and 1963 and first performed in German as *Spiel* at the Ulmer Theater in Ulm-Donau, this work unfolds as three separate strands of consciousness, voiced by three figures, a man, a wife and a mistress, each trapped up to their neck in an urn, as they attempt to narrate a past event – an affair that has entangled their three lives for many years. A single, swivelling spotlight moves between these figures, in a seemingly random order, extorting fragmented utterances from each in turn. There is no interaction between the figures, and their individual features are visibly reduced. At times, it is difficult to discern what the figures are saying, an effect which strongly undermines any sense of character or individual identity. The repetition demanded by the light works to destabilize any psychological linkage between the speeches. Here Beckett's focus on the disconnected, heterogeneous body is combined with a very deliberate investigation into the limits of visual representation, and, correspondingly, those of psychological legibility. In a direct reversal of the conventional dramatic situation, where light, along with other elements of performance such as sound and costume, tends to be subordinated to action, character, narrative and plot, here the spotlight functions as an agent within the performance field, disrupting the integrity of the theatrical frame and the structures of viewing on which this is based.

It is common within Beckett criticism to view *Play* as a turning point in Beckett's theatrical aesthetic, an attempt on the author's part to 'subordinate the actor

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

to the formal requirements of the *mise-en-scène*, or ‘to discipline [...] a recalcitrant corporeality that threatens to disrupt the stage’s aesthetic integrity’.²¹ S. E. Gontarski uses the term ‘Post-*Play* Plays’, in order to designate this move, thus describing a ‘new theatre’, which is more ‘overtly formalist and patterned’ than before and thus ‘more visual’.²² With *Play*, he says, Beckett balances ‘a theatre of concrete visual images with a theatre of poetic images. [...] the Beckettian bricks [are] no longer tossed directly at naturalism – that particular victim already on life-support by 1960 - but against modernism, if not against literature itself’.²³ Beckett’s theatre becomes one of ‘body parts and spectres, a theatre striving for transparency rather than solidity, a theatre, finally, trying to undo itself’.²⁴ As plot and character dissipate, the playing space grows to be more delimited, circumscribed and controlled. Erik Tønning, in turn, reads *Play* in terms of a new logic and language, partly comparable to that of Schoenberg and Kandinsky, the early twentieth-century pioneers of abstraction in their respective media.²⁵ He quotes Beckett in an interview published in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

I think that I have perhaps freed myself from certain formal concepts. Perhaps, like the composer Schoenberg or the painter Kandinsky, I have turned toward an abstract language. Unlike them, however, I have tried not to concretise the abstraction – not to give it yet another formal context.²⁶

²¹ Stanton B. Garner, ‘(Dis)figuring Space: Visual Field in Beckett’s Late Plays’, p. 58.

²² S.E. Gontarski, ‘De-Theatricalizing Theatre: The Post-*Play* Plays’ in S. E. Gontarski ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: The Shorter Plays*, Volume IV (New York: Grove Press, 1999), p. xv.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

²⁵ Tønning, *Samuel Beckett’s Abstract Drama*, p. 57.

²⁶ Samuel Beckett, quoted in John Gruen, ‘Samuel Beckett talks about Beckett’, *Vogue*, February 1970, 127/2. p. 168.

To summarise Tonning's standpoint, this turn towards an 'abstract language' is most evident in the abandonment of methods of illustration and verisimilitude implied in realist drama, the relinquishment of psychological motivation and personal history in constructing character and the unravelling of the logic of cause and effect in narrative. Finally, Stanton B. Garner analyses the post-*Play* works in the context of currents in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scenography, which have aimed to redefine the stage in specifically visual and plastic terms: 'as in the scenographic experiments that anticipated it', he writes, 'the visual field of Beckett's late plays is characterized by the formal predominance of shape, an emphasis that endows objects and the performance image they comprise with a high level of compositional abstraction'.²⁷ As theatrical setting is reduced to 'spare, geometric outline', he goes on, 'the visual field acquires an almost classical simplicity of form, relinquishing the anthropomorphic signatures of "inhabited space" for the aesthetic surface of visual abstraction'.²⁸

Such readings draw on claims made by actors about Beckett's handling of the body and the stage space in rehearsal. As Garner notes, actress Billie Whitelaw has suggested that Beckett 'writes paintings', emphasising his concern with the actor's body as sculptural material: 'the way the thing looks and the way he paints with light is just as important as what comes out of my mouth'.²⁹ Both Gontarski and Garner quote Pierre Chabert, who says that the actor's body becomes a kind of artistic material in Beckett's hands: it 'is worked, violated even, much like the raw material of the painter or sculptor, in the service of a systematic exploration of all possible relationships between the body and movement, the body and space, the body and

²⁷ Garner, '(Dis)figuring Space: Visual Field in Beckett's Late Plays', p. 63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Billie Whitelaw in Jonathan Kalb in *Beckett in Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 235.

objects, the body and light and the body and words'.³⁰ While both points indicate Beckett's increasing preoccupation with the body as theatrical or compositional material, my contention is that this preoccupation can be traced back to as early as *Waiting for Godot* (and perhaps earlier), both in his fascination with the geometrical apportioning of the stage space and in his multi-faceted attitude towards the relation between actor and character.

I read this preoccupation with the body as pliable, moveable material as an acknowledgement of the limits of the natural, the authentic, in short, the body as given, which, as previously suggested, correlates with a Nancean untying of corporeality from an ontotheology which traditionally posits it as the incarnation of the soul. This is a move which resonates both with a number of theories on puppetry, including Barthes' thinking of the *Bunraku* theatre, and with the 'déconstruction du christianisme' theorized by Derrida in *Le Toucher: Jean Luc Nancy*.³¹ My reading builds on, but also diverges from what Lois Oppenheim, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's figure of *la chair* or the flesh, has termed Beckett's 'painterly' approach to artistic practice.³² In linking Beckett's critical writings with Merleau-Ponty's work, specifically his idea of art as the overlapping of vision and bodily movement (where the body is both seer and seen), Oppenheim aims to offer an alternative to the 'psychologically informed interpretations.'³³ It is the 'intertwining, or "chiasmic," relation maintained by the perceiving subject' with its surroundings, a relation which implies an incarnate or 'corporealized mind', as well as 'the consequent emphases on visibility (the interplay between the visible and invisible),' which provides the basis

³⁰ From Pierre Chabert, 'The Body in Beckett's Theatre', quoted in Stanton B. Garner, '(Dis)figuring Space: Visual Field in Beckett's late Plays', p. 63.

³¹ Derrida, *Le Toucher*, p. 251.

³² Oppenheim, *The Painted Word*, p. 3, p. 142.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

for her reading of Beckett's approach to both his creative and critical works.³⁴ In my reading, Beckett's staging of the body in *Play* constitutes a more radical interruption of presence and of the christological foundations of the *corps propre* than that which Merleau-Ponty's theory, by definition, enables. Rather than calling for an *intertwining* or *merging* of the seer and the seen, the touching and the touched, I suggest that Beckett's subjects articulate a *spacing* and a *sharing* of agency which is fundamentally at odds with any notion of the incarnate, of the soul 'made present' via the body.

In a similar way to Barthes' *Bunraku* theatre, *Play* takes its impetus from the tension resulting from the gap between actor and character, performer and performed. It does so, as I hope to demonstrate, by flattening the performance image and relinquishing as far as possible the sense of make-believe, disguise and pretence traditionally associated with the naturalist stage. Beckett stipulates for example that the actors should be '*impassive throughout*', '*faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns*', their voices '*toneless*'.³⁵ Their task here is not to think or interpret a character that already exists within the script, that is, to bring it to life. Rather they are there to follow instructions, to respond (to the light), react and repeat. Secondly, those components of performance traditionally subordinated to narrative action, such as the light, are here elevated to the status of agent, a process which blurs the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. By isolating the different tracts of performance and allowing them to appear as dislocated fragments of a decentered field, *Play* brings both the tactility of bodies, and the tactility of the theatre as medium, to the fore. Beckett here moves from a language of the body as the

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 307.

privileged projector of sense, to a language of bodies, or the spacing between bodies, where meaning is continually displaced and therefore difficult to pin down. What underscores this investigation is a simultaneous un-working or dispersal of identity, and an attendant logic of propriety, integrity and selfhood. As I will demonstrate, the intense tactility of *Play*'s imagery paradoxically heightens our awareness of the distance or gap at the heart of the theatrical event, between character and actor, puppet and puppeteer, performance and reality.

At a very early stage of the play's development, Beckett insists upon the use of an 'histoire banale' in order to 'abolish' any claims to psychological realism and focus instead on a 'play of light and dark'.³⁶ In a letter to Alan Schneider, following the German production of *Play*, he suggests that the faces should not be 'excessively made up and characterized: ageing missus and exciting mistress etc. [...] There [for they] are all in the same dinghy at last and should be as little differentiated as possible. Three grey disks'.³⁷ In the same letter, Beckett asks for 'complete expressionlessness. [...] Voices grey and abstract as the faces, grey as cinders – that is what seems to me right'.³⁸ Like Winnie at the end of *Happy Days*, the characters in *Play* are completely immobile, confined, and forced to submit to external conditions imposed by the theatrical apparatus. In contrast to the earlier work, however, the stage image of *Play* is entirely static, and there is no interaction between the protagonists:

Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns about one yard

high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The

³⁶ Samuel Beckett, Letter to Lawrence Harvey, 30 April 1962, quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 498.

³⁷ Samuel Beckett, Letter to Alan Schneider, 26th November 1963, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Volume III: 1957-1965, ed. and trans. by George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 584.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of W2, M and W1.

They face undeviatingly front throughout the *Play*. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks.³⁹

‘The source of light is single’ and ‘at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below’; ‘a single mobile spot should be used, swivelling at maximum speed from one face to another as required’, ‘expressive of a unique inquisitor’.⁴⁰ A ‘Chorus’ section, with all three speaking at once, ‘*largely unintelligible*’, opens and closes one recital of the text, and each of the two main sections, each player uttering his or her initial half-line of the section simultaneously. The entire play is repeated, with possible variations outlined in the stage directions, and the final blackout occurs only after M has initiated a potential third round.

After a ‘chorus’ opens the text, the first section trisects the story of an adulterous affair via the differing perspectives of the husband (M), the wife (W1) and the ‘other woman’ (W2).⁴¹ Fragments of narrative are discernible as the three protagonists respond to the flitting light, making their interjections in non-consecutive order. The scenes evoked include a confrontation between the wife and the mistress, the man’s attempt to appease his wife, the mistress’s plan ‘to go away’ with the man, and a hint at the man’s trying to escape the messy situation altogether through suicide or something similar: ‘finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer –’.⁴² The scenario is deliberately recognisable, replete with clichés, and containing all the ingredients for a traditional realist or drawing-room drama: jealousies, threats, deceptions, confrontation-scenes and even a private-detective. The stage-picture

³⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 307.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

presents not a realistic setting but a state, ‘Beckett’s ultimate version of the Protestant Hell’, as Hugh Kenner has suggested.⁴³ The first ‘*blackout*’ is followed by an interlude from the chorus which precedes the second section. Here Beckett adds to the sense of confusion by interspersing the fragments of narrative with speculative comments from the protagonists about the state they find themselves in: ‘When you go out — and I go out. Some day you will tire of me and go out... for good’, or ‘I know now, all that was just... play. And all this? [...] When will all this have been... just play?’.⁴⁴ Such references to the light and to the performance situation draw attention further from the narrative content towards the interplay of different worlds, the fictional and the concrete, or spheres, the temporal and the spatial. According to Beckett’s instruction, the whole play should be repeated with or without minor variations, an effect which further undermines any sense of logical or psychological progression. We can see here how Beckett gradually shifts the focus from a theatre that relies upon imitation in order to represent conflicts in the real world in a fictional context, towards a theatre that discovers its own conflicts and tensions in the concrete and spatial interactions that underscore the theatrical situation.

While the image remains largely static, and the figures immobile, trapped in their urns, the text, by contrast, moves from one location to the next, drawing extensively on a rich vein of body-clichés:

W1: Give up that whore, she said, or I’ll cut your throat –

[...]

⁴³ Hugh Kenner, *A Reader’s Guide to Samuel Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 153.

⁴⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 312-313.

W2: One morning as I was sitting stitching by the open window she burst in and flew at me. Give him up, she screamed, he's mine.⁴⁵

Here, the expressions 'cut her throat', 'burst in' and 'flew at me' evoke a sense of the material underpinnings of language, what Courtney Massie refers to as its 'language's non-semantic elements', drawing attention away from referential meaning in order to prioritize shape and form.⁴⁶ As Simon Critchley puts it, such examples signal 'the eruption of materiality into the spiritual purity of tragic action and desire'.⁴⁷ In Ulrika Maude's terms, they are a marker of the 'grotesque emphasis', which runs through the play as a whole, serving to 'highlight the characters' affinity with the world of matter', and 'collapsing the boundary between self, other and world'.⁴⁸ This emphasis on the material further illustrated in various references to sensory experience as well as to basic bodily needs and desires:

W2: [...] Seeing her now for the first time full length in the flesh I understood why he preferred me [...]. What are you talking about? I said, stitching away. Someone yours? Give up whom? I smell you off him, she screamed, he stinks of bitch.

[...]

M: So I took her in my arm and swore I could not live without her [...] She did not repulse me.

[...]

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

⁴⁶ Courtney Massie, 'Something is Taking its Course', p. 45.

⁴⁷ Simon Critchley, 'Comedy and Finitude: Displacing the Tragic-Heroic Paradigm in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis', *Constellations* 6 (1999), pp. 108-22, p. 117.

⁴⁸ Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 108.

W1: Judge then of my astonishment when one fine morning, as I was sitting stricken in the morning room, he slunk in, fell on his knees before me, buried his face in my lap and [...] confessed. [...] ⁴⁹

The words, Beckett stipulates, are to be spoken in a '*rapid tempo*' throughout, not as the direct expression of thoughts but as 'dramatic ammunition', toneless, with no attitude to the audience.⁵⁰ As is the case in later works such as *Not I* (1972) Beckett privileges the rhythm and tactility of the words spoken, shifting the emphasis from supposed intellectual content towards visceral, spatial relationships between surface elements. The movement of the text here does not obey linear logic, but sustains, instead, a circular, insistently repetitive rhythm where narrative progression is subverted via interruption, reaction and revision.

This predicament is further evident if we examine the process of the play's construction. Between the initial draft entitled 'Before Play', and the final version of *Play*, there are nine separate typescripts in which the initial adultery story, expressed in a chain of cause and effect, divided equally among the three protagonists, is thoroughly deconstructed in order to abolish any sense of a coherent story line.⁵¹ A

⁴⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 308.

⁵⁰ Samuel Beckett quoted in S. E. Gontarski, 'Staging Himself; Or, Beckett's Late Style in the Theatre', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 6, 1997, pp. 87-97, p. 93.

⁵¹ The earliest available draft, 'Before PLAY' is housed as part of the Beckett Collection at the University of Reading. It differs from the published text in so far as its three characters, two men and one woman, are much more individualised in terms of appearance, background and modes of speech. They are also, in view of the well-known subject-matter of the adultery-story, highly recognisable stereotypes. Nickie has red hair and a milky complexion, and is preoccupied with her own beauty and that of her men. Syke is bald with a horizontal blond moustache. He has studied at Oxford and been injured in a war, after which he has taken up chicken-farming. Conk has sleek black hair and a drooping black moustache. He is extremely rich and conscious of his attractiveness to women. Both men are uninterested in love before they meet Nickie, and both bitterly resent the power she has gained over them. All three fantasise about the present whereabouts of the others. See Samuel Beckett, 'Before Play', Manuscripts: Drama – Play/Comédie sub-series BC MSS DRAMA/PLA, Undated, 4 leaves, Reading University Library, BC MS 1227/7/16/6.

number of over-explicit contexts are cut, and chains of reasoning are broken down and re-configured, as is the case in the following example:

W1: I said to him, **Give her up**. I swore by all I held most sacred –

[*Spot from W1 to W2*]

W2: One morning as I was sitting stitching by the open window, she burst in and flew at me. **Give him up**, she screamed, he's mine. [...]

M: We were not long together when she smelled the rat. **Give up that whore**, she said, or I'll cut my throat - [*Hiccup.*] pardon – so help me God. I knew she could have no proof. So I told her I did not know what she was talking about.

[*Spot from M to W2.*]

W2: What are you talking about? I said, stitching away. Someone yours? **Give up whom?** I smell you off him, she screamed, he stinks of bitch.⁵²

The initial highlighted phrase, 'give her up', begins to circulate among episodes and voices. Re-used, recycled, and transformed by each new sentence in which it appears, the phrase loses its attachment to any particular individual or context, proving deficient as an epistemologically grounded statement, and thus further undermining its own status as fixed origin or essence. Both here and elsewhere, *Play* foregrounds the materiality of language such that it is not 'owned' by any individual as the expression of an interiority but rather circulates as a form of external equipment, *shared* between agents.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Sight is explicitly foregrounded in the text, which is replete with references to ‘looking’, ‘glaring’, ‘gazing’, ‘staring’, and the ‘opening and shutting’ of eyes.⁵³ M says, for instance, ‘am I as much as... being seen?’ a question which points to the fact of his physical status as performer on stage, as well as his figurative position within the tale of adultery. Equally, in the meditation section, W2 asks ‘Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?’, and W1 expresses her physical unease at being watched: ‘is it something I should do with my face, other than utter? Weep?’⁵⁴ In the stage directions for *Play*, Beckett stipulates that ‘the source of light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims [...] the method consisting in assigning to each face a separate fixed spot is unsatisfactory in that it is less expressive of a unique inquisitor than the single mobile spot.’⁵⁵ The light, it is suggested, is intended to reflect the spectator’s single, fixed inquisitorial gaze. M makes this connection explicit by addressing the light in human terms: ‘and now that you are...mere eye. Just looking. At my face. On and off’, while W1 says: ‘When you go out – and I go out. Some day you will tire of me for good’.⁵⁶ Due to the fact that the spotlight is included within the playing area, it ‘must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage)’, the gaze which it encapsulates becomes part of the general workings of the theatre image. All three figures express a longing to escape the light, which places them under the obligation to speak:

yes, strange, darkness best, and the darker the worse, till all dark, then all well,
for the time, but it will come, the time will come, the thing is there, you’ll see

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-318.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 316, 312.

it, get off me, keep off me, all dark, all still [...] a shade gone, just a shade, in the head.⁵⁷

The metaphor of ‘shade’ also recurs in various forms throughout, an example being when W1 says: ‘though I had him dogged for months by a first rate man, no shadow of proof was forthcoming...’⁵⁸

Through such repetition, Beckett alerts our attention both to the formal play of light and darkness, and to the structures of viewing inherent in the theatrical encounter. When we enter the auditorium, we as spectators expect the performers to speak, to ‘make a *Play*’. The spotlight, in short, activates a kind of ‘scopophilia’, a desire to see, not in the sense of a rational quest, but a voracious hunger, reminiscent of the ‘œil de proie’, which Beckett introduces as a motif in his short prose.⁵⁹ In *Play*, Beckett explores the stage space as an arena in which this ‘œil de proie’ exercises its power to capture and master its objects. Whilst laying bare this process, he also resists it, putting together a stage image that refuses unification, continually drawing attention to its own constructedness. The spoken fragments of narrative conflict not only with each other but also with our overall perception of the stage image: there is a continual tension caused by the actors’ bodily constriction which repeatedly contradicts the images of movement evoked within the narrative. This produces what Trish McTighe refers to as ‘perceptual dissonance’ or an ‘incommensurability

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁵⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p.

⁵⁹ The phrase ‘œil de proie’ occurs in *Imagination Morte Imaginez*, published in French in *Têtes-mortes* (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1967), p. 57. The notion of an all-consuming eye which this phrase encapsulates is equally explored in *Textes pour rien* - ‘Œil patient et fixe, à fleur de cette tête hagarde de charognard, œil fidèle, c’est son heure, c’est peut-être son heure.’ (Beckett, *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien*, p. 119) – or in *Mal vu mal dit* where the eye is personified – ‘soulagé l’œil respire mais pas longtemps.’ (*Mal vu mal dit* [Paris: Minuit, 1981], p. 26). As I will demonstrate later on in this chapter, it also resonates with *Film*, where ‘E’ or the camera eye embodies a kind of voyeurism and relentless pursuit of the subject, O.

between what we hear and what we see', making us more aware of the gap between reality and fiction, performance situation and narrative world.⁶⁰ This, in turn, is where Beckett's approach can be seen to intersect both with Barthes' aesthetics of puppetry, and the anti-humanist, post-phenomenological standpoint of Nancy.

Like the puppeteers of Barthes' *Bunraku* theatre, the actors performing in *Play* are given a strict set of instructions, a number of unambiguous tasks to fulfil and material limitations summarised aptly by Sara Jane Bailes as: 'speak when the light shines on you. Be silent when it is off. Hold still. Get to the end. Repeat.'⁶¹ The three vertical urns in which the performers are encased, at the same time as fragmenting the actors' bodies and suppressing their individual identities, also serve to protect them from what Olga Taxidou refers to as 'the distorting effects of enactment' or imitation.⁶² As Bailes reminds us in her analysis of *Play*, 'Beckett dispense[s] with many of the tricks of the stage that can potentially fail the performer attempting to do her job – costume, accent, disguise, feigned emotion, the clutter and fakery of mimesis, and what to *do* with the body whilst standing still on stage.'⁶³ What is exposed, under these circumstances, is the shape and structure of the performance situation. As both performer and character are held in place literally by the material conditions of performance, the focus shifts away from the individual (body) as the site for the animation of a single soul or psyche, towards the grouping or assemblage of heterogeneous parts upon which character is shared or worked out. Here, Oskar Schlemmer's work on the *Theatre of Bauhaus* can provide yet another useful point of comparison, focusing as it does on the grouping of individuals in space and enlisting, in Taxidou's terms, the codes of 'abstraction, mechanization and technology' in

⁶⁰ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 31, 104.

⁶¹ Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, p. xv.

⁶² Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 11.

⁶³ Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, p. xv.

redefining the human form on stage.⁶⁴ In a work entitled *Space Dance*, performed by Schlemmer, Werner Siedhoff and Walter Kandinsky in 1926, and photographed in the same year by Erich Consemüller, for example, three identical figures are arranged ‘on an otherwise bare stage in padded monochrome unitards’.⁶⁵ Wearing commonplace dance slippers and metallic egg-shaped masks, ‘painted with wide-eyed expressions of mock surprise’, they appear dwarfed inside their padded costumes.⁶⁶ Apart from their hands, which protrude at odd angles in a manner suggestive of artificial limbs or prosthesis, the three bodies are completely encased, facing directly forward or at a right angle to the camera. In Juliet Koss’s terms, they ‘lack all trace of individuality, any sense of flesh and blood, or any hint of human skeletons at their core’.⁶⁷

Resembling oversized toys or swollen mannequins, simultaneously pleasing and unsettling to behold, they emblematised Schlemmer’s vision that all representations of the human form belong ‘in the realm of the doll-like.’⁶⁸ As Koss suggests, there is an ‘uncertainty of scale’ surrounding the body here, and this is exacerbated by the fact that the stage is completely empty but for the three figures.⁶⁹ There is no common denominator, no norm, in other words, against which to interpret the figures as individuals. Markedly different in size and shape, their poses apparently arbitrary, ‘each one’, as Koss puts it, is ‘an unreliable standard for judging the other two.’⁷⁰

Arranged in relation to the camera eye or spotlight, divided both vertically and horizontally into sections, the overall effect is of a flattened, geometrically organised

⁶⁴ Oskar Schlemmer as cited in Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, p. 27.

⁶⁵ Juliet Koss, ‘Bauhaus Theatre of Human Dolls’, *Art Bulletin*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (December 2003), pp. 724-745, p. 724.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Oskar Schlemmer as cited in Juliet Koss, ‘Bauhaus Theatre of Dolls’, p. 725.

⁶⁹ Juliet Koss, ‘Bauhaus Theatre of Human Dolls’, p. 725.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

stage world where technological and choreographed elements dominate.⁷¹ As Koss suggests, Schlemmer is here moving not only towards a new model of theatre, but also of subjectivity. Here psychological and emotional response loses its position as the foundation for interactions among individuals. The traditional actor's body makes way for a new 'human doll' which acquires significance by association, as integral parts within a 'corporate body, a group entity comprising identical forms operating mechanistically, in unison.'⁷²

This emphasis on the mechanical, what Maholy-Nagy, Schlemmer's collaborator, refers to as the 'mechanized eccentric[ity]' of the human form, is enlisted not only as a way to reconfigure a theatre based on representation, but also as a way to undermine the affiliated notion of the body as indivisible, natural whole.⁷³ The tall, bulging containers which enclose the performers up to their necks in *Play*, suppressing much of what identifies them as individuals, appear, like many of Schlemmer's figures, to be inspired by modern machinery.⁷⁴ However, whilst there is a sense of the mechanical or the machine-like in Beckett's work, any notion of instrumentality or the usefulness of these figures is undermined by their precise geometrical positioning in relation to both the audience and the spotlight rather than in relation to each other. Unlike the thinking that surrounds robots, machinery and pure automata, Beckett's stage image is determined by formal, aesthetic considerations rather than functional ones.

⁷¹ The photograph on which both Koss's and my own analysis is based, is taken by Erich Consemüller, Cologne, private collection (from Herzogenrath and Kraus, Erich Consemüller, pl. 123) and coincides precisely with Schlemmer's arrangement of the figures on stage.

⁷² Juliet Koss, 'Bauhaus Theatre of Human Dolls', pp. 733, 732.

⁷³ Maholy-Nagy as cited in Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ See for example, Oskar Schlemmer, *The Triadic Ballet in Metropolis Again (Das Triadische Ballet als Teil der Revue "Wieder Metropol")*, Metropol Theater, Berlin, 1926, Bühnen Archiv Oskar Schlemmer.

Play thus engages with the dispersal of the body proper, and the suspension of self-identity and self-presence by foregrounding the technical apparatus of performance and the spacing or juxtaposition of heterogeneous dramatic elements. Bringing the body to the fore by underscoring the materiality of words and stage image, Beckett simultaneously evades any thought of the body as origin, foundation or ground for meaning. Through a self-reflexive foregrounding of the theatrical medium, he posits meaning as occurring in excess of the individual body or *corps propre*, simultaneously fragmented and re-arranged via the juxtaposition of dramatic elements, or, to use Nancy's term, the *techné* of performance. Here it is useful to recall what Nancy says about *techné* in *Corpus*:

Notre monde est le monde de la « technique », le monde dont le cosmos, la nature, les dieux, le système complet dans sa jointure intime s'expose comme « technique »: monde d'une *écotechnie*.⁷⁵

What Nancy appears to suggest here, is that the environment, the cosmos, the world, God, Mother Nature, everything, in short, that we believe to be of a natural, given order, and therefore joined together in its essence, is in fact underscored by a technical aspect. This technical aspect is nothing like a system, a set of procedures or a linear framework. Rather, as James suggests, 'l'écotechnie' (ecotechnics, in English) 'aims to describe a certain manner of creation, not on the basis of a foundation or origin but rather on the basis of the connection and interconnection of sense, material bodies, and apparatus'.⁷⁶ When Nancy talks about 'l'écotechnie du

⁷⁵ Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 78.

⁷⁶ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 146.

monde' then he is seeking to outline the realm of technologies, devices, apparatuses, machines and appliances that intersect with our bodies, and through which life is mediated to us:

L'écotechnie fonctionne avec des appareils techniques, sur lesquels elle nous branche de toutes parts. Mais ce qu'elle *fait*, ce sont nos corps, qu'elle met au monde et branche à ce système, nos corps qu'elle crée ainsi plus visibles, plus proliférants, plus polymorphes, plus pressés, plus en « masses » et en « zones » que jamais ils ne furent.⁷⁷

Similarly, when he talks about 'techné des corps' Nancy is attempting to think through this fundamental interconnectedness, branching or mediation of the body and bodies via technological apparatus. In English, most critics refer to this aspect of Nancy's thought as the 'originary technicity' of existence, a term which, as James sees it, destabilises any kind of foundational 'opposition between nature and concept'.⁷⁸ I refer to this concept in relation to Beckett's works at various points throughout the remainder of this chapter.

While Merleau-Ponty's incarnate subject poses an amalgamation or merging of form and content, of the inner life of the subject with its outward manifestation in the world, Beckett very clearly foregrounds the mechanics of theatrical production, the technology of performance in his exploration of subjectivity on stage. In this way, he marks a dispersal and reworking of the ontotheological body or *corps propre*, appearing to trace the very shift identified by Nancy from the glorious body of God to

⁷⁷ Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 78.

⁷⁸ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 147.

the rhythmic, plural exposition of bodies via *techné*. The theme of adultery, which is raised in *Play* without becoming a unifying principle, contributes to this process, by actively problematizing notions of propriety, integrity and essence. The act of infidelity around which *Play* revolves divests the subject not only of integrity but of self-possession. As I have shown above, this divestiture is both thematic and formal, triggered initially by the reconfiguration of the conventional dramatic situation.

The self-reflexive foregrounding of the mechanics of production in *Play*, which brings about the dispersal of the ontotheological body and the interruption of self-identity and presence, can equally be discerned in *Film* (1965). Written and produced around the same time as *Play*, with Buster Keaton as its central protagonist, *Film* differs from the other works discussed in this chapter, insofar as it is not intended for the theatre. Significantly, however, the script is included in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, published by Faber & Faber in 1986, and again in 2006. The instructions, as with many of the theatrical works, are meticulously outlined, and include diagrams, lists, patterns and memos which demonstrate a concern for the form whilst describing in great detail, the exact movements of the actor/s within the frame and in relation to the camera eye. In this way, it further elucidates the author's preoccupation with the body as image, as well as his concern to dismantle a purely scopopic regime of representation and identification which relies on verisimilitude or illusionistic techniques. As I hope to demonstrate, the debates which fuelled the making of *Film* – the restructuring of conventions of viewing predicated on the image of the whole body – are similar if not the same as those which fuelled the making of *Play*. In looking at these two works alongside each other, therefore, I will continue to draw out the links between cinema and theatre.

Film (1965)

In his production meetings, recorded and published in Stan Gontarski's *The Intent of Undoing*, Beckett describes the project of *Film* as an exercise in finding 'the technical equivalent, a visual, technical, cinematic equivalent for visual appetite and visual distaste. A reluctant disgusted vision and a ferociously voracious one'.⁷⁹ As Anna McMullan puts it, 'the camera eye [E] is an agent not just of perception but also of scopophilic desire, [...] stalking O [the object of perception]'.⁸⁰ What comes under scrutiny in this work, as is the case in *Play*, is the spectator's gaze, which is incorporated into the picture and represented here by the camera eye. *Film* makes explicit use of the close-up shot to zoom in on Keaton's hands and various objects which resemble eyes. The absence of material context brought within the close-up shot means that the viewer is unable to place the image, to frame and thus interpret it fully. As film theorist Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, the close-up presents 'a lurking danger, a potential semiotic threat to the unity and coherency of the filmic discourse'.⁸¹ The most commonly used close-up, that of the face, 'fragments the body, decapitating it'.⁸² In doing so, it works to extract the image from the spatiotemporal coordinates of narrative and character, thus serving the same function as the spotlight of *Play*.

Written in English in April 1963, *Film* was commissioned for the Evergreen Theatre in New York,⁸³ directed and filmed in the summer of 1964 by Alan Schneider, with Beckett present for the duration of the process. It was then publicly

⁷⁹ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p. 129.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Mary Ann Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 14, 3, 2003, pp. 89-111., p. 90.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ An off-Broadway playhouse in 11th Street, formally known as the Renata Theatre. See <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/11780>, 12th December 2019.

shown at the New York Film Festival in 1965, and subsequently published by Faber and Faber, London, in 1967. With George Berkeley's famous maxim '*esse est percipere*' included in the 'general' notes for the script, *Film* has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention, firstly, as Ulrika Maude suggests, 'because it focuses on the question of the subject as the object of perception and secondly, because the mode of representation is restricted almost purely to the visual'.⁸⁴ Beckett states in the opening lines of the script that 'the film is entirely silent except for the "sssh!" in part one' which, given the absence of a naturalistic soundscape, serves to heighten the focus on vision as a theme.⁸⁵ Beckett goes on to emphasise the 'climate' of 'unreality' in the work, suggesting that the mood of the film should be 'comic and unreal' with Keaton, the 'unsmiling protagonist'⁸⁶ inviting 'laughter' through his responses and the particular way in which he moves.⁸⁷ As with previous examples of Beckett's work, the focus here is on extracting the individual from any kind of natural or psychologically approved setting, emphasising both its artificiality and separatedness, that is, the quality of being fabricated and held in existence by multiple agencies. This, in turn, will lead to a reexamination of the spatially-organised self in *Film* alongside Nancy's notions of dispersal, intrusion and the technical supplementarity of existence.

Though not included in the production notes, the film begins and ends with a close-up of Keaton's 'veiny, bloodshot eye',⁸⁸ presumably in order to emulate the atmosphere of discomfort produced by the protagonist's perpetual flight from perception, to heighten the 'unbearable quality of [...] scrutiny', and further confuse

⁸⁴ Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 41.

⁸⁵ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 323.

⁸⁶ See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 71.

⁸⁷ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 323.

⁸⁸ Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 42.

the boundaries between perceiver and perceived.⁸⁹ There is, as Ulrika Maude states, ‘a striking emphasis on surfaces’, throughout, ‘whether the texture of the wall in the opening shot, Keaton’s creased and lined skin, or the crumbling plaster of the walls of the room’.⁹⁰ This, coupled with the ‘explicit references’⁹¹ to looking and watching which various critics have identified, produces what Trish McTighe refers to as a ‘haptic image’, engaging the eye through touch, and ‘working against the fulfilment of vision’.⁹² The ‘haptic imagery’ introduced through the medium of *O*, as McTighe puts it, ‘asserts the presence of the film, screen, or skin that exists between perceiver and object’.⁹³ It thereby draws attention both to the medium of film and to the material, embodied nature of the eye.

O and *E*, it is stated, stand for ‘object’ and ‘eye’, and make up the dual or split protagonist whose fruitless ‘search for non-being’ or ‘flight from extraneous perception’ provides the principle action for the work.⁹⁴ Throughout three separate episodes or parts, ‘the street (about eight minutes). [...] the stairs (about five minutes). [...] the room (about seventeen minutes), we follow *O* from the point of view of *E* (camera eye) who remains invisible except at certain designated points when he ‘inadvertently’ and only partially comes into view.’⁹⁵ In order to achieve this effect, the actor is instructed to keep within what Beckett calls the ‘angle of immunity’, that is, ‘not exceeding 45 degrees’ until the end of part three, when *O* is ‘cornered’ by *E* and we see both in alternate shots.⁹⁶ As with other works the separation of the action into episodes or acts is supplemented by further

⁸⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 330.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 43.

⁹² McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 31.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 323, 324.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

multiplications and divisions. In his notes for *Film*, Beckett outlines a total of fourteen ‘scenes’, all of which contribute in some way or other to the central theme: the repeatedly foiled attempts by the protagonist to escape perception, whether ‘human’, ‘animal’ or ‘divine’.⁹⁷ In the first episode, as ‘O comes into view hastening blindly along [the] sidewalk, hugging the wall’, wearing a ‘long dark overcoat [...] with collar up’ and ‘hat pulled down over eyes’, he collides with an ‘elderly couple’ before rushing on.⁹⁸ As they recover from the shock of the collision, the couple look round at the camera eye (E), ‘the woman raising a lorgnon to her eyes, the man taking off his pince-nez’,⁹⁹ their expressions encapsulating what Beckett refers to throughout as the ‘agony of perceivedness’.¹⁰⁰ They then look back at O, who has by now moved away out of sight. A similar sequence of events occurs on ‘the stairs’, where O passes a ‘frail old woman’ carrying ‘a tray of flowers’.¹⁰¹ Here however, there is no collision, with O merely rushing by, continuing his flight from ‘extraneous perception’.¹⁰² As in the first scene, the woman enters into confrontation with E, causing her to assume the same look of anguish displayed by the elderly pair in the street: ‘she closes her eyes, then sinks to the ground and lies with face in scattered flowers’.¹⁰³ The room, like the street and the stairs, brings further unwanted opportunities for perceptual encounter, with the dog, the cat, the parrot, the goldfish, the mirror, and the picture of God the father all apparently ‘staring’ and thus needing to be erased.¹⁰⁴

Within the room, O looks at a series of photographs, a process which is meticulously outlined in the stage directions as well as Beckett’s correspondence with

⁹⁷ Samuel Beckett in Maurice Harmon ed., *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 159.

⁹⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 324-325.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 324.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 326.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

co-director Alan Schneider. In what follows, I examine this episode as crucial to an understanding of Beckett's particular handling of time and space in this work, focusing on the manner in which meaning or identity is split and spread across different media, emphasising discontinuity and interruption integral principles of the filmic encounter. Here O inspects a series of photographs in order 1 to 7, placing them one after another on his knee, so that when he has finished, 1 is at the bottom and 7 at the top. He then takes up 7, looks at it again (for 'six seconds') before ripping it into exactly four pieces, then dropping it on the floor 'on his left', before doing the same with 6, 5 and so on until all photographs are lying on the floor ripped to pieces.¹⁰⁵ According to Beckett's instructions, these photos should 'represent O [*in percipi*] at different ages from his infancy to his present age [...] and as far as possible in situations normally associated with these ages.'¹⁰⁶ In other words, they create the impression of a biographical or personal history, the final picture of a man 'over 40. Wearing hat and overcoat. Patch over left eye',¹⁰⁷ corresponding to the image of O that we see at the end of *Film*. However, the impression of linear time or narrative development is simultaneously undermined by the protagonist's picking up and dropping action which accompanies the sequence, and contributes to the sense of an infinitely repeatable and thus reversible series. While the pictures evoke a set of memories, moving from the 'male infant' held in his mother's arms, through to childhood, 'Graduation day', the wedding, fatherhood and finally middle-age) the temporal logic that this suggests is undercut by the spatially choreographed process of picking up, ripping and placing the photographs as objects in the room.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁰⁶ Beckett in Harmon, *No Author Better Served*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

Taking this spatial organisation of identity as a point of departure, I acknowledge *Film*'s thematization of visual display, via the carnal, embodied human eye, whilst demonstrating, in a move that resonates with Nancy's deconstruction of the *corps propre* as discussed by Derrida, how the work simultaneously disrupts any notions of proximity, immediacy or presence associated with the embodied individual and promulgated by phenomenologically informed readings. I investigate *Film*, in short, as charting a series of encroachments on bodily identity. In doing so, I draw again on Nancy, in particular his discovery of a primary process of ecotechnics which underscores the interrelations between human bodies in the world, and, more specifically, which disrupts any notion of the individual as natural self-sufficient being.

That *Film* addresses the link between visual perception, representation and subjectivity is indicated in the general notes for the script, which include the words of the eighteenth-century Irish philosopher Bishop Berkeley, *esse est percipi*, 'to be is to be perceived'.¹⁰⁹ In an unusually explicit move, Beckett presents this maxim at the start of the script seemingly in order to guide the audience in their interpretation of the action that follows. As such, it also plays a pivotal role in Gilles Deleuze's exegesis of *Film*, both in *Cinema I: L'Image-mouvement* and *Critique et Clinique*, which I refer to later in this section. In Sandra Wynands's terms, these investigations centre on 'the dualism between O and E', or 'object' and 'eye', the latter a homonym of 'I'.¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰⁹ Biographical sources confirm Beckett's exposure to and interest in Berkeley during his time at Trinity College, Dublin. His critical engagement with the philosopher was not restricted to his studies as an undergraduate in the early twenties. For example, a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, written in 1933, recounts his reading of Berkeley's *Commonplace Book*, written when the philosopher was an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin. Beckett remarks of this work that it is 'full of profound things, and at the same time of a foul (and false) intellectual canaillerie, enough to put you against reading anymore' (Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. I, 1929-1940 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p. 154).

¹¹⁰ Sandra Wynands, *Iconic Space: The Dark Theology of Samuel Beckett's Drama* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 152.

link between the two is made clear in the final moments of *Film*, when a ‘cut to E’ reveals a double of ‘O’s face’ identifiable in particular by the ‘patch’ over his left eye.¹¹¹ The camera then moves between the two near-identical faces for several moments, E (now revealed to be O) wearing a ‘very different expression, [...] neither severity nor benignity, but rather acute *intentness*’ while O stares, then ‘closes his eyes and falls back’ in the rocking chair, covering ‘his face with his hands’.¹¹² This unexpected twist threatens narrative coherency, altering our perception of the events that precede the final moment of the work. The journey enacted by O/E becomes a quest to overcome a fundamental split in the self, a quest, in other words, for unity or fusion. But as the final moments of the film indicate, this quest is doomed to failure, as the disunity or non-coincidence between O[bject] and E[ye] remains intact. In Beckett’s terms, the fundamental disparity between O and E is not only thematic, but also formal, that is, reflected in the technical configuration of the work:

The question of transfers should be clear from the further notes. The point I tried to make was that the two visions are to be distinguished, not only on the plane of absolute quality, but also dynamically, i.e. in their manner of transferring from one object to the next.¹¹³

Elsewhere he suggests that the difference between the ‘two visions’ should:

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 323, 324, 329.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

¹¹³ Beckett in Harmon, *No Author Better Served*, p. 158.

be sought in different degrees of development, the passage from the one to the other being from greater to lesser and lesser to greater definition or luminosity.

The dissimilarity, however, obtained, would have to be flagrant.¹¹⁴

Given these stipulations, it begins to become clear how *Film* opens up a space for thinking through a fundamental separation or disunity of the self. O's non-coincidence with himself is hinted at consistently throughout, in the moments when he confronts his own image in the mirror, for example, or in his various encounters with others, such as the couple in the street, the woman on the stairway, and the animals and objects in the room. O's actions appear guided by his anxiety over perception, beginning with that of other humans but developing over the course of the film to include that of self by self. As Beckett puts it: 'all extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self perception maintains in being [...] Search for non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception'.¹¹⁵ The search for unity or coherence, then, remains unfulfilled because the self is always already split, duplicated, or interrupted.

Like *Play*, *Film* thus destabilizes notions of origin and essence by staging a series of intrusions in or interruptions to identity. The subject or protagonists (O/E) is presented as pluralized and coming-to-presence across various technologies of looking such as the 'lorgnon', the 'pince-nez', the photographs and the camera eye itself, rather than being represented in terms of any naturalized, causal relations. As previously suggested, naturalized lineage is both thematized and symbolically broken down in the scene where O tears up photographs of pivotal moments in his life. The

¹¹⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 331.

¹¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 163.

physical presence of the photographs equally underlines the technical dimensions of being to which the subject is always already exposed. As Nancy puts it in *L'Intrus*, 'toujours "je" se trouve étroitement serré dans un créneau de possibilités techniques'.¹¹⁶ *Film* hints at this predicament by presenting its protagonist as necessarily disposed across, touching, and in contact with various forms of technology, which both constitute and intrude on the being of the protagonist. The work also draws on Christian iconography, with the image of God the Father in the room, suggesting, in a way that resonates with Nancy's thought, that the deconstructive probing of identity necessarily takes place around the ontotheological limits of the (Christic) body. As previously stated, Nancy's thinking of the body and touch is related to what Derrida calls the 'déconstruction du christianisme', an untying of corporeality from an ontotheology of the body which traditionally posits it as incarnation of the soul.¹¹⁷ As Nancy suggests in *Corpus*, the thought of the body proper and its attendant logic of propriety, integrity and selfhood are encapsulated in the words of the Eucharist: *Hoc est enim corpus meum* ('Here is my body'): the consecration of the flesh of the (Christic) body in all its presupposed presence and essence is what Nancy seeks to open up to the thought of deconstruction. *Film*, then, can be said to probe the limits of the ontotheological body, by exploring the irreducible, 'originary technicity' of existence.¹¹⁸ This predicament is played out, not only thematically, but also formally, that is, at the level of the film's construction. The initial close-up of Keaton's eyelid, a reptilian surface, uncomfortably close, slowly fades into a different image. Due to the jerky, unstable movements of the camera, it is difficult at first to discern the context or what is to become the filmic scenario. As the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ Derrida, *Le Toucher*, p. 251.

¹¹⁸ See James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 147.

camera recedes however, the picture becomes identifiable and we see O hurrying along a ‘dead street’ next to a wall.¹¹⁹

As previously suggested, this kind of image or *approach* to the image, has been identified by critics such as Trish McTighe as ‘haptic’.¹²⁰ In film studies, Laura Marks’ book, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* offers a rich vocabulary and conceptual framework for articulating a relation to such images which I will draw on now. She uses the term ‘haptic visuality’ to describe a mode of film viewing which is sensitive to the texture of images, and which occurs when ‘the eyes themselves function like organs of touch’.¹²¹ Haptic images, she suggests, ‘do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image’.¹²² The examples which she gives present what Marks calls a ‘diminished visibility’, where ‘visual coherence and plenitude of the image [are] denied to the viewer’.¹²³ Here, ‘the locus of identification and subjectivity is shifted from the human figure to an image dispersed across the surface of the screen’.¹²⁴

In its extreme attachment to surface (Keaton’s eye) and its troubling of the distinction between figure and ground (the pan of the textured wall), the opening sequence of *Film* appears to exemplify Marks’s notion of haptic visuality, inviting a ‘caressing gaze’, a ‘labile, plastic sort of look, more inclined to move than to focus’.¹²⁵ Rather than viewing the whole at a distance, we discover the scene gradually, our look lingering on the surface of the wall for some time before we

¹¹⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 324.

¹²⁰ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 31.

¹²¹ Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 2.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 91

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Marks, *Touch : Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, p. 8-9.

realize that it is a wall we are beholding. Equally, in the section that takes place in the apartment, a horizontal travelling shot, which follows Keaton (O) around the edges of the room, takes in the textures of the wall, with all its incisions and crevices. This is interspersed with a series of medium close-up shots of Keaton's hands, as he feels his way around, pulling the torn blind down, locking the door and covering the mirror with a black sheet. While for Marks, these kinds of shots reinforce a Merleau-Pontean notion of embodied subjectivity, encouraging a 'bodily relationship between viewer and the image',¹²⁶ I want to emphasise the close-up among other such shots which deny the viewer access to the whole picture, precisely in their capacity to make the familiar strange, to disrupt the natural course of events and introduce disorder into the smooth, continuously intelligible world of the viewer. These shots serve to remind us of the presence of the camera as agent, of human technology as mediator of the image. By cutting-up the film and focusing in on the surfaces and textures of objects and materials, Beckett thus outlines a body that is always already divided, broken up and shared between agencies, interspersed with technologies of looking, and held together through a variety of media. The images that make up *Film* are marked or shaped by this incommensurability, one which is perpetually reinforced through the fundamental disunity of the self and the originary non-coincidence that is articulated via the split protagonist (O and E).

As previously suggested, Deleuze provides extended analyses of *Film* in the first volume of his two part work *Cinéma* (1983) and in an essay entitled 'Le plus grand film irlandais (*Film* de Beckett)' in *Critique et Clinique* (1993). In both cases, he associates Beckett's work with a particular shift in the history of modern cinema, according to which the unities of time and space, the so-called 'clichés' of the

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

classical era are abandoned to make way for a more authentic approach to reality. As he puts it:

Nous ne percevons ordinairement que des clichés. Mais, si nos schèmes sensori-moteurs s'enrayent ou se cassent, alors peut apparaître un autre type d'image: une image optique-sonore pure, l'image entière et sans métaphore, qui fait surgir la chose en elle-même, littéralement son excès d'horreur ou de beauté [...].¹²⁷

The emphasis here is on rupture or the jamming of 'nos schèmes sensori-moteurs', a feature which Deleuze identifies both in Beckett's *Film* and in the work of other contemporary film makers like Duras or Resnais. Where action is no longer subordinated to or determined by psychological development, perception, as Deleuze sees it, is abstracted from any kind of sensory-motor system, and we, as spectators are able to gain a more immediate, authentic access to the cinematic image, to material reality.

Deleuze's discussion contains detailed analyses of various types of shot, including the close-up or the *gros-plan*, which, he suggests, plays a central role in this process. Citing Béla Balázs, he writes that:

le gros plan n'arrache nullement son objet à un ensemble dont il ferait partie, dont il serait une partie, mais, ce qui est tout à fait différent, il l'abstrait de toutes coordonnées spatio-temporelles, c'est-à-dire il l'élève à l'état d'Entité. Le gros-plan n'est pas un grossissement et, s'il implique un changement de

¹²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma II : L'Image-temps* (Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 1985), p. 32.

dimension, c'est un changement absolu. Mutation du mouvement, qui cesse d'être translation pour devenir expression.¹²⁸

In short, the close-up divests its objects of any kind of spatio-temporal context, allowing it to rise up to the surface of the screen. Through close-ups, Deleuze says, 'l'espace visuel [...] est un espace fragmenté et déconnecté', and 'les parties ont un raccordement manuel de proche en proche'.¹²⁹ Where the close-up is prominent, images do not appear in a rational or logical order, but rather function to produce what Deleuze refers to as an 'espace tactile', where affect becomes a condition for the possibility of reception.¹³⁰ Of all the different types of shot, the close-up is associated with the deconstruction of the rules of perspectival realism in the cinema, the annihilation of a sense of depth and the idea of the screen as surface:

le découpage affectif [...] procède par ce que Dreyer [...] appelait 'gros plan coulants'. Sans doute c'est un mouvement continu par lequel la camera passe du gros plan au plan moyen ou général, mais c'est surtout une manière de traiter le plan moyen et le plan général comme des gros plans, par absence de profondeur ou suppression de la perspective.¹³¹

As Mary Ann Doane puts it, building on Deleuze's framework, 'the image becomes, once more, an image rather than a threshold onto a world'.¹³² It 'is disengaged from the mise-en-scène, freighted with an inherent separability or isolation, a "for-itself"

¹²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma I: L'Image-mouvement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983), p. 136.

¹²⁹ Deleuze, *Cinéma II: L'Image-temps*, p. 22.

¹³⁰ Deleuze, *Cinéma I: L'Image-mouvement*, p. 154.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³² Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in Cinema', p. 91.

that inevitably escapes, to some degree, the tactics of continuity editing that strive to make it “whole” again’.¹³³ Space and time are stretched out or swollen by the face so that causal relations disintegrate.

While Deleuze’s exegesis of *Film*, as well as his more theoretical remarks about the close-up are useful, the emphasis that the philosopher places on purification or bracketing, as in the example he gives of the ‘image optique-sonore pure, l’image entière et sans métaphore’,¹³⁴ and his corresponding attempts to uncover a ‘philosophy of immanence’, ultimately jar with my approach to Beckett’s work.¹³⁵ In what follows, I draw on Derrida’s reading in *Le Toucher*, in order to problematize Deleuze’s standpoint, moving towards an understanding of the image in *Film* as ungrounded, always already plural and subject to exposure. Writing about Deleuze and Guattari specifically in relation to the haptic, Derrida suggests that:

ce qui le soude au proche, ce qui l’identifie au rapprochement du proche, non seulement à la ‘vision rapprochée’ mais au rapprochement en tous sens et pour tous les sens, au-delà du toucher, ce qui le fait tenir à l’appropriation du proche, c’est une postulation *continuiste*, un continuisme du désir qui accorde tout ce discours au motif général de ce que Deleuze et Guattari, d’après Artaud, revendiquent sous le nom du ‘corps sans organe’.¹³⁶

In other words, it is the movement towards continuity or synthesis in Deleuze’s work, articulated elsewhere in the notion of the ‘corps-sans-organes’, that justifies, for

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³⁴ Deleuze, *Cinéma II : L’Image-temps*, p. 32.

¹³⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. xv.

¹³⁶ Derrida, *Le Toucher*, p. 143.

Derrida, the assimilation of the former's 'philosophy of immanence' into the intuitionist haptological tradition which he associates in turn with a metaphysics of presence. The articulation of the notion of a 'corps-sans organes', as Derrida sees it, brings Deleuze's approach close to that of the phenomenologists insofar as it implies a relation of continuity between the touching and the touched, the seeing and the seen. In other words, it implies that sensible perception and material substance are inseparable and exist within such a relation. As Derrida sees it, Nancy is alone in departing from this tendency:

Il part, il marque son départ [...] Il partage et départage, il se départit sans doute aussi de cette problématique fondamentale, comme de cet intuitionnisme du continu ou de *l'immédiat* [...].¹³⁷

Without ever letting go of his insistence on the tactile or the material, Nancy interrupts a vocabulary based on metaphors of unity and fusion, with an emphasis on apartness, displacement, spacing and sharing out. It is in *Corpus* that he pursues this emphasis with regard to 'l'écotechnie des corps':

Il n'y a pas 'le' corps, il n'y a pas 'le' toucher, il n'y a pas 'la' res *extensa*. Il y a qu'il y a: création du monde, *techné* des corps, pesée sans limites du sens, *corpus* topographique, géographique des ectopies multipliées – et pas d'utopie.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹³⁸ Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 104.

I want to suggest that this same break with immediacy or continuous presence can be recognized in Beckett's *Film*, where sense and bodily identity are shared out, partitioned, partaken of, divided and pluralized – in a word, *syncopated* across various technologies of looking. Here Beckett foregrounds the very elements of cinema in a manner that challenges any notion of the natural or the given: a quivering eye shot in extreme close-up; a dirty, perforated wall, discovered through a slow pan shot; Keaton's hands in medium close-up as they fumble with various objects and obstacles. Rather than a sense of immediacy or physical presence, what links these images is the unravelling of the unities of space and time, the breaking down of a classically informed approach based on verisimilitude, an effect that is duplicated in the temporal and spatial dispersal of the self, and the repeated attacks on the integrity and propriety of the self-present subject, that is, of O's ability to just exist as an autonomous individual without being subject to scrutiny. This self-conscious approach means that the image, to use McMahon's phrase, 'is never self-evident or self-sufficient', but rather duplicated, multiplied and always already in relation to that which exceeds it.¹³⁹

Catastrophe (1982)

A similar effect is achieved in *Catastrophe* (1982), the final work I want to examine in this chapter. Written in French at the invitation of the Association Internationale de Défense des Artistes (AIDA), and first performed at the Avignon Festival, it is dedicated to political activist Vaclav Havel, and thus most frequently read in a political context.¹⁴⁰ Like both *Film* and *Play* it highlights processes of seeing and

¹³⁹ McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁰ One such reading is offered in Kier Elam's article, 'Catastrophic Mistakes: Beckett, Havel, The End, Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (1994), pp. 1-28. As well as providing

watching. Specifically, as Sandra Wynands has suggested, it focuses on the dynamics of visual power inherent in the theatrical encounter: ‘Catastrophe “sees” at the base of the violence and humiliation to which the Protagonist is subjected structures of vision and visuality deeply engrained in Western culture’.¹⁴¹ In the same way in which *Film* addresses the ‘visual mechanisms and philosophical assumptions at work in film-making and film–watching’,¹⁴² *Catastrophe* focuses its critique within the theatre, raising questions about the structures of truth, fabrication and communication that govern this apparatus.¹⁴³ Here Beckett targets anthropomorphic ‘practices of visuality’ as they occur predominantly in the theatre, setting up certain expectations in the audience in order subsequently to subvert them and suggest new ways of seeing.¹⁴⁴ This process, I argue, is intimately tied to a reconfiguration of the body in

contextual details of Beckett’s relationship with Havel, Elam reads *Catastrophe* in terms of its place within a reciprocal and notably political exchange between Beckett and his contemporary, Havel, who was at the time of dedication, a political prisoner, later to become President of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and as Elam states, ‘emblematic figurehead of the entire East European democratic renewal.’ (p. 2) As Elam indicates, Havel was to respond to Beckett’s play on his release from prison, with a brief work of his own entitled *The Mistake*. The two texts, eventually performed together at the Stockholm Stadsteater on 29 November 1983, are usefully examined alongside each other insofar as they both deal albeit in markedly different ways, with issues surrounding coercion, institutional hierarchy and the ‘dehumanizing’ effects of authority or absolutist totalitarian regimes. (p. 8) While Beckett sets his critique within the parameters of the theatre however, raising questions about the structures of vision and communication that govern this apparatus, Havel’s play is set within a prison, and focuses on the dynamics of prison life as a metaphor for the processes of discipline and subjection that occur in institutionalized contexts. For further details see Kier Elam, pp. 8-12.

¹⁴¹ Sandra Wynands, ‘Visuality and Iconicity in Samuel Beckett’s “Catastrophe”’, *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 37. No. 3 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 81-102., p. 82.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Though ‘Catastrophe’ in modern colloquial English, as in modern colloquial French, has come to signify almost exclusively natural or manmade disaster, a ruinous ‘overturning’, of the order of things, this has not always been the case. Like ‘theatre’, ‘protagonist’ and ‘antagonist’, ‘catastrophe’ has been removed from its etymological sphere, the drama, and given over to public and often political discourse. However, the original sense of the term is emphasized by Dr Johnson, Beckett’s preferred authority on lexical matters, who gives the following overriding definition: ‘the change or revolution which produces the conclusion or final event of a dramattick piece.’ (See Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Consortium, 1755), entry ‘Catastrophe’). Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (1751-1780) gives an identical primary definition: ‘en Poésie; c’est le changement ou la révolution qui arrive à la fin de l’action d’un poëme dramatique, & qui la termine.’ (See Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert eds., *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des arts et des Métiers*, Vol II (Paris: André le Breton, 1751-1766) pp. 772-3) During the Enlightenment, and the earlier Neo-classical period, the catastrophic becomes synonymous with the dramatic to the extent that a catastrophe is how plays end, and this is what gives them their overall teleological structure. Beckett’s opening stage directions evoke the final touches to a theatre rehearsal, suggesting that ‘catastrophe’ here, pertains to the dramatic rather than the political, or perhaps the latter only through the former.

¹⁴⁴ Wynands, ‘Visuality and Iconicity in Samuel Beckett’s “Catastrophe”’, p. 82.

relation to the shape and structure of puppetry, which I pursue here notably in relation to the work of Edward Gordon Craig, an early twentieth-century precursor to both Schlemmer and Barthes, whose model for the reconfiguration of the actor's body on stage equally has its roots in Kleist's insights. It is also, as I hope to demonstrate, a further example of the ways in which Beckett's work sets up a dialogue with Nancy's philosophy, specifically what I have thus far referred to as the latter's dispersal of the ontotheological or body proper, of identity and self-presence, via the motifs of exposure and exteriority. Challenging notions of essence and origin, *Catastrophe* lays bare the process by which the human body is transformed into artistic or 'compositional material'.¹⁴⁵ In doing so, it engages directly with the questions surrounding 'anthropomorphism and abstraction', 'identification and estrangement' that characterize much of the modern debate around puppetry.¹⁴⁶ Set in a theatre and focusing on the transformation of the actor/protagonist's body into a 'mute spectacle of subjection',¹⁴⁷ Beckett's play, as Stanton B. Garner indicates, cultivates and develops many of the issues surrounding the relationship between man and the marionette that have helped shape 'modernist scenographic movements'.¹⁴⁸ In this way, it further articulates Beckett's continual preoccupation with and reassessment of the individual human body as both instrument and agent, both on stage and within the broader philosophical debate surrounding subjectivity.

Catastrophe opens on a 'bare stage', fully lit and depicts a 'rehearsal', the 'final touches to the last scene'.¹⁴⁹ A director (D), who wears a 'fur coat' and a 'fur toque to match', sits in an armchair, 'downstairs audience left', while an assistant (A),

¹⁴⁵ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 115.

¹⁴⁶ Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 113.

¹⁴⁸ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 457.

stands beside him in a ‘*white overall. Bare head. Pencil on ear*’, ready to carry out the Director’s instructions.¹⁵⁰ Both are of an indeterminate ‘*age and physique*’ though the Assistant is frequently played by a woman, offering, as McMullan suggests, a further ‘perspective on objectifying vision’.¹⁵¹ *Catastrophe* sets itself apart from the rest of Beckett’s corpus by evoking, perhaps more than any other of the late works, the representational model of naturalist theatre. The cold, empty and fully lit stage, limited by visible walls, combined with details such as the ‘plinth’, D’s ‘*fur toque*’ and A’s ‘*white overall [...] pencil on ear*’, contributes at first to the sense that we are watching a real-life theatre rehearsal. The Protagonist (P) is positioned ‘*midstage, standing on a black block 18 inches high*’.¹⁵² Fully exposed to the gaze of the audience, both fictional and real, he wears a ‘*black wide-brimmed hat. Black dressing-gown to ankles. Barefoot. Head bowed. Hands in pockets*’.¹⁵³ As the play progresses, the Director thinks up ever more degrading, ever more dehumanizing poses for the Protagonist, reducing the body on stage to the status of an animal or skeleton.

While it is the Protagonist, therefore, with whom we wish to identify or sympathise, the structure of the play, as McMullan has shown, ‘does not allow any reassuring identification’, positioning the audience as both onlookers and participants, victims and perpetrators in the workings of power and coercion that bring about the process of subjection and objectification.¹⁵⁴ The concrete situation involves a theatre within a theatre: a fictional audience evoked through the sound of applause and the real audience who actually sit in a darkened auditorium, and contemplate the scene in

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, p. 114.

¹⁵² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 457.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, p. 115.

imitation of the Director and his Assistant. At the outset, the two worlds, the real and the fictional, are kept more or less separate. The position of the Director and the Assistant, ‘*downstairs audience left*’ reiterates at first the homogeneity of the box-set stage space.¹⁵⁵ But as the action unfolds, and the Director disappears behind the stalls, the boundaries of this fictional stage space become blurred, and the world of the play extends to incorporate the arena of the darkened auditorium. This effect, as will become clear, is enhanced by the disembodied presence of Luke, ‘*in charge of lighting*’, whose role ‘*offstage*’ is both part of the illusion and a real technical necessity.¹⁵⁶ It climaxes, however, in the final moment of the play, when the fictional stage set disappears along with the Director, the Assistant, Luke, and the body of the Protagonist, to leave just a ‘*head*’, or face, hovering in darkness.¹⁵⁷ For several moments, the protagonist’s face floats eerily, eight feet above stage-level, and lacking a distinctive outline compared with the stark, brightly lit box-set stage that opens the play, before it too disappears. The audience are in turn subjected to corporeal objectification, and are forced to acknowledge their own pivotal position, as both witnesses and actors within the mechanics of subjection brought about by the theatrical situation.

¹⁵⁵ Here it is useful to recall Elin Diamond’s analysis of the manner in which ‘the picture-frame or proscenium stage (which still dominates theatre design) reinforces the pleasures of perspectival space, in which each object has a measured and appropriate position within the whole – a ‘whole’ produced by a ‘single and immobile eye (I),’ positioned to see/know the relations between, and meanings of, the objects in view. As Diamond points out, the box-set theatre apparatus is associated above-all with late nineteenth century realism, for which ‘the lifelike stage sign is not only validated by, [but] reinforces the epistemology of an “objective world”.’ With the help of this box-set structure, Diamond says, realism, ‘position[s] its spectator to recognize and verify its truths.’ It ‘mystifies the process of theatrical signification’ and ‘naturalizes the relation between character and actor, setting and world.’ (See Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 5. Beckett appears to be drawing attention to these effects in *Catastrophe*, conjuring various elements of realism, in order ultimately to subvert them.

¹⁵⁶ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 457.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

While the Protagonist remains the central focus of the visual image, it is the ‘Director’s authoritative vision’, as McMullan suggests, along with the audience’s (normally) meek acceptance of this, that comes under scrutiny in *Catastrophe*. The Director is visible as part of the illusion at the outset, he is swathed in a cloak and hat, and positioned just inside the boundary of the box-set stage. When he then leaves the stage to examine his ‘work’ from the stalls, he becomes, in McMullan’s terms a pure ‘disembodied voice’, operating through ‘the intermediary of the Assistant.’¹⁵⁸ As is the case with Luke, who remains outside the boundaries of the visible stage space, the self-acclaimed status of the Director as materially absent ‘master’ or ‘mover’ of the scene is underlined through his increasing juxtaposition with the Protagonist, who’s embodied status coupled with his/her evident lack of agency is progressively intensified through the objectifying gaze of the audience (both real and imagined).¹⁵⁹

Most critics agree, in short, that the conversion of the Protagonist’s body into pliable, workable artistic material as it occurs in this play, is synonymous with a process of subjugation, involving the suppression of the individual for the purposes of artistic convenience. For McTighe, ‘the making visible of the Protagonist as an object of identification is simultaneously destructive of his autonomy and subjectivity’¹⁶⁰ while for McMullan, the positioning of the Protagonist centre stage, ‘reinforces the

¹⁵⁸ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁹ Here, as McMullan has shown, it is useful to recall Elaine Scarry’s analysis of the way in which the Old Testament God exercises his power over individuals by maintaining a state of disembodiment. McMullan quotes the following passage from Scarry in this context: ‘to insist that God be only verbally indicated is to ensure that the initial division between creator and created is maintained... to have no body is to have no limits on one’s extension into the world; conversely, to have a body, a body made emphatic by being continually altered through various forms of creation, instruction (e.g. bodily cleansing), and wounding, is to have one’s sphere of extension contracted down to the small circle of one’s immediate physical presence. Consequently, to be intensely embodied is the equivalent to being unrepresented and (here as in many secular contexts) is almost always the condition of those without power.’ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 206, 207, as quoted in McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, p. 114.

¹⁶⁰ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett’s*, p. 117.

subjugation involved in the process of turning the human body into a visual object, manipulated by the Director and consumed by the audience.’¹⁶¹ The role of the text, in this context, is to underline the process of subjection. As Bert O. States puts it, commenting on the English translation of the play, language, here constitutes a display of power:

To say ‘Lovely,’ or ‘Terrific!’ (at least here) is to be in possession of your world... This barrage of clichés is not itself a cliché but an invincible institute.¹⁶²

The Director’s painstaking questioning: ‘Why the plinth? [...] why the hat? [...] what has he on underneath? [...] Colour? [...] How’s the skull? [...] Why hands in pockets...?’, thus both exacerbates and continually reinforces the disparity between himself as omnipresent manipulator, and the Protagonist, whose extreme physical subjection leaves him without the ability to speak.¹⁶³

Assistant: Sure he won’t utter?

Director: Not a squeak.¹⁶⁴

However, like Oskar Schlemmer’s ‘human dolls’, the Protagonist maintains an ambivalent status in relation to both the stage space and the audience’s gaze.

Seemingly uncomplicated to behold, yet unnerving in its almost complete lack of

¹⁶¹ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, p. 115.

¹⁶² Bert O. States, ‘Catastrophe: Beckett’s Laboratory/Theatre’, *Modern Drama*, Vol. XXX, No. 1(1987), p. 15.

¹⁶³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 457-458.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

human personality, the body shaped on stage, engages with notions of abstraction and pointing towards the erosion of the individual subject as the basis for the theatrical illusion, whilst highlighting the artificial, plastic, compositional and technical elements of the performance image. As Peter Gidal suggests, this process is underlined through the whitening of the Protagonist's flesh:

The examples of 'the white' in various representational practices (writing, painting, theatre, film) are given not as analogies for something else, but as usages inscribed in the process of making, constructing, producing as artifice, as opposed to experiencing 'what is' as natural.¹⁶⁵

In addition to this 'whitening', there is an active attempt to eliminate any 'trace of face' by the Director, contributing to the sense that the body is somehow being mechanized, divested of its individuality and made infinitely reproducible rather than occupying the privileged status of centre.¹⁶⁶ While it is possible to read this play as an overt statement about the structures of subjugation and objectification inherent in the theatrical encounter, then, one might equally interpret the re-ordering of the staged body in terms of an investigation into the relationship between movement and reflection, between inner cognitive processes and their outward expression. By presenting the body as 'visual object' on stage, under the cruel, harsh conditions of a the fully lit box-set stage, Beckett displays resistance to the idea of the body as given or natural on stage, reconfiguring the role of the actor in a way that challenges distinctions between agency and submission, animation and insentience.¹⁶⁷ If

¹⁶⁵ Peter Gidal, *Understanding Beckett* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 39.

¹⁶⁶ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 459.

¹⁶⁷ McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 115.

Stanislavsky's actor is required to turn inwards, to use his own thoughts and emotions as dramatic ammunition in order to identify with and thus accurately portray the inner workings of a character, the Beckettian actor, as portrayed here, appears to gain definition from the outside, through external appraisal and a continual process of framing.

However, unlike in previous examples given of Beckett's approach, *Catastrophe* appears more actively to question this process, engaging more directly with the conversation surrounding the actor as puppet or marionette, inaugurated by Kleist, and carried forward by various scenographic theorists and artists who have sought to probe and investigate 'the representational efficacy of the human form'.¹⁶⁸ Key to this conversation, as Taxidou has argued, is Edward Gordon Craig, whose early twentieth century experiments in scenography, in particular his attempt to redefine the actor's presence on stage in purely 'architectonic' terms via the figure of the 'Übermarionette', can be understood as precursors to the more contemporary experiments of Oskar Schlemmer as well as Barthes' theorization of the *bunraku* theatre.¹⁶⁹ Craig's 'Übermarionette', a tool or metaphor which he uses to communicate his vision for an appropriate acting style, an alternative to Realism, offers a way to eliminate what Eynat-Confino refers to as the actor's 'personality', his 'belief in his own creative powers'.¹⁷⁰ This 'personality' of the actor, a direct result of the growing influence of naturalistic acting styles which favoured verisimilitude, presented an obstacle for Craig, whose aim, as has often been suggested, appears to have been absolute directorial control. In Stanton B. Garner's terms, 'Craig's almost

¹⁶⁸ Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁹ Edward Gordon Craig, diary (3 February 1909), quoted in Irène Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask: Gordon Craig, Movement, and the Actor* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 165.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Swiftian abhorrence of the body's disruptive physicality' leads to the actor being replaced by a 'fully mechanized body, one that would represent [his] corporeality without succumbing to its physiological anarchy'.¹⁷¹ The impulse already identified, towards mechanisation, standardisation and uniformity, and the move away from the individual as the site where meaning is made, appears here to manifest itself in an almost 'dictatorial' codification of the stage space and more specifically in relation to *Catastrophe*, of the 'deanimated body'.¹⁷² It is in the final moments of the play, that Beckett displays a heightened awareness of these effects, returning our attention to the paradoxical status of the body as both medium and agent, animator and animated, lively and lifeless. The ability of the puppet or the marionette to offer, in Taxidou's terms 'schematised and non-anthropomorphic representations of the human form' is here pitted against an equally profound investigation and critique of structures of vision and observation and a modernist compulsion to enframe, to objectify, to classify and to master the things that surround us as humans in the material world.¹⁷³ Here, in Garner's terms, Beckett articulates 'a specific ambivalence concerning the actor's body as an element of the formalized mise-en-scène', which in turn, feeds into more contemporary debates around acting and manipulation, animation and psychological representation.¹⁷⁴

As the Director comes to the end of his questioning, still speaking from the stalls, he asserts: 'Good. There's our catastrophe. In the bag. Once more and I'm

¹⁷¹ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 59.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Such a compulsion, as Martin Jay has shown, dates back to the Renaissance and to Descartes' dualistic philosophy which brought about a separation between the disembodied observer and the material field of observation. See Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity,' in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp. 3, 18.

¹⁷⁴ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 56.

off'.¹⁷⁵ The Assistant, still acting as an intermediary, transmits the information to L (Luke) who, we must assume, engineers the final scenario from the lighting box:

[Fade-up of light on P's body. Pause. Fade-up of general light.]

D: Stop! [Pause.] Now...let'em have it. *[Fade-out of general light. Pause.*

Fade-out of light on body. Light on head alone. Long pause.] Terrific! He'll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here.

[Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies.

Long pause.

*Fade-out of light on face.]*¹⁷⁶

This 'look' on the part of the Protagonist has attracted a number of different interpretations. On the one hand, it is characterized as a curiously 'unBeckettian' moment of resistance.¹⁷⁷ When P fixes us with his intense gaze, Anthony O'Brien says, his actions break the 'bonds of domination' that hold him in subjection to D.¹⁷⁸ The logic of this approach relies on what Jim Hansen calls a 'poetics of sympathetic identification', one which requires of the audience the ability to reflect on a social or ethical problem, in this case, it would seem, the 'exploitation of human beings by their fellow humans in institutionalized contexts that disguise and legitimize exploitation',¹⁷⁹ on a conscious, intellectual rather than emotional level.¹⁸⁰ P resists,

¹⁷⁵ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 460.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹⁷⁷ Jim Hansen, 'Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* and the Theatre of Pure Means', *Contemporary Literature* 49, 4 (Winter 2008), pp. 660-682, p. 661.

¹⁷⁸ Anthony O'Brien, 'Staging Whiteness: Beckett, Havel, Maponya.' *Theatre Journal* 46, 1 (1994), pp. 45-62, p. 47.

¹⁷⁹ Sandra Wynands, 'Visuality and Iconicity in Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*', p. 81.

¹⁸⁰ Jim Hansen, 'Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* and the Theatre of Pure Means', p. 663.

and we – along with the fictive audience who, Beckett reminds us, falter in their applause – are intended to sympathize with his resistance. The image of the protagonist thus becomes a kind of ‘fantasy of projection’ for the audience, in which ‘we imagine ourselves as heroic because, at least from the safety of our theatre seats, we are on the side of the victim’.¹⁸¹

However, as previously suggested, the structure of the play, and the gradual erosion of the framing apparatus, which separates the audience from the fictional world of the theatre rehearsal, stripping them of their status as disembodied spectators, and collapsing any neat distinction between human and non-human, animate and inanimate, prevents such processes of identification from taking place. In the final moments of the play, as the formerly passive Protagonist looks up to return the spectator’s gaze, the apparently clear distinction between the puppet, as fully manipulable object and raw-material, and the human or living actor, who draws from the inner world of his own experience in order to reproduce the thoughts and feelings of a character, on the other, also becomes blurred. As the puppet-protagonist’s face hovers eerily in the darkness, it encapsulates both an independence of ‘life’ which it shares with the spectator, whilst simultaneously pointing out the potential for the body, as material substance, to degenerate into formless matter. The ‘puppet’ protagonist, as it appears in *Catastrophe*, is not ‘the extreme end [...] of a linear dramatic spectrum, but on a continuum in which, from opposite directions, [living body and material object] come full circle to meet each other.’¹⁸²

In terms that resonate with Beckett’s portrayal of corporeality here, Victor Molina has argued that the human ‘body is not a space that ensures the indisputability

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 679.

¹⁸² Margaret Williams, ‘The Death of “The Puppet”?’ in Dassia N. Posnwe, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell eds., *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 18-29, p. 27.

of the I, but right where man (and together with him, anthropomorphism) finds himself contested.¹⁸³ *Catastrophe*, I am suggesting, articulates a recasting of the ontotheological body, or the *corps propre* as the privileged seat of human subjectivity. This comes to the fore especially through Beckett's self-referential uncovering of the mechanisms of artistic production, and the structures of viewing that underscore the theatrical event. Pointing up the technical dimensions of the artistic encounter, Beckett disrupts any thought of the body as indivisible, natural origin, fragmenting, cutting-up and exposing it via the *techné* of performance. As *Catastrophe* illustrates with particular acuity, the audience itself is implicated in this process through the complex play of power in the theatre.

As I have argued in this chapter, Beckett's works for the theatre and film offer a privileged space for developing such a thinking of the corporeal. Whilst privileging the tactile plasticity of the body, the three works analysed in this chapter simultaneously disclose and expose that body in its various modes of spacing, interruption and discontinuity. In doing so, they explore new ways of conceiving the relationship between actor and character, subverting the ideals of temporal continuity and spatial unity associated with the naturalist standpoint. As the spotlight of *Play* takes in the rough, irregular surface of the figures' faces, 'disintegrating like the urns', or as the camera of *Film* focuses in close-up on Keaton's creased, reptilian eye, the works unfold a sense of bodies as material, sentient, and touchable. Yet through an emphasis on the spacing of *techné* in *Play*, an investigation of the fundamental scission of the self in *Film*, and the explicit framing of the body as the contested site of animation in *Catastrophe*, Beckett marks the body in these works as fundamentally

¹⁸³ Victor Molina, 'Artificial Creatures,' in *Scenes of the Imaginary* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 1998), p. 176.

decentered, the site of an irreducible interval or separation. Questioning the dominance of a visual register based on the representation and identification of a unified self as the grounds for character and psychologically informed conflict in the exterior world, these works open up a space, whether filmic or theatrical, for exploring alternative modes of being-with, for exposing and exteriorising an always already fragmented notion of self whilst moving between the singular and the plural. In doing so, they engender non-appropriative modes of exchange between bodies on stage or screen, between the viewer and the medium. As the next chapter will show, these modes of relationality are in turn based upon an alternative understanding of sense, one that exceeds discourse, taking place at the outer limit between signification and the body.

Chapter Two: Hand

Gesture, Economy and Movement Technique in *Ohio Impromptu*, *Quad* and *What Where*

In the last chapter I highlighted Beckett's preoccupation with the relationship between the actor and character via the motif of puppetry, specifically with reference to Barthes' Bunraku theatre, Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus Theatre of 'human dolls' and Edward Gordon Craig's notion of the 'Übermarionette'. This chapter develops that theme in Beckett alongside and in light of the work and practice of early twentieth-century theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940). In doing so, it focuses on three plays, *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), *Quad* (1982) and *What Where* (1983) all of which display metatheatrical tendencies alongside a concern with the body and its relation both to sense and to the self. Bam's words at the end of *What Where*: 'Make sense who may. I switch off', which have been interpreted as Beckett's final address to his audience, bring into focus this preoccupation. Through a cycle of interrogations, appearances and disappearances that ultimately lead to nothing and nowhere, the action of this play reflects upon the theatre as a space of meaning – or sense-making, Bam's final words tracing a point of contact between language and that which exceeds it, negotiating the limits of the symbolic and facilitating a space of ambiguity between actor, fictional stage space and spectator. This process, I suggest, is equally fundamental to the work of Meyerhold and a number of his artistic contemporaries. Drawing on various examples from Meyerhold's artistic career and taking these as points of comparison with Beckett's approach, I show how the aforementioned three plays further articulate the notion of agency in Beckett as taking place across multiple components, depersonalized channels or means of expression, untying corporeality

from an ontotheology of the body and emphasizing the technical arbitration of existence which is at the same time a movement of exteriorisation or exposure.

Meyerhold's career spans a period of political and social change, encompassing the abolition of serfdom in late nineteenth-century Russia, the Bloody Sunday Massacre (1905) and the two revolutions of 1917. The profound changes that took place during this time were not only social and political, however. Meyerhold's most industrious period coincides chronologically with a time of artistic innovation in Europe, with works such as Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) signalling the start of the Cubist era, and in turn leading to the development of movements such as Futurism, Dada, Constructivism and Bauhaus. Meyerhold's contributions to the theatre during this time are profound, encompassing innovations in the practice of scenography, a comprehensive actor training system based on biomechanics and changes to the role of the director. Originally a student of Stanislavski's, Meyerhold is remarkable for the manner in which he breaks with the naturalistic approach to acting and directing, incorporating both abstract and realist elements on stage, doing away with the proscenium arch or box set apparatus and fundamentally redefining the position of the spectator in relation to the scene. Of particular relevance to an analysis of Beckett's work is Meyerhold's engagement with the visual, that is to say, the shape and colour of the performance space or *mise-en-scène*. He uses a number of techniques associated with early twentieth-century avant-garde movements, including a foregrounding of geometrical figure, a reconfiguration of the relation between surface and depth, and a non-specific or anti-individualist approach to the human body.¹ Moreover, in his theorisation of the actor's body in performance he prioritises

¹ For a detailed study of the development of Meyerhold's theatrical aesthetic alongside the advances in visual culture during the *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century, see Amy Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists: Perspectives on Painting and Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

physical dexterity and economy of movement, promoting the development of particular skills and proficiencies through a rigorous training programme. As I hope to suggest, Meyerhold's approach, as evidenced both in his directing style and his biomechanical training system, mobilises a new way of thinking about the relation between the individual, the body, thought and movement. My intention here is to offer this as the basis for a comparison with Beckett's work, taking as a starting point the split mode characteristic of the *biomechanical actor* in performance. This, in turn, will provide the basis for an analysis of the displaced, divided body of the actor in Beckett's work, which calls for a reconceptualisation of the relation between inside and outside, interiority and exteriority.

As previously suggested, there is a paradox inherent in Beckett's approach to the theatre in so far as he foregrounds on the one hand, the material, plastic aspects of the stage, making particular demands on the actor's physicality, whilst on the other hand he introduces techniques of reduction, enlargement, fracture and multiplication which fundamentally disturb any notion of pure essence or communion. This paradox is usefully summarised by Gontarski in his description of the body in Beckett as both 'figure [and] figment, visible [and] invisible, on [and] off stage, corporeal [and] incorporeal [...] real [and] electronic', neither authentic nor natural, but always problematic and multifaceted.² In the plays *Ohio Impromptu*, *Quad* and *What Where*, this process is evidenced in the separation and isolation of the various elements of the performance field which in turn enter into dialogue, producing effects of tension, imbalance, and instability. In Steven Connor's terms, Beckett undercuts 'the powerfully unified, non-repetitive structure of the theatre itself, in which the body or the "corporeal medium" of the form closes the gap between meaning and

² Gontarski, 'The Body in the Body of Beckett's Theatre', p. 169.

performance'.³ In other words, the body as it appears in these plays is no longer the singular focal point of a unified visual field, but appears as duplicated or fractured, off-centre and subjected to reduction and control: the Voice of Bam is isolated and enhanced by the megaphone in *What Where*, just as the tapping hand of the Listener is foregrounded in the otherwise still, symmetrical image of *Ohio Impromptu*. In their manipulation of the components of performance, these plays disrupt the unities of time, space and action that form the basis for the naturalist aesthetic, for a theatre based on verisimilitude.⁴ In doing so, they echo Meyerhold's concern to rearticulate 'the relationship between the artwork and the real world', to redefine 'the object of representation' through the use of 'mobile space and multiple perspectives'.⁵ The scenic and textual elements of the drama: text and body, script and performance, are held in tension, but do not collapse into identity or coincide in a way that guarantees presence.

The analysis that follows is divided into three sections. The first focuses on the status of the hand in *Ohio Impromptu*, in order to emphasise the importance of the effect of disjuncture in the work. The instances of touch in this play, where the hand is engaged in tactile interaction, serve to heighten our sense of the split or break at the heart of theatrical presence, a split which is played out at every level of the play's construction: in the interactions between actors and characters, bodies and text, text and stage image. Similar effects are identified in *Quad* and *What Where*, where the processes of division, fragmentation and decentering can be seen to contribute, via comparison with Meyerhold, (and more broadly Kleist and Geulincx), to the redistribution of agency outside the boundaries of the individual, self-regulating body.

³ Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, pp. 175-176.

⁴ See Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 162.

⁵ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 21.

In these works, as I will show, Beckett goes further still in his attempt at reconfiguring the relationship between the individual and the collective, establishing multiplicity and technical supplementarity or co-essence as fundamental to being, and thus once again animating what Nancy refers to as the constitutive ‘with’ of existence. In doing so, he breaks with phenomenologically informed approaches to the body as pivot or axis around which the world turns, focusing instead on the outward manifestation of movements that are responses to stimuli, reworking the performance space in a way that is fundamentally democratic, distributing meaning across multiple components and operations.

Ohio Impromptu (1981)

Ohio Impromptu, written in 1981 and first performed at Ohio State University in the same year, features two figures, a Listener and a Reader, ‘*as alike in appearance as possible*’, who sit at right angles to each other, at a ‘*plain white deal table*’, approximately 8 by 4 inches in size, centre stage and fully lit.⁶ L sits on a ‘*plain armless white deal*’ chair, facing the front towards one end (audience right) of the long side of the table, his ‘*bowed head propped on [his] right hand*’, ‘*face hidden*’, ‘*left hand*’ on the table.⁷ R sits on an identical chair at the short side of the table, ‘*audience right*’ such that we see him only in profile.⁸ Like L, his ‘*bowed head*’ is propped on his ‘*right hand*’, while his ‘*left hand*’ lies on the table next to a book ‘*open at last pages*’.⁹ Both figures wear a ‘*long black coat*’ which presents a direct

⁶ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 445.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

contrast both with the white table and their '*long white hair*'.¹⁰ A single '*black wide-brimmed hat*' lies at the centre of the table.¹¹

This opening image, which is held for '*ten seconds*' after the initial fade-up, before the action begins, provides the principle visual material for the play. As the Reader '*turns [a] page*' and begins to read from the book on the table, he is interrupted by the Listener who knocks on the table with his '*left hand*', at which point the Reader pauses, repeats the last full sentence and waits for a further knock before resuming. This occurs a total of six times throughout the piece, with twenty pauses punctuating the reading of the text. The narrative spoken by the Reader is in the past tense, and sketches out the tale of an individual, perhaps the Listener himself, who appears to be recovering from some form of past trauma:

[*Pause. Knock.*] In a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where they had been so long together to a single room on the far bank. From its single window he could see the downstream extremity of the Isle of Swans.

[*Pause*].¹²

Such fictional details jar with the visual stasis of the stage image and the material fact of the dual protagonist. The interest of the play lies in the interplay between these two levels, the text which tells one story, and the stage image which appears to suggest another. The two interweave and interchange in a way that resembles a figure of eight shape, meeting at a junction before reestablishing their separate perspectives.

Maintaining these two levels throughout the piece, Beckett establishes a dual focus

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 445.

where narrative content and theatrical form, imagination and concrete reality are brought together, pulled apart, placed and displaced, in short, co-exist as divisions of the same creative space. This, as is the case in Meyerhold's theatre theory, where the work of the actor is identified in terms of two concomitant modes, creates multiple possible planes of meaning, realist and abstract, metaphorical and literal, which wrangle and conflict with each other, involving the spectator in the process.¹³ Far from underpinning the assumption of the stage as a unified background for the creation of a psychologically informed or linear storyline, *Ohio Impromptu* as a play centres on the articulation of a relation between stage space and narrative image which continually unsettles itself, embedding division and spatio-temporal 'disidentification' within the very process of meaning making.¹⁴ Here the spectator can no longer sit back as an objective observer, but is forced to play an active role in order to make sense of the continually fluctuating relations between the various facets of the performance image. In *Ohio Impromptu* this model of spectatorship is retained throughout as the various levels of meaning continue to coexist seemingly never reaching any kind of conclusion or identification. While the stage space is arranged

¹³ Meyerhold's theorisation of the actor as plural or multi-faceted is pivotal to an understanding of the ways in which his approach crosses over with Beckett's, and it is a point I will return to later on in this chapter. As Paul Schmidt sees it, Meyerhold's system of biomechanics emphasises 'the actor's dependence on the actors he play[s] with', changing him, as Schmidt puts it, 'from a self-serving improviser to one who [sees] himself as a director would see him', that is, as a component within the wider theatrical machine. (Schmidt ed., *Meyerhold at Work* (Applause Theatre: 1996) p. xiii) One of the principle aims of biomechanics, as suggested above, is to get the actor to focus on the outward manifestation of his movements, the 'act of acting' as opposed to seeking psychological motivations, drawing from his own experience 'as if' he were involved in a spontaneous real life situation. (Schmidt ed., *Meyerhold at Work*, p. xiii.) This is where the idea of the *dialectical actor* comes from, the actor who 'both inhabits and comments on the role he or she is playing.' (See Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, p. 61). While Stanislavski works from the inside out, relying upon 'individual genius', 'private morality' and 'personal motivation' as key principles within his actor training, Meyerhold tries to reverse this method through a process of distancing, appraisal and external coordination, working, in short, from the outside inwards. (See Schmidt ed., *Meyerhold at Work*, p. xiii). This involves the elaboration of a series of exercises or *études*, a rigorous training programme, which serves on the one hand to provide the actor with an extensive movement vocabulary and on the other hand to prepare him for performance, to increase his strength and stamina and to teach him the essential principles of scenic gesture.

¹⁴ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 139.

in formal, geometric shapes, the action itself is divided into specific allocated tasks (reading and listening), a process which contributes to the sense of alienation or distancing at the heart of the piece. Here sense is not straightforwardly communicated through narrative but shared between multiple objects and agencies, material bodies and technical apparatus, a process which, in itself creates intrigue and demands the attention of the audience.

As both Trish McTighe and S. E. Gontarski have indicated, the piece can be considered in musical terms, observing ‘a clear strategy of “movements”, or expositions on a theme, interspersed with recapitulations’.¹⁵ While this process is evident in the knocking cycle, we perceive, on another level, the remnants of a story which itself can be divided into two key moments.¹⁶ The first, as McTighe suggests, is centred on ‘the flight and escape of the protagonist from familiar surroundings’, while the second describes the emergence of a reader, ‘sent by - and here he named the dear name’ perhaps to provide some form of comfort or relief from a past trauma suffered by the protagonist.¹⁷ While the text continually echoes itself, reverberating and resounding in the space, these two sections are nevertheless identifiable through the repetition of a number of key phrases:

Little is left to tell. In a last-

[*L knocks with left hand on table.*]

Little is left to tell.¹⁸

¹⁵ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

The phrase ‘little is left to tell’ followed by a knock and its repetition, then, announces both the initial process of reading and the start of the second section. The final lines of the text then repeat this pattern, identifying the completion of the story with the end of the piece:

Nothing is left to tell

[*Pause. R makes to close book.*

Knock. Book half closed.]

Nothing is left to tell.¹⁹

This highly formulaic structure is suggestive of a song or a poem, thus highlighting the play’s metatheatrical quality. This is equally true of the work’s title, *Ohio Impromptu*. Here the term ‘impromptu’, meaning literally ‘on the spot’ may refer either to the process of the play’s creation (it was originally written in English, in response to a request by S. E. Gontarski, for a piece to be performed during an international symposium on ‘Samuel Beckett; Humanistic Perspectives’ at Ohio State University in May 1981) or indeed to the action of the play itself, which takes place around a single central core, the ‘black wide brimmed hat’ positioned at the centre of the white table, in the middle of the stage.²⁰ As McMullan suggests, the title ‘links the play to a theatrical tradition of impromptus, including Molière’s *Impromptu de Versailles* (1663), Giraudoux’s *Impromptu de Paris* (1937), and Ionesco’s *Impromptu de l’Alma* (1955).’²¹ McMullan then goes on to quote Pierre Astier, who writes that:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

²⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 446.

²¹ McMullan, Anna, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett’s Later Drama* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 113.

[These plays] deal to a large extent with problems of play-acting or play-writing through the acting or the writing of a play that turns out to be the very one performed before our eyes.²²

What Astier's definition brings to the fore, in other words, is the layering of viewpoints (including directors and actors, actors and actors, writers and actors), which is integral to the *Impromptu* form, and which brings about a confusion or multiplicity of possible interpretations. Molière's *Impromptu de Versailles*, first performed in 1663, portrays a group of actors and a director (thought to be based on Molière himself) rehearsing a performance under time pressure, to be performed in court for the king. The rehearsal is repeatedly interrupted, both by outsiders (the king's courtiers and messengers), and by the director himself, who continually instructs and corrects the actors. According to critic Abby Zanger, Molière's *Impromptu de Versailles* is 'more a portrait of impediments to rehearsal than a depiction of a finished product [...] The many interruptions that counter the rehearsal take centre stage as the subject of representation.'²³ In the same article Zanger provides a useful definition of the *Impromptu* form, as a 'dialogical phenomenon in which the interrupting or interfering elements are shown to be central to the representation'.²⁴ While Beckett's short piece seems to have little or nothing explicitly to do with the theatre – the work within the play is not a play in this case but a story – it is founded on the dialogical relation between Reader and Listener, a relation which easily maps onto that of author and critic, actor and director. A

²² Pierre Astier, 'Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*: A View from the Isle of Swans', *Modern Drama*, XXV, 3 (1982), pp. 331-341, p. 332.

²³ Abby Zanger, 'Acting as Counteracting in Molière's *The Impromptu of Versailles*' in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (May, 1986), pp. 180-195, p. 180.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

continual swaying movement is established between the reading of the text, the knocks, and the accompanying pauses, describing, as Bailes suggests, ‘not so much [...] a process of continuation as a process of endless interruption.’²⁵ It is its interruptive form, as opposed to the scant details of character, location and narrative event, which provides both the intrigue and the dramatic impetus for the piece.

The Listener’s gestures establish a system of communication between the two figures, Reader and Listener, as well as constructing a link between the various layers of the play, the world of the figures on the stage and the world of the text. In the moments between the knocks, the relative stillness of the stage image enables the spectator to concentrate on the ideas evoked within the text, the image of an individual, living alone in a ‘single room on the far bank’ of the river Seine in Paris, attempting to come to terms with some form of personal loss, perhaps that of a close companion.²⁶ The gestures on the part of the Listener prevent the establishment of such a narrative however, pulling the spectator repeatedly back into the material space of the theatre, the concrete ‘here and now’ of the stage-auditorium relation. In doing so, the knocks also prevent the spectator from identifying on a psychological level with the protagonist described in the text, instead forcing images to turn and return. In McTighe’s terms, ‘the repetition [that the knocks] induce means that the scenic and verbal elements of the play never come to rest in an easy identification.’²⁷ This means that the sense of sheer or irremediable presence to which Robbe-Grillet refers in his 1963 article, and which forms the basis of many phenomenologically informed readings, is never in fact achieved. The presence of the ‘book’ or script on stage draws attention to the processes involved in staging, thereby further unravelling the

²⁵ Bailes, ‘Reading Blanchot, Hearing Beckett’, *Beckett and Musicality*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), pp. 199-214, p. 207.

²⁶ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 446.

²⁷ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 138.

illusion of spontaneous action in the theatre. Steven Connor uses the example of *Ohio Impromptu* to demonstrate ‘the possibilities opened up by the mixing and conflict of voice and text, or “original” utterance and mechanically reproduced utterance’ that occurs in Beckett’s late work.²⁸ The play, he suggests, offers a prime example of the manner in which Beckett undermines conventional ideas about performance as ‘live’, pure and unmediated experience, by foregrounding the theatre’s rootedness in or reliance upon the written word. This, in turn, offers an example of what Elinor Fuchs refers to in her 1985 article ‘Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-Thinking Theatre After Derrida’ as an unsettling of ‘the conventional distinction between performance and text’, through performance that ‘draws its textuality to our attention’.²⁹ While writing, she says, ‘has traditionally retired behind the apparent presence of performance’, remaining hidden in the service of creating the illusion of natural interaction between individuals on stage, recent performance histories, in a move that parallels Derrida’s deconstruction of speech and writing, ‘have begun to expose the normally “occulted” textual authority behind the phonocentric fabric of performance’.³⁰ The consequence of such a move, as Fuchs indicates, is ‘the undermining of theatrical Presence’.³¹

While it is true that *Ohio Impromptu* foregrounds the script, and thus the written word itself, it is also true that Beckett draws attention to the physical process of writing, the fleshly hand that writes, through his insistence upon the concrete actor-audience situation. As previously stated, the knocking action of the Listener brings us back repeatedly to the concrete ‘here and now’ of the stage present, a present which is

²⁸ Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 146.

²⁹ Elinor Fuchs, ‘Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-Thinking Theatre after Derrida’, *Performing Arts Journal* 9, 1985, pp. 163-174, p. 168.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

especially highlighted in the moments of physical contact between the two figures. Rather than allowing the viewer to lose himself within a textually delimited world, then, the play displays an awareness of the differing spatial and temporal frameworks that interact within the theatre, giving them equal weighting and incorporating their exchanges into the very fabric of the work. This, in turn, makes new demands on the spectator, who is required to be alert to the presence of these differing frameworks, as well as the mechanisms and juxtapositions that contribute to the production of meaning within the theatre. In *Ohio Impromptu* then, even as the story describes a world in the past and the Reader appears to be rehearsing a process that has and will be repeated endlessly, the Listener's interruptions continually accentuate the fact of 'real time', such that our focus remains the continual fluctuation between text, image, figure, background, actor, setting and stage space.

While, on the one hand, the knock-repeat-knock structure sets a tempo and a pace, on the other hand, the regularity of the knocks serves to highlight any major or minor variation, discrepancy or change in the basic predicament. This echoes a device used by Molière in his *Impromptu de Versailles*. The Listener's knocks perform a similar function to the repeat sign, which is propped up on a stick in this play, and used by the director to command the repetition of a particular section or phrase. Both have the effect of highlighting theatrical convention and thus encouraging a more active spectator who plays a role in the creative process. In *Ohio Impromptu*, the two figures on stage are defined in relation to the text: Listener and Reader. The knocks foreground these roles and establish, as McMullan puts it, 'a continual shift of focus from what is told to the conditions of the telling'.³² This dual perspective is maintained throughout so that text and image, sound and light, figure and background

³² McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 110.

form a collage-like structure which helps to highlight the difficulty of presenting memory or identity as a finite or unified story.

In keeping with the *Impromptu* form, there is a persistent shift between consistency and variation, both on a scenic and a verbal level. This is perhaps most clearly manifested in two key moments, which indicate deviations from the basic pattern of knocking. Here Listener and Reader interact more intimately with one another and the separation established by their pose, ‘bowed head [...] face hidden’, is disturbed.³³ Firstly, as previously indicated, there is an instance about half way through the play, when the Reader stops reading, then begins to leaf through the book seemingly in order to check an earlier citation. The Listener then reaches out as though to discourage the Reader in this venture, causing a further break in the established structure. The second variation to the original structure occurs near the end of the play, as both figures bring their hands down to the table, and raise their heads to look into each others’ faces. ‘*Unblinking. Expressionless*’, they remain in this position for ‘*ten seconds*’, a reflected duplication of each other.³⁴

Beckett displays a deep-rooted awareness of the processes involved in theatrical spectatorship here, creating a number of visual echoes between text and stage action and prompting the spectator to continually try to identify the physical situation of the two figures with that described in the narrative. One such echo occurs fairly early on in the play and unfolds as follows:

R: [...] Stay where we were so long alone together, my shade will comfort you.

[*Pause.*]

³³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 446.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 448.

Could he not -

[*Knock.*]

Seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long alone together, my shade will comfort you.

[*Pause. Knock.*]

Could he not now turn back? Acknowledge his error and return [...].³⁵

As the Reader speaks the final lines of this passage, he highlights the repetitive structure of the text itself, producing a kind of commentary of the process of story-telling even as he continues to participate in it. Whilst establishing a thematic connection between the figure in the narrative and the Reader on stage who appears to have made a pragmatic ‘error’, this moment paradoxically brings into relief the mechanisms of rehearsal, correction and modification that underscore the production of the theatrical event and thus the production of the narrative illusion.³⁶ In a similar way, the line ‘Yes, after so long a lapse that as if never been’ comes after a pause in which the Reader ‘*looks closer*’ at the text, as though to check what he is reading.³⁷ The phrase thus acquires multiple resonances both within the narrative and without, pointing out the theatrical situation as practiced as opposed to spontaneous, and drawing attention to the ‘*pause*’ as a dramatic convention.³⁸ The line ‘with never a word exchanged they grew to be as one’ equally foregrounds this self-reflexive structure, both serving a purpose within the narrative whilst at the same time

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

forstalling the final stage image of the play.³⁹ This effect is reinforced in the last moments of the play, when the Reader speaks the following words from the text:

Or was it that buried in who knows what thoughts they paid no heed? To light
of day. To sound of reawakening. What thoughts who knows. Thoughts, no,
not thoughts. Profounds of mind. Buried in who knows what profounds of
mind. Of mindlessness. Whither no light can reach. No sound. So sat on as
though turned no stone. The sad tale a last time told.

[*Pause.*]

Nothing is left to tell.⁴⁰

As the ‘sad tale’ comes to a close, the two figures on stage, the Reader and the Listener, sit on, like the protagonist and his companion, ‘as though turned to stone’.⁴¹ As they raise their heads to look at each other, ‘*unblinking, expressionless*’,⁴² the Reader’s words resonate once more throughout the space, and the oscillation between the various levels of perception is momentarily suspended. Yet even here, the central disjuncture remains intact, disturbing any attempt to integrate or merge the various layers of performance. Despite being, as the stage directions indicate, ‘*as alike in appearance as possible*’, Reader and Listener are two distinct figures, a permanent reminder of an originary gap or hiatus at the heart of self-identity. This is something that is lost, as Garin Dowd suggests, in the *Beckett on Film*⁴³ version of the work, where Jeremy Irons plays both the Reader and the Listener: ‘in the screen version of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 445, 446, 447, 448

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 447-448.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 448.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ohio Impromptu*, dir. Charles Sturridge (Dublin: RTE, 2001)

the play, now deprived of its bodies plural and dispersed, is given two host bodies which inhere in one. The play is reconfigured as an allegory of the divine presence of Jeremy Irons'.⁴⁴ Dowd's criticism highlights the importance of severance in this work, the gap, that is, between image and text, actor and character, artist and director, which surrounds and unfolds the central act of creation. As McTighe reminds us, 'it is perhaps in the materiality of the knocking action', the action of the hand, that this severance, what she calls, the 'disidentification' at the heart of Beckett's work, is at its most perceivable.⁴⁵

To conclude this section, we may say that Beckett stages the hand in *Ohio Impromptu* in a manner which resists consubstantiality or fusion, interrupting the fantasy of a natural or essential corporeal self-givenness.⁴⁶ In doing so, he draws out an originary technical or technological capacity of the stage and of the theatre in a way that recalls Meyerhold's approach to staging. In what follows, I draw out this similarity through specific examples taken from Meyerhold's writings on the theatre. Both Beckett and Meyerhold, as I have suggested above, share an interest in accentuating both the visual and the visceral qualities of the performance space, privileging the arrangement of the various elements that constitute the *mise-en-scène*

⁴⁴ Garin Dowd, 'Karaoke Beckett, or Jeremy Irons, Mimicry and Travesty in *Ohio Impromptu* on Film,' SBTA 12 (2003), p. 176.

⁴⁵ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 139.

⁴⁶ As suggested earlier, the hand plays a key role in Derrida's interpretation of Nancy's reworking of the phenomenological tradition within *Le Toucher*, and is directly connected to the notion of *techné*. He writes, for example, that, 'il faut relire encore et encore, dans *Corpus*, '*techné* des corps', car cette 'question de la main', qui est aussi une histoire de la main, nous savons bien qu'elle reste, qu'elle devrait rester indissociable de l'histoire de la technique et de son interprétation.' (See Derrida, *Le Toucher*, p. 177.) This emphasis on the hand can be read as further evidence of Nancy's engagement with Heidegger's thought, in particular the latter's understanding of *Zuhandensein* or 'being-ready-to-hand' (See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 96-98). While Heidegger's use of the term designates the way in which objects appear to us, not as wholly present unto themselves but as 'ready-to-hand' within a context which confers upon them an instrumental function, for Nancy, it is the body as image or exposure which emerges in the disjunctive relations such equipment, and it is the disjointed togetherness of bodies and technical apparatus which gives rise to the spacing and sharing of sense (See Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 78).

such as shape, texture, colour and the play of light over the construction of believable characters and plot.

Meyerhold stakes out his position in an article entitled ‘The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood’, in which he responds to a production of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* by the Moscow Art Theatre in January 1904. Here he reacts to what he sees as Stanislavski’s rhetorical approach to the staging of Chekhov’s play by focusing on naturalism as a stagnant form which inhibits creativity in both actors and spectators alike:

The naturalistic theatre teaches the actor to express himself in a finished, clearly defined manner; there is no room for the play of illusion or for conscious understatement.⁴⁷

Of particular significance here are Meyerhold’s comments about the spectator, who, he says:

aspires - albeit unconsciously – to that exercise of fantasy which rises sometimes to the level of creativity. Similarly, how can an exhibition of paintings possibly exist except as a spur to the imagination? [...] It would seem that the naturalistic theatre denies the spectator’s capacity to fill in the details with his imagination [...].⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Vsevolod Meyerhold, 1906-1908, trans. by Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre* (London: Methuen, [1969] 1998), pp. 25-26, as cited in Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Like Beckett, Meyerhold is looking to the world of visual art, specifically to painting, in order to conceptualise what he sees as the ideal relation between the spectator and the artwork. For Meyerhold, it seems, the spectator plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning of a work, which should act upon the viewer less like a finished product and more like a series of impressions, colours, shapes and patterns, which convey a particular tempo or mood. In practical terms, this involves condensing or compressing the performance space in order to undo the effects of Renaissance linear perspective, principally the illusion of depth used to establish the appearance of true life in naturalistic settings. As Amy Skinner suggests, Meyerhold's staging approach echoes 'the construction of bas-relief sculpture, juxtaposing the three-dimensional figure with a two-dimensional background'.⁴⁹ This technique, apart from presenting a direct link with early-twentieth century experiments in visual art, also serves as the basis for a comparison with Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*. Here the three-dimensional human figure is placed against a highly formalised, symmetrical background made up of predominantly quadrangular shapes such as the white table, the two armless white chairs placed at right angles to each other, the long, straight white hair of the two figures and of course, the book itself. The only exception is the circular shape of the black 'wide-brimmed' hat at the centre of the table.⁵⁰ The lit stage space is equally limited to the table and its immediate surroundings, the rest of the stage remaining in darkness. Here, Beckett's use of the relief stage, that is, his construction of a space in which the three-dimensional human figure appears to emerge as an outer layer, set against a flattened two-dimensional background which is dominated by geometric shape, combined with his use of stills that break up the action

⁴⁹ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 445.

and interrupt the flowing movement of the text, suggest similar concerns to those of Meyerhold and his contemporaries in the world of visual art. Here, as is the case in Meyerhold's work, the visual arrangement of the stage space is prioritised over the construction of a coherent stage world. Sense or meaning is shared between multiple objects and agencies, both technical and material, making demands in equal measure on actors, directors and spectators alike.

In the rest of this chapter I want to demonstrate how this thinking of sense as distributed among or susceptible to the corpuscular structure of the body, and its articulation through technical apparatus, manifests itself in two further plays: *Quad I* and *What Where*. Both plays raise the issue of the text and of textual authority by presenting figures that are caught in a formal schema or system. As previously shown, this is also the case in *Play* (1962), where three players are trapped in urns, their visibility and audibility being determined by the movement of the spotlight. *Quad I* takes this process of schematization further in the marking out of a diagram on stage. While the figures remain bound by this diagram or schema, meticulously guarding their prescribed route around the space, the play also carries something which exceeds this schema, an emotional intensity which goes beyond the pattern of movement whilst originating within it. In Erik Tønning's terms, the emotional impact of the play derives from a 'strangely poignant sense of individuals simultaneously close and far away, paradoxically failing to communicate whilst remaining bound to the same system, circling around the same centre'.⁵¹ In a similar way to Meyerhold, Beckett plays with the idea of movement, reduced to a set of carefully orchestrated exercises, providing the foundation for meaning, and therefore preceding any sense of character or narrative. As I will show, Meyerhold's development of a movement vocabulary

⁵¹ Tønning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 241.

which fundamentally splits the actor's presence via two co-existing attitudes or stances, thus undermining any notion of the actor's self as cohesive ground for the development of a character, can be used to illuminate the pacing of the figures in *Quad*. The emphasis that Meyerhold's training system places on 'the generalization of the actor's physical vocabulary', on 'streamlining' and 'efficiency' of gesture resonates with Beckett's approach in this play, as does the division of the action into a series of carefully delimited tasks that are learnt and replicated.⁵²

It is in seeking to explore the dual and apparently contradictory impulses of simplification and reduction on the one hand, and exaggeration on the other, universalization of movement on the one hand, and individual proficiency on the other, that I draw upon Nancy's discussion of dance in *Allitérations* (2005), a collection of emails and interviews that took place from 2003 to 2004 between Nancy himself and the choreographer Mathilde Monnier. In doing so, I show how this particular approach to choreography and patterning in the theatre can be used in order to deconstruct a system based on causal links and linear narrative, moving towards an understanding of movement not as sign or the transmission of a thought or idea into a different medium, but as producing and emitting sense in itself, through the exposure of bodies to each other and to technical apparatus. This, as suggested above, amounts to an attempt to think sense itself differently, that is, in terms of a thickness or viscosity which emerges in the piecing together of disparate materials. To use Christopher Watkin's phrase, 'it traces a dissipation of, or distraction from' a thinking of sense in its narrow and unified sense, substituting a system based on fixture and synthesis for multiple local meanings and impressions.⁵³ In staging the meeting point

⁵² Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 72.

⁵³ Christopher Watkin, 'Dancing Equality: Image, Imitation and Participation' in Giunta and Janus eds., *Nancy and Visual Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 39-52, p. 49.

between the body and the text, the actor and the stage object, *Quad* can be said to suspend any notion of agency and the human individual as essential origin or ground. Rather, agency is shared via the incommensurable assembly of elements, an accumulation which resists fusion, and projects sense as permanently divided and heterogeneous.

Quad I (1982)

The impossibility of complete identification, the incommensurability that exists between figures or movement and typescript is central to the structure of *Quad*, a television play, first transmitted in Germany by Süddeutscher Rundfunk in 1982 under the name of *Quadrat 1 + 2*, then subsequently shown on BBC2 on 16 December 1982.⁵⁴ Though written for television, and written for four players, none of whom speak, *Quad* takes up many of the same concerns that run through *Ohio Impromptu*. Dressed in ‘gowns’ which reach the floor and ‘cowls’ that hide their faces, the four players, ‘as alike in appearance as possible’, pace ‘the given area’, a square playing space, ‘6 paces’ in length on each side.⁵⁵ Each follows his own particular route, defining a series of triangles as he paces, negotiating the centre of the quadrangle without significantly altering his course. According to Beckett’s instructions for *Quadrat 1 + 2*, the lighting is ‘dim’ and comes ‘from above’, with ‘four sources of differently coloured light clustered together’ over the playing area.⁵⁶ Each player has his own particular light (‘1 white, 2 yellow, 3 blue, 4 red’), to be ‘turned on when he enters’, ‘kept on while he paces’, and ‘turned off when he exits’.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 450.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The 'gowns' worn are similarly coloured, with each player's 'colour corresponding to his light'.⁵⁸ Finally, Beckett stipulates that there should be 'four types of percussion, say drum, gong, triangle, wood block', such that each player is accompanied by his own sound. This is heard 'when he enters, [...] while he paces', and ceases 'when he exits'.⁵⁹ The percussionists, 'barely visible in shadow' are positioned on a 'raised podium at back of set', playing quietly and intermittently 'to allow footsteps alone to be heard at intervals'.⁶⁰ The camera is positioned on a 'raised' platform, with a 'frontal [...] fixed' view, such that all players and percussionists are in the frame.⁶¹

In the script, which includes diagrams of the playing space, the corners of the square are marked A, B, C, D, while E designates the centre.⁶² The central 'problem' of the play is announced as the 'negotiation of E without rupture of rhythm' no matter how many players are crossing paths at this point.⁶³ This problem is played out in all its possible combinations, with four possible courses and four possible series given as follows:

[Player 1] enters at A, completes his course and is joined by 3. Together they complete their courses and are joined by 4. Together all three complete their courses and are joined by 2. Together all four complete their courses.⁶⁴

Once all four players have completed their courses for the first time, player 1 exits and 2, 3 and 4 continue. After completing his course for the second time, player 3

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 451

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

then follows player 1 off stage, while 2 and 4 continue. Player 4's exit marks the end of the first series, as player 2 remains, completes his course and is joined again by 1, then 4, then 3 and so on. In this way, all possible combinations of series (for example '1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 42...') and courses (for example 'AC, CB, BA...') are played out and repeated.⁶⁵ As Beckett puts it, there are 'four possible solos all given. Six possible duos all given (two twice). Four possible trios all given twice'.⁶⁶

Quad has no other identifiable features aside from its formal characteristics, the organised and controlled negotiation of a chain of geometric shapes meticulously guarded by its four protagonists, 'short and slight for preference' with 'some ballet training desirable' who traverse the given space.⁶⁷ According to Beckett's instructions, the length of the play is '25 minutes', an approximation based on the time required for all possible combinations of courses and series to be played out and repeated once, calculated at the rate of 'one pace per second' and 'allowing for time lost at angles and centre'.⁶⁸ *Quad II* repeats this same action without colour, with the figures moving around the quadrangle at a steadier pace.

In S. E. Gontarski's terms, the two *Quad* plays provide a arresting example of the 'move away from a purely text based mode of working and creating' which characterizes Beckett's work from the 1960s onwards, one that can be traced in the *Theatrical Notebooks*.⁶⁹ At this point, Beckett was working more directly in the theatre, not always recording his insights in new editions but working with actors in the stage space. For William Worthen, *Quad* indicates the author's increasing attempts to take control of the stage space and of the human body within it,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 451-452.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

⁶⁹ S. E. Gontarski, 'Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theatre,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 22 (Fall 1998), p. 142.

demanding extreme forms of subjugation from his actors. With *Quad*, he writes, 'Beckett extends the playwright's authority from the drama to embrace these textual signs – the stage directions – and so to govern the texture of performance.'⁷⁰

What is clear from these readings is that *Quad* raises the issue of agency, of the actor and his relationship to the text and to its direction. The audience, here, is aware of two contradictory impulses; on the one hand, we acquire the sense of a pattern, sequence or arrangement, imposed from outside; on the other hand, the adroitness, physical dexterity and apparent resoluteness with which each figure moves around the square, imparts a sense of individual aptitude or at least of independent purpose. In this vein, Steven Connor has suggested that *Quad* 'collapses and complicates the relationship of outside and inside'.⁷¹ This is evident in so far as the players each perform as both 'prisoner and jailor', he says; they may appear as 'prisoners of their own movement', as they enter the square and follow their designated trajectory. But since this 'movement describes a space, they may be said to be describing their prison from the outside'.⁷²

In the original television version, Beckett employs a structural device familiar from his earlier plays. When the film begins, two players (white and yellow) are already in motion. Each follows his individual trajectory, before one player leaves, signalling the start of a new series. Similarly, at the end, the film is stopped when all four figures are at the midpoint of the diagram, moving away from the centre, suggesting that the pattern will continue beyond the boundaries of the film. The 'climax' of each series occurs when all four figures are on screen, pacing towards the centre as though they are about to collide. The accompanying percussion, which

⁷⁰ William Worthen, *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 159.

⁷¹ Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 160.

⁷² *Ibid.*

builds to a crescendo at this point, contributes tension, allowing the effect to be continued and repeated throughout, in each series. However, the moment of collision is undercut each time, as the four figures skilfully avoid each other. The ‘climax’ therefore never occurs. As Erik Tønning puts it, ‘*Quad I* formally crystallizes the undercutting of narrative “climax” by the serial repetition first explicitly foregrounded [in *Play*].’⁷³ The effect is to highlight and in a sense to make a mockery of the determination with which the figures move towards the centre, a determination which leads them to concentrate unwaveringly upon the achievement of an ‘unattainable finality’, to strive continually for what emerges as the very inaccessibility of the centre.⁷⁴

In his essay *L’Épuisé*, Gilles Deleuze identifies the action of *Quad* in terms of what he calls *Language III*, a language that does not relate to objects that can be counted, classified or assembled, but to what he calls ‘des limites immanentes qui ne cessent de se déplacer, hiatus, trous ou déchirures dont on ne se rendrait pas compte’.⁷⁵ Deleuze compares *Quad* to a piece of modern ballet in so far as it substitutes conventional narrative for a logic of poses, whilst emphasising rhythm, balance, syncopation, punctuation and gestural dissonance. In doing so, he emphasises the moment of rupture which is central to the structure of the piece:

La potentialité du carré, c’est la possibilité que les quatre corps en mouvement qui le peuplent se rencontrent, par 2, 3 ou 4, suivant l’ordre et le cours de la série. Le centre est précisément l’endroit où ils peuvent se rencontrer; et leur rencontre, leur collision, n’est pas un événement parmi d’autres, mais la seule

⁷³ Tønning, *Samuel Beckett’s Abstract Drama*, p. 242.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze in Samuel Beckett, *Quad et autres pièces pour la télévision, suivi de l’Épuisé par Gilles Deleuze* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1992), pp. 57-106, p. 69.

possibilité d'événement, c'est-à-dire la potentialité de l'espace correspondant.

[...] La solution du problème est, dès lors, dans ce léger décrochage central, ce déhanchement, cet écart, ce hiatus, cette ponctuation, cette syncope, rapide esquive ou petit saut qui prévoit la rencontre et la conjure.⁷⁶

For Deleuze, this moment of separation or syncopation at the centre of the diagram points to the exhaustion of representation and of signification in the form of narrative. According to Deleuze, Beckett's work enacts the exhaustion of all possibilities, a process which is fundamental to the creation of new forms of art: it is only once all possibilities of a given system have been exhausted that the ability to think outside that system can occur. In what follows, I want to take this idea of rupture as central to the structure of *Quad*, as the basis for a comparison between Beckett and Meyerhold. For as previously suggested, Meyerhold postulates an actor who is fundamentally divided, decentred and separated from himself, such that he simultaneously expresses two contradictory yet, as the director sees it, interdependent impulses. In Skinner's terms, Meyerhold's biomechanical training system is designed to produce 'an actor who is conscious of the process of performance and the functioning of the body on stage'.⁷⁷ In other words, the actor should be able to consciously split himself in order to adopt differing roles or attitudes simultaneously: he who executes the movements and he who steps back and observes them from the outside. Furthermore, Meyerhold's *études* are designed to develop a number of specific skills that are considered essential to this process and the development of the actor's dual focus. As I hope to demonstrate, all of these skills are exhibited by the figures who pace the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

⁷⁷ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 69.

diagram in Beckett's *Quad*: 'precision, balance, coordination, efficiency, rhythm, expressiveness, responsiveness, playfulness and discipline' suggesting further resonances between the two.⁷⁸

Meyerhold offers justification for his theories in a lecture of 1922, in which he attributes much of his thinking on the nature of the actor's art to the work of Constant-Benoît Coquelin, which in turn is based on Diderot's insights in *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (c. 1773).⁷⁹ The key question which Meyerhold raises in this essay, drawing on Diderot, via Coquelin, is that of the relationship between the actor and his own physicality. For the ideal actor, in Diderot's terms, should be able to regulate both his physical needs and his emotions, to coordinate and arrange his body parts in the same way that the director is able to organise the raw materials of the stage. Within this discussion, the actor emerges as plural or multifaceted, and Meyerhold chooses to express this plurality via the algebraic formula:

$$N = A1 + A2$$
 (where N = actor; A1 = the artist who conceives the idea and issues the information necessary for its execution; A2 = the executant who executes the conception of A1).⁸⁰

It is only by recognising his fundamental duality, as Skinner argues, that the biomechanical actor is able to achieve a 'heightened physical awareness' and an 'outside eye'.⁸¹ Whilst recalling the image of the dual protagonist in *Ohio Impromptu*, this offers a new perspective on Beckett's handling of the performer's body in *Quad*,

⁷⁸ Jonathan Pitches, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 120.

⁷⁹ See Vsevolod Meyerhold 'The Actor of the Future and Biomechanics' as cited in Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), p. 202.

⁸⁰ See Meyerhold, 'The Actor of the Future and Biomechanics' in Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, p. 198.

⁸¹ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 70.

bringing additional significance to the idea put forward by Connor that each of the players performs as both ‘prisoner and jailor’ in this work.⁸² In the same way that biomechanics makes use of a highly stylised, conventional movement vocabulary, instituted through a rigorous physical regime, *Quad* appears to experiment with the idea of schematised movement and geometrically organised space whilst simultaneously foregrounding bodily expressivity and exploring the reflexive structure of the actor’s body in that space. In doing so, it probes the limits of the individual embodied self as the unified basis for meaning, exploring an originary dispersal at the heart of self-identity. The ‘heightened physical awareness’ which occurs through recognition of the actor’s dual perspective, as both artist and executant (A1 and A2), puppeteer and puppet, jailor and prisoner, is perhaps most clearly manifested in the player’s dexterous avoidance of each other’s paths at the centre of the scenic diagram.⁸³ The performers’ ability to ‘negotiate’ the centre of the square, whilst keeping time and rhythm, testifies to their capacity to work as an ensemble, each embodying the role of ‘external observer’, whilst simultaneously carrying out the task he has been assigned.⁸⁴

In order to supplement this analysis, I now explore this dual status of the actor in relation to Nancy’s thinking on dance. I do so in part with reference to Christopher Watkin’s essay *Dancing Equality*, which offers useful insights into the status of dance in Nancy’s thinking, identifying in particular how the philosopher escapes the reduction of dance to thought ‘about dance’, allowing it to participate instead ‘in the circulation of sense’.⁸⁵ In doing so, as previously suggested, I demonstrate how this dual perspective on the actor’s body, evidenced in both Meyerhold and Beckett’s

⁸² Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 160.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Watkin, ‘Dancing Equality: Image, Imitation and Participation’, p. 39, 46.

work, can be used to deconstruct an integrated system based on representation, psychological motivations and linear development, moving towards an understanding of movement as ‘producing sense, where sense escapes (*se dérobe à*) the difference between the intelligible and the sensible’.⁸⁶ When writing about the biomechanical *études*, Jonathan Pitches cites Alexei Levinsky, a contemporary of Meyerhold’s, in order to illustrate the self-sufficiency of the system:

I once asked Alexei Levinsky [...] the question: What else does an actor need to do, beyond a training in the *études*? ‘Nothing,’ he said, ‘that’s all you need.’⁸⁷

The *études* are here presented, not as the outward expression of inner states or thoughts, but as in themselves producing meaning through patterned movement, rhythmic structuring and a deliberate balance of work and rest. In seeking to understand dance in a similar way, that is, outside or in excess of any representational strategies, Nancy discusses a phrase of Stanislavski’s: ‘partir de soi ou *partir* de soi’, to begin from oneself or to leave oneself.⁸⁸ This phrase, with its two differing accentuations, provides an opening for Nancy, a way in to thinking about the relationship between subjectivity and dance: ‘elle donne en fait la formule même de la question du sujet.’⁸⁹ The first half of the phrase, ‘partir de soi’, is in keeping with Stanislavski’s own theory of acting, insofar as it posits the self as something given, continuous and foundational, a formula which Nancy, as shown elsewhere, rejects:

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ Pitches, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, p. 126.

⁸⁸ Mathilde Monnier et Jean-Luc Nancy, *Allitérations – Conversations sur la danse* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), p. 93.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

‘on suppose alors que le danseur est un soi, a un soi et que c’est de cela qu’il va partir’.⁹⁰ In Nancy’s terms, the ‘I’ of the subject cannot be foundational since it exists, like the biomechanical actor, only ever in relation to an outside, that is, an exteriorising moment:

C’est une question extrêmement simple que nous connaissons tous: si je me demande quel est mon ‘soi’, mon ‘moi’ auquel je dois me rapporter, je ne peux évidemment jamais le trouver, puisque le seul sujet possible est le sujet de l’énonciation, c’est-à-dire ‘je’ et non pas ‘moi’. Le ‘moi’ ne peut être que produit en quelque sorte, posé après.⁹¹

If, as Nancy puts it here, the only possible subject is a subject of enunciation, then this would suggest that the subject is always already plural and divided from itself, always, that is, ungrounded. To think of dance in terms of a departure from the self, *partir de soi*, Nancy says, is to think the self not as the foundation for movement but as occurring in and through movement, a departure from nothing: ‘partir de rien’, towards nothing: ‘parce que rien n’est donné.’⁹² The dancer, or the actor in Meyerhold’s terms, becomes the manifestation of this externalising moment performed by a separated self, the ‘soi’, which departs from nothing and returns to nothing. Similarly, dance is reconfigured not as the expression of an inner state or thought process but as the interruption or cessation of a pre-given, continuous self, the spacing of sense via the rhythmic articulation of elements across the stage space.⁹³

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ For an in depth discussion of Nancy’s thinking on dance, see also Watkin, ‘Dancing Equality’, p. 42.

When speaking about dance, Nancy is careful to avoid such terms as ‘clivage’, ‘coupantes’ or ‘castatrices’, which, he suggests, belong primarily to a psychoanalytic register.⁹⁴ His starting point, rather, is the dance itself, ‘avec tout ce que l’on voudra d’ouverture, d’espace, d’écartement’.⁹⁵ It is no coincidence, he says, that space, variation, balance and contraction are all constitutive, whether of the solo dance or of the ensemble. For it is through these constituents that the self is reconfigured outside theoretical and practical assumptions of origin, primacy and essence. Nancy’s thinking of dance, when considered alongside both Meyerhold and Beckett’s work, can be used to further articulate the notion of the body as exposure, suggesting, as Watkin puts it: ‘a refusal of the privileged self-as-origin and an extension of the exposition of existence itself’.⁹⁶

Like Nancy, both Meyerhold and Beckett pose movement, in the place of dialogue or speech, as a form of sense-making that exceeds the stable ground of the pre-given, integrated self. Dance, in these works, is not a metaphor, nor the translation of a thought, but rather a producer of sense in its own right, one that does not return us to an individual, expressive self but rather articulates subjectivity in terms of its departure from nothing, its vulnerability as exposure and opening on to a world. The players of *Quad*, ‘as alike in build as possible’,⁹⁷ appear as ‘generalization[s] of the human figure’, versions of each other/themselves, driven by the same impulse, the negotiation of the centre the diagram.⁹⁸ Distinguishable only by colour, the sound of their footsteps, and the different sounds of the percussion instruments which accompany them, the impulse which drives them towards the centre equally forces

⁹⁴ Monnier and Nancy, *Allitérations – Conversations sur la danse*, p. 95.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Watkin, ‘Dancing Equality’, p. 43.

⁹⁷ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 453.

⁹⁸ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 72.

them back out to nothing, ceaselessly articulating and re-articulating the irreducible spatial-temporal division of the self.

Here, through the staging of the diagram, sketched out and meticulously guarded by the four figures, movement participates in the production of meaning in the same way as does the rhythmic knocking action in *Ohio Impromptu*. By elevating the stage directions to the status of dramatic material, foregrounding the actor's dual status as both 'prisoner and jailor' of his own movement, Beckett suspends any notion of essence or ground, creating a theatrical image that resists fusion or consubstantiality. In doing so, he displaces the deterministic and metaphysical underpinnings which might derive from an investment in the actor's body, as a marker of the individual, the essentially human. Here meaning emerges in the rhythmic assemblage of bodies, tools and apparatus, a piecing together which undermines any notion of origin or foundation whilst operating in excess of a logic based on representation.

In what follows I explore this same movement of ungrounding and interruption in *What Where*. While the hand is not explicitly staged here, this play can be seen to further articulate Beckett's approach to creation as based not on a foundation or origin but rather on the disjunctive association or contact-in-separation of material bodies and technical apparatus. Like both *Ohio Impromptu* and *Quad*, *What Where* substitutes linear narrative, and the projection of a system based on the realization of particular goals, for a process of making that is foregrounded, and which produces multiple and local differences and variations on the production of sense. It is thus productively read alongside Nancy's reworking of Heidegger, and in particular his foregrounding of the plural spacing and sharing of sense.

What Where (1983)

What Where, Beckett's final play, was first published by Faber and Faber, London, in 1984. The première of the play had taken place on the 15th June the previous year at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York.⁹⁹ Although, according to James Knowlson, 'Beckett revised the dialogue for *What Where* three times in three different languages for three separate productions', the basic movement sequence and choreography, in short, the visual content of the work, was only altered once, namely for the German television adaptation, aired by Süddeutscher Rundfunk on 13 April 1986.¹⁰⁰ This adaptation resulted in two further revised texts, one in French at the request of Pierre Chabert, and one in English, prepared by Beckett for S. E. Gontarski. In what follows, I refer for the most part to the original English stage script as it appears in the 2006 edition of *The Complete Dramatic Works*. However, as in previous cases, I also draw upon Beckett's production notes, specifically those taken during the summer of 1985 in preparation for the 1986 television adaptation of *Was Wo* at the Studios of Süddeutscher Rundfunk, Stuttgart. As well as highlighting Beckett's direct involvement in the process of staging the play, these notes reiterate both the author's acknowledgement of the 'unfinished' status of the written script and his recognition of the need for an approach which combines the textual with the spatial or the choreographic.¹⁰¹

The stage play centres, as do both *Quad* and *Ohio Impromptu*, on a limited number of dramatis personae, 'as alike as possible', that interact within a designated playing space.¹⁰² Though only four characters are named in the script, a fifth is

⁹⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 468.

¹⁰⁰ Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. 415.

¹⁰¹ S. E. Gontarski in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. xxii.

¹⁰² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 469.

referred to: 'We are the last five.'¹⁰³ The speaker here is V or Voice of Bam. Physically separated from the other protagonists and the playing area, he is represented in the stage version by a '*small megaphone*' suspended '*at head level*', '*downstage left*' and '*surrounded by shadow*'.¹⁰⁴ On the other side or stage right, '*as seen from house*', and '*surrounded by shadow*', is a dimly lit rectangular playing area, '3m x 2m', in which the four remaining figures, Bam, Bem, Bom, and Bim, are directed by V to enact a series of perplexing, circuitous interrogation scenes.¹⁰⁵ In the Stuttgart Notebook, Beckett indicates that these four figures, as well as being '*as alike as possible*', should be '*differentiated by colour*'.¹⁰⁶ Though this detail was later cut, along with the 'distinctive headdresses' and 'audible steps' which Beckett had originally attributed to each figure, the use of colour as a differentiating mechanism both links the play with previous works such as *Quad I* whilst at the same time re-emphasizing the shift from a single focus, towards a refracted, pluralistic viewing perspective.¹⁰⁷ Here Beckett draws out States's 'binocular vision' once again by dividing up the various elements of the theatrical experience and allowing meaning to emerge in the gap or collision between the different layers or frameworks: the real, the material and the fictional.

The initial speaker, V or Voice of Bam, issues from a megaphone. While at first he serves as a kind of narrator, setting up each scene and marking the passage of time, his role quickly expands to include directorial and authorial functions. He introduces characters but also interrupts the action and prompts revisions. In a similar

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

¹⁰⁶ Beckett, 'Stuttgart Notebook', as cited in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. 449.

¹⁰⁷ Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. 449.

way to the Listener of *Ohio Impromptu*, he appears to exercise control over the performance space, initiating the action with the lines:

V: We are the last five. In the present as were we still. It is the spring. Time passes.
First without words. I switch on.¹⁰⁸

As V speaks the final sentence 'I switch on', a light illuminates the playing area and Bam appears stage left, '*head haught*', followed by Bom stage right, '*head bowed*'.¹⁰⁹
After a pause, V resumes his instructions:

Not good. I switch off. [*Light off P*] I start again. We are the last five. It is spring.
Time passes. First without words. I switch on. [*Light on P. Bam alone [...] head haught. Pause.*] Good. I am alone. It is spring. Time passes. First without words. In the end Bom appears. Reappears.¹¹⁰

Bom's appearance and reappearance mark the start of the main action of the play; the first appearance without words, so that we register only the pattern of entrances and exits, is followed by the second with words, so that we become aware of the context in which the movement is taking place. Through the second repetition, 'with words',¹¹¹ we discover that the four figures who appear in the '*same long grey gown*', with the '*same long grey hair*', are in fact participating in a cycle of interrogation and torture, initiated by Bam, and externally coordinated by V.¹¹² Bam interrogates first

¹⁰⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p.470.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 469

Bom, then Bim and Bem, each of whom, after failing to produce the desired confession, is in turn subjected to torture and interrogation. As Bom's interrogation by Bam comes to an end, Bim appears, taking Bom away in order to 'give him the works'.¹¹³ However, when Bim too fails to make Bom confess, he is in turn subjected to interrogation under torture by Bem. The sequence is repeated so that Bom, Bim and Bem are each in succession torturer and torture victim, and each is successively eliminated from the narrative playing field presumably without revealing the 'it' sought by Bam from the outset.¹¹⁴ The cycle continues through spring, summer, and autumn, until V is left to sum up the seemingly futile exercise and restore darkness to the stage:

V: Good.

I am alone.

In the present as were I still.

It is winter.

Without journey.

Time passes.

That is all.

Make sense who may.

I switch off.¹¹⁵

Like both *Ohio Impromptu* and *Quad*, *What Where* displays aesthetic self-reflexivity, and expresses a concern with the limits of symbolic signification. The evocation of

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

the context of torture serves to heighten these effects by drawing a link between the objectification of bodies in space and the process of ‘making sense’ through narrative or language.¹¹⁶ Rather than shedding light on the action within the playing area, V’s directorial instructions add a further level of uncertainty, pulling attention away from the subject of the interrogations towards the process of their articulation. V’s purpose, in other words, is not so much to provide clarification and solicit resolutions, but rather, like the Listener’s knocks in *Ohio Impromptu*, to regulate the pace and pattern of the proceedings. The information being sought is never elucidated beyond vague inquiries about ‘what’ and ‘where’ and the players, including the chief inquisitor Bam, seem equally ‘in the dark’ about the purpose and function of the interrogations. As McMullan sees it, *What Where* is characterised by a ‘continual veiling or deferral of truth [...] The cycles of interrogation reflect on the play as a process of meaning-making.’¹¹⁷ V’s closing words before ‘switching off’, ‘Make sense who may,’ thus prompt the spectator to think critically about his own role within this process, highlighting the contradictions or irreconcilable perspectives that persist at the end of the play.¹¹⁸

That the play concerns itself with the construction of self or put another way, the erosion of identity, has been suggested by several critics. In a paradigmatic

¹¹⁶ Trish McTighe argues this point effectively in *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett’s Drama*, drawing on Elaine Scarry’s book *The Body in Pain* in order to suggest that there is an ‘unmaking’ or ‘uncreating’ at work in Beckett’s play. As she puts it, ‘the “what” and the “where” are a way of maintaining absolute openness of interpretation and point to the limits of language, where bodies and words touch, intertwine, and fall apart, as language falls short and bodies “pass out.”’ Quoting Scarry, she suggests that ‘the primary goal of the mechanics of torture is to ‘make sense’, [...] to coerce the body into a meaningful performance which legitimates intrusive power systems.’ The final words of *What Where*: ‘time passes./ That is all./ Make sense who may. / I switch off’, both point to this process, and to its limits, establishing a link between the act of sense-making through language, narrative, dramatic representation and the objectification of bodies in space. See McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 125.

¹¹⁷ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 44.

¹¹⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 476.

reading of this work, S. E. Gontarski refers to *What Where* as ‘a memory play’,¹¹⁹ an interpretation supported by Beckett’s own words, in so far as the author talks about the playing-area in which the B-ms perform as ‘the field of memory’.¹²⁰ Further evoking the notion of memory, as Colin Gardner suggests, the names given to the figures in the playing area, ‘Bim’, ‘Bam’, ‘Bom’ and ‘Bem’, recall those of earlier characters in the Beckett canon: Mr. Thomas ‘Bim’ Clinch has a twin brother named ‘Bom’, both of whom appear in *Murphy* (1938) while Bem and Bom (and Pim) are characters in the prose work, *Comment c’est* (1961).¹²¹ Two further sources of inspiration for *What Where* are cited in the *Theatrical Notebooks* as Thomas Moore’s poem ‘Oft, in the Stilly Night’ (1815), and Schubert’s song-cycle *Winterreise* (1827).¹²² While Moore’s poem is referred to in the preparatory notebook for the Stuttgart television adaptation of the play, where Beckett comments that ‘for PA [playing-area] “the lights of other days”’, Schubert’s *Winterreise* is indirectly eluded to by Voice in the latter half of the play: ‘It is winter. Without journey’.¹²³ Though it is difficult to single out any direct narrative links between these works and *What Where*, both centre, as Erik Tønning has noted, ‘on questions of lost love and the present misery of dwelling on traces of the “other”’.¹²⁴ There is, in other words, a comparative sense of ‘deepening solitude’, and the ‘haunting, spectral presence of lost “others” along with a longing for some release from the pain of the present’.¹²⁵ All this in turn suggests a struggle of the self coupled with a feeling that the relation between the self and the other is pivotal to the process of memory and identity.

¹¹⁹ S.E. Gontarski, Textual Notes to “*What Where*: Revised Text.” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 2:1 (1992), pp. 11-23, p. 12.

¹²⁰ Beckett cited in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. 450.

¹²¹ For further details, see Colin Gardner, *Beckett, Deleuze and the Televisual Event: Peephole Art* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p.94.

¹²² Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. 452.

¹²³ Beckett cited in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol. IV, p. 452.

¹²⁴ Tønning, *Samuel Beckett’s Abstract Drama*, p. 251.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

Through such readings and associations, the scenes of torture and interrogation that take place within the playing area acquire significance not as narrative events in themselves but as components within a broader set of histories and frameworks, both literary and philosophical.

What these readings suggest, in other words, is that *What Where* is less remarkable as memoir than as a dramatic reflection on the nature of memory itself, and the relation of the latter to the act of artistic (re)creation. In the late novel *Company*, first published in English in 1979, and itself based on recollections from Beckett's youth, the narrator describes a process which is useful for interpreting what occurs in *What Where*:

Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself. He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company. Leave it at that.¹²⁶

The notion that the process of devising the self is somehow bound up with the need for company, the process of speaking, the construction of voice and of one who listens, also recalls the scene of *Ohio Impromptu*. In the case of *What Where*, it provides a possible explanation for V's puzzling statement that 'We are the last *five*'.¹²⁷ While in the stage version of *What Where*, one sees only four figures in the 'field of memory': Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom (V appears only as Voice of Bam via the megaphone), the striking similarities in name and appearance give the impression

¹²⁶ Beckett, Samuel, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said and Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1980), pp. 1-46, p. 18.

¹²⁷ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 476.

that all of the players are fragments, shades or ‘avatars’ of the same self.¹²⁸ What Bam (both Voice of Bam and Bam) demands of each figure in turn is precisely what he appears to lack throughout, namely any ability truly to occupy a ‘figure’, or an origin, and thereby refer his sense of self-presence to some point or location that would serve as correlates of the signifiers: ‘what’ and ‘where’.

This process is amplified by the presence of the megaphone, which, as Martha Fehsenfeld suggests, causes an effect of disjuncture:

It [the megaphone] seemed to assume a meaning, an importance, which I could never completely either erase from mind or integrate into what I saw and heard... The Voice, coming from the suspended megaphone, drew my attention to its object-agent function each time I heard it, and my eyes were distracted by what my ears heard. The ears were likewise distracted by what the eyes saw. There was an imbalance, a conflict – not existing within the stage frame, but instead pulling me outside of it – between these two areas of focus.¹²⁹

This description gives a useful indication of the manner in which the separation and juxtaposition of dramatic elements forces the spectator to assume a more active role in the construction of meaning, as he or she works to interpret and amalgamate differing perceptual information. Stanton B. Garner equally refers to the megaphone, among other Beckettian props, when he writes that ‘those vestiges of naturalism that assert themselves in the setting [...] seem mocked by the essentially formal space that

¹²⁸ Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 251.

¹²⁹ Martha Fehsenfeld, “‘Everything out but the Faces’: Beckett’s Reshaping of *What Where* for Television.” *Modern Drama*, 29:2 (1986), pp. 229-240. p. 230.

surrounds them, and they gradually surrender their utilitarian value for the more strictly aesthetic value of shape'.¹³⁰ In addition to its aesthetic or theatrical value, the placement of the megaphone outside of the playing space reinforces the process of the un-working of self, which is depicted less as an essence, and rather as a performance across different and juxtaposing spaces. Voice and stage image are separated out in a manner that seems designed to disrupt the ease of spectatorial pleasure and identification. Sense or meaning is (re)configured in excess of the text, emerging in the meeting between the Voice that issues from the megaphone and the narrative action that takes place within the playing area. It is the relation of contact and disjuncture between these two spaces that presents the paradigm for the spectator's response to the drama.

This effect is less pronounced, I would argue, in the television version of the play, where the specific viewing conditions of the medium make a comparable sense of spacing and disjuncture difficult to achieve. The two-dimensional television screen makes the placement of a subject at an intermediate 'third remove' from the playing area, less convincing. Entrenched in the top left corner of the screen therefore, V hovers over the action in the lower right quadrant. His directorial role is communicated through his imposing size, his face taking up fully one-third of the screen as opposed to the other four players, who take up two thirds of the screen together. V conveys a certain distance and aloofness from the narrative proper in his tone of voice. Though he interrupts less than in the stage version, he speaks in a distorted and 'colourless' voice, noticeably more subdued than the voices of the players. V appears as a form of puppet-master, controlling the production, but aurally and visually his intensity is waning. His screen image is distorted and dissipated by a

¹³⁰ Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 63.

gauze, which is used to blur and soften the image of his face, as opposed to the B-boys who appear sharp and distinct in outline. V is portrayed as both master and victim, puppeteer and puppet, here. On the one hand, he exercises complete imaginative control over the televisual field, the field of his memory. On the other hand, he is himself in danger of disappearing, as darkness and silence progressively enshroud him.

This comparison demonstrates how the effect of Beckett's play, and his final provocative challenge to the audience to 'make sense' of the proceedings, is dependent upon a particular handling of space, a 'reconfiguration of the relationship between performer and [his] spatial context' which, as I have suggested, resonates with Meyerhold's approach.¹³¹ The cycle of entrances and exits, migration and relocation which structures the action of *What Where*, orchestrated from outside the playing area, generates a plural perspective where both the real in the sense of the concrete, the actual, and the fictional co-exist on stage. By emphasizing rather than concealing the fragmentary nature of the theatrical apparatus, the gap between actor and character, spectator and production, Beckett, like Meyerhold, transforms the theatre from a character-centric model based on individual psychology into a materially oriented performance aesthetic, where the focus has dispersed, and the actor's body is merely one element among many, all of which mediate, transform and contribute to the production and circulation of meaning in the work.

In the final section of this chapter, I want to re-examine this process with reference to a sonnet by Arthur Rimbaud entitled 'Voyelles', which Beckett refers to in the Stuttgart Notebook as a source of inspiration for *What Where*. This, in turn, will enable me to draw together the various threads of this chapter, returning, via

¹³¹ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 76.

Meyerhold and Nancy, to the question of agency, the puppetesque and the dispersal of sense in Beckett's work:

A noir, E Blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles,

Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes.

A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes

Qui bombillent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfe d'ombre; E, candeur des vapeurs et des tentes,

Lance des glaciers fiers, rois blanc, frissons d'ombelles;

I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles

Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes;

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,

Paix des patis semés d'animaux, paix des rides

Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, supreme Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,

Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges:

- O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux! ¹³²

This sonnet, written in alexandrines between 1871 and 1872, then published in October 1883 in a journal called *Lutèce*, deals with questions of sight, authorship and, as Virginia A. la Charité suggests, the idea of the poet as 'Voyant', 'Savant' or

¹³² Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies complètes* (Paris: Léon Vanier, 1895), p. 7.

‘Clairon’, a God-like figure who is able to occupy a celestial sphere.¹³³ Apart from the theme of creation, and the examination of the status of the poet as originary creator, there are a number of useful points of comparison with Beckett’s work. This is evident in the profusion of disparate and fleeting yet vivid images such as ‘noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes’,¹³⁴ what Charles Russell refers to as the ‘rapid accumulation of disjunctive images which seem to suggest causal relationships’, but instead produce a restlessness of thought, forcing the reader to continually shift focus from one image - pulled apart and displaced - to the next.¹³⁵ In a chapter entitled ‘The Poet as Seer’, Russell examines Rimbaud’s status as a post-Romantic avant-garde thinker and the proponent of a ‘wilfully irrational, hallucinatory language whose supposed origin lies beyond the individual poet and poetic tradition’.¹³⁶ Rimbaud’s ‘refusal’ of a ‘pre-established order’ to be found either in an originary subject or in its representation through language, coupled with his investigations into the post-Romantic notion of the ‘poète voyant’,¹³⁷ ‘whose actions thrust him beyond personal identity’, results in what Russell refers to as the ‘depersonalization of the poetic process’, a concept that resounds, as suggested previously, with Beckett’s approach.¹³⁸ This is particularly evident in, for example, the final stanza of ‘Voyelles’, where Rimbaud grapples with the term ‘l’Oméga’, meaning literally ‘great O’, the last letter of the Greek alphabet which is often used to evoke a limit, the final or end component in a set. According to la Charité, the letter *O* is at the same

¹³³ Virginia A. la Charité, ‘A Note on Rimbaud’s “Voyelles”’, *Romance Notes*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Autumn, 1967), pp. 53-56. p. 54.

¹³⁴ Rimbaud, *Poésies complètes*, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Charles Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 48.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹³⁷ This term derives from an essay written by Rimbaud in 1871 entitled ‘Lettre d’un Voyant’ (Letter of May 15, 1871 to Paul Demeny) in *Œuvres*, ed. Suzanne Bernard (Paris: Garnier, 1960). For a detailed analysis of the relevance of this letter and of Rimbaud’s theory of ‘le voyant’ see Virginia A. la Charité’s article (cited above).

¹³⁸ Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries*, p. 51.

time a ‘symbol for God’, the model of ‘supreme perfection’, as well as signifying, in a more cosmological sense, the combined spheres of the divine and the material, and the poet’s necessary participation and entanglement in both realms.¹³⁹ On another level it refers to the ‘actual centre of activity, energy, and force’ where artistic production occurs, while geometrically it is the ‘figure for the depiction of ‘the eyes [...] and the mouth’, the ‘two essential characteristics’, as la Charité sees it, of Rimbaud’s creative vision.¹⁴⁰

Much of the unique relevance of Rimbaud’s poem here lies in the contradictions inherent in this image of the ‘great O’. On the one hand we see his rejection of the Romantic notion of the poet as ‘privileged visionary’, his refusal of the primacy of the originary self, and his quasi-Geulinxian assertion that humans are not the initiators of their actions, but rather the passive receptors of impersonal and universal forces that issue from outside the individual body.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, the intensely tactile imagery of ‘Voyelles’ imparts a sense of involvement with and participation in the material world, a ‘personal activism’ which contradicts the idea of the poet or human as receptacle.¹⁴²

It has been suggested in view of Beckett’s citing Rimbaud’s poem, that the elusive fifth figure in *What Where*, though referred to by Beckett as ‘Voice of Bam’, might be representative of the ‘missing fifth vowel’, as Knowlson puts it, the ‘already dispatched figure whose name might contain the missing [...] u’.¹⁴³ This is further indicated by the fact that Bom, on first entering the playing area, does not appear but ‘reappears’, ‘*head bowed*’, presumably having already tried and failed to extract

¹³⁹ Virginia A. la Charité, ‘A Note on Rimbaud’s “Voyelles”’, p. 55.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁴¹ Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries*, p. 51.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

information from another, perhaps the fifth and absent ‘Bum’.¹⁴⁴ The emphasis that Beckett places on pattern of movement, on the visual and geometric arrangement of the stage space here is emblematic of the recurrent shift away from a singular psychologically motivated, character-centric perspective, towards an open, pluralistic model, in which multiple viewpoints are possible, and the actor is able to achieve a distance from his character, understanding his own role within a broader set of relations.

As suggested previously, useful examples of this process can be found in Meyerhold’s work. While Meyerhold’s exercises do on occasion require the actor to perform continuous, smooth movements, bending and twisting in order to exploit the natural curvature of the spine, the majority of poses taken from the *études* suggest a preoccupation with straight lines, the actors performing jarring, rigid movements and contortions, with sudden changes of position and refusal. Sequences of movements are executed by the actor who responds to external instruction, carrying out a pre-given task. In the case of ‘Shooting the Bow’,¹⁴⁵ for example, the outwardly motivated task is subdivided into a series of poses or interconnected tableaux, through

¹⁴⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 470.

¹⁴⁵ To begin the sequence, ‘the actor executes two “dactyls”’, an exercise that forms the basis of most biomechanical training. The actor stands with his feet shoulder width apart, and with his hands by his sides. Leaning forward slowly, he bends his knees, raises his arms above his head, straightens his legs and transfers his weight to his toes, all in one continuous movement. He then bends his arms so that the elbows travel downwards towards the floor, clapping twice, quickly and sharply as his hands reach the level of the hips. He repeats this movement before returning to a neutral position. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKMJV6beIZM> Viewed on 18th September 2019. In order to complete the exercise called ‘Shooting the Bow’, ‘the actor falls to the floor [...] He draws his legs and arms together. [...] Rising on his right foot, he slowly draws up an imaginary bow. [...] The actor advances with his left shoulder forward and his right foot back. [...] Spotting an imaginary target, he transfers his weight from his right foot to his left and back to the right foot. [...] Describing an arc with its center at his right shoulder, the actor’s balance is shifted from the right leg to the left and back again to the right. [...] He draws an imaginary arrow from his belt, or imaginary quiver. [...] Very quickly he bends his upper torso toward the floor. [...] Now, slowly the actor straightens up, holding his extended arms in a rigid position. The left arm is drawn out toward the front and the right arm is thrown back to a slightly lower level. [...] He slowly loads the imaginary bow and draws it back [...] The actor aims. [...] He fires with a shout. [...] His body immediately contorts like a sprung bow into positions of “refusal.”’ This description is taken from Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 112-113.

which the actor is able both to develop his physical agility, whilst practising some of the key skills which Meyerhold considers essential to actor training: ‘self-awareness, physical expressiveness and reflex excitability’, among others.¹⁴⁶ As Amy Skinner suggests in her analysis of this exercise, ‘straight lines’, both vertical and horizontal, can be identified throughout the ‘Shooting the Bow’ sequence, particularly ‘along the actor’s arms’ both in the initial stage referred to as the dactyl, and in the final stages of the exercise, when the actor raises his torso with the imaginary arrow in his hand, extends his arms out into a rigid position before firing the shot.¹⁴⁷ As Skinner suggests, this ‘extension of the arms’ draws our attention away ‘from the curve of the back, maintaining an impression of angularity in the overall image’.¹⁴⁸ The alternation between quick, sharp movements, and slower, more sustained ones, creates the impression of different forces converging upon the actor’s body simultaneously from outside. This impression is heightened in the moments of extension, when the shapes created by the actor’s body, in particular the contours of the arms and legs, appear to extend beyond the individual himself, puncturing the stage space and fracturing the illusion of unity. In this way, the actor’s body becomes part of a wider network of material relations, producing meaning through its spatial interactions with other objects and technical apparatus.

This anti-illusionistic reconfiguration of the stage’s spatial relations is evident in all three of Beckett’s plays analysed in this chapter, each of which divides the playing space, staging multiple planes of meaning and prompting plural perspectives. The handling of stage space in these works is in keeping with Nancy’s thinking of the spacing of sense in relation to *techné*, which, as I have shown, is rooted in his

¹⁴⁶ Skinner, *Meyerhold and the Cubists*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

reworking of Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein* or *Mitdasein*. Tied up with this is a particular understanding of the body as the anatomistic or corpuscular site for a spacing and a sharing of sense, which occurs via the disjunctive accumulation of tools, technical apparatus and machinery. In place of a coherent totality, space is figured here as exposure, exteriority, or *espacement*, implying an unlocking of spatiality from representational space. For Nancy, this *espacement* or 'l'espacement – espace et temps – fait ou transit tout d'abord l'existence en tant que passibilité de sens'.¹⁴⁹ Space, as I have tried to suggest throughout this chapter is already always implied in the making of sense, which takes place not in the amalgamation or fixture of vectors or points of orientation, but in the preservation of a gap or dehiscence between different elements of performance, such that these remain in originary dialogue. In the next chapter, I examine this process in relation to the sound.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy, *Le Sens du monde*, p. 238.

Chapter Three: Ear

‘Revolving it all’: Sense as Resonance in *Ghost Trio*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*

The three works *Ghost Trio* (1975) *Footfalls* (1975) and *Rockaby* (1980) are centrally concerned with sound, voice and the process of listening. In these works, Beckett stages the act of listening as partaking in the condition of resonance, the physical and acoustic articulation of the subject and of sense. Engaging directly with the tension between sound and image, music and language, he pits these elements against each other in order to create particular effects, exploiting dissonance and disorientation as productive strategies. Images collide and juxtapose such that the spectator has to contend with multifarious and often contradictory perceptual information. Such effects are succinctly articulated by Steven Connor in his book *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, to which I refer at various points throughout this chapter. Alongside this, I will draw upon Nancy’s engagement with the auditory, specifically in his 2002 work *À l’écoute* in order to situate this discussion with respect to the broader aims of this thesis, in particular the move towards an understanding of the theatrical image and of the body as divided or spread out across multiple agencies, a disconnected layering of disparate parts all of which contribute equally to the production of meaning. This, as previously shown, involves a process of reduction, magnification and exposure, a focus on the outward manifestation of events rather than internal motivations. I carry this analysis forward here through an emphasis on sound.

Connor provides a useful working definition of ventriloquism as ‘the puzzling dissociation of a vocal sound from its source, followed by an erroneous or coerced

attribution of the sound to another visible source.’¹ In reviewing and dissecting the numerous attempts to theorize or ‘demythologise’ this phenomenon over the centuries, he identifies two remarkably different forms which begin to distinguish themselves around the beginning of the eighteenth century. The first most ancient form of ventriloquism is that of the ‘engastrimyth’, a word which is made up of the Greek *en* meaning ‘in’, followed by *gaster* meaning ‘belly’, followed by *muthos*, meaning ‘speech’.² Associated above all with the ancient practice of soothsaying, that is, of ‘speaking without appearing to speak’,³ this form is exemplified in the ancient Greek tradition of the Delphic Oracle. Here the prophetess or high priestess, thought to be possessed by the spirit of God, acts as a conduit between heaven and earth, calling forth the dead to speak through her.⁴ The engastrimyth is described in the Oxford English Dictionary as the ‘one who appears to speak in the belly’.⁵ Her voice, as Connor suggests, is an ‘inner voice’ which positions her as a sort of shrine or place of privileged access through its association with the divine and the sacred.⁶ The second form of ventriloquism, which emerges in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, is different insofar as it involves an act of projection or casting away.⁷ As Connor suggests, this later form of ventriloquial illusion centres on ‘the power to disembody the voice and launch it into external space’, beyond the boundaries of the individual body, such that it occupies a peripheral, distant and often

¹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 217.

² <http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-eng1.htm>, viewed on 27th September 2019.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ As Connor states ‘the practice of engastrimythic prophecy’ was prolific albeit in different forms from ancient Greece all the way through to the medieval period. (See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 51). The engastrimyth or prophet acts as a conduit or vessel for voices and sounds that are alien and in most cases spiritual. (See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, pp. 47-153).

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62209?redirectedFrom=engastrimyth&>, 27 September 2019.

⁶ Johannes Baptiste de la Chapelle, *Le Ventriloque, ou l’engastrimyth*, (London: chez de l’Etanville/Paris: chez la Veuve Duchesne, 1772), p. 88 as cited in Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 214.

⁷ See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 214.

unidentifiable position.⁸ In a movement which disturbs the proper or logical course of sense, the audience hears words as issuing from afar, from somewhere other than the body which they see before them.⁹

In Connor's terms, there are certain implications to be identified in the shift from an engastrimythic structure, where the voice appears to come 'from within',¹⁰ to the latter, projective or exteriorizing structure. For in this shift, the voice becomes 'itinerant', dislocated from any singular origin.¹¹ Put another way, it takes its leave of the body proper, entering into dialogue with it. In the first instance, one might argue, a conception of character, and of the individual as something cohesive and identifiable, remains intact. Though there is space attributed to the subliminal, the inexplicable, a certain fantasy of interiority and of individual subjectivity endures, insofar as the prophetic, the engastrimyth, appears as the centre or dwelling place of an essentially

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁹ In order to articulate this second type of ventriloquism more clearly, Connor cites the following account given by the eighteenth century theorist of the ventriloquial, Johannes Baptiste de la Chapelle, and taken from his book *Le Ventriloque, ou l'engastrimyth* (London: chez de l'Étanville/Paris: chez la Veuve Duchesne, 1772): 'M. Saint-Gille asked me to a little room on the ground floor (what those in trade call a Back-Shop) and each of us occupied a corner of a little fireplace which warmed us, with a table beside us. We were alone. My eyes did not leave his face, which I saw almost continuously from the front. / For about half an hour, he had been relating to me some extremely comic scenes arising from his talents as a ventriloquist, when, in a moment of silence on his part and of distraction on my own, I heard myself called, very distinctly, with the words *M. l'Abbé de la Chapelle*; but from so far off, and in such a strange voice that all my entrails were disturbed. / As I was warned, I said to him, I believe that you have just spoken to me ventriloquially. He responded only with a smile; but, as I was indicating the direction of the voice which seemed to me to come from the roof of a house opposite, I heard through the floor of the room above the one where we were, quite distinctly, and with the same character and tone as that which had just caused me such surprise, *It is not from that direction [...]*.' (See La Chapelle, *Le Ventriloque, ou l'engastrimyth*, pp. 17-18.) As Connor indicates, this scene is highly revealing in its staging of the complex processes involved in the production of the ventriloquial voice. Despite La Chapelle's attempts to rationalise or theorise the experience purely in terms of the speaker's vocal apparatus, attributing physiological explanations such as the ability to exercise 'particular muscles of the Pharynx or the throat' in order to produce particular effects, a skill which almost any individual 'with ordinary functions' has the potential to master, it is clear from the above account, and from Connor's reading of it, that this kind of ventriloquial illusion relies rather upon a complex interplay of sight and sound. (See La Chapelle, p. 390) The instinctual precautions which La Chapelle takes against the possibility of trickery, and the preliminary knowledge he has of his friend's ventriloquial capabilities, end by serving as the necessary conditions for their reception. In Connor's words, La Chapelle is 'prepared' for the experience by a series of 'expectations or promptings' which draw attention to the 'determination of hearing by vision.' (See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, pp. 213-217)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

narrative driven situation. Whilst the body of the prophet is supposed to be possessed or permeated by forces that are beyond human control, it retains its position as privileged space of meaning, providing access to higher truths and exerting influence over a specified visual field. In the second instance, however, agency appears to be divided, split and multiplied across what has the potential to become an infinite, unlimited space. Whether the ventriloquial voice is attributed to a dummy, as in certain forms of nineteenth century popular entertainment for example, or whether it simply emanates from elsewhere (offstage), as is the case in La Chapelle's account (see footnote), the tensions between 'acting and manipulation, living performer and puppet-object, onstage and offstage' are highlighted and brought under scrutiny within this model.¹² Reflected in this predicament, is the idea of a body which is simultaneously 'acting', 'acting-on' and being 'acted-upon'.¹³ The body, in short, becomes a 'contested' space, which no longer guarantees the singular subject.¹⁴ This second form of ventriloquism then radically undermines the notion of the individual as centre of a clearly defined visual field, destabilizing the strict distinctions between internal and external space and, as Connor suggests pointing to 'the magical exchangeability of the interior space of the body and the exterior space in which it moves'.¹⁵

In this respect, this second form of ventriloquism brings into play Nancy's conception of the listening subject, a subject that comes into being in resonance, in self-referral, a sending-back or spreading out of sense. As Nancy states:

¹² Williams, 'The Death of "The Puppet"?' in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Molina, 'Artificial Creatures', as cited in Williams, 'The Death of "The Puppet"', p. 27.

¹⁵ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 217

Être à l'écoute, ce sera donc toujours être tendu vers au dans un accès au soi
[...] Lorsque' on est à l'écoute, on est aux aguets d'un sujet, ce (lui) qui
s'identifie en résonnant de soi à soi, [...].¹⁶

In keeping with the aforementioned shift away from those modes of representation that reinforce the dominion of the eye, I read the turn towards listening and the acoustic, exemplified in Nancy's *À l'écoute*, as a rewriting of Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* or 'being-there'.¹⁷ In doing so, I draw upon Adrienne Janus's essay 'Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the "Anti-Ocular" Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory', in order to situate Nancy's writing in relation to Heidegger's deployment of the aural or the acoustic. As Janus underlines:

Against the dominant modes of thinking that entail 'a looking-at that sunders and compartmentalizes'¹⁸, a compartmentalization from which emerge the dichotomies of the subject-object paradigm, Heidegger offers a triumvirate of auditory concepts – '*hören*,' '*horchen*,' and '*gehören*' (to listen, to hearken, to belong) – to indicate belonging of *Dasein* to Being.¹⁹

The metaphor of listening is used by Heidegger, in other words, to indicate the existential structure of *Dasein* as a form of being-in-the-world with others, a communality integral to the structure of existence. As Janus underlines, Nancy's

¹⁶ Nancy, *À l'écoute* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 25.

¹⁷ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, p. 12.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, 'Science and Reflection', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), p. 166.

¹⁹ Adrienne Janus, 'Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the "Anti-Ocular" Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory', *Comparative Literature*, 63:2 (2011), pp. 182-202, p. 183, 183. For translations of the German terms within this citation see Michael Inwood ed. *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 86.

emphasis in *À l'écoute* is slightly different insofar as he focuses not on Being as such but on sense, and on sense as resonance, the self that emerges in and through a 'listening to the resonance of sense'.²⁰ To listen, for Nancy, is to engage with the structure of the self as self-reflection, referral, expansion and dispersal, to be drawn towards other sounding bodies whose resonances both infiltrate and wrap the listener in an envelope of sound. In this respect, to listen is to attend to the resonances of sense at the same time as passing beyond them. As Nancy asserts,

Être à l'écoute, c'est toujours être en bordure du sens, ou dans un sens de bord et d'extrémité, et comme si le son n'était précisément rien d'autre que ce bord, cette frange ou cette marge [...] non pas cependant comme phénomène acoustique [...].²¹

Simultaneously separating and connecting these two strata, that of sense and that of the self, is the listening body, the 'corps sonore', a sonorous cave onto which the ear opens:

l'espace du corps à l'écoute n'est-il pas, à son tour, une telle colonne creuse sur laquelle une peau est tendue, mais aussi de laquelle l'ouverture d'une bouche peut reprendre et relancer la résonance? Frappe du dehors, clameur du dedans, ce corps sonore, sonorisé, se met à l'écoute simultanée d'un 'soi' et d'un 'monde' qui sont l'un à l'autre en résonance.²²

²⁰ Janus, 'Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the "Anti-Ocular"', p. 183.

²¹ Nancy, *À l'écoute*, p. 21.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Nancy thinks of resonance, in short, not only as a condition but as the very foundation [l'envoi même] and opening [l'ouverture] of sense, as both beyond-sense and constitutive of sense that goes beyond signification.²³ This, in turn, involves treating the body, before any distinction of place and function, as 'resonance chamber'²⁴, or as Nancy puts it: '[une] caisse ou tube de résonance de l'outre-sens'.²⁵ From here Nancy posits the subject [le sujet], as that surface or layer of the body which is constituted in listening, in the vibration or echo which is simultaneously a self-reflection, an expansion and dispersal of self through sound.²⁶

As shown in previous chapters, Beckett can be seen to foreground the body and the self, through an emphasis on rhythm, movement and spacing, not as referring beyond to something else, something like linguistic meaning, but as participating in what Christopher Watkin refers to as 'the circulation of sense' where 'sense escapes (*se dérobe à*) the difference between the intelligible and the sensible'.²⁷ Here, sense takes place in the space between signification and the body; it occurs as an attempt to represent that which is outside representation and it recalls not only an unrepresentable experience but the impossibility which this poses of translating it fully into words and symbols. In short, it indicates a dissipation and expansion of meaning in its narrow sense. The present chapter, as previously suggested, approaches this predicament, the relation between the representable and the unrepresentable, via the motifs of sound, rhythm and music, interrogating the reflexive structure of sound, and its relation to perceptual awareness, the awareness of self and world.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁴ See Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin eds., *The Nancy Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 144.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59-60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁷ Watkin, 'Dancing Equality', p. 46, 49.

In this respect it builds upon the work put together by Sara Jane Bailes and Nicholas Till in a recent volume entitled *Beckett and Musicality* (2014). As Bailes and Till state in their introduction, ‘Beckett’s concern with the musicality of language— its rhythmic, sonorous and structural possibilities as composition’, suggests ways in which he expands the notion of sense to incorporate the act of making, in this case, making words sound, resonate and reverberate, whether they are spoken or heard.²⁸ They highlight the plural disposition of sense in Beckett’s work by suggesting that:

words function not only as signifiers, they reach towards a place beyond meaning where a sense of the world is illuminated by the tonal and poetic qualities of language, shaped as much by a perfectly tuned ear for pattern and resonance as by an eye acutely trained on the intellectual value and weight of signification as words are meticulously arranged on the page.²⁹

This focus on the ‘tonal and poetic qualities of language’, as Bailes and Till aver, is in keeping with the shift away from a strictly linear and unified perspective on the theatre where meaning is conveyed through narrative or spoken words. It suggests rather a polyphonic structure of sense in which multiple spoken melodies and variations in rhythm, tempo, timbre, pace, pause and repetition all contribute to the production of meaning. What Bailes and Till among others succeed in highlighting, in other words, is Beckett’s interest, not only in the voice, sound or the spoken word but in the spaces between words or linguistic phenomena, spaces that exceed signification as language. This is something to which Nancy refers in *À l’écoute*, when he writes

²⁸ Bailes and Till eds., *Beckett and Musicality*, p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

that silence is not ‘une privation’, but, ‘une disposition de résonance: un peu – voire exactement... – comme dans une condition de silence parfait on entend résonner son propre corps, son souffle, son cœur et toute sa caverne retentissante’.³⁰ It is this space of tension between the heard and the unheard, its productive possibilities, to which I refer in the analysis that follows.

The feature common to all three works analysed in this chapter is the placing together of sounds and images that do not appear to match up. As Paul Sheehan puts it, Beckett experiments with a wide variety of disjunctive relations between sound and image producing effects similar to those found in the work of avant-garde film makers like Jean-Luc Godard:³¹

the voices that are heard issue from somewhere other than the bodies that inhabit the visual frame. [...] music filter[s] obtrusively across scenes; voices appear [...] on the soundtrack from no apparent source; [...] ambient sound [is] either eerily absent, or incongruously displaced onto the ‘wrong’ scene.³²

This technique, I would argue, can equally be read in light of Beckett’s interest in Sergei Eisenstein, in particular his theory of montage, in which multiple and often conflicting images are placed together in order to create effects of dissonance and thus shock the audience into a state of heightened awareness.³³ Building on Eisenstein’s

³⁰ Nancy, *À l’écoute*, p. 44.

³¹ See for example, Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L’Image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

³² Paul Sheehan, ‘Beckett’s Ghost Dramas: Monitoring a Phenomenology of Sleep’ in Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman eds., *Beckett and Phenomenology* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 158-177, p. 165.

³³ Beckett’s interest in Eisenstein is well documented, and he is understood to have written a letter to the director in 1936 requesting access to the Moscow State School of Cinematography. Significantly, Eisenstein was a pupil of Meyerhold’s, and his notes on film-making display evidence of a deep-rooted understanding of the biomechanical approach as well as an awareness of Kleist’s essay ‘On the Marionette Theatre.’ See Anthony Paraskeva, ‘Beckett, Biomechanics and Eisenstein’s Reading of Kleist’s Marionettes’, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 22:2 (2013), pp. 161-179.

model, Beckett foregrounds the materiality of the medium in which he is working, whether it is film or theatre, as well as its particular facility for manufacturing illusion. Through the use of off-screen or off-stage space and sound, Beckett tests out the limits of the viewing apparatus, producing images that both evade mastery and exceed the linguistic frame. All three works analysed here enact a shift in attention from the visual to the aural plane, as the act of listening – to music, to speech, to the reading aloud of a text or even just to silence – is itself foregrounded and dramatized. Through an emphasis on ellipsis, both linguistic and visual, and an anti-naturalistic performance style, these works demand of the spectator a heightened awareness of the sonorous body, of rhythm, movement and of their potential for making meaning. Freed from the obligation of having to support or fit in with a psychologically informed narrative framework, sound does not merely adjust or adapt itself to the visual image, but enters into competition with it, gesturing towards an originary multiplicity or disconnectedness at the heart of theatrical presentation. As Beckett sets out to probe the discontinuities and ambiguities of sonorous space, his work enters into close dialogue with Nancy's reflections upon resonance and the listening subject.

Ghost Trio (1975)

Written in English in 1975, and first broadcast on BBC 2 in April 1977 as part of the *Lively Arts* programme, *Ghost Trio* features a male figure confined in an almost empty room, apparently transfixed both by the sound of a particular piece of music (the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Trio in D Major, op. 70, no.1), and the prospect of the arrival of a particular woman evoked in the text. In his hunched pose, in intimate proximity to a cassette player, he resembles Krapp of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), though unlike Krapp he does not appear to control the sounds that are emitted

from the recorder. Both plays feature a man alone who muses over the past. As Graley Herren puts it:

Both men are prompted into deeper meditation by audio recordings. Both are occasionally distracted away from their respective tapes, which stop and start several times. But each man eventually returns to his intent pose, crouching protectively, even lovingly, over the indispensable instrument of his reverie.³⁴

Like Krapp, the protagonist of *Ghost Trio* appears engaged in an internal struggle to come to terms with past relationships or past selves: the atmosphere is one of longing, as suggested by the play's original title, 'Tryst', meaning a rendezvous or planned meeting between two lovers.³⁵ In Beckett's notebook, this word is blotted out with ink with the new title *Ghost Trio* written next to the original.³⁶ The meeting, as is clear from subsequent drafts, never takes place. As Beckett puts it in the notes addressed to Ruby Cohn: 'I wanted a calm scene which revealed an inner storm as the camera approached'.³⁷ The link to earlier works is made explicit in a letter dating from January 1976, where Beckett writes: 'all the old ghosts, *Godot*, and *Eh Joe* over infinity'.³⁸

Apart from evoking various 'ghosts' of the past, *Ghost Trio* also makes reference to the act of listening. The male figure, in a '*tense pose*', embodies a listening stance, seemingly using the sounds that permeate the stage space as a vehicle

³⁴ Graley Herren, 'Ghost Duet, Or Krapp's First Videotape' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui, Samuel Beckett in the Year 2000*, p. 160.

³⁵ Samuel Beckett, 'Ghost Trio', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 1-7, p. 1.

³⁶ Samuel Beckett, 'Ghost Trio/Tryst scored through', Manuscripts: Drama – Ghost trio sub series BC MSS DRAMA/GHO, Reading University Library, BC MS 2832. Published with revisions in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 1-7, p. 1.

³⁷ Samuel Beckett cited in Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 339.

³⁸ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 621.

for orientation and differentiation. In the second of three acts, for example, he first ‘listens with right ear against door’ and then ‘pushes door open half-way clockwise, looks out’.³⁹ In the third and final act, he opens the window in order to let in the ‘faint sound of rain’.⁴⁰ Examining the use of non-verbal sound in the play, specifically the ‘Faint music’, Mary Bryden outlines the history of the musical term ‘overture’ from the Latin *apertura* (opening): ‘On its passage into English this term relates to the French noun *ouverture*, which, as well as denoting an opening, can mean an openness, a making-available of oneself for the reception of some external event or atmosphere’.⁴¹ Here, in short, listening is configured in terms of an opening or juncture: ‘both the door and window are agents of negotiation with external spaces.’⁴² The sense or meaning of the play occurs at these junctures, between the visible, quasi-representational space of the stage and the invisible, yet implicated off-stage space, which evades our grasp.

In keeping with Beckett’s ethos in his late work, *Ghost Trio* offers a self-reflexive comment upon the medium of film, and more specifically on television. This is reflected in its engagement with different forms of technology, such as the cassette player, which, as Ulrika Maude observes, drawing on the work of critics such as Jonathan Crary and Sara Danus, both ‘underscores the limitations of the human eye,’ whilst ‘liberat[ing] it from its association with knowledge, enabling a more sensuous, aestheticized experience of vision’.⁴³ If *Film* (1965) and Beckett’s first television play, *Eh Joe* (1966) already offer what Maude refers to as a ‘pared-down setting’,⁴⁴

³⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 410

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁴¹ Mary Bryden, ‘Beckett’s Apertures and Overtures’, in *Beckett and Musicality*, Bailes and Till eds. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 187-198, p. 192.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁴³ Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 119.

featuring a man alone in a plane room, devoid of human comforts, *Ghost Trio* goes further still, presenting ‘a rectangular box, dominated by unnaturally even and smooth grey rectangles, in floor, wall, door, window, mirror, pallet, pillow’.⁴⁵ As Maude suggests, the Süddeutscher Rundfunk production of *Geistertrio*, which Beckett directed in 1977, is particularly remarkable for this effect insofar as both the figure of ‘F’, including his ‘*head, hands [and] face*’, and the ‘*small cassette*’ are deliberately indistinct, initially only identifiable as two further grey rectangles before the camera focuses in ‘*slowly*’ at the end of the first section.⁴⁶

In Gilles Deleuze’s terms, this paring-down of the stage set offers a kind of vocal and spatial purification: ‘une sorte d’épurement vocal et spatial’, equivalent to the exhaustion or ‘dépotentialisation’ of space as representational space.⁴⁷ In *Ghost Trio*, he says, ‘la voix murmurante est devenue neutre, blanche, sans intention, sans résonance, et l’espace est devenue quelconque, sans dessous ni profondeur, n’ayant d’autres objet que ses propres parties’.⁴⁸ The characters are de-personalized – ‘une femme, un homme et un enfant, sans aucune cordonnée personnelle’.⁴⁹ The central figure is referred to in the directions as F, the female voice-over as V. The entire visual field is abstracted and flattened: there is no cupboard and no space under the bed, only a pallet against the floor that echoes the recurring pattern of rectangles. The emphasis, in other words, is on the surface of things: the body of F is framed and reframed by a limited number of camera shots, so that he is seen from various planes

⁴⁵ Eckhart Voigts-Virchow, ‘Exhausted Cameras – Beckett in the TV-Zoo’, in Jennifer Jeffers (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Casebook* (New York and London: Garland, 1998), pp. 225-49, pp. 229-30. as quoted in Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 409. See Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Deleuze, ‘L’Épuisé’, p. 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

and angles, including through the mirror.⁵⁰ Here, as in previous examples, Beckett demonstrates a preoccupation with the body as image, as well as a fascination with the statuary body, and the relationship of the actor to the visual medium. As previously suggested, I see this preoccupation not as a process of purification or bracketing, nor as a movement towards abstraction in the sense of a cancelling out or erasure of the actor's body which reduces it to the status of machine. Rather, as indicated in previous chapters, I read Beckett's fascination with the still body, his foregrounding of the body as static image in Nancean terms, as an acknowledgement of the limits of the christological body, an untying of corporeality from an ontotheology which traditionally posits it as incarnation of the soul. In *Ghost Trio*, this investigation is extended and complicated through an emphasis on sound, rhythm and music.

The play takes its title from Beethoven's Piano Trio in D, Opus 70, No. 1, nicknamed *Geistertrio*, after its second movement, the *Largo assai ed espressivo*, whose wavering effects, chromatic scales, and stark changes of dynamic, evoke a haunting atmosphere. As Beckett acknowledges in an early typescript, the work is intended as a chorus for the three witches in an opera based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for which Beethoven was sketching ideas in 1808.⁵¹ In James Knowlson's view, Beckett appears to have been attracted to this work precisely because it 'retained for [him] something of Macbeth's doom-laden atmosphere, as well as the involvement in the spirit world, the element of the supernatural'.⁵² As Graley Herren suggests: 'the choice of "The Ghost" as theme is also significant because it implies

⁵⁰ From Pierre Chabert, 'The Body in Beckett's Theatre', quoted in Garner, '(Dis)figuring Space', p. 63.

⁵¹ Samuel Beckett, 'Tryst', Manuscripts: Drama – Ghost trio sub-series BC MSS DRAMA/GHO, Undated, Reading University Library BC MS 1519/2.

⁵² Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 622.

from the start that F's [the male figure's] anticipated tryst will not take place, at least not in the material world'.⁵³ This, in short, adds to the sense of longing that drives the action of the play, the 'failed encounter' or foiled act of communication providing the ammunition for the continued search for meaning in the piece.⁵⁴

Beckett's acknowledgement of the link to *Macbeth*, specifically the theme of the witches, is significant for a number of reasons. In Shakespeare's play, the three witches are prophets, agents and witnesses, who hail Macbeth and prophesy his ascent to king. They straddle the border between reality and the supernatural, exemplifying the inversion of hierarchy or the confusion of antitheses within the world of the play. In the context of Shakespeare's work, the appearance of the three witches establishes what Stuart Clark refers to as 'the sense of obscurity, uncertainty and dissimulation which clouds the subsequent action and its physical locution with the effect of claustrophobia'.⁵⁵ Their presence foreshadows the treasonous 'hurly-burly', the 'upside-down' world which the action of the play will aggravate and disclose.⁵⁶ The weird sisters, as they appear in Shakespeare, evoke a meeting of contrasting worlds: the human and the supernatural, the logical and the irrational. As ephemeral creatures, they occupy a limit or border between the visible and the invisible, neither fully real nor fully imaginary, neither fully corporeal nor fully immaterial. *Ghost Trio* brings together all these associations. As is the case in *Macbeth*, the action takes place between worlds, albeit radically reduced. Here it is the relationship between the off-screen voice and the framed image which drives the action of the piece, providing the basis for a dialogue between the visible and the invisible, the represented and

⁵³ Graley Herren, *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television* (New York and Basingstoke, 2007), p. 77, as cited in Bryden, 'Beckett's Apertures and Overtures', p. 192.

⁵⁴ Bryden, 'Beckett's Apertures and Overtures', *Beckett and Musicality*, p. 192.

⁵⁵ Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft,' *Past and Present*, 87 (1980), pp. 98-127, p. 126.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

seemingly unrepresentable. As Deleuze puts it: ‘c’est comme si l’on jouait simultanément une pièce radiophonique et un film muet: nouvelle forme de disjonction incluse’.⁵⁷ This tension is played out at every level of the play’s construction, and is equally reflected in the music. Beckett praises the faltering, disjunctive quality of Beethoven’s work, as Deleuze suggests:

Et c’est bien ce que Beckett souligne, chaque fois qu’il parle de Beethoven: un art de dissonances inouï jusqu’alors, un flottement, un hiatus, ‘une ponctuation de déhiscence’, un accent donné par ce qui s’ouvre, se dérobe et s’abîme, un écart qui ne ponctue plus que le silence d’une fin dernière.⁵⁸

According to Mary Bryden, the recording of ‘Ghost Trio’ which Beckett owned, a performance by Daniel Barenboim (piano), his wife Jaqueline du Pré (cello) and Pinchas Zukerman (violin) recorded in 1970,⁵⁹ is remarkable for its ‘riveting intensity, [its] refusal to domesticate the piece or make bearable its unbearable qualities’.⁶⁰ Short extracts of the piece are played throughout, in non-consecutive order. The effect, as Bryden suggests, is appropriately summed up in the French word ‘revenant’ which, ‘as well as being the present participle [of the verb *revenir* signifying] “returning” or “coming back”, is also a noun meaning “ghost”’.⁶¹ Rather than forming a continuum, and serving a narrative function, as is the case with a traditional film soundtrack, the music is broken up and shared out, its volume ranging variably

⁵⁷ Deleuze, ‘L’Épuisé’, p. 90-91.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁹ This version was used for the 1976 BBC2 recording of Beckett’s play and is available on YouTube.

⁶⁰ Bryden, ‘Beckett’s Apertures and Overtures’, *Beckett and Musicality*, p. 194.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

between ‘*faint*’, ‘*progressively fainter*’, ‘*audible*’, ‘*slightly louder*’, ‘*louder*’ and ‘*growing*’.⁶² As Catherine Laws puts it:

Beckett uses the expressivity and the formal symmetries of the Beethoven in the same way as he does other elements of the play, posting them provisionally only in order to undermine their stability as their constructedness is revealed.⁶³

In short, the Beethoven piece is subject to a process of dissection and fragmentation, and thus foregrounded as material to be manipulated and arranged like the other elements of performance. This effect is further underlined by the fact that Beckett does not deploy explicitly musical terminology when referring to the extracts from ‘Ghost Trio’, preferring words such as ‘*faint*’ or ‘*audible*’ when describing the volume and texture of the sound. Indeed, in a move which seems oddly to muddle the distinctions between music and other forms of sound or noise, he reserves such terminology for seemingly everyday auditory phenomena with phrases such as ‘*decrescendo creak of door*’ or ‘*crescendo creak of window*’ punctuating the stage directions.⁶⁴

In an essay entitled ‘Tuning In/Tuning Up: The Communicative Efforts of Words and Music in Samuel Beckett’s Words and Music’, contained within the 2014 volume *Beckett and Musicality*, Brynhildur Boyce develops a useful framework and a vocabulary derived from radio, for understanding what she calls the ‘inherent misalignment between communicants’, in this case written text and music, in

⁶² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 405-410.

⁶³ Catherine Laws, ‘Beethoven’s Haunting of Beckett’s Ghost Trio’, *Assaph*, 17-18 (2003), pp. 197-213, p. 206.

⁶⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 412.

Beckett's late works for radio, theatre and film.⁶⁵ Using the 1961 radio play *Words and Music* as an example, Boyce shows how this play 'presents a decidedly disjunctive communicational situation, which is made immediately obvious through its structure'.⁶⁶ In what follows, I draw on this framework, and the 'radiogenic' vocabulary which Boyce deploys, in order to further articulate the relationship between sound and image in *Ghost Trio*.⁶⁷

Boyce focuses on the radio play *Words and Music*, in which, as she shows, two characters referred to in the script as 'Words' ('Joe') and 'Music' ('Bob') are directed by a figure called 'Croak' ('My Lord') to evoke, first individually and then 'together', a range of particular themes including, 'sloth', 'love', 'age' and 'the face'.⁶⁸ In this way, the piece gives the impression of a bewilderingly disorganised rehearsal, with Music proposing a wildly varied range of sound interventions while Words supplies seemingly formulaic verbal responses. Through these operations, as Boyce suggests, 'Music and Words attempt to overcome their essential incommensurability and tune into each other's form of expression'.⁶⁹ At the outset, the two modes seem almost completely at odds with each other. Words embarks on extended soliloquys about one particular topic or another while the interjections of Music range from '*Small orchestra softly tuning*', '*Humble muted adsum*', '*Rap of baton on stand*' to '*audible groans [...] drowning Words' protestations*'.⁷⁰ However, as the rehearsal continues, the two figures or emblems appear to try to overcome their differences, attempting to 'tune-in', to use Boyce's phrase, to each other's modes of

⁶⁵ Brynhildur Boyce, 'Tuning In/Tuning Up: The Communicative Efforts of Words and Music in Samuel Beckett's *Words and Music*' in Bailes and Till eds. *Beckett and Musicality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 63-83, p. 64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 287-294.

⁶⁹ Boyce, 'Tuning In/Tuning Up', p. 64.

⁷⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 288.

expression. Words, as the stage directions indicate, tries to ‘*sing, softly*’ while Music makes ‘*suggestion[s]*’, ‘*invites*’ and ‘*finally accompanies*’ Words ‘*very softly*’.⁷¹

Notwithstanding their efforts to combine and form a continuum, the play ends on a somewhat negative note:

Music: *Brief rude retort.*

Words: Music [*Imploring*] Music!

Music: *Rap of baton and statement with elements already used or wellhead alone*
[*Pause.*]

Words: Again. [*Pause. Imploring*] Music!

Music: *As before or only very slightly varied.* [*Pause.*]

Words: Deep Sigh.

With their apparent mutual resignation comes an acknowledgement of the ‘misalignment’ or ‘slippage’ between ‘communicative ontologies’, between Words and Music, as representing diverse and seemingly irreconcilable perspectives, to which Boyce refers.⁷² In the same article, she further clarifies this predicament with reference to the symbol ‘A’:

‘A’ is the first letter of the alphabet, but when transposed to the neutral, default key of C it is the sixth note. What is more, it can denote anything from the first to the seventh note of a scale, depending on the particular keynote. Its identity slips, in this way, as it moves from one context to another, and what is

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁷² Boyce, ‘Tuning In/Tuning Up’, p. 63-64.

revealed, in this rather literal manner, is the incommensurability of music and words.⁷³

As Boyce indicates, Beckett's play underlines this so-called 'incommensurability' as well as the innate uncertainty or irresolution that characterises any kind of communicative event, by leaving the contributions, and therefore the particular character of Music unspecified. More specifically it is the product of the specific choices made by each individual director or composer who stages the play. This prompts Boyce to argue against what she calls a 'strictly textual interpretation' of Beckett's work, on the grounds that such a reading would either explain the character of Music or musical component away in 'metaphysical' terms, or gloss it over as something which is part of, and thus accounted for by the script.⁷⁴ She similarly rules out a reading that would seek to explain the role of Music in Schopenhauerian terms, that is, as a means to access some form of transcendent reality, a reality which refuses verbal or written expression. Such a reading, as Boyce suggests, is often justified through recourse to Beckett's early writings, in particular his monograph *Proust* (1931), where he describes music with reference to Schopenhauer.⁷⁵ While such an analysis recognizes 'a vital difference between words and music', it also, as Boyce suggests, oversimplifies Beckett's complex and multiple engagements with music as a practice, according the latter a unique epistemological status within a system that is essentially discursive and hierarchical.⁷⁶ It falls short, in other words, in cases such as *Words and Music*, and, as I will argue, *Ghost Trio*, where live performed or recorded music plays an essential role, fundamentally altering the structural logic of the piece.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ See Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990)

⁷⁶ Boyce, 'Tuning In/Tuning Up', p. 81.

Whatever meaning *Words and Music* has, Boyce writes ‘resides [...] in the actual coming together of text and composition’, a ‘coming together’, which is at base problematic.⁷⁷ This same problematic ‘coming-together’ of ‘communicative ontologies’ - in this case music, voice and image - is at stake in *Ghost Trio*, manifested in the formal separation, juxtaposition and subsequent negotiation of these elements.⁷⁸ In place of a textual interpretation then, I propose, like Boyce, one that takes into account the fundamentally ‘inconclusive’ nature of communication, underlining fissures or differences of perspective which prevent the assimilation, amalgamation or absorption of one form of communication into another.⁷⁹

As previously suggested, *Ghost Trio* stages a tension or dialogue between various ‘communicative ontologies’, or modes of expression: music and voice, voice and image, image and spoken text.⁸⁰ These modes of expression, as has Trish McTighe indicated, do not ‘add up to structural consummation’, but rather appear as vectors or strata in an at base divided composition, where subjectivity, memory and meaning are compiled not within one individual, narrative, face or language, but across the visual and aural texture of the play.⁸¹ The play is divided into three sections, each of which bears a separate title: ‘Pre-action’, ‘Action’ and ‘Re-action’.⁸² The setting, as the woman’s voice describes it, is yet another ‘familiar chamber’, and the text includes a detailed diagram, with instructions for filming.⁸³ In the opening sections, the male figure is ‘*seated on a stool, bowed forward, face hidden*’, silent and barely distinguishable from his surroundings, while the Voice, which appears without

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁸ Boyce, ‘Tuning In/Tuning Up’, p. 64.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82, 64.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸¹ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 54.

⁸² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 407.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

personal coordinates – there is little characterization at this stage – functions to defamiliarize the room, and the items within it, informing the viewer of the perceptual conditions which the piece imposes.⁸⁴

Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly. [Pause] Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly. [Pause.] It will not be raised, nor lowered, whatever happens.⁸⁵

The first scene opens with a ‘*general view*’ of the room, with the camera being held in the middle at a distance from the scene.⁸⁶ Beckett stipulates that the camera: ‘should not explore, simply look. It stops and stares. [...] This staring vision essential to the piece’.⁸⁷ The room should be fully visible: the floor, the walls, the door, the window, and the pallet, which is meant to suggest a bed. V directs a mode of looking that is apparently objective and authoritative, treating the figure (F) and his environment as objects of scrutiny: ‘having seen that specimen of floor you have seen it all’.⁸⁸ Her authority extends to the viewer who she instructs to ‘Look’ or ‘Keep that sound down’.⁸⁹ V may be seen as staging or controlling the movements of F, or, having observed them through innumerable replays, as anticipating them. She comments on his actions in a way that recalls a nature documentary. From one perspective, this dissection of the space evokes technological control and the mediation of both the body and the visual domain from an apparently disembodied viewpoint. Writing about different uses of off-screen sound and voice in cinema, Mary Ann Doane

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

⁸⁶ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 408.

⁸⁷ Beckett as cited in Tønning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 171.

⁸⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 408.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

characterizes this kind of voice in terms of its ‘radical otherness with respect to the diegesis’, an otherness which ‘endows [it] with a certain authority’.⁹⁰ It is because this voice is ‘not localizable’, because it cannot be attributed to any specific figure or body, that it is able to inspect and peruse the image, translating it for the viewer.⁹¹ Separated, unmediated, and ‘lacking any specification in space or time’, the voice as voice-over plays a role in perpetuating an image of unity, or ‘oneness’, masking the material heterogeneity of the filmic medium.⁹² While Beckett points out these particular effects, he also, through a complex process of transfer and exchange, complicates the status of the voice in this play, disrupting any illusion of unity or self-sufficiency produced by the voice-over.

This process is triggered through the introduction of the body of F: ‘Sole sign of life a seated figure’, at the end of the first section.⁹³ Having demonstrated ‘the kind of pallet’, ‘the kind of window’, ‘the kind of door’ and so on, V tells us to ‘look again’ as the camera cuts submissively to a ‘*general view*’.⁹⁴ After ‘*5 seconds*’ it then begins to ‘*move [...] slowly*’ forward to a ‘*medium shot*’ of F, ‘*seated on a stool, bowed forward, face hidden, clutching a small cassette*’ recorder, though, at this point, it is not ‘*identifiable as such*’.⁹⁵ Accompanying this shot, we hear the sound of ‘*faint music*’ (Beethoven’s *Largo*), and as the camera moves in upon F, the music gets progressively louder, reaching its peak with a close-up of F’s ‘*head, hands, cassette*’.⁹⁶ As Michael Maier puts it, ‘the appearance of the protagonist is thus linked to the entrance of the music with a pathos that strangely contradicts the cold scrutiny

⁹⁰ Mary Ann Doane, ‘The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of the Body and Space’, *Yale University Studies*, No. 60, Cinema/Sound (1980), pp. 33-50, p. 42.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 409.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

of the camera and the emotionally detached tone of the voice'.⁹⁷ F's seemingly abstracted and puppet-like figure jars with the haunting, nostalgic effects of the music and there is no attempt to unify the elements of performance: figure and music, music and spoken text. Indeed, the figure of F is multiplied or split into a series of mysterious doubles: F and his mirror image, or F and the boy who emerges in the third section.⁹⁸ Though he appears at first to be controlled by V as by a puppeteer, this dynamic is modified in the 'Action' section, when F acts counter to V's prediction.⁹⁹ The way it is set up, we are prompted to read this move on the part of F not in psychological or narrative terms, but rather in terms of the effect it has on the formal continuity of the filmic space. Following the documentary style introduction with V as 'extra-diegetic' voice-over, F's sudden change of direction has a destabilising effect, revealing possible alternative relationships between on-screen and off-screen space.

At the beginning of the section, V speaks again, declaring that 'He will now think he hears her,' at which point F '*raises head sharply, turns still crouched to door, fleeting face, tense pose*'.¹⁰⁰ He appears, at this stage, to be following instructions as usual. As V repeats the phrase, F puts his cassette player down, goes over to the door and listens. Apparently hearing nothing, he floats noiselessly, 'with no visible propulsion', back to the 'pallet', but then abruptly alters his course to move towards the mirror, provoking an astonished 'Ah!' from V.¹⁰¹ In this moment, as F moves temporarily from object of scrutiny to agent of expression, V's status as 'extra-

⁹⁷ Michael Maier, 'Geistertrio: Beethoven's Music in Samuel Beckett's *Ghost Trio*', *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 12, 2002, pp. 313-320., p. 316.

⁹⁸ In directing the German Süddeutscher Rundfunk version of the play, Beckett stipulated that the body should resemble F as closely as possible. See James Knowlson, 'Ghost Trio/Geister Trio', in *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*, ed. E. Brater (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 193-207.

⁹⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 410.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

diegetic' observer is challenged. Revealing herself (Beckett specifies a female voice) to be involved (perhaps emotionally) with, or interacting with the figure on stage, V enters into a relationship of possible inclusion within the image. V, in short, begins to haunt the border of the framed picture, no longer fully outside, nor fully inside. This effect is amplified through the evocation of the absent woman in the text whom F thinks 'he hears', and who continually summons expectation, but never materializes.¹⁰² Even the small boy, '*dressed in black oil-skin*' who appears '*before open door*', in the final section, does not bring any kind of resolution.¹⁰³ After a silent encounter, he recedes along the corridor as the male protagonist slowly closes the door and reinserts himself into the room and the music. Just as the boy does not enter the room, the male figure does not leave it, but remains on the threshold of the door.

F's ambiguous status, as both visual object and agent, is reflected in his irresolute stance, his continual movement between the centre of the room and its various apertures, such as the window and the door. When he stands at the window and at the door, he '*stands irresolute*', as though poised to continue according to instruction.¹⁰⁴ When he returns to his stool, he '*sits irresolute*', equally ready to resume movement.¹⁰⁵ Insofar as he holds a cassette player, it might be imagined that he is in control of the music, that he engineers the musical interventions, in the same way as Krapp does his spools of tape. Yet the music appears to play unreliably, and in the action section of the play it is the female voice (V) that instructs it to 'Stop', to which it responds without question.¹⁰⁶ The music, like the Voice, is neither fully contained within the diegesis nor fully extra-diegetic: it occupies the edges of the

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 410

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

visual frame, hovering between inside and outside. The disturbing impact of the piece is precisely in its dual imaging of the body, and of the self as constituted not through an individual image, face or text, but in a dispersal or spacing, through the disjunctive relationship between dramatic elements, voice, image and music, elements which in turn, do not fully match.

In order to conclude this section and further clarify these effects, I refer to Michel Chion's book *La Voix au Cinéma*, which focuses on the hidden powers of the voice in cinema. Chion identifies a specific kind of disjunctive interrelation between sound and image, which I want to suggest, is equally applicable to *Ghost Trio*. Drawing on a range of examples and describing different filmic effects, he observes how, between one scenario and another, it is not the sound itself that changes its nature, colour, volume or pitch, but rather the relationship [*le rapport*] between what we see and what we hear: 'ce n'est pas le son qui change ni de nature, ni de présence, ni de distance, ni de couleur. C'est seulement le rapport entre ce que l'on voit et ce que l'on entend.'¹⁰⁷ The *acousmètre*, as he calls it, refers to a specific kind of relationship in which we hear a sound or a voice without being able to identify its source within the visual frame. As Connor puts it, the *acousmètre* is:

to be distinguished on the one hand from the 'natural' (though in fact synthesized) voice which is simultaneously seen and heard, and on the other from what [Chion] calls the *acousmatique* voice, which is heard but does not emanate from the action on the screen (for example the voice-over or narrating voice).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Michel Chion, *La Voix au Cinéma* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 20.

The classic example of this phenomenon, for Chion, is that of the child-murderer in Fritz Lang's *M* (1930). In an emblematic scene, the Murderer's shadow descends over a poster which offers a reward for his capture, while his off-screen voice addresses a little girl, also off-screen at this point: 'You have a pretty ball!'.¹⁰⁹ The feeling of unease associated with the murderer's voice derives from the fact that its source remains just beyond the boundaries of visibility, though he remains in the picture as shadow. Emerging as a combination of voice and shadow, the child-murderer haunts the borders of the framed picture, neither fully inside nor fully outside. According to Chion, the entire film hangs on the disclosure of the murderer's identity, the Voice's source. Our experience of the film, its suspense, is built upon our desire to bring the *acousmêtre* into view or as Chion suggests, into 'le cadre [...] le champ visuel'.¹¹⁰ His explanation unfolds as follows:

il suffit qu'il se montre, que la personne qui parle vienne inscrire son corps dans le cadre, dans le champ visuel, pour qu'elle perde sa puissance, son omniscience et naturellement son ubiquité.¹¹¹

Being involved in or interacting with the image means that the voice does not merely speak as an onlooker or commentator, but that it 'bears with the image a relationship of *possible inclusion*', of agency capable of operating in both directions.¹¹² *Ghost*

¹⁰⁹ As cited in Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 19.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹¹¹ Chion, *La Voix au Cinéma*, p. 38.

¹¹² Chion as in Gorbman, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 23.

Trio, I suggest, explores this very predicament: the voice is on the edge of the visual frame, capable of operating both as master and as subordinate. As Chion indicates:

Il faut naturellement, comme nous l'avons dit, que l'acousmètre ne soit pas situé dans la position retirée du bonimenteur, du commentateur, de la voix de lanterne magique, mais que la voix ait, si peu que ce soit, *un pied dans l'image*, dans le lieu du film, qu'elle hante un lieu de passage qui n'est ni l'intérieur de la scène filmique, ni le proscénium – un lieu qui n'a pas de nom, mais dont le cinéma joue constamment.¹¹³

In other words, the *acousmètre* is neither sound nor image but indicative of the complex array of possible relationships between the two. In Mary Ann Doane's terms, it calls into question the so-called 'fantasmatic body' of the cinema, a body which acts as a pivot for the perpetuation of a regime based on representation and visual display.¹¹⁴

The body reconstituted by the technology and practices of the cinema is a *fantasmatic* body, which offers a support as well as a point of identification for the subject addressed by the film.¹¹⁵

The attributes of the 'fantasmatic body' are according to Doane, 'unity (through the emphasis on a coherence of the senses) and presence-to-itself'.¹¹⁶ In keeping with this model, sound has traditionally been used to fill-out the body in the cinema,

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹¹⁴ Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of the Body and Space', p. 34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

lending it a more realistic appearance. As is the case in Steven Connor's explanation of the ventriloquial illusion, the voice presents a threat when it does not appear to belong to a body, just as the body presents a threat when it is not situated in a given, comprehensible space. The 'fantasmatic', as Doane describes it, is the product of a number of techniques, all of which are designed to locate the body in a given space, to create a best-fit between the voice and its material environment, in the service of verisimilitude.

The disequilibrium and tension caused by the *acousmètre*, then, derives from the manner in which it interrupts this illusion of continuity or unity in relation to the framed picture: it derails the identity or propriety of the image. The 'misalignment' of sound and image, to recall Boyce's term, inherent in this model means that sound is no longer subordinated to the image, but perceived in its singularity, as participating in, and sharing the same structure of meaning, that is, of sense as resonance. The *acousmètre*, as Beckett deploys it in *Ghost Trio*, intrudes into the visual image, and into the body proper, actively undermining its integrity. The work does not attempt to absorb, assimilate or master this intrusion, but allows it to remain intact, as the condition for the possibility of sense understood as meaningfulness or that which makes sense. Nancy writes that there is always a kind of foreignness at the crux of being – an 'originary non-coincidence' that is conveyed in a number of different ways throughout his philosophical œuvre.¹¹⁷ The estranging effect of the *acousmètre* brings this 'originary non-coincidence' to the fore, and in doing so it enacts a dispersal of sense as signification, calling upon multiple senses in order to make meaning.¹¹⁸ This process is further explored in *Footfalls*, where sense is articulated as a movement of

¹¹⁷ McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 139.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

referral, of echo or sending and returning. Here, as I will demonstrate in the following analysis, sound emerges as a privileged figure of a reverberating, resonating, and infinitely reconfigurable model of sensing which opens onto without fully grasping the world that exceeds linguistic signification.

Footfalls (1975)

Footfalls, written in English (1975) and first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 20 May 1976, features a ‘*dishevelled*’ female figure with ‘*grey hair*’ named May, who paces backwards and forwards along a narrow ‘*strip*’ of light.¹¹⁹ She is referred to in the script as a ‘semblance’, only partially visible, though her pacing constitutes the principle action of the play.¹²⁰ Both movement and image are very precisely outlined in the stage directions, and it is clear from the theatrical notebooks that Beckett was heavily involved in the original direction of the play, making changes to the script during rehearsal which have been incorporated into successive editions. The major alteration which occurred between the publication of the first text by Faber & Faber in 1976 and Beckett’s direction of the play at the Royal Court in the same year was the increase in the number of paces undertaken by May from an initial ‘seven steps’ to a revised ‘nine steps’.¹²¹ This change has been incorporated into all subsequent versions, affecting the rhythm, tempo and pace of the piece and providing ample cause for speculation among critics. As is suggested in the theatrical notebooks, Beckett’s sensitivity to the play’s ‘musical composition’, its sonic orchestration, is evidenced in his approach to timing, phrasing, the coordination of different vocal or melodic lines, the use of polyphony, harmony and dissonance, all

¹¹⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 398-399.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

¹²¹ Gontarski in Knowlson ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Vol IV, p. 281.

of which would be appropriate to the arrangement of a piece of ‘chamber music’.¹²² During rehearsals for the later Berlin production, for example, and seemingly at odds with the earlier alteration of the number of steps from ‘seven’ to ‘nine’, Beckett stipulated that the ‘basic unit of time’ for the play should be ‘seven seconds’, providing further evidence of his quasi-mathematical, quasi-musical interest in counting:

[...] The bell at the beginning of *Footfalls* dies away in seven seconds; then the light comes up during seven seconds and one can see May walking. At the end of the three parts, the light fades out each time inside seven seconds, the bell dies away in seven seconds, and the light comes on again in seven seconds.¹²³

In the revised text, then, the strip of light is positioned ‘*downstage, parallel with front, length nine steps, width one metre*’, from the audience’s perspective, ‘*a little off centre [on the] right*’.¹²⁴ May’s pacing sequence starts ‘*with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R*’, each length consisting of precisely nine steps.¹²⁵ Though the lighting is ‘*strongest at foot level, less on body, least on head*’, the feet remain invisible, hidden by the ‘*worn grey wrap*’ which shrouds May from top to toe.¹²⁶ The emphasis, here, is on the sound of the footsteps, which Beckett states, should be ‘*clearly audible*’ and ‘*rhythmic*’, like a metronome, so that one

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Walter Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television: Rehearsal Notes for the German Première of Beckett’s *That Time* and *Footfalls*’ at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt, Berlin (directed by Beckett)’, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 2, Summer 1977, pp. 83.

¹²⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 399.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

length lasts exactly nine seconds.¹²⁷ To actress Hildegard Schmal whilst rehearsing for the 1976 Schiller theatre production of the play, Beckett stressed ‘the importance of the footsteps’, stating that the ‘walking up and down is the central image [...] the text, the words were built up around this picture’.¹²⁸ According to Walter Asmus, he further highlighted May’s posture as crucial to his idea of her character, and to his conception of the modulations of her voice: ‘the position of the body’, he said, ‘will help you find the right voice’; and ‘When you walk, you slump together; when you speak you straighten up a bit.’¹²⁹ May’s drooping, withdrawn stance, in other words, expresses the fact that she ‘is there exclusively for herself. She is isolated.’¹³⁰ As Beckett put it: ‘the costume will look like a ghost costume. [...] It is the costume of a ghost.’¹³¹ This ghostliness and the faint, ‘tattered’ disposition of the figure on stage echoes the sense of in-betweenness conjured in *Ghost Trio* and is equally evocative of the witches in *Macbeth*. Here, however, additional significance is attributed to this figure, largely through the following anecdote given by Beckett in an instance of unusual outspokenness about one of his characters:

In the thirties, he says, C. G. Jung once gave a lecture in London and told of a female patient who was being treated by him. Jung said he wasn’t able to help this patient and for this, according to Beckett, he gave an astonishing explanation. The girl wasn’t *living*. She existed but didn’t actually live. [...] This story had impressed him very much at the time.¹³²

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, p. 83.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

This predicament, the fact of ‘not living’, appears to resonate with Beckett, and it seems, his interest in exploring theatrical presence. What is clear from the outset (and from Beckett’s stage directions), is that the figure on stage appears on the threshold of the visible, between the seen and the unseen, challenging the viewer to engage other senses apart from the eyes. In this way, Beckett’s play demands a certain kind of attention, one that tallies with Nancy’s definition of listening as an attitude which implicates all the senses, tending towards mixing and contamination rather than definition, moving beyond individual idiosyncratic concerns. As I hope to demonstrate in what follows, *Footfalls* enacts a shift away from a logic based on representation and mimicry by foregrounding sound and its particular role in the construction of the self, of self-sensing and of the relation between self and the world. In doing so, the piece interrogates Nancy’s notion of sense as entering into the condition of resonance, as a material and acoustic spacing of the subject that exceeds signification in its narrow sense. Listening, here, allows us to move beyond sense as verbal communication or semiotics, since to listen is to lay oneself open to that which exceeds the realm of interpretation [*l’outré-sens*], to allow oneself to be infiltrated, moved, traversed by non-verbal, non-textual phenomena.¹³³

With the aforementioned reference to Jungian psychology to hand, critics have tended to interpret this play, and the indistinct figure of May, as staging the crisis of the mother/daughter relationship as posed by psychoanalytic feminist theories.¹³⁴ In Moonyoung Chung’s terms, May presents an example of ‘the prematurely old

¹³³ Nancy, *À l’écoute*, p. 60.

¹³⁴ Mary Bryden’s *Women in Samuel Beckett’s Prose and Drama* focuses on the mother/daughter relationship in Beckett’s work, by applying the theories of Deleuze & Guattari, and Hélène Cixous. Bryden’s work forms the basis for other more recent readings which seek to uncover a progressive tendency in Beckett’s work from a ‘strict gender polarity’ towards a ‘tenuous psychic matrifocality’, especially finding an allegiance between Beckett’s *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* and Cixous’s *écriture féminine*. See Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett’s Prose and Drama: Her Own Other* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; Lanham: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993), p. 2.

daughter [...]’, who shows a ‘willed renunciation’ through which she retreats into ‘isolation [...] gazing back at the deadly mirror of the disembodied mother’.¹³⁵ Elin Diamond, in turn, sees May’s pacing and her apparent ‘inability’ to figure herself properly as an individual, as emblematic of a tendency in patriarchal society to collapse any distinction between mother and daughter, to merge the two, as Diamond puts it, ‘culturally, socially, [and] linguistically’.¹³⁶ When looking at the play, Diamond thus interprets the ‘Mother’ as that ‘dark space’ which surrounds the figure on stage, symbolizing a dominant presence and literally overshadowing the daughter. Trish McTighe builds on such readings by suggesting that the ‘frayed solitary figure’ on stage, who converses ‘with maternal darkness’, becomes symbolic of the skin or boundary between mother and daughter.¹³⁷ As McTighe states, ‘her psychic and physical boundaries, manifest as skin ego, are malformed [...] Fraying at the edges, both literally and psychologically,’ she lacks the necessary ground to become a fully formed identity.¹³⁸ While I recognise this approach, acknowledging McTighe’s claim that ‘the complexity of [M + V’s] relationship is played out in the spatial and vocal organisation of the stage space’, I want to argue that this ‘spatial and vocal organisation’ occurs prior to the construction of any form of Mother/Daughter dialectic, that it precedes individual existence and therefore character or psychological interpretation. I focus first and foremost therefore on the structural interplay of ‘communicative ontologies’¹³⁹ in this work, interpreting the play via the terms set out by Brynhildur Boyce, as an ‘investigation [into the structure] of communication’, and

¹³⁵ Moonyoung Chung, ‘The Mother/Daughter Relationship in Beckett: “Footfalls and Rockaby”’, *Irish University Review*, Vol. 29, no. 2 (Autumn-Winter, 1999), pp. 281-293, p. 286.

¹³⁶ Elin Diamond, ‘Feminist Readings of Beckett’ in Lois Oppenheim ed., *Palgrave Advances in Beckett Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 58-59.

¹³⁷ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 103.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Boyce, ‘Tuning In/Tuning Up’, p. 64.

an acknowledgement of the central ‘slippage’ or ‘misalignment’ that this method serves to highlight.¹⁴⁰

In addition to the image and the strip of light we hear a ‘Woman’s Voice’, which issues from a megaphone off-stage, presenting a counterpoint to the body on stage. As is the case in *Ghost Trio*, the elements of performance – voice, image and movement – are formally detached, or misaligned, and then brought into dialogue with each other. *Footfalls* stages a coming together of image and sound, in a way which highlights the essential ‘incommensurability’ of these modes of expression.¹⁴¹ As Walter Asmus suggests, Beckett was meticulous about the arrangement of these modes:

The first ‘May’ comes on the fourth step while May is walking from right to left, the second ‘May’ comes on the eighth step May says her ‘Yes, Mother’ on the fourth step when she is walking from left to right, and on the sixth step of the same stretch the Mother begins with, ‘Will you never have done?’ The sentence ends immediately before the turn.¹⁴²

In its first major speech, the ‘Woman’s Voice’ works its way into the sound of the pacing:

V: [Pause. M resumes pacing. Four lengths. After first length, synchronous with steps] One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, wheel, [Free] Will you not try to catch a little sleep?¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁴¹ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 104.

¹⁴² Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, p. 85.

¹⁴³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 399.

Here, to refer again to Boyce's framework, contrasting 'communicative ontologies', in this case the words of V and the steady rhythmic thud of M's footsteps, appear to try to 'fit' together or 'tune-in' with each other's modes of expression.¹⁴⁴ The Woman's Voice fine-tunes its contribution in a bid to make it correspond with the sound of the figure's pacing. However, as is the case in *Words and Music*, this process of hyper-synchronization in fact has an estranging effect, drawing out the unnaturalness of the relationship between M and V, and further exacerbating our sense of fissure or discord at the heart of the work. The technique has the effect of further defamiliarizing the psychological content of the piece, drawing attention to its theatrical construction. Sense, in this context, consists not in a signifying intention communicated in the form of a coherent narrative, but rather in a spacing or spreading out of communicative agency which never amounts to a singular, unified presence and thus holds the central figure of May in a state of perpetual suspension. In Nancy's terms, this spreading or spacing is synonymous with listening [*écouter*] as distinguished from hearing [*entendre*] that is, as a reopening of meaning beyond interpretation and understanding, and beyond harmony [*entente*] or resolution.¹⁴⁵ In *Footfalls*, this process is co-equal with the continual displacement of the signifying body, the body as distinct and wholly visible origin of meaning. Through the discovery and maintenance of a gap between different 'communicative ontologies'.¹⁴⁶ voice and image, image and sound, the body is reconfigured as 'resonance chamber', unlocking sense from its status as pure linguistic signification.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Boyce, 'Tuning In/Tuning Up', p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ Nancy, *À l'écoute*, p. 16-19.

¹⁴⁶ Boyce, 'Tuning In/Tuning Up', p. 64.

¹⁴⁷ Gratton and Morin eds., *The Nancy Dictionary*, p. 144.

Both M (the figure on stage) and V (the voice from off-stage) speak alternately throughout the play. Their voices echo each other so that, at times, it is difficult to distinguish between them. As Trish McTighe puts it, ‘the text supplies us with two characters, [...] “May” and “Woman’s voice”’.¹⁴⁸ We know the latter to be May’s mother only because May calls her so, though as the play progresses this distinction becomes increasingly hazy as both figures take on a range of different personae, blending and fluctuating between mother and daughter, carer and dependent, narrator and subject. The ‘role-play’ in which they engage, in other words, confuses any notion of clearly defined individuals within a fixed narrative or fictional situation. The fact that the spotlight is strongest at foot level, leaving May’s face almost invisible, also calls into question her status as the origin or ‘source of her “own” voice’.¹⁴⁹ David Pattie elaborates on this point by suggesting that:

Footfalls tells the same story three times; but with each retelling the story is distanced further and further from its original source, and its status as the unambiguous relation of direct experience is rendered increasingly problematic.¹⁵⁰

All this suggests the plural origin of sense. *Footfalls* evades any singular or absolute meaning, one that might arise from a unique original source, by mobilizing a polyphony of voices or vocal tracts that are shared out and intersect with each other, never forming any kind of resolution or whole. As previously suggested, this process designates a shift from a mode of attention based on understanding to one that is

¹⁴⁸ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁹ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 104.

¹⁵⁰ David Pattie, ‘Space, Time and the Self in Beckett’s Late Theatre,’ *Modern Drama* 43 (2000), pp. 393-403, p. 400.

founded on listening, a move to listening, ‘à l’écoute’, which Nancy plainly distinguishes from *entendement*. To listen here is to assist in the bodily spreading out of the subject which is also the sharing of multiple voices, voices which resonate throughout the auditorium and thereby circumvent amalgamation or any form of synthesis. As I hope to demonstrate in what follows, *Footfalls* thrives on the multiplicity of its auditory phenomena and the sense of ambiguity that this causes. To listen, here, is necessarily to listen beyond what is already known and classified as sense [*l’outré sens*].¹⁵¹ But rather than moving towards intellectual pre-eminence or superiority, this process of listening ‘beyond’ necessarily implies participation and distribution of the corporeal, and implicates both sense and the subject in the process of transfer and referral, which Nancy refers to as resonance.¹⁵²

The sound of a ‘*faint single chime*’, signals the start of the play, followed by a ‘*pause as echoes die*’.¹⁵³ A ‘*fade up to dim light*’ then reveals M, a ‘*dishevelled*’ figure, in a ‘*worn grey wrap hiding feet*’, as she paces along the dimly lit strip, ‘*positioned downstage audience right*’.¹⁵⁴ This female figure, so we are told, obsessively needs to hear the sound of her own footsteps. The opening dialogue establishes her as May, the daughter of V, who in turn, speaks out of the darkness:

M: Mother. [*Pause. No louder.*] Mother.

V: Yes, May.

M: Were you asleep?

¹⁵¹ Nancy, *À l’écoute*, p. 60.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁵³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 399.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

V: Deep asleep. [*Pause.*] I heard you in my deep sleep. [*Pause.*] There is no sleep so deep I would not hear you there.¹⁵⁵

While the daughter (M) is visible, or partially so, and the mother (V) is not, they both exist, as Katherine Worth suggests, as ‘auditors’, listening and reacting to each other’s words, ‘re-enacting a scene, perhaps of memory, in which each expresses concern for the other’.¹⁵⁶ The dialogue focuses on basic bodily needs, conjuring a vivid image of the mother’s physical state, though at this stage it may appear that M, the figure on stage, is somehow participating in or as Worth puts it ‘projecting’ the voice of the Mother:

M: Would you like me to inject you again?

V: Yes but it is too soon.

M: Would you like me to change your position again? [...] Straighten your pillows? [*Pause.*] Change your drawsheets? [*Pause.*] Pass you the bedpan? [*Pause.*] The warming pan? [*Pause.*] Dress your sores? [*Pause.*] Sponge you down? [*Pause.*] Moisten your poor lips? [*Pause.*] Pray with you? [*Pause.*] For you? [...] ¹⁵⁷

Steven Connor analyses these effects, and in particular the ability of the disembodied voice to conjure for the hearer an image of its source, in terms of what he calls the ‘vocalic body’.¹⁵⁸ Recalling Rick Altman’s sound hermeneutic, he writes that ‘the fact

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Katherine Worth, ‘Beckett’s Auditors: Not I to Ohio Impromptu’ in Enoch Brater ed., *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 168-192, p. 184.

¹⁵⁷ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 400.

¹⁵⁸ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 36.

that an unassigned voice must always imply a body means that it will always partly supply it as well'.¹⁵⁹ In a description that resonates strikingly with Beckett's *Footfalls*, he explains that:

So strong is the embodying power of the voice that this process occurs not only in the case of voices that seem separated from their obvious or natural sources, but also in voices, or patterned vocal inflections, or postures, that have a clearly identifiable source, but seem in various ways excessive to that source. This voice then conjures for itself a different kind of body; an imaginary body which may contradict, compete with, replace, or even reshape the actual, visible body of the speaker.¹⁶⁰

The 'vocalic body', in short, is not a fixed, finite body, nor is it divisible into specific parts which subsequently amalgamate to create a whole.¹⁶¹ Rather it is always already multiple and heterogeneous, open to all possible relationships between voice and body, exceeding classification or signification in its narrow sense. It is, as Connor puts it, 'a body in-invention, an impossible, imaginary body in the course of being found and formed'.¹⁶² Beckett presents an awareness of these features, as he continues to probe the relationship between Voice and Image in this play. The following section consists in a monologue spoken purely by V, out of the dark. The opening lines create a perfect ambiguity: V speaks in the first person, as though in the place of M, before disassociating herself and reverting to the third person:

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

V: I walk here now. [*Pause.*] Rather I come and stand. [*Pause.*] At nightfall.
[*Pause.*] She fancies she is alone. [*Pause.*] See how still she stands, how stark,
with her face to the wall.¹⁶³

The Voice then tells the story of May – ‘the child’s given name’ – as a young woman who has been pacing the same ‘strip of floor, once [...] carpeted’, ‘since girlhood’.¹⁶⁴ While other ‘girls of her age were out at... lacrosse’, she was ever pacing ‘in the old home, the same where she- [*Pause.*] The same where she began’.¹⁶⁵ It is notable here that Beckett does not use the word *born*, thus further undermining the notion of an origin or a vocal source. May appears simply to come into being through the sound of her footsteps and the voices that convey her story. V constructs a dialogue between the girl and her Mother, just as M will later construct a dialogue between Amy (an anagram of May) and her mother, Mrs Winter. Each adopts or plays the voice of the other, and each, in turn, directs the attention of the audience to significant, recurrent features of the story:

Till one night, while still little more than a child, she called her mother and said, Mother, this is not enough. The mother: Not enough? May – the child’s given name – May: Not enough. The mother: What do you mean, May, not enough? May: I mean, Mother, that I must hear the feet, however faint they fall. The mother: The motion alone is not enough? May: No, Mother, the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 401

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Whether the standing figure is still listening to the Voice at this stage, or whether she is in some strange way projecting it, as she later projects the voices of Amy and Mrs. Winter, is unclear. Beckett makes us increasingly unsure of what we see and hear, of our ability to identify coherent characters, as V and M, mother and daughter continually echo each other, moving between the roles of listener and narrator. Indeed, such categories as real and imaginary, truth and fiction, are actively called into question as the elements of the story continually revolve, and evolve, never reaching a climax or conclusion. Beckett indicates that M should ‘move her lips twice during the mother’s text’ with reference to specific lines:

‘she has not been out since girlhood’ until the interruption in the sentence
 ‘...the same where she – (pause)’ and then again from ‘till one night, while
 still little more than a child’ until ‘May: Not enough.’¹⁶⁷

This effect only further enhances the mysterious ambiguity of their relationship and as M resumes her pacing, V once again counts herself into the motion of the footsteps:
 ‘Watch how feet she wheels. [*M turns, paces. Synchronous with steps third length.*]
 Seven, eight, nine, wheel’.¹⁶⁸ The two are in a constant state of tension, moving between division and reunion.

The final section of the play consists of M’s ‘sequel’, a deliberate pun on the expression ‘seek well’.¹⁶⁹ Here M takes the role of narrator, and tells the story of a ‘semblance. Faint, though by no means invisible’, a grey ‘tangle of tatters’, that walks at ‘nightfall’, back and forth in the churchyard, before ‘vanishing the way she came.

¹⁶⁷ Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, p. 87.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

¹⁶⁹ See Diamond ‘Feminist Readings of Beckett’ in Oppenheim ed. *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, pp. 45-67, p. 59.

[*Pause.*] No sound [*Pause.*] None at least to be heard'.¹⁷⁰ Here M adds a remark that draws our attention once again to the mysterious play of sound in the work; voices continually recall each other in the same way as the chime sends out its diminishing echoes.¹⁷¹ Like V in the previous section, M recounts an exchange between a girl and her mother, this time Amy and Old Mrs Winter, whom, she says, 'the reader will remember'.¹⁷² Just as we cannot be sure whether or not M hears V in the previous section, we cannot be sure who exactly the 'she' is whom M describes in her ghostly sequel, the effect of which is to stop the narrative from getting beyond itself, forcing the images to turn and return.

At the end of the play, we might even ask ourselves whether the figure we think we see, pacing and turning on the narrow strip of light, is in fact there at all. Or whether, as Worth suggests, she 'is herself conjured up and kept in being by the voices and sounds that convey her story' just like the 'semblance' she evokes in her narrative.¹⁷³ Beckett seems to suggest as much when he states that the dim light should be strongest at foot level, the level of the '*clearly audible rhythmic tread*'.¹⁷⁴ With each fade up, the light diminishes, so that a '*little less*' of the figure is visible, the final fade-up revealing '*No trace of May*'.¹⁷⁵ The figure of May, as her name indicates, suggests a state of possibility, the possibility both of sense understood as meaningfulness or that which makes sense, and of a sense of self, which, in Nancy's terms, 'n'est peut-être aucun sujet sauf à être le lieu de la résonance, de sa tension et de son rebond infinis'.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 402.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁷³ Worth, 'Beckett's Auditors: Not I to Ohio Impromptu', p. 185

¹⁷⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 399.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁷⁶ Nancy, *À l'écoute*, p. 45.

This analysis of *Footfalls* thus gathers together a number of key motifs of Nancy's thinking of sensing which are developed not only in *À l'écoute* but elsewhere, in, for instance, *Les Muses* and *L'Évidence du film*. Here the making of sense emerges in and through the non-totalising activities of multiple and various senses (predominantly but non exclusively hearing and sight). This process is achieved through an uncovering, refraction and dispersal of communicative elements, the disruption of specular identification and the foregrounding of sonorous phenomena which in turn creates a shifting, syncopated or beaten out encounter with the image. As Nancy puts it in his description of timbre:

Le timbre est la résonance du son: soit le son même. Il fait la consistance première du *sens* sonore en tant que tel, sous la condition rythmique qui le fit retenir [...]. Le *sens*, ici, c'est le renvoi, le retentissement, la réverbération: l'écho dans un corps donné, voire *comme* ce corps donné, voire encore comme le don à soi de ce corps donné.¹⁷⁷

The term timbre is useful insofar as it does not refer to a single atom or piece of data. The very characteristic of timbre as described here is itself to be, more than a component, a composition whose complexity continues to increase as acoustic analysis is refined and as it goes beyond mere determination of a sound by its harmonics. As Nancy puts it: 'le timbre est par excellence l'unité d'une diversité que son unité ne résorbe pas'.¹⁷⁸ Hence it does not yield to musical notation as do, for example, volume or time. Timbre opens, rather, directly onto a catalogue of other

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

perceptual registers: colour, touch, taste and smell. In this opening or resonance the mutual operations of the senses are not subordinated or placed within a hierarchy, as is the case when they are governed by a logic of the visual, but rather share responsibility, participate in and contaminate each other in a state of perpetual flux.

To conclude then, Beckett's play positions meaning not only on the boundary of the visible, but also on the boundary of comprehensibility in its narrow sense, that is as signification. Through a series of disjunctive confrontations between sound or voice and image, *Footfalls* opens up a space in which sense resounds in a sharing of sonic material: voices sounds or auditory phenomena. These sonic materials refer not beyond themselves to an intelligible meaning, but participate in the circulation of sense as resonance, referral or echo. What Beckett mobilizes here, is a contingent, embodied encounter with sense, a syncopated spacing out which calls upon multiple senses in order to make sense. He interrupts the reign of the purely visual by foregrounding the tactility of the stage space, presenting this as a space in which multiple voices echo. As Nancy comments, 'c'est toujours dans le ventre que nous – homme ou femme – finissons par ou commençons à écouter. L'oreille ouvre sur la caverne sonore que nous devenons alors'.¹⁷⁹ To witness the structure of echoes that constitute *Footfalls*, in other words, is to be embodied and exposed to sense and to resound with it.

Rockaby (1980)

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

A similar effect is achieved in *Rockaby*, which emphasises rhythm as a mode of structuring the theatrical event, elaborating a thinking of sense that goes beyond signification. In what follows, I draw on Nancy's analysis of rhythm in *À l'écoute* in order to elucidate this process. As Nancy puts it:

Il faudrait [...] s'arrêter longuement sur le rythme: il n'est pas autre chose que le temps du temps, l'ébranlement du temps lui-même dans la frappe d'un présent qui le présente en le disjoignant de lui-même, en le dégageant de sa simple *stance* pour la faire *scansion* (montée, levée du pied qui scande et *cadence* (chute, passage dans le battement)).¹⁸⁰

Here, rhythm is seen to separate or intrude upon the linear passage of time; it flexes and distorts time 'pour le donner au temps lui-même', and it is in this way that it unfurls a sense of self.¹⁸¹ With timbre, that is to say, between the two, rhythm outlines what Nancy calls the 'constitution matricielle' of resonance as the basis for sense when accessed via listening.¹⁸² Prior to music or language, but common to both, rhythm partakes in the impulse to presence whilst dividing that same impulse from itself: 'présence du sens en tant que résonance, poussée sonore, appel, criée, adresse [...]'.¹⁸³ In this way, Nancy builds upon Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe's extended analysis of the rhythmic as preceding representation and therefore the social, verbal, thinking subject, in *Le Sujet de la philosophie* (1979). As will become clear, I draw on the work of both philosophers in order to demonstrate how rhythm operates in *Rockaby*.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Written in English in 1980, and first performed in Buffalo, New York, the work centres on the image of a woman (W), described by Beckett as ‘prematurely old’, with ‘unkempt grey hair’ and ‘huge eyes’ in a ‘white expressionless face’.¹⁸⁴ Throughout the play she sits in a rocking chair, her ‘white hands holding [the] ends of [the] armrests’, her demeanour, impassive, her eyes ‘now closed, now open’ in an ‘unblinking gaze’.¹⁸⁵ Her costume is made up of a ‘black lacy high-necked evening gown’, with ‘long sleeves’ and ‘jet sequins’ which Beckett says should ‘glitter’ when the chair rocks.¹⁸⁶ In addition to this she wears an ‘incongruous flimsy hear-dress set askew with extravagant trimming’, which, like the sequins, is intended ‘to catch [the] light when rocking’.¹⁸⁷ The chair itself is made from ‘pale wood highly polished to gleam when rocking’.¹⁸⁸ It is said to have ‘rounded inward curving arms’ which Beckett stipulates should ‘suggest [an] embrace’.¹⁸⁹ The notes on set and costume for this play are remarkably detailed, with words such as ‘glitter’, ‘glimmer’, ‘gleam’, suggesting an even more than usually acute attentiveness to visual cues and how these will affect the audience. Beckett appears, through such descriptions, to be drawing the audience’s attention towards specifically aesthetic concerns: the painterly construction of the *mise-en-scène*, the patterning or choreographic arrangement of objects in space. By isolating the points of connection or collision between different forms on stage, he sparks an awareness of the play of light and shadow. Underlining this emphasis further is the fact that the text itself contains various references to seeing, specifically the closing and opening of eyes and window blinds: ‘with closed

¹⁸⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 433.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

eyes/closing eyes [...] let up the blind and sat/quiet at her window'.¹⁹⁰ In the wider context of the theatre, these references serve a self-referential function, evoking 'all [the] eyes' of the spectators, fixed upon the 'window' or threshold, which can be understood as the proscenium arch stage. As is the case in *Footfalls* among other works, vision here comes under scrutiny as the principle coordinate by which we identify objects and their meanings within the theatrical frame. As Mary Bryden puts it, in *Rockaby*, 'the credentials of sight are incrementally jettisoned [...]' which in turn makes space for the experiences of sound and voice to be unusually intensified.¹⁹¹

The woman, referred to in the stage directions as W, is illuminated by a lone spotlight, and rocks to the sound of a recorded voice (V). This Voice, labelled V, issues from an off-stage microphone, and accompanies the 'slight [...] slow' motion of the rocking chair, which in turn is 'controlled mechanically without assistance from W'.¹⁹² With no punctuation or capitalisation, the text is disjointed and equivocal, each line taking up no more than eight syllables and some comprising only two or three words. Fragments of narrative conjure the image of a woman, perhaps the one in the chair, perhaps a duplicate. 'She' appears to be approaching death: 'till in the end / the day came / close of a long day / in the end came / close of a long day /when she said /to herself / whom else /time she stopped /*time she stopped* [...]'.¹⁹³ Spoken in the third person, the text is divided into four sections, each of which is separated by a 'Long pause', during which we hear the echo of the last line spoken, and the sound of the rocking chair coming to rest. At the end of each section W and V speak together the lines: 'time she stopped' (sections one and three) and 'one other living soul'

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 436-437.

¹⁹¹ Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 189.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 434.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

(section two).¹⁹⁴ In these moments, figure and voice, performance and recorded text come into contact, literally synchronising in a similar way to voice and image in *Footfalls*. Yet as is the case in earlier examples of this process, the moment at which they approach each other is also the moment at which their ‘inherent misalignment’ as belonging to different ‘communicative ontologies’ is most apparent.¹⁹⁵

Like *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* displaces the straightforwardly signifying body and stages instead a body of resonance which conditions but also opens onto sense, as ‘l’outre-sens’ or sense that is not classifiable in terms of signification.¹⁹⁶ It does so first and foremost by de-centering the visual image (the rocking chair is positioned ‘downstage slightly off-centre audience left’), making use of off-stage sound and voice in order to probe the limits of the theatrical or visual frame.¹⁹⁷ Presence is undermined, and character or meaning is broken up, separated out and communicated via different forms of media. The opening stage directions state that the ‘recorded voice’ and the ‘woman in [the] chair’ belong to one and the same person, namely the figure on stage.¹⁹⁸ However, the text is partly spoken in the third person: the reflexive pronoun ‘herself’ or ‘hers’ is omnipresent, as is the phrase ‘another like herself’, which reoccurs a total of five times throughout.¹⁹⁹ These references to ‘herself’ and to ‘another’, are most often interpreted in terms of the mother/daughter relationship, which is equally evoked in the text in the image of the ‘mother rocker/where mother rocker/all the years’, as well as in the title, *Rockaby*, which suggests a maternal setting.²⁰⁰ For Trish McTighe, the ‘demand for the voice to continue speaking, is like

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 435-442.

¹⁹⁵ Boyce, ‘Tuning in/Tuning Up’, pp. 63-64.

¹⁹⁶ Nancy, *À l’écoute*, p. 60.

¹⁹⁷ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 435.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

that of a child's desire for soothing words and the combination of the rhythmic vocals and rocking motion appear to reproduce for W what [Didier] Anzieu terms the sound/tactile envelope'.²⁰¹ Though I do not wish to explicitly foreground the maternal thematic here, McTighe's comments are useful in so far as they stress the importance of the dual nature of the sonorous space in this play: on the one hand we have the various sounds that emanate from the setting: the recorded Voice and the sound of the gently rocking chair, on the other hand, we have a series of words uttered by the subject, W. There is a consistent dialogue, in short, between inside and outside, between agency on the one hand and passivity on the other. This dual nature of the stage space is central to an understanding of Beckett's handling of the body and of the relation between movement and thought in this play. As stated above, W is positioned 'facing front downstage slightly off centre audience left'.²⁰² She rocks in and out of the 'subdued' spotlight, literally occupying a threshold between the visible and the invisible.²⁰³ Despite its contracted form, the text establishes a sense of progression, as the figure counts down the 'close of a long day', until finally she 'stop[s] her eyes' while the chair 'rock[s] her off', leaving us unsure as to whether she is dead or merely sleeping.²⁰⁴ The stage image reiterates this ambiguity as what little light remains gradually fades-out, and we hear the echo of the last words spoken, 'rock her off', while the rocking chair comes to rest.

An awareness of rhythm as 'structural agent' lies at the heart of most analyses of *Rockaby*.²⁰⁵ In a recent article entitled 'Articulated Arrhythmia: Samuel Beckett's Shorter Plays', for example, Maria Ristani explores the play's particular 'rhythmic

²⁰¹ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 97.

²⁰² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 435.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 441- 442.

²⁰⁵ Maria Ristani, 'Articulated Arrhythmia: Samuel Beckett's Shorter Plays', in Bailes and Till eds, *Beckett and Musicality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 119- 135, p. 119.

register' alongside and in light of the work of Julia Kristeva, highlighting what she calls, 'the capacity of the rhythmic to mobilize the structural, semantic and expressive values of the verbal text'.²⁰⁶ Kristeva's work, she suggests, holds an important place in relation to Beckett's own in so far as it 'highlights the potential of rhythmicity for a heteroglossia' undermining the status of 'language as semantic register', and 'directing attention instead to a language-made-body'.²⁰⁷ Citing the well-known comment made by actress Billie Whitelaw in relation to *Rockaby*, that 'I am beating time the whole time. Also, even if at first the script is not fully understood I know that if I get the rhythm and music of it right it works',²⁰⁸ Ristani draws out Beckett's particular 'sensitivity to timing, repetition, durational patterns, pulse, tempi',²⁰⁹ reading this in light of Kristeva's theory of the semiotic. In line with this theory, Ristani postulates rhythm 'as the functioning of bodily drives and "pulsions" rippling through linguistic structures', a reading that, I argue, falls short in relation to Beckett insofar as it presupposes a distinction between two opposing and ultimately irreconcilable realms. This is due to the fact that Kristeva associates rhythm with what she calls, 'une fonctionnalité kinésique [...] antérieure à la position du signe' – a bodily realm which includes the unconscious and is fundamentally separate from the world of signs. Its role within her theory is essentially to break through the symbolic, the realm of language, and in psychoanalytic terms, the law of the Father, in order to effectuate change.²¹⁰ While both realms are necessary for the production of what Kristeva calls the '*sujet de l'énonciation*', what remains is an essentially dualistic schema, which does not hold, for example, in a Nancean reading of the play, where

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 129.

²⁰⁷ Ristani, 'Articulated Arrhythmia', pp. 128-129.

²⁰⁸ Janet Goodridge, *Rhythm and Timing of Movement in Performance: Drama, Dance and Ceremony* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 1999), p. 56.

²⁰⁹ Ristani, 'Articulated Arrhythmia: Samuel Beckett's Shorter Plays', p. 119.

²¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p. 26.

rhythm is understood to be always already participating in the circulation of sense as resonance.²¹¹ Indeed, rhythmic articulation is part of a broader move in Nancy's writing, to rethink the concept of sense not in terms of a product or the goal of an operation, but in terms of a sharing, a spacing, and a movement of exchange or participation which in itself makes sense. Hence I want to build on Ristani's claim here that rhythm has the power to 'usurp the role traditionally provided by syntactic and punctuation devices [...] narrative links and chronological chains'.²¹² Due to the lack of punctuation in the script of *Rockaby*, language is framed, shaped or sculpted not in relation to any symbolic law or indeed patriarchal principle, but by the interrupted rhythms of the breathing body, the involuntary inhalations and exhalations that occur as breath meets speech, thus lending the text a kind of heightened material plasticity. Rhythm, as it is operates here, participates in the circulation of sense in excess of signification.

In what follows I dwell on the capacity of the rhythmic to interrupt what Nancy calls 'la logique mimétique et "typographique"', in short, the logic of representation, by operating in excess of syntactical rules, privileging sensation not as an equivalent or supplement to linguistic meaning, but as participating in the passage of sense as resonance.²¹³ The text of *Rockaby* sustains this process by undermining conventional grammatical rules. The mechanical sing-song like structure of the text resists or defers the completion of the sentence or phrase, and thus the key principle that underlines linguistic communication. As previously suggested, the effect is amplified through the absence of punctuation marks:

²¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 20.

²¹² Ristani, 'Articulated Arrhythmia: Samuel Beckett's Shorter Plays', pp. 128-129.

²¹³ Nancy, *À l'écoute*, p. 75.

so in the end
close of a long day
in the end went and sat
went back in and sat
at her window
let up the blind and sat
quiet at her window
only window
facing other windows
other only windows²¹⁴

To recall an idea put forward by Anna McMullan in her book *Theatre on Trial*, there is a constant tension here between a movement outwards, a widening of perspective,²¹⁵ towards infinite possible meanings and a movement back to the concrete here and now of the stage space, the unchanging, repetitive to and fro of the rocking chair. The following passage provides an example of this phenomenon: ‘let up the blind and sat/quiet at her window/only window/facing other windows/other only windows’.²¹⁶ The image of the woman sitting alone at her window, the ‘only window’, resonates for a few brief seconds, before it is again modified, duplicated and recycled, becoming ‘other only windows’.²¹⁷ Narrative development is continually stilted through such modification and doubling which is in itself a form of negation in the same way that the rocker’s forward tendency is continually folded or counterbalanced by its own backward pull. Essentially static, it creates the illusion of movement as

²¹⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 437.

²¹⁵ See McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 94.

²¹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 437.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

what resounds is an unrelenting rhythm, holding back, refusing resolution, and resisting the very principles of linguistic form.

As is the case in both *Ghost Trio* and *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* enacts a shift in register from the visual to the aural plane – as the act of listening, in this case to a recorded voice, is foregrounded and dramatized. While inviting the audience to look beyond the limits of the conventionally clear-cut stage space, this play simultaneously emphasizes that which exceeds the viewer's grasp. Contrasting 'communicative ontologies',²¹⁸ to recall Boyce's phrase, such as voice and kinetic image are brought to the fore and held in tension in a manner which foregrounds the dispersal and passage of sense beyond any logic of the 'proper', or any thinking of identity in terms of fusion and conjoining. This effect reaches its climax in the disjunctive phrase 'Fuck life', or in French, 'aux chiottes la vie' (literally meaning 'down the toilet with life'), which constitutes a moment of rhythmical and verbal discordance, interrupting the hypnotic effect of the recorded voice.²¹⁹

At the start of this chapter, I identified two different forms of dissociation or displacement between sight and sound, drawing on examples from Steven Connor's monograph *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* in order to suggest some of the implications and possibilities inherent in the manipulation of sound and sight through ventriloquial form. To conclude, I return to this analysis in order to elucidate the significance of these findings. The shift from one form of ventriloquism to another, as Connor suggests, reflects a shift in our understanding of subjectivity, of its articulation via speech, via the body and via the voice.²²⁰ Furthermore, 'the power

²¹⁸ Boyce, 'Tuning In/Tuning Up', p. 63-64.

²¹⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 438.

²²⁰ As suggested earlier in the chapter, Connor distinguishes between the 'engastrimythic', an ancient form of speaking without appearing to speak, in which words appear to come from the belly, in which the subject is seen as a vessel or conduit providing privileged access to the divine or the sacred, and later forms of ventriloquism in which the voice appears to come from outside the body of the speaker,

to disembody the voice and launch it into external space' such that it appears to come from far off, to occupy a peripheral sphere, is simultaneously the power to dislodge the body from its central position as indivisible natural whole, to undermine the orthogonality of the given environment and to blur the boundaries between internal and external space.²²¹ The projection or casting away of sounds beyond the limits of the individual body, constitutes, as Connor puts it, to 'an unfixing of natural relations', a disturbance in a logic of embodiment which relies upon the proper integration or unification of body and soul.²²² Here the voice 'from within', the voice which has a fixed origin or dwelling place, is replaced by an 'itinerant' voice, characterized above all by 'detachment' or, as I see it, remoteness.²²³ It is this 'itinerant' voice, as I have shown, that emerges as predominant in Beckett's work. It is manifested not only in the deployment of the *acousmêtre*, the ambiguous positioning of vocal material with regard to the visual stimuli, but also in the use of the recorded voice, the superimposition of sound upon apparently dissociated imagery, and the deliberate juxtaposition or misalignement between what is seen and what is heard. All this in turn contributes to the move from a space governed or compartmentalized by the viewing eye towards a space in which hearing predominates, in which sense may be said to 'resound' beyond the limits of a single, unified and indicative meaning.²²⁴ In a talk broadcast on Resonance FM in 2008, Connor defines resonance in a manner which recalls Beckett's work:

flung beyond the boundaries of the individual, projected or cast off into external space. See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, pp. 213-217.

²²¹ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 217.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 251.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 251, 217, 197.

²²⁴ Steven Connor, 'Resonance', A talk broadcast on Resonance FM, 14 July 2008, pdf version available at: <http://stevenconnor.com/seeingtosound.html>, p. 1.

[...] let us remember that stones are not in fact deaf at all, but are sharply, sparkingly resonant. Counter-intuition: soft, compliant or moist substances (human bodies for example) amorously soak up sound, but thereby annul it; it is obdurate substance – stone wood, crystal - which by resisting sound, rings and responds to it, giving back to itself, completing it by rebuffering and doubling it. A warm, responsive place damps sound off; only hard, dry places can give mellowness and body to sound, and cold flint is needed to strike a spark.²²⁵

It is Beckett's refusal to assimilate, to monopolise or combine the various elements of performance (music and voice, voice and image, image and text) into a single unified theatrical or cinematic image, that produces the necessary conditions for this 'rebuffering and doubling', this giving body to sound and giving sound to sense, through friction or resistance. As Connor suggests, this process involves 'a kind of reflexivity', an awareness or heightened perception of space, and of the self and the body within that space.²²⁶ A sound, as it resounds, divides, multiplies and mirrors itself, a process which in turn becomes the necessary condition for the sounding of sense.

As previously suggested, Nancy uses the term 'resonance' to suggest the material viscosity as well as the plural reflexivity of sense, a sense which transcends or exceeds the boundary or distinction between the sensible and the intelligible. For Nancy it is our embodied existence as humans among or 'with' other humans which presupposes this plural reflexivity and spacing of sense as resonance, prior to any

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

form of signification or linguistic meaning. Both the modern ventriloquial subject and the subject of ventriloquism (he who is subjected and he who subjects) which emerge in a casting-off and drawing back of the voice, the ‘renvoi’ or ‘écho’ of sound as sense or resonance, may thus be said to underline once again this conception of being as singular plurality without bringing about identity or closure. In Nancy’s terms:

l’écoute – l’ouverture tendue à l’ordre du sonore, [...] peut et doit nous apparaître non pas comme une figure de l’accès au soi, mais comme la réalité de cet accès, une réalité par conséquent indissociablement ‘mienne’ et ‘autre’, ‘singulière’ et ‘plurielle’ tout autant que ‘matérielle’ et ‘spirituelle’ et que ‘signifiante’ et ‘asignifiante’.²²⁷

In the collection of essays entitled *Beckett and Musicality*, Sara Jane Bailes and Nicholas Till underline ‘the ability of the sonorous (and the act of listening as an operative mode particular to the sonorous) to invite, share and induce participation’.²²⁸ This, they suggest, is, ‘key to the role and function of musicality as a non-mimetic yet reciprocal mode of exchange and relationality that extends throughout Beckett’s work’.²²⁹ In emphasising the powers of the dislocated, detached or ‘itinerant’²³⁰ voice in these works, the effects of ‘rebuffing and doubling’²³¹ between dramatic components which give sound its body as resonance, I have tried to build on this claim, further articulating the multiple origins of sense as a resonant

²²⁷ Nancy, *À l’écoute*, pp. 30 - 31.

²²⁸ Bailes and Till, *Beckett and Musicality*, p. 5.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 217.

²³¹ Connor, ‘Resonance’, p. 2.

spacing and the associated untying of the body from an ontotheology which posits it as incarnation of the soul.

Chapter Four: Mouth

‘...practically speechless...’ Voice and Spoken Text in *Not I*, *That Time* and *A Piece of Monologue*

The plays *Not I* (1972), *That Time* (1975) and *A Piece of Monologue* (1979) are centrally concerned with processes of speaking and voicing. All three works draw into view the theatrical convention of the monologue and the tension between fiction and enactment which this convention brings into play. While the last chapter focused on the sonorous as a non-mimetic yet reciprocal mode of exchange and relationality that extends throughout Beckett’s work, providing a space of encounter between self and self, self and other, it is my aim in this chapter to consider more directly the issue of the voice and its related modalities of oral behaviour and imagination. This will conclude my investigation of the ‘body in parts’ in Beckett’s work, mobilising and disclosing existence in a space between discourse and matter whilst reimagining agency through a specific approach to the relation between movement and reflection. Thus the principal focus here is the organ of speech, the mouth, which operates, I want to suggest, as a limit or a boundary between language in the sense of the symbolic, on the one hand, and our concrete, embodied existence, on the other, with the voice emerging in the space between those two instances in ways that I will discuss further on. In Brandon LaBelle’s terms:

The mouth affords entry onto the complicated weave of language and power, inscription and iteration, by locating speech as part of a greater assemblage where breath and spit, food and vomit, desire and angst, for instance, all stage their particular events to ultimately surround, interrupt, flavour, and support forms of agency and communion. In short, the mouth is so radically connected

to both language and the body, desire and the other, as to provide an extremely pertinent education on what it means to be – *and to create oneself as* – a subject.¹

This notion of the mouth as playing a decisive role in subjectivity is equally central to Nancy's thinking, where the figure of *la bouche* emerges in the context of a discussion or reappraisal of Descartes' methodological scepticism and his rationalist meditations on the relation between the body and the soul.² The way Nancy approaches this figure within his text can be seen to expand and develop the rethinking of being in terms of what Ian James refers to as 'exteriority and non-mathematizable extension'.³ *La bouche* for Nancy is neither substance nor representation. Rather it takes the form of an opening or *béance* which surrounds, carries and renders possible both the identification of the mouth as feature of the face, and, perhaps more pivotally, the enunciation of the ego in the articulation of the phrase '*ego sum*'.⁴ As I will demonstrate, Nancy is not opposing the legacy of Descartes here so much as attempting to modify its foundations.⁵ As he puts it '*La bouche est l'ouverture de Ego, Ego est l'ouverture de la bouche.*'⁶

This, in turn, reopens a question that runs throughout this study, namely that of the rearticulation of subjectivity in Beckett's late drama as a function of the spacing of the body which emerges, to use Christopher Watkin's phrase, in 'the non-rigid distribution of an indefinite number of parts'.⁷ In what follows, I approach the

¹ Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 2.

² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego Sum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), p. 118.

³ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 60.

⁴ Nancy, *Ego Sum*, p. 162.

⁵ For a more extensive discussion of Nancy's engagement both with Descartes and the Cogito, see James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, pp. 54-63.

⁶ Nancy, *Ego Sum*, p. 162.

⁷ Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, p. 176.

mouth as a site of tension, conflict, and disruption to language and the body, speech and the subject. In doing so I attempt to bring in to relief the wider array of operations and behaviours which condition the relations of the mouth to the voice and which define the two in their inherent multiplicity. Speech, as it appears in these works, is part of a greater collection of what one might call ‘oral gestures’ which both extend and bring into question language as a marker of linguistic imperialism, causing a continual play between sense and non-sense.⁸ These gestures, sometimes referred to by LaBelle as ‘mouth movements’ or ‘modalities of mouthing’, are largely involuntary and include ‘laughing, stuttering, whispering, singing and burping’.⁹ In so far as they open up a space of indeterminacy around words and speech, suspending or interrupting the flow of communication, such ‘modalities’ can be used to investigate the various pathways, crossings and circuits that distinguish the relation between the mouth and the voice, and which condition subjectivity.

In what follows I approach these so-called ‘mouth movements’ as methods of bodily figuring, each of which surrounds, intrudes upon and thereby contributes to a notion of the self as outside any logic of the proper, of identity and self-enclosed presence.¹⁰ Through analyses of the aforementioned plays, I show how Beckett exploits the mouth as a vehicle for complicating subjectivity, articulating what LaBelle refers to as an ‘expanded territory of oral performativity’, and thus insisting upon the plural or heterogeneous origin of sense.¹¹ Whether through the shattering screams of the protagonist in *Not I* or the rasping breath of the listener in *That Time*, the mouth ruptures the discursive and illusionistic sphere of theatrical representation, modifying the limits of the visual frame by redefining the boundaries of the body.

⁸ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Sustaining an inclusive logic which is based on practices of both ingestion and expulsion, the mouth offers a space in which to rethink the relation between the interior space of thought and the outward world of actions, in short the connectivity between a movement and the impulse or stimulus which triggers it.

As has been suggested, this reading is part of a broader attempt to rethink the concept of agency in Beckett's theatre, as occurring outside or in excess of the ontotheologically or phenomenologically informed definition of the subject as seat or pivot of the soul. Where the mouth is pervasive, I argue, the interior space of subjectivity no longer functions as the fixed foundation for meaning. Rather, sense emerges outside the subject position, in negotiation, conflict and across a range of phenomena, both linguistic and material. In order to identify these effects, I draw upon LaBelle's analysis of 'micro-vocables', or '*disfluencies*' (such as *er*, *um* and *uh*), the stammers and stutters that stave off or interrupt the steady flow of speech and contribute to what LaBelle calls a 'weak poetics'.¹² By introducing forms of 'delay', 'distraction' and 'slowness' into the process of 'linguistic ordering', such instances can be seen to pose a challenge to accepted forms of speech which support normative systems of judgement, instead making space for a disabled or dislocated body within the narrative of the 'proper' and perhaps giving voice to the so-called 'weak-mouthed'.¹³

This, in turn, resonates with what Shane Weller says about '*forms of weakness*' in the context of his investigation into processes of 'animalisation' in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Beckett's *Molloy*.¹⁴ Drawing out the similarities between Kafka and Beckett, Weller identifies in both writers' works the presence of

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 132-134.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁴ Shane Weller, 'Forms of Weakness: Animalisation in Kafka and Beckett', *Beckett and Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 13-26, p. 13.

‘a negatively determined being (or ‘un-’ being) [...] that is defined principally by its inabilities (in motion and speech)’.¹⁵ This, I suggest, recalls a definition of the puppet cited earlier as marked principally (and negatively) ‘by its relationship with its manipulators’.¹⁶ Anthony Uhlmann has stated that Beckett ‘borrows an image of thought (a way of imagining what it means to think) from Arnold Geulincx’.¹⁷ Uhlmann’s claim is that ‘following Geulincx, he [Beckett] identifies the cogito (the “I think”) with a nescio (an “I do not know”)’.¹⁸ It is in these instances of interruption or suspension, that is, of ‘*delayed presence*’,¹⁹ where the ‘not knowing’ (nescio),²⁰ the impotent or the so-called ‘negatively determined’²¹ may be said to come into play. As in Geulincx, this emphasis prompts a move into ethics, that is, it encourages particular responses and behaviours. If the stutter, the pause and the break are brought about by ‘external pressure’, by forces imposed from the outside, then they can equally be understood, as LaBelle suggests, to push back against such pressures, returning or resisting the ‘proper’ through recourse to the ‘unclear’, the indefinite and the not yet categorised.²²

With this in mind, my final chapter will survey the range of oral movements and operations that shape the mouth in *Not I*, *That Time* and *A Piece of Monologue*, movements that interrupt, assist and delay in order to bring in to view the central corporeal dynamic that runs through these works. As previously suggested, Beckett’s late plays enact an anti-representational critique which brings him into close dialogue

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶ Debra Hilborn, ‘Relating to the Cross: A Puppet Perspective on the Holy Week Ceremonies of the Regularis Concordia’, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 164-175, p. 164-5.

¹⁷ Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006), p. 87.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁹ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 135.

²⁰ Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, p. 90.

²¹ Weller, ‘Forms of Weakness’, p. 20.

²² LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 135.

with Nancy, specifically in the latter's attempt to foreground the limits of the ontotheological body through notions of exposure and exteriority, as well as in his articulation of the originary or pre-existing dispersal of self-identity. Held together through a combination of words, sounds and light, whilst remaining vulnerable to the interventions of darkness and noise, these plays further test out Nancy's model of corporeality, through a particular emphasis on the spoken, extending, problematizing and subverting its communicative purpose.

As has been suggested throughout this study, Beckett's theatre examines and exploits the disparity between representation and its object by tirelessly foregrounding the process of creation, rupturing the illusion of continuity in the theatre, and uncovering the gap between the imagined world of fiction and the concrete world of performance. In keeping with this trend, the three plays analysed in this chapter break with theatrical conventions in a number of ways, conjuring the monologue style of address yet radically reconfiguring this style, dislocating speech from its source, flattening and de-centring the theatrical image, fragmenting and distorting the body of the actor through the play of light and the use of recorded, amplified sound. Disrupting the classical referents of narrative progression and character development in this way, these plays further demonstrate Beckett's handling of the theatre and of the body not as an independent construct but as a necessarily fragmentary gathering of parts and surfaces, bringing into play the Nancean thought of the body as touch, as a contact, and as 'an exposure which is always already an interval, a spacing, an interruption,' whilst simultaneously challenging this thinking, developing the dialogue between theatre and philosophy.²³

²³ Laura McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 38.

What draws these three works together is a particular handling of the monologue form, the staging of a prolonged speech or discourse purportedly spoken by a single speaker. All three works explore the status of the speaker or the voice, not as a unified presence, but as a fraught, unsettled process.²⁴ Mapping sites of (oral) activity by mixing registers, playing with syntax, and deliberately incorporating both linguistic and extra-linguistic material into the performance of speech, they foreground language as ‘*stuff*’ that has ‘texture, weight, and density’, and like all instances of oral activity, requires ‘physical as well as emotional energy’ to produce.²⁵ Here the subject of speech is always already plural in its essence, gaining impetus from the mouth, the efforts and activities of which are foregrounded as they frame and delineate the spoken.

This process offers a new way of approaching the gap between representation and its object, opening up a space of ambivalence around the speaking subject and presenting the performance of self as an arena of conflict between sound and sense, sense and nonsense. In the first of the three works, *Not I*, the mouth serves a dual function both as fictional character and as a theatrical device which continually agitates and troubles the representational illusion. Seemingly no more than a feverish gush of indistinguishable words and sounds, Mouth’s monologue necessarily problematizes the notion of ‘proper’ speech by incorporating what one might call the disorderly milieu of words, the largely unintelligible fog of noise that is consistently and necessarily filtered out for the purposes of everyday communication. As an obstacle to be persistently accommodated without being assimilated, this backdrop of speech forces us to suspend or hold in abeyance the efforts we normally undertake in

²⁴ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

order to make sense of what surrounds us, focusing instead on the performance of the process of speaking and listening that this play enacts.

If the analysis that follows gives primacy to the mouth, ‘locating speech as part of a greater assemblage’, this necessarily leads to a consideration of the voice.²⁶ As Steven Connor puts it, the voice which ‘comes and goes’ constitutes the means by which a body establishes itself as ‘capable of recognizing and being recognized by an outside’.²⁷ In moving from ‘an interior to an exterior’, it announces itself, like the mouth, as the method by which the body ‘verifies’ and ‘co-operates’ with its environment, by which it enters into relation with other bodies and shares space with them.²⁸ In bringing the voice into play alongside Nancy’s figure of *la bouche*, that movement of thought prior to the realm of representation which simultaneously grounds and ungrounds the metaphysical subject, I draw upon a later essay entitled ‘Vox clamans in deserto’, published in French in the 2008 collection *Le Poids d’une pensée, l’approche*.²⁹

Structured as a dialogue or encounter between various thinkers, including Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, this text expands the movement articulated in *Ego Sum*, exposing the rupture or failure of pure presence or self-plenitude, which, in itself, is constitutive of existence. As Nancy states, ‘[la voix] n’est pas présente à soi, elle est seulement une présentation au dehors, un tremblement qui s’offre au dehors, le battement d’une ouverture [...]’.³⁰ Like the figure of *la bouche*, the thinking of the voice articulates the ‘essentially plural structure of *Dasein*’, that is, the thinking of *Mitsein* or being-with as constitutive and coequal with

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁷ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Vox clamans in deserto’, *Le Poids d’une pensée, l’approche* (Strasbourg: La Phocide, 2008), pp. 23-36.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Dasein.³¹ *Dasein*, as *Mitsein*, does not express a grounding or foundation of *Being*, as is the case for Heidegger, but rather originates in a state of exposure and vulnerability and takes place in the dissociation and scattering of body and space.

Nancy invites us to hear and think the voice in an expanded sense, not as the performance of language, but as something which occurs ‘avant la distinction entre une langue disponible et une parole exécutrice [...]’.³² To hear the voice in this context includes hearing the body, that assemblage which resonates through the voice. While the text of ‘Vox clamans in deserto’ includes the voices of multiple theorists, Nancy states explicitly that ‘la vocalité de la voix, si vous voulez, ou son essence de voix, ce sera ce qui ne se confond avec aucune de ces voix’.³³ Rather, voice is ‘ce qui ne parle ni ne chante ni ne donne le ton d’une passion, tout en étant capable de jouer ces trois rôles, et tout en étant apte à devenir aussi bien votre voix que la mienne, celle de ce personnage aussi bien que celle d’un autre’.³⁴ Originating in a state of abandonment, of vulnerability and exposure, each voice is at once unique (‘singulière’), and at once already plural and heterogeneous: ‘il y a plusieurs voix possible pour chacun’.³⁵ The allusions to the voices of animals, ‘un chien aboie au loin, seul dans le silence. Une vache mugit’, further underline this point, reiterating the fact that the voice is not the same as language: ‘une précession de la parole, une parole infante qui se fait entendre en-deçà de tout parler [...]’.³⁶

This consideration of the voice in Nancy’s terms will supplement my interpretation of the workings of the mouth in what follows. If the voice is understood

³¹ Ignaas Devisch, ‘A Trembling Voice in the desert: Jean-Luc Nancy’s Rethinking of the Political Space,’ *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 239-56, p. 241.

³² Nancy, ‘Vox clamans in deserto’, p. 24.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 23, 26.

to be something which ‘defines’ us at the same time as carving out a space which allows us to go beyond ourselves, that is, ‘beyond mere belonging, association, or instrumental use’, the mouth can equally be said to participate in such a condition of reflexivity, extending and providing a backdrop to the comings and goings of the voice, a gateway to further negotiations.³⁷ As LaBelle puts it, ‘the voice is such an effective sensual material precisely because it comes from the mouth; it rises from the chest, up into the throat, to shudder the vocal cords’.³⁸ These physical features of the voice are foregrounded in the three works analysed below. I emphasize them here, not in order to insist upon an essential unity between body and voice, nor to draw out any form of pre-reflective realm which might amount to plenitude or self-presence in the Merleau-Pontean sense. Rather, I refer to the voice alongside the mouth and the so-called ‘*stuff*’ of spoken language here, in order to highlight how meaning, and therefore subjectivity, is compiled across a variety of interconnected strata in these works, each of which carries equal weight and each of which enters into negotiation with other forms of expression.³⁹

Not I (1972)

With little dramatic action, *Not I* operates at the limits of theatrical representation, condensing the image and offering minimal visual material: a single and apparently disembodied mouth elevated, ‘upstage audience right [...] about eight feet above stage level’ pours out a stream of words while a ‘tall standing figure’ called ‘Auditor’, ‘sex undeterminable,’ stands ‘downstage audience left’ on ‘an invisible podium about

³⁷ Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 7.

³⁸ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 33.

four feet high'.⁴⁰ The standing figure, as Beckett stipulates, is 'enveloped from head to foot' in a 'loose black djellaba', with a 'hood' to cover the face and head.⁴¹ In the absence of any visible facial features, the figure is 'shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across' the stage, 'intent on Mouth' and 'dead still throughout'.⁴² Rather than representing a specific character in Mouth's story, for example her father, mother, lover or confessor, the Auditor's identity remains deliberately unspecified: he or she appears at different times in the course of the tale, as agent, goad, director, recorder and judge. Positioned at a distance from the ordeal undergone by Mouth, the Auditor plays a similar role to the Listener in *Ohio Impromptu*, commanding corrections and repetitions, whilst apparently exerting an influence over the rhythm and pace of the speech through a series of gestures.⁴³

At four designated moments in the script, each time following the words 'what?... who?...no!...she!', the Auditor makes the significant movement of raising and dropping the arms in a kind of shrug which Beckett suggests is 'a gesture of helpless compassion'.⁴⁴ The movement diminishes throughout, with the final gesture being barely distinguishable. According to Enoch Brater, it is this image of the Auditor that gave rise to the initial idea for *Not I*:

⁴⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ As suggested in Chapter Two of this thesis, *Ohio Impromptu* sees the two figures on stage defined in relation to the spoken text: Reader and Listener. The Listener's interruptions foreground these roles and establish 'a continual shift of focus from what is told to the conditions of the telling.' (See McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 110). This is equally the case in *Not I*, where, as Lawrence Graver puts it, the Auditor 'provides the essential element in the dramatic counterpoint of the play', helping to 'anchor Mouth firmly in a material and spiritual world.' (See Lawrence Graver, 'Mouth's Auditor: The Emergence of an Enigma in Not I', Manuscript held at the University of Reading with covering letter from James Knowlson, 16 August, 1979, p. 3). See Reading University Library: BC MS 3519.

⁴⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376.

Sitting in a café, Beckett observed a solitary figure, completely covered in a djellaba, leaning against a wall. It seemed to him that the figure was in a position of intense listening – what could that lonely figure be listening to?⁴⁵

As with previous examples of Beckett's working process, this piece of biographical detail shows the conception of visual or choreographic elements prior to the creation of the text. We have here, as Brater suggests, a typically Beckettian division of roles: 'like Pozzo and Lucky, Hamm and Clov, Winnie and Willie, Mouth and Auditor are tied down, and to one another'.⁴⁶ In this case the interdependence is manifested in a literal separation and isolation of body parts and functions: Auditor, like the audience, 'hears' and, it appears, 'sees', though we cannot be sure of this as we only see the back of his/her cloak-covered body. Mouth, on the other hand, speaks, though as pure 'lips, tongue and teeth [...] no ears or eyes' cannot, it seems, see or hear.⁴⁷ This predicament applies both to the actor and the character, as Lisa Dwan, the most recent actress to interpret the text, has confirmed:

always before I do a run, I look at the page, and I run the peace through my mind, and I visualise it, because, you know, I'm blindfolded and I can't hear and I can't move, so that's really all I have in the darkness.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Enoch Brater, 'Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of Not I', *Modern Drama*, 18,1, Spring 1975, pp. 49-59., p. 50.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Transcription from video 'Lisa Dwan behind the scenes tour backstage at University of Reading', part of Tim Masters, 'Not I: Lisa Dwan's record speed Beckett', *BBC News online*, 12 May 2013, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-22397436>, viewed 13th November 2019.

Interesting to note here is the actress's sense of her own vulnerability, and even, it seems, her sense of being at the mercy of or subjected to the processes and mechanisms of the performance space. As I hope to demonstrate, this spare, unforgiving landscape leaves each of us, actor, character and spectator alike, equally vulnerable and exposed, open, that is, to the singular-plural, the heterogeneous structure of sense.

Despite the fact that neither Mouth nor Auditor are assigned a particular gender in the script, *Not I* is a play frequently discussed in the context of Beckett's representation of female characters. As Anna McMullan indicates: 'the fascination of [the play] lies in its articulation both of the intense inner experience of a particular subject and of a complex network of associations and issues relating to gender and the representation of women and the "feminine" within Western culture'.⁴⁹ For Hanna Scolnicov, 'Mouth's way of thinking and speaking is culturally determined and gendered. [...] her attitudes to love, aging, nature, sin – in other words, to herself [...] are decidedly female, raising questions about female experience'.⁵⁰ Aside from the question of gender, however, or more specifically the constructed notion of the 'feminine', *Not I* poses significant challenges to our sense-making faculties, our ability (if not to say our need) to deduce significance from that which surrounds us, to draw out intelligible meanings from what one might call the disorderly chaos of arbitrary noise, 'to push up the slope' to use Connor's phrase, 'from the direction of nonsense to sense, of nondirection to direction'.⁵¹ What I am suggesting, in short, is that there are forces at work within this play, forces which emerge from the spatial

⁴⁹ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 75.

⁵⁰ Hanna Scolnicov, *Women's Theatrical Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 149.

⁵¹ Steven Connor, 'Earlips: Of Mishearings and Mondegreens', A talk given at the conference *Listening In, Feeding Back*, Columbia University, 14 February 2009, available at: <http://stevenconnor.com/earlips/earlips.pdf>, 12th November 2019.

composition of both the stage space and the auditorium, which precede any sense of the individual, specified or gendered subject, drawing meaning instead out of the impersonal interrelations between bodies exposed to other bodies.

In what follows I draw on LaBelle's framework in order to examine this plural status in *Not I*, highlighting what the former refers to as 'the slippages, ruptures and [...] nonsensical outpourings' as they emerge from Mouth, which 'trouble the trajectories of proper speech' in order ultimately 'to unsettle and complicate its meanings'.⁵² For Mouth's words, 'unintelligible'⁵³ as they are at first, begin as the play progresses to 'twist and tense under pressure', 'tripped up' by 'urgency', distorted by 'nervous shaking' or shattered by the exceptional audibility of the scream.⁵⁴ Through these effects they open up an arena both prior to and to the side of the order of the figurative or representational, evidencing how sound and sense, the corporeal and the linguistic interact, conflict and inspire each other's effective trajectories. Highlighting these effects, I demonstrate how the play introduces a complex set of relations between speaker, spoken object (speech) and the always unstable territory of oral phenomena, which provides both a necessary background and an obstacle to the production of meaning in the work. The mouth here provides a framework for accommodating what one might refer to as 'difficult', 'other', or 'foreign' to the enclosed structure of language. As words resonate and reverberate in the darkened auditorium, (the stage in this case has no visible boundary), they are revealed in their 'muscularity', their 'sonority'⁵⁵ or, to use a word often associated with Nancy, their 'viscosity'.⁵⁶ In other words, *Not I* stages both the voice and the spoken word as

⁵² LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 61.

⁵³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ See McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 62.

inherently plural, and therefore, as I hope to show, always already in relation, extending beyond the boundaries of thought and of the individual body, to be constituted not only in language but in its other, its excess. As Lisa Dwan states in an interview with *The New Yorker*, ‘it isn’t one voice, and it isn’t one “I.” I see a continent in there.’⁵⁷

In a ‘semiotic’ analysis of what he calls ‘the textual phenomena of resonance’ in Beckett’s late works, Hoon-Sung Hwang uses the term ‘reflexivity’ to describe in particular three kinds of ‘echoing, mirroring, *mise en abyme*, and theatereality’ which he finds at work in *Footfalls* and *Ohio Impromptu*.⁵⁸ In what follows, I want to draw on Hwang’s framework in order to identify the reflexive structure of *Not I*, demonstrating how the play problematizes the relationships between actor and character, actor and fiction, author and character, fiction and spectator, thus emphasising multiplicity or contradiction as inherent to the theatrical presentation. The first type of reflexivity identified by Hwang is that of the ‘author-text relationship’ and addresses, as he suggests ‘the author’s self-awareness of himself as fictionalizer’.⁵⁹ In the case of *Not I*, this self-awareness can be identified at particular moments in the text, when Mouth refers either to her(it)self as speaker, or to her situation as the subject of her own speech. Early on, for example, she interrupts herself with the words: ‘...what?...girl?...yes...[...] what?...seventy?...good God...coming up to seventy...’, prompted perhaps by the Auditor, perhaps by some other invisible force off-stage, to correct certain details of the story.⁶⁰ This self-

⁵⁷ Lisa Dwan cited in Anthony Lane, ‘Chatterbox’, *The New Yorker*, article published in the print edition of the September 29, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/29/chatterbox>, accessed on 12th November 2019.

⁵⁸ Hoon-Sung Hwang, ‘One Mirror is “Not-Enough” in Beckett’s *Footfalls* and *Ohio Impromptu*.’ *Modern Drama*, 36, 3 (1993), pp. 368-82., p. 369.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁶⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376-377.

questioning highlights, in Hwang's terms 'the process of representing reality instead of merely mirroring it.'⁶¹ In these moments, Mouth appears to 'usurp' the author's position as 'fictionalizer', creating a kind of 'mirror' image of the author at work on stage.⁶² As the text is literally modified before our eyes (and ears), we become aware of the process of writing, and the status of the text itself is altered, becoming multiple possible texts.

The second type of reflexivity, according to Hwang, involves the 'character-audience relationship', and is often manifested, as he puts it 'through the presence of an audience on stage'.⁶³ Here we must only think of the aforementioned Auditor, who, in providing a direct reflection of the spectator on stage, problematizes any neat distinction between actor and observer, blurring the boundaries between the fictional stage world and the so-called 'real' world of the auditorium. This type of reflexivity, as Hwang suggests, is also manifested in a 'character's awareness of him/herself as *dramatis personae*'.⁶⁴ In this way it overlaps with the third type which involves a kind of three-dimensional echo between the various layers of the theatrical production: the aural, the visual and the textual. This is evident at various points throughout *Not I*, in particular in the moments where Mouth appears to describe to us with perfect accuracy the physical predicament of herself as performer on stage: 'whole body like gone... just the mouth... lips... cheeks... jaws...never-...what?... tongue?... yes... lips [...] never still a second ... mouth on fire.'⁶⁵ In such moments, the verbal or linguistic event, what Hwang refers to as the 'stage fiction' and the visual or aural stimulus, the 'physical fact' of the performance, can be said to come together or 'converge',⁶⁶

⁶¹ Hwang, 'One Mirror is "Not-Enough" in Beckett's *Footfalls* and *Ohio Impromptu*', p. 370.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 380.

⁶⁶ Hwang, 'One Mirror is "Not-Enough" in Beckett's *Footfalls* and *Ohio Impromptu*', p. 370.

creating a kind of verbal-visual-aural echo chamber, much like Nancy's 'corps sonore', referred to earlier.⁶⁷ This final type of reflexivity of Hwang's framework is perhaps most clearly encapsulated in the so-called 'buzzing'⁶⁸ to which Mouth refers, identified by Steven Connor as a 'correlative of the voice itself'.⁶⁹ Situated on the threshold 'between ground and figure, insisting on being recognized and acknowledged' yet remaining just outside linguistic signification, this 'buzzing' acts as a kind of background to Mouth's speech, an excess or intrusion upon the conventions of authorized or standardized speech, which is nevertheless held in place by those conventions, necessarily entering into dialogue with them.⁷⁰ In auditory terms, the 'buzzing' encapsulates a sort of 'in-between' state, the milieu of the 'not-quite' intelligible or what Connor refers to as 'indeterminable noise'.⁷¹ The play begins and ends in such a state, Mouth's speech emerging as its outer layer, approaching comprehensibility before retreating back into sonic obscurity. Beckett stipulates that Mouth's voice should be heard 'unintelligible behind curtain' for at least '10 seconds' before and after speaking the monologue, 'ad-libbing from text as required'.⁷² The process of layering is further underlined by the fact that Mouth makes reference to the sound of the 'buzzing', drawing it into view or elevating it to the status of dramatic material: 'what?... the buzzing?... yes...all the time the buzzing...dull roar like falls...and the beam...flickering on and off...'.⁷³ It is on this layering effect as well as the 'not-quite' intelligible nature of the 'buzzing' as auditory phenomena that I wish to focus in my analysis of the play. For this, as I hope to

⁶⁷ Nancy, *À l'écoute*, p. 82.

⁶⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 380.

⁶⁹ Steven Connor, 'Making Flies Mean Something', *Beckett and Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 139-153, p. 144.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

demonstrate, mobilizes a contingent, embodied yet always already plural encounter with the subject, a subject constituted in a sharing or clustering of sense.

The principal visual image of *Not I*, a mouth that is physically separated or perhaps cast-off from any kind of identifiable human body, defies theatrical convention in a number of ways. Beckett dispenses with the proscenium arch stage, in what Hanna Scolnicov describes as a ‘radical experiment in abolishing theatrical space’; the ‘complete darkness of the stage stipulated by Beckett for the performance of *Not I* destroys any perception of space’.⁷⁴ Three-dimensional space becomes distorted as the background surges forward, overwhelming the scenic space and producing a claustrophobic enclosure in which sound rebounds and reverberates between invisible walls. The experience of sensory deprivation is shared by both actor and audience, as suggested by Lisa Dwan in a 2013 interview with the BBC, accompanying her performances of *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*. Here she explains the process of staging the play, including the physical demands it makes upon the actor:

I am blackened out and blindfolded [...] and I can’t see or hear and I am strapped by my [...] stage manager into this device and then the harness is closed and my arms are tucked in [...] so I can’t move [...] so my whole body is pressed against this piece of wood and then I [...] go like the clappers.⁷⁵

Whilst apparently offering itself as spectacle, Mouth’s performance upsets the conventional apparatus of perception and interpretation through which an audience

⁷⁴ Scolnicov, *Women’s Theatrical Space*, p. 149.

⁷⁵ Transcription from video ‘Lisa Dwan behind the scenes tour backstage at University of Reading’, part of Tim Masters, ‘Not I: Lisa Dwan’s record speed Beckett’, *BBC News online*, 12 May 2013, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-22397436>, viewed 13th November 2019.

would normally establish the truth of a representation. In the absence of any clear-cut theatrical frame, the stage image refuses the spectator an object of identification. In McMullan's terms, it 'presents a visual representation of the lacking and fragmented subject [...] the very opposite of the stable, specular imago with which, according to Lacanian theory, the ego wishes to identify'.⁷⁶ In other words, it eschews our grasp in a similar way to *Play* (1962), for example, echoing a move made by Nancy in *Corpus*, away from both positivistic and psychoanalytic models of vision and towards viewing as *compearance* or being-with.⁷⁷

The text itself is divisible into five sections or 'life scenes', which, while barely discernible as such in performance are nevertheless highlighted by Beckett in various rehearsal notes.⁷⁸ The first, 'picking cowslips', the second, 'shopping centre', the third, 'Croker's Acres', the fourth, 'courtroom', and the fifth, 'rushing out to tell'.⁷⁹ In life scene I, Mouth narrates the story of a 'tiny little girl' who, now being nearly 'seventy' and while 'wandering in a field...looking aimlessly for cowslips', finds herself suddenly in the dark.⁸⁰ Though the text does not specify, one might infer that the woman has had something like a stroke and is therefore lying 'face down in the grass', insentient and unable to move.⁸¹ The text merely registers that she is in no physical pain, that her 'whole body [is] like gone', and that her mind is still active, indeed her brain 'like maddened' recalls the intervening facts between her being born and her present ordeal.⁸² The other four 'life scenes' recount a series of moments from the woman's past, which stress her isolation, her being 'practically speechless', and

⁷⁶ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 77, 75.

⁷⁷ See McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ Beckett as cited in Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p. 146.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 376.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 381, 380.

her failed attempts at communication with others.⁸³ The third life scene (Croker's Acres) suggests a possible reason for her chronic silence, describing how she has repressed her feelings throughout life: '...or that time she cried...the one time she could remember...since she was a baby...'.⁸⁴

While these 'life scenes', when viewed together, form a kind of story, the text shifts between past and present abruptly, making it difficult to establish a chronological sequence. The already irregular chronology is further complicated by the double or triple-casting of Mouth, as both the younger and the older versions of the 'she' whose life she appears to narrate. In addition to this, the register moves between a kind of semi-objective or 'gossipy' narration and a troubled and strikingly personal account of extreme sensory or physical experience. The speech of Mouth is written in fits and starts, as opposed to fully formed sentences. It consists of units or clauses, punctuated by ellipses, interspersed with stage directions: '[*Brief laugh*]' '[*Good laugh*]', '[*Screams*]' '[*Screams again*]' and '[*Silence*]'.⁸⁵ On occasion, these stage directions are elevated such that they appear as part of the narration, once again confusing the boundaries between text and context, narrative fiction and physical situation on stage: 'should she feel so inclined ... scream...[*Screams.*]...then listen ...[*Silence.*]...scream again ...[*Screams.*]...then listen again...[*Silence.*].'⁸⁶ Although it is possible, in other words, to piece together a story, there is a continuous shift between the different levels of narration, past and present, concrete description and imaginary reflection, a process which further unsettles our ability to identify any specific character or individual as the basis for a rational, psychologically integrated world view. As the brute operations and interjections of the mouth break into

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 377-378.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

coherence, they necessarily rupture the narrative message, and prevent the mood from settling into one register.

In an article already mentioned, Enoch Brater considers the genesis of *Not I*, comparing its structure to Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's film, *Un chien andalou*, made in 1929. Apart from its 'sensational effects', he says, *Not I* shares with Dalí's work a 'principle of organization' insofar as 'a finite series of non-sequiturs, scenes that seem to be related logically and yet, on closer analysis, prove to be not related in this way at all'.⁸⁷ Like Dalí's film, says Brater, *Not I* goads us into believing that there is 'some kind of unified structural logic' between the scenes evoked in the text, when in fact, all we have is 'a series of incidents and pictures floating "in boundless space, in endless time"'.⁸⁸ The relationship between Mouth on stage and the 'she' within the text is also ambiguous.⁸⁹ There are moments in the text when they appear to come together, 'carefully poised' as Brater puts it, between union and disunion.⁹⁰ But the status of the image remains ambiguous, almost or not-quite balanced between identification and non-identification, direction and non-direction, being and non-being.

This comparison brings us back to a point raised earlier, emphasising the state of 'in-between' or 'not-quite' which characterizes the relationships between speaker and text, actor and character, speech and speaking subject in this play.⁹¹ By uncovering the gap between the character and the performer, the performer and the text, the text and its object, this play enables what one might call an expansion and distribution of agency across multiple elements and surfaces, a process which

⁸⁷ Brater, 'Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*', p. 54.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

⁸⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 376-383.

⁹⁰ Brater, 'Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*', p. 55.

⁹¹ Connor, 'Making Flies Mean Something', p. 144.

complicates any straightforward search for self-understanding suggested perhaps initially by the monologue form. Here we can recall Elinor Fuchs in her description of ‘postmodern theatre’ as a theatre in which ‘the human figure is no longer the single, perspectival “point” of stage performance’.⁹² In *Not I*, as previously suggested, this state is literalized in the division and distribution of body parts and functions (speech, sight, hearing) across the otherwise obscure stage space. Within this compilation, the gap between Mouth and its narrative, between speaker and the spoken, is foregrounded, and continually held in tension. Mouth’s movements, or oral behaviours, (here we can think back to Connor’s analysis of the ‘buzzing’), function as a counterpoint to narrative, operating alongside it and expanding the cohesive, stable world of purely linguistic meaning. The ‘not-quite being’ that is Mouth, like the ‘buzzing’ referred to earlier, is closely aligned with narrative. Yet because it does not quite fit in to a narrative framework, it continually calls the latter into question.

This effect is particularly pronounced in those aforementioned moments, where the ‘verbal sign’ or ‘stage fiction’ to return to Hwang’s framework, and the sensory stimulus, the ‘physical fact’ or actual situation of the performance appear to merge or synchronize on stage.⁹³ ‘Out’ is the most oft cited example of this phenomenon, expressing, as McTighe among others has suggested, ‘both the birth of the waif whose life she narrates and the emergence of the word, of speech from the lips’.⁹⁴ Mouth’s words repeatedly refer us to the scenic level of performance, whilst at the same time recalling to the audience the very fact of our own visceral experience as we sit in the theatre: ‘the eyelids...presumably...on and off... shut out the light...reflex they call it...not feeling of any kind’.⁹⁵ In addition to this, the physical

⁹² Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 12.

⁹³ Hwang, ‘One Mirror is “Not-Enough” in Beckett’s *Footfalls* and *Ohio Impromptu*’, p. 370.

⁹⁴ McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 63.

⁹⁵ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 378

process of speaking is outlined in minute detail: ‘...her lips moving...imagine!...her lips moving! [...] and not alone the lips...the cheeks...the jaws...the whole face...all those-...what?... the tongue?...yes...the tongue in the mouth...all those contortions without which...no speech possible...’⁹⁶ While Mouth’s sudden ‘urge to tell’ and her hastening to the ‘nearest lavatory’ produce what McTighe refers to as an ‘uncomfortable alliance’ between words and waste matter⁹⁷: ‘sudden urge to...tell...then rush out stop the first she saw...nearest lavatory...start pouring it out...steady stream’.⁹⁸ During such moments, as both the representation of the narrative and the enactment of that narrative come into view in the same instance, we become aware, once again, of the gap or incommensurability between representation and its object.

In this way, *Not I* foregrounds the materiality of the stage space, at the same time as negotiating a tension between language and its excess, drawing attention away from the linguistic meaning of words and sentences, towards the brute fabric of the stage presentation, underlining our dependence upon the mouth, the lips, the tongue, the teeth for the possibility of vocal expression. It does so, as I have been suggesting, not in the name of a Merleau-Ponty style foregrounding of the body as pre-subjective foundation or origin of sense, but rather to emphasise the Mouth as a vehicle of negotiation, dialogue and exchange. Mouth’s speech incorporates not only the linguistic but other forms of oral behaviour: the scream, laughter in the first section, and a series of pauses in which it appears to be moving yet no sound is coming out. The incorporation of these elements, I suggest, underscores an attempt to negotiate a limit or threshold between language and its other, opening up a space to use a phrase

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ See McTighe, *The Haptic Aesthetic*, p. 66.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

from LaBelle's book, 'at the peripheries of speech', activating a territory alongside the orders of linguistic ordering, bodily integrity, and social acceptability.⁹⁹ This is the sense in which Nancy articulates *bouche* or the speaking mouth in *Ego Sum*, that is as the singular-plural passage of identity which is not gatherable into words as such. This opening out of identity and signification resonates in *Not I*, and can equally be identified in the staging of *That Time*, where the simultaneous grounding and un-grounding of the subject, and the gap between the self as continuous event or series of instances and its representation in language, is exposed and continually played out in the relation between the text, the ensemble of voices, and the stage image.

That Time (1975)

The image is that of an 'old white face, long flaring white hair', floating 'about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre', disconnected both from any kind of body or spoken text.¹⁰⁰ The text in turn is divided up and delivered by three voices, A, B and C, which 'modulate back and forth without break [...] except where silence indicated'.¹⁰¹ According to Beckett's instructions they should 'relay one another without solution of continuity', and in cases where this is unachievable, mechanical assistance should be sought.¹⁰² Walter Asmus describes this predicament in some detail in his rehearsal notes for the 1976 production:

⁹⁹ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 388.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 387.

The voices flow without serious interruption into one another and are only differentiated by the position of the loudspeakers on the left, in the middle and on the right of the 8 foot high platform on which the man is sitting.¹⁰³

The ‘*old white face*’ remains static throughout, the only movements consisting in the opening and closing of the eyes. The separation of the three voices which are seemingly at odds with and external to the image of the severed head, immediately presents a challenge to the conventional organization of stage space. The image is suggestive of ‘an old man on his death bed’, yet, as McMullan has argued, ‘the [...] the spotlit image’ coupled with the positioning of ‘the disembodied head, situated unnaturally three metres above stage level and seen from above’, also defies any such naturalistic associations, disrupting the unity of the stage image and preventing the audience from fully contextualising it.¹⁰⁴ From the outset, then, Beckett denies his audience a stable point of identification, refusing to collapse the elements of performance, the aural and the visual, into a single, unified whole. In doing so, as I will show, he emphasises duality or multiplicity as key to the theatrical encounter.

While *Not I* enacts the struggle of a single voice against itself, or against a unified source of speech, *That Time* plays different voices or units of speech against one another, and against the visual image, thus recalling Nancy’s staging of the vocalization of voice in terms of the singular-plural. As is the case in Nancy’s essay, subjectivity is seen to emerge not in any one of these possible voices, but rather elsewhere, in the spaces between words and images, making itself understood outside language. In this way, as will be shown, *That Time* can be seen to engage with the

¹⁰³ Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁴ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 49.

singular plurality of being, as exteriority and sharing, which displaces both signification and the metaphysical presupposition of the Subject as substance or ground.

The voices labelled A, B and C recount a series of recurring images and themes, the three-part text allowing for a variety of moods and registers. As Beckett recounts, ‘between A, B, C, there must be a transition without interruption, as for example in music from A minor to C major’.¹⁰⁵ While he specifies that ‘the B story is the most emotional,’ while ‘the C story [...] is cold, almost cynical’ the majority of his remarks focus on questions of tempo, pace rhythm and texture.¹⁰⁶ He emphasises for example that the text must have a ‘power of suggestion’ without losing ‘tension’ such that the words acquire ‘false significance’.¹⁰⁷ All this contributes to the ‘flow’ or movement of the text, which should appear ‘murmuring, dreamy’, ‘without being monotonous’, presenting images ‘in the round without a long-winded narrative resulting’.¹⁰⁸ A series of tableaux or impressions are vividly evoked, but, as is the case in *Not I*, they fade as they are played off against each other, circulating and mutating rather than occurring sequentially to form a linear narrative.

As James Knowlson suggests, ‘each of the three accounts is given its own physical setting, its own season of the year, even its own light, as well as its own range of incidents and images’.¹⁰⁹ The setting for A is ‘the protagonist’s former home town with its grey, desolate landscape’¹¹⁰ in which he encounters a series of changes including the closure of the ‘Doric terminus of the Great Southern and Eastern’,

¹⁰⁵ Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, p. 93.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (London: John Calder, 1979), p. 216.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

which impedes his journey back to the ‘ruin where [he] hid as a child’, in other words, to his origins.¹¹¹ The mood is one of loneliness as the people he encounters only ‘gape at the scandal [...] drooling away out loud’.¹¹² The scenes conjured in B appear to establish a direct contrast with those of A, evoking a rural setting with blue sky and ‘wheat turning yellow’, while the atmosphere is nostalgic and mournful, as two lovers sit ‘stock still side by side in the sun’.¹¹³ Here a sense of impermanence reigns as images come into existence through negative statements: ‘no stir of sound only faintly the leaves in the little wood [...] no sight of man or beast no sight or sound’.¹¹⁴ In addition the lovers appear to hover on the edge of something, in a state of in-betweenness: ‘always parallel’, ‘on the fringes’, ‘always space between’.¹¹⁵ As figures they appear puppet-like, in a state of hesitation, delay or suspension, as though awaiting instruction, rather than moving productively towards a goal.

The setting for C’s account is the city of London, with a number of liminal public spaces being referred to including the Portrait Gallery, the Post Office and the Library.¹¹⁶ While individual moments stand out with a sharp precision of visual detail: ‘the old green greatcoat in the pale sun’, the small child reading ‘among the giant nettles’, ‘the glider passing’ overhead, the overall impression is one of invocation, retention followed by relapse, making it difficult to distinguish a clear path and leaving the spectator, like the protagonist, ‘sunk’ or ‘crawling’ beneath the surface of narrative distinction, unable to transcend the ‘mess’ and extract a clear-cut history from the indeterminate matter of memory.¹¹⁷ As McMullan suggests, ‘descriptions

¹¹¹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 391, p. 388.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 393.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p. 392, 389, 392.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 392.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

mirror each other' creating a 'dual perspective' and emphasising on the one hand 'sameness',¹¹⁸ evoked for example in the image of 'winter [...] endless winter', and on the other hand constant variation: 'having turning-points and never but the one'.¹¹⁹

All this contributes to the sense that we are watching a play about play, that is, about self-reflection, introversion and the performance of identity. Indeed, the thread that runs through all three accounts, A, B and C, is that of a search for the Self, coupled with the perpetual failure by the individual to bear witness to his/her own existence, to make up or enact a stable 'I' in and through linguistic representation: 'making it all up on the doorstep as you went along making yourself all up again for the millionth time'.¹²⁰ The play provides no solution to this process of play-acting, of acting out the self, maintaining a continual circular movement by blurring distinctions between the different layers of narrative and preventing stable identification between any one of the particular scenes evoked and that of the figure on stage. All three voices undermine their own status as truthful accounts or representations of events in the Protagonist's past. B's text, for example, ends not with the anticipated image of lost love, but with an apparent recognition of the failure of creative imagination to conjure accurate memories of the past: 'when you tried and tried and couldn't anymore no words left to keep it out so gave it up gave up there by the window'.¹²¹ Similarly, A's speech ends in a tone of resignation, with 'the old scenes the old names' coming back, and the uncertainty as to whether the time described was in fact 'another time all that another time was there ever any other time but that time away to hell out of it all'.¹²² C's final words are equivocal, seemingly undermining the fact of

¹¹⁸ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 54-55.

¹¹⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 388-393.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 395.

the presence of the three voices all together: ‘not a sound only the old breath [...] when you opened your eyes [...] nothing only dust and not a sound only [...] something like that come and gone come and gone no one come and gone’.¹²³ These words reverberate in the darkened auditorium as the lights fade out upon the face and the curtain comes down, prompting us to question once again what it is we have seen and heard, and how these relate to each other.

As with other works, the typescripts for *That Time* shed considerable light on the author’s artistic priorities, linking the play with other works in the Beckett canon and highlighting his aesthetic principles. In Gontarski’s terms, the genesis of *That Time* ‘can be traced through ten versions, one holograph and nine successive typescripts [...] all on deposit at the University of Reading’.¹²⁴ From these typescripts, we can see that the original concept for the play was an ‘Old man (sitting) in dark’, a much fuller and more realistic image than the ‘severed head’ suspended eight feet above stage level.¹²⁵ As Gontarski indicates, however, the shift to a ‘face alone lit faintly’ is made early on, and the second draft of the play already includes the directions ‘as when seen from above’.¹²⁶ In contrast to the notion of the ‘Old man (sitting)’, the ‘severed head’ is not identifiable with any pre-existing context or reality.¹²⁷ It therefore upsets the audience’s ability to frame the action, either on a literal or a thematic level.

Unlike some of Beckett’s other plays, the typescripts for *That Time* suggest a clear format from the outset: ‘3 fold text in single voice coming from text (A). Light

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ See S. E. Gontarski, “‘Making Yourself All Up Again’: The Composition of Samuel Beckett’s *That Time*” *Modern Drama*, XXIII, 1, Spring 1983, pp. 112-120, p. 116.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹²⁶ Samuel Beckett, ‘Typescripts for *That Time*’ as cited in Gontarski, ‘Making Yourself All Up Again’, p. 116.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 116.

(B). Above (C). Recurrence of element time in all 3, e.g. “the time they...”, “that time she”, “one time – we””.¹²⁸ Beckett states that the play should last fifteen minutes, with two pauses, the first pause occurring ‘5 min. from opening/2nd 10 min. from opening’.¹²⁹ The basic components therefore are ‘three changes of voice, [...] three interruptions, each voice interrupting once, each interrupted once’.¹³⁰ This principle of threes is retained throughout the typescripts with variations, resulting in a more complex arrangement of interruptions and divisions for the final version. It has been suggested that the breaks or pauses in the flow of the spoken text designate significant points in the narrative, and indeed the earliest draft of the play outlines what might be interpreted as a struggle for power between the voices: ‘A beginning stops B or C, but for a moment 2 together. A may persist. B or C continue’.¹³¹ However, later manuscripts suggest a different emphasis, with breaks being determined less by content than by timing and length of text.

The struggle articulated in these early typescripts is less one of choosing words and shaping them into coherent narratives and more one of taking language as sonic material, breaking it up into units or motifs, and orchestrating these into increasingly complicated patterns or phrases. What appears to be the focus for Beckett at this early stage of development, is neither the content of the narratives, nor even their thematic division, but rather the formal apportioning of words as materials in relation to the concrete space of the stage. In total, at least fifteen possible patterns are recorded, the final version being a perfectly symmetrical variant of threes. A, B, and

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 117.

¹³⁰ Gontarski, ““Making Yourself All Up Again”: The Composition of Samuel Beckett’s *That Time*’, p. 117.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

C each make twelve statements, or memory fragments, providing 36 statements or ‘versets’ in all.¹³²

I ACB ACB ACB CBA (*Silence*)

II CBA CBA CBA BCA (*Silence*)

III BAC BAC BAC BAC (*Silence; smile*).¹³³

It is worth noting that the final triplet in each of the first two lines is altered, the result being an effect of minor asymmetry, or a rupture in the original patterning. Beckett’s highly formalistic approach and his meticulous attention to rhythm and timing, as suggested in these typescripts, provides further evidence of his non-naturalistic, anti-representational approach, moving towards an understanding of the body and of movement, not as the external manifestation of an internal process, but as an outwardly conditioned sequence or order of events, which cannot be attributed to any one particular individual. As has been shown in previous chapters, this effect links Beckett’s work to a theatrical tradition which privileges stylised or conventionalised gesture alongside the use of masks, oversized and sometimes exuberant costumes with artificial set designs. This particular tradition, which includes the work of practitioners such as Gordon-Craig, Schlemmer and Meyerhold, and which may be said to have its origins in Kleist’s insights about the marionette, seeks to find an alternative to a theatre dominated by the actor, that is, by a particular individual with a personal emotional landscape, this being the direct consequence of an approach which privileges verisimilitude. Instead, these dramatists look to the theatre itself, to

¹³² The term ‘verset’ is used by Ruby Cohn in ‘Outward Bound Soliloquies’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 1, February 1977, pp. 17-38.

¹³³ Samuel Beckett as cited in Gontarski, ‘Making Yourself All Up Again’, p. 119.

convention and form, in order to reconfigure the relation between movement and psychology, to distribute agency among multiple concrete elements, and thus to divest the actor of their privileged status as centre of the theatrical scene.

An example of this process within the text of *That Time*, is Beckett's use of particular exclamations or phrases such as 'for God's sake' and 'when was that', the repetition of which causes them to lose meaning, such that they seemingly no longer have any rational justification within the psychologically informed landscape.¹³⁴ Apart from drawing attention to the process of utterance, the repetition of such phrases draws into view the relationship or tension between language and the body, words and text, the so-called 'choreographies' or 'micro-vocables' which structure the workings of the mouth.¹³⁵ In LaBelle's terms, such 'small interruptions and hesitations' cause delay to or suspend the process of 'linguistic ordering' proper to standard methods of communication.¹³⁶ As minor digressions which create intervals within speech, these phrases provide space for poetic agency, producing a kind of formal resistance or unsettling of linguistic structures from within language. Rather than undermining speech as such, they support what LaBelle refers to as a 'steady stream of thought' whilst simultaneously overflowing its boundaries, operating at the outer edges of linguistic signification.¹³⁷ In the same way as Mouth's gibberish in *Not I*, the convoluted text of *That Time* carves out a space to the side of proper speech and bodily integrity, necessarily stretching the terrain of the mouth and expanding the notion of what passes as language.

In a similar way to *Not I*, this process is bound up with the continued production of the self. As indicated previously, the voices A B and C are described in

¹³⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 389.

¹³⁵ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 63, 132.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132, 135.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

the stage directions as belonging to the figure on stage, coming to him from both sides and above: ‘moments of one and the same voice A B C relay one another without solution of continuity – apart from the two 10-second breaks’.¹³⁸ According to Asmus, Beckett stipulated in rehearsals that the three voices A, B and C should be identified with different times in the Listener’s life: ‘B is the young man, A the middle-aged man and C, the old man’.¹³⁹ The stage space is thus most often interpreted as ‘the inner space of the Listener’s mind or memory’, and Beckett’s own reflections are regularly used to support this interpretation:¹⁴⁰

While he was listening to his own voice he was in the past [...] During the listening everything is closed. In the silence he is startled to find himself in the present, everything is open. It is not decided whether he opens his eyes and the voice stops for that reason or whether the voice stops and therefore he opens his eyes.¹⁴¹

Steven Connor has written about *That Time* in terms of a direct enactment of the situation described in *Proust* (1930), where, as he puts it, ‘it is argued that the mobility of the subject through time, the endless process of “decantation” from the past to the future, makes it impossible to be fully present at any one time’.¹⁴² In a similar vein, McMullan says that the text of the play ‘recreates a myriad of times, spaces and identities, transforming the space of the stage into one that is animated and ruptured by temporal differences [...]’.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 387.

¹³⁹ Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 49.

¹⁴¹ Asmus, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television’, p. 92.

¹⁴² Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 150.

¹⁴³ McMullan, *Theatre on Trial*, p. 49.

Yet there are features of the text which prevent any simple identification of the stage space with that of the protagonist's mind. All three voices address the Listener as 'you' creating a grammatical fissure between themselves, their words and the image of the figure on stage, as well as undermining any suggestion that the process of listening to which we are witnesses is a purely internal one.¹⁴⁴ Difference, here, is not only enacted temporally and therefore inwardly, but rather occurs externally, that is to say, spatially. For not only do the three voices come to us from different physical locations, the image of the Listener's face also repeatedly calls attention to itself, and thus to the physical space of the stage as something separate, impermeable and resistant to transformation. It does so in particular through the sound of the steady, low breathing in the intervals between the speech. The dynamic of the play consists not only in the interplay of textual fragments relayed by three voices, but also in their physical juxtaposition, and their arrangement in relation to the stage image.

Image and text are physically separated, with the text coming from outside the image, yet entering into relation with it. As Connor suggests, A's description of an old man 'drooling away out loud eyes closed and the white hair pouring out from under the hat',¹⁴⁵ resonates strikingly with the image of the figure on stage, which in turn recalls another incident from B's narrative: 'eyes closed nothing to be seen [...] that old Chinaman long before Christ born with long white hair'.¹⁴⁶ As in other play-texts mentioned, there is an emphasis here on looking, on looking again, and also on listening, all of which implicates the audience in 'the play of reminiscence and recall'¹⁴⁷ whilst contributing to the erosion of the text as a single and fixed point of reference, with images being doubled and tripled both from within and from without:

¹⁴⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 388-395.

¹⁴⁵ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 393-4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

¹⁴⁷ Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 168.

‘that time you went back to look was the ruin still there’, ‘where gradually as you peered trying to make it out [...] a face appeared’, ‘eyes closed [...] no sound [...] just a murmur’.¹⁴⁸ While such details, as Connor puts it, establish a link between ‘disembodied narrative’ and stage image, they do so only partially: ‘the figure we see doesn’t have hair pouring out from under a hat, for instance, but “*long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread*”’.¹⁴⁹ In other words, the gap or misalignment between text and stage image is retained throughout. Indeed, it is most evident in the moments where they appear to come close together, approaching identification. In a manner which recalls the paradox of Nancy’s thinking, they come into contact or touch, and in doing so, they realise the impossibility of complete identification.

This effect is enhanced through a series of pauses in the speaking of the text: at three separate moments in the play, the voices stop and we hear the slow, regular sound of the Listener’s breathing: ‘[*Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible After 3 seconds eyes open*]’.¹⁵⁰ The sound is amplified, so that every catch in the throat can be heard. In addition to this, we see the Listener open and close his eyes before the speaking of the text recommences. The only variation in this sequence occurs at the end of the play, when after five seconds the Listener breaks out in a ‘*smile, toothless for preference*’ which is held for ‘*5 seconds*’ before the final ‘*fade out and curtain*’.¹⁵¹ This final gesture reiterates the central ambiguity of the piece, reinforcing the equivocal relationship between text and image, between the idea of the self as internally regulated, and the external choreography of voice or voices which makes up the dramatic material of the play. In a similar way to May in *Footfalls*, we are left wondering as to whether the figure on stage is simply listening passively to the words

¹⁴⁸ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*., pp. 388-390.

¹⁴⁹ Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 168.

¹⁵⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 390.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

that come out of the dark, or whether he is somehow projecting them, a kind of ‘visual analogue’¹⁵² to the process of creating the self, of ‘making it up’ or ‘trying to make it out’ from the ‘lifelong mess’ that is memory.¹⁵³ The face, while taking on multiple personas, both old and young, acts in a similar way to Connor’s resonant ‘stone’ as mentioned in the previous chapter.¹⁵⁴ ‘Obdurate’, ‘resistant’, it acts as a backdrop to a series of iterations, rallying, ‘rebuffing’ and giving body to the multiple voices that fill the space of the stage.¹⁵⁵

The intensity of the breathing as it occurs in *That Time* brings us once again to the terrain of the oral. In the same way as Mouth’s scream in *Not I*, the respiratory event punctuates the straightforward delivery of the text in *That Time*, shifting the focus away from the words spoken and prising open a gap alongside the operations of representational discourse. In so far as it produces a gap or pause in the production of speech, the respiration in *That Time* brings into view what LaBelle refers to as ‘*being on the verge of speech*’ or put another way, a ‘subject under duress by the force of a linguistic order’.¹⁵⁶ As a ‘break’ or ‘cut’ through which the body is revealed to be working, that is to say inhaling, filling the lungs, exhaling, releasing air into the world, prior to or in excess of speech, these moments of breathing highlight the subject as manifested not only in words but in the mouth, forcing us into confrontation with the overflows and residues of language. To give greater emphasis to such moments in Beckett’s work, I borrow LaBelle’s notion of ‘weak speech’ as a form of wording ‘tuned to the delicate and *interrupted* movements of [...] the mouth that squirms in the midst of the stutter’ or indeed any other form of vocal hesitation or

¹⁵² Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 169.

¹⁵³ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 390.

¹⁵⁴ Connor, ‘Resonance’, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 129-131.

malfunction (the ‘lisp’, the ‘mumble’), which delays and agitates the process of ‘linguistic ordering’.¹⁵⁷ Such instances, as LaBelle suggests, allow for alternative modes of thinking, offering ‘agency’ to the ‘weak-mouthed, the weak-footed, [...] the weak-minded’, in other words, the linguistically ‘abnormal’ or marginalised.¹⁵⁸ In this way they delineate a different kind of body, one that conflicts with and puts pressure on the orders of the ‘proper’ or the normative.¹⁵⁹

Beckett explores the capacity of such extra-linguistic instances to break into the order of the representational, in a work written in 1969 entitled *Breath*, which consists purely in the sound of a faint human cry, followed by a single amplified breath, and consequently another cry, identical to the first. The instructions read as follows:

Curtain.

1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold for about five seconds.
2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold for about five seconds.
3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold for about five seconds.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 369.

This short piece might be read as a literal parody of Artaud's theatre of cruelty and particularly his insistence on the breath or 'le souffle' as providing access to shared emotions and meanings, inaccessible via language: 'le souffle accompagne le sentiment et on peut pénétrer dans le sentiment par le souffle'.¹⁶¹ Artaud's attempts to restore body and breath to the theatre, to promulgate a body without organs (*corps sans organes*), manifests itself in an emphasis on the primordial, on spiritual communion, and on the production of networks of shared participation which serve to link actor and spectator at a pre-reflective level: 'il faut pour refaire la chaîne, la chaîne d'un temps où le spectateur dans le spectacle cherchait sa propre réalité, permettre à ce spectateur de s'identifier avec le spectacle, souffle par souffle'.¹⁶² Beckett's provocatively short piece appears to defy the very notion of communication between actor and spectator. Humorously described by the author as a 'farce in five acts', it deliberately fails to satisfy audience expectations, anticipating plays such as *That Time*, not only in its brevity, but also in its rigid arrangement of forms, its symmetrical structure, and its use of amplified sound. Here, the language of the stage is complicated rather than obliterated, doubled and reshaped rather than replaced by an extra-linguistic, non-verbal dimension, which nevertheless has the potential to interrupt and disrupt the theatre as a space of representation.

Both *Breath* and *That Time* mobilise the operations of the mouth, in order to unsettle the boundaries of the spoken, the 'foundational' narrative of 'proper'

¹⁶¹ See Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 201.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 206. As suggested in Chapter One, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the 'corps-sans-organes' in *l'Anti-Œdipe* where it supplements their anti-capitalist theory of production. See chapter one of Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 2013). Deleuze also refers to the 'corps-sans-organes' in the context of a discussion of Francis Bacon's work in *Logique du Sens* (Paris: Minuit, 2013), see for example the chapter entitled 'Vingt-Septième Série de l'Oralité' in this work.

speech.¹⁶³ In doing so, they stage the vocal subject in its singular plurality, as both anterior to and in excess of linguistic signification, operating both inside and outside the realm of the spoken. Thinking back to Nancy, we might suggest that Beckett is here once again tracing the limits of the individual, self-enclosed subject, or rather, to use Ian James' phrase, 'positing a subject which persists only in its being-outside-of-itself, its exteriority, irreducible to any order of the symbolic or logic of *subjectum* which would support or ground it in a given context'.¹⁶⁴ In Nancy's thought, what ensues is a logic of non-identity 'whereby a difference with what is figured is internalized within the figure itself'.¹⁶⁵ In Beckett, and specifically in *That Time*, what emerges is a being characterized by disunity, un-decidability and division, a being defined by its relationship to what it is not, to its outside. Such a being endures only in 'its exposure to an absence of ground', that is, to the uncertainty of its own situation.¹⁶⁶

Returning to the discussion posed at the outset, then, it begins to become clear how Beckett creates a space of doubt or ambiguity around the speaking subject, both through his engagement with the monologue form and through his integration of a 'weak poetics', that is, of vocal material which interrupts and modifies the production of 'proper' speech, and therefore articulates an expanded notion of voice.¹⁶⁷ Like the play of voices in 'Vox Clamans in Deserto', both *Not I* and *That Time* stage the subject in terms of its fundamental multiplicity, that is, as voice-play, transfer and exchange. This multiplicity is distinguishable through its inclusion of the seemingly ineffective surpluses of speech, those vocal productions deemed non-significatory,

¹⁶³ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 135.

¹⁶⁴ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁷ LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 135.

non-communicative and which originate in and draw us continually back to the mouth.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

A Piece of Monologue (1979)

A similar engagement with voice as enacting the singular-plural of existence can be discerned in *A Piece of Monologue*, originally entitled *From an Abandoned (interrupted) Soliloquy*, and written between October 1977 and April 1979 for actor David Warrilow. In Renée Docquois's terms the text of this play is both dialogic and polyphonic: 'on peut peut-être évoquer la notion de dialogisme, qui lui, est polyphonie "inclusion de la parole de l'autre dans un énoncé" et également "concert de voix différentes qui dissent en même temps diverses versions d'une même chose"'.¹⁶⁹ Alongside this, Linda Ben-Zvi has examined the play in terms of what she calls the 'schismatic self' as it appears in Beckett's writing. *A Piece of Monologue*, she says, enacts a 'separation between the speaking subject' and its 'outer' persona:¹⁷⁰

the speaker is not the *I*, the macrocosmic figure facing the world and claiming the use of the first person pronoun, but rather the inner me, that objective self that watches and reports but has no means of independent articulation of being. Unlike *That Time*, where the figure at least opened and closed his eyes and smiled while the voices of self talked, and unlike *Footfalls*, where May moved as Voice spoke her thoughts, here there is a figure that remains impassive, like the figure in *Still*, while the voice within describes the man without.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Renée Docquois, 'Seul le silence est verbe, ou réflexions sur l'absence apparente d'échange verbal dans 'A Piece of Monologue' de Samuel Beckett', Note de recherche présentée en vue de l'obtention du DEA (1984), Université de Lille 3, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Linda Ben-Zvi, 'The Schismatic Self in *A Piece of Monologue*', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 7 (Spring 1982), pp. 7-18, p. 12.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

In what follows, I want to expand these readings by examining the operations of the mouth and the oral in this play, in particular how these serve to multiply, entangle and disrupt the identity of the ‘man’ to which Ben-Zvi refers. For here the speaker, as in *Not I*, attributes another source than himself to the words coming from his mouth. Words come into existence rather clumsily and mechanically, from outside the Speaker: ‘stands there staring beyond waiting for first word. It gathers in his mouth. Birth. Parts lips and thrusts tongue between them. Tip of tongue. Feel soft touch of tongue on lips. Of lips on tongue’.¹⁷² Instead of articulating and performing a series of events and actions, the speaker’s words take the form of stage directions, interspersed with fragments of what appear to be memories. The material elements of performance are thus elevated to become part of the central subject matter of the play. This further puts in question the status of the speaker’s speech as coming from himself, that is, from an originary source, suggesting rather that meaning is to be found elsewhere, outside of the words, in the sharing of voices, multiplied and juxtaposed.

It is suggested in an edition held at the University of Reading that *A Piece of Monologue* is born of the textual body of *Company*, a short prose work equally completed in 1979 and published in French as *Compagnie* a year later.¹⁷³ That the latter text lends itself to being staged in performance is suggested by both Chabert’s and Gontarski’s respective adaptations.¹⁷⁴ The situation described in the opening of *Company*, that of a voice coming to one in the dark, is equally evocative of *That Time*, as is the image of a man ‘sitting’ and listening, which is implied in both

¹⁷² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 428.

¹⁷³ See Charles Krance ed., *Samuel Beckett’s Company/Compagnie and A Piece of Monologue/Solo: A Bilingual Variorum Edition* (New York: Garland, 1993).

¹⁷⁴ Pierre Chabert directed *Compagnie* in Paris at the Théâtre du Rond-Point, 15 November 1984, with Pierre Dux in the solo role. S. E. Gontarski’s English-language version was presented at the Actors’ Theatre’s Half-stage, Los Angeles, in February 1985. See Katherine Worth, *Samuel Beckett’s Theatre: Life Journeys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1999] 2001), p. 166.

works.¹⁷⁵ At times the voice in *Company* speaks in the third person, describing the figure's tormented confinement in the present; at other times, it speaks in the second person, narrating striking scenes from boyhood and adolescence. The text shifts, in alternating paragraphs, from one voice to the other. The first person voice is implicitly acknowledged, and as in *Not I*, makes itself conspicuous through its absence. There is no continuous sequence of events and no unifying narrative. We do not know where the figure is or how he comes to be in his present situation, on his back in the dark. All we know is what he 'can tell by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again'.¹⁷⁶ While *A Piece of Monologue* is written specifically for stage performance, it appears, on first glance, to share many of the characteristics of a prose work. Equally, *Company*, though written as a prose fiction, displays a dialogical structure rooted in the alternation between second- and third-person voices. The two works are therefore usefully examined alongside each other.

In what follows I draw on several readings of *Company*, isolating certain features of the text in order to demonstrate how the two texts (*Company* and *A Piece of Monologue*) operate in similar ways to mobilise the division of self. *Company* concerns itself with the construction of the subject through narrative. Put another way, it experiments with narrative devices in order to express an anxiety about the self, and the origin of a voice or voices in a body. In Nirit Salmon-Bitton's terms, 'the division in *Company* falls not only between voices that differ in tense, style and pronoun but also between inner narrative positions'.¹⁷⁷ From the outset there is a confusion of

¹⁷⁵ Beckett as cited in Gontarski, 'Making Yourself All Up Again', p. 116.

¹⁷⁶ Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁷ Nirit Salmon-Bitton, "'Himself He Devises Too for Company': Self-Making in Samuel Beckett's *Company*", *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring 2006), John Hopkins University Press, pp. 142-155, p. 146.

subject positions, with differing voices over-layering in a manner that blurs the boundaries between speaker and listener, self and other: ‘Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company [...] He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself. He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company’.¹⁷⁸ Here ‘the voice’, ‘its hearer’, and ‘himself’ are all involved in the activity of making-up the self. This ‘behaviour’ can be likened, as Salmon-Bitton suggests, to that of ‘the positions of addressor, addressee, and message in [Roman] Jakobson’s model of verbal communication’.¹⁷⁹ While in Jakobson’s model, the ‘content’ or textual matter is produced, transferred and exchanged externally or inter-subjectively between participants, in *Company*, as Salmon-Bitton states, ‘the communicative process of self-construction is [...] intrasubjective’.¹⁸⁰ In other words, it occurs ‘between the interior narrative positions of creator, reader, and narration’.¹⁸¹ The creator transfers material to an internal critic, who subsequently amends the narration realizing the amendments from within. Meaning and identity are repeatedly deferred as ‘himself’ is passed from creator to critic, examined, altered and passed back in a continuous circular movement. Thus the first person is equally deferred: ‘What an addition to company that would be! A voice in the first person singular. Murmuring now and then, Yes I remember’.¹⁸² Here the critical hearer or internal reader intervenes to warn of the danger of a unifying ‘I’: ‘use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he [the creator] speak to [the reader] and of whom the voice speaks [himself] there would be a first [person]. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall

¹⁷⁸ Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁹ Salmon-Bitton, ‘Self-Making in Samuel Beckett’s *Company*’, p. 146.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

¹⁸² Beckett, *Nohow On*, p. 9.

not'.¹⁸³ The separation and subsequent dialogue between creator, reader, and the narrated must be retained in order for the process of creation to continue.

Such a separation is equally apparent in the text of *A Piece of Monologue*, where the different functions of speaker, internal critic and 'himself' are foregrounded as they participate in the construction of the narration and of the split self: 'All the ... he all but said of loved ones. [...] Nights wore on. None now. No. No such thing as none'.¹⁸⁴ The voice begins to speak before stopping, correcting itself as though provoked by the possibility of an alternative perspective. The speech continues in this stilted, self-effacing way as a statement is made and then retracted, contradicted or amended from within. As Docquois puts it: 'la présence du "him" dans le texte, dans le discours du sujet de l'énonciation qu'est le "speaker" ne confirme, ni n'infirmes, une présence ou une absence réelles sur la scène'.¹⁸⁵ There is, as she sees it 'un débrayage actantiel', that is to say, a disparity between the speaker and the 'him' whom he describes, from which the play derives its dramatic impetus.¹⁸⁶ This, for Docquois, is supplemented by what she calls 'un débrayage temporel' within the text itself:

à aucun moment les temps grammaticaux ne peuvent restituer la temporalité telle que la vit le parleur, entre le passé et le présent il faudrait introduire des intermédiaires qui permettent de désigner un passé presque présent et un présent en train de devenir passé ou la résonance du passé dans le présent [...].¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 426.

¹⁸⁵ Docquois, 'Seul le silence est verbe', p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

As is the case in *Company*, where ‘the second-person narration is consistently associated with the past tense and a lyrical style’, while ‘the third-person voice uses the present tense and the style of reportage’, the voices that make up the narration in *A Piece of Monologue* differ in register, tense and in style.¹⁸⁸ Though the speaker adopts the third-person throughout, he begins with a statement in the past tense: ‘Birth was the death of him. Again’, and then moves abruptly to the present: ‘words are few. Dying too’.¹⁸⁹ This movement between tenses continues as fragments of memory and scenes from the past are communicated in a quasi-poetic style, while actions in the present tense are described in a more straightforward, impersonal tone: ‘Born dead of night. Sun long sunk behind the larches [...] And now. This night. Up at nightfall. [...] Gropes to window and stares out’.¹⁹⁰ Like the second-person narration in *Company*, these reports take the appearance of instructions, perhaps to the reader, or in this case, to the figure on stage who nevertheless remains motionless throughout. As is the case in *Company*, the internal dialogue or exchange between creator or speaker and critic, is essential to the structure of the piece: ‘stands facing wall after the various motions described. That is up at nightfall and into gown and socks. No. In them already’.¹⁹¹ Continually eschewing the process by which the voices of the narration merge to form a single entity, such as an omniscient narrator, Beckett encourages the spectator or reader to participate in the process of recollection, leaving open those gaps between narrator and critic, speaker and actor, text and action, for further dialogue and negotiation.

In another reading, Kateryna Arthur sees the text of *Company* as exemplifying multiplicity, or, as she puts it a ‘double impulse - towards order and coherence on the

¹⁸⁸ Salmon-Bitton, ‘Self-Making in Samuel Beckett’s *Company*’, p. 148.

¹⁸⁹ Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 425.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

one hand and towards chaos and indeterminacy on the other'.¹⁹² This dual propulsion towards separation and at the same time unification or amalgamation, is evident, as Arthur suggests, both in the work's 'structure and in its themes'.¹⁹³ She, like Salmon-Bitton, sees the 'division' and 'accumulation' of perspectives at the heart of the text as productive rather than destructive, that is to say, necessary to the continued process of creation and renewal of the self.¹⁹⁴ Hence she draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'schizophrénie' in *L'Anti-Œdipe*,¹⁹⁵ in order to show how *Company* 'generates contradictory visions' without recourse to any underlying originary or foundational formula, prompting an active reader whilst simultaneously encouraging co-operation or a sharing of agency, postulating the very immeasurability of the text as a source of strength or power.¹⁹⁶ In this way, she suggests, the alternation between the two narrative positions has a strictly meta-fictional function, continually throwing light on the rhetorical process: 'while the third-person commentary tends to be mobile and disruptive, the second-person narrative is frequently devoted to the telling of stories whose mode is autobiographical in spite of the second person construction they adopt'.¹⁹⁷

This analysis is useful insofar as it shows how the double narrative forces attention repeatedly upon the process of narration, prompting multiple perspectives as

¹⁹² Kateryna Arthur, 'Texts for Company' in James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur eds., *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), pp. 136-144, p. 136.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

¹⁹⁵ Central to Deleuze and Guattari's theory, as Arthur suggests 'is the idea that the will to unification or totalisation, whether in analysis or in writing, tends towards unproductive closure.' (See Arthur, 'Texts for Company', p. 138). Hence their concept of desiring machines or 'les machines désirantes', which work as follows: 'Dans les machines désirantes tout fonctionne en même temps, mais dans les hiatus et les ruptures, les pannes et les ratés, les intermittences et les courts-circuits, les distances et les morcellements, dans une somme qui ne réunit jamais ses parties en un tout. [...] La production désirante est multiplicité pure, c'est-à-dire affirmation irréductible à l'unité.' (Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, p. 50.) According to Arthur, then, *Company* is driven by 'clusters of conflicting desires', and is in these terms, a schizophrenic text. (See Arthur, 'Texts for Company', p. 137).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

well as an awareness of the arbitrary, non-finite nature of creative production. This can equally be said of *A Piece of Monologue*, where the alternation between voices and registers brings about sudden shifts in point of view which work to decentre the subject of the narrative, and thus displace the metaphysical presuppositions that serve to ground and secure that subject's position as a self-ascribing identity, as site or locale for the production of meaning. However, here the uncertainty brought about by the internal splitting and multiplication of voices or positions is augmented by the actual presence of the performer on stage, which adds a further layer of indeterminacy. Before concluding this section on *A Piece of Monologue* then, I want to briefly dwell on two accounts of the staging of *Company* by Robert N. Scanlan and S. E. Gontarski respectively which shed light on this process and underline what has been called the 'contrapuntal relationship' between speaker and speech, image and text that occurs in these works.¹⁹⁸ In keeping with my argument so far, I interpret this effect alongside Nancy's thinking of the singular-plural, that is, as the sharing of agency among bodies and technical apparatus that make meaning in their mutual separation or disconnectedness.

As Scanlan states, the challenge in putting a work like *Company* on stage centres on the following question: 'what literal and actual thing is there to "see"? How should one identify and present the source of the words? Who should speak?'¹⁹⁹ Gontarski tackles this problem in his 1985 adaptation of the prose work, by recording and taping the second-person fragments, thus establishing two separate modes of stage action corresponding to the two voices, 'a speaking or hypothesising mode and

¹⁹⁸ S. E. Gontarski, 'Company for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett's Prose' in James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur eds., *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), pp. 193-202, p. 196.

¹⁹⁹ Robert N. Scanlan 'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark', *Romance Studies*, 11, (1987), pp. 23-8, p. 24.

a listening or searching mode', playing the one against the other, 'both visually and aurally'.²⁰⁰ In other words, he invites the spectator to participate in or at least acknowledge the temporal split within the text, by realising this split spatially, hinting at the problem which Scanlan raises between '*being there*' and '*not being there*', whilst exploiting the 'disparity between the fictional situation [...] of which the prose text is an account [...], and the differing situation created by the staging'.²⁰¹ For Gontarski it is this disparity, already hinted at in the prose text of *Company* by the separation of the 'he' voice from the 'you' voice, which provides the dramatic impetus for the adaptation of the piece. Put another way, what Gontarski's stage adaptation attempts to capture and retain is the fact of the inevitable gap or rupture between the event of thought and its representation in language, a gap which, as has been suggested previously, both Beckett and Nancy can be seen to explore.

A similar effect is achieved in the staging of *A Piece of Monologue* which, unlike *Not I* and *That Time*, features an entire human figure rather than a fragment, though like the other works, there is next to no action on stage. A human figure with '*white hair*', dressed in '*white nightgown, white socks*', is set against two other objects: a lamp, '*skull-sized white globe, faintly lit*', and the pallet of a bed, only part of which is visible to the extreme right of the stage thus hinting at a world beyond the stage space.²⁰² While Beckett here exploits the proscenium arch stage with its rectangular playing area, illuminated by a '*faint diffuse light*', he also foregrounds the limits of this set up, emphasizing the stage space as constructed space and the objects within it as fabricated spectacle.²⁰³ This effect is enhanced by the conventional

²⁰⁰ Gontarski, 'Company for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett's Prose', p. 196.

²⁰¹ Scanlan, 'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark', p. 24.

²⁰² Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 425.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

whitening of all stage objects: ‘*white hair, white nightgown, white socks [...] white globe*’ creating a stark contrast with the surrounding darkness.²⁰⁴ The actor’s physical presence, which is itself compromised by the ‘*white hair, white nightgown, white socks*’ is set against the ‘milkwhite globe’ of the standing lamp, an abstract equivalent, with the same dimensions as the actor’s head.²⁰⁵ Both speaker and lamp appear first and foremost as visual components within the frame, presenting a direct formal contrast to the darkness that surrounds them.

The use of the rectangular visual frame and the objects suggesting the interior of a room recalls the television work *Ghost Trio*, discussed in the previous chapter, in which Beckett turns the cinematic medium in upon itself.²⁰⁶ The self-conscious process of framing evident in the opening is recycled in *A Piece of Monologue* where the voice in the present tense describes a figure and a setting almost identical to that which is visible on stage: ‘still as the lamp by his side. Gown and socks white to take faint light. Once white. Hair white to take faint light. Foot of pallet just visible edge of frame stage’.²⁰⁷ The voice then goes on to describe the actions of that figure in the form of stage directions:

Loose matches in right-hand pocket. Strikes one on his buttock the way his father taught him. Takes off milk white globe and sets it down. Match goes out. Strikes a second as before. Takes off chimney. Smoke-clouded. Holds it

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 425-426.

²⁰⁶ Here the image is made up of a series of rectangular shapes, the visual frame of the television screen echoed in the frames of the door and the window and in the rectangular shapes of pallet or mirror, all viewed from a variety of angles and produced from a limited number of camera positions. (See Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 408.)

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

in left hand. Match goes out. Strikes a third as before and sets it to wick. Puts back chimney. Match goes out. Puts back globe. Turns wick low.²⁰⁸

The effects of duplication established by the text draw attention to the various layers of the theatrical performance making us more acutely aware of the inconsistencies between fiction and the stage image. While the situation on stage is strikingly similar to the one described, the two remain fundamentally disproportionate: the lamp featured in the text is lit and relit repeatedly for example while the lamp on stage sustains a constant light throughout. Likewise the figure in the text moves around from bed to ‘window and stares out. Stands there staring out. [...] Gropes back in the end to where the lamp is standing. Was standing’, while the figure on stage is still throughout.²⁰⁹ The introduction of the past tense in this example adds an additional layer of instability, further complicating the ‘present’ of the stage space.

The schism or ‘débrayage’ to which both Ben-Zvi and Docquois refer, is thus visibly enacted at every level of the play’s construction: both within the text itself and between spoken text and visual image.²¹⁰ The precise scene-setting within the text, and the un-mistakable echo between the situation described and the situation on stage, far from establishing a sense of certainty, generates confusion about the relationship of the speaker to the ‘him’, to his story, and to the infinitely multipliable spectator. The question that remains unanswered at the end of the work is that of ‘who speaks’ or where the spoken text comes from in relation to the image of the figure on stage.²¹¹ Here, as is the case in both *Not I* and *That Time*, the spoken text cannot be attributed

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.

²¹⁰ Docquois, ‘Seul le silence est verbe’, p. 3.

²¹¹ See for example, Justin Beplate, ‘Who Speaks? Grammar, Memory, and Identity in Beckett’s “Company”’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Autumn 2005) pp. 153-165.

to a single unified or permanent source. This effect is enhanced by the fact that the face of the figure on stage is in shadow, such that we cannot see clearly the movements and contortions that shape the mouth as it speaks. It is through its absence, in other words, that the mouth makes itself conspicuous. In *A Piece of Monologue*, the masking of the mouth as the origin or source of speech articulates and maintains a tension between speaking as a method for articulating subjectivity, and its other or its excess, which permanently threatens to engulf it like the darkness that surrounds the figure on stage. Here it is the impossibility of the relationship between speech and the mouth that underpins the work: the discontinuous continuity between stage image and narrative situation highlights both the impossibility of the representational act, and the possibilities that lie in its disruption.

The mouth movements and behaviours that I have sought to foreground throughout this chapter form a repertoire of gestures and comportments, influencing and effecting the presentation and perpetuation of self and identity in these works. In presenting these behaviours, I have both drawn on and tried to build on the framework articulated in Brandon LaBelle's book *Lexicon of the Mouth*, in particular the notion of a 'weak poetics' to be found in the sighs, breaths, screams and stutters of the vocal imaginary, in short the 'small interruptions and hesitations' that 'scratch, dub and delay' the workings of the proper, the integrated, the foundations of cultural and linguistic normativity.²¹² Through such additions, Beckett asserts subjectivity as liable to disruption both from within and from without. He demonstrates a belief in the ability to accommodate otherness through principles of difference and non-coincidence. Carving out a space between the material and the immaterial, the animal and the human, the mouth negotiates a tension between speech and its excess. In

²¹² LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, pp. 132-135.

doing so it reveals the subject to be ‘negatively determined’²¹³ in the sense that it is always already in dialogue with forces that are exterior to it, always already negotiating and attempting to ‘tune in’ to the ‘mess’ which surrounds and defines it.²¹⁴ In this sense, the mouth articulates a movement that is central to Nancy’s thinking, and which, as shown earlier, emerges in the course of *Ego Sum*. As a figure, *bouche* works to further dislodge or unground the subject position, to eradicate what Phillip Armstrong refers to as ‘the possibility of establishing the meaning of Being in terms of a self-positing identity, the ‘I’ or ‘One’ as a self-contained unity’.²¹⁵ In this way, it participates in an ontology that seeks to rethink the relation of Being not in terms of individual identities or even intersubjectivities, but rather in terms of the ‘singular-plural’, that is to say, in terms of an always already divided, interrupted and multiplied agency.²¹⁶

This catalogue is neither systematic nor subject to a transcendental law, but rather localized, specific and subject to each particular practice and capacity in which it appears. Beckett exploits the modalities of the mouth in order to generate a space of ambivalence around the speaking subject, addressing the disparity between thought and its representation in language, the creative impulse and the attempt to capture that impulse through communicated expression. As previously suggested, the mouth acts as an eruptive force in these plays, an obstacle or a permanently altering directive within the spoken text, such that this includes but does not assimilate what is other, external or foreign into its composition. Beckett exploits this eruptive capacity of the mouth in order to enact a certain unsettling of linguistic structures, prying open a gap

²¹³ Weller, ‘Forms of Weakness.’ p. 20.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²¹⁵ Phillip Armstrong, *Reticulations: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Networks of the Political* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) p. 126.

²¹⁶ Nancy as cited in Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 216.

on the terrain of signification, and pointing out the power of the extra-linguistic. The subject of Beckett's drama of the mouth specifically gains definition by operating alongside a functional stable body, adjacent to its proper and integrated functions. In doing so, it animates and reanimates the body in parts, a body that operates at the boundary between signification and the flesh.

Conclusion

Agency, The Puppet and the ‘Body in Parts’

My intention in this thesis has been to rethink the notion of agency in Samuel Beckett’s theatre. In doing so I have sought to re-imagine the status of the body as a ‘body in parts’, a concept I have developed over the course of four chapters through close analysis of Beckett’s works, and with reference to a range of different theoretical sources, in particular the aesthetics of puppetry and the post-phenomenological philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy. In concluding my investigation, therefore, a number of threads can be pulled together.

I began by referring to the work of writers: Heinrich von Kleist, in particular his essay ‘Über das Marionettentheater’ (1810) and the post-Cartesian philosopher Arnold Geulincx (1624-1669). As stated, Beckett’s admiration for these writers as expressed in personal and critical correspondence has been duly explored, notably by James Knowlson and Anthony Uhlmann, both of whom emphasise the aesthetic and the philosophical implications. Building on the approach of these scholars, I have sought to return to Beckett’s drama via the work of these writers in order to mobilise a new way of thinking about the relation between movement and reflection. More specifically I have attempted to rethink the relationship between what is sometimes called muscular contraction and the mental functions which are thought to accompany it. This, in turn has enabled me to complicate the status of the phenomenologically embodied subject which, as stated in my introduction, has dominated readings of Beckett’s work in recent years.

To take Kleist’s essay ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ as a starting point for an analysis of the body in Beckett’s theatre is not simply to suggest that the latter’s work

is populated by puppet-like machines conceived or fabricated in the image of the human. Rather it is to acknowledge Beckett's contribution to and participation in a particular counter-tradition, which, I argue, has its roots in a Kleistian approach to theatricality, and which emerges over the course of the first half of the twentieth-century in opposition to naturalism, psychologism and positivism. This counter-tradition places particular emphasis on factors external to the human and the individual, drawing on trends in visual art and focusing on the painterly configuration of the stage space, displaying a particular concern for the properties and relations of lines, contours, points, surfaces, textures and tones, as evidenced by Beckett in his theatrical notebooks. As artists and directors begin to experiment with the architectonic arrangement of the stage, the place of the actor begins to shift. He no longer shapes his environment but is shaped by it, in continuous dialogue with other theatrical elements such as music, rhythm, language and light, all of which carry equal weight in the multi-layered endeavour which implicates both actors and audience alike in the production of meaning.

We might look to a play such as *Come and Go* (1965), where three figures, identified in the script as Flo, Vi and Ru sit side by side on a bench, alternately leaving the stage, shifting along the bench, or returning to occupy a different position until each of the three figures has taken on each of the three possible positions on the bench, in order to emphasise the importance of pattern and symmetry in Beckett's work. Furthermore, we need only glance at the opening of *Endgame*, which consists in a full page of stage directions outlining Clov's actions before any words are spoken, to demonstrate how Beckett separates and choreographs the actor's movements in a way that forces him to listen and respond in a different way to one who is naturalistically trained.

When the interlocutor in Kleist's essay demands to know what 'advantage' the 'puppet would have over a living dancer', the speaker, Herr C replies that this is first and foremost a 'negative gain'.¹ Drawing on recently published interpretations of Beckett's philosophy notes, alongside those which focus on the author's transcriptions of lengthy passages from Geulincx's major study *Metaphysica Vera*, I have tried to redefine this notion of the 'negative' in relation to both the body and to the interior agent in Beckett's works. Incapacitated, un-knowing, yet endlessly expressive, uninhibited by self-consciousness or personal history, yet physically restricted, the puppet teaches us the fragility of straightforward dichotomies, whether this refers to the relation between director and actor, choreographer and dancer, subject and object or mind and matter. As the 'work' or labour of multiple external operations, the puppet is always already in dialogue with its outside, the strings or fibres which fasten, suspend, intrude upon and connect it with other tasks and environments. In this sense, it has no essence, no autonomy, even as a physical object in space. To reuse a phrase cited earlier, the puppet does not 'take place' or 'embody' a subject which acts either as a pivot or a membrane and which reinforces the Christian myth of incarnation.²

An examination of these laws as they relate to the Beckettian actor offers the necessary platform for a rethinking of the embodied or incarnate subject, implicitly addressing questions surrounding intentionality, orientation, interaction and knowledge acquisition that might have implications beyond the field of Beckett studies. Read through the lens of the aesthetics of puppetry, Beckett's plays allow us to consider modes of being in the multiple or the 'singular-plural', to think of

¹ Heinrich von Kleist and Thomas G. Neumiller, 'On the Marionette Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR* Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1972), pp. 22-26, p. 24.

² Weber, 'Being...and eXistenZ', p. 319.

existence, in short, in terms of the 'with' which Nancy repeatedly postulates, and which enables him to move beyond principles of Being as pure presence, that is, as the essential and absolute comingling of the human and material worlds.

For many actors, especially those who have received training in social realism and the Stanislavskian method, Beckett's work may pose challenges. His refusal to discuss the inner workings of his characters, his insistence that the correct gesture, posture or delineation of an outline will produce the desired emotional effect, requires the actor to make particular adjustments: to approach the theatrical situation not as thinker or a conscious imitator but more in the mind set of a trainee, a worker or an artisan to be instructed in a certain way. The actor, in short, must limit the impact of his own emotional experience in order to allow external forces to conduct his actions. Perhaps this, then, is where Beckett's contribution to the twentieth-century stage ultimately lies. In dispensing with a tradition that has consistently relied in one way or another upon human temperament as the primary stimulus for dramatic action, for meaning and emotion, he invites us, spectators and actors alike, to pause, to sit, perhaps to kneel or to stand, to step in a particular direction for a particular number of seconds, to listen, in short, differently, to what is going on beyond the boundaries of our sense of ourselves.

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