

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

“Acting Beckett: Towards a Poetics of Performance”

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by

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Abstract

Samuel Beckett's writing stalks the progress of twentieth century art and culture. Seen as both symptomatic of the practices of high Modernism, as well as influential within the fragmented tropes of postmodernity, his drama is often referred to as exploring the limits of an incrementally reductive approach to performance in which fine margins – through time and space; sound and image – are used in the determination of an authentic rendering of his work. This study argues that it is the figure of the actor, in all its rich signifying complexity, which provides us with a lens through which we can evaluate Beckett's work for theatre and other media.

In considering the Beckettian actor, the study grounds a poetics of performance in a principally phenomenological discourse in which theatre history and popular culture throughout the twentieth century is seen as a key factor both in Beckett's writing and theatre directing, as well as in the often contested development of the actor's craft. Throughout, it is the theme of music and musicality that provides the actor with a starting point, or *modus vivendi*, in which the individual self or personality of the actor is valorized alongside other practices based on acquired technique and its application.

This study does not propose instruction or a range of techniques for the actor to pursue in furthering their understanding of Beckett's canon. Instead, this work establishes an understanding of the Beckettian actor in which strategies of *implication*, born out of sometimes paradoxical representations of silence, absence and abstraction, subordinate acting pedagogies based on programmed curricula. This examination of an implied actor illustrates the various ways in which notable, as well as relatively unknown, actors have sought to reconcile some of these issues. In doing so, the study also interrogates my own creative practice as a director and performer of Beckett's drama over a fifteen-year period.

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Abbreviation:

<i>CDW</i>	Beckett, Samuel, 2006: <i>Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works</i> (London: Faber & Faber).
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Foreword

The actor in Beckettian performance operates within tight margins. Shorn of the imperatives born out of the major acting pedagogies of the twentieth century, he/she encounters a restrictive, but nevertheless creative freedom to express that runs in parallel with those levels of dramatic prescription found in Beckett's canon and which also run counter to his self-professed and progressively intensifying difficulties with the writerly impulse. It is the task of this study to describe the critical, and philosophical background to the emergence of this actor as well as provide a close reading of Beckett's drama as written, directed and performed by the author and his collaborators.

In doing so, this study does not aim to identify a historically isolated phenomenon: an example of an approach to acting that was restricted to those unique creative partnerships that existed between Beckett and his collaborators. Instead, this study claims that the Beckettian actor is also symptomatic of a wider reconsideration of the self in contemporary culture that is the product of paradigm shifts in philosophy and critical thinking. In an article on Beckett, Heiner Müller and their place within a postdramatic theatre aesthetic, Jonathan Kalb, speculates on the wider significance of Beckettian performance and suggests

that the future of theater that resists the norms and assumptions of a materially glutted age lay not in new material or information but rather in changed modes of perception, in fresh means of questioning what is and is not 'I' (Kalb, 2002: 82).

Part of this study identifies, through the lens of the actor, the “fresh modes of perception” mentioned by Kalb. In doing so, the work delineates a genealogy of philosophical thought that starts with a Cartesian emphasis on the *Cogito*, or an approach to body/mind dualism, that is not only the basis for Western thinking on the philosophy and practice of acting but also the starting point for Beckett criticism as it emerged in the period after his first theatrical successes in the middle of the twentieth century. The study moves on to consider the ways in which these parallel Cartesian approaches gave way to an emphasis rooted in a more complex perception of the self, both in the actor and Beckett’s writing, based on the phenomenology of existence and materiality.

The study argues that, partly in the wake of Modernist thinking and dramatic practices, but also in the ways we have arrived at fresh attitudes to self-perception, Beckettian acting is phenomenologically different to other acting approaches in which the existence of a programmed training regime, as well as implied assumptions with regard to the dramatic text and especially the performance of character, has become a dominant discourse. In exploring some of those practitioners who have sought to use Beckett’s texts, and Beckettian acting, as an entry point towards new ways of approaching the craft of acting, the work begins to suggest a ‘legacy’ in Beckett’s literary and theatrical practice that exists for a new generation of performance makers working both in the field of drama, theatre and performance as well as those who work outside, or across, those disciplines. Whilst that ‘legacy’ is not central to this study, it is certainly worthy of further investigation.

Throughout, the sometimes ghostly figure of the Implied Actor pervades the discourse of this study. The work sets out to establish through illustration, as well as contextual understanding, an implied set of conditions that can be defined by the overall production environment in which the actor operates, as well as the relationship to text and the place of the director. In this context, the work also interrogates my own practice as a director and performer of Beckett's drama and, through close readings of text, rehearsal and performance, aims to relocate the Implied Beckettian Actor from out of its ghostly shadows to an illuminated state.

In order to illustrate this conception of the Beckettian actor in terms of its genesis when working on productions with the author, the study focuses specifically on the work of two of Beckett's closest collaborators: David Warrilow and Billie Whitelaw. These two actors have been selected owing to, not only their close and enduring professional relationship, but also because of their relevance to at least three of the four texts highlighted in chapters four and five. Titled 'The Beckettian Actor in Performance', these chapters seek to apply some of the ideas outlined in the earlier theoretical chapters to a close reading of the text as it developed through Beckett's authorship and their subsequent performance both originally and as part of my own performance practice.

Although the approach of the Beckettian actor is one grounded in strategies of implication, a clear dramaturgical framework is also applied and exists as a continuing theme throughout the study. Music is often used as an analogy when describing the structure of Beckett's drama. In theatrical terms, this study posits that this analogy can be extended to include an approach to acting in which such musicality in the text can be

exploited in its realization in performance. As George Devine states, when considering the overt theatricality of Beckett's drama:

one has to think of the text as something like a musical score wherein the 'notes', the sights and sounds, the pauses, have their own interrelated rhythms, and out of their composition comes the dramatic impact (Devine in Schneider, 1986: 249).

Beckett himself can also be cited in terms of his own understanding of musicality as an abstracted device that he saw as a possible answer to the problem of language and its perceived inadequacy as a means of expression:

[...] it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All (Beckett in Cohn, 1984: 171).

Therefore, in embracing an all-encompassing articulation of the term, music and the Beckettian actor is taken as a means of acknowledging what this study identifies as a pervasive effect in terms of the audience's experiences of Beckett's works in performance: that in which engagement with emotion, 'feeling' or a phenomenological sense of subjective resolution is emphasized as much, if not more than, the reasoned deliberation of the intellect. By so doing, Beckett's work enables us to access something fundamental to our existence that endures as an affect well beyond his life and work. As Ruby Cohn says, "Aristotelian drama, which imitates an action, is crystallized by Beckett to the acting which is all we know of living. Beckett's drama draws us to its root

[...] through radicalizing all aspects of performance” (Cohn, 1966: 237).

In its radicalism and its expressive potential the Beckettian actor embodies an impulse that promises much for future generations of performers. This study describes its origins in Beckett’s work, his development of it in production and its current manifestations in recent performances.

Chapter 1: Mapping Beckett through Critical and Performative Perspectives

Music is the art of the hope for resonance: a sense that does not make sense except because of its resounding in itself (Nancy, 2007: 67).

Work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect.

(note from Beckett to Jessica Tandy, 1972, in Brater, 1974: 200)

The Beckettian actor is an Implied Actor. In negotiating the narrow margin that exists between authorial prescription and the performer's creative impulse, those working with Beckett's texts have found strategies in rehearsal – either in collaboration with Beckett himself, or as part of subsequent productions – that are based on the internal rhythms, sounds and inherent musicality of the texts. Additionally, these strategies of implication are also built on an awareness of key absences in the work that in other dramatic contexts might have provided the actor with explicit starting points. Absence of key markers with regard to character, plot, location or context force the Beckettian actor to rely on the existing personal resources of voice, and an overall somatic presence that privileges the actor's own personality or identity whilst subordinating any explicit presentation of character. Beckett's Implied Actor is also aware of the author's own antipathy towards grounded training pedagogies and the potential for interference in the rehearsal process. That, coupled with those levels of prescription found in the texts - the inter-dialogic stage

directions, as well as any preliminary notes or instructions – creates an enticing image of an actor positioned carefully, restrictively, between the directives of the author and his work as well as the professional and personal ‘baggage’ that the actor carries into the rehearsal process.

Scholarly investigations into Beckett’s actor are relatively scarce. Much has been written during the 1970s and 1980s regarding Beckett’s work in production, especially when directing his own work (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988) and Jonathan Kalb’s work (1989) still remains a seminal text when considering a range of productions staged during his lifetime. However, the specific contribution of the actor playing Beckett’s work, as well as the existence of any accompanying aesthetic legacy, has tended to be under-theorized. Aside from a handful of key journal articles considered as part of this study (Brater, 1975a & 1975b), the majority of scholarly work on Beckett’s actors has been restricted to interviews, transcripts and autobiographies. When considering Beckett’s dramatic work, it is the figure of the Director (perhaps for authoritarian reasons echoed in Beckett’s own directing practices) that has dominated the discourse surrounding the realization of his work in performance (Oppenheim, 1994). Key theoretical work on the status of the body both in his prose, as well as his drama, has emerged – especially in the light of postmodern critical thinking (McMullan, 2012), however the actor as the key instrument of an embodied Beckettian stage presence is notably absent from this discourse.

This thesis is structured across five chapters. Chapters one to three consider the relationship

between Beckett, the practice of acting and the artistic and cultural conditions that mark what can be seen as a transformation in our perception of live presence as embodied by the actor. In this sense, the first three chapters progress from a consideration of the broad critical and performative perspectives that surround Beckett and the actor to a closer look at the landscape of contemporary performance practices in which the figure of the actor exists as an enduring motif in the context of both mainstream and avant-garde performance practices. This chapter introduces the key critical, philosophical and performative aspects of methodology that inform the study. Specifically, a phenomenological reading of Beckett's Implied Actor will be offered, in which the significance of an embodied, fleshly presence contrasted with a dramaturgy of enduring absence, or reducing visibility, offers a narrow margin of negotiation within which the Implied Actor is forced to execute her/his craft. Beckett's own presence at the height of Modernist literature, and subsequently post-war theatre practice, as well as being a key influence on postmodern performance, is an important feature of Chapter two. In Chapter three, this study looks more closely at the phenomenon of the Implied Actor as a fundamental defining aspect of Beckettian performance and, in doing so, seeks to locate this phenomenon within philosophical traditions that have arguably transformed in the wake of the paradigm shift from Modernity to postmodernity.

In considering Beckett's work as writer and director, Chapters four and five of this study will examine 'The Beckettian Actor in Performance' as one who is, in turn, mindful of these two creative roles. Taking four key dramatic texts from across Beckett's canon - *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Not I* (1972), *Footfalls* (1976) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981) – the

two chapters employ a shift in register in comparison to the earlier sections of the study that seek to map a range of critical and historical perspectives. From a foundation that looks at the origins and development of the texts, these chapters explore consciously the application of acting practices deployed in Beckett's own productions of his work - as documented either in published form, through the various primary and secondary materials that remain as a record of these productions - and in relation to my own practice as a director and performer of Beckett's dramas in various contexts.¹

In seeking to examine the reductive, sometimes painfully minimalistic nature of Samuel Beckett's dramatic works, scholars have frequently turned to the symbiotic relationship that exists between script and performance. Looked upon as a truism in the theatres of Shakespeare, his contemporaries and onwards, more recent critical thinking about drama from the early part of the twentieth century has sought to establish distance or dislocation between the written word and its physical expression. The work of Structuralist linguistics in the early part of the twentieth century² introduces a critical dialectic that exists in all aspects of signification between that which is the object of description (the *signified*) and the means by which it is communicated (the *signifier*). In isolating the fundamental units of the sign in this way, Saussurian linguistics has provided a foundation on which postmodern/poststructuralist discourse has sought to move on from earlier Enlightenment/Romantic notions of 'truth' in the absolutist sense (a belief system that

¹ It is important to note that, when considering my own performance practice in relation to this study, I elect to write using the first person pronoun for the purposes of clarity and also as a means of differentiating between the analysis of creative processes and objective critical practice.

² For a useful consideration of the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent generation of critics and scholars operating in the field of semiotics in drama, literature and linguistics see Hawkes, T., 2003: *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Routledge).

ultimately leads to the perceived “incredulity with meta-narratives” demonstrated by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) in his essay on the postmodern condition) to an awareness of the liberation of meaning from a perceived straitjacket of traditional hierarchical values associated with text, authorship and theatrical production. It is the purpose of this study to argue that, in Samuel Beckett’s drama, it is the nature of his writing coupled with its realization in performance that enables an Implied Actor to emerge who transcends those hierarchical values in favour of a reciprocal relationship between text and performance that is both symptomatic of the performance context in which Beckett wrote his drama in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as being a significant contributory factor in the ways that performance has developed since his death. It is the Implied Actor in Beckettian performance who also provides a performative legacy to a generation of contemporary practitioners operating across art-making disciplines, as well as from within the traditional boundaries of drama and theatre.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, theatre has faced some significant challenges and transformations that have developed as a consequence of the aforementioned incredulity towards certain metanarratives of recent, and not so recent, theatre histories. These metanarratives include, in particular, dramaturgical assumptions based upon the linearity, logocentricity, and hierarchy of theatrical elements. The effects of these challenges are evident in differences that emerge between structured forms of organized performance and other less apparently coherent approaches that deflect theatre away from its long established habitat of language-oriented poetics to seek other alternative non-textual and body-centred approaches. This has led to the development of various nomenclatures and

labellings of such theatre activity, including some relatively recent examples such as physical theatre, devised theatre, visual and musical theatre, amongst others. These labels are aimed at underlining aspects of theatre practice that would have been perhaps neglected, bypassed or just temporarily underestimated during different periods, under different circumstances, and according to the particular necessities of individuals and communities that needed and created theatre activity as a means of expression.³

After shifting the emphasis of the theatrical act towards the actor at the turn of the twentieth century – incorporating her/him in what Alison Hodge, in her account of actor training in the theatre during the last century, argues was “a revitalized role as a theatre maker” (Hodge, 2010: xxii) – various theatre practitioners in the West continued to give more space to the performative dimension of their work. With their practice, they challenged categories and developed a resistance to compartmentalizing performance practices into genre and media. This attitude led to a continuum of interdisciplinary activity which also saw the emergence of a new wave of non-representational aesthetics that veered away from literary foundations so long considered central to the construction of dramaturgy in theatre. A paradigm shift was inevitable, one that led to a reality where practitioners developed performance expressions that challenged audiences with their intrinsic, and arguably ontological, hybridity.

³ As Simon Murray and John Keefe claim in the opening of their critical introduction to *Physical Theatres*, “[t]his is a book about intersections, cross-overs and spillages. It is a book which is trying to understand some key features of contemporary Western theatre practice, but at the same time striving to unearth and [re]articulate modes of theatre history which often seem to have been hidden from view or subject to a strange amnesia” (Murray & Keefe, 2007a: 1).

In articulating this paradigm shift, Richard Schechner argues that in the context of academic study, “the new paradigm is ‘performance’, not theatre. Theatre departments should become performance departments” (Schechner, 1992: 9). Schechner’s position, considered controversial at the time, is not one that should be considered solely in relation to the politics of higher education in North America or, indeed, much of the western world. The article from which these ideas come is one that is symbolic of a more generalist shift or widening of critical perspective in the latter half of the twentieth century. This shift can be described, on one level, as a move away from the consideration of the performing arts as essentially building-based disciplines; hidebound to the constricting traditions of orthodoxy: training, aesthetics, criticism or institutional politics. From another perspective, the emerging field of Performance Studies can be described as an eclectic combination of inter-disciplinary communities of academic interest in which the diverse interests of anthropology, linguistics and philosophy carry as much significance as those of theatre, literature and the rest of the performing arts. Despite its criticisms (principally based on the slipperiness of the term *performance* and its perceived status as a discipline that “covers everything” (Napoleon, 1995) and, perhaps, nothing), the emergence of Performance Studies in the 1970s and 1980s is contiguous with the proliferation of a range of performance practitioners and artists whose work has become increasingly difficult to define within the critical frameworks of traditional theatrical or performative discourses. Philip Auslander⁴ goes as far as to refute Schechner’s assertion that the academic shift

⁴ Auslander charts the nature of this critical shift in his book, *From Acting to Performance: essays in modernism and postmodernism*. Written in 1997 as a collection of previously published essays on theatre and performance in the light of postmodern/poststructuralist thinking in the 1980s/1990s, his work is important in setting out the implications of not only the impact of this line of critical investigation on the status of the performing body, but also its significance in charting what Richard Schechner described as a new paradigm for theatre in the Academy (Schechner, 1992).

toward Performance be described as a change of paradigm. Citing Thomas Kuhn's vocabulary of scientific revolution, he reminds us that "a new paradigm not only replaces the exiting one, but *invalidates* it [...] if you accept the new paradigm, you must reject the previous one" (Auslander, 1997: 2-3). In this regard, Theatre cannot therefore become a subsidiary or *enclave* of Performance Studies as it represents a fundamentally discredited set of ideas in which further dialogue with the new paradigm becomes impossible. For Auslander, the shift marked by Schechner is, instead, more of an *articulation* of the Theatre Studies project; a project in which many of the fundamental questions posed by Theatre scholars can be applied equally to those engaged in the study of Performance.⁵

Performance Studies as an emerging academic discipline, as well as the framework for a paradigm shift in performance practices, is offered partly as a means of establishing background context to the prevailing landscape of contemporary performance that emerged during the 1970s and 80s. Aside from the various academic debates, not without controversy, that took place during the time when the first Performance Studies programmes were commencing in universities as far afield as North America and India, a relationship was also developing between those students of the new discipline and the community of artists and practitioners who began to make performance work sometimes as a direct response to their academic experiences. In identifying these bodies of practice, it is

⁵ Auslander is not alone in his critique of Performance Studies. In the same *TheaterWeek* article as that cited above, Davi Napoleon questions the integrity of Performance Studies in relation to more established academic disciplines. She suggests that in offering an eclectic diet of disciplinary approaches, gathered under the umbrella term of Performance, students are unable to substantively advance their deeper academic understandings. For Napoleon, Performance Studies is essentially "anti-disciplinary" (Napoleon, 1995). For more on the origins and approaches to Performance Studies, see Stucky, N. & Wimmer, C. (eds.), 2002: *Teaching Performance Studies* (Southern Illinois University Press).

also important to document the ways in which these shifts in perceptions of the body, the actor and the identity of the performer have also given rise to new performance disciplines that have, in keeping with the inter/multi-disciplinary approaches of Performance Studies and academia, sought to contest, and often transgress, the traditional aesthetic boundaries inherent in both performing and fine or creative arts practices which historically have been held in place by an unquestioning critical establishment.

The outcome of this shift of paradigm was a ‘turn to performance’ in theatre that Hans-Thies Lehmann, in his articulation of the postdramatic critical paradigm, considers as one of its conditions. The shift implied by the turn to performance is framed, amongst other things, around the de-hierarchization of the different layers that constitute theatrical performance. The postdramatic context advocates a non-hierarchy of means, thus quashing Aristotelian notions of subordination. Lehmann, in fact, argues that beyond dramatic theatre the process is different:

[P]ostdramatic theatre is *not simply a new kind of text of staging* – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information (Lehmann, 2006: 85, emphasis in the original).

This framing responds to assertions made by various theatre practitioners in the West who, rather than approaching theatre as a multimedia activity, adopt an inter- and intra- relational dynamic to the various layers that constitute their work. This is an important distinction that promotes a practice that feeds on a relational dynamics of processes, rather than the delineation of different layers of creative organization. For the purposes of this study, the principle of relational dynamics is based on an understanding of those processes of change and transformation based on the relationship between different elements, rather than their place in any established cultural or aesthetic hierarchy. Following this understanding, different layers and/or ideas are not approached individually but rather as relationships, thus transforming binaries such as body-mind or tempo-rhythm into unified phenomena. It is this approach to the various elements of theatrical production that are not only a symptom of the performative and philosophical paradigms described in charting the shift away from a Cartesian emphasis on the body in performance, but which also offer a pertinent organizational framework for the study of the actor in relation to Beckett's drama.

Another aspect of the postdramatic condition that leads to practices of non-representation, making it particularly relevant to this study, is that emphasis is shifted from the literary basis to performance action. Indeed, as Italian theatre maker Eugenio Barba argues, "all the relationships, all the interactions between the characters or between the characters and the lights, the sounds and the space, are actions. Everything that works directly on the spectators' attention, on their understanding, their emotions, their kinaesthesia, is an action" (Barba & Savarese, 2006: 66). Barba, in fact, speaks of "simultaneity" as an important dimension that, together with the linearity of the plot, gives life to the "actions at work" in a

performance.⁶ This attitude adds a vertical dimension to the traditional linear, accepted norms, in the construction of dramaturgy that has a direct relevance to the way this study will frame its investigations and understandings.

The ‘turn to performance’ paradigm also resonates with the effects that recent developments in performance studies are having on the theatre event. As a reaction, and in response to these developments in the theories of performance and contexts of practice, this study will investigate acting as a phenomenon and the impact of an approach to performance predicated on music, and musicality, in terms of its performative dimension in Beckett’s theatre and the legacy it left. Although concerned with the auditory properties of Beckettian performance and their manifestation in both the dramatic texts and key performances, this study also considers the relational dynamics that exist between the musical and the somatic dimension of the performer in the course of devising dramaturgies for performance. This is not to say that the work will suppress or elide completely the significance of words spoken - their lexical and grammatical meanings as uttered by actors within performance scores. Instead, it takes the impact of a musical approach by the actor, in terms of its auditory qualities and overall tonal character in delivery, as an important precursor to our understanding of Beckett’s texts in performance.

In considering the ‘performative dimension’ the study considers the doing of an activity more than the conceptualization or writing of it. It is what James Loxley, in his account of

⁶ Eugenio Barba expounds on the idea of concatenation (or linearity of the plot) and simultaneity in dramaturgy in his article “Dramaturgy” in Barba and Savarese, 2006: 66-71.

performativity and its relevance to theatre and performance, calls the “quality something might have by virtue of being a performance” (2007:140).⁷ With regard to theatre, this study refers to the means whereby something is performed, i.e. both the processes of rehearsal the actors go through in order to present their activity to an audience, and the activity of the spectators when sharing what the actors present in performance. For the purposes of this study, any detailed consideration of training and pedagogy in relation to the preparation of the actor will be subordinated in favour of a concentration on rehearsal and the moment of performance itself, in which various internalized processes that might relate to a range of vocal and somatic practices are made manifest for a spectator. Later chapters will go on to elucidate the presence of the Implied Actor in Beckettian performance who is, in essence, a *gestalt* phenomenon in which her/his repertoire of skills, abilities, techniques and practices is the accumulated outcome of a varied background in performer training or other pedagogical contexts. This varied menu of attributes bears similarities to that proposed by Eugenio Barba and his work on ‘barter’, or cultural exchange, with the Odin Teatret theatre collective.⁸ For this study, it is the moment of exchange between actor and spectator that is of interest, rather than the means by which the sum of collected parts that define the actor are determined.

⁷ This study will acknowledge the “double history of performativity” (Loxley, 2007:141); one stemming from J. L. Austin, the other related, via Judith Butler, to performance theory, and will be using the term in the way it is used within the context of the latter. With respect to the former, James Loxley argues that performativity “has not necessarily been borrowed from Austin, [...] nor from the intertwined traditions developed in response to his work; or if it has been thus borrowed, it is the term rather than the concept that has been transplanted” (2007:140). In performance theory, performativity denotes “the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration” (140). By performance, Richard Schechner’s understanding that “performance is the whole event, including audience and performers” (Schechner 2003: 84) is preferred. Schechner’s understanding is important in that a musical approach to acting is effective only when addressed in terms of performer-audience interaction.

⁸ For a useful consideration of his work on processes of ‘barter’ or cultural exchange, with Odin Teatret especially, see Watson, I., 1995: *Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret* (London: Routledge).

Rather than positing a binary between literature and performance, one aim of this research is to question the function of the actor as simply an interpreter of authored texts, and to consider how musicality and corporeal performance practices can be deployed in the realization of Beckett's drama so that audiences are challenged to engage at the level of emotion as well as intellect. This distinction between the musical and the somatic acknowledges what Murray and Keefe consider as one of the elements that define the difference between physical theatre forms and text-based theatre, namely, "a distinctiveness, rooted in the performer's body as starting point, in the compositional and dramaturgical strategies employed in the composition of the emerging performance text" (2007a: 18). In a contemporary context, where the performative dimension has developed as a foundation for action, key questions for this study emerge. How does the use of musicality and corporeality by the actor create a new mode of performance in Beckettian drama? In identifying this new mode, how does this approach to performance create a theatre of affect that prompts emotional and intellectual engagement?

This study will argue that through an approach to musicality that is rooted in somatic as well as auditory practices it is possible to address the sensorial dimension of performance in a direct manner and, within a phenomenological framework, promote the theatre event as lived experience. Operating in parallel, as well as separate from the performing body, the Beckettian actor is required to adopt a flexible understanding of the term 'musical'. Mary Bryden describes the breadth of approach to musicality, as found in Beckett's wider canon, in the context of listening as a receptive practice:

One still needs an explanation of what predisposes to that intention [to listen actively] in specific contexts. [...] There are, I would suggest, two main reasons. The first is that Beckett's texts exhibit an extraordinarily acute attunement to sound: not just to noise, but to intimate, ambient sound. The second is that there is a peculiarly rich role allocated to silence in Beckett's writing (Bryden, 1998: 24 – my comment in parenthesis).

In dealing with this “attunement” to the everyday sounds and noises of the natural, and manufactured, world, Beckett's actor is one that is invited to exploit not only that material associated with traditionally asserted tropes of character and individual psychology, but also those points of intersection between foregrounded, semantic meaning in the words spoken and everyday, background ambience – often characterized by silence. It is this invitation that also marks a shift not only in approaches to acting but also in our cultural predispositions. Marvin Carlson summarizes the aforementioned shift of twentieth century paradigms as one in which an immanent Modernist aesthetic of presence has been replaced with a poststructuralist aesthetic of absence "which accepts contingency and the impingement of the quotidian upon art" (Carlson, 1996: 149). This slippage between the immanent and self-contained practices of Modernism – in which we witness the artist's servitude either to the literary text or to a prevailing ideology – and the ephemerality of a contingent postmodernity, also offers a musical analogy in the dynamics that exist in the realization of Beckett's drama in performance. In considering the Beckettian actor, this study explores the transformations that occur when translating an act of creative expression from one form to another. The parallels that exist in those transformations from the written to the performance text are also evident in musical practices and the process of translation

from the composer's score to the musician's performance have provided a number of composers, with a significant interest in Beckett's work, fertile ground in which to explore further transitions in their own music or across disciplines (especially when working on text-to-music adaptation).⁹

The dynamics of this relationship between processes of creation provide a foundation on which to build an argument for a poetics of Beckettian performance in which the actor is central. In making use of the term, 'Poetics', this study seeks to move on from those received literary definitions¹⁰ towards an enlarged awareness that acknowledges the problem associated with the rigid compartmentalization of ideas according to disciplinary boundaries. Contemporary arts practices, especially in the realm of digital technologies, have sought to establish base principles, critical as well as analytical, for the study of nascent art forms¹¹ and, in the context of performance practices, have emphasized the act of

⁹ Luciano Berio used the text of Beckett's *The Unnamable* as a sung element of his *Sinfonia* (1968). Also using elements of Mahler's Second Symphony, Berio was drawn to Beckett's awareness of the abstract qualities of time, and its passing, that when linked to the rest of his score were able to "say what cannot be spoken" (Bryden, 1998: 189). Philip Glass echoes this view when asked of his views on the Beckett actor as a musical instrument: "I can say things in music that can't be said in words [...] Music has fluidity. It exists in a world without objects and colloquial complications, and so we have a certain freedom in music that we don't have with words" (ibid: 193).

¹⁰ In literary terms, Jonathan Culler (1997) distinguishes between poetics and hermeneutics as two inter-twined branches of modern literary criticism. The latter focuses on textual meaning whereas the former emphasizes the ways in which the elements of the text combine to produce effects on the reader. Historically, There is a substantial heritage associated with Western applications of the term. From Aristotle's categorization of the elements of dramatic poetry in antiquity to more recent attempts to systematize a raft of twentieth century practices such as stage naturalism, feminism and also a 'poetics of the oppressed' - used as a founding set of principles in applied theatre practice.

¹¹ For example, see Glazier, P., 2001: *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press) in which he emphasizes the importance of "thinking through making" (Glazier, 2001: 6), an articulation of Poetics that echoes early derivations of *Poiesis* as the ancient Greek verb "to make" and which came in use as a means of describing "creative production esp. of a work of art" (OED) in the mid nineteenth century.

making and those often indistinct combinations of materials and ideas that characterize the creative process.

For Beckett's actor, a poetics of performance is based on dramaturgies of paradox and indeterminacy in which live stage presence is contrasted with a sometimes literal, metaphorical or implied absence. It is those strategies of implication that are of particular interest in this study. Jonathan Kalb writes¹² that during his lifetime Beckett had "not established an authorized style of acting" (Kalb, 1989: 37). As a director of his own works, Beckett would facilitate the means by which his actors came to the text with fresh eyes in order to apply their own sense of technique or style to the given circumstances offered. Often these circumstances would have musical resonances, as seen in this often-quoted piece of correspondence to the director Alan Schneider in the late 1950s:

My work is a matter of fundamental sounds [...] made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. [...] that's all I can manage, more than I could (Cohn, 1983: 109).

The gaps between signifier and signified that would manifest themselves in many of the difficult reified stage images combining with the sometimes dense, but poetic, lyricism of

¹² Kalb, J., 1989: *Beckett in performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

the spoken word leads Kalb to suggest that it is the position of ambiguity itself that is a key component of this implied actor's craft in approaching Beckett:

That simple standard, that idea of considering ambiguity as a positive performance value, is really all the critical raw material one needs to discuss a poetics of Beckett performance (Kalb, 1989: 38).

Therefore ambiguity and an approach to the Beckettian actor based on musicality mines those grey areas of discourse that exist between musical and linguistic expression. In doing so, it is important to note that the two modes of expression should not be seen as mutually separate, and therefore distinguishable. The philosophy of music has concerned itself with the relationship between 'meaning' and 'expression'. Andrew Bowie writes:

The important issue [...] is the differing ways in which something can be construed as 'meaning' something. [...] The tone and rhythm of an utterance can be more significant than its 'propositional content' and this already indicates one way in which the musical may play a role in signification. Judgement on whether music possesses meaning in the way natural languages do would seem to presuppose an account of verbal meaning that allows it to be strictly demarcated from whatever it is that we understand in wordless music. Analytical philosophers of music tend to assume that an account of verbal meaning has been established, and that this is what allows them to attempt to determine the status of musical meaning. However there are good grounds for doubting whether such an account really exists (Bowie, 2007: 3-4).

Music and musical expression should therefore be seen, in relation to acting, as an inter-dependent phenomenon as well as a tool at the disposal of the actor. It is also a phenomenon that operates across cultural boundaries. Music has often been important in non-Western as well as in Western theatre and the Noh dramas of Japan are but one example of the foundational role of music in many non-Western theatre practices. Japanese actor and playwright Motokiyo Zeami (1363-1443), in his treatises on Noh performance practices, made constant references to music and how musical elements, including song and rhythm, are inseparable from drama. In his accounts, Zeami went into detailed explanations of the ways in which actors should use their voice in relation to the pitches and modes of songs used during performance, and underlined that during the working process, “rhythm must be understood throughout, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end” (Zeami & Hare, 2008: 441). Furthermore, Zeami advised actors how, before approaching the dramatic text, they should first master these musical elements. When giving instructions concerning the initial stages of apprenticeship, which according to him starts at the age of seven, Zeami was clear: “You should not [...] instruct the child to do things apart from singing or Sparring or Dance. Even if he is capable of dramatic imitation, you should not teach him such techniques in any detail” (ibid: 27). While still referring to a dramatic text, Noh Drama is a form of theatre where musical elements are an important foundation for the generation of dramatic practices.

In the West, the obvious example is opera, in which music plays the dominant role in conveying the drama. However, the music is still based on a literary text – the libretto – and the musical score creates another fixed text, one that is arguably more fixed than a spoken

dramatic text. Although Richard Wagner (1813-1883) in his idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* sought to make the constituents of opera more coherent, they remained nonetheless subservient to the originating dramatic idea. Wagner's own naturalistic approach to theatrical production, however, clearly contradicted the symbolism of his dramatic ideas. It took the Swiss theatre maker and visionary Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) to recognize that the *mise-en-scène* could be treated as abstractly and lyrically as the music. A musical dimension is also evident in the way Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) used music as a means of control for both the actor and the director during rehearsals. Meyerhold, as Robert Leach explains, "paid particular attention to each scene's internal rhythm and to the whole production's through rhythm" (2003: 165). His musical approach, like Appia's, is the result of his rejection of naturalistic styles of acting. Nevertheless, as with Appia, music remained largely in the service of dramatic texts, rather than being developed as an independent dramaturgical method. Much of the Modernist avant-garde that came to act as a significant influence on the remainder of twentieth century theatre has also adopted a musical approach to performance. The Dada performers of the Cabaret Voltaire, and later manifestations in Paris and Berlin, expressed an interest in the performative exploration of sound through the tribal, 'brutist' practice of simultaneous or 'noise' poetry. German Expressionist drama also explored an anti-naturalistic approach to performance through the telegraphic delivery of its key texts in performance. Some of these forms are considered in Chapter three.

For Beckett, musicality was also a way of presenting theatre in a more formal manner. Beckett's texts are full of repetitions, pauses, rhythms, and other quasi-musical nuances that

became his main preoccupation when staging the plays and which also reflect his own personal interests in the form.¹³ As an author, Beckett's musicality started with the literary text and became the key reference point for the realization of the work in performance when engaged as a director. In this key interface, the actor's role is a key feature and their collaborative status in production is one that is not lost on more recent exponents of Beckett's work. Lisa Dwan echoes this emphasis on musicality when writing about Billie Whitelaw's contribution to acting in Beckett's drama: "She taught me that truth has a sound, a timbre. I will always be in her debt for this" (Dwan, 2014). The relational dynamics that exist between Beckett as a writer and director of his work, and the creative interventions of the actor, are a key aspect of this study.

Use of the term 'musicality' indicates an approach to performance and theatre making that adopts some of the essential elements of music including rhythm, tempo, and melody. This understanding of musicality is directly related to the physical as well as auditory dimensions of performance, and is applied to the actor's presence. This approach develops notions of the Implied Actor around the use of rhythmic and melodic associations that are proposed as alternatives to rational or logocentric approaches. A musical approach to performance does not privilege the literal representation of character. Neither does it prioritize any pre-ordained or preconceived literary narrative, as was the case with some of the practices of those practitioners mentioned above. The function of the approach formulated in this study is different from that of the musical score and the dramatic text as

¹³ James Knowlson writes of Beckett's interest in Music, especially the time spent listening to the works of Beethoven, Schubert, Haydn and Brahms, with his friend Avigdor Arikha: "Listening to music was essential to him" (Knowlson, 1996: 495).

developed in opera in the West. A musical approach to acting Beckett stems from the inherent and explicit resources of the actor as applied to the text in the moment of performance. This, in fact, responds to other body-oriented perspectives mirrored in Lehmann's commentary on the postdramatic when he argues that:

Despite all efforts to capture the expressive potential of the body in logic, grammar or rhetoric, the aura of physical presence remains the point of theatre where the disappearance, the fading of all signification occurs – in favour of a fascination beyond meaning, of an actor's 'presence' of charisma or 'vibrancy'. [...] The body becomes the centre of attention, not as carrier of meaning but in its physicality and gesticulation (Lehmann, 2006: 95).

Acting processes, therefore, are concerned not only with the way the work unfolds over time (as a musical composer might arguably assume). Rather, they are developed in terms of spatial relations and physical manoeuvres, including gestures and movements, performed by the actors. Here the energy contained in any moment of the performance is a quasi-musical energy generated by the actors.

The musicalization of theatre is considered as one of the "postdramatic theatrical signs" (Lehman, 2006: 91-93). Arguably, one of the reasons for this musicalization in theatre is an awareness of the inadequacy of language as a fully satisfactory vehicle of communication. Various critiques of language and language-centred mechanisms and practices led to an awareness that triggered Artaudian non-representational and non- text-based approaches to

theatre. As Matthias Rebstock argues, when framing the field for what he together with David Roesner propose as ‘Composed Theatre’,

[t]he fundamental criticism of text and language as primary elements in the theatre has been leveled since the end of the nineteenth century. This critique led to a crisis of the psychological character and linear uninterrupted dramaturgy and has given rise to forms of theatre that were forced to secure the coherence of their works on the basis of other non-textual, non-dramatic approaches, integrating principles of structure and form that contributed to compositional approaches and ways of thinking (Rebstock & Roesner, 2012: 28).

This study argues that one of the ways that one can enhance non-textual or non-representational approaches to theatre is through musicalized processes. This argument acknowledges French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Nancy’s understanding that “music [...] never stops exposing the present to the imminence of a differed presence, one that is more “to come” [*a venir*] than any “future” [*avenir*]]” (2007: 66). Therefore a musicalized approach to theatre has the potential to activate processes that are not referential to an ‘other’ outside the work. It propels, instead, a presence that is self-referential, existing within the work itself, developed through a process of ‘becoming’, i.e. a process of affirmation related to self-referentiality which is an innate musical quality.

[Music] calls to itself and recalls itself, reminding itself and by itself, each time, of the birth of music, that is to say, the opening of a world in resonance,

a world taken away from the arrangements of objects and subjects, brought back to its own amplitude and making sense or else having its truth only in the affirmation that modulates this amplitude (ibid: 67).

An environment, after Beckett, in which performers and makers of theatre can develop dramaturgies that venture beyond the “arrangement of objects and subjects” is the logical extension of this study, which investigates the products of a musical approach in theatre. Nancy, who critiques representation via a phenomenological account of the act of listening, makes the point that music, because it refers to itself, is beyond the subject-object binary upon which the Cartesian construction of knowledge is based. In view of this understanding this study argues that when developed as a non-representational process via musicality, theatre has the potential to reach beyond this binary. While reference to subjects and objects remains possible, it need not be a determining factor in the development of this approach. Through musicality, alternative means of non-representation can be adopted for a process of composition of action framed around the postponement of the moment of closure in performance, and articulated in terms of what Phillip Zarrilli has defined as ‘Psychophysical acting’.¹⁴ This emerges as a key post-Stanislavskian discourse which seeks consciously to move away from traditional approaches to earlier Cartesian body/mind dynamics and which can be readily applied to the Beckettian actor. The final section of this chapter will consider further the relationship between Beckett’s actor and musicality, specifically in the context of the later plays.

¹⁴ See Zarrilli, P., 2009: *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (London: Routledge). His work in this field, and his body of performance work on a range of Beckett’s dramas, is considered in Chapters two and three.

This chapter locates the status of the actor through the aforementioned paradigm shift in dramatic theory and practice as illustrated in the dramatic works of Samuel Beckett for stage and other media. However, it will seek to demonstrate that whilst the Beckettian Implied Actor operates at the forefront of the contemporary avant-garde(s)¹⁵ in terms of audience perception, physical execution and philosophical thinking, it is a status that finds echoes within a Modernist tradition that is firmly rooted in Beckett's own interests as an artist and scholar. Beckett's instruction to Jessica Tandy (that she work on the audience's nerves rather than its intellect)¹⁶ speaks to the commonly held and unshakeable belief that stage acting is wholly reliant on the sometimes mystical *communion* that exists between actor and spectator.¹⁷ For that reason, this chapter will seek to establish an understanding of

¹⁵ In locating Beckett's actor within the context of avant-garde performance practice, this study operates with an understanding of Richard Schechner's critique of a contemporary avant-garde tradition as found in Schechner, R., 1993: "The five avant-gardes or... or none?" in *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London: Routledge). His formulation of a 'historical' contrasted with a 'current' avant-garde (nuanced with 'forward-looking', 'tradition-seeking' and 'intercultural' articulations) works with this study's assertion that Beckett's dramatic works operate across the chronological spectrum of modern and contemporary performance practice.

¹⁶ This note was given to Tandy during rehearsals for the first production of Beckett's *Not I* at the Lincoln Centre, New York City in 1972. Beckett's instruction to Tandy (quoted at the top of this chapter) came at a difficult point in rehearsals for the first production. Prior to rehearsals, Tandy had irritated Beckett through a line of questioning in relation to his text that did not correspond with his own perceptions of how the piece should be read: "What had happened to the woman in the field? for instance; had she been raped?" (Knowlson, 1996: 591). For Beckett, *Not I* was a piece that could not be comprehended at the level of narrative logic or intellectual interpretation. In keeping with much of his late work for the stage, it is a piece that operates in the moment of performance itself, at a point when words delivered via this particular 'stream of consciousness' technique cease to take on conventional meaning. The gap between the arbitrary Saussurian relationship of signifier and signified is extended to breaking point and in many ways 'swallowed' by the mesmeric presence of Mouth on stage. For Beckett, audiences not only show a reluctance to engage 'intellectually' with the conventional meanings of the words spoken, they unconsciously surrender this traditionally-held obligation in favour of an immediate connection with the rhythm, shape, pace or overall musicality of the sounds emerging in performance.

¹⁷ Modern and contemporary theatre practitioners have sought to re-discover the primal relationship that exists between audience and performer. From the Modernist preoccupations with tribal cultures (cf. Antonin Artaud and his fascination with Balinese theatre) to those in the 1960s who looked to a fundamental reduction of the theatre event, the idea of theatre as secular communion has gained

the status and social function of the actor in the context of modern and postmodern thinking that has in some part contributed to our awareness of the actor as it has developed over the last century. This in turn provides a foundation on which to consider, both in this and in Chapter two, more recent thinking on the nature of the Beckettian actor from key points in the progress of the substantial critical works that exists in the field of Beckett studies.

Beckett's work is of particular interest in the context of those paradigm shifts in critical thought that have occurred throughout the twentieth century. Whilst the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded in 1969 emphasizes "his writing", there is an inherent paradox here in terms of some of the questions Beckett raises in his work that are associated with a pervasive challenge to conventional orthodoxies: of author and work; of text and reader; of script and performance; play and audience; actor and spectator. The awarding committee's summary of his Nobel prize goes on to acknowledge his output "which - in new forms for the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation".¹⁸ This study argues that whilst such a "destitution" of the human condition is certainly a key theme that echoes across the range of Beckett's output, and can be identified certainly as a theme that characterizes the concerns of Modernism in all its forms, his is a destitution that emerges not just in the philosophical sense implied by the Nobel Prize citation. Destitution, or poverty - to use a synonym – is also a feature of the developing aesthetic that pervades

currency at the time that Beckett was writing his increasingly reductive dramas. Jerzy Grotowski, when working on his 'Theatre of Productions' in the 1950s/60s, believed that "the actor's gift of self-sacrifice had the potential to realize some of the fundamental aspects of ritual, for which he was searching in the theatrical experience: i.e. an act of self-revelation and communion between those present which would consequently permit deeper knowledge and experience of self and others (and hence change)" (Kumiega, 1985: 143).

¹⁸ "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969". *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2013. Web. Accessed: 6 July 2014. <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/>

theatre practice in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is found in the ‘Poor Theatre’ of Jerzy Grotowski, as well as the ‘Rough’ or ‘Immediate’ theatres of Peter Brook, or the ‘Third Theatre’ of Eugenio Barba. In the same year as Beckett received his Nobel Prize for Literature, Peter Brook published his seminal text on theatre, *The Empty Space*. Through his own polemical examination of the ills that had befallen mainstream Western theatre practice – the “Deadly” theatre that had infected our whole perception of the cultural process that theatre-going had become; as well as our programmed understanding of the works of Shakespeare in performance – Brook offers an alternative model based on a poverty of production and, indeed, the broader human condition that translates to a theatre that is elemental, stripped down and made bare. He, amongst others, advocates a reductive approach to performance making that places a renewed emphasis on community or shared experience at the expense of financial profit or commercial expediency. It is an approach that enables Beckett to distil centuries of critical debate around the relationships that exist between actor and spectator, or artist and society, in to stark visual representations. These images are often rooted in conflicting depictions of fleshly presence contrasted with ambiguous, perhaps beguiling absences that stretch the spectator’s comprehension of plot and circumstance. An example can be found in his later work *Catastrophe* (1982) in which the silent figure of The Protagonist provides audiences with a defiant, provocative closing image of the artist operating within a totalitarian state.¹⁹ In that moment, it is the poverty of

¹⁹ *Catastrophe* takes its title from the Aristotelian formulation of “an action bringing ruin and pain on stage, where corpses are seen and wounds and other similar sufferings are performed” (Aristotle, quoted in Sportelli, 1988: 126). Beckett’s fictional character, Malone, talks of one of the effects of catastrophe being our ability to recognize in man “what stuff he is made of” (Beckett, 1994: 255). In this play, the character of The Protagonist stands emblematically as a victim of a repressive regime, in which his gesture of defiance can be seen as just such an expression of the human spirit under duress.

this image of man at his most vulnerable that perhaps encapsulates the “destitution of modern man” so lauded by the Nobel Prize committee.

Beckett’s work at the end of the 1960s was similarly preoccupied, albeit for differently motivated aesthetic concerns. His early works for the stage - beginning with *Waiting for Godot* in the mid 1950s – had seen a progressive and, indeed, incremental sense of reduction in terms of the dramatic structures of his writing. The early two-act drama had reduced to ever more sparse, distilled reflections on the human condition, provoked partially by his own personal inability to come to terms with certain mental obstacles in his development as a writer. In an unpublished interview with Monica McCutcheon in 1983 he claims to have found it “harder and harder to find different ways to say the same thing”. Almost simultaneously, the period from the end of the 1960s onwards marks a significant turn towards the language of picture and visual metaphor in an attempt to mitigate his own perceived inadequacies of the written/spoken word. In his early essay on Proust, Beckett states “There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication” (Worton, 1994: 74). His subsequent works for the stage and television would consequently become characterized by an ever more refined approach to staging as well as overall stage picture. *Breath* (1970); *Not I* (1973); *That Time* (1976); *Quad* (1984), are four selective examples of dramatic works with a heavy emphasis on visual engagement and which in the case of one (*Quad*) mark Beckett’s on-going fascination with the exploitation of emerging new media technologies, in this case television.

Beckett's pre-occupation with the fallibility of language goes hand in hand with his distrust of overtly representational art forms. In the same essay on Proust from 1930, he describes "realistic art" as a "grotesque fallacy" and a "miserable statement of line and surface". As Modernism began its retreat from the strictures of language and the perceived tyranny of implied creative hierarchies, Beckett begins his own creative odyssey that ultimately results in a body of work that straddles comfortably both Modern and Postmodern discourses. Drawing for influence from the Modernist figures of Joyce and Yeats at the start of his career and ending his life in the midst of poststructuralist, Derridean deconstruction, Beckett's work resonates at key moments during these tumultuous times in Western art and culture.

It is against this cultural background that the body in Beckettian performance negotiates its position. The Modernist retreat from language in the 1920s and 30s served to render the theatricalized body as a vehicle for differently inflected approaches to meaning and signification invoked by a generation of artists now committed to anti-literary, anti-art statements of cultural intent. The Dada movement, arguably, began this trend with their post-war frustrations expressed via new techniques such as simultaneous poetry and, with it, an understanding of simultaneous performance, in which our conventional understandings of linear plot development and with it the emotional trajectory of a dramatic character, are challenged.²⁰ Simultaneous poetry, invented by Tristan Tzara during this period, consists of material that is read in different, often nonsensical, languages and with

²⁰ For a closer consideration of the dada performer in relation to modern performance theory, see Melzer, A., 1994: "The Dada Actor and Performance Theory" in *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore (MA): Johns Hopkins University Press).

contrasting rhythms and tonalities. It is delivered simultaneously by a range of performers and therefore can be seen to adopt a musical approach to the scoring of the work that formed the basis for simultaneous approaches to performance. These early twentieth century performers of the *Cabaret Voltaire* (especially Hugo Ball and his seminal performance *Karawane* – written and performed in 1916) began to explore an approach to performance that rendered in flesh and bone those emerging ideas in literature that progressively subjugated the conventional meanings of language and consciously strove to extend and stretch the potential gaps that existed between signifier and signified. In choosing to perform in a cabaret environment, the Dadas' work facilitated a deconstructive approach to performance (and with it the process of acting) that begins to pre-figure much of what was to follow in Beckett's theatre.

The setting for these performances was what Michael Kirby calls a “non-matrixed environment.” Kirby speaks of the performer in traditional theatre as performing within a matrix, a created world of time, place and character. The dada performer [...] performs outside the matrix of character and time. The time is now. The performer is himself. (Melzer, 1994: 60-61)

Whilst this can be seen as the beginnings of a significant retreat from the artistic and literary orthodoxies of the late nineteenth century, it is important that the status of the body, and with it the iconic image of the actor, is seen in its proper historical context. The

twentieth century, in theatrical terms, has been viewed by many scholars²¹ as the century of the Director; a point at which the convergence of technological advancement, economic opportunism and socio-political reform necessitates the establishment of creative leadership and aesthetic direction as a means of harnessing the increasingly complex industrial as well as artistic phenomena placed at the disposal of a theatre company. It is at this point in the industrialization of mainstream theatre practice that the status of the body and, by extension, that of the actor, begins to be questioned.

Our understanding of the actor works in tandem with our understanding of what it means to act. Classical scholarship unearthed from the traditions of Athenian and Roman antiquity reveals a close understanding of the significance of action - those processes of doing: of speaking, of gesture, that clearly have just as much significance in the everyday world as they do in the aesthetic realm of the theatre. These processes of doing are impossible to separate from the human vessel engaged in the activity and, as witnesses, we consciously or not read individual qualities of identity, persona and perhaps even the notoriety of the man or woman carrying out that function. From this early period in our documented understanding of the function of the actor, what is most apparent is the blurred distinction that exists between the actor's aesthetic function and that of his social function as a member of the community. In both of these roles, he is seen as a quasi-shamanistic figure – at once a

²¹ Bradby, D. & Williams, D. 1988: *Directors' Theatre* (London: Macmillan) is one of the first major studies on the role of the director as a peculiarly twentieth century phenomenon. More recent studies, such as Delgado, M., & Rebellato, D. (eds.) 2010: *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London: Routledge), have sought to locate more recent reviews of significant practice in the context of political and cultural transformations in European society.

member of the community (the theatre community gathered to watch a performance or a crowd of citizens witnessing an act of oratory, say) but at the same time, at one remove from that same community. The actor, the orator, the rhetor stands between the audience and the object of performance (theatrical performance, courtroom trial, parliamentary debate etc.) and it is this act of witnessing or representation that is a recurring theme in much of the Modernist and contemporary criticism to have emerged in the twentieth century and beyond. In Beckett's theatre, scholars have been acutely aware of the interactive nature of the actor-spectator relationship, as well as the representational nature of the actor's role. This is most obvious in a piece such as *Not I* (1972) – and discussed further in Chapter four of this study - in which the actions of 'Mouth', a disembodied presence suspended eight feet above the stage floor and lit by a single spotlight around the teeth and lips, are mediated through the presence of the 'Auditor', a non-specific figure downstage who appears simultaneously to qualify, explain or mitigate Mouth's presence *on behalf of* the audience watching.²² It is a role that appears to acknowledge explicitly the responsibility of the spectator to 'complete' the theatrical performance but which also recognizes the role of the actor in facilitating that act of completion. Michael Beresford-Plummer also articulates this mode of acting in his rehearsal reflections on the playing of Beckett's *Footfalls* (1976).

The actors discovered that the creative role of the spectator bore similarities to their own role as actors. It was necessary for the spectator to be in

²² After initial publication of the text, the Auditor was removed from most subsequent performances of the play.

the same mindscape as the actor. (Beresford-Plummer, 1996: 79)

Before looking more closely at the range of scholarship that has emerged during Beckett's life in relation to the question of acting and the body, it is important to consider the historical progression of ideas surrounding this phenomenon. Contemporary scholars operating mainly within the field of Performance Studies have developed a bibliography of criticism that seeks to establish degrees of performance activity in relation to the term acting. In addition to a generation of theatre practitioners, especially those emerging in the 1960s and 70s, who openly celebrated the theatre event as a shared or communal experience, additional playwrights and scholars sought consciously to develop ideas and performance material that turned away from the fixed and immutable relationship between actor and spectator towards a more fluid relationship that allowed for ambiguities as well as interactions. Specifically, Michael Kirby's seminal article, *Acting and Not-Acting* (1969), sets out to identify a taxonomy of acting in the aesthetic realm that is based on the size and magnitude of the performance rather than degrees of status, power or responsibility. This will be considered below, in addition to a number of other key texts, however it is important to raise Kirby's work at this stage given his emphasis on a spectrum or continuum of acting that differentiates between 'not-acting' at one end of a continuum and 'acting' at the other. It is this identification of a potential for slippage between these two points on a notional continuum that acknowledges implicitly the loosening of borders between not only the relationships between actor/character and actor/audience, but also

those that existed across arts disciplines²³ and which provide a backdrop throughout the 1960s against which Beckett's dramatic forays into visual abstraction as well as his technical experimentation with electronic media are a consistent theme.

Kirby's system of acting and not-acting is one based on degree: "Degrees of representation and personification are 'colors', so to speak... artists may use whichever colors they prefer" (Kirby, in Zarrilli, 1995: 58) and ranges from the absence of 'pretence' (non-matrixed performing) to the most 'complex' acting at the opposite end of his continuum. On the face of it, Kirby's system offers a sophistication of the question of acting that is a long way from the issues affecting classical scholars, however it is worthy of mention here as his work aims to distinguish between the two states: "Acting can be said to exist in the smallest and simplest action that involves pretence" (ibid: 46). Beckett mined a reductive territory that sought to re-define what might be considered valid in theatrical terms. As Tom Stoppard observes: "Historically, people had assumed that in order to have a valid theatrical event you had to have x . Beckett did it with x minus 5. And it was intensely theatrical." (Stoppard in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006: 283-284). In this context, his work clearly operates in a liminal space between presence and absence.

²³ For example, those active within Fluxus, an international network of artists, composers and designers noted for blending different artistic media and disciplines since the 1960s. They have been active in Neo-Dada noise music and visual art as well as literature, urban planning, architecture, and design. Fluxus is sometimes described as intermedia. See Smith, O., 1998: *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press).

The historical avant-garde of the mid-to-late twentieth century was consistently to challenge the nature of text, language and the status of the theatrical body. Beckett's career would develop across this period of rich artistic proliferation and persistent questioning of the status of the actor in the light of these developments. This chapter will continue with an examination of the key philosophical foundation for more recent considerations of the theatrical event and the position of the actor's body within it. For the purpose of this study, it is the impact of a phenomenological discourse on later twentieth century criticism that is of most use in framing this articulation of the Implied Actor.

Phenomenology and the Actor

Often viewed as a critique or, at the very least, a response to the Structuralist/poststructuralist ideas of Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida, phenomenological readings of the relationship between theatrical performance and the embodied presence of the actor emerged in the 1980s. As an antidote to the poetics of absence espoused by many of the poststructuralists, Bert O. States's *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (1985) and Stanton B. Garner's *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1994) aimed to re-centre the debate surrounding theatre and perception in favour of the physical properties that serve to define human existence, of which the body is perhaps the most significant.

Up until this point in the late twentieth century, the Avant-Garde tradition in theatre, which had often, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, stressed the bodily presence of the actor, tended after Derrida to turn from presence to absence, destabilising meanings and displacing the subject. This theoretical tension between a metaphysics of presence and a Derridian metaphysics of absence has echoes in much late twentieth-century performance theory, which often provoked tension between the Structuralist and semiotic concept of theatre as a site of messages and meanings and a poststructuralist concept of performance as a site of desire. More recently, critical discourse across the arts, humanities and social sciences has undergone a discernible ‘turn to affect’ in which the philosophical foundations laid by earlier phenomenologist readings of human experience have been consciously applied in ways that have embraced interdisciplinary approaches towards the understanding of human feeling or emotion and its affective potential in reaction to a range of social and cultural contexts. In the field of Theatre and Performance Studies, this turn to affect has resulted in a range of studies that have sought to engage directly with theories of spectatorship and the impact of performances on not only the level of the intellect or rational thought, but at the level of feeling and reflexive physiological response.²⁴

Bert O. States, although primarily interested in the phenomenological operations of theatre, saw these phenomenological concerns as working in tandem with the operations of semiotics, leading to the conclusion that there was room for a dual understanding of theatre that recognized both its referential function, concerned with information and meaning; and

²⁴ For an example of the ways in which dance studies has worked with the discipline of neuroscience in order to examine the physiology of audience response, see Ehrenburg, S., Jola, C., Reynolds, D., 2011: “The experience of watching dance: phenomenological-neuroscience duets” in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1-21: 17-37.

its more phenomenological performant function, seeking to please or amaze an audience by a display of exceptional achievement.

His book, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (1985) can be seen as a response to the growing force of semiotic and Structuralist discourse in theatre criticism. His work situates itself in a relationship towards what had become the dominant analytical tool of the 1980s by adopting a stance that was admittedly un-scientific in its broad phenomenological approach but which was able to adopt a position at one remove from the sometimes neutralized semiotic process of meaning construction. His is a phenomenology “least interested in the psychology of the actor but in the psychology... of the audience viewing the actor [...] We want to know what we see *in* and *through* the actor as the instrument on which the text of the play is performed.” (States, 1985: 19). His text is worth considering in some detail.

In part one, he considers scenographic or spatial relationships that exist in the context of theatre practice during both early Modern and Modernist eras. In part two, he turns to the actor by considering the twin concerns of the actor’s relationship to the dramatic text as well as the actor’s connection with audiences. His theorising is prefaced with a strenuous assertion of the need to consider phenomenology and semiotics as parallel discourses. In addressing Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) consideration of the phenomenology of perception, States is keen to look for an approach to theatre criticism that enables these twin discourses to operate as mutual but separate discourses. For States, theatre semiotics denies the status

of ‘feeling’ or ‘sensation’ either in the figure of the actor or the spectator: “In addressing theater as a system of codes it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theater makes on the spectator.” (States, 1985: 34). He quotes Merleau-Ponty as a means of qualifying this assertion: “It is impossible... to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts.” (ibid).

As a discourse founded primarily on the constructs and mechanical workings of language, semiotics approaches the creation of meaning on stage as a linguistic exercise. For States, this denies the kind of *sensory* engagement that theatre offers the spectator and which is difficult to account for purely in terms of linguistic constructs. Speech, as the prime verbal means by which conventional meaning is communicated to the spectator (via the voice channel of the actor), exists simply as a medium, a vessel in which content is conveyed to the spectator. It is the content which serves to not only provide an articulation of the meanings inscribed in the content but which also animates the medium itself. It is the difference between the ‘How’ and the ‘What’ of the poet’s message. Both these terms are engaged in a symbiotic relationship of mutual support. The actor playing Lucky, in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, for example, is able to occupy an ambiguous role throughout the play as a down-trodden, servile retainer – completely subordinate to his master, Pozzo. For the most part, his is a silent presence that intrigues the spectator with his compliant stance that is underpinned with a discernible defiance towards Pozzo as a representative figure of authority. This defiance is confirmed towards the end of Act 1 in his renowned ‘tirade’ or rapid stream of consciousness that punctures the character’s silence and provides another dimension to his stage presence. A *semiotic* analysis of this speech would

place an emphasis on the relationship between verbal/aural transmitters and receivers in regard to actor-spectator communication. It might focus on the rhythms of the speech and the extent to which *meaning* is facilitated or denied via this approach to delivery; how the actor's/director's decision-making has disrupted (or not) the audience's ability to create meaning out of the text in performance. A phenomenological reading of this same speech might prioritize the extent to which the sensory experience of the audience is facilitated by the actor's performance; the same analysis of delivery: rhythm, pace, pitch, timbre etc. would move beyond a consideration of the channel of communication in favour of a nuanced description of the subject positions or pro-nominal modes that exist. States explores this in part two of his book, where the relationship between actor and text/audience is explored. It is in his articulation of the relationship between actor and audience that his understanding of the ways in which the actor addresses the audience can be applied to Lucky's tirade. States offers the following matrix as a means of describing the potential shifts of key during any given performance:

I (actor)	=	Self expressive mode (lyric)
YOU (Audience)	=	Collaborative mode (Epic)
HE (Character)	=	Representational mode (Dramatic)

(ibid: 214)

The self-expressive mode, for States, is a highly individualized mode in which the actor is consciously drawing attention to her/himself and her/his virtuosity. Many of the great actor-

managers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century provide good examples of those arresting moments in specific theatre productions where the skill of the star performer is given full vent.²⁵ Arguably, the drama of this period²⁶ facilitated this performance mode. From the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, in which either the soliloquy form or the comic skit was practiced for high and low characters, it is possible to observe the operation of this pro-nominal mode. In one play: *Macbeth* - for example – the eponymous figure's darkest moments are captured in the extended monologue form, whilst, in close proximity, this is balanced by the comic relief of the Porter's speech (II.iii) in which, arguably, Shakespeare provides the actor with a loose improvisational score around which the star performer (Will Kemp in the original production) is given full rein to execute his comic skills in an act of complete self-expression, to use States's terminology. In the case of Lucky, in Beckett's *Godot*, his extended monologue has entered the canon of modern (or Modern-ist) texts available to young actors looking to make their mark on the acting profession. Thus:

LUCKY:

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public
works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God
quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua
outside time without extension who from the heights
of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves
us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown
but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda

²⁵ In the 18th century, actor-managers such as Colley Cibber and David Garrick gained prominence and in the 19th century the tradition was extended through the work of actors such as William Macready, Charles Wyndham, Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree. See: Donaldson, F., 1970: *The Actor Managers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).

²⁶ The repertoire usually consisted of a combination of the works of Shakespeare, popular melodramas, and new dramas, comedies or musical theatre works. The era of the actor-manager was geared to star performances, such as Henry Irving's role in the 1871 play *The Bells* (by Leopold Davis Lewis).

with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell
are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire
flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire
the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so
blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even
though intermittent is better than nothing but not so
fast and considering what is more that as a result of
the labours left unfinished crowned by the
Acacacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-
Possy of Testew and Cunard...

(*CDW*: 42)

A speech that, at the level of surface meaning, resembles a comic satire on academic discourse (that which Beckett himself might have encountered in Dublin and Paris during his early years as an academic), in purely formal terms becomes a challenge for the actor with multiple possibilities and interpretations. For the actor cast in this role it represents, at this mid-way point in the script, a culminative pinnacle against which his success or failure will be measured. As with Beckett's later, shorter dramatic works that made a more direct and central engagement with the stream of consciousness technique,²⁷ the density of the monologue and the opacity of the implied conventional meanings provides more in the way of performance potential than it denies. As will be explored elsewhere in this study, the actor has the option of abandoning any attempt to make sense of the text in favour of an approach that embraces an acknowledgement of the musical qualities that the words offer, affirms play, and shuns the tyranny of the word. Derrida's *Logos*, or subjugation to the

²⁷ This can be defined as a literary technique readily associated with the Modernist novel of the early twentieth century but with origins in the late nineteenth century. Used in literature "to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind" (Cuddon, 1984: 660-1), Beckett's usage of the technique in drama may well have been influenced through its use by James Joyce, who Beckett assisted on the research for his novel, *Finnegan's Wake*, in the 1920s. It is a technique that readily shuns narrative chronology in favour of free association as a means of emulating human thought processes.

arbitrary relationships between sound and meaning, are here made manifest in Lucky's speech and also provide us with an example of States's articulation of the self-expressive pro-nominal mode. Part of his illustration of this mode also uses a musical allusion: "Whatever they are *about* is always less important than what they display [...] the opera soprano who is not expected to disappear into her role as a dying tubercular, because it is impossible to sing properly and die properly at the same time." (States, 1985: 216). For States, self-expression and vocal technique go hand in hand as the inherent semantic meanings in the written text are subordinated to the performer's abilities to put on display the full range of vocal technique.

The second pro-nominal mode States offers is the *Collaborative* state, a condition in which the actor, consciously or otherwise, acknowledges the presence of an audience occupying the space or place in which the performance occurs. The 'I' of the self-expressive mode is here replaced by the 'YOU' of the collaborative mode, in which deictic marking as a function of dramatic technique employed by the playwright can be deployed by the actor in order to point outwardly from stage to auditorium. States acknowledges that the 'WE' pronoun is also appropriate in this context however it can be seen to subdivide to the 'I' of the actor and the 'YOU' of the audience in a way that also offers a continuity when looking at the model overall. This is a mode in which the audience is progressively implicated in an act of *conscription* and, for the purposes of this study, provides us with a useful context in which to consider the Beckettian actor, in particular the actor performing in his later dramas. Conscription, or the act of 'writing together' is a common feature of dramatic technique and tends to exploit the peculiar physical, as well as psychological relationship

between individuals gathered in a space to watch a play. It acknowledges a shared public intimacy; a paradoxical state in which public display and private emotions co-exist in the service of a wider artistic as well as an often commercial, imperative. It is a relationship that is often playfully conscious in its acknowledgement of a 'real' universe beyond the fictional confines of the dramatic text and the managed theatricality of the spectacle. The audience can simply be referred to obliquely as an implied presence in the satirical texts of Aristophanes or made a more explicit part of this collusive alliance between performer and spectator as seen in later theatricality such as that found in the late seventeenth century. States refers to the comic aside, typically found in many English Restoration comedies. Often expressed through the character type of 'the clever servant', the audience is made to feel part of the action, indeed actively colluding at some points, even if this actorly reference is one in which the audience is part of a generic description. At no point are they made to feel as if they might 'step in' to the action in order to assist with the many traps and pitfalls encountered by the comic principals. However, their presence is a vital part of the aside and there is also an underlying certainty implied in the comic aside that should they be absent from the performance, the action could not continue in the same way.

Beckett, as a *doyen* of the direct theatricality and complicit referentiality of the British Variety or Music Hall theatre (that emerged out of a nineteenth century tradition in which oblique or indeed direct contact with the audience was a feature), deploys numerous devices and techniques as a means of highlighting audience conscription. Early in his stage career, this is seen momentarily in *Waiting for Godot*:

Estragon moves to center, halts with his back to auditorium.

ESTRAGON: Charming spot. (*He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.*) Inspiring prospects.

(*CDW: 15*)

Estragon's turn, followed by an advance "*to front*" in order to confront his public with an ambiguous compliment punctures the air of fourth wall naturalism that has pervaded what, up until this point, has been a somewhat austere, self-enclosed portrayal of a fictionalized, but desolate, landscape. Beckett constructs an environment in which there is a heavy emphasis placed on the relative isolation of the two tramps, whose chief responsibility is to wait for an ill-defined acquaintance. It is an environment that encourages an atmosphere of inward reflection rather than outward projection and therefore Estragon's sudden rupture of the fourth wall forces the spectator into an alternative relationship with the drama. In this rather coy, as well as reluctant acknowledgement of the audience's presence, the brevity of the moment is in inverse proportion to the gravity of the arrest. For the audience members, this intervention potentially signals a moment of recognition in which they suddenly become thrust into the world of Vladimir and Estragon.²⁸

²⁸ Ian Brown's production of *Waiting for Godot* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse Leeds (2012), chose consciously to exploit and underline this moment. On delivery of Estragon's line, the house lights were slowly brought up on the audience to the same level as in the pre-set.

In *Endgame* (1957), Beckett is bolder with his dramatic excursions away from the fictional world of the play to the immediate reality of the audience's experience.

Enter Clov with the telescope. He goes towards ladder.)

CLOV:

Things are livening up.

(He gets up on ladder, raises the telescope, lets it fall.)

I did it on purpose.

(He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium.)

I see... a multitude... in transports... of joy.

(Pause. He lowers telescope, looks at it.)

That's what I call a magnifier.

(He turns toward Hamm.)

Well? Don't we laugh?

(CDW: 106)

Gogo's assessment of potential ("Inspiring prospects") has given way to Clov's qualitative judgment, albeit laced with Beckettian irony. For a play that is consciously pre-occupied with its own status, the entirety being a metatheatrical essay on the philosophy of existence and the nature of laughter, the complicity of the audience is more overtly managed here. The audience is inducted into a world in which their active engagement in the process of meaning construction is invited through a developed (in comparison to *Godot*) sense of

ambiguity: time, place and action are consciously subverted. This can be seen in contrast to the emerging 'kitchen sink' or new wave of British realism genre of the late 1950s, in which the need to innovate through dramatic form is subordinated amidst the desire to originate material with a fresh political insight at the level of dramatic content.

If Beckett's early plays are momentary in their use of the aside to the audience as a means of collusively engaging it in the act of creation, the later dramas are often structured around the idea of conscription. *Not I* (1972) is a piece notable for the disembodied presence of Mouth however the silent presence of Auditor (downstage audience left), completes the stage picture. At four key points in the text he intervenes/interrupts Mouth's diatribe with a "gesture of helpless compassion. It lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third" (*CDW*: 375). He describes the gesture as consisting of a "simple sideways raising of arms from sides and their falling back" (*ibid*). In performance, the "scarcely perceptible" third movement almost inevitably becomes visualized as an act of resignation or surrender. The temptation is for the actor to direct this resignation towards the audience by way of implicating them in the 'dilemma' of Mouth's fate. This very simple, silent, almost imperceptible action – when directed outward - is capable of creating an immediate and poignant connection with the audience. Mouth is almost immediately victimized or martyred in front of us as we are relegated to the position of bystanders in this reductive and minimalist variation on the French *Théâtre du Grand-Guignol*. In this example, audiences were often exposed to horrific scenes of fictionalized, but violent, human suffering depicted in meticulous Naturalistic detail. For the spectator, the overall effect of these 'horror plays' might have been to promote a feeling of powerlessness, or even

vicarious suffering, as they witnessed acts that would normally have demanded intervention.²⁹ When witnessing Beckett's *Not I*, with Mouth's predicament acting on our nerves rather than our intellect, we share Auditor's powerlessness as he stands both at one remove from, and between, the audience and Mouth.

Thus the audience, through a process of relentless linguistic bombardment, become co-author in Mouth's narrative. This is an authorship that is phenomenologically constructed as a collaborative state of address, according to States's model. The actor playing Auditor functions as the chief arbiter in this collective gathering of audience and performers, in the auditorium and on stage, in order to realise a performance environment that is rooted in cooperation and empowerment rather than passive reception.

The collaborative mode in Beckett's output is also echoed in his final work for the stage. *What Where* (1983) includes a similar mediating (as well as mediated) presence in the form of the Voice of Bam, a character invisible to the audience whose voice issues from a megaphone placed on stage. At once narrator of the somewhat sinister cyclical account of a violent interrogation process conducted through the passing of the seasons, as well as a displaced disembodied presence (the character Bam also appears in the flesh on stage), the Voice of Bam also functions as an intermediary between audience and performers in a similar way to the Auditor in *Not I*. In echoes of an earlier work, the Voice of Bam also resonates as a Director or Producer figure similar to the Director in *Catastrophe* (1982).

²⁹ See Hand, R. & Wilson, M. 2002: *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Great Britain: Short Run Press).

The Voice of Bam is constantly questioning or challenging the quality of the unfolding performance presumably from a privileged, but unseen, vantage point: “Not Good. I switch off [...] I start again.” (CDW: 470).

It is, therefore, this figure of the *arbiter* between stage and auditorium; between spectator and actor, who is most redolent in terms of States’s collaborative mode of audience address.

There seems to be a need in drama, or in certain kinds of drama, for a character who, among his other duties, will serve as a delegate or extension of the audience itself – the audience forming a sort of constituency that demands representation on the stage. (States, 1985: 202).

He goes on to use the example of the Greek chorus as a “communal abstraction” (ibid) or delegation of spectators that tends to “have our emotions for us” (ibid: 203). In this sense, Beckett’s Auditor in *Not I*, for example, occupies a similar space. In this instance it is not an emotional space he occupies but one that offers a neutralized mirror up to the audience as they aim to capitalize on their investment in the play.

Of course, any consideration of a collaborative relationship between audience and actor must take into account the ideas of Bertolt Brecht and the extent to which his classical comparison of the traditional dramatic theatre and his own Epic theatre in the early

twentieth century has fundamentally influenced the progress of Modern and postmodern drama. Writing in 1927, his critique of the western ‘culinary’ theatre that had come to dominate the major playhouses of Europe, was framed as an acquired impotence on the part of the spectator to engage politically with the subject matter, that is take direct action – intellectually or otherwise – when faced with a degree of social injustice. In presenting his comparison of the two traditions, he frames his own Epic theatre as one that forces the spectator to “stand outside” (Willett, 1978: 37). Consequently, it is the actor who is thus required to facilitate this process of objective study through a demonstrative presentational mode that, in turn, allows the actor to step outside the part. In *Not I*, not only is the figure of the Auditor standing as the audience’s delegate, the figure of Mouth also ‘steps out’ of her own presentation. Hers is an acutely self-reflexive address in which the “vehement refusal to relinquish third person” (*CDW*: 375) is characterized as a self-negotiation or rational consideration of the options available to her as she continues to tell her tale. Mouth’s self-reflexivity contrasted with Auditor’s delegatory responsibilities and the audience’s nervous investment, therefore serves to create a complex framework of shifting perceptions.

It is the *representational* mode that provides us with the last of States’s three pro-nominal modes of performance when considering the phenomenology of acting and the audience. Moving from self-expressive to collaborative; States submits to a classical comparison of lyric to epic. This final stage is compared to dramatic presentation: “the audience sees through the sign language of the art to the signified beyond.” (States, 1985: 216). It is characterized by a direct engagement, indeed investment, in the fictional world of the play

and the enactment of human experience that is offered by the production. For States, this ability to see beyond the sometimes-elaborate symbolism of the work's theatricality, or the intricacy of the writer's craft, is not something that is dependent on a realistic or Naturalistic presentational form. Our engagement in the representational mode is based on the power of the image in front of us to "serve as a channel for what of reality is of immediate interest to the audience" (ibid: 218). In other words, our "immediate interest" can be read as the prevailing taste or *zeitgeist* of the day and the ways in which these current forms of representation can be seen to resonate with audiences. This resonance can be seen to diminish over time and with the dictates of fashion. As images move from innovation to convention, and finally to cliché, the force of their ability to connect and communicate with audiences in relation to the deepest considerations of the human condition, as well as the most trivial matters of gossip and innuendo, reduces to the level of self-parody.

Beckett's writing career for stage, film and television can be characterized as a process of reduction. From the full-length dramas of *Waiting for Godot* to the spare, fragmentary vignettes of *Breath* or even *Catastrophe*, his is an *oeuvre* that is indicative of a restlessness in his desire to express. What marks out his work as a distillation of the initial impulse, is not a progressive shift (on the lines set out by States) from innovation to cliché, but a coherent sublimation from one poetic register to another. In the last decade of his life, his work can be seen to divert from the levels of abstraction and ontological exploration so characteristic of the earlier dramas to dramas that resonate with a distinctly political edge. *Catastrophe* and *What Where* (1984) involve recognizable characters in clearly identifiable

situations: a rehearsal or a reported interrogation; whilst also retaining the complex ambiguities of time and location that audiences had become accustomed to in the earlier dramas. The demonstrative mode of acting, in which a predominantly collaborative method of address is used as a means of standing as the audience's representative on stage, is allied to a broadly politicized content or subject matter that brings the Beckettian actor more in line with a Brechtian aesthetic based on *verfremdung* or a distancing from the subject. As mentioned earlier, The Voice of Bam in *What Where*, in functioning as our delegate, also forces us to think about the concrete socio-political applications of those ideas at worst implied in Beckett's text. As States confirms with his own brand of phenomenological analysis, "The actor acts out our ways of referring to the things of the world [...] he does this by becoming in part a thing himself, in part by doing a thing, and in part by sharing it" (States, 1985: 220). This chapter will now move on to consider Beckett's actor in more detail.

Beckett, acting and the actor

The human condition, Heidegger says, is *to be there*. Probably it is the theatre, more than any other mode of representing reality, which reproduces this situation most naturally. The dramatic character *is on stage*, that is his primary quality: he is *there*. (Robbe-Grillet, 1965: 111)

It is the aforementioned concentration on *immediacy* at the end of the 1960s (as exemplified in the thinking of Peter Brook and other practitioners that emerged throughout this decade) that has dominated critical discourse in the field of theatre, performance and, specifically, the status of the actor-performer ever since. Whether it is the articulation of presence offered by Robbe-Grillet in the early part of the 1960s and developed by Brook, Grotowski and Barba; or the concept of liveness expressed by a generation of critics emerging in the 1980s³⁰ who were more acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities for live performance afforded by the proliferation of new media technologies, Heidegger's description of the human condition has emerged as a prescient philosophical context in which to build a poetics of acting and performance in the late twentieth century. In relation to Beckett's work, Robbe-Grillet's re-formulation is often quoted when considering his characters in fictional prose as well as drama. It is no accident that, as painting turns towards abstraction in the early part of the twentieth century, Beckett's career as a writer progresses from this period of high Modernism with a similar emphasis on the notion of the fragmented body in his literature. From this point, Beckett's characters both pre-figure the kind of theatrical concretization offered later as well as offering a portrait of the human body in crisis that progressively reduces in its material reality (either on stage or on the page) and its physical capability.

³⁰ For example, see Phelan, P., 1993: *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. (London: Routledge) and Auslander, P., 1999: *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. (London: Routledge) for contrasting opinions on the ontological status of live and recorded performances. In response to Phelan's assertion that, due to its ephemerality, "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented..." (1993: 146), Auslander claims that the very idea of liveness stems from 'mediatization' and the existence of performance within recordings.

Murphy, Molloy, Malone, Mahood, Worm – the hero of Beckett's narrative deteriorates from book to book, and faster and faster. Feeble, but still capable of traveling on a bicycle, he rapidly loses the use of his limbs, one after the other; no longer able even to drag himself along [...] (ibid)

A similar reduction is found in the dramatic works: the frailties of Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* give way to the very obvious physical disabilities of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell in *Endgame*; Krapp's age-related frailty in *Krapp's Last Tape*; the increasingly incremental restrictions of Winnie in *Happy Days*. Later dramatic works provide examples of Beckett's increasing pre-occupation with the reified body; the painterly levels of abstraction or distilled essence of humanity made concrete on stage. The spotlight, decaying faces of M, W1 and W2 in *Play*; the *reductio ad absurdum* of a disembodied mouth in *Not I* appear to complete this Zeno-esque³¹ articulation of Clov's gradual but inevitable subdivision of the "impossible heap" from *Endgame*. Throughout, it appears that the absence of any specified grounded reality (especially in the later works) forces the spectator to consider the figures presented in terms of their negotiated presence as well as their fictional reality. Didi and Gogo are described as "irremediably present" by Robbe-Grillet in the same article. It is this sense of fatalistic inevitability that has an impact not only on the lives of the characters in all of Beckett's drama but also on the status of the actors who play them.

³¹ Like, or relating to, the pre-Socratic scholar, Zeno, whose paradoxes were designed to challenge the philosophical certainty of time and motion in space. Examples are found in the parables of 'Achilles and the Tortoise', 'Dichotomy' and 'Arrow' paradoxes. "The impossible heap" referred to by Clov in *Endgame* is a reference to the passing of time in the indistinct bunker inhabited by himself and Hamm. Beckett uses the genre of paradox in his early prose and drama as a means of reminding us that, in metaphysical terms, we can never arrive at our chosen destination (death). See Byron, M., 2007: *Samuel Beckett's Endgame* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press).

The “irremediable” presence of the actor is a quality that is born out of a progressive development of the status of the body in experimental performance since the early part of the twentieth century. The well-documented revolt against Naturalism as exemplified by a generation of artists after World War I challenges the notion of the actor as mediator between author and spectator. Beckett’s emergence on the Western stage in the 1950s marks the completion of a shift in perceptions: “This body, which had previously been only a mediator, something that wore a costume and provided a voice, has become the actual subject of many plays” (Hubert, 1994:55). It is this shift in the signification of the actor’s body from a mode that moves from that of “mediator” (in Hubert’s terms) or *object* to one of identifiable *subject* in the eyes of the spectator, that not only characterizes Beckett’s drama as it emerged and developed across his career, but which also offers an allegory for the development of the status of the acting body within contemporary performance practice.

The experiments of especially innovative directors like Evreinoff, Appia, Craig, Meyerhold, Schlemmer; the discovery of oriental theatre; the theories of Artaud [...]; the renewal of mime [...] have profoundly modified the theory of acting techniques by revealing the expressive power of the body. The evolution of painting and dance, in addition to the birth of cinema, have contributed, as well, to this transformation. Silent films proved that imitation and gesture can transmit a complete message. Painting and dance turned, at the beginning of the century, toward abstraction and resolutely rejected realistic representation, exploring, instead, geometrical forms or unusual forms representing imaginary images which foreshadowed the body that playwrights tried to represent in the 1950s (ibid).

In surrendering “realistic representation” for “geometrical” or “unusual” forms, Beckett’s dramas not only relinquish the mediating presence of the individual actor – a negotiated role specifically in place to act as mouthpiece for the authorial voice of the playwright – but also they place the material or fleshly presence of the actor to the forefront of the spectator’s consciousness in ways that had not been afforded such a high priority up to that point. Actors brought up on Classical traditions had become used to a mode of representation that, in varying degrees, submerged the presentation of an overt, subjective self on stage in favour of Hubert’s mediated presence; one that existed almost solely as a means of giving voice to the author’s text.

Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before. (CDW: 11)

The opening stage direction in *Waiting for Godot* exemplifies this almost forensic concentration on the immediate presence of the human body, engaged in that most mundane activity of removing a boot. As spectators, its prominence at the opening of the play gives such an innocuous activity extra resonance or significance. We expect it to be a portent; a metaphorical signpost toward something of greater significance that emerges later in the drama. However, in the context of the play as a whole, it simply exists for what it is. It exists in that moment of appreciation and, whilst critics have gone on to interpret not only this opening image but the general status of the two characters Didi and Gogo as somehow being emblematic of the human condition, Beckett is insistent that the image

resonates in the moment of its performance. Talking in the midst of a 1971 production of *Godot* in which he actively discusses “concrete circumstance” as the actor’s most important tool Beckett says: “the concept is: to see if I can get a sense of waiting, of unfulfilled, unredeemed waiting.” (Kalb, 1989: 29).

Debates centred around the notion of acting from the beginning of the early modern period until the late nineteenth century³² have focused on the nature of ‘feeling’ versus ‘technique’. The extent to which the actor surrenders himself to a personal exploitation of that reservoir of impulses and emotions that lurk within the psyche on the one hand, balanced with an understanding of the role of technical/virtuosic mastery on the other; the external presentation of emotion that is essentially illusionistic. The ways in which actors allow one of these performative states to inform or drive the other forms the basis on which Stanislavski’s Naturalistic approaches to actor training proceeded in the early twentieth century. The Beckettian actor emerges at a time when Naturalism (and, by implication, those acting approaches that came with it) was being challenged by the contemporary avant-garde. ‘Feeling’ and ‘technique’ gives way to an alternative binary relationship that places an emphasis on ‘presentational’ and ‘representational’ performance (Kalb) or, to use William Worthen’s formulation:

The actor’s task is at once to *represent* – to
disappear from view while he imitates a false,

³² For a historical overview of the development of this debate prior to the late nineteenth century, see Zarrilli, P., 1995: *Acting (re) considered: a theoretical and practical guide* (London: Routledge) and also Benedetti, J., 2007: *The Art of the Actor* (London: Routledge).

fictional reality – and to *interpret* – to remain personally accessible as an actor, to provide the public with an “interpretive” prism through which to evaluate the “represented” actions he performs. Acting invariably articulates this dynamic equipoise between the actor’s implied absence as “representer”, and his immediate presence as “interpreter” (Worthen, 1984: 207).

For both Kalb and Worthen, it is this tension (or “dynamic equipoise”) between these two states that characterizes Beckettian approaches to acting. For Worthen, writing about the later plays, it is *Not I* and the two figures of Mouth and Auditor, which emblemizes this relationship. Mouth offers the audience a relentless stream of consciousness from her disembodied and suspended position upstage. On one level, her doggedly representational mode of delivery enables the actor to disappear from view and thus offers glimpses for the spectator of a fragmented narrative; a life lived and still being lived; but also of a body in crisis psychologically, physically and in reality. For what is represented is not only Mouth’s ‘story’ but also the very immediate crisis of the actress playing Mouth in that moment on stage. On this alternative level of recognition, the actor becomes visible again. As an interpreter of Mouth’s circumstances, the actor steps out from behind the traditional mask of character in order to facilitate an objective evaluation on the part of the spectator that consequently allows for an appreciation of the personal experiences of the actor playing the role. Faced with this recognition of actuality (in addition to the parallel level of representation), the spectator becomes acutely aware of the environment, the performance conditions and the sheer feat of endurance required of the actor. The physical restraints imposed on any actress playing Mouth since the first production are formidable. Billie Whitelaw, who famously played the role in the early 1970s at the Royal Court Theatre,

claims to have suffered from a paralysed jaw as a result of her run in the part.³³ Because of the demands of the text; in which the pin-point accuracy required of the lighting designer in focusing a narrow spotlight on the actress's mouth necessitates a secure bodily restraint, each new production of the play has provoked comparisons with Whitelaw's challenging experiences and has also resulted in critical reviews that have tended to focus on matters of process and staging as well as acting technique, rather than the content of the text itself. This set of issues will be revisited in chapters four and five of this study in which a range of key texts in performance will be considered.

Throughout the play, the figure of the Auditor remains apparently impassive downstage. Silent and almost motionless except for four interventions at key 'movements' in the text on the cue "what?...who?... no!...she!.." (*CDW*: 379), Auditor exists in that particular moment of stage time to interpret Mouth's utterances for the audience. He stands between us and Mouth. His gestures of "helpless compassion" (*ibid*: 375) not only exist in the fiction of the text, they exist more immediately in the three-way relationship that exists between Mouth, Auditor and audience. We feel powerless to intervene in Mouth's predicament for three reasons: (i) her stream of consciousness appears unstoppable in its relentlessness; (ii) it is uncertain whether her plight requires any intervention; (iii) to do so would flout theatrical convention. As an, at best, enigmatic presence on stage during this play, Auditor provides a

³³ Linda Ben-Zvi summarizes the punishing physical consequences of acting Beckett: "The Beckett veteran Whitelaw admits, 'Every damn play of Beckett's that I do involved some sort of physically or mentally excruciating experience.' A paralyzed jaw in *Not I*, a spine injury in *Footfalls* – there is a price to pay." (Ben-Zvi, 1990: 220). See Ben-Zvi, L., 1990: *Women in Beckett* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press).

point of contrast between the dogged representations of Mouth and his own interpretive role as a filter for the audience's perception of the work.

Worthen's book³⁴ is an important text in terms of our understanding of Beckett's drama in performance. In considering Beckett's actor in relation to *Not I*, *Play* and *Endgame* Worthen offers a dual picture of the actor's role in terms of the aforementioned interpretive/representational axis. What is also significant, is his establishment of a key comparison between Beckett and the ideas of Bertolt Brecht. Enoch Brater, in his 1975 article³⁵ picks up on this theme in order to examine Brechtian notions of estrangement or alienation (the classic *verfremdungseffekt* set out in Brecht's major critical works and put into practice throughout his career as a theatre practitioner) in relation to Beckett's writing and, more significantly, in terms of the challenge that his texts offered the actor. Like Worthen, he also cites *Not I* as an illustration, along with some other of the shorter works: *Come and Go* (1966), *Cascando* (1963), *Play* (1963) and *Breath* (1969). Beginning with an acknowledgement of similarities in relation to "the orchestration of dramatic structure" (Brater, 1975: 195), Brater moves on quickly to consider Beckett and Brecht as "co-workers" (ibid, 204) rather than opposites, as has often been the case in other critical contexts. The austere, minimalistic, regressive concentration on metaphysical concerns and the human condition characterize Beckett's writing in contrast with the expansive, socially

³⁴ Worthen, W., 1984: *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance* (Princeton: Princeton UP).

³⁵ Brater, E., 1975: "Brecht's Alienated Actor in Beckett's Theater", *Comparative Drama* 9 (3): 195-205.

engaged and politicized theatre of Brecht. Brater attempts to ‘close the circle’ of this apparent polar divide in his examination of the actor in Beckett.

Beckett parallels Brecht’s dramatic technique: the actor in his theater is as consistently “alienated” from the role he is playing as he is meant to be in Brecht’s repertory. Brecht wanted his actor to remain outside his role, to study and comment on the character so that his audience would respond less emotionally than intellectually. [...] In Beckett’s theater Brecht’s alienated actor faces an “estrangement” which is experienced not only dramaturgically, but literally. For Beckett demonstrates how far the playwright can progress in making abstractions achieve theatrical embodiment on stage (ibid, 197-8).³⁶

Brater thus identifies a persistent theme running through Beckett criticism in regard to the status of the performer in relation to the text: that of the reified actor, one that is charged with a responsibility to deliver and make concrete the meticulously crafted abstractions that emerge within Beckett’s writing. One who must make flesh that which is non-specified or ambiguous to our conventional understandings of the relationship between signifier and signified. More so in the later plays than in the early works, it is through a carefully articulated process of “estrangement” of the actor from dramatic role (offered in the text) and the spectator that the actor is able to do this. Brater argues that this process raises more

³⁶ This sense of estrangement is also invoked by one of a generation of British playwrights on the left of the political spectrum who owed much to Brecht’s legacy. Howard Brenton talks of his desire to “give an audience a sense of moral vertigo” (Innes, 2002: 207), specifically in his play *Christie In Love* (1969) where a serial killer is humanized in order to form a critique of orthodox morality and the inverted snobbery of establishment figures. Beckett’s drama, in many ways, can be seen to offer audiences a sense of ‘emotional vertigo’ in terms of the levels of abstraction achieved through sonic and spatial forms. See: Innes, C., 2002: *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

questions: “How does the actor identify with motivation that refuses to identify itself? And how does the actor present a passion only mimed but never felt?” (ibid, 199). These two questions in many ways lie at the heart of this study. The question of “motivation” - what drives the actor to synthesize textual material in order to “own” something that is the product of a third party; and the question of “emotion” or “feeling” that flows from this issue of motivation. The Classical debates surrounding the relationship between the exploitation of emotion and technique are impossible to evade even at this late stage in the twentieth century.

Brater concludes by suggesting that Beckett’s theatre alienates at the level of physicality as well as dramaturgy:

In his process of confrontation with the bizarre text placed before him, Beckett’s actor demonstrates a problem in staging, illustrating through this challenge to his craft an uneasy metaphysical crisis which can only then be apprehended by his audience. “Don’t touch me! Don’t question me! Don’t speak to me! Stay with me!” cries Gogo, his last commandment forcing the actor to switch in an instant from one emotion to the next. Estragon’s uneasy situation, is therefore, far more portrayable thanactable (ibid, 203-4).

Here, Brater echoes what William Worthen and Jonathan Kalb would later articulate as that complex relationship between the interpretive and the representational. The actor playing Estragon is unable to represent such contrasts of emotion in naturalistic terms therefore his

is forced into an interpretative or “portrayable” mode of delivery. In doing so, the actor effects an estrangement (or “alienation”) between the character/performer and the spectator. It is an estrangement that is born out of Beckett’s own metaphysical dialectic rather than a politicized dialectic or Brecht’s “idealized Marxism” (ibid, 204). Actors performing Beckett are therefore charged with the responsibility of finding an approach to style or technique in rehearsal and performance that is “something between a realistic character and a marionette” (ibid, 204). The emphasis here, in Brater’s concluding remarks, is on where the burden of responsibility lies. For Brater, it is one that lies squarely on the shoulders of the actor.

Jonathan Kalb, in his discussion of a German production of *Warten auf Godot* (1975) points at the Brechtian technique of ‘alienated’ or ‘estranged’ acting technique, developed in Brecht’s own career, as prioritising a rigid distinction between a presentational approach - in which the actor consciously steps outside of the role in order to make key moments in the text clear to the audience - contrasted with a representational mode in which the actor consciously simulates, feigns or pretends to ‘be’ the character offered in the text. The Beckett actor’s process of estrangement operates differently in that the distinction between the presentational and representational is eradicated

because it commits to an internal logic of clowning, his *Godot* is light-spirited, physical and sensible [...] eventually leading the spectator’s mind towards questions of presentational action rather without destroying the integrity of its representational action (Kalb, 1989: 35).

Situating Beckett *between* Brecht and Stanislavsky, Kalb suggests that Beckett offers a “new kind of theater” that, for the spectator, “renders the presentational and representational indistinguishable” (ibid).

It is this “light-spirited”, clown-like approach to performance that marks the early plays in terms of the actor’s challenge to render the presentational and representational aspects of the drama “indistinguishable”. The later plays, however, call for a different approach. From *Happy Days* (1961) onwards, vocal delivery in Beckett’s dramas takes on a progressively fractured, dislocated and unnatural quality in which poetry is heightened, any sense of narrative continuity is subordinated and the relationship between actor, character and audience is stretched and challenged with regard to the poetics of ambiguity highlighted by Kalb. Key actors working with the late Beckett canon have turned towards a more rhythmic mode of delivery that foregrounds sound, shape, pitch and timbre rather than the imperative to communicate conventional linguistic meaning to the spectator. In this mode, the actor emphasizes the musical qualities of the text as opposed to the dramatic, and it is this approach that is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Acting and musicality in Beckett's later plays

Beckett was famously pre-disposed to explore the multiple potentialities of language within his writing for prose, poetry and drama. Arguably, when not producing original material, most of his time as a writer was taken up by the continual translation of his works from one language to another. The French language would, more often than not, be the language of the original work, with subsequent translations into English, or German. It is this restlessness with language; this apparent dissatisfaction with the constraints of linguistic constructs, that informs our understanding of Beckett's interest in music.

Mary Bryden, in her collection of essays on the relationship between Beckett's work and musicality, *Samuel Beckett and Music* (1998), brings together a constituency of artists and scholars – some who collaborated with Beckett, some related to him, some simply interested in his work – to examine his own fascination with this alternative mode of expression in addition to carrying out a deconstruction of the major works sometimes in quite detailed musicological/analytical terms. Bryden offers the following quotation from the composer Stravinsky in her own essay on “Beckett and the Sound of Silence”:

While Stravinsky states ‘I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature’ [...] Beckett writes of ‘the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power

to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express' (Bryden, 1998: 34).

Not only does Beckett emphasize his own perceived weight of responsibility with regard to the need to communicate or express as a writer, he also prioritizes the idea of obligation. It is an apparent frustration in his practice that the desire residing in him to “find different ways to say the same thing” (McCutcheon, 1983) leads to a restlessness that not only manifests in his experiments with language, nor with his forays into musical incorporation (especially, for example, in his radio plays of the early 1960s), but also in his practice as a director in key productions of his dramas:

Beckett, is implicitly aligning his own compositional art with that same dynamic of inexplicability. By permeating his writing with his own sensitivity to sound and music, he is not seeking to add an extra dimension of ‘meaning’ but rather to enhance its ambiguity (ibid: 35).

It is this need to embrace ambiguity, as seen in the previous section of this chapter, that also transfers from the act of composition to the act of rehearsal and performance. As a director *cum* conductor of his work, Beckett facilitates an approach to acting in his later dramas that forces the performer to apply the rhythms of musical language to the cadences of verbal expression. According to those he has worked with, he approaches this task with the discipline of a musical conductor. Billie Whitelaw, an actor who worked consistently with Beckett throughout the peak of his theatre career, chiefly in the 1960s and 70s, and arguably became a major influence on Beckett’s writing in a number of works, talks of the

extent to which his direction was conducted. “Working on *Play* was not unlike conducting music or having a music lesson” (Whitelaw, 1995: 78). In this particular respect, it was the timing of the pauses or silences in between words that reinforced the importance of rhythmical impulse in the writing: “Will you make those three dots, two dots[?]” (ibid, 77).

It is the actor David Warrilow’s engagement with Beckett’s works that also gives a key insight into the ways in which a musical approach to the later plays might be undertaken. *Ohio Impromptu* (written and performed in 1981 with Warrilow cast as Reader in its first production), offers the actor a distilled, essentialized dramatic situation in which the simple presence of a Reader and a Listener, sat at a long table, leads to the reading out of a reflective narrative that closely echoes the situation before our eyes. In this respect, it is a situation redolent of the fairground hall of mirrors in which the detail of character, dress and circumstance tantalisingly resembles the narrated tale. Warrilow describes how, in rehearsing the character of Reader, “the issue was tone and tempo, because the way the author hears that piece is somewhat different from the way it lies in my being” (Kalb, 1989: 224).

It is the extent to which the part taken on by the actor relates to her/his individual psyche or personality that appears to resonate with both Warrilow and Whitelaw. For Warrilow, “There’s a place in me that does Beckett, a place I go to in myself [...] Everybody has in themselves a sanctuary that they can go to when they need deep guidance. It’s a place of natural knowing and inspiration” (ibid: 221-2). Clearly, this “place” is one that affords a

meditative perspective on the work; one that perhaps even transcends the aesthetic imperative to perform the text. Warrilow, in effecting his own introspective self-examination as part of his approach to preparing for the role of Reader, feels no subsequent obligation to pass on the emotional consequences of that reflection to the spectator. Any emotion that is felt by the audience is coincidental, not planned. The fundamental reason for this inward, almost hermetic approach to performance is rooted in the musicality that Warrilow looks for in his playing of a Beckett role. In the same interview with Jonathan Kalb, he describes Beckett's plays as "art songs" (ibid: 225) and that he knows when his performance is "working" when he achieves the "right tone". "By right, I mean what works for me. I then have to trust that it'll work for somebody else – that if I get it right, if I sing it "on key," "in tune," it's going to vibrate properly for somebody else" (ibid: 224). Sharing his performance, in this sense, is a process born out of hope and self-satisfaction rather than close communion. Warrilow also admits to barely dealing with any kind of psychological reality implicit in the text and this position is reinforced in criticism of later productions. Writing about the filmed version of the play for the *Beckett on Film* project in 2003, Anna McMullan responds negatively to Charles Sturridge's direction as being "led once again by a psychologized approach to performance [since] Jeremy Irons plays both parts and the 'ghost' fades away at dawn" (McMullan, 2003: 231).

The act of rehearsal therefore becomes an exercise entirely based on translation from dramatic to sonic form. Especially in the later, shorter works rather than the earlier plays, actor and director take on the responsibility of exploiting the sounds that the words make in the physical, as well as acoustic, space designed for them to the complete exclusion of any

consideration for narrative structure or implied meaning. This, in itself, echoes Beckett's own thoughts on his approach to writing and subsequent production:

I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. [...] 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters (Beckett, cited in Hobson, 1956:153)

This concentration on shape is exemplified in *Ohio Impromptu*. The final speech in the play, the point after which the ambiguous 'tale' is concluded for the final time, comprises typically of Beckettian opacity contrasted with apparent surface clarity:

So the sad tale a last time told, they sat on as though turned to stone. Through the single window dawn shed no light. From the street no sound of reawakening. 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 to stone. The sad tale a last time told. (*CDW*: 447-8)

The speech has a chiasmic structure that can be represented diagrammatically, as follows:

So the sad tale a last time told, they sat on as though turned to stone Through the single window dawn shed no light. From the street no sound of reawakening 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,	So sat on as though turned to stone. The sad tale a last time told. Whither no light can reach. No sound. Buried in who knows what profounds of mind. Of mindlessness. Profound of mind. not thoughts.
	no,

When analysed in diagrammatic form, the immediate problem facing the reader, let alone the actor, is the paradoxical contrast between delivery in linear time and the two-dimensional qualities of the speech's shape. The mid-point "no" is the pivotal moment in this speech, the axis around which both our reading off the page, and the actor's delivery on stage, revolve. If reading in linear mode, we proceed downwards from the top of the left column and then up the right hand column from the foot. However, the actor's responsibility is to somehow represent this monologue as part of a three-dimensional stage picture that also incorporates the 'image' or 'shape' of the speech itself. When engaged in such a formal exercise, the introduction of character psychology, emotion, 'feeling' appears redundant if not overly-ostentatious, as is any kind of reciprocal emotional identification with the spectator.

It is this emphasis on the shape of the text, as well as Warrilow's commentary on the imperative to pass on emotion to the spectator, that is indicative of a theatre of affect identifiable in much of Beckett's later drama. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the 'turn

to affect' is a phenomenon that can be observed within scholarship to emerge in the arts, humanities and social sciences over the last twenty years or more. Partly brought about by the rapid acceleration of our understanding of neuroscience, and the ways in which brain chemistry is able to govern human response and behaviour, there has been increased awareness of the significance of non-conscious response to a range of stimuli active in the social and aesthetic spheres. In the field of theatrical performance, it is the cycle of semiotic transmission and response between stage and auditorium that enables a 'theatre of affect' in which Ruth Leys' broad description of the term can be accommodated:

For the past twenty years or more the dominant paradigm in the field of emotions [...] assumes that affective processes occur independently of intention or meaning. According to that paradigm, our basic emotions do not involve cognitions or beliefs about the objects in our world. Rather, they are rapid, phylogenetically old, automatic responses of the organism that have evolved for survival purposes and lack the cognitive characteristics of the higher-order mental processes (Leys, 2011: 437).

In the performing arts, recent research has highlighted exactly how this potential for non-conscious response in performance can be activated physically. Dance research provides fertile ground for the inter-disciplinary exploration of affective responses to performance

given Dance's combination of physical, gestural, musical and scenographic elements.³⁷ The absence of verbal communication also allows researchers to evaluate response based on abstracted emotional feeling rather than reasoned conclusion. Kinesthetic empathy in the spectator is described as one of the affects of dance performance:

In dance research, the concept of kinesthetic empathy has emerged to describe the response of some spectators when watching dance. Spectators frequently report that even while sitting still, they feel they are participating in the dance they observe, experiencing movement sensations and related feelings and ideas (Jola et al., 2012: 20).

Responses to Beckett's drama can be identified as affective in that they exist not only in the logical, reasoned reactions to the text in performance, but also at the level of non-conscious feeling. It is an affect that can also be ascribed to the actors in their experiences of rehearsal and performance. Billie Whitelaw, in her performance as Mouth in *Not I*, describes the very personal meanings that experience evoked for her. She also talks of the need for a musical approach to the later dramas and her role in the piece as being "like a musical instrument playing notes" (Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006: 170). She also evokes the analogy of the athlete "crashing through barriers" (ibid) in order to get to the finishing line. In her autobiography, she talks of the close emotional relationship established between her own

³⁷ In addition to the paper cited here, see also: Berrol, C., 2006: "Neuroscience meets dance/movement therapy: Mirror neurons, the therapeutic process and empathy", *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 33 (4): 302-315; Foster, S., 2010: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (London; New York: Routledge); Reynolds, D. & Reason, M., 2012: *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

first reading of the play and her son's recent life-threatening illness, while preparing for the 1972 Royal Court production:

I started reading, and three-quarters of the way through it I found I couldn't stop crying. [...] Looking back, I think I understand my reaction. What hit me was an inner scream, an endless nightmare that poured out of this old woman of seventy [...] In her outpourings I recognised my own inner scream which I'd been sitting on ever since Matthew's illness began (Whitelaw, 1995: 116).

If David Warrilow's approach to playing Beckett in *Ohio Impromptu* might be described as meditative, Billie Whitelaw's recollections of her early kinesthetic responses to *Not I* could be described as therapeutic. Again, it is the inward process of self-reflection and response that is subsequently assimilated and projected outward, with or without the intervention of the spectator, that separates the Beckett actor from earlier approaches to rehearsal and performance.³⁸

In conclusion, the location of Beckett's career as both integral to, and straddling, the twin pillars of twentieth century artistic praxis that define Modernism and Postmodernism, is a useful expedient in determining a poetics of the Beckettian actor. The "irremediable presence" of the actor proposed by Robbe-Grillet in the early 1960s has given rise to later

³⁸ For further considerations of the relationship between performance and affect, from the dual perspectives of performance and spectatorship, see Blair, R., 2008: *The Actor, Image and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (New York: Routledge) and McConachie, B., 2008: *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

concentrations by a host of practitioners on “immediate” theatre³⁹ projects (Brook, Barba, Grotowski, for example) that consciously foreground not only the presence of the actor, but his personality. Joseph Chaikin, writing in 1974, says, “When we as actors are performing, we as persons are also present and the performance is a testimony of ourselves [...] Through the working process [...] the actor recreates himself” (Chaikin, 1974: 6). This is contrasted with David Warrilow’s approach, when playing the role of Reader in *Ohio Impromptu*. In his role as Beckett’s “instrument” he adopts a musical approach to his rendering of the text in which aspects of self and individual personality are rigorously subordinated to the needs of “tone” and the “shape” of words; an approach that denies the actor any true revelation of self in service of a different set of priorities.

Billie Whitelaw, in describing her approach to acting Beckett, effects a similar surrendering of personality to the musical needs of the text however she also admits to the impossibility of totally eliminating the actor’s self. In doing so, she deploys a visual metaphor to describe a musical approach in which the instrumentalist’s personality cannot help but influence the performance:

³⁹ See Brook, P. 1968: *The Empty Space* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). In this seminal work, Brook outlines an immediate theatre in which contemporary practice enables the re-framing or re-presentation of, sometimes, historical material in order to acquire currency – social, cultural or otherwise, in the present. For Brook, the result can unite spectator and performance in a communal celebration that, in its totality, can leave a permanent image in the minds of the spectators. It is the physical presence of the actor that facilitates this currency and makes relevant that which might have disappeared from memory were it not for the body’s inherent ability to revivify and rehabilitate. Brook writes at a time when other practitioners were looking for alternative models of theatrical exchange that avoided an overtly commercial imperative.

I use a metaphor from the wallpaper industry; we have a phrase, to ‘grin through.’ If you paint on wallpaper without taking the wallpaper off, the wallpaper pattern will ‘grin through’ the paint (Whitelaw, in Kalb, 1989: 241).

With the advance of postmodernity in the 1980s, critics were quick to look for a new poetics and for Cynthia Bishop-Dillon, writing in 1993, Beckett’s canon provided a useful means of articulating a deconstructive approach to performance that was modelled closely on the work of Jacques Derrida. In citing *play* as the disruption of presence, Derrida deconstructs the tradition of “logocentrism” that places the grounding of ‘truth’ or objective reality at the heart of human endeavour. For Derrida, “the logocentric impulse [...] arrests play and closes the possibilities of interpretations that pass beyond humanism” (Bishop Dillon, 1993: 30). Philip Auslander also articulates this idea in his essay *Toward a Concept of the Political in Postmodern Theatre* (1987):

Concepts of presence are grounded in notions of actorly representation – presence is often thought to derive from the actor’s embodiment of, or even possession by, the character defined in a play text, from the (re)presentation of self through the mediation of character, or in the Artaudian/Grotowskian/Beckian line of thought, from the archetypal psychic impulses accessible through the actor’s physicality (Auslander, 1997 [1987]: 62).

These ideas have become articles of faith within a postmodern/poststructuralist landscape after Beckett. Play, and the disruption of presence, results in the absence of character in

contemporary performance practice and marks the completion of a shift from Modernism to postmodernism in the theatre. Beckett can be seen as the fulcrum for this shift of ideas. Elinor Fuchs points to a 1975 production of *Come and Go* by David Warrilow's company, Mabou Mines, as undermining "habitual expectations of bodily presence and actor-audience contact" (Fuchs, 1985: 164).

Throughout this paradigm shift in critical thinking and artistic practice, the status of the actor in Beckett's drama retains a significant aspect of playfulness and experimentation that – even outside the Derridean definition of play and playfulness – evokes the "clown-like" qualities seen in productions of the early plays through to the more essentialized, reductive "art-songs" of the later works. However, regardless of critical stance, point in history or textual constraint, the actor retains the freedom to play with the textures, rhythms and meanings of the words written. Whether born out of the comic traditions of silent film, or the musicality of the great instrumentalists, the actor's ability to "work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" will always be a fundamental requirement, against which the success of any production will be measured.

This introductory chapter describes a critical and performative topography for the actor, in which Beckett's work during the twentieth century can be located in the context of shifting cultural paradigms in relation to drama and theatre practice. In doing so, it has begun to trace a through-line of argument surrounding the status of the body in performance that becomes progressively fragmented in terms of its articulation of the inherent paradoxes

embodied in the theatre event and yet also strives for moments of grounded clarity, or a return to the traditions of the past, depending on which aspects of modern and contemporary performance practice take priority.

The next chapter will explore the landscape of contemporary performance from the perspective of the actor. In doing so, it will adopt both a wider perspective on the nature of theatre and performance in a postmodern age whilst also locating Beckett's actor in that same context.

Chapter 2: Acting, Beckett and the Landscape of Contemporary Performance

To act means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate. As Happenings demonstrated, not all performing is acting (Kirby, 1972: 3).

Written in 1972, Michael Kirby's seminal article "On Acting and Not Acting" was written at a time when the aforementioned paradigm shift towards performance and its associated spheres of activity across all human endeavours began its progress within the study of drama, theatre and performance in Western universities. The emergence of art forms that incorporated a performative, embodied presence in ways that provided a stark contrast to the art of acting within the traditional drama was in many ways seen as a stimulus towards this shift within the academy and, by extension, the wider performance culture. This chapter focuses on the Beckettian Implied Actor as a phenomenon that has emerged out of, as well as being responsive to, a new performance terrain that established itself at around the time Kirby formulated his thinking and which operated in parallel with Beckett's work as a writer and director. Building on the critical and philosophical base established in Chapter one, this chapter not only locates Beckett's drama within this landscape, but also explores the ways in which his approaches to characterization and representation have, in turn, contributed to the work of spectators and the changing ways in which they perceive the performing body. The complex topography created by these changing trends in critical and performance practice can be seen as an important background and one in which Implied Actors,

along with Beckett's deployment of them in performance, can obtain a liberation from previous dramatic orthodoxies that was perhaps not hitherto available.

As a director of his own material, Beckett might have identified with the spirit, if not the theoretical complexity, of Kirby's statement. Famous for the prescriptive nature of his stage directions, this level of reduction would find its way into his directing practice. In an interview conducted after her work with Beckett was completed, Billie Whitelaw describes his blunt insistence: "the words that I've got scribbled all over my texts are: "No color", "Don't act", "No emotion", "Just say it." (Whitelaw in Kalb, 1989: 234). She goes on to describe an organic process in rehearsal whereby, after days of robotic recitation of the script, "gradually something happens" (ibid: 236). A task of this study is to explore what, for the actor, Beckettian performance might be when denuded of the kind of "acting" Beckett wanted to avoid.

Kirby's work in this article is also important not only for the ways in which it provides us with a means of categorizing traditional, character-driven, acting performances. It is notable for the implicit acknowledgement it gives towards its alternatives. As Goldberg (1979, 2004) documents in her histories of Live and Performance Art since the early Modernist period, a characteristic of twentieth century performance practice has been the increasing shift away from conventional exploitations of time, space and action towards an aesthetic that privileges the singularity of the performer's embodied presence in ways that discard a traditional subjugation to the spoken word or narrative-based performance. Kirby offers the 1960s phenomenon of Happenings as his initial

point of comparison between traditional acting practices and emerging alternative forms.¹

This chapter considers the Beckettian actor as a *gestalt* phenomenon in which the cultural conditions of the twentieth century actively shape its definition and efficacy. In doing so, it sets out the separate, but not wholly discrete concepts of acting and performance in the context of contemporary performance practices from the early twentieth century to more recent understandings. In doing so, it will aim to explore key texts and performances that are considered to be emblematic in their negotiation of the space between acting and performance. From this basis, Beckett's Implied Actor is situated as a key agent in the nexus of time, place and action and its reconfigured relationship in postmodernity.

The emergence of performance art practices after the end of the Second World War complements the turn to performance, and Performance Studies in academia, from the late 1960s onwards (as outlined in Chapter one). Although emerging from the discrete epistemological context of Fine Art practice, it is notable for its active contestation of prevailing orthodoxies with regard to representation and the body as well as narrative or chronological depictions of the artist's intentions. Samuel Beckett's writing for theatre, film and television can also be seen to actively challenge those dramatic orthodoxies closely linked to representation through time and space that become challenged from the early part of the twentieth century onwards. In seeking to explore the various topographical features of the landscape of contemporary performance, this study seeks

¹ This protest-rooted form, in which mass, spontaneous gatherings become, almost through a process of sublimation, culturally significant art events, was able to persuade artists and academics from the diverse disciplines of art, performance, anthropology or behavioural psychology that performance as a practice could stretch further into our understanding of the ways in which human societies interact than those rooted in conventional, linear narratives (see Sandford, 1995).

to locate Beckett's work as, at once, responsive to, as well as influential in, the development of much new performance in the middle to later part of the twentieth century that has sought to provoke, challenge or transgress the aesthetic and disciplinary boundaries of performance and the performing arts at this time.

Indeed, it is an influence that continues to assert itself. As recently as 2007, the academic journal *Performance Research*² devoted an issue to a consideration of the extent to which Beckett's influence might be found both within and across non-theatrical arts practices. Articles appear on the impact of aurality in Beckett on the work of artists such as Janet Cardiff and Bruce Nauman; European choreography and its use of a mathematical paradigm; Beckett's influence on Fine Art practitioners (Linda Karshan, Nico Vassilakis). In addition, the issue considers Beckett's own relationship to art-making, principally through his love for Music - as a pianist³, and as a devotee of the work of Franz Schubert.⁴

A consistent theme running through this issue of the journal is that of the pervasive quality of Beckett's writings as inter-textual devices for the realization of often interdisciplinary collaborations, as well as the representation and status of the body as a vehicle for non-dramatic or non-theatrical articulations:

Most noticeably, these traces relate to significant features of Beckett's practices: his particular use of patterns of repetitious movement in space, or the (often related) patterns of fragmented speech and silence – of repetitious and exhaustive form; [...] his approach to image-making (and particularly the creation of animated tableaux) for stage and

² See Laws, C. (ed.), 2007: *Performance Research: On Beckett* 12 (1): 1-150.

³ Mansell, T., 2007: "Sam's Shambles: Beckett's piano-peddalling technique", *ibid.*:124-137.

⁴ Witts, N., "Beckett and Schubert", *ibid.*: 138-144.

screen; his exploration of visual and/or aural perception, testing the limits of representation and the drive towards self-identity; the use of forms of interrogation; [...] his fragmentation, subjection and constraining of the body, but also its later re-imagining and potential re-emergence through technical reproduction and manipulation (Laws, 2007: 2).

It is this emphasis on the body, and the ways in which the presence, implied or otherwise, of the actor stands as an embodied representative of Beckett's own ideas and practices, which is at the heart of this study. In identifying some of the key critical ideas that underpinned new approaches to performance from the Modernist Avant-Garde to postmodernity, those innovative approaches to acting characterized by new performance and performance art will be outlined in this chapter in relation to key practitioners of the time and Beckett's own writing. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to address the question of the extent to which Beckett's approaches to drama and the actor influenced the ways in which the performing body is perceived.

Contemporary Culture and the Performing Body

It is the performing body, for Philip Auslander (1997), as well as other scholars of contemporary performance, which is the site of many of the fundamental questions shared by Theatre Studies and Performance Studies alike. As an entity at the heart of discourse in Theatre Studies, it is the performing body that remains the nexus or meeting point between audience and artist engaged in both a social gathering as well as a process of art making. In the context of a contemporary, postmodern theatre practice, it is the question of subjectivity, and with it the vehicle of the performing body, that emerges as

a common theme. Karoline Gritzner, in an article comparing three significant dramatists and practitioners of recent times, deploys an Adornian Marxist understanding of subjectivity in order to articulate “New Expressionsim” (Gritzner, 2008: 328) as a continuation of Modernist explorations that “engage with the crisis of subjectivity (a Modernist trope) in a late-capitalist context, using aesthetic approaches which heighten the ‘damaged’ nature of the subject (Adorno)” (ibid: 330). In developing her theme, she points towards the kind of aesthetic approach required for a theatre practice that pursues a familiar Modernist agenda under changing social and political circumstances:

An Adornian approach to theatre would suggest that the theatrical space can provide the conditions for subjective freedom only if the aesthetic principles employed create a world that is sufficiently removed from the social and moral prescriptions of objective reality (ibid: 331).

The three practitioners covered in her article (Howard Barker, Sarah Kane and the work of Forced Entertainment) each choose to present the subjective self as a contested and fragmented phenomenon in their work. In doing so, their work can also be seen to echo familiar themes found within Beckett’s writing and consequent theatre practice. This chapter aims to establish a connection between Beckett’s work and an emerging landscape of performance that has developed against a backdrop of shifting critical and political discourses.

As an entity within contemporary performance practice, the performing body resonates on similar terms but in the context of a widened social, cultural and political frame of reference. Patrice Pavis, in his *Intercultural Performance Reader* (1996) acknowledges

Drama as the activity of bodies in a space; however, at the same time, he posits the idea that the body is a complex signifying phenomenon. Whilst its own corporeality can be seen as an essential and immediate presence in the live space, it is also impossible to ignore the various levels of cultural inscription that come with it. It carries the effects of the society in which it grew and was educated and it is often impossible to ignore the external trappings or adornment of the body (clothing, costume, make-up etc.) as an index of that background. This is especially the case in those circumstances where the three-way relationship between actor, character and the autobiographical self of the actor begins to move away from a traditional emphasis on fictional character towards the 'real', albeit ambiguous, presence of the person appearing on stage.

In those situations where character begins to fade into the background, in favour of a more direct engagement with the actor's performing persona (for Auslander, the logical conclusion of his shift away from the acted character to the performed figure), cultural inscription increases its force in terms of the potential impact it can have on an audience. An actor standing in front of an audience claiming to be her/himself will suddenly draw much renewed attention to the various cultural markers and signifiers from the spectators present. The clothes he/she has selected will cease to be the accepted designed ensemble of a third party and will potentially be seen as a deliberately chosen outfit. Pavis sees cultural inscription as operating on three discrete levels that all co-exist inter-dependently: (i) a *shaping* cultural influence that actively serves to define and mould the identity of the body; (ii) an *artificial* tendency in which cultural influence exists as a wholly constructed phenomenon, in turn determined by its own preceding influences; following on from this sense of artifice, (iii) a tendency for

culture to be *transmitted by social heredity* via a lineage of encoding and decoding that is passed down from one generation to the next (Pavis, 1996: 3-4).

This overtly cultural dimension in the way that the performing body is perceived and generated for an audience is contrasted with the more immediate, fleshly corporeality signified by the live presence of the actor's body. As a physical presence governed by dimensions of height, breadth, reach and rhythm, any approach to the training of the body is designed to educate a sense of deliberateness in the actor that comes from the tacit understanding that, to a greater or lesser degree, acting/performing in live theatre is a managed or planned event in which the performer has prior knowledge of their task. Approaches to actor training from the early Modernist to the postmodern eras have operated between these positions of cultural determination and the immediacy of presence. Depending on the point in history and the broad aesthetic *milieu* in which the practitioner operates, actor trainers/artists have sought to define an approach to the training of the actor in which cultural inscription or social heredity is given greater or less emphasis at the expense of learned behaviour. The emergence of Naturalism in the second half of the nineteenth century ushered in a new spirit of innate or spontaneous approaches to actor training in which the inner self or psychology of the actor was mined as an available resource of emotions or personality types that might be the basis for a fictional character. This increased emphasis on an innate or spontaneous approach to acting can be contrasted with a more learned or mechanical approach that was arguably reserved for a theatrical setting in which formality and rigid dramatic structure was a dominant feature of the drama of the time. The development of dramatic genre is marked by a progression in structure and subject matter in ways that continually make fresh demands of the actor. George Steiner, in his seminal consideration of tragedy, *The*

Death of Tragedy (1961) argues that the genre may no longer exist owing to its almost unrecognizable qualities of form and content in relation to much earlier manifestations. For Steiner, Shakespeare's tragedies provide a pivotal moment in the genre's development. They constitute a rejection of Aristotle's classical model in the light of increasingly tragi-comic or "realistic" content. He describes the key difference as "richer but hybrid" (Steiner, 1996: xiii). This richness can be seen to extend into characterization and therefore the actor's task is rendered more complex. The early nineteenth century philosopher, Hegel - in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), argues for a more complex theory of tragedy driven by a dialectical opposition of ethical forces that can be seen played out in the characters rendered on stage. For Hegel, it is the conflict of subject and object that is key: the competing demands of individual, subjective, personality contrasted with the unpredictable demands of the external, objective, world further complicate the actor's technical challenge.

Genres that aim to present heightened levels of emotion through character types that represent basic human personalities at stages of moral or emotional crisis, appear to operate within a paradox that the Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot sought to highlight in his seminal essay *Paradox sur le Comédien* (*Paradox of Acting* - 1772). For Diderot, it was the constant demand placed on the actor to re-create complex human emotions nightly on the London stage that led to the practical/technical problem of how the actor might execute this very real physical demand. In his opinion, it was the potential for "the lack of sensibility that qualifies actors to be sublime" (Diderot, in Wilson, 1972: 621) that was crucial to his understanding. In other words, the ability of the actor to detach emotionally from the "sensibility" embodied in the character portrayed not only enabled him/her to sustain a long run of performances, it also

enabled an intellectual detachment; one that freed up the actor to step aside from the role and impose a technique that might be acquired or learned methodically. It is no accident that this attitude to a learned or mechanical approach to actor training was succeeded by the emergence of Naturalism in which an acting approach based on a spirit of planned and prepared spontaneity replaced the rigid, hierarchical structures of the earlier theatre. This set of ideas will be re-visited later in this chapter.

Kirby and the Actor

Before examining the more recent ideas that have evolved, partly in light of the emerging Performance Studies discourse outlined in Chapter one, it is important to return to those ideas encapsulated in Kirby's early article. Prompted by the early Modernist pioneers such as the Dada and Surrealist practitioners of the *Cabaret Voltaire* (see Melzer, 1994), as well as those of the German pre-war Avant-Garde of the 1920s and 30s, a counter-cultural spirit of artistic experimentation flourished again in the 1960s. This spirit of enquiry combined with an intellectual curiosity for the political, as well as philosophical rights of the individual, is arguably crystallized in Kirby's article. It recognizes an underlying complexity in our perceptions of acting and the actor; a complexity that he chooses to express as a *continuum* or *spectrum* of phenomena in which 'acting' is described according to a hierarchy of quantity or magnitude (as opposed to any qualitative prescription). The continuum is outlined thus:

NOT ACTING**ACTING**Nonmatrixed
PerformingSymbolized
MatrixReceived
ActingSimple
ActingComplex
Acting

(Kirby, 1972: 45)

For Kirby, it is this pre-determined *matrix* that provides context for our reception of the actor's presence and it is our knowledge of this matrix for any given performance that determines the ways in which we comprehend it. At the far end of the continuum, a *nonmatrixed* performance is described by Kirby as one in which the 'actor' or 'performer' in a given situation (artistic or otherwise) carries an arbitrary or indiscriminate relationship to the function of the action or the space in which it is performed. He uses the example of the far-eastern *koken*, or stage attendants found in *kabuki* performance, who are functionaries charged with the responsibility of moving stage props and scenery into position: "They do not act, and yet they are part of the visual presentation" (ibid: 41). At the other end of the scale, complex acting comprises of nuanced, psychologically layered, often meticulously observed representations of character-based personae that we are used to seeing on the traditional stages of all theatre cultures.

Found between these two opposing ends of the continuum are three incremental stages that describe the transition between the nonmatrixed performances of the *koken* and the complex acting performances of the trained professional. Kirby identifies a *symbolized matrix* as the entry point for our perception of the performer as being in some way engaged in an aesthetic activity or one that separates them from the kind of everyday 'real world' behaviour that enables a stage attendant to be in such close physical

proximity to art whilst still being perceived as carrying out an everyday activity. This symbolized matrix is defined visually, for Kirby. Our ability to process differences between the everyday world and the fictionalized, aesthetic realm can be determined by our reception of simple cultural markers such as costume or clothing. The ways in which these decisions help to provide the beginnings of a rendering of character or persona, that is something other than the everyday world shared by those inhabiting the same space, is a key sensory factor in the ways that audiences read acting. The identifying visual signifiers of hairstyle and make-up, as well as clothing and footwear can provide an immediate, sub-conscious connection with the spectator that triggers cultural, temporal and political associations before a word is uttered by the actor. For Kirby, this is an important crossing point from one state to another. The entry from the non-aesthetic, nonmatrixed, everyday world to the aesthetic, fictional world of art and imagination brings with it the opportunity for an ambiguous blurring of definition as well as playful slippage between the two states. It is the status of this liminal territory in which, potentially, the actor is neither one or the other; neither character/persona or real person, that has provided cultural anthropologists as well as performance theorists with an object of study that aims to explore the implications of this ambiguous territory for wider human behaviour, not only performance. It is worth reflecting on this phenomenon and its implications for contemporary performance.

Liminality, Anthropology and Performance

Liminal states can be found throughout human societies, and apply to both the individual as well as the wider community. They can relate to key moments in our

personal lives, historical periods that might include wars or revolutions or extended periods or epochs in which instability or political confusion begin to assume a sense of permanence. Victor Turner creates the distinction between *liminal* and *liminoid* in his 1974 essay, whereby the permanent and affective social rituals of transition from one *liminal* state to another (the academic graduation or wedding ceremony, for example) are contrasted with the temporary, imitative and essentially playful rituals of *liminoid* leisure activities such as rock concerts or amateur sporting contests. For Turner, the western, industrialized world has seen an increasing diminution of formal, liminal rituals in favour of liminoid practices that aim to imitate or feign the kind of transformational processes affected in the liminal realm. In this context, the world of art and performance can be seen as a set of both liminal or liminoid pursuits in which the temporary, transient sense of escape or transportation afforded by a night out in a West End theatre, for example, can be contrasted with a prolonged process of applied drama therapy in which the individual is taken through a course of theatrical interventions or exercises in order to address a series of underlying psychological/physical pathologies.

For Kirby's actor, the liminoid space between the nonmatrix of the *koken* and the symbolized matrix of the costumed persona can also be seen as a playful space in which the actor is able to exploit their status as an embodied presence, with all the available human attributes of physicality, in order to set up perceptual ambiguities in their reception. In describing the ways in which human societies function during periods of instability, Skakolczai (2009) identifies a process of mimesis or imitation as a feature of individual behaviour for those trapped in a liminal state. In the absence of permanent structures and a stable environment (political or otherwise), people can be seen to mimic behaviours that might be deemed acceptable and, at the same time, start to reproduce

dominant messages regarding what to copy in turn. Linked to this, for Skacolczai, is the key figure of the trickster, a universal figure found in folktales and myths in most cultures. They are described as:

always marginal characters: outsiders, as they cannot trust or be trusted, cannot give or share, they are incapable of living in a community; they are repulsive, as – being insatiable – they are characterized by excessive eating, drinking, and sexual behavior, having no sense of shame; they are not taken seriously, given their affinity with jokes, storytelling, and fantasizing (Skacolczai, 2009: 155).

Within a liminal culture (Germany in the early 1930s, for example), the instability and uncertainty prompted by a period of transition from one political or economic state to another is often accompanied by a search for a charismatic leader figure capable of saving their society. Often a trickster is mistaken for someone with these genuine leadership qualities. The trickster is defined by her/his inherent sense of homelessness (actual or otherwise), dislocation and existence outside the margins of that particular society. Their project is to perpetuate or extend any sense of confusion or instability seen as a feature of the liminal state. This is done via a process of playful mimicking of those around them as an act of imitation that takes the trickster away from their true selves. It is through this process of imitation that wider society can be forced to recognize solutions to the liminal crisis as the trickster projects an image of stability and eventual restitution of the natural order. The trickster is able to exploit their position of power or leadership in order to extend their mimicry to distorted reflections of reality. It is precisely in these situations that “schismatic doubling and copying are escalated, and the erratic, even repulsive, becomes normal” (Horvath & Thomassen, 2008: 15).

The link between the socio-political realm of human societies and that of the aesthetic, fictionalized environments inhabited by the actor may seem stretched, however, much of the cultural or anthropological studies carried out by scholars such as Victor Turner have sought to identify the practice of theatre as something which moves beyond cliché Shakespearean metaphor. For Turner, the theatrical space is one in which the social processes of politics, ideology and public governance meet the aesthetic concerns of narrative, creative expression and performance. The theatre space is a universal space that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere but which has at its unified heart a pre-occupation with the culture it serves. It is also seen as a reflective space, one in which the liminal crises that might beset a society can be addressed and solutions put forward:

To look at itself a society must cut out a piece of itself for inspection. To do this it must set up a frame within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned-off can be scrutinized, assessed, and if need be, re-modeled and re-arranged (Turner, 1977: 35).

The figure of the actor is the pivot on which this inspection, re-modelling and re-arrangement can be activated. In this scenario, the trickster moves centre stage in order to adopt a shamanistic role as both leader of the process of social re-examination as well as representative of the audience present to witness the event. Neither of them, nor apart, the actor stands betwixt and between the spectators in order to occupy a privileged position in that grey area of performance whereby he/she can render her/himself invisible as an individual presence whilst at the same time maintaining a tangible role as the facilitator of a complicit transaction between stage and auditorium.

Thus, the traditional drama has operated from antiquity to the present. Kirby's acting matrix, however, posits a shift from the overtly *complex* acting of the professionalized stage – a technical realm in which virtuosity and craft have grown to dominate over any prescribed social function that Turner's model might suggest – towards a more consciously ambiguous operation in which notions of play, distortion and confusion between roles has sought to extend the status of the trickster to new levels. In his article, Kirby puts forward the idea that contemporary performance practice (i.e. that which he had become aware of in the late 1960s) had seen a marked shift towards the *simple* indeed *not-acting* end of his own continuum. The emergence of Performance Art practices (set to proliferate in the 1970s after the writing of his article), as well as Live Art performance in the 1980s and beyond, has enabled an approach to performance that refuses to abandon the traditional role of the actor but which instead has sought further to exploit its potential for playful leadership – in line with the trickster figure identifiable within liminal cultures. In the practice of applied drama/theatre, Augusto Boal's 'joker' figure is a particular example of this phenomenon.⁵

The collusive and conscriptive power of the actor to represent and stand between the spectator and the performance is resonant of Bert O. States's phenomenological articulation of his pro-nominal modes of performance. As outlined in Chapter one,

⁵ Working within a broadly defined "Poetics of the Oppressed" (Boal, 1979: 95), he/she is one who stands between audience and stage in order to facilitate an engaged and politicized series of interventions from those spect-actors present. This can be seen as a wholly interactive space in which the traditional passivity of the audience is replaced with a dynamic, potentially empowering, stage-auditorium relationship in which not only are the rigid structures of dramaturgy, playwriting and theatre architecture dismantled, but the accompanying contractual or transactional definitions of actor and spectator are conflated and consequently destroyed. It is the Forum Theatre form in which this is best illustrated. As the use of Boal's techniques proliferated globally, Forum Theatre applications were only limited by the extent of the diverse levels of oppression experienced. "Cop in the Head" (Boal & Epstein, 1990: 35-42) techniques were also developed in order to enable individuals to address the internalized processes of self-repressive inhibition as distinct from those externalized forces of oppression that was the basis for his early work. In both of these forms, Boal proposes theatrical scenarios in which individual agency is promoted at the expense of passive capitulation.

Phenomenology as an aesthetic, as well as philosophical discourse, offers a powerful means of analysis in this examination of not only the contemporary actor, but the ways in which Beckett's work can be viewed in such a context. This chapter will now move towards an application of this framework to the Beckettian actor as well as continue with a wider consideration of the contemporary performance landscape.

Worthen and the Beckettian Actor

As argued in Chapter one, it is possible to identify, in phenomenological terms, a 'binocular' view of the theatre event - in which the spectator is invited, potentially, to conduct their reception of a given performance on two planes of perception, and as a response to demonstrative/collaborative as well as representational modes of acting. It is also possible to look further towards a phenomenological reading of Beckett's works with the figure of the actor central to that analysis. Worthen (1984) considers the Beckettian actor to inhabit a similar duality: at once performing in a *representative* mode in which s/he effectively disappears from view in an attempt wholly to immerse in the fictional world of the character offered by the text; whilst also providing an *interpretative* function whereby s/he is able to stand outside the role and offer a *prism* through which the spectator can make sense of what they are seeing. In this instance it is possible to map Worthen's *interpretative* actorly function on to a phenomenological understanding of the *performant* function. The performant mode can be seen as a display of virtuosity; an opportunity for the spectator to delight in the physical or vocal skills of the actor in the moment of performance itself. It is a mode that subordinates

intellect or rationality in favour of a playful, perhaps celebratory engagement with the performance score. This is illustrated well using Beckett's shorter work *Not I* (1972):

... then thinking... oh long after... sudden flash...
it can't go on... all this... all that... steady stream..
straining to hear... make something of it... and her
own thoughts... make something of them... all-...
what?... the buzzing?... yes... all the time the
buzzing... so-called... all that together...
imagine!.. whole body like gone... just the
mouth... lips... cheeks... jaws... never-... what?..
tongue?... yes... lips... cheeks... jaws... tongue...
never still a second... mouth on fire... (CDW: 380)

The spectator's subjective engagement with this piece in performance has the potential to go either of two ways (or, indeed, operate simultaneously): when the actor playing Mouth is in *interpretative/performant* mode, it is the playful, self-referential qualities of the text that come to the fore. The *Logos* referred to by Derrida in his critique of Western theatre's subservience to the arbitrary constructs of language and conventional meaning, is displaced here by a more playful engagement by both actor and spectator. Derrida writes of the need to relinquish the tyranny of the word in favour of play and it is Beckett's work in this case that provides that opportunity. Mouth's words at this point in the text – the well-known 10-15 minute stream of consciousness - are playfully self-referential in their quest to "make something of them" (ibid). But this is not a desperate craving on her part. In his note at the front of the text, Beckett talks of Mouth's "vehement refusal to relinquish the third person" (ibid: 375) at those points when the silent Auditor intervenes in her monologue. She is determined to remain objective. She is *Not* 'I'. Her experience of the world, and the reflective narratives she recounts, are presented by the actor as if they have instantaneously made themselves apparent to Mouth's consciousness. In that moment, it is the *interpretative, performant* qualities

with which we engage. Spectators marvel at the dexterous ability of the actor in negotiating the vocal challenge of not only memorising, but delivering with accuracy, the words in the text. At the same time, we query the actor's ability to remain physically static in restricted, confined circumstances. In many ways, the performer ceases to act. They are of a different art form: a popular circus act, a virtuoso musician, a music-hall curiosity. Enoch Brater's (1975) ideas on the 'alienated' actor in Beckettian performance imply a Brechtian approach to acting except without the required ideological engagement (in the earlier dramas) that would spur the spectator to social action. In this instance, time and space are virtually suspended as we reflect on the 'suspense' (literal as well as metaphorical) of Mouth in front of us. That said, it is also important to acknowledge the existence of a politically motivated strand of acting/performing within postmodernity that has attracted attention from a range of critics and practitioners keen to examine the implications of a body of practices that exploit the affective, transformational potential of the theatre event.

The Political Actor in Postmodernity

The apparent richness of theatricality in performance, as characterized by a post-war generation of radical left-wing dramatists in Europe and North America, has led to a re-thinking of the status of a politicized performance practice, and by extension the status of the actor, with the advent of postmodernism. Beckett's drama, and by extension his actor, needs to be considered as a body of work contiguous with, if not a product of, this environment. Whilst his work during the 1970s and 80s is not immediately identifiable within an overtly politicized set of concerns, through which the realities of a grounded,

socio-economic agenda dominate over those more metaphysical issues commonly associated with his output, there are some key contradictions which some critics have pointed out (see Brater and his discussion of Brecht, above). Philip Auslander, in his 1987 article, “Toward a concept of the political in postmodern theatre”⁶ writes:

There is much a postmodern political theatre can learn from Brecht, but such a theatre must also move beyond Brecht, for whom the transgression of the conventions of bourgeois theatre remains to the point (Auslander, 1997 [1987]: 64).

By the mid 1980s, postmodernist discourse had led to a fresh consideration of the embodied, live presence of the actor with the benefit of a reflective look back at the political protest movements not only in the UK but throughout the Western world and especially in the United States. For Auslander, a fundamental feature of postmodernity is the collapse of the distinction between the economic and cultural realms. This has come about, essentially, due to an explosion of cultural practice and product that has rendered any distinction between this and the worlds of finance or economic supply and demand, virtually impossible. Culture is thus unable to affect any kind of critique of the socio-economic sphere. Its traditional ability to stand apart and peer inside is disabled by its own proliferation and rupture of the economic means by which it operates. This in turn has a significant impact on reception. Audiences are effectively forced into the cynical, perhaps futile position of critical impostor, whereby the very practice of critique – professional or otherwise – is discredited owing to its inherent status as a product of the very sphere of practice (or ‘industry’) from which it comes.

⁶ This article was subsequently reproduced in his collection of essays published in 1997: Auslander, P. 1997: *From acting to performance: essays in modernism and postmodernism* (London: Routledge).

This somewhat problematic scenario is confronted through what Auslander identifies as the remaining challenge for the political artist in a postmodern culture. Citing the work of Frederic Jameson and Hal Foster, he contrasts the former's highlighting of the need for a pedagogical response to postmodernity in the ways that the artist might provide "cognitive maps" (Jameson, in Auslander, 1997 [1987]: 60) as a means of re-positioning our selves in the world. Armed with that knowledge we "regain a capacity to act and struggle" (ibid). Foster is keen to make comparisons between the "transgressive" practices of Avant-Garde practice in the Modernist era with what he sees as a need for a "resistant" political art that is mindful of the limitless horizons of multinational capitalism:

The political artist today might be urged not to represent given representations and generic forms but to investigate the processes and apparatuses which control them (ibid).

Foster's notion of resistant political art forms compared to those of its transgressive predecessors marks a considerable shift not only from the height of Modernism but from the end of the 1960s. The communitarian radicals from the decade of counter-cultural, counter-hegemonic structures in which the artist was content to celebrate their position as outside or on the margins of society, is replaced with a resistant practice in which the term 'radical' is removed in favour of a more inclusive, almost covert approach to art-making. Auslander cites the Pop Art movement of the 1960s as an illustration of this from the fine art sphere: the manifesto-driven, anti-art statements of the 1920s were replaced with the 'cool' and ironic game-playing of the Warhol generation; a generation content to critique its subjects obliquely from within existing

industrial or socio-economic structures; part of, not outside, the cultural practices it embodies.

Building on Foster's premise, the resistant actor, for Auslander, is one that is mindful of "the problematics of presence" (ibid, 62). Given the tendency of postmodernity to imply a collusive relationship between the structures of authority and the power of presence itself, earlier perhaps somewhat idealized concentrations on the purity of the actor-audience relationship and the consequent presence of the live performer, have been exposed as naïve attempts to re-capture the impossible. This problematic of presence in postmodern articulations of performance leaves the actor in a position whereby Modernist assumptions regarding the required levels of critical distance necessary for an audience to affect an objective critique of the presented material are rendered invalid. Critical distance for the actor implies a stepping outside of the role in order to point at it. This very act implies a shared understanding of presence that is free of any collusive relationship to the hegemonic forces of authority and control. If presence is tainted, how is distance established? What is left for the postmodern actor is the need to expose these structures of authority, control and presence in order to affect resistance from within. It is a theme within postmodernity that, in terms of the actor, has led to a turn away from those Stanislavskian pre-occupations with cause and effect towards a post-Stanislavskian set of theories and practices that has emerged out of a phenomenological understanding of the body and the spectator's experience. Operating from within this cultural construct, Beckett's Implied Actor is one who is aware of the problematics of presence, and with it the creation of distance. Instead, their priorities lie within the temporal sphere; the instant of performance itself in which the spectator's

phenomenological experience of the event carries more weight than any proxemic or emotive relationship between actor and text.

For Phillip Zarrilli, it is the phenomenology of perception, as put forward by Merleau-Ponty in the early 1960s, that marks a paradigmatic shift in our thinking with regard to the role of the body in the constitution of experience. Until that point, the ideas of René Descartes had tended to dominate the western theatrical tradition and, by extension, its approach to actor-training. Early Modernist practice of the mid-to-late nineteenth century had laboured under the dual ethos of scientific materialism and industrial production so that claims for an absolutist approach to the scientific practice and language of acting emerged. European practitioners such as Delsarte, Stanislavski and Meyerhold formulated approaches to the training of actors that were founded on principles of objective observation through quasi-scientific methodologies. As Modernism advanced in the early part of the twentieth century, this objectivity was replaced by a growing interest in subjective experience.⁷ Practitioners such as Antonin Artaud, members of the Dada, Surrealist and the German Expressionist movements rebelled against rationalism and the tyranny of the Word.

Underlying these shifts in aesthetic values and artistic practices, Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) as a declaration of philosophical thought from the seventeenth century continued to form the bedrock on which the actor's craft rested. "Character is an object logically constructed by the mind and then put into the body" (Zarrilli, 1995: 13). Merleau-Ponty's ideas on phenomenology come at a point in the post Second World War period when alternative approaches to political values and

⁷ For a useful account of the historical and theoretical paradigms within which these discrete approaches sit, see also Benedetti, J., 2007: *The Art of the Actor* (London: Routledge).

practices within society in the western world were being actively sought. The assumptions of the natural sciences were therefore challenged in favour of an assertion of the centrality of lived experience.

He rejected the exclusive assumptions of the natural sciences and modern psychology that treated the body as a thing, object or instrument, or machine under the command and control of an all-knowing mind (ibid: 14).

In turn, this rejection of Cartesian orthodoxy also dispensed with the perceived need for an absolutist, universal language of acting that could only be seen as, at best provisional; at worst inadequate. For Zarrilli, the quest should be towards finding languages of acting which are best suited to particular contexts and for specific purposes in which the nuances of social class, gender, ethnicity or cultural circumstance are given emphasis through an approach to embodiment that fits in with the overall agenda of the artists concerned.⁸

A post-Stanislavskian ethos of acting must therefore embrace a mind-set that is not bound by the fundamental principle that all actions on stage are motivated psychologically. Meaning can come from actions that have resonance and connection with the spectator via the illogical, irrational or purely physical. Beckett's emphasis on the "nerves [...] not its intellect" (Brater, 1974: 200) of the spectator is here given extra force by confirmation of ideas enshrined in his approach to directing, in operation within a wider tradition. The stable, psychologically whole character is no longer the

⁸ The ways in which Zarrilli, as a practitioner, appropriates these ideas by focusing on the underlying philosophy, as well as Beckett's drama in performance, will also be considered in Chapter three and as part of a discussion of *Not I* in Chapter four.

“paradigm of action” (Zarrilli, 1995: 20). This rejection of orthodoxy can be found in a number of Beckett’s dramas, not just in relation to the establishment (or not) of character, but in the overall status of the embodied presence represented by the figure of the actor on stage. This problematization of character has also been picked up by other writers interested in the function of the actor in a postmodern landscape.

Fuchs and the Death of Character

At the same time as postmodern criticism has deconstructed the status of the actor in the 1980s and 90s, literary as well as dramatic criticism has done the same with regard to traditionally held beliefs in the position of character in performance. The New York Theatre critic and academic Elinor Fuchs published a series of reflections on *The Death of Character* (1996) in which she collected a range of articles spanning the period between 1979 and 1993, including one written in 1983 from which she takes the title of her book. In this article she charts the historical progress of the drama towards postmodernity, a condition she describes as constituting as marked a shift as that from Classicism to Romanticism. As a means of simplifying this earlier shift, she describes how the drama moved from a concentration on the primacy of plot to the primacy of character:

From this shift flowed the far-reaching consequence that the energy driving dramatic structure moved from the physical realm outside the mind [...] to the psychic and spiritual realm within. Consciousness replaced structure as the central fascination of the stage (Fuchs, 1996: 169-170).

For Fuchs, the progression of the drama from antiquity to Modernism has seen an incremental evolution of perception whereby all externally perceived features of Aristotle's famous six elements (Music, Diction, Thought and Spectacle in addition to Character and Action) become projections of the conscious or unconscious mind. Fuchs cites Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as the end point in this process, a play in which:

voracious consciousness has laid waste the entire universe right up to the feet of an ever-retreating deity, himself a probable projection: "character" becomes merely the sum of past and present attempts to survive and evade the pain of conscious existence (ibid: 170).

The "impasse" cited by Fuchs is one in which the immovable object of character meets the irresistible force of an uninhabited cosmos. The growing secularization of Western societies significantly impacted on the new drama of the second half of the twentieth century. An increasing trust in the natural sciences compounded by the dominant, atheistic political ideology of Marx's historical determinism and the self-centred existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, led many writers to explore a universe bereft of logic, design or other-worldly authority. Beckett is an obvious example of this exploration and it is no accident that his apparent philosophical preoccupations with the nature of the human condition would come to have a profound impact on the design of his characters and, by extension, their representation on stage by actors.

For Fuchs, writing at least a decade after the introduction of a generation of artists, writers and theatre makers who are actively seeking to exploit this godless belief system, whilst Beckett's career continues, the result is a stage turned curiously in upon

itself. It is not a stage landscape that adopts the polar opposite of the Romantic view of character, but which blurs our traditional understanding of

the old distinctions between self and world, being and thing; and doing so not through a representation of the outside world but through the development of a performance art “about” performance itself (ibid).

This approach to a self-reflexivity in theatre; a theatre about itself in which, rather than proposing a transgressive model of alternative politics the postmodern artist finds a resistance that operates from within existing structures, is one that on the surface has echoes of early Modernist practices. The dramas of Luigi Pirandello in the 1920s were consciously metatheatrical in their explorations of the mechanics of theatrical, as well as dramaturgical discourse. *Six Characters in Search of An Author* (1921) is a play in which the limitations of dramatic character and the ways in which they are approached by actors is played out as a process of dialectical conversations using consciously self-reflexive devices in order to remind the audience of their presence in an auditorium. The difference between Pirandello’s play and the later works of postmodern and, latterly, those defined as postdramatic writers is the absence or collapse of any coherent boundary against which the drama can be compared. The removal of any trust in an absolutist reading of human history (Lyotard’s (1984: xxiv) “incredulity with metanarratives” that serves to define the postmodern condition), renders untrustworthy our traditionally held reliance on moral frameworks that might have secured our past ability to make comparisons between the ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ worlds created in Pirandello’s works, for example.

Thus, we are left with “signs of signs” (Fuchs, 1996: 71). The discourse of semiotics arguably seeks to rationalize the hall of mirrors that postmodern theatre practice embraces through its project to identify the discrete channels of communication and varying encodings and decodings that inform production and reception on the stage. The Prague School linguist Jiri Veltrusky’s assertion “all that is on the stage is a sign” (Elam, 1980: 7), whilst reductive in its simplicity, is a bold indication of the inwardly reflective postmodern stage.

But in addition to this theatre of signs, Fuchs also posits the idea that this self-reflexive, inward-turning stage environment also provides us with a “Theatre of Things” (Fuchs, 1996: 172) as a result of the fragmentation of human identity in which individual utterances, thoughts and gestures reduce to a single point that has no apparent link to pre-ordained causality or consequent agency. Beckett’s earlier dramas can be seen to align themselves with this strand of thought. In the 1950s and 60s, Beckett’s godless stage environments in which human agency is seen as blissfully, if not playfully, futile are combined with an almost obsessive attitude to the inanimate object. Much has been made of Estragon’s relationship to his boots in *Waiting for Godot*. Krapp establishes a comic, almost improvisational sketch that exists wholly separately and isolated from the core of the drama early in *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958). However, it is Winnie’s compulsive treatment of the contents of her handbag in *Happy Days* (1961) whilst seemingly unaware of her physical entrapment (buried up to her waist in act 1; her head in act 2), that perhaps offers the best example of Fuchs’s idea. In the course of the first three pages of the text, Winnie retrieves the following items from her handbag in order for them to be given central prominence as part of her early morning routine: toothbrush, toothpaste, small mirror, spectacles case, spectacles, handkerchief, parasol,

revolver, bottle, lipstick, hat, glass (*CDW*: 138-40). In keeping with the sentiments of Veltrusky's assertions, the signification of these objects is considerable and exceeds the semantic frameworks normally associated with such worldly objects. They cease to be mere props and take on a potential resonance for the spectator, perhaps amplified by their humorous impact, that relies on the assistance or collusion of the actor to realise. It is a shared task or 'doing' that facilitates one of the pleasures associated with theatre-going and which Anne Ubersfeld identifies in her important essay in the context of spectatorship theory, "The Pleasure of the Spectator" (1982). As part of a broad analysis of pleasure for the spectator, Ubersfeld identifies our sub-conscious desire to seek out that which is absent from the immediate theatrical environment and, by extension, our consequent yearning to return and resume the search as one of the fundamental drives underlying our participation in the theatre event. It is an assertion that has echoes of Derrida's emphasis on the nature of *Différance* (highlighted by Auslander in his essay on "logocentrism and *différance*" in his 1986 article) in which the inwardly reflective character of postmodernity is articulated further as a constant process of self-definition in relation to absence: the "thing" is like x because it is not like y. Ubersfeld describes this constant search for the missing, unidentifiable "thing" as "the most semiotic of all pleasures" (Ubersfeld, 1982: 129) and in Beckett's relatively early theatrical attempt (as depicted in *Happy Days*) to contextualize his own personal search for the "thing", that he was to spend his entire career trying to define, the actor is at the forefront of that quest.

A 'Theatre of Doing'

If Fuchs has identified a “Theatre of Things” exemplified by Beckett’s early theatrical universe, contemporary performance practitioners have identified a “Theatre of Doing” that borrows from the same discourse of postmodernity. Performance Art has promoted the reified body, or distilled articulation of the human condition in which Veltrusky’s linguistic interpretation of the sign as ever-present in a stage environment is given extra resonance when examining the embodied presence of the performer. Actions take on extra resonance in a way that challenges the literary/narrative causality of Aristotelian theatre aesthetics in favour of an immediacy that celebrates absence and valorizes the ambiguous sign relationship between concrete signifier and arbitrary, often indistinct signified.⁹ In the UK, Forced Entertainment is a useful example of a contemporary performance company that emerged in the mid 1980s at the very point where these critical discourses were gaining currency.

In a 1994 book chapter, “Diverse Assembly: Some trends in Recent Performance” the company’s artistic director, Tim Etchells, locates the work of Forced Entertainment in the context of contemporary culture, as well as British performance in the middle of the 1990s. In doing so, he invokes much of the postmodern discourse that was by now a common underlying thread in much of the performance material emerging in the UK at

⁹ Otakar Zich’s, as well as Jiri Veltrusky’s work in the Prague School on the concept of “the stage figure” is useful in this context. Instead of adopting the dichotomy of actor/character, Zich developed a tripartite model of the actor by adding the intermediary concept of the stage figure. Veltrusky then pointed out that the stage figure inevitably contains traces of the actor’s physicality, even if that is not the actor’s or the director’s intended purpose (See: Matějka, L. (ed.), 1976: *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan): 553–606). The corporeality of the human being motivates an indefinite number of physical traits that become semiotized the moment after the actor steps onto the stage. It is therefore impossible to attain complete control of the fluctuation between non-motivated signs and those that are consciously integrated in the process of construction of the stage figure. This model is useful in defining a ‘theatre of doing’ in contemporary performance, where there is often ambiguity in the relationship between the identity of the performer and the figure represented.

that time. He points to Susan Sontag's assertion that "performance is everywhere" (Etchells, 1994: 108) owing to a weakened sense of reality or the absence of any stable assumptions regarding our individual connection to the world around us. For Etchells, this weakening of our perception of reality is well illustrated through our engagement with representations of identity in a theatrical environment. Identity on stage cannot be seen as being in any way fixed. Traditional notions of 'role' or 'character' are seen as being subject to a potentially playful engagement or continual change. Identity is, at best, something to be negotiated as part of the on-going transactional relationship between spectator and performer. When linked to the stage space inhabited by the performer the intersection of performer and environment sets up "zones of possibility" (ibid: 108) in which contradictory occurrences are sanctioned or allowed to happen. These areas of promise, in which the audience feels wholly liberated from the traditional strictures of linear dramatic narratives, is characterized by an emerging set of performance conventions in which approaches to acting are proposed in addition to a dramaturgy that bears striking resemblances to many of Beckett's dramatic techniques from both early and late in his career¹⁰:

Verbal game-playing; listing; obvious quotation of imagery or text (intertextuality); partial or flawed character representation; alienated delivery; mediated performance via video or PA; identical costuming; costume swapping/undressing; stage architecture with internal mirroring; re-arrangement of objects (ibid: 108).

Etchells begins to sketch out the fundamentals of what have become the defining characteristics of Forced Entertainment's aesthetic principles. Now readily identifiable

¹⁰ In addition to the obvious verbal game-playing evident in *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*, his emphasis on colourless delivery ("Don't act"), a fascination with media and mediated performance and the re-arrangement of objects is echoed in works such as *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Come and Go*, *Not I* and *What Where*.

as their work has matured in the years since this article was published, it is the actor/performer in a Forced Ent. show who carries many of the signifying marks. It is the emphasis on “partial or flawed character representation” that is perhaps of most interest to the actor. Partiality, for Etchells, is a liminoid area in which the audience is drawn to those moments in between one state and another. Whilst any particular representation of character is often “flawed” in terms of its sense of wholeness or completion, this ambiguity is added to via the performer’s continuing ability to engage the audience when apparently at rest: “waiting, resting, setting-up, watching” (ibid: 108). In this sense, there is the possibility of a sub-text, or score, beneath the performance text that is there for the actor to engage with playfully and with the possibility of improvisation.¹¹ This is illustrated in a number of their performances since Etchells’ article was written. *And on the Thousandth Night...* was created in 2000 in response to one section from their 24-hour durational performance piece *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me* (1999). This shorter (6 hour), but nonetheless gruelling, performance invites audiences to engage with the practice of story-telling as presented by eight performers who perpetually start, but fail, to finish a seemingly endless round of fanciful narratives. In a way that has echoes of some of Beckett’s earlier dramatic works - in which the ‘double act’ partnerships of, for example, Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, can be seen to engage in playful competitions with each other in order to dominate – this piece is similar in the way that it appears to operate according to rule or game-based structure. Throughout the piece, story-tellers appear free to interrupt and take over at will with the only un-said ‘rule’ in place being that which permits interruption with the proviso that it coincides with the beginning of a fresh story. Crucially, the performance allows the audience to observe

¹¹ This aspect of musicality, especially with regard to the Jazz-like, part-improvisational qualities associated with Beckettian acting, is discussed in the next chapter.

the performers at their points of rest with the same visibility as when they take centre-stage in order to deliver their stories. They can be clearly seen either seated alongside their fellow performers or at the back of the stage where a long table is set, replete with refreshments to sustain them through the six-hour duration of the performance. Our eyes are drawn to them in this state of rest and recovery; an increasingly vital part of the performance as it progresses through the course of an evening show. The “zones of possibility” referred to by Etchells in his 1994 article are here given further resonance because of our ability to make a clear distinction between the actor at work and the actor at rest.

Club of No Regrets (1993) is a one-hour piece from earlier in the company’s career. It toured extensively some eight years after the company’s inception. It is a physically demanding, as well as chaotic piece¹² that culminates in a moment of stillness and relative quiet towards the end. Its “zones of possibility” are handled differently in the way that a metatheatrical inner structure or scenographic ‘box-set’ is placed in order that two performers can coercively enact a series of scenes at the behest of a central figure, Helen X. Throughout, these two performers are tightly bound to hard-backed chairs with parcel tape. The closing scene, occurring after a chaotic and bewildering sequence of fast-paced movement in which talcum powder, fake blood, water and leaves are hurled across the stage area, consists of the two bound performers slowly, and unaided, freeing themselves from their bindings. This sequence is allowed to run for as long as it takes for the performers to free themselves. Averaging at least 10 minutes of stage time, and without any accompanying speech, the action is presented as a silent but heroic portrait of human endeavour. The act of freeing themselves takes a monumental

¹² One of the performers, Terry O’Connor, in an unpublished conversation with the author, described the performance as “relentless” in terms of the demands it made of both audiences and performers.

physical effort in the case of both performers. By the end, perspiration drips from their bodies and they are clearly out of breath. In order to rid themselves of the parcel tape and the chair to which they are strapped, they must destroy the chair, breaking it down to its constituent parts in order to be free.

The actors carrying out this action have ceased to represent any of the characters that might have been implied at the beginning of the performance. Through the sheer physical effort expended on this act, in which the actors concerned have been engaged in a very real predicament quite separate from any of the implied narratives, they have transformed into authentic individuals charged with the responsibility of carrying out a task. In turn, the audience undergo a shift in their expectations. Having worked at making meanings out of the fractured narratives and implied relationships inherent in the performance, this closing scene moves towards an alternative register. It is a performance more akin to escapology or illusionism¹³, as found in the music hall or variety theatre, rather than the theatre. Instead of an arc of emotions that the conventional actor is tasked with representing, Forced Ent. see the actor's role as a set of tasks to be executed, often through an intense physical engagement. In this particular piece, a complex dramaturgical frame is constructed that is self-reflexive and inward looking. The various frames of performance - plays within plays - collapse in on each other however it is to this point: the point at which human effort is reduced to a single act of endurance or physical labour, that the show culminates.

¹³ Especially those "full view" escapologists such as Norman Bigelow, who pioneered the form in the 1970s – in which artists are tested on skill and endurance rather than their ability to create an illusion that is hidden from the audience's sight. See: Cannell, J., 1973: *The Secrets of Houdini* (New York: Dover Publications); Dawes, E., 1979: *The Great Illusionists* (New Jersey: Chartwell Books). As I will go on to discuss in chapter three, Beckett's actor is often engaged in a presentational mode of performance in which endurance and predicament is an important aspect, especially in the challenge for the actor offered by a text such as *Not I*.

Such levels of endurance have the effect of also draining the actor of any sense of emotional or psychological identification with the fictionalized ‘character’ set up for the spectator at the outset of the play. The spectator’s attention is shifted away from the dramatic universe that the company have carefully constructed – in which complex kidnapping narratives are allowed to seed themselves in the imagination of the audience and placed carefully at a distance through the careful use of self-reflexive framing devices – towards a closer engagement with the individual predicament of the actor.

Under these circumstances, it is less the psychological processes of identification or emotional empathy that are in play here for the spectator, than a more reasoned or rational engagement with the process of enactment that exists on a much more functional level. For the actor, charged with this responsibility, the engagement with laboured or endurance-based activities is reminiscent of Diderot’s eighteenth century point of realization. As referred to earlier:

It is extreme sensibility that makes actors mediocre. It is middling sensibility that makes a multitude of bad actors. And it is the lack of sensibility that qualifies actors to be sublime (Diderot, in Wilson, 1972: 621).

The process of sublimation that Diderot describes in his essay on the *Paradox of Acting* can be grafted on to our contemporary understanding of the actor’s place in performance. Those processes of psychological or emotional identification that exist for the spectator can be seen to provide the actor, in turn, with something of a challenge. Not only the challenge of re-creating a particular emotional state from within the deep well of emotions that we have available to us, but also the need to adopt the discipline of re-producing that emotional engagement throughout the duration of a run of

performances – a run that might last for months on end. For Diderot, this set of circumstances was not only impractical, but unreasonable. It was not sustainable for the actor to produce sometimes deep emotional crises on stage without suffering physical as well as emotional distress or harm. He proposed that the craft of the actor should be more concerned with finding the means by which “passion” or “sensibility” could be imitated on stage rather than reproduced. The taped and restrained actors in *Club of No Regrets* therefore go through their own process of sublimation from psychological investment and empathy to detached and wholly committed ‘real’ activity in which any sense of artifice or fiction in the figures *represented* is transformed into a fundamental or immediate *presentation* of real human endeavour.

Beckett, through his work as a writer and director located in Modernity as well as a postmodern world, has cast a long shadow across cultures and art forms; media and related practices. Incrementally, his works for radio, stage and television have been seen, perhaps somewhat crudely, to have evolved from the rich characterizations of *Waiting for Godot* (with its origins found in the earlier prose of works such as *Mercier and Camier* (1946)) to the later, and shorter, works - for the stage in particular – where, perhaps in hindsight, the notion of character is often seen to have been sacrificed on the altar of a distinctly postmodern narrative of abjection and dislocation. As Gritzner has identified in her article on the “New Expressionism” (Gritzner: 2008: 328), postmodern performance has been characterized by an increasing reification of subjective experience in which abstract notions of the self have been reproduced on stage, using the body as a vehicle, but in circumstances that are removed from objective reality. In other words, the ‘everyday work’ that we see carried out on stage employs recognizable physical actions but in estranged spatial, temporal or worldly environments. Throughout, it is this

emphasis on the quotidian, or everyday, in performance that is identifiable as an aesthetic choice in much work that has emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. A ‘Theatre of Doing’, observable in the work of Forced Entertainment during the 1990s, owes much to the spirit of experimentation and counter-cultural innovation of the 1960s whereby cultural phenomena such as Happenings and the emergence of new arts practices such as Performance, later Live, Art began to privilege the body as a site of restored or “twice-behaved” behaviour (Schechner, 2006: 22) in the broadest sense.¹⁴

A concentration on ‘doing’; on manual labour or work, and its representation; of trial and of error, exercises the contemporary actor/performer. It is also an emerging theme in contemporary critical practice that has sought to document both the historical breadth of arts and performance practices throughout Modernity and postmodernity as well as the inter and intra-disciplinary cross-fertilization of ideas, forms and artefacts that has become a feature of the cultural landscape in the last few decades. Sara Jane Bailes, in *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (2011), identifies not only the right, but the need to fail, as fundamental to the act of art-making. Taking Beckett as her prime stimulus, in viewing his work as existing both between and astride the historical Avant-Garde of Modernity and the fragmented, inwardly reflective landscape of contemporary performance, she argues for a poetics that frames a particular space “between what is unintelligible and what wants to be understood” in order to “extend rather than reflect the world *as it is*” (Bailes, 2011: 200). Beckett’s often quoted mantra from his *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* is here invoked as a means of illustrating the frailty of

¹⁴ The work of the American company, Goat Island, can also be used as an example in this regard. See Bottoms, S., & Goulish, M., 2007: *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* (London: Routledge).

artistic endeavour, indeed it's tendency to fail, and which pre-figures a central feature of postmodernism and a 'performance theatre' practice that acknowledges the failures of representational art: "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." (Beckett, 1965: 103). Bailes suggests that we cannot 'do' without failure (op. cit. 12). It is the actor/performer in contemporary performance who has, through a gradual process of transformation, acquired a fresh identity: as demonstrator, as participant, as 'neutral doer' in the practice of a 'Theatre of Doing'.

Lehmann and Postdramatic Theatre

By way of concluding this chapter, more recent theories of drama and theatre can be considered as a means of placing Beckett's work in context. His work can be seen to occupy a significant status in relation to this shift between tradition and the Avant-Garde; acting and performance. As someone whose career straddled the movements between Modernism before the Second World War and the later postmodern/poststructuralist era of the 1970s and beyond, it is possible to identify an approach to acting or performance in his works that broadly follows this momentum. Hans Thies-Lehmann, in his book *Postdramatic Theatre* characterizes this move between Modernism and postmodernism in terms of the various cultural and technological conditions that were prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century. He describes this process of historical development as a three-stage process that commences in antiquity with the parallel rise of the 'pure' and 'impure' dramas in

which the heroic purity of classical tragedy is embodied in the hero/anti-hero figures of Oedipus or Agamemnon. Using the coercive logic of the anti-exemplum, these figures express reality through language and the unified narratives that are played out on the classical stage to offer a model of idealized, albeit flawed, human behaviour in society. In parallel, the 'impure' drama reflects those more problematic elements of human existence such as conflict, immorality and political expediency. This impure, 'flip-side' of the pure hero deals with the irresolvable and the irrevocable aspects of the human condition that can merely be reflected or indeed satirized by the actors who embody such characters in order to provide contrasting models of behaviour for audiences.

Lehmann's second stage is characterized as a crisis point in the relationship between drama and theatre. Chiefly as a consequence of the rise of Naturalism/Realism in the 1880s, these crisis points are determined by the intersection of form, subject and action. The prime naturalistic form to emerge at this time is the expansion of conversational dialogue between two characters. This is seen as a significant development away from earlier, more lyrical forms such as the Renaissance dramas of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Here, the drama is seen to progress through the quasi-musical composition of soliloquy interspersed with a heightened dialogue in which the interaction between characters tended to take the form of individual statements rather than the naturalized flow of language.¹⁵ Naturalism ushers in a mimetic sensibility whereby everyday speech patterns on stage reflect demotic speech. It is an acknowledgment of the place for a quotidian understanding of the human condition in which the inconsequential or the mundane have just as much to offer to our

¹⁵ In contrast to non-Western theatre forms in which music and musicality is more integrated in the actor's performance. Rather than an implied lyricism, the Japanese Noh actor, for example, is expected to evoke consciously the musicality of the piece in performance. See my discussion of this in my introduction to the idea of musicality and performance in Chapter one.

understanding of human interaction as the heroic or profound statement made to a sometimes undefined interlocutor.

Both of these elements combine to offer a sense of action to the spectator that consists of an 'absolute present' in which the narrative arc that combines this with past and future is subordinated to an overwhelming sense of 'now'. The speculative and the reflective are denied as the inconsequentiality of everyday, trivial conversational gambits are imbued with a theatrical significance that denies the spectator any hope of a future cathartic resolution. As an example of the apotheosis of the Naturalist movement, Chekhov's character, Uncle Vanya, is a pathetic and emasculated presence existing within a hopeless situation with no foreseeable escape or, indeed, no particular ending. Even the gunshot fired toward Serebryakov at the end of act three misses its target in an emblematic expression of this inertia. Sonya's final words at the end of the play provide little resolution to his plight: "Wait, Uncle Vanya, wait... We shall rest" (Chekhov, 2002: 245).

For Lehmann, it is the aesthetic, as well as political torpor of late nineteenth century Naturalism that precipitates a period of experimentation or 're-theatricalization' in which a rift or separation occurs between the dramatic text and theatrical expression. Coming at the start of the twentieth century, the emergence of film and cinema aids this process as the need to celebrate 'liveness' or the mesmerising presence of the actor on stage becomes the prime means by which theatre is able to distinguish itself from the new medium. For Lehmann, this is a significant feature of the ways in which the arts have sought to re-energize and respond to the often-bewildering pace of technological change in the twentieth century. Painting responds to the inception of photography

through an increasing commitment toward abstraction; film responds to the emergence of television and home video recording/playback through the development of the mainstream blockbuster and computer generated imagery; television responds to the growth of internet consumption through an increase in digital or online interactivity.

Theatre is therefore left, in this third stage of the shift from dramatic to postdramatic aesthetics, with an approach to dramatic writing that echoes Martin Esslin's articulation of a 'Theatre of the Absurd' in the early 1960s: "no story or plot to speak of [...] without recognizable characters [...] neither a beginning or end [...] reflections of dreams and nightmares" (Esslin, 1961: 4). For Lehmann, the postdramatic is therefore defined by what it can no longer offer the spectator:

The aim is no longer the wholeness of an aesthetic theatre composition of words, meaning, sound, gesture, etc., which as a holistic construct offers itself to perception (Lehmann, 2006: 56).

Beckett is seen by Lehmann as a key writer in the development of postdramatic theatre in the latter part of the twentieth century. Citing Bertolt Brecht and his vision of a "theater with a minimum of dramaturgy, that is, almost no dramaturgy" (ibid: 30), his lengthy examination of those writers and practitioners who might be seen to operate within this tradition include: Robert Wilson, Heiner Goebbels, Robert Lepage, Tadeusz Kantor, Eugenio Barba and Théâtre de Complicité. He also draws comparisons from the work of Heiner Müller, the East German dramatist who, operating within a post-Brechtian universe in which the political imperatives of the 1930s have become replaced by the ideologically uncertain air of postmodernity, created texts that aimed to re-visit the classics as a means of defining his present. Works such as *Hamletmachine*

(1977) consciously problematize the centrality of the subject and the linearity of narrative as expressed by these characters' original authors. Jonathan Kalb (2002) uses Lehmann's postdramatic model in order to affect a comparison of the works of Müller and Beckett as key examples within this new tradition. His article for the Beckett journal *Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* is important in its tracing of a lineage between Brecht and the avant-gardists of contemporary dramatic writing and theatre-making. Kalb echoes Lehmann when he says, "'Robert Wilson can be understood as no less legitimate a Brecht-heir than Heiner Müller', and so can Beckett, particularly in his later plays" (Kalb, 2002:81). He sees Beckett's later drama as parodic in the way that it satirizes the classical unities of place and time. Citing *That Time* (1975) as an example, Kalb sees this play as embodying a tripartite search for three different "lost times", which may or may not have existed, thereby producing the impression of a "breakdown of time" (ibid: 81). There is a "fragmentary narration", by voices presumably allied with the single head if not emanating from it, but "no time-space for dramatic action in the 'Now' of the stage. Time doesn't march on but rather becomes buried in itself, circles and folds in on itself as remembered time" (ibid: 81). Furthermore, this "decomposition" or "scattering" of the dramatic time dimension "manifests the disintegration and death of the Individuum" (ibid: 81). Lehmann compares Beckett's image of "floor to ceiling" dust at the end of *That Time* with Müller's image of a blinding sandstorm at the end of *Der Auftrag* (*The Mission*, 1979): he says both are picturizations of an inhibited "time-flow", also experienced by the spectator, which precludes the dramatic speaker from settling on any fixed point of "present-tense consciousness" or any "comprehensive perspective on his life-reality" (ibid: 81-2). Ultimately, Kalb sees a key similarity in both Müller's and Beckett's outlook on the

future of drama that for both of them expressed itself as a critical blockage or inability to express as they moved towards the end of their lives.

Kalb also cites Elinor Fuchs in his consideration of the postdramatic, as well as Jeanette Malkin and her book *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*. Fuchs's notion of a 'diffused spectatorship' referred to in *The Death of Character* is seen as a crucial link between Müller and Beckett, with Beckett as the pioneer of an approach to witnessing performance that not only fragments the subject seen on stage but also deconstructs the event itself; away from the Cartesian mind/body duality practiced by generations of dramatists and practitioners to this point, towards a practice that is devoid of causality and fully reflective of the de-centred, character-less universe inhabited by Müller's and Beckett's theatrical apparitions. This in turn can be seen to prepare the ground for later spectatorship studies in the 1990s and 2000s, specifically Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) and their sociological study of audiences across media that range from the 'simple' to 'mass' and 'diffused' modes of perception in the context of diverse events that exist within the arts and cultural life.

Beckett's later dramas can be seen to facilitate an approach to acting that, whilst bereft of any prescribed method, appear to present to the actor a series of texts, or performative templates, that resolutely refuse to be identified with any specific twentieth century tradition. For that reason, their performance offers distilled and abstracted representations of the human condition, one of which is the rigorous, relentless, noble, inevitable, irremediable and ultimately doomed-to-fail pursuit of human agency. Whilst so much has been made of the presence, or indeed absence, of the Beckettian actor over the years, it is not simply this presence that intrigues. It is the intervention of

recognizable and human traits of effort and endurance that continue, support and sustain this presence.

In providing the actor with the potential for a theatre of doing that is based on agency and the politics of failure, Beckett also stimulates a generation of artists and practitioners who share his belief in the status of representational art as essentially fallacious. From the North American diaspora characterized by the work of collectives such as the Wooster Group or Goat Island to the British live art or experimental theatre traditions of Forced Entertainment or Reckless Sleepers, theirs is a practice that constantly mediates this contemporary paradox of presence and absence; of action and inaction; of the existentially visible and the dramaturgically invisible. The next chapter will explore more closely the Beckettian actor in the context of the body of Beckett criticism that emerged during his lifetime and since his death, as well as his own interventions as a director of his own works and as an influence on the key actors who worked on his texts.

Chapter 3: The Beckettian Actor

As discussed in the last chapter, the broad landscape of contemporary performance is one in which the classical, unifying properties of time, place and action have undergone a progressive, subversive transformation since the advent of Modernism in the late nineteenth century. Throughout these shifts in philosophy and performance practice, it is the figure of the actor who has been found at the forefront of a shift away from representational art and theatre-making practices. It is a shift in which the securities and familiarities of character, plot and action have given way to an abstracted, de-centred and fragmented approach to drama and performance in which the actor's traditional role as a mediating presence between spectator and performance; audience and script; community and message is one that has become satirized, manipulated and deconstructed¹ to the point at which the actor working at the beginning of the twenty-first century is charged with a different set of responsibilities and imperatives compared to her/his counterpart some hundred years earlier.

Beckett's writing output and directorial practice stalks the eras of Modernity and postmodernity that have served to define the cultural identity of the last century. The

¹ Drama of the twentieth century has sought to satirize acting, and the creative process of theatre-making, using meta-theatrical devices. Pirandello's 'trilogy of the theatre in the theatre' (*Six Characters in Search of an Author* - 1921; *Each In His Own Way* - 1924; *Tonight We Improvise* - 1930), self-consciously sets out to challenge the problematic relationship between fiction and reality as embodied in the process of theatrical representation (see Bassnett-McGuire, S., 1983: *Luigi Pirandello* (New York: Grove Press). Contemporary drama has moved towards an active process of manipulation and deconstruction in which the fragmented self becomes a priority, often through the re-visiting of canonical texts. The Wooster Group's *L.S.D. (...Just The High Points...)* - 1982 challenges the status of the actor/performer through its use of randomized, selected readings from the works of Huxley, Ginsberg and Kerouac - and using Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* as a pervasive theme. See: Savran, D., 1990: *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group).

Beckettian actor is an emblematic figure whose presence is not only found as a symptom of the age, but whose lasting image has influenced a significant body of performance practitioners in the years since Beckett's death. This chapter identifies those characteristics of the Beckettian actor that have evolved since Beckett's first significant theatrical successes up until the end of his writing and directing career. In doing so, it is important to focus on the critical and philosophical contexts for this evolution, as well as examine the evidence for these developments through the existing primary texts and documented performances. This task is rendered more complex by the nature of Beckett's career in relation to the body of criticism of his work that has emerged during and after his life. As David Pattie (2000) has pointed out, Beckett criticism can be characterized by marked developments that have sometimes been determined by key events in his life. For example, the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 prompted a new direction for much of the subsequently published material in the next decade. More reflective volumes on his body of work to date, as well as biographies and examinations of his work in the theatre marked a shift away from earlier, generally more isolated scrutiny of his output.² While he was alive there was an inevitable, almost symbiotic relationship between Beckett's output and the critical community that responded to his work.

In considering Beckett's critical heritage, it is also necessary to trace the philosophical genealogies that precede the main period of critical activity from the middle of the

² After the award of the Nobel Prize in 1969, the number of scholars engaged in Beckett studies increased significantly. General studies included the first bibliography of his work and the critical response (Federman, R. & Fletcher, J., 1970: *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics*); Ruby Cohn's *Back to Beckett* (1973) sought to re-examine the texts themselves rather than the wealth of secondary criticism that had emerged by then; Hugh Kenner's *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (1973) minimizes philosophical reflection and roots his work in a more historical analysis. Dramatic criticism in this decade continues through studies of the major plays (Fletcher & Spurling), Knowlson (*Light and Darkness in the Plays of Samuel Beckett* – 1972) and Eugene Webb (*The Plays of Samuel Beckett* – 1972).

twentieth century onwards. A key feature of the development of Beckett studies has been the shift from a liberal-humanist, broadly Cartesian consideration of the author's prose, poetry and drama to one that embraces phenomenological (in philosophical terms), and psychophysical (in corporeal terms) turns, from the late 1960s onwards. Philosophically, it is important to trace the move from early modern to Modern thinking, marked by a turn from metaphysical spirituality towards Utilitarianism³ and the rise of Materialism⁴ and political philosophy, as an important precursor to Beckett's activity as a writer. In its assertion of the primacy of matter (and its products), Materialism can be seen as a shift from the idealist philosophy of Cartesian dualism, in which the doctrines of immaterial substance as applied to the mind prioritize mental processes, or cognition, as the wellspring from which we formulate our perception of reality. Although developing in parallel, but not necessarily in close connection to, the emergence of phenomenology as a subject-centred methodology that accounts for lived experience and our encounters with those objects that constitute our perception of reality, Materialist discourse in relation to Beckett studies is a critical theme that emerges in relation to notions of the actor. This is dealt with below, as is the influence of Jacques Derrida and his deconstructionist ideas relating to the subject as a contested phenomenon.

In addition to a philosophical lineage, the Beckettian actor can also be considered in the context of performance practice and its development throughout the twentieth century. In straddling the Modernist and postmodern paradigms (Bradbury and McFarlane, 1991; Green and LeBihan, 1996), Beckett's work occupies a historically panoptical

³ See Bentham, J., 2009: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Dover Publications Inc.); Mill, John Stuart, 1998: Crisp, Roger, (ed.) *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁴ Specifically, the dialectical materialism developed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and adopted as a methodology for the study of society and history during the period of the Soviet Union.

position at the latter half of the twentieth century: on the one hand, influenced by such canonical Modernist writers as James Joyce and Luigi Pirandello (Knowlson, 1996) and, on the other, relying heavily on postmodern notions such as the transgression of the body, performative identity and the failure of grand narratives such as language and truth. Richard Begam reinforces this point in his study, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (1996):

Beckett's conception of his undertaking, what we would now call his postmodernism, recognized that an absolute break with the past, a complete supersession of what had gone before, was itself the product of a teleological or modern form of thinking. Proust and Joyce therefore became not figures to be replaced or surmounted but telling points of reference in an ongoing dialogue between past and present (Begam, 1996: 14).

Beckett's position as a liminal writer, spanning two distinctly different but obviously connected intellectual paradigms, enables the examination of not only his work, but the specific contexts of critical and performance theory that inform our understanding of the Beckettian actor. This chapter will seek to map the key performance practices of the Modernist era, specifically that which emerged in the early part of the twentieth century as a conscious turn away from Naturalism/Realism as the dominant creative paradigm in Western theatre: what for Richard Schechner can be termed as the "historical avant-garde" (Schechner, 1993). Additionally, this chapter will also seek to explore those practices that can be identified as having emerged either in parallel with, or after, Beckett's career as a writer and practitioner. In doing so, a generation of artists can be identified as having emerged with an awareness of Beckett's body of work. Their subsequent creative energies can be seen to provide a sense of continuity in the

development of the actor/performer in contemporary performance practice – in which internal resources, embodied awareness, intellectual development and self-identity play just as significant a part in the realization of a role, as does any externally imposed training regime. With the dual awareness of a philosophical framework – phenomenology – that is structured on the premise of a grounded awareness of the subject, and its psychophysical complexity, as the source of creative experience; along with a historical understanding of the actor's contested and problematized place in the development of performance practice, the Beckettian actor can be seen as one that defines themselves according to that which she/he is not, as much as by the sum of their constituent parts.

This chapter will start by examining the evolution of the Beckettian actor with an awareness of changes in the critical response to Beckett's work. It will also use selected examples from the work of key actor/practitioners, either in collaboration with Beckett during his career, or as a response to his body of work since his death in 1989. In doing so, this part of the study proposes that those who perform Beckett's works do so through strategies of implication and a grounded awareness of the psychophysical absences at play, as much as the self-evident presence of the performer. The Implied Actor in Beckettian performance is one that builds their practice on an awareness of Beckett's own rejection of a grounded methodology, or technique, for the training of the actor - "Not for me these Grotowskis and Methods..." (Bair, 1990: 544) – but nevertheless is content to incorporate a range of personalized, or indeed borrowed, techniques that have their origins in a range of somatic, religious and/or spiritual practices, as well as the actor's own sense of personal, social and political identity. What unites this potentially eclectic approach, in addition to the texts themselves, is a

willingness to engage with a set of playful aesthetic values in which a liminal stage existence that emerges somewhere between presence and absence, is given free reign to explore the sometimes minute presentational gaps that open up between the prescriptive directions of Beckett's texts and the creative will of the actor.

As discussed earlier, the twentieth century has seen a fundamental shift with regard to not only the status of the actor, against a background of changing approaches to avant-garde or experimental performance practices, but also the status of the audience and those practices of witnessing, spectating and indeed participation in the theatre event that have become transformed across the Modernist and postmodern eras. Auslander (1997) accounts for this shift – from the perspective of the actor – in his articulation of a tangible move from acting to performance.⁵ The former encompasses those acts of representational performance in which recognizable characters with identifiable histories or back-stories are embodied and made flesh using the medium of the actor's body in order to serve a narrative function that is usually closely wedded to an overarching dramatic text. The latter phenomenon: performance – is, in part, a product of a major shift in philosophical thought that concerns itself with human perception and the ways in which individuals engage with the world around them. It can be characterized as an ontological shift from the epistemological assumptions of Cartesian dualism to the late nineteenth century philosophy of phenomenology (specifically, the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger); and more recently, its framing as a means of explaining our perceptual encounters with the external world by the philosophers Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre and, most significantly, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

⁵ See: Auslander, P., 1997: *From acting to performance, essays in modernism and postmodernism* (London: Routledge).

Our contemporary understanding of phenomenology is built on early nineteenth century thinking on the nature of phenomena, or that which presents itself to us in conscious experience, as first explored by Hegel (1807) as a means of interpreting and, ultimately accessing, metaphysical or spiritual realities denied to us in the everyday conscious realm⁶ Husserl's conception of phenomenology in the early twentieth century, shifts our understanding of phenomena towards that of the structural properties of consciousness itself. This shift from a Cartesian analysis of the world based on objects, in isolation or combination, acting and reacting upon one another; to one that places a greater emphasis on the objective study of subjective or lived experience, is a pattern that is repeated in the development of Beckett criticism from the period of the early 1950s to the time of his death and beyond. This progress is dealt with below.

Whereas Husserl conceived humans as having been constituted by states of consciousness, Martin Heidegger countered that consciousness is peripheral to the primacy of one's existence, which cannot be reduced to one's consciousness of it. From this angle, one's state of mind is an "effect" rather than a determinant of existence, including those aspects of existence of which one is not conscious. By shifting the centre of gravity from consciousness (psychology) to existence (ontology), Heidegger altered the subsequent direction of phenomenology. As one consequence of Heidegger's modification of Husserl's conception, phenomenology became increasingly relevant to psychoanalysis. Whereas Husserl gave priority to a depiction of consciousness that was fundamentally alien to the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious, Heidegger

⁶ See Hegel, G.W.F., 1976: *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford UP).

offered a way to conceptualize experience that could accommodate those aspects of one's existence that lie on the periphery of waking consciousness.⁷

The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of key applications of phenomenological thought in the realm of aesthetics and, importantly, everyday life. Michel de Certeau, in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), identifies our quotidian experiences as a valid object of study. For de Certeau, subjective experience lived through waking consciousness can be experienced according to the key organizational terms "strategies" and "tactics". Strategies are devised by institutions and corporations with a unifying worldview that enables them to create products that reinforce a dominant ideology or structure. Individuals are "consumers" acting in environments defined by strategies by using "tactics". De Certeau therefore argues that everyday life works by a process of poaching on the territory of others, using the rules and products that already exist in culture in a way that is influenced, but never wholly determined, by those rules and products. His ideas can be seen to build on an earlier, similarly politicized polemic, in which Henri Lefebvre argues that everyday life can be seen dialectically as the intersection of "illusion and truth, power and helplessness; the intersection of the sector man controls and the sector he does not control." (Lefebvre, 2008: 40). For Lefebvre, if the ordinary individual could become increasingly aware of their everyday existence, this leads to increasing resistance, even revolution, in the face of capitalist repression and the inhibition of self-expression. It is a powerful, phenomenological, articulation of human existence that can be projected on to much of

⁷ See Natanson, M.: 1973 *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of infinite tasks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press) and Safranski, R.: 1998 *Martin Heidegger: Between good and evil* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

what later became recognized as resistant art-making practice in the cultural experimentation of the 1960s and beyond.

For Merleau-Ponty, our contact with external reality is mediated by the physical senses and it is precisely our acquired perception of the world that enables us to provide it with meaning. In contrast to the classical Cartesian starting point (*Cogito ergo sum* – ‘I think therefore I am’), a phenomenological analysis of human perception places subjective ‘lived’ experience at the heart of our engagement with external reality:

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: xxii-xxiii).

Whereas a Cartesian perspective would seek to offset the ‘unreliability’ of subjective, sensory perception through the regulating and objective presence of the rational mind, a phenomenological view accepts that the mind is not detached from the body. Consciousness, the body’s senses, and the exterior world are inextricably linked; therefore the act of perceiving constitutes being itself, hence: ‘I *perceive* therefore I am’. An important consequence of this shift from a Cartesian to a phenomenological approach is the accompanying acknowledgement that the act of perception cannot be seen as a passive act of acceptance. As Alva Noë argues:

Perception is not something that happens to us or in us. It is something that we do [...] the world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction (Noë, 2004: 1).

From this idea, it can be argued that the activity of bodies in not only perceiving the external world but of acting or performing within it is not only a useful philosophical model for a change in thinking with regard to the aesthetics of theatrical performance, but also an effective tool for an examination of audience engagement. It provides us with an analytical device for the experience of the spectator when encountering a theatre event. It is no coincidence that this increase in the emphasis on human subjectivity and individual agency as a prime force in the emerging aesthetics of postmodern performance practices in the second half of the twentieth century happens at a time when those same attributes of subjective individuality, participatory intervention and political resistance are emerging as a feature of contemporary spectatorship. This, in addition to an over-arching decline in the concept of community in the face of industrialization, mechanization and the progressive impact of a subordinated sense of individual self in late capitalist societies.

This acknowledgement of an increasing awareness of, at the very least, a developing role for the spectator can be illustrated in Beckett's early plays in which there is often a sometimes coy attitude expressed toward an implied presence in the auditorium. Estragon's oblique indication of "inspiring prospects" (*CDW*: 15) in *Waiting for Godot* can be contrasted with Clov's more emboldened observation of a "multitude in transports of joy" (*CDW*: 106) in *Endgame*. In the later plays, it is the minor, supporting figures that provide the mediating link between audience and text. The Auditor in *Not I*, adopting a physical position between these two points, can be seen to open up the piece to the possible intervention of the audience almost as a last-ditch attempt to find some assistance for Mouth. The "gesture of helpless compassion" (*CDW*: 376) described in

the stage directions at four key points in the text can be seen as a somewhat desperate plea to the audience by the time the piece reaches its final movement.

The growing popularity of this shift in philosophical thinking in the early 1960s has resulted in a profound transformation in the ways in which the body, and hence the actor, has been perceived. The scientific, objective truths of Cartesian discourse - in which the laws of cause and effect are applied to our understanding of the body to such an extent that only rational thought processes can entail a meaningful aesthetic production of physical action – gives way to a wholly subjective democratization of the body's anatomy, in which flesh, blood and bone shares equal status with the power of the conscious and unconscious mind.

Beckett criticism, from the point at which he emerged into public prominence following his first theatrical successes, to the end of his life and beyond, can be examined according to a series of phases. This chapter examines the changes in the status of the Beckettian actor using these discreet phases as an organising framework. They can be summarized as follows⁸ and in terms of their broad relationship to the totality of Beckett's output:

- Late 1950s-1969: Liberal-humanist approach dominated by Cartesian analysis
- 1970-80: An emphasis on language as a problematic/inadequate expression of the self
- 1980-95: The influence of postmodern/poststructuralist discourses and an 'anti-Cartesian' reading of the work.
- 1995-present: Re-examination of Beckett's work in the light of biographical studies and the emergence of 'the grey canon'; Beckett's unpublished manuscripts, correspondence and bibliographical marginalia.

⁸ David Pattie provides an expansion of this summary, as well as a useful survey of each phase described (Pattie, 2001: 103-4). See: Pattie, D., 2001: *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge).

It is tempting to reduce this description of the progress of Beckett criticism to a simple articulation of that which, in terms of its consideration of the actor/performer and the body, can be seen as ‘Cartesian’ versus that which takes an alternative view. Much of the criticism that has emerged in regard to the particular focus of this study can be seen to fall into either of these two ‘camps’ however it is also important to point out that many critics have sought to identify the potential for slippage between the two.⁹ For the purposes of this chapter, in its consideration of the Beckettian actor, the distinction between what might be termed ‘Cartesian’, and that which turns away from the body/mind dichotomy, provides a convenient critical framework in which to examine Beckett’s work as well as the inadequacy of its current critical responses. In regard to terminology, it is expedient to avoid use of the phrase ‘post-Cartesian’ in order to differentiate the latter of these two phases in Beckett criticism. Aside from risking accusations of reductionism, the phrase is also established as a means of describing a specific historical shift in the development of philosophical thought, in which Descartes’s ideas of causality and body/mind dualism had become challenged even in the early modern period, specifically the late seventeenth century.¹⁰ This study elucidates the body of Beckett criticism, and associated performance practices, that emerged in the latter quarter of the twentieth century and which might be described as turning away from a grounded reliance on Cartesian dualism in relation to our perceptions of the body, and by extension the actor, in art, literature and performance. It is a turn that can be described in terms of its opposition to the Cartesian model, but which also eludes a definitive label. ‘Anti-Cartesian’, ‘Psychophysical’ or

⁹ As discussed in Chapter two, Bert O. States in his book *Great Reckonings in Small Rooms* (1987) adopts a phenomenological stance in relation to the figure of the actor however is keen to point out that the discourses of semiotics and phenomenology should be seen as, effectively, twin sides of the same coin rather than competing and oppositional traditions - as Merleau-Ponty himself might have viewed the distinction.

¹⁰ See Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1667), in which he challenges the key foundations of Descartes’s assumptions on the relationships between the body, the mind and the senses.

‘Phenomenologically-aware’ are phrases that can be applied to this opposition, depending on the critical, or performative, context.

Cartesian analysis and early Beckett criticism

The early liberal-humanist wave of Beckett criticism, characterized by the work of critics such as Hugh Kenner and Martin Esslin, reads Beckett as a transcendental writer who subscribed to a classical Cartesian dualism. The prominence of the body and its decrepitude, if taken note of at all, was accredited to the body’s inherent otherness; what ‘truly’ mattered in Beckett’s writing was the mind and its capacity to transcend, or move beyond material concerns. An example of Kenner’s criticism – his discussion of “The Cartesian Centaur” (Kenner, 1961a) – is dealt with below; Esslin’s work in the mid 1960s sets out what he considered to be three modes of critical inquiry that he deemed as valid responses to Beckett’s writing (explicating allusions, discovering their structural principles and shaping how the writer’s work is perceived by the reading and theatregoing publics).¹¹ His collection of critical essays on Beckett’s earlier prose, poetry and dramatic works reinforces a Cartesian sentiment.

In addition to this distinct philosophy that set out the inter-relationship of mental and physical processes, Beckett criticism in the 1950s was also characterized by an interest in the emerging continental philosophical discourse of Existentialism, as well as its

¹¹ See the editor’s introduction in Esslin, M. (ed.), 1965: *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Prentice-Hall).

accompanying emphasis on notions of the Absurd. Principally espoused in the writing of Jean-Paul Sartre, existential thinking posited a similar idea to that of Cartesian philosophy, whereby individual existence is built on a solid foundation of doubt as to the relationship between our selves and the external world. An existential duality of ‘existence before essence’, in which presence and corporeal certainty defines and confirms our existence in the world, challenges the Cartesian duality of the *Cogito* in which the thinking self (or essence) exists independently of the external world. For the existential individual, human agency – free will – is of paramount importance in terms of the ways in which our experience of the world is encountered, negotiated and ultimately lived. Sartre, in his book, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943) suggests two options for the individual, charged with ultimate responsibility for living his life in a secular world: the ‘man of bad faith’ is enslaved to the habit that people have of deceiving themselves into thinking that they do not have the freedom to make choices for fear of the potential consequences of making a choice. One example of bad faith that Sartre gives is that of a waiter who does his best to conform to everything that a waiter should be. For Sartre, the waiter's exaggerated behaviour is evidence that he is play-acting at being a waiter, an automaton whose essence is to be a waiter. However, in order to play-act at being a waiter, the waiter must at some level be aware that he is not in fact a waiter, but a conscious human being who is deceiving himself that he is a waiter: “man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being” (Sartre, 2003: 574). The ‘man of good faith’ freely recognizes this principle and chooses to embrace his freedoms via a noble progress through life, in which the freedom to make choices at the level of the mundane or everyday, as well as at the level of ethical and moral decision-making, are positively

exercised. Albert Camus's seminal work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) uses the classical figure of Sisyphus as a metaphorical illustration. Condemned forever to push a boulder up to the top of a slope, only for it to fall due to its sheer weight thereby prompting a fresh attempt the following day, Sisyphus cuts a heroic figure for Camus. As with human existence, his task is futile and ultimately comic, or absurd, in both its repetitive nature as well as its inversely proportional relationship of expended effort to final outcome. With no apparent significance attached to the previous day's efforts, nor any motivational consideration of the rewards to be received in the event of him successfully completing his task, Sisyphus is merely required to exist in that isolated moment of toil. He remains in that moment of exertion: futile and absurd but imbued with a classical nobility and freedom of will that condemns him to an ill-defined lifetime of self-chosen constraint. Of course, the humour, or absurdity, of this existential reality can only emerge with the intervention of a third party to observe the action and, for Beckett, his early dramatic observations on the nature of human existence provide us with a modern perspective that valorizes the act of repetition and those prosaic qualities of human behaviour (waiting, resting, playing etc.) which elevate the ordinary to the essentially noble. Steven Connor is keen to point to the link between performance and the dramatic text as being key to our understanding of repetition in modern Drama.¹² In citing Artaud's belief in the need for Drama to find its "own language" as a means of turning away from the "compulsion to repeat" through our perpetual desire to "read back" to the original text (Connor, 1988: 131), Beckett's works in performance can be seen to challenge the spectator to find a new validity for the act of repetition through the immediacy of his characters on stage. The classical allusion invoked by Camus can be extended to the figure of the actor operating within an absurd universe. Beckett's early

¹² See Connor, S., 1988: *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Blackwell).

short mime work, *Act Without Words I* (1956) explores similar themes in its depiction of a solitary male figure “flung backwards” on to the stage, at the start (*CDW*: 203). The force behind this, and other ensuing additions of various objects that are either pushed on from the wings or flown in from above, is unseen. The objects that are gradually introduced offer him the tools to build shelter (scissors, cubes, rope), as well as the means to sustain life (a carafe of water). With each addition, his efforts are thwarted in some way as the unseen off-stage presence constantly frustrates his efforts to make the best of his predicament. Ultimately, in an apparent act of resignation, he sits on a large cube and stares at his hands.

Aside from the various interpretations: allegorical or metaphorical - that can be applied to this piece, one key symbolic resonance lies in the figure of the man himself. Charged with this undefined task to sustain himself in a dislocated environment, his inability to find meaning, resolution or ultimate closure in his activity has metatheatrical connotations in terms of his status as an actor. His presence on stage, charged with the simple responsibility to be there and to do, without any apparent meaningful imperative or end-point, parallels the life of an actor with no apparent *raison d'être* other than to execute his planned and rehearsed performance with the maximum of economy, only for him to return the following night and repeat the exercise. It is perhaps no accident that the levels of futility found in the myth of Sisyphus and his labour with the boulder, is echoed in Beckett's early mime. In this theatrical setting, the audience is shown various simplified and reductive objects and behaviours, as the figure of the man apparently exists to engage in various acts of ostension, in which objects shown to the audience become effectively “de-realised” in their expected connotations in order to

stand “as an expression of the class of which it is a member” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1984: 112).

Camus’s metaphor for the absurdity of the human condition can easily be applied to characters and situations, as well as the actors performing those roles, created by Beckett in his early dramas and throughout the remainder of his career. The tramps in *Waiting for Godot* are engaged in a futile act of waiting for an elusive figure that never arrives. With the freedom of the open road ahead of them and as representatives of that lifestyle that offers precisely none of the social restrictions of job, family or conventional responsibility, Didi and Gogo are in possession of the starkest existential choice. Their choice to withdraw or opt-out is framed as a positive choice; a heroic choice in which their sense of sacrifice is one that has stretched into a life of servility and subordination to an invisible master in exchange for a life bereft of the pressures that come with multiple commitments. As explored in Chapter two, it is this emphasis on the quotidian or everyday features of human existence that finds extra resonance in contemporary performance practices after Beckett. Elinor Fuchs, and then Sara Jane Bailes, have identified, with the benefit of phenomenological discourse, the existence of both a ‘Theatre of Things’ and a ‘Theatre of Doing’ amongst a generation of performers and theatre-makers since the 1970s. A set of practices emerged at this time that sought to valorize and re-frame, not merely re-present or emulate, those everyday behaviours that, for Beckett’s tramps are acted, but for a new generation, are simply done. It is an emphasis in which the intricacies of process, preparation and rehearsal are given as much weight as any final performance outcome; and one in which the sounds and images associated with the mundane act of waiting, of being at rest, in a state of neutral

stasis, finds its way in to the stage environment.¹³

It is the comic aspects of absurdity and the human condition that can also be seen to appeal to this emerging Beckettian aesthetic that, by extension, becomes immediately of interest to the actor:

the mechanical aspect of human gestures, their meaningless pantomime make silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking behind a glass partition; you cannot see him but you can hear his incomprehensible dumb-show; you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own humanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are [...] is... the absurd (Camus, 2005: 18-19).

Although many critics believed that Beckett's Cartesian credentials were most readily apparent, perhaps best suited, to the prose form because of the opportunities that existed in that format for a more clear and direct engagement with the mind or consciousness of the author, the drama perhaps offers a more resonant manifestation of the existential/absurd readings that critics were beginning to pursue during the 1950s. The "incomprehensible dumb-show" referred to by Camus as a means of characterising the ways in which it is possible to perceive the impact of humanity in an absurd universe, is one that has its parallels in an approach to Beckettian performance in which external, technical virtuosity carries as much resonance as any internalized or solipsistic form of performance. At the time of Beckett's first success in the theatre, in the early 1950s, his

¹³ See Chapter two and my discussion of a 'Theatre of Doing' in relation to the Forced Entertainment piece, *And on the Thousandth Night...* (2000).

comic influences would have sprung from the earlier part of the century and the silent cinema where physical comedy, slapstick and the kind of ‘dumb-show’ born out of technological necessity rather than any philosophical imperative would have stimulated his imagination. Roger Blin confirms this with regard to his own work on *Waiting for Godot*:

It is probable that while writing *Godot* Beckett was, as far as his four characters were concerned, under the influence of the great American comic actors of the time. When I was thinking of staging it, I was myself completely obsessed by them and I can say that one day I suddenly saw the characters such as I wanted them to be. They were, ideally, Charlie Chaplin for Vladimir, Buster Keaton for Estragon, and Charles Laughton for Pozzo. Because Pozzo must be played by a fat man. I have played it myself but it is not my part and from now I shall play Estragon (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988: 69).

Actors such as the three listed by Blin in this reference in turn found their roots in the vaudeville or music hall traditions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century popular theatre. In this context, the comic turn or sketch would largely consist of an individual performer engaging the audience directly either with a routine of jokes, performed monologues, comic dancing or rigidly structured slapstick routines.¹⁴ In each of these examples the performer’s persona or stage identity was all-important. Whether they chose to adopt the ‘cheeky chappie’ persona of a stand-up comedian such as Max Miller (in which risqué double entendre would pepper his material as well as a direct engagement with his audiences),¹⁵ or veer toward the comic-grotesque balletic

¹⁴ For an authoritative history of Vaudeville as originally found in North America from around the 1880s, see: Trav, S., 2005: *No Applause-Just Throw Money: The Book That Made Vaudeville Famous* (London: Faber & Faber).

¹⁵ For the definitive biography of Max Miller, see: East, J., 1998: *Max Miller the Cheeky Chappie* (London: Robson Books Ltd.).

performances of Max Wall (in which his elastic physicality would enable him to achieve his trademark stylized strutting walk across the stage as his alter ego, Professor Wallofski),¹⁶ popular theatre audiences of the time were used to a presentational, rather than representational, approach to performance.¹⁷ There was no interest in the character's back-story or internal motivations. The comic performer existed purely in the ephemeral moment of performance and traded off the audience's anticipation of the next laugh. Any nod toward dramatic representation was done with an economy of scale and awareness of caricature that eschewed the usual three-dimensionality of the 'rounded' character for an approach that placed the performer's virtuosity and technical ability at the forefront of the act. It is an approach that perhaps uniquely dissolves and subordinates the actor's sense of self as well as any sense of character in favour of a fleeting but vivid *presentation* of an immediate persona. It is no accident that actors such as Max Wall and Buster Keaton would, in their later careers, work on Beckett's dramas either on stage or (in Keaton's case) on film.¹⁸

Although the prototypical Beckettian actor of the mid 1950s can be seen to have its roots in the popular entertainments of the early twentieth century, it is something of a shift both in terms of audience and form to find this kind of approach resonating so pertinently in the avant-garde theatre of Paris in the mid 1950s. Its relevance to the

¹⁶ For an account of Max Wall's work, especially on *Krapp's Last Tape*, see: Elsom, J., 1983: "Samuel Beckett, Max Wall and Me", *Contemporary Theatre Review* 242 (May): 261-65.

¹⁷ See Chapter one, where I discuss Worthen (1984) and Kalb (1989) and their ideas on Beckettian acting as operating a "dynamic equipoise" (Worthen, 1984: 207) between representation (of character) and presentation (of specific moments of performative dexterity). Whilst seen as existing simultaneously or as alternating parts, this presentational aspect is also applicable to the variety or vaudeville performer.

¹⁸ Both actors worked either with Beckett or performed in his plays during the latter part of their careers. Buster Keaton collaborated with Beckett on his only foray into the film medium: *Film* (1965). Max Wall performed in two of Beckett's plays: *Waiting for Godot* (1979) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1984). For an account of Keaton's performance in Beckett's *Film*, see the director, Alan Schneider's, discussion of the making process: "On Directing *Film*" in Wulf, C., 1994: *The Savage Eye* (Amsterdam: Rodolpi Press), 29-40.

work of a writer whose presence in the academic world of Dublin and Paris is more clearly linked to the prose and poetry of his early career than the theatrical populism that related to his early dramas is notable. However, the work of those vaudevillians that made subsequently successful careers in the nascent cinema industry of the inter-war years did so in the context of work that could be seen to have a political dimension to it. At a time when the economies of the Western world were booming during the 1920s, the success of these entertainers was derived significantly from the portrayal of a material society's materially dispossessed. Some of Charlie Chaplin's most revered silent feature films of this period such as *The Immigrant* (1917), *The Kid* (1921) and *The Gold Rush* (1925) portray central characters at the disadvantaged end of society: vagrants, the economically dislocated or naturally orphaned.¹⁹ For Beckett, it is figures like these that attach a degree of poignancy and, perhaps more importantly, provide the kind of ironic potential for much of the humour so readily observable in the early dramas. It is also the case that in a cultural and philosophical landscape mindful of the absurdity of the human condition, there is much dramatic potential in mining the implied comic associations that might exist in a figure that is at the bottom of the social heap and charged with the sole responsibility of manipulating, Sisyphus-like, their metaphorical boulder. Within an absurd universe, it is the comic figure of the clown that provides critics and actors with an appropriate persona with which to explore those philosophical and metaphorical associations prevalent in Beckett's early work.

For early critics of Beckett's prose and drama, the body was seen as an impediment; a fleshly encumbrance that hindered the consciousness in its transcendental path. Hugh

¹⁹ The major studies on Chaplin and his work all appear to be in agreement with the nature of his comic characterizations in these early films. See: Robinson, D., 1986: *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (London: Paladin); Brownlow, K., 2010: *The Search for Charlie Chaplin* (London: UKA Press); Louvish, S., 2010: *Chaplin: The Tramp's Odyssey* (London: Faber and Faber).

Kenner explores this notion in his discussion of “The Cartesian Centaur” (Kenner, 1961a) in the novel, *Molloy*. Here, the body is likened to a bicycle that, like the body, enables the character’s difficult mobility. Due to the imperfections of the body, this is seen as a painful process in which physical restriction impedes the superiority of the rationally constructed bicycle and throws into sharp relief the body’s contrasting deficiencies. Kenner goes on to liken this emphasis on physical restriction and imperfection – the ever-present potential to fail – to the figure of the clown, with all its attendant echoes of an earlier theatrical, or indeed cinematic, tradition. In describing the Cartesian nature of a man split from his own body, the clown is seen as a theatricalized example of this split made manifest through circus or music-hall tradition. Through a sustained use of the pratfall, or slapstick inability to carry out an action such as walking a tightrope, he draws attention to the philosophical split between mind and body; our constant reliance on the body as carrier for the mind as well as the related frustrations and insecurities that come with the body’s deterioration through either age or infirmity. Additionally, the figure of the clown also embodies another philosophical rupture, that of the perceived contrasts between the perceived world as it is and the material objects associated with it. Collectively known as the Incongruity Theory of Humour, philosophers have sought to locate the practice of laughter as being linked to our realization of the incongruities present between a concept and its related objects.²⁰ However, what Kenner also draws attention to in his consideration of the clown is the issue of representation: one that would develop as a key factor in Beckettian performance in the years to come.

²⁰ See Schopenhauer’s (1883) development of Francis Hutchinson’s earlier thoughts on the nature of laughter and incongruity. Henri Bergson attempted to reduce incongruity to the ‘living’ and the ‘mechanical’ in his discussion of the ‘concretization of the metaphor’ in Bergson, H., 2008: *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Book Jungle).

He does not imitate the acrobat; it is plain that he could not; he offers us directly, his *personal* incapacity, an intricate artform. The man who imitates is the acrobat himself (all ropewalkers are alike) (Kenner, 1961b: 34 – my italics).

Beckett's clown is seen as one who, perhaps more than any other from that long historical lineage of popular performance, lifts the veil of character or performance persona in order to reveal the true personality underneath. Stripped of the vestiges of character psychology wrought from the well-made play, the clown is left with nothing more than himself, in the present moment, in the midst of a task. The poignant sight of human failure, contrasted with the comically mundane routine of physical ineptitude provides a Cartesian metaphor of rational thought/emotion contrasted with physical limitation and deterioration. Along with these vestiges of character, we are left with the *personality* of the clown. If this is allowed to map on to the Beckettian actor, what is revealed is a complex binary that offers a choice for the audience: a cartoon-like portrayal or representation of the human condition; in which the philosophical and practical absurdities of human existence are manifested through a distorting mirror of slapstick and chaos; versus a more presentational approach to humanity in which authentic and honest images of the actor's self begin to penetrate the audience's perception.

Ruby Cohn, writing in 1962, talks of an alternative kind of duality in comparison to the Cartesian relationship of mind and body. "Plays and Player in the Plays of Samuel Beckett" is a short article published in *Yale French Studies* that reflects on Beckett's existing *oeuvre* to that point in his career. She dwells specifically on the plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days* in order to emphasize the metatheatrical qualities

of his work by the early 1960s. Written from a broadly liberal-humanist perspective, Cohn identifies multiple dualities that exist in the figures of the actors playing their various roles across these plays: Vladimir as actor and spectator; Hamm as actor and director; Winnie (“more so than any other Beckett character” (Cohn, 1962: 47)) as actor and spectator. For Cohn, each of these plays, in drawing attention to themselves as play, are able to expose the workings of the drama in a fashion that implicitly invokes metatheatrical Modernist conventions such as those found in the works of Luigi Pirandello. His conscious dramatization of those theatrical professionals (the director, the stage manager, the actor) responsible for bringing the work to the stage serves to provoke debate amongst audiences as to the function of contemporary drama.²¹ The idea of ‘play’ as a ludic, almost child-like enterprise and one that is often utilized throughout these three pieces is dealt with in the context of possible interpretive readings of each one and in many ways pre-figures Cohn’s later monograph *Just Play: Beckett’s Theater* (1980). Her concluding paragraph is prescient in its anticipation of a more active form of spectatorship:

Man the actor no longer believes in the play; only a spectator can force the show to dodder on. And to this end, says Beckett, the actor may have to invent his audience (Cohn, 1962: 48).

As Beckett’s output progressed through the 1960s the divisions between mind and body became wider in terms of the machine-like, fragmented and dismembered qualities of the body contrasted with evermore isolated or inwardly-reflective states of consciousness that serve to emphasize the separation of body and mind rather than any potential relational link based on the control of one over the other. What remains at the

²¹ See footnote 1 in this chapter.

core of the reader's or spectator's reception of Beckett, however, is the quality of the engagement. This paraphrased example from Act 2 of *Waiting for Godot* is used as an illustration:

*Lucky falls, drops everything and brings down Pozzo with him.
They lie helpless among the scattered baggage.*

[...]

VLADIMIR: We're coming!
*He tries to pull Pozzo to his feet, fails, tries
again, stumbles, falls, tries to get up, fails.*

[...]

ESTRAGON: Come on, Didi, don't be pig-headed.
*He stretches out his hand which Vladimir
makes haste to seize.*

VLADIMIR: Pull!
Estragon pulls, stumbles, falls, Long silence.

[...]

ESTRAGON: Suppose we got up to begin with.

VLADIMIR: No harm in trying.
They get up.

[...]

Lucky gets up, gathers up his burdens.

(CDW: 72-82)

This extract summarizes a key sequence of action from Act 2 in which nearly one third of the stage time is conducted with at least one of the four key characters lying prostrate on the floor. From Lucky's theatrical collapse under the weight of his baggage, upon his

and Pozzo's entrance, to their exit towards the end of the act, the four characters (Didi, Gogo, Pozzo and Lucky) engage in a protracted and seemingly unmotivated ballet of movement whereby successive attempts to help each other to their feet are started and failed. Without any rational explanation, Vladimir makes a failed attempt to assist Pozzo, followed by Estragon who offers a hand to his companion. All four of these men end up in a heap on the floor, surrounded by Pozzo's and Lucky's accoutrements. Estragon sleeps briefly before the blind Pozzo crawls away from the pack and, with the assistance of Vladimir and Estragon, slowly retrieves the ability to stand unaided before exiting the stage with Lucky in harness.

This earliest of Beckettian dramas presents a significant challenge to the director and actors, as much as it does to the spectator. In the context of a period in theatrical history in which the dominance of the written text over performance entailed a fidelity to the logical certainties of narrative and carefully constructed plot, the renowned and more negative critical responses to Beckett's professional debut in the theatre were grounded in perceived absences: of plot, action and consequent outcome. The Enlightenment mentality of scientific observation providing detailed and complex understandings of the natural world, coupled with an aesthetic sensibility in which classical models of dramatic action were dominant in European theatres, had become ossified in the mainstream imagination of both public and dramatist during the immediate post-war period.²² Another absence that was problematic for many critics was the absence of a perceived motive for the characters portrayed in *Godot*. The sequence described above

²² There are key historical and critical studies on the state of post-war European Drama and its perceived state of stagnation owing to a dominant mainstream reliance on representational forms. See Taylor, J., 1963: *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama*; Styan, J., 1983: *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Vol. 1: Realism and Naturalism*. In Rebellato, D., 1999: *1956 And All That*, the author seeks to challenge orthodox wisdom through his examination of the social and economic forces driving the construction of an enduring mythology based on moral panic.

is an example of this. Peter Gidal describes Beckett's productions as purely self-contained works in which nothing is not play, nothing is not artifice, and there is no final humanization of body or mind (1986: 182). In this regard, the abandonment of teleology in favour of play and the importance of the moment at this early stage in Beckett's production career pre-figures much of what was to come in terms of critical thought in relation to postmodern/poststructuralist ideas in the latter part of Beckett's life and which, by extension would become a feature of Beckett criticism.²³

Actors working on *Godot* in the 1950s were required to take a leap of faith that might potentially be seen as a compromise to their creative freedom and ability to interpret a given role as well as undermining their position within the rehearsal process. Beckett's fondness for working within the German theatre is notable owing to his belief that technicians and artists were more willing to respond to the overall needs of the writer and director when in production (Bair, 1990: 595-6). Actors were also seen as willing to serve the needs of the text and the director's vision in such a way that they were prepared to subordinate their natural creative urges or any perceived 'power of veto' in order for the centrality of the overall vision to succeed.

In this sense, Beckett's renowned refusal to enter into protracted (if any) discussion regarding the possible meanings or interpretations in his work needs to be balanced against his well documented willingness to discuss with actors the *means* by which his vision might be sustained: if not the 'why', the 'how'. With this in mind, his production of *Godot* at Berlin's Schiller-Theater in 1975 provides us with a useful account of

²³ See Philip Auslander's essay "Just be yourself: logocentrism and difference in performance theory" (in *From Acting to Performance*, 1997, London: Routledge). Here, he advocates play and the subordination of the *logos* or word as part of an approach to acting in postmodern performance that suppresses the need for logical, motivated 'endings' (teleology) and instead affirms an almost child-like adherence to performance that exists of itself and in the present moment.

Beckett's dialogue with Stefan Wigger, the actor who played Vladimir in this, Beckett's first production as director of the play. This extract deals with the sequence from Act 2 described above:

It should be done very simply, without long passages. To give confusion shape, he says, a shape through repetition, repetition of themes. Not only themes in the script, but themes of the body.

... Lucky falls twice, and this mustn't be done realistically but very clearly.

Wigger: 'Does that mean there is no naturalism left whatsoever?

Beckett demonstrates: he goes down on his knees and, his arms first upwards, then stretching forwards, lets himself slide on the ground.

Wigger: 'But how can one prevent the loss of all human consideration, how can one prevent it from becoming sterile?'

Beckett: 'It is a game, everything is a game. When all four of them are lying on the ground, that cannot be handled naturalistically. That has got to be done artificially, balletically. Otherwise everything becomes an imitation, an imitation of reality'.

(Asmus, 1975: 23).

Here, Beckett can be seen to almost tease Aristotle's position on the nature of dramatic action. In establishing *Godot* as a play in which its principle activity is that of waiting, it seeks to imitate one of the most fundamental, albeit prosaic, behaviours known to the human race. However, for Aristotle this can be seen as an act of imitation bereft of the imperative to portray character:

Most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a

quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. (Aristotle: 62-63).

Godot's dramaturgy takes this precept to the ultimate expression. Didi and Gogo are primarily remembered by their waiting. Other than that, they are no different than any other vaudevillian pair on which much of Beckett's early drama is modelled and, at this stage in his career (it was during this period that he was engaged in the writing of *Footfalls*), Beckett is interested in presentation rather than representation. Although twenty years have elapsed since the original production of *Godot*, Beckett's intentions as an author can be clearly mapped on to his practice as a director. He sees the movement sequence quoted above as being akin to a choreographed dance through the ways in which the characters not only interact with each other but also in the ways that traditional dramatic concerns of plot and psychology are subordinated, indeed effaced, in favour of an approach whereby action in the moment itself is key to our understanding. In that moment, the representational qualities of the drama that, to this point, have unfolded for the audience according to recognizable tropes of character, situation and emotional recognition, undergo a transformation in which the language and cadences of dance provide a more abstracted, indicative presentational register. It is a register that echoes the pratfall of the clown or the vaudevillian but which in many ways moves beyond this point of comparison towards that of a reciprocal exchange between somatic, physicalized expression and the punctuating interventions of spoken dialogue. It is also a transformation that is rooted in a musical quality. The cadences and rhythms of Dance, in this example from *Godot*, are almost inextricably linked to the

musical qualities of speech that feed symbiotically from each other and which also permit the presentational, immediate and abstracted qualities of performance rather than the representational approach of the traditional drama.²⁴

The four men are engaged in a curious and opaque ballet of somewhat inept human fallibility, in which failure and an acute awareness of physical restriction born out of a well-rehearsed Cartesian paradigm, is suddenly presented in a different way to the traditional pathos of the clown. Contextually, the sequence is without motivational imperative. There are no clear reasons for Lucky's and Pozzo's initial fall. Even the simple comedic imperative: the punch-line or visual/verbal pay-off that we might have been used to in a free-standing sketch or comic routine is denied to us. The four characters simply find themselves in their predicament with no apparent direction of travel. Half-hearted attempts to rescue each other give way to surrender and, ultimately, tacit recognition that the game has ended as Didi and Gogo get back on their feet, swiftly followed by Lucky and Pozzo.

This predicament without risk, motive or consequence provides us – through a denial of causation – with an absurd metaphorical portrait of the human condition, on one level, in which the ratio of effort and reward are cruelly and inversely proportional. Without the comic and cathartic certainties of the joke, their plight is reduced to a pathetic image of the human condition. On another level, the sequence as play is motivation enough for this act as a display of virtuosity; a rendering of pure form in which the interplay of cod physical ineptitude is contrasted with the spare verbal dialogue of call and response.

²⁴ See my discussion of musicality in Chapter one of this study.

The play is enough as we witness this swift act of effacement from one performance paradigm to another.

It is this sense of effacement in the moment of performance that is also key to our understanding of what this approach to delivery means for the actor. It is a theme that pervades many of the interviews and documented accounts of Beckett's collaborations with actors on productions of his own work throughout the period between the initial success of *Godot* and the end of his working life in the theatre. It is an effacement or, indeed, eradication, that begins with the author himself:

For Beckett, the perfect stage vehicle is one in which there are no actors or directors, only the play itself. When asked how such theatre could be made viable, Beckett replied that the author had the duty to search for the perfect actor, that is, one who would comply fully with his instructions, having the ability to annihilate himself totally (Bair, 1990: 544).

Beckett's position is one that is born out of his transition from the solitary world of authorship, prior to the success of *Godot*, to that of the theatre. As an author, the creative demands of prose or poetry as a generative process are different to those of the theatre, in which the social realities and political hierarchies of company, production, audience and critical establishment pose significant challenges to the isolated figure of the playwright.

Faced with these realities, as well as his own literary and artistic principles regarding the function of the drama and his desire to express,²⁵ it is understandable that Beckett might hold somewhat trenchant, if not autocratic views. The actor as ‘vehicle’ for ‘the play itself’ is a complex set of ideas in which philosophical, as well as critical questions regarding the status of the text (one that is also seen to have changed and that is continuing to change both during and since Beckett’s career) and the position of the actor in relation to it are raised. Some of these questions will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Historically, Beckett’s position as a writer located between two specific cultural and artistic eras may provide evidence for his apparent desire for autonomous control over the rendering of his dramatic output. Some Modernist ideas on the status of the actor from the early part of the twentieth century propose yet further rigid views on the relationship between director and performer: specifically, Edward Gordon Craig’s ideas as espoused in ‘The Actor and the Übermarionette’ (1907). In many ways a denunciation of the modern theatre and its slavish adherence to stage realism, Craig denied acting as an art form and bluntly criticized actors for their inability to exercise true control over bodily movement, facial gesture or vocal expression as well as being in thrall to their emotions. For Craig, any expression of the actor’s ego was no more than exhibitionism in which the self was revealed and nothing else. In an almost Platonic critique of nineteenth century realism, artless, machine-like facsimiles of nature were seen to undermine the more transcendent potential of the theatrical experience, thereby missing the essence of life itself. The actor was seen as a symptom

²⁵ As discussed in Chapter one, Beckett’s artistic values appear to rest on a dynamic of powerlessness that stayed with him throughout his career: “The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.” See Beckett, S., 1969: *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder Publications Ltd.).

of this diluted and disingenuous approach through what Craig saw as the discredited practice of character-based representation.

[...] the aim of the Theatre as a whole is to restore its art and it should commence by banishing from the theatre this idea of impersonation, this idea of impersonating nature; for while impersonation is in the Theatre, the Theatre can never become free.
[...] Do away with the actor, and you do away with the means by which a debased stage realism is produced and flourishes.
[...] The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the übermarionette we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name (Craig: 1911).

What Beckett would later describe as the “grotesque fallacy” of representational art is pre-figured in Craig’s proposal for a new approach to acting in which the performer achieves a supreme mastery of the body that frees them from the tyranny of technique. In a way that can perhaps be seen as a proto-type for much of the presentational approaches to performance in the early and latter half of the twentieth century, including the biomechanics of Vsevolod Meyerhold as well as the theatrical, and para-theatrical, experimentation of Jerzy Grotowski, Craig’s übermarionette is one that allows for a separation of self from performance; of mind from technique; or of personality from role in order that mimetic representation might be abandoned in favour of creative interpretation.

Craig’s ideas, published in the early part of the twentieth century are resolutely Cartesian in their approach, despite his radical, oppositional stance towards realism as part of an emerging European avant-garde. Nevertheless, he can be seen as significantly influential in terms of changing attitudes - not only to the status of the actor, but in

developing an approach to drama through which the politicized advocates of social change saw performance as a powerful tool in contrast with a growingly benign realist aesthetic that had lost much in terms of its power to shake the establishment. As the twentieth century wore on, the growing power of the director as chief arbiter as well as the overall controller of aesthetic vision, became stronger — thus rendering the actor as being in service to the pre-ordained, pre-determined decisions of producer, author and director.

However, what remains resolutely in the gift of the actor is the freedom that comes with stage presence. Given unrestrained physical and vocal freedom, the actor is able to express themselves on stage within those prescribed limits imposed on them by a director. In ways that can be seen as analogous to that of the musical performer, specifically those working in the field of jazz improvisation, these freedoms are expressed as relative to, not discrete from, the constraints of the text. Without the text (or performance score) to work with, or in opposition to, the actor is cast adrift from any anchoring thematic concept and forced to operate in complete and often incoherent isolation. With the existence of even a notionally drawn text, the actor is able to operate in a way that enables them to extemporize with the sounds of words and the somatic structures of physical posture and embodied movement in ways that adopt an interpretative stance towards the material. As with the seemingly dislocated ensemble choreography in the *Godot* example (cited above), or the vocal gymnastics performed by Mouth in *Not I*, Beckett's lack of a grounded motive or psychological imperative creates a series of gaps or opportunities wherein the actor is able to shape or bend a sound or movement between prescribed points, or the set nodes, provided by the author. This process of shaping can be executed according to variations in temporality, timbre

or volume, when approaching a vocal score, with the conjoined physical qualities of gesture and rhythm providing the impetus for somatic exploration.

In the immediate post-war period and beyond, the time at which Beckett arrives on the European theatre scene, these freedoms to express as an actor could be regarded as treasured privileges within an establishment that was still dominated by the literary control of the author in conjunction with a director. As Beckett's reputation grew, many actors saw the demands made by Beckett in his plays, and later his productions, as not simply a challenge but also a threat to their creative impulses. Any freedoms they might have had with regard to skill, virtuosity, intuition or interpretation were seen by some to be at best compromised, at worst cast adrift in the service of a dramatic aesthetic that shuns the traditional certainties of place, history, psychology or even biology. Beckett's close collaborator, Alan Schneider reflects this view in his account of working with Beckett in the mid 1970s:

[...] there are a number of actors (and directors) who still do not respond to Beckett, or avoid doing his plays. They feel he limits them too severely as artists, removes their creativity and individuality, constricts them too rigidly in their physical and vocal resources. They tell me that he must hate actors because he denies them the use of their own impulses, as well as more and more of their physical selves. After all, if they cannot move freely about the stage, cannot use their voices and bodies – their very means of reaching their audiences – what are they but impersonal or even disembodied puppets of his will? [...] What's next, they ask me, the uvula alone, pinpointed on a darkened stage? And no words for them to speak? (Schneider, 1975: 35).

The select band of actors and collaborators who worked with Beckett throughout the 1960s and 70s could therefore be seen to enter into a very specific kind of creative contract; one in which self-effacement and a surrendering of the subjective, creative will or, indeed, the actor's ego, formed a vital part. In this tacit agreement that is executed between the actor and Beckett as writer/director another paradox, the very stuff of which theatre is made, emerges in performance: by absenting themselves through the suppression or effacement of that subjective element in the duality of actor and role, the actor is best enabling the consequent presence of Beckett's fictionalized characters. Beckett's injunction that his ideal theatre would consist of "no actors, only the text" (Bair, *op cit.*: 544) might perhaps be read to mean 'no actors, only the *characters*'; an idea that has echoes of Beckett's own thinking when writing about James Joyce:²⁶ that the work is "not about something ... [but] that thing itself". In this regard, form becomes content; content is form.

As a director of his own work, Beckett cannot be seen as a marionettist in the mould of Craig's idealized theatre model. His collaboration with actors cannot be reduced to that of the mechanical reproduction of programmed directions or the dehumanized, one-dimensional presentation of technical virtuosity. Beckett engaged his actors at the level of the intellect, in harness with technique, in order to affect a presentational style that eschewed Naturalism and elevated those intrinsic, often abstracted elements of the written character to a level of prominence that denied the extrinsic superficialities of the actor's training. Above all, though, the surrendering of the will is seen as a vital part of the compact. David Warrilow, one of Beckett's closest and most-respected collaborators emphasizes this heightened role of the actor as moving beyond the mechanistic towards

²⁶ See Beckett, S., 1972: "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce," in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber & Faber).

something more akin to support and mutual assistance for the author/director, as well as the audience:

I'm interested in the function of the actor. I'm interested in the fact that artists have a role to play, vis-à-vis their fellow men. There's something very important about it, about this aspect of *enabling* – of helping – people to get in touch with something in themselves or to get in touch with places they know but maybe they've lost the ticket to, that makes a lot of sense to me (Zurbrugg, 1987: 98).

In the same interview, Warrilow talks of the extent to which he considers his performances of many of Beckett's works (especially the prose works and later dramas) as being closer to music than drama: "The actor's job is not to understand the work but to channel it, just as a musician doesn't have to *understand* Mozart but has to know how to *play* it" (ibid: 96). In this respect, Warrilow's conception of the actor's "understanding" of the text is one that is based on his ability successfully to internalize the piece – a process of embodiment through practice and repetition that engages the actor's vocal and somatic skill, rather than any wider contextual, historical or political meaning associated with the origins of the piece. The act of channelling, as opposed to representing, or bringing to life a particular character on stage, or voice off the page, implies of itself a status for the actor of conduit, whereby the words of the author or the instructions of any director are mediated for an audience. There is a semiotic purity in this analogy that is seductive in its simplicity; however it becomes problematized when held up to scrutiny. Whilst Warrilow has stated in other interviews that his sense of

surrender to the text and Beckett's will is complete and uncompromising,²⁷ his modesty in assuming the role of cipher or channel for Beckett's words denies the significant power of the actor's craft or intellect in shaping the material. Rather than submit to a quasi-mystical process whereby Beckett's words arrive in the consciousness of the spectator without any conscious intervention on the part of the actor, Warrilow, and others, are able to use their not-insignificant skills both to vocalize the part through a musical ear for the rhythms and cadences of the language, at the same time as deploying a finely honed sense of dramatic timing and physical discipline in order to render something on stage that is as close to the demands of the author's text as possible. It is this kind of mediation or intervention on the part of the actor that serves to define or characterize the function of the actor, even when considering the somewhat passive role as enabler.

It is also a mediation that is characterized by a two-way dialogue between Beckett and Warrilow that also serves to negate the metaphor of the autocratic marionettist. Beckett's creative processes in rehearsal during his major productions of his own works are well documented and reveal an engaged conversation with actors that, at times, reveal cracks in the taciturn edifice that has often been invoked to describe his approach to the text. In some cases, the actor can be seen to operate within a crucial revising capacity as part of the writing process itself:

He has said things like "I know it was a woman's voice." I know too that he has always read out loud to himself what he has written. The sound, the spoken word, matters terribly, and until this sounded right to him, it wasn't fully written (ibid).

²⁷ See Eric Prince's interview with David Warrilow included in his 1994 thesis, *The Stagecraft of Samuel Beckett* (University of Ulster): "He wants it the way he wants it. I want it the way he wants it. He's better than me [...] I just surrendered myself to him totally." (Prince, 1994: 74).

In this sense, the two-way dialogue over the nuances of delivery, emphasis and the physicality of the part can be seen to extend into a more interactive creative process between writer and actor, as well as director and same.

David Warrilow's contribution to the visibility and rendering of Beckett's work for the stage cannot be underestimated; both for the stark, mesmeric and poetic qualities of his performance across a range of the dramatic and literary works as well as the views he offered on his approach to playing the roles. In one of his obituaries, written for the *New York Times*, Mel Gussow describes Warrilow as one who was intimately acquainted with Beckett on an artistic level: "he became so identified with Beckett that he was like his acting alter ego: if Beckett had been an actor, he might have been David Warrilow" (Gussow, 1995). There is an implicit irony in his broad approach that comes out in the key interviews that constitute the documentary evidence available in this area. They are noteworthy for the way in which they explicate an approach to Beckett in performance that perhaps falls short of privileging the actor's function but at the same time imbues him with a quality and sense of agency that is vital both as a means of realising the author's vision as well as articulating this approach as a tangible art-making practice.

Indeed, Warrilow uses the language of art-making in its broadest sense in order to set out his approach. The interview with Nick Zurbrugg, already cited, summarizes what can be perceived as a dual consideration of commandeered disciplines in the service of a 'greater' vision. The distinct languages of Music and Fine Art are deployed in order to explain his approach. When talking of his production of *The Lost Ones* (for Mabou

Mines during the 1970s) he describes his work on modifying the performance during a particular run:

So I decided to drop all my attention to sense and try playing the text as if it was a piano concerto, just dealing with phrasing, and dynamics, and vibrations and *just sound* – just dealing with the sound of my own voice. [...] the curious thing was that people who had seen the piece before many times said, “It’s incredibly clearer!” “It’s *much* clearer!” (ibid: 95).

Speaking in more general terms with regard to the qualities of Beckett’s writing, he expresses a similar approach through the invocation of an alternative artistic metaphor:

Every word is of itself. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And after a while, you begin to treat the words a bit like sculpture. They really have a weight and substance in the air. And then it becomes a whole other process, and I think that then what happens, sometimes, is that people get quite mesmerized by the language, and it is as if they are hearing it – *seeing* it – for the first time. You can almost write the words in the air (ibid: 96-7).

Elsewhere, Warrilow expands on his musical understanding of Beckett’s work in performance. In his interview with Laurie Lassiter,²⁸ he provides a more articulated understanding of the musical approach leading to a greater sense of understanding for the audience, as well as his own understanding of himself as an actor. Operating within this analogy, he sees his role as metaphorical as well as practical. Likening the function of the actor to that of the instrumentalist he describes his performance in *The Lost Ones*

²⁸ Published in Zarrilli, P., 1995: *Acting (Re) Considered: Theories and Practices* (London: Routledge).

as one in which the immediacy of musical performance, with all its inherent dangers and risks of immediate failure, lends itself well as a practice to his performance.

I therefore decided [...] that I was going to perform that piece as if I were playing a piano concerto. I was not going to, in any way, pay attention to the intellectual, academic literary *meaning* of the phrases. I decided to perform it as if it were all notes (Zarrilli, 1995: 318-9).

In turn, Warrilow sees this decision as having an impact on the audience's reception of the work:

Some other level of experience appeared both for me and for the audience. People seemed to receive it on a deeper level that they didn't quite know how to describe. The very fact that audiences who didn't speak English could be just as enthusiastic as those who did was and is very mysterious to me (ibid).

This “mysterious” reaction from audiences is something that was replicated in my own experiences when working on a production of *Not I* in the early 2000s. Produced using the original English text for an audience of overwhelmingly non-English speakers, at a theatre festival on the Palestinian West Bank, the work was received on a very different level to that which might be expected by those able to engage with the conventional semantic meanings embedded in the language of Mouth's continuous monologue. In conversation after the performance, some spectators spoke of their reception of the work in terms of the rhythms, cadences and guttural sounds created by the actress. They also read the visual resonances of Mouth symbolically; in terms of her political status in relation to what they perceived as their own dislocated existence; as well as various

feminist readings of her on-stage presence. This production is dealt with at length in Chapter four.

Warrilow's experience of Beckett in the theatre, in terms of his creative relationship with both the works themselves and Beckett as writer and director, marks a significant stage of transition in the way that Beckett's works were perceived by a range of establishment constituencies or communities of professionals, artists and scholars who had developed an interest in his work since the beginning of his career as a writer. The critical establishment and the scholarly community had progressively refined their view of Beckett's dramatic works during the 1960s from that which saw them operating within an absurd, futile or 'Cartesian' universe, to one that acknowledged an aesthetic radicalism in his theatricality; a poetics of minimalism that had the potential to open up new frontiers in both production and reception. As Beckett's dramatic output became incrementally sparse in its temporal duration and distilled in its essential visual reduction, actors and other theatre professionals became increasingly beguiled by the possibilities that this aesthetic approach afforded.²⁹

Warrilow's career intersects with Beckett's at this point of transition. Following the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969, Beckett criticism becomes less concerned with the liberal-humanist approach that was characterized by an emphasis on Cartesian philosophy, and more on the problem of the self and the function of language as a medium for articulating those concerns. Published Beckett criticism, however,

²⁹ Specifically, this influence has been most keenly felt in the fields of playwriting and musical composition. His minimalism and radical approach to theatre aesthetics has affected writers such as Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard and Václav Havel; and led to a purity of dialogue and dramaturgy in many of the plays they have written. Composers such as Morton Feldman and Phillip Glass have adopted a reductive approach to music; expressed by the latter in his collaborations with Robert Wilson during the 1970s - *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), being the seminal example.

cannot be seen as the sole arbiter within the discourse surrounding his works and how they might stand to represent late twentieth century articulations of the human condition. A *lingua franca* that seeks to question the function of language *per se* also happens to be one that is wholly reliant on the written/spoken word as its prime means of dissemination. It is therefore to the aesthetic or theatrical realm (in which those processes of challenge and resistance can be actively processed) to which we should also turn for evidence of Beckett's changing legacy of interpretation. Warrilow is arguably the first of those artists who consciously sought to engage critically, albeit sympathetically, with Beckett's works in a way that privileged the political status of the author and his freedom to express but who was also liberated to explore the actorly and performative limitations of the work's potential from within: within the text and from within the process required to realize the work: performance.

For Warrilow, acting as "symbol and cypher" (Fischer, 2012: 115), the potential duality of the actor's status as one who offers both traditional sign referents to the audience at the same time as providing the 'key' with which those meanings might be accessed, is one that is keenly felt. Speaking of his performance in *Ohio Impromptu* in 1981, he describes this process as one that operates from within strictly defined, pre-determined boundaries of Beckett's own making:

It is highly choreographed [...] to the point where the conventional actor [...] would probably find it absolutely intolerable and insulting. I have an entirely different experience of it. To me, the greater the degree of accuracy of the parameters, the greater the freedom of action within (Zarrilli, 1995: 317).

It is in a piece such as *Ohio Impromptu* (or, indeed, many of the later works in which physical stasis or extreme restriction is a significant feature of the stage picture), that this approach to performance is of particular value. Taking the part of the Reader, Warrilow points out that for a text written with such precision, which in turn demands an approach to performance that is equally structured, no two performances were ever the same. He uses the example of the book from which Reader takes his ‘sad tale’ as being perpetually “recalcitrant” in its refusal to lie flat. The minuscule physical modifications and checks required to mitigate the behaviour of this unpredictable prop add considerably to the actor’s task in ways that are imperceptible to the spectator but which require a level of concentration and coordination of the actor’s body/mind without which would debilitate the overall effect.

Even from within this literary straitjacket, Warrilow is able to describe the potential for improvisation:

Improvisation only means that which is not foreseen, that which appears at the moment. Something is always appearing at the moment. The point is how much attention you pay to it. I now pay great attention to what happens in the moment, and its part of the flow of each performance. It is what brings life to the structure (ibid: 317).

It is this emphasis on “the moment” as a temporal zone of possibility for the actor that becomes a common theme in many further considerations of Beckett’s actor, and which will be dealt with later in this chapter when considering more recent articulations of his work. However, for Warrilow, whose practice originates via a circuitous route from University, to magazine publishing, to a chance encounter with Beckett in Paris, his is a theorising that has its roots in the realm of the artisan or craftsman; one who establishes

a deep, personal and often visceral relationship to the material in which those chance associations and unforeseen consequences that often spring from improvisational play are positively welcomed as part of the creative process.

It is those qualities of musical improvisation that are seen to work best in the moment of creation. In an earlier interview with Jonathan Kalb,³⁰ he describes in general terms the need for the “right tone” in performance: “By ‘right’ I mean what works for me. I then have to trust that it’ll work for somebody else – that if I get it right, if I sing it ‘on key,’ ‘in tune,’ it’s going to vibrate properly for somebody else” (Kalb, 1989: 224). In this respect, Warrilow implies that it is the sheer resonance of the sounds created in performance that create an equally physical connection with the spectator than the intellectual or emotional meanings that are offered in the text. The phrase “art songs” (ibid: 225) is used to describe this process of connection between actor and audience in which the somatic effect caused by sonic vibration is able to combine with those mental processes of assimilation that make sense of the words. In the best tradition of the songwriter’s craft, whether it is those of Beckett’s beloved Schubert or those of the popular canon of the late twentieth century, songs that resonate with the listener do so at the level of body and mind. It is a phenomenological unification of these two phenomena in which there is no identifiable separation. For both the actor and the spectator engaged in this performance, the body stands between – mediates – the reception of the author’s work in a way that begins to challenge the binary *Cogito* of Cartesian analysis. Warrilow’s performance seeks to enable a physical vibration, or resonance, for himself that is transferred to the spectator in a way that is in tune collectively with processes of both intellect and bodily stimulation.

³⁰ Published in Kalb, J., 1986: *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: CUP).

In this regard, the identity of the performer, their personality or self, can be seen to disappear in the moment of performance in much the same way as the actor's sense of self becomes subsumed in the theatrical acts they are performing. It is only in relatively recent times (through the varying cults of personality generated since the second world war and with the advent of recorded sound) that there has been a subsequent resurgence of the 'singing personality' that has become augmented by postmodern obsessions with the notion of the media celebrity and their fictional, as well as private, lives. Warrilow's almost ascetic sense of deference to the canonical status of the author's text renders his own sense of self as superfluous to requirements, leaving him with the view that the actor of Beckett's work should regard himself as a resonating channel: "The action in performing a Beckett play is making the instrument resonate" (ibid: 229). In addition, it is also the physical process of "depicting energy in action and in space" (Zarrilli, 1995: 224) that combines with the sonic realities of the voice to offer the spectator a broad-ranging menu of responses that demand an active engagement in the absence of any prescribed meaning offered by either writer or actor.

Later approaches to the Beckettian actor and the impact of postmodernism

There is no clear or simple division - in critical, historical or biographical terms - between the broad approaches taken from within the realm of literary criticism in the early phase of Beckett's theatrical career and those later perspectives adopted by a generation of critics who operate within and across various academic disciplines. Beckett's work has been considered within the context of, not only Literature,

Philosophy, Drama, Theatre and Performance; but also from within the visual or fine arts, Music and Dance. It is this level of diversification in terms of his treatment within the academy that is symptomatic of the appeal generated within his work. However, the discipline-specific division of responses to his work must be tempered with a recognition of the overlaps and slippages that occur when even tacitly drawing any lines of separation. This study chooses to examine those various approaches to our understanding of Beckett's actor through the application of a division between those Cartesian approaches that characterized readings of the prose, poetry and drama in the 1950s and 60s from what might be framed as a more phenomenologically-aware approach, that describes the body of criticism that emerged in the two decades leading to his death, and beyond.

After the influence of Cartesian analysis, more recent approaches to Beckett's actor are not solely born out of the progress of his work: his writing output, as well as his work in the theatre or television. Psychophysical approaches to the body in space can be identified as a feature of contemporary approaches to theatre and performance that have emerged in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. Beckett's work has been strongly influential in this shift, one that can also be regarded in relation to the shift from Modernism to postmodernism as well as that between acting and performance. Although arrived at in philosophical terms a long time prior to the advent of postmodernity, it is seen as a shift in the context of late twentieth century thinking that is partly born out of necessity, as well as a turn away from the body/mind approach of Cartesian philosophy:

According to postmodern, poststructural thought, the metanarratives of western culture no longer provide access to originary knowledge, and the Cartesian constructive subjective no longer provides a basis for a definable self (Dillon, 1993: 28).

It is also a shift of paradigm that Hans-Thies Lehmann has described as postdramatic in the way that western culture has seen a progressive move away from the word, or *logos*, toward an emphasis on image or the theatricalized spectacle in which the traditions of organization and aesthetics within the theatre establishment have given way to new configurations of audience, actor, director and writer.³¹ Within this new formulation, it is not those traditional hierarchies of command and control that define its existence but the varying systems of cognition: “The politics of theatre is a *politics of perception*. [...] Its political engagement does not consist in the topics but in the forms of perception.” (Lehmann, 2006: 184-5).

For the purposes of this study, it is the politics of perception that sit at the heart of our engagement with the actor’s presence. As a *locus* of perception for the spectator, as well as the actor engaged in a perpetually reflective act of self-perception, the shift from the linear structures of authorial power (whether it resides in the figure of the writer or director) to the horizontal, collective, perhaps subjective or participatory dynamics of creativity in the latter part of the twentieth century is one that is exemplified in David Warrilow’s reflections on his practices and which, if only in organizational terms,

³¹ See Lehmann, H., 2006: *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London & New York: Routledge).

provide a compelling template for the generation that followed.

From Beckett's perspective, his dramatic output after the 1960s can be seen to undergo a shift of its own. Marie-Claude Hubert, writing in 1994 describes what he sees as a shift in perception within the work itself that has its roots in the beginning of the decade:

Rough for Theatre (1960), is the last Beckett play in which the theme of the body is expressed in the way that has just been described³² [...] After the sixties, however, a change occurs: instead of emphasizing its infirmity, Beckett's plays focus on the question of how to situate the body or, in other terms, of how to find the place where the fragmented body can be integrated (Hubert, 1994: 59).

The remainder of this chapter will chart those key developments in both the practical as well as the critical approach to Beckett's actor; set against a backdrop of shifting aesthetic and cultural paradigms that are responsive to, as well as influential in, the development of our contemporary understanding of the significance of his work as well as the ways in which it is framed and articulated in practice. Hubert's analysis of Beckett's evolving use of the body in performance during the mid to late 1960s can be seen as a precursor to some of the criticism that would emerge in the next decade. A new phase with an emphasis on language as a problematic vehicle for the literary voice, and influenced by the discourse of Deconstruction, would also acquire influence from

³² This article, written for the *Journal of Beckett Studies* in 1994, charts the development of approaches to the body in performance in Beckett's theatre since his emergence in the 1950s: "Up to about 1960, the world that Beckett created was populated by mutilated bodies. His characters, nearsighted or blind, lame or paralyzed, some of them even amputees, have come to the end of their lives. The dramatic action is reduced to their meager bodily movements." (Hubert, 1994: 56). See Hubert, M., 1994: "The Evolution of the Body in Beckett's Theatre", *Journal of Beckett Studies* 4: 55-65.

within a materialist analysis of politics, language and, importantly, performance practices.

Critical approaches to the Beckettian actor during the 1970s are marked by comparative thinking in relation to key Modernist practitioners and their contribution to the aesthetics of reception. As discussed in Chapter two, Enoch Brater's essays: "Brecht's Alienated Actor in Beckett's Theater" and "The 'Absurd' Actor in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett" (both published in 1975) aim to situate Beckett's actor in relation to two of the significant movements of twentieth century avant-garde practice. In examining Beckett's actor in relation to Bertolt Brecht, Brater emphasizes the effect of distance (or *verfremdung*), both between actor and role as well as actor and spectator, in order to articulate Beckett's actor as one who is co-existent with the aesthetic concerns of Brecht's alienated practice, albeit somewhat detached from the explicit ideological imperatives associated with his Marxist beliefs. His later consideration of the 'Absurd Actor' situates this alienated figure as one that has moved on from the classical, metaphysical projections of man at the mercy of spiritual extra-worldly control, towards a secular morality that considers absurdity as a positive force for human agency and one in which the actor has a role to play in representing this new philosophical reality.

By the early 1980s, postmodernism, and its various inflections through the epistemologies of Deconstruction, was beginning to take hold in both the academy as well as contemporary performance practice. Jacques Derrida's interpretation of Antonin Artaud's critique of Western psychological drama had been published in the late 1960s

and formed the bedrock on which much of the literary criticism of the 1980s and 90s would be founded. Christopher Balme summarizes Derrida's conclusion that Artaud's desire for a theatre of immediate, visceral experience is one that rests on paradox:

The search is pointless because theatre is predicated on repetition and, hence, representation: the achievement of pure presence would mean the end of theatre. Derrida's argument [...] demarcates an aesthetic borderline that much contemporary performance art and postdramatic theatre has explored: the move from representation to presentation, from mere repetition of a role to the presence of the human body as a phenomenological experience (Balme, 2008: 84).

For Derrida's compatriot, Jean-Francois Lyotard (whose seminal paper, *The Postmodern Condition*, served to define the terms of reference for this new era within Art and Culture), Artaud's critique of the Western *status quo* in the 1930s is also taken as a starting point. Lyotard saw Artaud's fascination with Asian theatre as an alternative to staged Realism as a compromise on the way to the kind of viscosity he prescribed in his writings. Replacing the spoken word and psychologically motivated dramas of the European stage with the visual performances of Eastern mime and dance exemplified by the Balinese trance dances he encountered was, for Lyotard, simply replacing one language with another; the dominant verbal discourse of Ibsen or Shaw giving way to the 'hieroglyphs' of mime or dance:

Instead of a semiotic system predicated on the idea of substitution by representation, Lyotard imagines a theatre of energy streams and libidinal displacements (ibid).

The “libidinal displacements” evoked by Lyotard as a solution to the problematic of representation, and its consequent suppression of the presence of the actor’s body, would enable an honesty or authenticity in performance that is not merely based on the flesh and bone of the actor’s body, but which also has a temporal dimension that privileges the moment of creation rather than any historicized emphasis on a valorized past or potential future occurrences. In citing the libido as the seat of these performative impulses, Lyotard invokes a Lacanian understanding of his performance model, in which human impulses, drives and desires are driven by an overall perception of lack. Jacques Lacan, writing from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis and tempered with the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic terminology, perceived the human unconscious as being structured like a language. Within this overall structure, the interplay of conscious and sub-conscious thought (or texts) accounted for the influences sustained through childhood development in the same way as a spoken language is subjected to its own process of evolution.

Lacan offers a system that subscribes to Derrida’s views on the inter-relationship of presence and absence. In this construct, theatre and theatre-going can be seen as a process through which spectators confront their sense of absence, or lack, as a means of acquiring self-knowledge.

It is perhaps ironic that the theatre and theatre-going should be used as a remedy for the spectator’s perceived sense of lack at a time in the latter part of the twentieth century when the shift from Modernity to postmodernity was being described as the “new

medievalism of our times”.³³ Critics and cultural commentators writing in the 1980s, especially, point towards the collapse of the paradigms of Modernism as part of a growing awareness that reality could not be adequately expressed or processed using the structures of Modernist thought. Operating in parallel with this seismic cultural shift, postmodern theatre offers the spectator a turn away from representation and linguistic signification. From a position that is consciously invoking Derrida’s work on Deconstruction and the negotiation of presence and absence, Cynthia Bishop Dillon, writing in 1993, offers a distinctive critique of Beckett’s actor. Describing the postmodern theatre as one that is characterized by its sense of lack: “non-mimetic, non-referential, non-matrixed performance” (Dillon, 1993: 28), Dillon sets out the beginnings of a “new poetics of acting praxis” that is firmly rooted in her conception of “active deconstruction” (ibid). In an echo of Beckett’s own rejection of a grounded methodology or technique for the actor (as cited on page three of this chapter), the Modernist preoccupation with concepts of presence as exemplified in the work of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht or Chaikin is seen as an unreliable premise.

Derrida’s analysis of the human subject is a key feature of Deconstruction as a philosophical mode of enquiry. For the purposes of this analysis in relation to acting and performance, key texts are *Writing and Difference* (1978) in which he critiques various histories of the Enlightenment and *Of Grammatology* (1976) in which he sets out his ideas on *différance* and the relationship between subjectivity, writing and wider social practices. Derrida questions a number of previously-held beliefs with regard to human presence; the centre or subject; difference or otherness and its relationship to a historical valorization of the word or *logos* in which a universal consensus or truth can

³³ See Corrigan, R., 1984: “The Search for New Endings: The Theatre in Search of a Fix, Part III”, *Theatre Journal* 36 (2): 157-163.

be accommodated. Within a cultural landscape in which this constant turn toward the *origin*, or historically-defined centre of humanism, is at the heart of human experience, our experience of the world is shaped by a constant process of interpretation; a sustained quest for meaning that is shaped by the interplay of symbol and metaphor in order that the “grand narratives” of the human condition (referred to by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*) can be successfully communicated. Within the aesthetic realm, specifically the theatre, the actor’s task is to become the conduit for that communication of logocentric meaning in a process that utilizes the complex interplay of presence and absence; character and self.

Key to this process of apprehension, or the means through which we encounter and shape the world around us, is the act of ‘writing’. For Derrida, any reliance on a perpetual turn towards the centre or pre-determined, historicized ‘word’ denies the free interplay of fresh interpretations or ‘writings’. In his book, *Writing and Difference* (1978), Derrida looks for a theoretical reversal of this hierarchy in which ‘writing’ precedes speech and can be seen as a pro-active negotiation with reality in which the concept of ‘play’ is seen as a liberating process whereby individual human agency is privileged and not seen as being in thrall to historical predecessors. Play becomes the act of interpreting or ‘writing’ experience without dependence on those self-legitimising epistemologies, stable references or hegemonic forces of control that have perhaps invidiously dominated human experience. Derrida concludes that the human subject is thus faced with an existential choice:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign [...]

The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who [...] has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play (Derrida, 1978: 292).

Derrida's second interpretation (that which seeks to move away from a pre-determined reference point based on the notion of 'truth' or 'origin'), marks a shift in emphasis, for the artist, towards the creative process. Instead of the primacy of *telos*, or the inexorable move toward an end point in any creative enterprise, Derrida proposes a playful engagement that is not anchored to any historical, scientific or ideological prescription. The reassurances offered by these foundations, once removed, create the conditions for an immediate engagement in the moment that also sets up a contested relationship between presence (embodied, material, self-evident) and absence (implied, invisible, abstracted).

In addition to the relationship between play and history, Derrida also highlights the tension that exists between play and presence. For him, "Play is the disruption of presence" (ibid) in that, as a voluntary activity free of the constraints of the word, it is able to pre-determine or define the presence or absence of a particular phenomenon. In the same way as a child's game of 'Let's Pretend' in a school playground can instantaneously shift from the presence of carefully drawn (or 'written'), improvised characterizations that often disappear in the moment of their creation, our perhaps more sophisticated and politicized engagements in the adult world are predicated on similar unwritten rules of interaction whereby the elusive structures of personality or persona can be similarly viewed on a sliding scale of visibility and disappearance, of presence and absence. Ultimately, Derrida's credentials as a Structuralist first, poststructuralist

second - in which our knowledge and understanding of textuality and its underlying structures precede our attempts to break it down into its component parts, are important to bear in mind. As either an art maker or legislator; actor or political activist, the deconstructionist impulse is one rooted in a structural knowledge of the systems and hierarchies that comprise a given sphere of human activity. A deconstructionist approach to the re-ordering or re-configuration of this known structure enables a fresh perspective for not only the practitioner, but also the recipient. It is an inherently political practice that, for the artist, facilitates the deconstruction of the learned or received structures of the aesthetics and organizational systems of performance practice. Although somewhat at odds with phenomenology,³⁴ a deconstructionist approach to the practice and analysis of acting accounts for the active agency of the actor in working with the author's texts, as well as the reader in engaging with the plurality of meanings available.

The presence of the actor, after Derrida, is a phenomenon that has been increasingly identified as one in which the representation of 'presence' has given way to the performance of 'absence'. Partly through the collaborative practices of writers, artists and practitioners choosing to work with actors and performers on a new dramaturgy that reflects Derrida's philosophical and aesthetic concerns — a progressive turning away from the origin toward a playful engagement with the potential of performance has characterized much contemporary performance practice. 'Absence' in this context can

³⁴ During the late 1950s, Derrida participated in the debate over phenomenology versus Structuralism that occurred on the French intellectual scene. He contended that human experience was an effect of structures and their impact on subjective consciousness. In critiquing the phenomenological aim to understand experience by comprehending and describing its genesis, he wrote: "Must not structure have a genesis, and must not the origin, the point of genesis, be *already* structured in order to be the genesis of something?" See: Derrida, J., 1978: "'Genesis' and 'Structure' and Phenomenology," in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

be defined as an absence of narrative context, an absence of character or an absence of place or locale. Elinor Fuchs, writing in the mid 1970s, points to the Mabou Mines production of Beckett's *Come and Go* as representing the beginning of a change in the way theatre artists perceive the phenomenon of presence:

The audience was confronted by a mirror nearly the width of the stage, sunk slightly below platform level, then angled back and upwards. The actors performed the entire piece from a balcony above and behind the spectators; we saw only their ghostly reflections. Such a staging undermined habitual expectations of bodily presence and actor-audience contact (Fuchs, 1985: 164).

In the same article, Fuchs points out that other directors (for example, Robert Wilson) have refused to use “professional” actors who would “contaminate the performance with enlarged personal ‘presence’” (ibid: 165). This de-valuing of the magnitude of individual acting performances, in which the accretion of a lifetime of technique through the adoption of varying training regimes is seen to result in superficiality and a certain lack of authenticity in performance, can be seen to have developed within much Western contemporary performance theatre during the 1990s and to the present.³⁵ For some time, especially in the UK, various contemporary performance practitioners have championed a discreet style or mode of performance in which under-acting, or a conscious, sometimes apologetic mode of delivery is adopted by performers. This conscious denial of the trained, finished specimen as a celebration of absence has dominated work produced in the last twenty years that is elusive in its definition and

³⁵ Many examples of the performance of absence come from those hybrid performance forms that have emerged in the fields of performance art, live art or performance theatre in the late twentieth century. Sara Jane Bailes argues that Beckett is the starting point for a generation of contemporary practitioners working in these genres. For an account of the work of Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, and Elevator Repair Service, see Bailes, S., 2011: *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (London: Routledge).

which might locate itself comfortably between the disciplinary definitions of theatre and live/performance art practice.

Dillon argues that this turn away from the Derridian centre, or origin, marks a significant shift away from the Cartesian preoccupations of earlier Modernist practice and criticism with Beckett's work seen as both symptomatic and influential in its progress: "Without reference to character, Cartesian subjectivity, or a language of mimetic signification, actors become formal elements of a thematic design in which they embody an absence of referential context" (Dillon, 1993: 32). As a de-centred subject, the actor's presence becomes one that lends itself to the art of the scenographer as much as the self-contained process of acting. As a "formal element" that lives and breathes, the actor is well positioned to draw attention to, or emphasize, the problematic nature of a traditional, character-based presence. Beckett's later plays increasingly illustrate this through the status of the figures presented: narrators, listeners, or silent sentinels – these are figures that exist in terms of their arbitrary relationships to sometimes absent 'others'. In terms of Beckett's practice as an evolutionary process, his work on the later dramas can also be viewed in the context of early twentieth century avant-garde performance practices in which this turn away from the centred subject, or

naturalist pre-occupation with individual psychology, is countered by the radical artistic movements of the inter-war years.³⁶

When faced with this denial of any tangible subject or concrete representation of character or place, the Beckettian actor is tasked with the responsibility of finding alternative creative avenues. David Warrilow's approach to the musicality of Beckett's writing exists alongside the work of another of Beckett's close collaborators during his career in the theatre that is also worthy of note. Billie Whitelaw worked very closely with Beckett and her services were consciously sought by him during his productive period from the mid 1960s to mid 1970s. Renowned for her performances in *Play*, *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, she brought a quality of experimentation and willingness to submit to the wishes of the writer/director that resulted in a lengthy and fruitful collaboration. Ruby Cohn notes in her book, *Just Play*: "Lacking formal training in acting, Whitelaw never thought to ask psychological questions about her role" (Cohn, 1980: 198). Instead, it was the close attention that she paid to the rhythms and cadences of Beckett's words rather than their 'origin' that yielded what were, for Beckett, the best results.

For Dillon, this process of submission, of surrendering her talent as an actor to the manipulation of a third party, can be identified as a process of "absenting herself as a

³⁶ Specifically, the performance practices of the Dadas, Futurists and German Expressionists. See Melzer's ideas on the dada actor in *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (1994) in which the rhythmic, tribal impulses of sound poetry and brutalism are considered in the context of a resistant, protest-based art-making practice. Michael Kirby's analysis of futurist practices in *Futurist Performance* (1986) emphasizes the immediacy of the work, as well as its declamatory, perfunctory style that "maximizes the sensory dimensions and minimizes or eliminates the intellectual aspects" (Kirby, 1986: 21). Karoline Gritzner argues that techniques of Modernist expressionist drama in many ways pre-figured the deconstructions of the self in postmodernism. See: Gritzner, K., 2008: "(Post)Modern Subjectivity and the New Expressionism: Howard Barker, Sarah Kane, and Forced Entertainment", *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18 (3): 328-340.

definable constructive subject” (Dillon, 1993: 35). It is a process that is wholly divorced from that of self-awareness and representation found in Naturalistic acting methods where the mixture of the actor’s self, the prescribed ‘given circumstances’ of character and a lifetime of accumulated technique works in combination in order to render a fleshed-out, psychologically motivated character. In this context, an awareness of the actor’s self is important as a means of accessing those aspects of the emotional life of a character (the very stuff of Cartesian duality in which mind and body exercise a causal relationship) so that remembered, lived experience can substitute itself for the fictional agencies created within the imagination of the writer and present itself to an audience as actuality. Billie Whitelaw’s act of surrender to Beckett’s will, as well as her realization of the text for a piece such as *Not I* during her collaborations with him in the 1960s and 70s, is one that places an emphasis on rhythm and cadence rather than conventional meaning. This also has echoes of the Modernist avant-garde. German Expressionist acting of the Weimar period is notable owing to the particular performance qualities sought by writers. Oskar Kokoschka, in his *Murderer, The Hope of Women* (1909), insisted on a performance quality that became a feature of the genre: “the diction [was] violent, suggestive and elliptical. In production, the chief performance elements were rhythmic choral lyricism, deliberately provocative stylization of speech and gesture, and above all, extreme emotional and physical commitment” (Kuhns, 1997: 81).

Within a postmodern universe of absence and *différance*, Beckett’s actor is obliged to absent the essence of individual, lived experience from this traditional triumvirate of actor-character-self. The “contaminating personal presence” referred to by Fuchs is removed in favour of a more technical approach to presentational acting in which Beckett’s text dominates the creative discourse. In an interview with Linda Ben-Zvi,

Whitelaw describes this process of self-effacement as a conscious act that, for her, became a part of the performance process:

With *Not I*, every night before I went on, while I was being taken up the scaffold, I used to go through a ritual and say, “All right now, Whitelaw, let the skin fall off; let the flesh fall off; let the bones fall off; all right, let it all go; keep out of the way; you physically keep out of the way” (Ben-Zvi, 1990: 4).

It is a process that is not wholly adherent to the puppet metaphor promoted by Craig’s theory of the übermarionette. Warrilow, Whitelaw and other key Beckettian actors have established a relationship with Beckett as director based on reciprocity; in which their particular skills of interpretation and presentation are used to complete a rendering of the text that is faithful, but nevertheless creatively liberated, to work within the narrow confines of the writer’s prescription.³⁷

It is this process of creative experimentation with the text or “active interpretation” that Dillon proposes as a response to Derrida’s concept of ‘play’ within the context of postmodern acting theory. An actor’s interpretation that actively engages with the freedoms offered by a writer who consciously absents the customary expectations of character, plot and locale can be seen as one that imbues the actor’s status with an element of reciprocity that is missing from Craig’s and perhaps other models of Modernist approaches to the actor. Rather than assume a wholly subordinate position, the actor’s sense of craft is recognized, with an open invitation to operate freely within

³⁷ David Warrilow speaks of this process in his interview with Laurie Lassiter. When discussing his performance in *Ohio Impromptu*, he says: “To me the greater the degree of accuracy of the parameters, the greater the freedom of action within” (Zarrilli, 2002: 317).

the strict demands of the text. It is a relationship between actor and director based on reciprocity and respect.

Barbara Becker and Charles Lyons summarize the task of the actor (and the director) working with Beckett's texts thus:

The actor must, however, work both to establish and then dissolve the character's consciousness of his or her history and focus, not upon what grounds the character in space and time, but – rather – upon the uncertainties that undermine the processes of self-conceptualization [...] that remains true to the absences Beckett defines (Becker & Lyons, 1985: 304).

It is this process of dialectical resolution: of establishment and dissolution; of grounded character and flagrant uncertainty; immediate presence and glaring absence, that provides a challenge for the actor that is rooted in technique and application as much as Derridean theories of postmodernity. A performance practice that enables the reification of absence at the same time as acknowledging Alain Robbe-Grillet's "irremediable presence" (1965: 111)³⁸ of the Beckett character is one that places an emphasis on the corporeality of the body as well as the vocal modulation and exploitation of the human voice: a body that celebrates its own presence whilst consciously exploiting those prescribed absences apparent in the text. Derrida, in his essay on Artaud ("The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation"),³⁹ speculates on the 'end' of representation as being characterized as a cycle of repetition that closely emulates the

³⁸ As discussed in Chapter one, Alain Robbe-Grillet's description of Didi and Gogo as "irremediably present" in *Waiting for Godot* sets the tone for an approach to contemporary performance practice that celebrates the presence of the actor whilst also allowing for a metaphysics of absence with regard to the subordination of character.

³⁹ See: Derrida, J., 1978: "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

cycle of birth, life and death. This repetitive cycle, played out on the postmodern stage, creates the playful environment within which the constant need to return or repeat, to make over again, to “Fail again. Fail better” (Beckett, 1984: 1), is the space in which the almost reflexive longing to turn to the centre or origin is abandoned in favour of a “full presence” that permits an open-ended, unresolved outcome.

Phillip Zarrilli is an academic and practitioner who has consistently sought to negotiate and explore the possibilities presented in the advent of late twentieth century developments in approaches to acting and actor-training that have come to be known as operating within a post-Stanislovskian paradigm. Additionally, Zarrilli’s work can be seen to operate within the context of a freely acknowledged, postdramatic cultural landscape in which a shift of dramaturgical practices towards the playful uncertainties of character, plot and location have been seen to respond readily to many of the theoretical positions advocated by Derrida and other postmodern thinkers in the late twentieth century.⁴⁰ His work also moves on from a Cartesian perspective, in that his reflections on the nature of the actor’s body/mind is one that acknowledges the problematic nature of Descartes’s *Cogito* and the privileging of a causal relationship between body and mind. For Zarrilli, a significant feature of the contemporary actor’s work is not based on the question(s) of representation based on traditional notions of character, but on an “energetics” of performance:

It explains how energy is activated, how perceptual/sensory awareness is heightened - animal like – as the body “becomes all eyes”, and

⁴⁰ See his most recent publication in this field: Zarrilli, P., 2009: *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (London: Routledge).

how both are applied to a variety of dramaturgies
(Zarrilli, 2009: 1).

In adopting this particular approach to acting, Zarrilli's work can also be seen to adopt a philosophical stance that is inflected towards phenomenology and, specifically, the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and those he influenced in the second half of the twentieth century. Within this philosophical paradigm, the body is seen as the centre of lived experience, not an instrument of the mind at the end of a causal chain;

not that possible body which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but that actual body I call mine, this sentinel standing quietly at the command of my words and acts (Merleau-Ponty in *ibid*: 45).

Thus, Zarrilli's considerable body of work – combining practice with various approaches to the theory of contemporary acting – is able to position itself within a post-Stanislavskian, postdramatic, phenomenological paradigm that enables not only the centrality of the body in all its complexities, but also the significant aesthetic force at its disposal. This force is one that can be identified as operating in a liminal environment. When discussing his work on a range of Beckett's plays, as part of his 'Beckett Project' in the 1990s, Zarrilli talks of Beckett's work as existing on the

“edge of a breath” where thought takes shape as impulse/action – a place where one “stands still while not standing still” [...] Beckett's plays take the actor to this same place “between” where meanings, associations, and experiences are left open for the audience (*ibid*: 115).

Here, Zarrilli is keen to locate the Beckettian actor as a liminal presence. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is the liminal space identified by cultural anthropologists as

well as performance studies scholars, which opens up a richness of possibility for aesthetic playfulness and social/cultural re-ordering; a subjunctive space in which an unlimited number of possibilities can be processed and incrementally exhausted either as a means of correction in very real political contexts (see the work of Augusto Boal and other Applied Theatre practitioners, for example) or as an imaginative tool in the armoury of the creative artist. In this latter context, it is the possibility of a liminal, playful approach to performance that combines with the opacity of Beckett's texts in order to produce what is, for Zarrilli, an opportunity to focus on the relationship between and beyond physical movement rather than any psychologically motivated relationship between cause and effect. Zarrilli's work on his Beckett project will be considered further in Chapter four.

What is also key to the actor's engagement with Beckett is what Zarrilli defines as the "energetic engagement with the musicality of Beckett's texts" (ibid: 119). Operating from the slow *legato* pace of works such as *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Eh Joe* and *Piece of Monologue* - in which the actor is required to maintain a slow pace of delivery through which energy and imagination is difficult to sustain – through to the faster pace found in pieces such as *Not I* and *Play* where precision of delivery at almost breakneck speed is required; the actor is, in more ways than one, seen to occupy a theatrical space *in extremis*. The Modernist, and indeed traditional Eastern, antecedents of this approach to a performance aesthetic that seeks to place the actor's delivery at high degrees of abstraction from a representational alternative, can be found in the European avant-garde of the early twentieth century as well as the dance dramas of Butoh in Japan or

Indian Kathakali.⁴¹ A key difference between those forms and Beckett's approach to the Implied Actor lies in the individual and their subjective impulse towards any accumulated training regime and its use in performance. This approach to musicality can also be traced in terms of the cramped or restricted stage environments s/he is required to occupy. In addition to those verbal constraints, especially of the late Beckett text, based on rhythm, pace and dislocation, the exigencies of place and placement for the actor add extra demands in which the possibilities offered by a playful approach in performance come with risks attached. Billie Whitelaw's performances for Beckett during his lifetime required her to endure varying physical restrictions. As Mouth in *Not I*, she was encased in a bespoke harness so that her head could be held in position and focused under the pin-point spotlight required to illuminate her mouth and nothing more. Over the course of runs of performances at the Royal Court Theatre, London, Whitelaw sustained a paralyzed jaw as a consequence of the repetition of Beckett's relentless monologue. When performing as May in *Footfalls*, at the same venue later in that decade, she was required by Beckett to adopt a contorted, almost grotesque, posture when facing the audience in a still position and when pacing across the prescribed width of the stage. Consequently, she has since suffered from a twisted spine that she describes as being "like a corkscrew" (Gussow, 1996). For Whitelaw, and others, the immediacy of presence and the "energetics" required to engage playfully with the Beckett text in a celebration of its inherent ephemerality is something that can leave permanent marks.

⁴¹ For a useful consideration of Butoh and the notion of movement *in extremis*, see Sanders, V., 1988: "Dancing and the Dark Soul of Japan: An Aesthetic Analysis of "Butoh"", *Asian Theatre Journal* 5 (2). Phillip Zarrilli also talks of the relationship between actor and music in Indian Kathakali. See Zarrilli, P., 1984: *The Kathakali complex: actor, performance & structure* (Abhinav Publications).

In conclusion, the development of a Beckettian poetics, both during his career and in the period since his death, has been a complex process in which the impoverished but valorized status of the body, and specifically the actor, becomes a site on and in which the shifting paradigms of academic discourse compete with the changing nature of theatre aesthetics throughout the twentieth century. In addition to the populist influences operating on Beckett from within the traditions of early cinema and the latter days of music hall, his is a poetics that also rests on an avant-garde sensibility that is born out of the imperatives of Modernism and a literary/theatrical approach based on an antipathy towards the realist impulse. What is, on the face of it, a poetics based on negativity or a turn away from the prevailing doctrines of representation is embraced as a positive set of values to carry forward to the latter half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Jonathan Kalb, in his consideration of Beckett's unique contribution to twentieth century dramaturgy, subscribes to the idea that a poetics of absence can be embraced as a progressive force: "that idea of considering ambiguity as a positive performance value, is really all the critical raw material one needs to discuss a poetics of Beckett performance" (Kalb, 1986: 38).

Writing in the late 1980s, at a point when the politics of presence and absence; of corporeality and mediatized virtuality, were becoming theorized within a poststructuralist, Derridean philosophy, Kalb's assertion can be seen in the context of an emerging discourse. A turn away from the centre, origin or *logos* – and with it the institutional politics of hierarchy, organization and control that had characterized the forces of cultural production for so long – operates in parallel with an already emerging poetics of performance that had become so much a feature of Beckett's writing since the mid 1960s. A postmodern discourse that proclaims the 'death' of both author and

character is one that, almost by default, places the onus of creative and textual responsibility squarely on the shoulders of an implied actor/performer.

Against this background, it is the documented thoughts and processes of the actors who worked with Beckett during his career and emerge as well-equipped both to execute his writing as well as articulate the creative reciprocities that gave birth to the work and provide us with insights as to how they were realized in rehearsal. David Warrilow and Billie Whitelaw have been highlighted in this chapter as key exemplars in these processes; however, they also stand as emblematic figures in an approach to acting Beckett that spans not only the key collaborations in Beckett's lifetime but also as models of collaboration that form a legacy for future practitioners to emulate.

The distilled essence of these contributions resides in their willingness to surrender to the will of the author – whether this be as evidenced in the real-time conversations and mutual collaborations with Beckett himself, or a simple adherence to the demands and strictures of Beckett's texts. As demonstrated in this chapter, the post-war, postmodern models of collaboration developed within the various projects undertaken by Beckett and his contemporaries are ones that are not based on earlier notions of authorial/directorial autocracy. The unseeing, unthinking marionette of Edward Gordon Craig's vision is one that is not replicated within the Beckettian landscape. For David Warrilow, perhaps his modesty as an actor forces him to acknowledge his role within Beckett's productions as an *enabler* (for the audience to acquire understanding); as a *cipher*; or as a *channel* through which the author is able to present the text as he envisages it. However, throughout, the Implied Actor's role is active rather than passive. Warrilow or Whitelaw engage in an active process of engagement with

Beckett, not in order to establish meaning through concealed metaphor or inherent symbolism, but in order to establish an appropriate theatrical form for the text as it is.

Once established, the Implied Actor is then free to explore the playful potential that remains. The textual crevices and gaps that exist between the author's words and his intention; what can and cannot be said or done; becomes a space rich in its potential to innovate and transform a performance according to the persona of the actor in control. It is this remaining certainty – of presence and fleshly embodiment – that offers the spectator the last vestiges of dramatic clarity within a universe of ambiguity. At this point, Kalb's "critical raw material" finds its limit.

Chapter 4: The Beckettian Actor in Performance - 1

Not for me these Grotowskis and Methods [...] the best possible play is one in which there are no actors, only the text. I'm trying to find a way to write one (Beckett in Bair, 1990: 544).

In the next two chapters, I consider in more detail the application of ideas surrounding the Beckettian actor to a range of thematically, and chronologically ordered, texts. In doing so, I will establish the emergence of this identifiable approach to craft and individual virtuosity as an evolutionary process that can be characterized in performances of four of Beckett's works for the theatre: *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Not I* (1972), *Footfalls* (1976) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981). Beckett's comment to Deirdre Bair in the mid 1970s, close to the time of writing of the last of these four plays listed, indicates a possible confirmation of that customary analysis of Beckett's work as incrementally reductive. His comment can be interpreted as betraying a certain disillusionment, or frustration, not with the nature of actors but with the systemic nature of the training regimes and implied 'schools' of thought that surround them. His opaque pronouncements on the possible interpretations of his works, in addition to the ways in which they should be played by the actor, chime with much that has been written on the nature of contemporary performance both before and after Beckett's death. Philip

Auslander, writing about the problematic relationship between language, the actor's self and postmodernity, talks of the difficulty with which one can approach a poetics of performance based on deconstructive approaches to acting: "Although it is intriguing to speculate on what a deconstructive poetics of acting might look like, such speculation runs counter to the spirit of deconstruction itself" (Auslander, 1999: 38).¹

As discussed in the previous chapter, Beckett's comment to Deirdre Bair on the need for "no actors, only the text" is later qualified to express his need for actors who were prepared to submit fully to the prescribed elements of the text and, by extension, to his demands as a director. These two chapters, in seeking to explore the ways in which a selected range of Beckett's dramas have been produced both during and after his lifetime, will consider the nexus of actor and director as a practical, collaborative relationship. Beckett himself would not deny that his own productions were products of fruitful collaborative exercises in which those key actors who were selected for their ability to respond to the challenges of various roles in performance, as well as sometimes provide the inspiration for Beckett's initial writing process, were able to

¹ As discussed in Chapter one, Jonathan Kalb, in his book, *Beckett in Performance*, also writes about the problem of establishing a poetics of Beckett performance that in some way provides the actor with the beginnings of a technical approach. As with Beckett's texts, it is as if the actor is forced perpetually to wrestle with the shifting sands of potential meaning and technical execution armed only with the primary evidence of Beckett's writing as source material. As Kalb says, "that idea of considering ambiguity as a positive performance value, is really all the critical raw material one needs to discuss a poetics of Beckett performance" (Kalb, 1986: 38).

offer elements of theatrical talent and virtuosity that would enrich the raw material of the text.² One of the challenges for the actor working with Beckett's material, as well as working with the man himself, is to reconcile creative expression within tight parameters, and without the power of veto.

In exploring the four texts listed, I will demonstrate the changing manifestations of the actor playing Beckett's characters over time. I will do this using a methodology that is three-pronged in its approach and which can be described with reference to the ensuing practical examples. Each section will be organized according to the following key areas:

- The text and its relationship to Beckett's work as a writer and director;
- Selected productions of Beckett's works not involving the author;
- My own work as an actor and director involved in producing Beckett's works.

² Of all Beckett's collaborators in performance it is his relationship with the American director Alan Schneider that is perhaps the best documented. In addition to his work alongside Beckett in theatre productions, and his only film project, Schneider became a close friend and guardian of Beckett's textual integrity. His autobiography and correspondence with Beckett reveal much in terms of Beckett's attitudes towards actors and the creative process. What is clear is his willingness to work reciprocally with an actor within the constraints offered in the text and often this was seen as having unwanted consequences. In his later career, Schneider observes Beckett "gradually discovering that all actors have imaginations and get ideas that might seriously affect or even distort the intentions of an author." (Schneider, 1987: 249). See also, Harmon, M. (ed), 1998: *No author better served: the correspondence of Samuel Beckett & Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) for evidence of an ongoing dialogue between the two on their various projects together.

Before continuing with this analysis, it is important that I locate my own work as a practitioner in the context of this material. In addition to the significance of the four selected texts as being emblematic of the various approaches taken by actors when performing Beckett's works, they also demonstrate the ways in which my own performance practice has evolved over the last twenty years as both an academic scholar and creative practitioner. My early academic fascination with the explicit manifestations, as well as underlying philosophical references to Beckett's uses of comedy in the early plays has developed into an increasing awareness of the ways in which his works resonate for diverse audiences. Many of the productions I have devised over the course of the last decade have been for international festival environments in which knowledge of the English language can never be assumed. A growing realization that the verbal text, or linguistic score, of the production was a potentially problematic feature of the work served to define my practice in relation to rehearsal and performance. Working with a range of actors from diverse backgrounds: students, professional academics and trained actors/singers, I looked towards the rhythms and sounds of the text; its inherent musicality, as an initial point of departure.

In addition to this, my simultaneous work as a university lecturer, in which I was teaching undergraduate modules in and supervising undergraduate dissertations on the

work of Beckett from both critical and practical perspectives, facilitated a rich exchange of views and practices using studio laboratory spaces and classrooms as the incubator for many of my ideas. It was in the university studio environment where I was able to apply my own understanding of a ‘universal’³ approach to performance-making along the lines of an approach to rhythm, texture and musicality that would often be discovered through a mutual process of creative experimentation. The outcomes of these experiments would be further developed in rehearsal.

Not only have the audiences for these performances been characterized as diverse and offering a particular kind of challenge. The venues and environments in which the performances were staged have, simultaneously, also posed particular problems and generated remarkable opportunities. As with any theatrical touring environment, the nature of a venue’s fabric, acoustic and stage-audience configuration poses different and sometimes complex challenges. From a studio space in a provincial English theatre to a

³ Modern and contemporary theatre practitioners have sought to extend the contested notion of universality in theatre through their work. Most notably, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook have used their practice as a means of, amongst other things, exploring the problematics of language as a barrier to cross-cultural understanding. Peter Brook’s production of *The Mahabharata* (1985) utilized archetypes and symbols in the rendering of character in order to make this Hindu myth fresh and accessible for a contemporary, and cross-cultural, audience. Subsequent critics of this approach have questioned a dominant Euro-centric tendency that emerges as an inevitable consequence of this flattening out of cultural diversity in the face of sometimes unavoidable political or economic constraints. See Bharucha, R., 1993: *Theatre and the World* (London: Routledge). My approach to universality in performance is predicated on a subordination of language to that of tonal substance rather than contingent semantic meaning. In doing so, my work as a practitioner seeks out theatrical vocabularies that can act as trans-national and inter-cultural vehicles of expression; through ways of performing that can speak to the specific needs of audiences in diverse cultural contexts.

small airless room in the middle of Jerusalem's West Bank; to a ruined church in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains in central Romania; the work presented has always been bespoke, adaptive to unique environments and specifically targeted at the audience in question.

Therefore, these last two chapters place this body of my own work as a practitioner in the context of Beckett's writing as well as his own production work and the work of others. Throughout, the status of the actor remains the prime focus, just as it has been when engaged in the production processes for each of my performances. The extent to which s/he becomes the locus of meaning for culturally diverse audiences at once connected to each other but disconnected from a familiar setting was a significant and common factor in the making of these performances. In the same ways as other productions of Beckett's work are able to make a deeper connection within a shared community,⁴ work examined in this context can be seen to resonate at the level of both individual and collective experiences.

⁴ For example, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* has succeeded when performed in front of audiences with a shared sense of crisis. The San Quentin gaol performance of the 1960s can be contrasted with a production in Sarajevo in 1993 at the height of the city's shelling during the war in the former Yugoslavia. For an account of this latter example, see Sontag, S. 1994: "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo" *Performing Arts Journal* 16(2): 87-106. In this article Sontag talks of the importance of unique creativity as a means of healing fractured communities: "It was the only one of the three things I do [...] which yields something that would only exist in Sarajevo". (Sontag: 1994: 87).

Krapp's Last Tape: "I wouldn't want them back"

Beckett's solo piece for a male actor was written in the early part of 1958. It is noteworthy for several reasons when viewed in the full context of his dramatic legacy. The play was written and first performed some five years after his first theatrical success with *Waiting for Godot* in January 1953. Subsequent to this major career breakthrough, Beckett followed-up this success with *Endgame* in 1957 and the short mime piece, *Act Without Words* in the same year. Although complex in their respective approaches, implied or otherwise, to the paradoxes of language and existential philosophy, both of these plays were replete with a similar attitude to physicality and the presentational visual scoring found in key passages from the earlier *Waiting for Godot*. One of the significant features of *Krapp's Last Tape* is the extent to which the performance of the text requires the actor to 'turn in' visibly (and almost literally) on himself in order to communicate some of the key moments in the piece. It is at this point of inward reflection, and simultaneous outward projection, that the task of the actor cast in this role becomes representative of an emerging aesthetic that can be applied more generally to those performing in his works.⁵

⁵ Lisa Dwan's recent production of *Not I* reveals the extent to which actors are forced to confront their inner, often prosaic, selves simultaneously with the act of public performance: "There is not a cell of my body that isn't called to arms while performing, but most challenging of all is to silence one's own internal *Not I*. There's no room for reckless thoughts. They disturb the concentration. But

This is a drama of incarceration: “there is something frozen about him and he is confined within himself, ‘filled up to his teeth with bitterness’” (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988: 297), however it is not a process of incarceration that requires the actor to disappear within himself. Beckett’s approach to the directing of various productions of his work reveals a heightened approach to physicality in the communication of subtle but deep emotional crisis that can be regarded as something of a departure from the more overtly externalized, perhaps almost two dimensional, declamatory role-playing of the earlier plays. This section exposes this emerging approach to acting; it will do so through examining the following evidence base: the text, Beckett’s documented processes as a director and my own approach when directing the work in a specific production with a particular kind of actor.

The play itself is primarily notable because of its combination of personal biographical inspiration with an academic interest in Eastern philosophy. Intense lyrical passages that can be directly associated with aspects of Beckett’s earlier life are imbued with a poignancy born out of Krapp’s technological engagement with his documented past. At the same time, the framework for this sometimes tender lyricism is a consciously asserted underscore based on Manichaeism, a gnostic religion originating in

like vultures, they hover above his lean lines. "Out into this world ..." it begins. Did you turn off the gas? Your mobile?" (Dwan, 2013).

Babylonia that thrived between the third and seventh centuries A.D.⁶ Beckett explicitly identified this organising framework in his production of the play in Berlin during 1969. His director's notebook for this production sets out a range of decisions taken with regard to lighting and scenography that aim to symbolize those fundamental Manichaeian ethics associated with the separation and contrast of light and dark. It is this emphasis on Manichaeism as an organising structure for the play that also serves to define Krapp's character and which, in turn, provides a starting-point for the actor cast in that role.

In many ways, Krapp is seen as the embodiment of this approach to a Manichean lifestyle and his conduct during the play is indicative of the problems associated with this kind of 'black and white' approach to moral dualism. Aside from his psychological imperfections, he is presented as an essentially flawed individual suffering from many

⁶ Manichaeian dualism is based on the cosmological principle that defines the universe as a struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world full of darkness. The progress of human history can be described as an on-going process of light gradually being removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light from which it came. Its beliefs contain aspects of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Central to its beliefs is a moral dualism in which followers are encouraged to make clear and distinctive choices between good and evil. In practice, this involves the adoption of an ascetic lifestyle in which the pleasures of the flesh or the vacuous enjoyment of the material world are renounced in favour of a spiritual engagement that transcends a flawed, worldly existence. McMillan and Fehsenfeld account for the relationship between these ideas and the text of *Krapp's Last Tape* and Beckett's own notes on the subject (for the 1969 Berlin production) can be found in Knowlson, J. (general ed.), 1992: *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape Theatrical Notes* (London: Faber & Faber). See also, Cronin, A., 1997: *Samuel Beckett: the last modernist* (London: Flamingo) who suggests that Beckett's knowledge of Manichaeism might have stretched no further than the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry in his possession (Cronin, 1997: 485-6).

of the weaknesses and tendencies that define humanity, to which Beckett was prone to draw attention in the earlier stage and radio dramas. The opening stage direction illustrates this through a silent mime during which, in the course of a short passage of action, Krapp is presented as a comic creation with an intense fondness for bananas and an inability to resist hard liquor. As part of this comic mime, he is observed consuming two bananas in quick succession and slipping and falling on the skin of the first. Later, he disappears off-stage in order to find a drink – with the tell-tale sound of clinking glasses and an improvised song giving him away. These two comic devices: visual and aural, both serve to establish character at the same time as offering a view of humanity that confirms the choices available within a polarized moral universe. It also becomes clear that these appetites – encountered live – are the result of a lifetime's refinement. His taped entry from 'Box 3, Spool 5', recorded on the occasion of his thirty-ninth birthday, includes this recollection from a taped entry twelve years prior to that:

Statistics. Seventeen hundred hours, out of the preceding eight thousand odd, consumed on licensed premises alone [...] Plans for a less ... (*hesitates*) ... engrossing sexual life (*CDW*: 218).

By the age of thirty-nine, his plans to renounce the pleasures of the material world have apparently been enacted to the point that he is able to declare himself "Well out of that"

(ibid) when recalling his co-habitation with Bianca on Kedar Street. However this play, in examining the impact of a lifetime of incarceration for the sake of an ascetic way of life, is also a study of the regret that comes with that dedication. A significant theme in the play is the sense of mourning and bereavement that comes through Krapp's annual recollections. As with much of Beckett's writing, the metatheatrical device of temporal repetition – where a scenario is not merely established in the moment of performance but implicated as having happened many times previously, is here given customary ritual status (as with Didi's and Gogo's eternal waiting, Hamm's and Clov's endless game of mutual dependence and the nameless figure's absurd struggle for existence in *Act Without Words*).⁷

Krapp's situation, however, is not merely an investigation of the consequences of a life lived according to Manichaeian ethics. Beckett's inclusion of a poignant final taped entry in the latter stages of the play, in which Krapp remembers the girl in the punt on a summer's afternoon, provides some of his most lyrical writing:

⁷ In Chapter five I consider the issue of 'doubling' as a textual and performative practice in relation to *Footfalls*. This phenomenon is also considered by Steven Connor in his book, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, in which he attempts to wrest Beckett studies away from the critical straitjacket of "Descartes, Sartre, Existentialism and the Absurd" (Connor, 2007: xii) in order instead to explore a later critical tradition that echoed Beckett's own explorations. Connor's investigation of Beckett's repetition in the theatre divides itself in terms of embodied presence (*Godot, Endgame*) contrasted with 'Voice and Mechanical Reproduction' (*Krapp's Last Tape, Ohio Impromptu, Rockaby, That Time*). See Connor, S., 2007: *Samuel Beckett: repetition, theory and text* (Aurora: Davies Group Publishers).

We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stern! (*Pause*) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side (ibid: 221).

One of the challenges for the actor comes with the way in which the play is structured. Beckett had become intrigued by the possibilities of the new medium of magnetic tape on a visit to the BBC in January 1958 when reviewing some recordings of his prose work that had been broadcast earlier in the previous year (Knowlson, 1997: 444). He was fascinated by the potential that now existed for the human voice to be easily recorded and played back almost instantaneously. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, we therefore see Beckett exploring the possibilities for the selection and juxtaposition of fragments of human memory, as this frenetically punctuated stage direction illustrates:

Long Pause. He suddenly bends over machine, switches off, wrenches off tape, throws it away, puts on the other, winds it forward to the passage he wants, switches on, listens staring front (ibid: 223).

Not only do we see here the physicalization of this act of selection and juxtaposition. We also witness the kind of tactile engagement between man and technology that was to become a feature of contemporary performance practice in the ensuing decades. In Chapter two of this study, Elinor Fuchs's articulation of a "theatre of things" is used as a means of defining the progressive retreat from traditional notions of character and representation throughout the twentieth century. She argues that the insecurities and instabilities of character on the postmodern stage are perhaps substituted by the certainties of the inanimate object (Fuchs, 1996).⁸ In addition to this "theatre of things", a "theatre of doing" has also emerged as part of a tendency within contemporary performance practice that is born out of this retreat from character. In this early example, not just of Beckett's dramatic writing, but of the gradual drift toward postmodernity, we can see these phenomena pre-figured. Krapp's engagement with the tape recorder is seen as a tactile, almost visceral relationship of convenience in which the functional qualities of the machinery are subsumed within the physical interaction it requires. Pierre Chabert, when directing this play (as *La dernière bande*) in Paris during 1975, describes the kind of engagement required of the actor:

It is a law of Beckett's theatre (the dramatization of physical effort) that we find at several levels in

⁸ I return to consider Fuchs's ideas in relation to the death of character and audience identification in my discussion of *Footfalls* in Chapter five.

Krapp's Last Tape: the effort to hear, to see, to get started, to bring back memory. The tension instead of lying in a clash between personalities, as in conventional drama, takes place inside the body of the character himself (Chabert in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1989: 292).

It is the locus of the body that becomes the seat of meaning for this play. Not merely in terms of the ways in which the actor vocalizes the spoken passages, but in terms of his attitude and posture in relation to the tape recorder.

The confrontation in Krapp lies in the relationship between a voice and a body (stretching his body to hear) and is externalized in the listening posture. The first task of the actor consists in finding this posture (ibid).

Beckett is clear in his stage directions regarding the nature of this posture however there is room for directorial interpretation:

He raises his head, broods, bends over machine, switches on and assumes listening posture, i.e. leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, face front (CDW: 217).

Successive actors and directors working on this text have worked with this stage direction in different, but subtle, ways. From such a passive stance, nuances of gesture,

posture and the overriding symbolic relationship of the character to the tape recorder can be employed. Patrick Magee was the first actor to perform the role in the late 1950s. He subsequently re-visited the role and recorded a televised performance that was screened in November 1972.⁹ Of all the documented performances of this piece, this perhaps remains closest to its theatrical original in terms of the quality of delivery. Magee adopts a staged, bordering on mannered, delivery in which the rasping, forceful tone of his voice contrasts with the frailty of his physical disposition. He chooses to gaze away from the desk towards the middle distance whilst cupping his ear in such a way that is faithful to the original stage direction. His is a poignancy that enables the audience to contrast the overt strength of the younger Krapp depicted on the tapes, with the declining faculties of old age. By contrast, more recent productions have veered towards a more naturalistic portrayal with notable versions having been recorded for film; following on from, or prior to, successful theatrical productions.¹⁰

Despite Beckett's reluctance to agree to the transfer of his work between media during his lifetime, this play can be seen as an exception (in his lifetime he sanctioned Radio,

⁹ McWhinnie, D., Accessed: 12.7.2013; *Krapp's Last Tape* ('Thirty Minute Theatre'), http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068819/?ref=fn_al_tt_6, 29.11.1972.

¹⁰ Most notably, John Hurt performed the role in 2001 for the *Beckett on Film* project directed by Atom Egoyan. He reprised the role for the theatre in 2011 (using the tapes from the 2001 production). Harold Pinter was cast in the role for a Royal Court Theatre (London) production directed by Ian Rickson in 2006 in order to mark the theatre's 50th anniversary. The production was re-produced as a film for DVD release in 2007 and broadcast on BBC4 in 2009.

TV and gramophone recordings of the work) and for that reason it is perhaps no accident that subsequent productions of this particular play have adopted more filmic acting performances as the reservoir of available reference material has proliferated. Both John Hurt and Harold Pinter employed a comparatively internalized, inward portrayal of Krapp in contrast to the more theatrical renderings of Magee, and also Rick Cluchey, who was directed by Beckett in the role during 1977. Cluchey adopts a reverential, almost supplicatory stance towards the tape recorder as both the means of access to, and recording of, the distant memories he finds increasingly difficult to recall. When considering all of the varying approaches to the role adopted since its premiere, actors have tended towards one of two directions: a broadly representational style in which the implied reality of the character's situation is allowed to influence an internalized, almost 'haunted' rendering; contrasted with a presentational approach in which theatricality and the externalized virtuosity of the actor's abilities is foregrounded for the spectator.

Beckett is also clear with regard to the extent to which the actor's relationship with the machine should be based on emotion. He is clear in his stage directions at the beginning of the play that the action takes place in the future and that Krapp has had the opportunity to record numerous entries, presumably using this tape recorder or one very similar. Aside from the content of the taped entries replayed for both Krapp and the

audience present, there is a tangible sense of child-like fascination with the machine. The posture adopted when in the listening position is almost one of a penitent sinner or remorseful suppliant at the mercy of their past experiences. In the same way as the eponymous character in the morality play *Everyman*¹¹ is forced to account for his actions in order to gain access to paradise, Beckett's Manichaeic hero is forced to face the consequences of a life that has consciously turned away from the darkness of material, earthly pre-occupations towards the light of spirituality in search of a similar fate. His act of worship at this twentieth century altar is therefore imbued with a complex web of emotional torment and attempted reconciliation that requires careful playing.

Pierre Chabert talks of the physical manifestations of this relationship in rehearsal and performance:

The look, the touching, the physical posture: moving from and returning to the machine. The changing expressions are important; they are reproachful, interrogative, defiant, excited [...] at other times they are expressions of complicity, love, good humour, as when Krapp laughs with his recorded voice (Chabert in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1989: 292).

¹¹ See: Cawley, A.C. (ed.), 1993: *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London: Everyman).

It is also the musicality of the text that presents challenges for the actor in this role. An ever-present feature of the Beckettian approach to acting, *Krapp's Last Tape*, at this relatively early stage of Beckett's writing for the stage provides a working set of analogies for the actor that become more pronounced as the material develops during the remainder of his career.

In the 1975 production, Chabert's notes reveal this emphasis on musicality having been broken down to three discreet elements:

- The text as score
- The alternations between the two voices
- The relationship between the recorded voice and physical movement

Bringing these three elements together clearly results in the completion of an overall 'final' score when staged. A fourth element, that of the visual score, is also identified.

As a score, Beckett himself was able to formulate the text in order to illustrate its internal musical structure where Krapp's live voice is labelled 'A' and his recorded voice, 'B': "b-A(b)-A-B-a-B [small letters indicate brief passages, and large letters

indicate extensive passages]” (ibid: 289). Once established, it is possible to see the progress of the play as akin to the movements found in an orchestral work or other musical composition. In simple terms, the progress of the dialogue can be compared to early plainsong found in the liturgies of the Western church, in which antiphonal singing (the alternation of verses between soloist and choir or choir and congregation) enabled the advance of an unaccompanied melodic line. Krapp’s live utterances are delivered uniquely as a response to his recorded voice therefore a more valid comparison might be with responsorial plainsong, in which the soloist (or choir) sings a series of verses followed by a response from the choir (or congregation). In this regard, Krapp’s live reactions to his recorded self are responsive as opposed to self-contained. In later, more complex musical compositions (the symphony or concerto, for example), the balance between thematic musical development across movements versus a more isolated approach, in which movements acquire a discrete integrity and changing melodies, is observed.¹² In Beckett’s text, examples of an isolated approach to composition can be seen through the visual scoring of the banana pratfall near the opening and Krapp’s “*Brief burst of quavering song*” (CDW: 219) after the first taped entry is played. In contrast, there are thematic motifs that run through the play; and which return to haunt

¹² This structural phenomenon is explored later in this chapter in my discussion of the rehearsal process for my production of *Not I*.

both Krapp and the audience: regret, lost love and a personal bitterness born out of unfulfilled ambition.

Once the basic structure identified by Chabert is established, the task of the director when working with an actor is to identify the ‘points of alternation’ between the two voices as well as their transition from one to another and how they might be distinguished musically rather than naturalistically.

This dialogue, or literary ‘duet’ between the two identifiable voices in the play can be articulated differently according to the actor playing the role and the priorities of the director concerned. Musically, and tonally, the delivery of the text benefits from a contrast that can be recognized as striking both in its sense of sonic difference as well as its poignant associations. Actors appear to relish the optimization of this effect. The university academic and actor, Michael Patterson, has toured his own production of the play across a lengthy period since the early 1970s. By the time I saw the piece in the early 2000s, the gap in time between the taped diary entries and the moment of performance was almost the same as stated in the text (Patterson was 34 when he recorded his tapes in the 1970s contrasting with Krapp’s explicitly stated age of 39 in the published text. I witnessed his performance of the play more or less 30 years later).

This level of authenticity created marked differences in the vocal and consequently musical qualities of Patterson's voices. The strong, higher-pitched tone of his younger self contrasted starkly with the deeper and thinner resonances of the live performer. More recently, John Hurt was also keen to use the tapes that were produced for his 2001 production when he reprised the role a decade later.

The distinction between the quasi-naturalistic dialogue of the earlier plays that precede this and the heightened lyricism and de-naturalized, distanced delivery of the dialogue that exists between the two voices in *Krapp's Last Tape*, marks an important shift in Beckett's approach to dramatic writing. The actor playing Krapp has increased license to increase the gap between a psychologically determined, naturalistic performance register and its alternative: a formal, patterned, structured approach to delivery that is closer to music.

Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough (UK) – May 2002

Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield (UK) – October 2002

My own approach to the staging of this play is one that set out to explore the possibilities of engaging with the emotional relationships that exist between Krapp and the content of his recorded entries as well as those between him and the machine on

which they are recorded. I wanted to see how Beckett's prophetic vision of a world, in which the live body sits comfortably alongside mediatized representations, might work as a self-referential discourse on the nature of communication between ourselves - self, meaning the live self; talking to oneself - and the recorded self: in other words, the status of reminiscence as an act of mediatized performance.

I chose to work with a blind actor named Antoine Reeves in an attempt to give equal distribution both to the poetic content of the piece and to set up an intriguing and resonant mouthpiece for Krapp's memories. It is the content of the piece that raises interesting questions regarding these meditations on the self - aside from any consideration of the nature of theatrical form and electronic media. The play's themes of love, loss and an ascetic lack of bodily fulfilment reveal an image of a man engaged in an act of culminating self-perception. Although it can be argued that we are provided with a version of self that is virtual and mediated, nevertheless it is a similar act of self-realization to that explored in Beckett's only excursion into writing for the film medium, - *Film* - shot in 1965, and written in 1963, only five years after *Krapp's Last Tape* was completed.

In this piece, the all-seeing ‘eye’ of the camera lens is used to explore and test Bishop Berkeley’s seventeenth-century philosophical treatise on the nature of existence to its logical conclusion: “*Esse est percipi*” - ‘To be is to be perceived’ (CDW: 323). The Latin formation is used as a prefix to the text published later (1967) and provides us with a defining statement for the reception of this work. In a similar way to his earlier work, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, this piece appears as an experimental encounter with a medium (film) in which the possibilities of visual editing, close-up, exterior and interior location shooting, as well as visual comedy, become part of Beckett’s creative imperative. However, we are also asked to consider a key existential issue amidst this artistic game-playing in much the same ways as Beckett’s experiments with audio-tape did some five years earlier: that is, the nature of the relationship between consciousness and human ageing as a means of defining individual existence. How is this relationship given any extra potency when articulated through the voice of an unsighted actor? In considering this, it is necessary to look at some of the practical staging decisions I made during the rehearsal process undertaken in this production.

Primarily, it is important to consider the qualities of the actor I was working with on this project. Antoine Reeves was in his late forties at the time and lived and worked in the town of Huddersfield in West Yorkshire. He is an accomplished musician in more

than one instrument, the piano in particular, and has pursued this interest in equal measure to his acting work, of which he had considerable experience both during his training and at the beginning of his professional career. His musicality is an important feature of his work as an actor. He learns his scripts, from braille, very quickly, and soon moves towards a rehearsal style that is playful and experimental, in a similar manner to that of the jazz pianist improvising around alternate modal structures in a quest to perfect his instrument.

As a man who has inhabited a world that is principally based on aural experience, music has played an extremely important part in his life. He became blind at a very early age and therefore has no perception of colour, structural volume, line or form in the same way that a sighted individual might encounter the world. Music therefore provides him with a sense of spatial possibility as well as aural experience. Music enables access to those spatial dimensions denied through the sense of sight, and a more detailed knowledge of the physical properties of interior and exterior space can be built through an understanding of the ways in which sound is reflected off surfaces. For Reeves, music therefore ceases to function solely on the level of auditory experience, but starts to generate mental 'pictures' that he likes to exploit when transferring this awareness to a given role. When recording the taped passages for subsequent playback in

performance, he would talk of the vivid imaginings he experienced when voicing Krapp's reminiscences of, for example, his punting afternoon on the upper lake or his reflections from the bench by the weir, or those hellish visions of old men, dogs and the big black-hooded perambulator.

As a director, I was also anxious to retain a sense of Reeves's regional identity in this piece. His Yorkshire accent appeared to lend itself very well to the latter part of the play when Krapp records his final entry, and we hear the ten-year differences between young and old. In this sense, he was able to bring his own regional nuances to particular passages in that live speech. From the opening line: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago..." (*CDW*: 222), the plosive cadences and flat vowel sounds of 'bastard' are a clear index of regional identity. The later, more reflective passages, in which the sheer rhythm of the monologue lent itself well to Reeves's intrinsic vocal qualities, are a clear sign that his regional roots is an important tool in his approach to the role. Reeves also has a natural flair for comedy and this, allied to his regional identity, worked well in the lighter-hearted passages.

At the level of visual comedy, Reeves was also able to bring to bear his physical skills. The early establishing scene is designed to expose Krapp's frailties as an individual, as well as his personal weaknesses. It was in this respect that Reeves's comic timing was used especially strongly. Some of the comic business associated with the two bananas early in the opening stage direction is potentially ambiguous for the spectator new to the work and, I think, says a lot about the extent to which Krapp's world of sensory experience has been distilled down to the simple, but apparently absurd, pleasure gained from holding the end of a banana in one's mouth. For Reeves, as an individual lacking one of his five senses, this was something he could identify with readily and to that end the sequence during which Krapp contemplates, acquires and consumes the two bananas early on became a comic study on the paradoxical contrast of child-like delight brought on by elderly diminishment.

This production was designed for a relatively small-scale performance space. Its first performance in Scarborough was to an audience of around 200 in an end-on studio configuration. With this consideration in mind it was important to arrive at a decision regarding the design for this production that combined this knowledge with our own thoughts about the text in performance. Practically, Reeves needed to have confidence in a set that gave him the freedom to move around what we identified as a 'centre of

gravity’ and which was comprised of a white, single-drawer table and chair centre stage, in a pool of white light and surrounded by darkness.

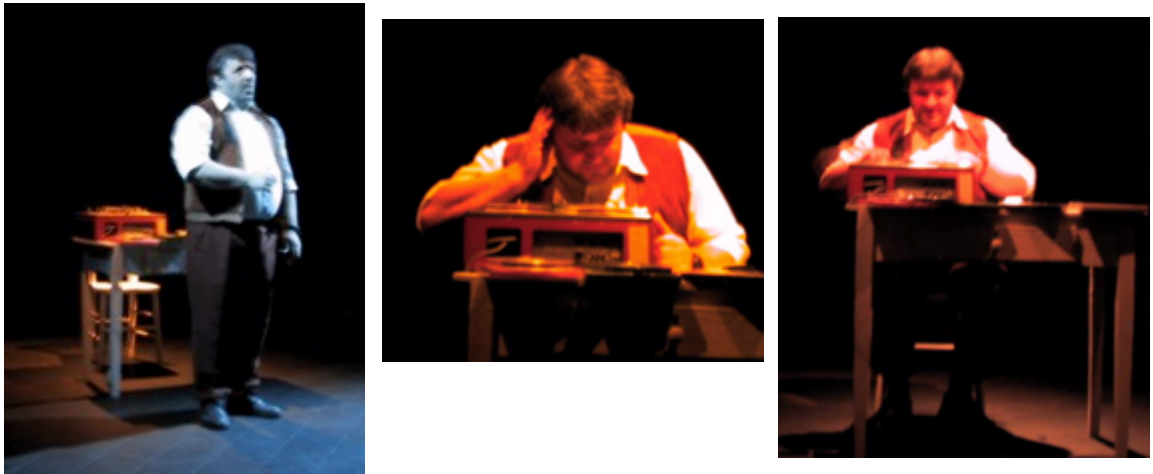


Fig 1: *Krapp's Last Tape*: Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough – 2002 (credit: author)

In everyday life, Reeves relies on a stick to guide himself when away from home. In this production, we wanted him to appear completely familiar with this, his private space, meaning that he needed to establish his own familiarity within the stage space. This was done - quite laboriously at first - through a simple pacing out of the distance between centre-stage and the wing area, where the off-stage business could take place with the assistance of an assistant stage manager. Over time, this ‘pacing-out’ would become second nature until Reeves could eventually make his way quite freely between the two points. The consequent ‘familiarity’ that Krapp was therefore able to

communicate was not down to a false understanding of the space. Early on in the process we decided privately that Krapp's blindness came with the onset of old age (and that he would have been sighted at the time he recorded his earlier tapes), and that his knowledge of 'the den' came from a lifetime spent inhabiting that space - a knowledge that is enhanced in the earlier tapes: through the reference to the recently installed overhead light, for example.

The final major concern for this production was in the relationship between Krapp and his tape recorder - the visually iconic image that everyone associates with this play. Given our decision to 'strip down' the overall setting, it was important that the machine - which would now exist as the focal point for the gaze of the audience - had the right proportions and the correct overall look. We acquired a 30-year-old Tandberg reel-to-reel tape recorder, constructed to a wood-effect finish, which gave it a battered look that seemed strongly in keeping with the piece. We decided that the taped reminiscences from Box 3, Spool 5 would not be operated by Reeves from the stage, but would be cued visually by an operator using a CD recording of the taped extracts, played back by Krapp during the course of the play.¹³

¹³ An example of one of the taped entries used in this performance can be found in Appendix (DVD).

Having made this decision, one of the main aims during rehearsals therefore became Reeves's gradual familiarization with the workings of the tape recorder and, especially his quest to learn the mechanical processes involved in lacing up, and successfully connecting, three different changes of spool during the course of the performance. This was, in purely mechanical terms, the hardest part of the process as it was a procedure that had little margin for error. Even though the sound cues were being operated from the box, it was important that the audience saw the spools rotating on their spigots and successfully laced-up. A highly prescriptive procedure had to be worked out from which Reeves could escape should he find that one end of the tape had strayed. Once this procedure was learnt, mastered and subsequently put into practice in performance, the effect on the piece was remarkable in what became a physical manifestation of the relationship between live and mediatized presence. The effect on audiences was also notable in respect of the sense of novelty felt amongst younger spectators who had no experience of this kind of analogue technology.¹⁴ They became curiously warm to the visceral relationship between flesh and machine; the necessary blurring of fingers with metal levers that is a staple requirement in the efficient use of this machinery. In this age of digital technology, where yesterday's technique of pulled levers and deftly-manipulated magnetic tape has given way to screen-based menus and graphic icons for

¹⁴ This sense of novelty was gleaned from informal conversations with a varied cross-section of the audience after the performance.

play/pause/stop functions, these spectators were curious to visit a technology where a certain amount of physical investment at the point of input is necessary if one is to experience the desired output.

To support the operation of the machine, a considerable amount of work was required on the correct physical posture to be adopted when listening to the taped recordings. As mentioned in earlier accounts of past productions, including those involving Beckett, the relationship between man and machine had been established as an almost integrated combination of live and mediated presence. A listening posture was needed that accentuated this relationship and gave the impression that the two were almost inseparable. This was eventually done by adopting a crouching posture, in which Reeves positioned his ear in the direction of the speaker in an almost grotesque representation compared with past performances. In this respect, more recent productions for the theatre that have subsequently been re-produced for film or DVD release (see John Hurt's and Harold Pinter's performances) are useful points of contrast. The more cinematic approaches of these two actors have tended to under-play the relationship between Krapp and the tape machine to the extent that it exists more by implication than being visually evident to the spectator. Earlier productions (Magee, Cluchey, for example) were more ready to exploit this association through posture and

an explicit sense of closeness between man and machine. In Reeves's performance, his blindness added an extra dimension to the act of listening. The machine became a more obvious and apparent extension of his sense of hearing and which, for that reason, appeared as fundamentally connected to Krapp's existence.

Since Beckett wrote this piece in the late 1950s, performance theory has sought to articulate the proliferating relationship that exists between the embodied presence of the live performer and media technology. Philip Auslander's *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, aims to set out the differences between the two terms 'live' and 'mediatised' in the context of contemporary performance practice. He uses a quotation from the performance artist Eric Bogosian, writing in 1994, who describes live theatre in largely Grotowskian terms as a holy act of ritual in which, "Instead of being bombarded by a cathode-ray tube we are speaking to ourselves. Human language, not electronic noise" (Auslander 1999: 10).

In conclusion, Bogosian's claim that live performance enables us to "speak to ourselves" free of the electronic noise of the electronic media, can be seen to be given greater credibility when the liveness of this activity is situated in the experience of an

unsighted performer playing this most mournful of Beckett's early dramas. Conversely however, Auslander's later assertion - that live and mediatized performance is engaged in a reflective relationship through the ability of each to feed off the respective strengths of the other - appears to find a means of self-illustration within this play. Using a poetic form to explore a broadly ontological treatise on the nature of self at the moment of perception, Beckett offers us a prescient vision of our later attempts to document our personal as well as our collective histories in the light of technological change. In doing so, we negotiate our way through a drama of overlapping dialogues: between Krapp and his younger self; between the live Krapp and his theatre audience; between pre-recorded dialogue and a live audience; between live performance and the early electronic medium that exists at the beginning of a new technological age. In an added irony, the analogue technology that would have represented the last word in 'high tech' *circa* 1958, has gradually given way to its contemporary equivalent - to the extent that future performances of Beckett's vision of the future are becoming ever harder as the equipment deteriorates. There will be a point in the near future when a performance reconstruction of this play will be almost impossible.

Krapp's narrative of loss and regret is not matched in Reeves's own reflections on his life lived to date as he repeatedly asserts that he would decline any offers for his sight to

be returned if the possibility presented itself. The clarity of vision with which he is imbued as an actor is curiously comparable to the poetic vision offered in Beckett's work and, for the actor in more general terms, clarity comes from an approach to dramatic form that provides stark choices: either to engage with a traditional notion of character, through which Krapp is allowed to develop as a rounded individual with a traceable psychological lineage, or to advance a persona based on, and using, the lyrical/musical motifs resonant in the text. It is this tension that exists between processes of representation and presentation (and as identified in earlier chapters) that emerges in this relatively early example of Beckett's dramatic canon. The play offers the actor, at this point perhaps in its most acute form to date, the kind of choice that was less apparent in the earlier drama. Through its attention to the overtly lyrical, possibly autobiographical, narratives of love and loss, Beckett is seen to consciously move away from the earlier works in which the inter-personal dynamics of coupling, and their inherent theatricalities, are a more pressing priority. Through an implied narrative of incarceration and introspection, his ability to transfer the internalized workings of consciousness, as found in the earlier prose and poetry, to a theatrical setting, enables an approach that in many way can be seen to culminate in *Not I* and its emboldened attempt to find a reduced theatricality tempered with a monologue of excess.

***Not I*: “never still a second ... mouth on fire”**

Beckett's dramatic output between the production of *Krapp's Last Tape* in the late 1950s and *Not I* in the early 1970s, is marked by a diversification in his use of media as well as an increased sense of experimentation with form, spatial dynamics and the position of the actor. In addition to the theatre works *Happy Days* (1960), *Play* (1963) and *Come and Go* (1965), Beckett wrote another play for radio: *Cascando* (1962); wrote and produced his first and only foray into film: *Film* (1964); and wrote his first piece for television, *Eh Joe* (1966).

Theatrically, his output in the three plays written during this period is characterized by a marked retreat from the traditional dramatic certainties of plot, character and location towards an increasingly ambiguous and physically reductive set of constraints for the actor playing his roles. Krapp's drama of self-imposed, intellectual incarceration gives way to Winnie's physical entombment in *Happy Days*. Progressively buried up to her waist (in act 1), then her neck (in act 2), Beckett's increasing fascination with the limits of human expression are matched by his exploration of the limits of theatre as an art form. This is emphasized in his next work for theatre, *Play*, in which the three characters represented experience a modified form of incarceration through their containment in life-size, stone-like urns in which only the head is visible to the

audience. *Come and Go* perhaps can be seen as a momentary lapse in this incremental reduction of human mobility however the three women in this play appear as ghostly, de-humanized apparitions rather than rounded characters. Trapped by the strictures of class, manners and social convention, their incarceration is less physical, and more an exercise in the formal deconstruction of the human life-cycle.¹⁵

Not I was written and produced in 1972 at the end of a five-year period since the writing of *Eh Joe*, in which Beckett had failed to produce any original dramatic material. His working life was pre-occupied with the translation and publication of earlier prose and dramatic works whilst also directing his existing works in significant theatre productions across Europe. It was also a period blighted by illness. He sustained broken ribs after a fall and continued to suffer from Cataracts, a source of increasing anxiety, as he feared that he might be losing his eyesight.¹⁶

¹⁵ Much has been written on Beckett's incremental retreat from full-body representation towards an approach based on incarceration and restriction. Closely linked to his distrust of language, it can be argued that Beckett's treatment of the body was his response to the view that language was an inadequate means of expression. Anna McMullan writes that "Beckett's late theatre composes and recomposes the body" (McMullan, 2012: 109) perhaps as an indication of this restless search for new forms. H. Porter Abbott, considers the strain placed on actors when performing the roles: "Beckett is famous for his exactitude, for the precise realization of his will on stage. One should keep in mind, moreover, what Beckett does to his actors. He ties ropes around their necks and crams them in urns. He ties them to rockers. He buries them in sand under hot blinding lights and gives them impossible scripts to read at breakneck speed[...]" (Abbott, 1988: 82).

¹⁶ In his biography of Beckett, James Knowlson suggests that cataracts had an impact on his productivity. He quotes Beckett in correspondence with a friend when he writes, "'Up to the cataracts' was a favourite expression of Beckett" (Knowlson, 1996: 574).

His first piece of original dramatic writing in close to five years must therefore be seen in this context. The first of his ‘stream of consciousness’ plays, in which a single, apparently dislocated, voice is seen to vent a torrent of words, can in some ways be seen as the breaking of a dam of creativity in which his difficulty in writing (“no power to express”¹⁷) experienced during the preceding period is finally ended. The reduction of dramatic characterizations from fully-rounded figure, to incarcerated technological dependency, to an isolated head reaches its apogee in this piece as audiences are presented with an image of a suspended mouth surrounded by darkness; watched only by a non gender-specific, robed ‘Auditor’. The text for this piece offers in part a carefully constructed narrative based around a character implied, indeed constructed, by Mouth. The character’s birth, childhood and early adulthood are summarized early in the play and offer audiences a possible means of accessing a range of potential meanings or ways of justifying the presence of Mouth in conventional terms. However, it is the sexual politics and radical valorization of absence that renders this a particularly significant challenge for the actor.

¹⁷ In Chapter one, I use this often-quoted phrase from Beckett in the context of his perceived responsibilities as a writer in relation to musicality. I also allude to it in my previous footnote. Mary Bryden compares Stravinsky’s belief in the essential powerlessness of music to express anything with his own thinking: “the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.” (Bryden, 1998: 34). At this point in his life, Beckett’s creative block was a significant aspect of his working life.

As the text most frequently discussed in the context of Beckett's representation of female characters, critics have sought to apply a coherent critical discourse to the text that is rooted in a feminist understanding as well as that of Lacanian psycho-analytical theory. Anna McMullan argues that it is those very aspects of de-naturalized aesthetics at the heart of the play that provide it with license to

[shift] the focus on to questions of gender and representation. If Mouth can be interpreted as a voyeuristic castration of the female, [she] may also be interpreted as an attempt to present the confusion of the subject confronted with [her] alienation from particular signifying positions within language and gender (McMullan, 1993: 76).

For McMullan, it is impossible to view Mouth as a politically isolated or neutral entity, even if her physical setting encourages such a view. Mouth stands as an abstracted metaphorical construct that engages with the various signifying processes at the heart of female representation. Not only does this position reflect more broadly, it also forces audiences encountering this work to evaluate their own experiences. Although rooted in Modernist practices, Beckett's play as an example of late twentieth century dramatic writing also begins to offer radical possibilities for the postmodern artist. Hal Foster's distinction between the "transgressive" and "resistant" artist dealt with in Chapter two is

particularly resonant in the context of this play. Eschewing the Modernist practices of fellow avant-gardists in the earlier part of the century, Beckett adopts a resistant discourse when writing for *Mouth*. Her language is constructed in such a way so as to question, challenge or struggle with the very processes and apparatuses of power or control that dominate the internal narrative that is presented within the text as well as the theatrical and linguistic structures that control our perceptions of the performance and its organization. His status as a writer situated at the border between mainstream and avant-garde has enabled him, and subsequent artists working with his material, to activate this resistant stance from within conservative cultural structures.

Because he was embraced so readily as a classic he was able, in effect, to smuggle ideas across the border of mainstream culture, and that achievement is, rightfully, his most celebrated: he has actually changed many people's expectations about what can happen, what is supposed to happen, when they enter a theatre (Kalb, 1986: 157-8).

This section uses one particular example of this kind of resistant art-making practice as a means of illustrating the impact of this play on a particular audience as well as highlighting the extent to which it was able to engage with the sexual politics of gender representation.

Jerusalem Theatre Festival (Palestine) – July 2000

Sibiu International Theatre Festival (Romania) - May 2001

University of Hull Scarborough Campus (UK) - April 2008

My own engagement with this play took place over a period of eight years and in two different incarnations. One production originated in the early part of the 2000s as part of a project mounted from within my university as part of a collaboration with an academic colleague. Teresa Brayshaw is a university academic in the field of Performance with a background in acting as well as directing performance projects professionally and in a university setting. In addition to public performances from a theatre studio on campus, the production toured to two international theatre festivals in 2000 and 2001. I then worked on a new production – a rehearsed reading of the text - as part of a mixed bill of public performances presented in support of a research project at my institution in 2008. In the course of an evening, this piece was presented alongside other dramatic pieces based on devised or scripted material and which were designed to illustrate research findings into computerized speech simulation and its affect on human perception. Although a rehearsed reading, this production was particularly notable both for the actor I was able to work with on this project and the techniques worked on in rehearsal.

The first production was aimed specifically at a principally non-English speaking audience. Rehearsals commenced once we had secured an invitation to the third Jerusalem Theatre Festival to be held in July 2000. The piece was to be performed at the Al-Kasaba Theatre (known as the Palestinian National Theatre at this time) and, aside from the deep political resonances this kind of institution carried in the region, the prominence of the festival on the Palestinian West Bank was a significant backdrop to this production. The on-going historical dispute between Arab and Israeli citizens over the status of the Israeli-occupied territories in this region and the rights of Palestinians to self-determination within a defined nation state had reached a moment of crisis. The optimism of the Oslo accord signed between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in 1993 had gradually deteriorated to the extent that, by the summer of 2000, American-initiated moves to propose a “final status” agreement were set to collapse at talks in Camp David between Arafat and the newly-elected Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak.

It is this crisis point that heralded the “Second Intifada” or popular uprising by Arabs against Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. It was an uprising that was to last another five years and which still resonates within a troubled geo-political context.¹⁸

¹⁸ This ongoing and fluid question of sovereignty, nationhood and self-determination is one that scholars from multiple academic and political perspectives have struggled with for many years. It is not the task of this study to attempt any detailed analysis; however, the following texts have proved useful in providing a historical background and cultural context for the work I undertook in Jerusalem in the early 2000s. Those listed represent both ‘sides’ of the dispute: Gold, D., 2007: *The*

The catalyst for this second resurgence of violence (the first Intifada occurred in 1987 as an uprising against Israeli occupation of the lands in Gaza and the West Bank) is seen as the visit by the right-wing opposition leader of the time, Ariel Sharon, to Temple Mount (the Al-Aqsa Mosque) in late September 2000. The violence that occurred between Muslims and Israeli police the day after this visit prompted a further escalation of violence, including suicide bombings and terrorist attacks that, by 2005, had resulted in the deaths of over 4000 Arabs and Israelis. In July of that year, as the third Jerusalem Theatre Festival commenced, raised political tensions were a tangible as well as a visible feature of life in the city. The security presence was high within the Islamic quarter of the city with routine and sometimes heavy-handed individual searches of Muslim youths taking place regularly amidst the usual throng of tourists and religious pilgrims. The festival-going audience were therefore in a heightened state of alert by the time we arrived with our performance. The main theatre venue would compete on a nightly basis with open political meetings on the streets of the city, where amplified speeches to large crowds would ratchet up the overall sense of tension and encroach into the auditoriums and the collective consciousness of those watching the festival programme in the designated venues.

Fight for Jerusalem: Radical Islam, the West, and the Future of the Holy City (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing Inc.); Morris, B., 2009: *One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict*. (Yale: Yale University Press); Peters, J. & Dajani Daoudi, M., 2011: *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Parallel Discourses* (London: Routledge).

Our approach, prior to arrival, had been to keep a close eye on the developing political situation and take advice where appropriate. As the Director of this new production, I was acutely aware that Beckett's early instruction when working on the original production to "work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" (Brater, 1974: 200) appeared to be something of a double-edged sword as we became more aware of the anxieties that existed within the population. Although this was an international festival attracting companies and performers from all over the world, the audiences were deemed to be local. Whilst the actors performing Auditor and, principally, Mouth might have a fully charged well-spring of "nerves" to work on, I also believed it to be important that we found a way of both diverting their immediate attention from worldly reality at the same time as allowing the content of the piece to have an impact on those present. For me, the politics of this piece existed at the level of personal identity and the representation of gender. It was the sexual politics of Lacanian psychoanalysis that offered itself to a potential reading of the text in performance. Jacques Lacan's revision of Freudian theory offers a 'mirror stage' within childhood development that lends itself to a reading of this particular text. At this stage, the child becomes aware of itself as separate or 'other' and this in turn marks the first point of separation from the maternal figure. Mouth in *Not I* can be seen to express a denial of self-awareness that is both a symptom of the kind of dis-location and fragmentation suggested in the mirror stage as

well as an implicit consciousness, or self-perception, of the ways in which the figure is being regarded or 'looked at'. It is a focus on the autobiographical impulse that is not rooted in adult experience but in the very origins of life itself. Mouth here is seen as an extension of the girl who "had never been born entirely"¹⁹ mythologized in one of Carl G. Jung's lectures in the 1930s and for which Beckett himself was in attendance. In this respect, Mouth can be seen not only as the fictional product of the creative imagination, but as a universal figure applicable to all. It was my hope that a production of this piece might subsequently offer a non-English speaking audience a less linguistically and culturally bound reading of female experience in which the implied sub-text outlined in the opening paragraph is subordinated to the sound and musicality of Mouth's anguished presence.

For that reason, the more visceral qualities of the text and its resulting performance were often foregrounded in my thinking. Closely linked to this is the visual score prescribed by Beckett in his stage directions. The stage picture presented is one of potent austerity in which the barely illuminated and shadowy figure of the Auditor, stage right, is contrasted with the relatively piercing impression of Mouth as a pin-prick of light, stage left. When seen in performance, it is this minute and shimmering light source when

¹⁹ For a useful account of this and the broader relationship between Beckett's writing and psychoanalytical theory, see Moorjani, A., "Beckett and Psychoanalysis" in Oppenheim, L., 2004: *Palgrave advances in Samuel Beckett studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Mouth's delivery is in full flow, that provides the audience with a mesmerising intensity that begins to transcend the rationality of language in favour of a mutual relationship between visual and vocal scoring that negates conventional meanings. For me, the audience have the potential to be taken to an alternative plane of comprehension and this level is one that is defined by a de-stabilising or disorientating visual imagery. A key feature of this sense of disorientation is the image of Mouth as a key focal point for the spectator. Live performances of this piece, when lit according to the stage directions, have the potential to draw the audience in to an almost hypnotic state during the performance as the combination of the spoken text and the optical effects of simply looking at a distant speck of light for 15 minutes or more have an impact on the spectator that operates at a sub-conscious level, as well as one that engages directly with their rational consciousness. From a distance, the image of Mouth begins to abandon its conventional visual identity as it becomes lost in the swirl of teeth and lips affected by the relentless, almost hypnotising, stream of verbal consciousness. I wanted to enhance that sense of disorientation for the spectator and this was achieved by taking the decision to invert the mouth of the actress to a vertical position. In discussion with the actor, we were aware of the creative risks associated with this decision. The immediate connotation that might be generated by this vertical positioning of the mouth, that had traditionally been placed on the horizontal axis, might be one related to female genitalia.

Given the potential reading of this piece that touched on issues of power, identity and the sexual politics associated with the position of women in society, it was felt that this was an ‘easy’ reading to promote. We wanted not to dispense with this possible connotation altogether but subordinate it to the more pressing aesthetic needs of the visual score. This was intended as a piece that spoke just as much about the dynamics of power that existed in the auditorium, between actors and spectators, as it was about the place of women in the wider sphere.

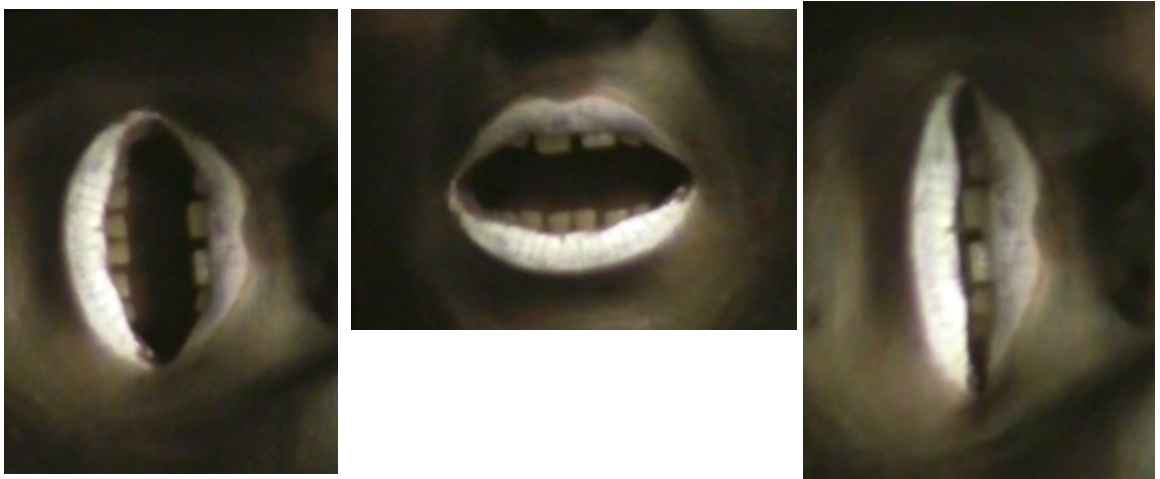


Fig 2: *Not I*: Rehearsal photographs – 2001 (credit: author).
Outer images manipulated to illustrate the inverted stage position

Rehearsal work confirmed the rationale behind this decision. Mouth was placed at varying distances away from potential viewing positions, under studio lighting conditions, in order to gauge the visual impact. Ranging from a close point of contact downstage to the furthest distance upstage of the audience, Mouth’s optimum distance was determined as that in which it was prominently visible but not so close as to offer

detailed levels of recognition. I wanted the mouth to flicker in the distance but with some evidence of recognizable human movement. Once this was determined, we were able to consider the fixed position adopted by Teresa in performance.

Landmark productions of the play²⁰ have remained true to the original positioning of Mouth on stage according to Beckett's stage directions: "*upstage audience right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow*" (CDW: 376). The positioning of Mouth 8 feet above ground was an important part of the rationale behind this new production. The sense of physical dislocation and isolation from a recognizable universe is enhanced by the apparent 'floating' of the character in mid-air and without any visible means of support. I wanted to replicate this and I was able to do so in the preview studio performances held in the university studio, prior to our departure for Jerusalem. It was known that we would not have access to this kind of construction facility however it was felt that we needed to produce something that was as close to the stage directions as possible so that we could then discover how to scale back our performance for a touring set-up. Utilising the kind of controlled conditions

²⁰ Aside from Billie Whitelaw's Royal Court performance (directed by Beckett in 1973) and Lisa Dwan's recent revival as discussed in this chapter, significant productions of the play have been scarce. Interestingly, the cultural memories that linger in the imagination are of productions that have emerged in media that were unintended for the original text. Whitelaw reprised her role for a filmed version in 1975 that was broadcast on television by the BBC as part of a bill of three of Beckett's plays. After Beckett's death, there was a theatre production of the play at the West Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds, UK); Julianne Moore's film performance as part of the *Beckett on Film* project in 2000 and Juliet Stevenson's performance for BBC Radio 3 in 2006.

available in a theatre, and the expertise of dedicated scenographers, we were able to construct a scaffold or platform that was built out of the balcony space and which ran around the perimeter of the studio. The raised platform was positioned approximately 8 feet above ground and created enough space for Teresa to lie on her side, her mouth inverted, and with her head cradled in a simple wooden support. This support was simple and rudimentary however crucially important to the success of the overall *mise en scène*. I wanted the mouth itself to be isolated enough so that only the lips and teeth of the actress were visible. Because of the positioning of the fixed lantern that would illuminate her, and the sharply defined gobo required to shape the beam of light, this meant that there was very little margin for error for Teresa when adopting the required motionless position in this wooden cradle. Whilst her body was unrestricted, as she was able to lie on her side on the suspended platform, it was the head that needed to be secured in order to meet the fixed beam of light. For Teresa, this presented a serious challenge. In the same way that Billie Whitelaw found the constraints of playing Mouth in a horizontal position restricting through the harness she was required to wear, Teresa found the restrictions of playing Mouth in a vertical position challenging because of the stillness she needed to achieve at the same time as delivering the text. Bodily posture, facial musculature and breathing all had to be carefully modulated in order to stay in the light. As there was no communications link between her and the production team, this

meant that she had no real way of telling if any problems would arise during the run. All that remained was the need for constant repetition via rehearsal in order to establish an almost intuitive relationship between Mouth and light. This, combined with a preparation consisting of physical and emotional relaxation meant that she was never outside of the tight margin for error in performance.

In addition to the fundamental decisions taken regarding scenography and the overall stage picture we were trying to create, it is our work on the text that took up the bulk of our time in rehearsals. At a very early stage in the process (that spanned a period of around two months), Teresa expressed a willingness to learn the text by heart and perform without the aid of a prompt. Aside from some amplification provided through a microphone positioned on the platform, this meant that she would be completely unsupported in performance.

This aspect of the actor's task when playing this role cannot be under-estimated. Unlike other dramatic roles, even those that contain lengthy soliloquies, Beckett's stream of consciousness plays or extended monologues require a different act of recall. From Lucky's extended philosophical tirade in *Waiting for Godot* to the ever more reductive and truncated monologues of his later career, culminating with *Rockaby* in the early

1980s, these plays do not offer the usual associations of narrative or logical causality that come with representational dramatic literature. In terms of sentence structure, syntactical composition, rhythm and flow of the monologue, a part such as Mouth in *Not I* requires an approach from the actor that is strategic and laterally organized in terms of the mental associations or ‘cues’ the actor can create. In this production, Teresa approached the learning exercise as one that was closely linked to the visual patterns that could be identified in the text. Not only is it structured around the punctuating breaks offered by the Auditor’s diminishing movements or “gestures of helpless compassion” (ibid: 375); within these ‘movements’ (as we came to call them) there are specific themes within the drama that are based on a specific ‘colouring’ or quality to the delivery that chimes either with the implied content of the monologue or a more formal, structural coherence. Identifying these passages, and the transitional cues that separate them from each other was an important part of the rehearsal process as well as Teresa’s attempt to learn the part.

It was in this regard that the musical analogy became helpful and ‘the text as score’ became an important organising principle for us. We divided the text into four ‘movements’ and extended the musical analogy in treating the text overall as akin to a classical symphony. The evolution of the symphonic structure from its early form in the

eighteenth century to its more recent incarnations has progressed around the number of movements incorporated in its composition as well as the progressive variations in tempi. Early symphonies were structured around a three-movement sequence of quick-slow-quick passages. By the nineteenth century this had expanded to include a fourth movement and the classical symphonic structure was in place, thus:

Allegro – quick or lively tempo

Adagio – slow tempo

Scherzo – lively, playful or humorous passage

Allegro, Rondo or *Sonata* – quick, repetitious or solo passage

(Stein, 1979: 106)

Beckett's text is not strictly identifiable as having slavishly followed any particular symphonic model, however it can be seen to offer itself to a variation if not in tempo, but in intensity of delivery according to its sentence structuring and emotional content. In 'Movement 1' – the beginning of the play up to Auditor's first gesture - the language is emphatic, expository and accessible:

. . . . out . . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny
little thing . . . before its time . . . in a godfor- . . .

what? . . girl? . . yes . . . tiny little girl . . . into this
. . . out into this . . . before her time . . .
godforsaken hole called . . . called . . . no matter . .
. parents unknown . . . unheard of . . . he having
vanished . . . thin air . . . no sooner buttoned up his
breeches . . . she similarly . . . eight months later .
. . almost to the tick . . . (CDW: 376).

The text invites the audience to engage with a specific narrative that concerns the circumstances surrounding the birth of a young girl. This relatively short movement concludes at the moment ‘she’ finds herself plunged into the kind of darkness we might associate with the conditions experienced in the theatre space.

[*Pause and movement 1.*] . . . found herself in the
dark . . . and if not exactly . . . insentient . . .
insentient . . . for she could still hear the buzzing .
. . so-called . . . in the ears . . . and a ray of light
came and went . . . came and went . . . such as the
moon might cast . . . drifting . . . in and out of
cloud . . . but so dulled . . . feeling . . . feeling so
dulled . . . she did not know . . . what position she
was in . . . imagine! . . . what position she was in! .
. whether standing . . . or sitting . . . (ibid: 377).

This temporal and physical transportation from the specificity of birth and an emerging childhood to a theatricalized, dislocated and abstracted reality that appears to deliberately disorientate both character and spectator warrants a change of register in this new movement. The rest of this passage continues to dissect the specific properties

of the circumstances in which we find her: the quality of light, the sounds witnessed, her posture. The exposition started in the first movement has continued but under a new set of circumstances that is almost filmic in the way it jump-cuts from one scenario to another: from the concrete certainties of biographical exactitude to the metaphysical properties of a 'higher' consciousness.

The third movement acknowledges the presence of language and indeed offers the actor potential for a celebratory display of verbal dexterity and a self-referential study into the capacity of the mind to practise what Beckett is doing as a writer:

imagine! . . . whole body like gone . . . just the
mouth . . . lips . . . cheeks . . . jaws . . . never— . . .
what? . . . tongue? . . . yes . . . lips . . . cheeks . . . jaws
. . . tongue . . . never still a second . . . mouth on
fire . . . stream of words . . . in her ear . . .
practically in her ear . . . not catching the half . . .
not the quarter . . . no idea what she's saying . . .
imagine! . . . no idea what she's saying! . . . and can't
stop . . . no stopping it . . . she who but a moment
before . . . but a moment! . . . could not make a
sound . . . no sound of any kind . . . now can't stop
. . . (ibid: 380).

In our production, this third movement was read as a fast-paced section in which the proliferation of punctuating exclamation and question marks as well as an emphasis on sensory, subjective experience implied a gradual speeding up of the delivery over the

course of the passage. As it moves towards its end, the return to a more recognizable, less abstracted reality (the mound at Croker's Acres) along with her invocations of a benevolent God, imply a return to a more reflective, slower, *adagio* tempo.

The fourth movement reveals a return to an earlier theme or *Rondo*:

sudden flash . . . perhaps something she had to . . .
had to . . . tell . . . could that be it? . . something
she had to . . . tell . . . tiny little thing . . . before
its time . . . godforsaken hole . . . no love . . .
spared that . . . speechless all her days . . .
practically speechless . . . how she survived! (ibid:
381).

There is a powerful sense that Beckett is beginning to tie up the loose ends that were unpicked at the start of the play as the themes are repeated and the text comes full circle. A short fifth movement implies the infinitesimal nature of this work. A common Beckettian theme in much of the dramas,²¹ her predicament is suggested as one that is played out, almost self-consciously (insofar as that can be seen as an option for a character who so vehemently denies the subjective self), and theatrically, for the rest of

²¹ The relationship between the suggestion of a repeated, infinitesimal activity and its theatrical representation can be seen as a metatheatrical device in which everyday monotony is framed for aesthetic purposes. Andrew Kennedy points to *Endgame* as a play that "enacts a diminished theatre, along with the diminished humor and physical universe it evolves" (Kennedy, 1991: 66). See Kennedy, A. 1991: *Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). In addition to *Endgame*, Beckett's continued use of repeated action as an indicator of theatrical, as well as dramatic, continuation can also be found in *Waiting for Godot* (1953), *Acts Without Words* (1957), *Play* (1963), *Breath* (1970), *Footfalls* (1976) and *Quad* (1984).

time. Hers is a self-defined ‘theatre of doing’ that exists in itself – as a task to be executed night after night, year after year – just as Hamm and Clov attempt in their universe and as Didi and Gogo practice in theirs. It is also offered as a possible engagement with an ignorant God: “all the time something begging . . . something in her begging . . . begging it all to stop . . . unanswered . . . prayer unanswered . . . or unheard . . .” (ibid: 382).

In terms of affect, and the impact that this musical approach to rehearsal and performance has on audiences, it is the implied presence of a repetitive, or cyclical, process in the playing of this piece that offers much for the spectator in terms of understanding and cognition. With the traditional levels of identification with character in turn offered up, and then snatched away, the audience are required to resort to alternative modes of reception in which music can be seen as a compelling register. Musical structures as an approach to text and performance cannot therefore be seen solely as a self-contained academic discovery; they exist in the text as a potent stimulus for the actor to propose a more visceral understanding of human experience. The tropes of wilful continuation, infinitesimal performance and ultimate absurdity provide a philosophical background for the audience in which Mouth’s cycle of performance lends itself well to a musical approach. A cycle of performance that echoes the cycle of

repetition and renewal found in the musical score implies that this is a piece in which the over-arching theme of survival is one that dominates. Themes emerge in the early stages and re-emerge towards its putative closure in ways that echo the reassurances of a musical resolution but which also imply the never-ending continuation of Mouth's predicament. Through the exploitation of this form of musical structuring, audience response based on emotion, rather than intellect, draws out an empathic identification not rooted in the character or her back-story, but in terms of an instinctive understanding of the human condition.

Religious, or indeed socio-political, sub-texts notwithstanding, *Not I* can be seen as a piece in which the actor is asked to, at best, re-think, or, at worst, abandon any pre-conceived notions regarding the preparation of a role prior to performance. The dominant, Stanislavskian, approach to actor-training in the West can be seen as especially ill-equipped to provide an appropriate base for a performance of Mouth's infuriating and unfathomable predicament. Under these performance circumstances, the traditionally applied logic of cause and effect, operating within a quasi-Aristotelian universe and built around a classical perception of the progress of time and reality, cannot be seen to hold much currency given this text's very particular structural qualities. In addition to the problems of cause and effect, the actor's programmed

impulse to pursue a Cartesian separation of mind and body in the physical realization of the role is problematized through this text. The straightforward execution of physical action that follows on from rational thought is not an option for the actor playing Mouth. The physical dislocation and separation of the actor's mouth from the rest of her body, let alone any identifying facial characteristics, provides no easy visual references or points of identification for the spectator in the auditorium. There is no opportunity to observe any of those thought processes or mental cogitations often seen 'written' into the faces of actors performing in productions that offer fully-lit representations of the human face. This character is de-humanized, dislocated and wholly removed from our usual cultural, spatial or temporal milieu. For this reason, subsequent productions of the play have attempted to 'make sense' of the overall atmosphere of disorientation offered in the text through critical interpretations of it that go beyond the dislocated world of the characters and place an intriguing emphasis on the actor's predicament. In a recent production performed at the Enniskillen International Beckett Festival (2012) and then reprised for the Royal Court Theatre (London) in 2013 and 2014, much was made of the speed of delivery executed by the actress, Lisa Dwan, in the role of Mouth:

When the piece was first performed by Jessica Tandy in New York in 1972 the dramatic monologue lasted 22 minutes.

Billie Whitelaw [...] performed it in 14 minutes at the Royal Court in 1973.

Fast forward to 2013 where Lisa Dwan does it in nine minutes - the quickest it has ever been performed (Masters, 2013).

Under the title, “*Not I*: Lisa Dwan’s record speed Beckett”, this BBC preview article aims, amongst other things, to locate the performance of the play in the context of sporting competition in ways that echo Billie Whitelaw’s earlier comments in which she states that performing the role was akin to sport: “I felt...like an athlete crashing through barriers, but also like a musical instrument playing notes...” (Knowlson, 1978: 89). Much is made of the act of physical endurance required of the actress in ways that privilege the narrative of achievement or ‘doing’ in the absence of a grounded context, rather than the form or content of the play itself.

Alternative approaches to acting have been adopted by practitioners keen to explore training environments that operate within a post-Stanislavskian context. Phillip Zarrilli is one such practitioner/scholar who has taken a very particular interest not just in this alternative approach to actor-training, but in the ways in which Beckett’s texts can be applied as source texts in the realization of what he terms a ‘psychophysical’ approach to acting. Zarrilli’s approach is also dealt with elsewhere in this study (see Chapter

three) however it is his focus on the actor's 'impulse' and its relationship to the technicalities of breathing that exemplify a progressive concern with the moment of performance; that phenomenological and indeed ontological reality that confronts actor and spectator in a live performance environment. In an article written for *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Zarrilli describes such moments of performance as one[s] in which:

[the performer] is always precariously counterpoised and counterbalanced 'on the edge of a breath'. If the actor is able to place himself 'on the edge of a breath' he is in a state of 'readiness', poised to act as he rides an impulse through the breath/action/thought (Boyette & Zarrilli, 2007: 71).

Zarrilli's formulation of psychophysical approaches to acting has seen him focus on Asian martial or meditation arts in order to facilitate this physical state operating in conjunction with a particular text or dramaturgical paradigm. Utilising daily training in *taiquiquan* (Wu style), yoga, and the closely related Indian martial art, *kalaripayattu*, he aims to develop a highly attuned state of 'readiness' for the actor, a state that consciously explores the relationship between impulse, energy and action.

His co-author in this same article is the American actress, Patricia Boyette. As an actress, she has pursued a combination of American and British actor-training programmes that were explicitly oriented around a Stanislavskian approach to performance. Her approach to Zarrilli's psychophysical regime is one that forces her consciously to move away from the logic of cause and effect and body/mind separation towards one that invites her to reverse those traditional polarities. A traditional emphasis on external action/impulse as a consequence of internal generation is replaced with rehearsal exploration that privileges external action as the starting point in performance: "We begin with the physical – breath, movement, saying the words, doing the specified actions – and an 'internal' connection comes along during the process as a result of the external 'doing'" (ibid: 74).

Not I was produced as the result of collaboration between Boyette and Zarrilli in 1997. It subsequently toured internationally throughout the 2000s at the same time as my production of the same piece was presented in various locations. In the *CTR* article, Boyette talks of the narrow gap that exists, for her, between impulse and action: "the impulse is often equivalent to the action. There is an extreme physical need to tell all of this, to get it out, to purge herself" (ibid: 77). In this sense, the exigencies of text and dramaturgy contrast with the demands of training and preparation. Zarrilli's conscious

desire to place physical action ahead of inner feeling is mitigated by Beckett's textual collision of impulse and action. For her, it is the act of 'doing' itself that is key to our understanding of the text.

It is Boyette's sense of equivalence in the narrowing of the gap between impulse and action when performing *Mouth* that provides the spectator with a point of entry for this play in performance. This was most clearly in evidence during the Jerusalem performance in 2000. In addition to the geo-political factors impacting on the region, the audience demographic became an important factor in the performance. As part of an international festival, it is fair to say that the audience was composed almost exclusively of Palestinian women who were local to the West Bank community. For these women, the festival was fulfilling an important cultural remit in regard to national and regional identity, as well as presenting a face to the world at the level of arts and cultural practice. In articulating some highly public concerns over the nature of Palestinian identity and the politics of the dispossessed, this festival was also enabling a private engagement with the politics of individual identity, religion and the freedoms enjoyed when treading a line between the two.

In conversation with our audience after the performance, it became clear that many of

the women who had gathered to see the work, the majority of whom had little or no prior knowledge of Beckett's material, had become energized by the visual dynamics in operation, specifically the physical presence of Mouth. Some of the women present had reached a point in their lives where they felt repressed, not merely by the state of Israel and its contested interference in the region at almost every level of Palestinian society, but at the level of sexual identity and the politics of gender. As women, they felt unable to speak out on a range of issues concerning their daily lives. This sense of disempowerment, perhaps even disenfranchisement, was in place for a number of reasons which are not explicitly of relevance to this study; however, the mere fact of their existence was enough reason for them to react to the figure of Mouth in ways that provided them with an alternative vision. For these Palestinian women, Mouth was an empowered and empowering figure with the freedom simply to speak, to 'do', to deny, to bear witness. Her presence on stage, although fragmented and incomplete in its dismantled state, simply drew attention to the apparatus of vocal expression. Any kind of implied male presence, in the form of Auditor, was a silent, subjugated presence that lacked a voice or the power to control. In this environment, any language barrier created by the absence of an Arabic translation (the piece was performed in English) became irrelevant as the audience began to comprehend the work on another level. Mouth's stream of consciousness, in this regard, genuinely transcended the restraints of language

and rationality and acquired a level of musicality that could only ever really be achieved in such a context.

Chapter 5: The Beckettian Actor in Performance – 2

His feeling for precision in inflection, rhythm and movement seems almost severe, but not for a moment does he restrict the imagination or inventive feeling of others [...] He creates a freedom in working which actors do not often enjoy in the theatre today, and this freedom is always the bedfellow of true discipline (Jack MacGowran in Calder, 1967: 24).

As explored in earlier chapters, it is the fine margin that exists in the playing of Beckett's drama – that which exists between "severe" prescriptive instruction in the text and the imaginative freedom of the actor – that characterizes much in the nexus of actor and role. This is perhaps most apparent in the later works, where economies of language, image and physical dynamism are at their most acute and the resources of the actor are stretched both in the ways that they are required to apply themselves – physically, in terms of often protracted stillness or repetitive action; or imaginatively, in terms of the invention and creativity they are invited to bring to their performance.¹ This chapter explores manifestations of this "true discipline" that MacGowran refers to in relation to two of the later plays and their performance in discrete contexts.

¹ This creativity and sense of invention is often expressed alongside Beckett's own strident views. Billie Whitelaw describes her experience of performing May in *Footfalls*: "I felt like a moving musical Edvard Munch painting [...] he was not only using me to play the notes, but I almost felt that he did have the paintbrush out and was painting [...] as fast as he draws a line in, he gets out that enormous India-rubber and rubs it out until it is only faintly there" (Knowlson, 1978: 89).

***Footfalls*: “Revolving it all”**

This play, written in 1975 and first performed at London’s Royal Court Theatre in the following year, immediately follows *Not I* in the chronology of Beckett’s dramatic output. It follows a period of some three years during which Beckett directed theatrical productions of *Happy Days* in London and *Waiting for Godot* in Berlin, in addition to working on translations of his prose and poetry.² There are tonal similarities with *Not I* in that the central figure of May resonates with Mouth through the practice of referring to herself consistently in the third person. May’s relationship with the unseen presence of her Mother, a voice (‘V’) heard from off-stage, can be interpreted in many ways and is often seen as a crucial element in determining interpretation and inflection when in production.³

Structurally, the text offers a number of challenges to conventional interpretations of what is, on the surface at least, a representation of a mother/daughter relationship that is defined according to a dynamic of incarceration and entrapment. The early exchanges of dialogue (the only formal dialogue to exist in the play) between May and V imply a classical set-up in which May is seen to assume a primary caring role for V in which all

² Specifically, his novel *Mercier et Camier* (published in French in 1946 and eventually published in English translation in 1974), a French translation of the film script of *Film* and an English translation *Le Dépeupleur* (*The Lost Ones*) in 1971.

³ James Knowlson (op. cit.: 614-6) describes the genesis of Beckett’s conception of *Footfalls* as being essentially auditory. The sound of repeated pacing across a floor was perhaps prompted by the sounds made by actors in rehearsal for the German *Godot* or from memories of his childhood.

her most basic needs with regard to comfort and medication are provided in this image of a somehow typical domestic scene. However, this recognizable scenario is undermined by the overall structure of the text as it unfolds through time. Beckett's earlier established pre-occupation with reduction and its various manifestations with regard to space, light and time as well as the theatricality of stage picture and visual metaphor, is seen to repeat itself here in terms of the actor's dynamics of movement, the lighting of the space and an accompanying incremental diminution of presence.

It is the question of presence that is uppermost in this play. The phenomenological certainties of objects and material possessions that served subjectively to define and determine the presence of character and, by extension actor, in the earlier plays (e.g. *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*), are seen increasingly to disappear in the later, shorter dramas where human presence, and the accompanying detritus or material baggage of human existence is replaced with an evermore abstracted portrayal of the human condition. In *Footfalls*, the material world is something that is hinted at by an off-stage voice and confirmed via implication rather than explicit usage. However, this implicit usage is just enough to confirm a theatrical presence. As the audience begins to question or problematize May's presence in the space and, by extension, the status of V as an apparently disembodied entity that is never seen, the quality of the emerging

dialogue as well as the subsequent extended monologues from May and V force the spectator to question whether May is operating in real time or some kind of dream-state; the embodiment of memory or a ghostly apparition.⁴ Stanley Gontarski characterizes this relationship between May and V, and indeed that between Mrs Winter and Amy later in the play, as indicative of a trend in Beckett's writing career from an early stage. His pre-occupation with a doubling of the self through his use of the "pseudocouple" (Gontarski, 2004: 194) can be seen as a quasi-Cartesian idea in which the classical separation of mind and body is made explicit in the physical manifestation of this coupling on stage or in print. Use of this device can be seen in other theatrical pairings: Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell; and perhaps in a more abstracted form, Reader and Listener in *Ohio Impromptu*. Additionally, the idea of embedding dialogue within the monologue form is one that is used in his prose work, *The Unnamable* (1952).⁵ Not only does this literary device open up the existence of a second layer of performance from within an existing performative construct, it also begins to implicate the audience through this reminder of the work's inherent theatricality.⁶

⁴ In Beckett's original production of *Footfalls* at the Royal Court Theatre, London, Billie Whitelaw (in the role of May) recalls one of Beckett's Director's notes asking her to "make it ghostly" in the later monologue when May evokes the memory of Amy in the church (Whitelaw, 1995: 146).

⁵ An example of this form of internal dialogue can be found in the closing passage of the novel: "It will be I? It will be the silence, where I am? I don't know, I'll never know: in the silence you don't know. You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on." (Beckett, 1994: 418).

⁶ In Chapter one I identified a phenomenological reading of the actor's presence using Bert States's pro-nominal 'collaborative' mode to define the extent to which actors and audiences collude in

The constant, ritualized pacing across the stage as part of a repeated pattern implies a choreographed approach to movement that is patterned, programmed, de-naturalized and consequently de-humanized in its approach to representation. However, in performance this play cannot be categorized as Dance. Beckett's conscious shift from quasi-naturalistic dialogue at the start of the play culminates in a reductive, and ultimately disappearing presence that can be characterized as a progressive move away from the safe, conservative values of psychological realism towards a poetic ambivalence in which language, narrative (implied or otherwise) and the embodied presence of the actor operate in combination to produce a radical reappraisal of our acts of perception. Although the opening exchange between May and V is unusual in its theatrical circumstances, the dialogue itself communicates much in terms of its implied relationship between the two characters:

M: Mother [*Pause. No louder.*] Mother.

M: Were you asleep?

M: Would you like me to inject you again?

M: Would you like me to change your position again?

(*CDW*: 399)

performance. Mouth and Auditor in *Not I* can be offered as an additional 'pseudocouple' or doubling of the self.

Despite V's physical absence from the stage, this short exchange is enough to imply a poignant, but perhaps typical relationship between parent and child, in which the advances of old age lead to a reversal of caring responsibilities but with all the sometimes fraught dynamics that existed previously still in place. This opening exchange contrasts significantly with the later sections, in which prosaic dialogue gives way to complex, internalized and role-playing discourse in which the doubling of May and V with Amy and Mrs Winter echoes the opening exchange:

Old Mrs Winter, whom the reader will remember,
old Mrs Winter, one late Autumn Sunday
evening, on sitting down to supper with her
daughter after worship, after a few half-hearted
mouthfuls laid down here knife and fork and
bowed her head. What is it Mother, said the
daughter, a most strange girl, though scarcely a
girl any more...
(ibid: 402)

May's 'disappearance' is not only restricted to the interplay between actor and light, especially as the play moves towards its closure. Throughout the play, the spectator is invited to consider and re-evaluate the actor playing May in a variety of ways. In addition to the connotations associated with many mother/daughter relationships, in this instance we are aware of a close, almost inseparable bond between May and V. It is a closeness that brings into play Freudian psychological models concerned with the

separation between mother and child at early stages in childhood development, specifically that which is defined by Jacques Lacan in his formulation of the mirror stage.⁷ It is also an association that has echoes in later life when, often, roles are reversed in the responsibilities assumed for primary care. What is denoted in the early exchange of dialogue between the two characters connotes a shrugging reluctance on the part of May to assume this role that is simultaneously borne as an emblem of sacrifice and inevitability. May and V's familial connection is one that became an important feature of my own practice when I came to produce this work and will be dealt with later in this chapter.

May's 'disappearance' can also be determined through the shifting identities that she assumes. During her monologue, V takes on a narrational role in describing, in some detail, May's relentless and seemingly perpetual pacing up and down the width of the playing space. There is a clear *deixis* in the opening of her speech:

I walk here now. [*Pause.*] Rather I come and stand. [*Pause.*] At nightfall. [*Pause.*] She fancies she is alone. (*CDW*: 401).

⁷ See my discussion of a potential psychoanalytical reading of Beckett's drama – in relation to *Not I* – in Chapter four.

In adopting the first person pronoun at the same time as we see May walking, we are invited to assume that V *is* May (“I walk here now.”). As soon as this is established, there is a sudden shift from the first person to the third person (“She fancies she is alone.”) that serves to disorientate and obfuscate the spectator’s established understanding of May’s presence. In May’s final monologue, Beckett allows her to engage consciously in an extended role-play whereby the characters of Mrs Winter and her daughter Amy are presented seemingly as figments of May’s imagination:

Mrs W. did not at once reply. But finally, raising her head and fixing Amy – the daughter’s given name, as the reader will remember – raising her head and fixing Amy full in the eye she said – [*Pause.*] – she murmured [...] Amy, did you observe anything . . . strange at Evensong? (ibid: 402-3).

We discover that Mrs W’s enquiry into “something strange” occurring at Evensong is quickly forgotten as Amy reveals that she had no way of comprehending this owing to her not being physically present in church. As Amy’s/May’s role-playing monologue continues, Mrs W. retorts with the assertion that she heard her respond “Amen” in answer to prayers: “How could you have responded if you were not there?” (ibid).

The clear denotative certainties of the opening dialogue, in which May and V play out a warm, even poignant scene of a close mother and daughter bond are replaced by the end of the play with a cold distortion in which the warmth of parental care is substituted with an ambiguous and somewhat frigid concentration on “Winter” and a self-referential, abstracted emphasis on the structural nature of the play’s composition: “Will you never have done . . . revolving it all? [...] In your poor mind.” (ibid: 403). Beckett’s concentration on the nature of perception as a determining feature of ontological status (as covered in the section on *Krapp’s Last Tape* in Chapter four) is here offered, in dramatic terms, as a self-reflecting ‘hall of mirrors’ in which the letters that spell ‘May’ are re-arranged to form ‘Amy’ at the same time as the unseen voice from off-stage is replaced with a role-played character from within May’s own monologue; a level of self-referentiality that is even extended to describe her own appearance as “Tattered. [Pause.] A tangle of tatters.” (ibid: 402).

For the actor playing May, the text offers an opportunity to engage vocally with the text in a similar way to Mouth in *Not I*. Whilst not as brittle or fragmented in composition as the earlier play, May’s extended monologues in *Footfalls* are now coupled with a rigorous as well as restrictive physical score that is defined by Beckett’s prescribed lateral pacing of nine steps across the width of the stage. As with all of his stage

directions, these prescriptions are set out with precision and with little room for compromise. The actor is instructed: "*Pacing: starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R. Turn: rightabout at L, leftabout at R.*" (ibid: 399). For Beckett, it is the nature and precision of the pacing that is at the heart of the play. When in rehearsal for the Berlin production he emphasized:

the importance of the foot-steps. The walking up and down is the central image, he says. This was my basic conception of the play. The text, the words were only built up around this picture (Asmus, 1977: 83-4).

This emphasis is supported in a short hand-written note to Billie Whitelaw before they commenced rehearsals for the original London production: "The pacing is the essence of the matter. To be dramatized to the utmost. The text: what pharmacists call excipient" (Whitelaw, 1995: 139).⁸

The centrality of the image of May pacing repeatedly across the width of the stage is also augmented by her physical posture and appearance. In Beckett's original London production, his work with Billie Whitelaw has produced some of the most recognizable

⁸ Beckett's use of pharmacological terminology here relates to the use of an *excipient*, or inactive substance, as a vehicle or medium for an active substance in the chemical composition of drug therapies. May's pacing is therefore seen as being at the very centre of the play's composition, with the words of the text occupying a more inductive position.

and memorable images of his theatrical career. The twisted and reflective nature of the plotting and residual semblances of any kind of narrative in the play is reflected in the distorted posture adopted by Whitelaw in performance. She talks of the extent to which she felt modelled by Beckett the Director. As if akin to a piece of modelling clay or being “painted with light” (ibid: 145), his was a gradual process of paring down from one physical state to another. A physical process of reduction to mirror that practiced in his writing of the text. She also uses the analogy of the artist using an eraser to “brush away” (ibid) that which was superfluous; almost to the extent that what remained “grinned through” (ibid), faintly, like the remnants of a faded sheet of wallpaper behind a newly-painted wall: “Something that was not quite there” (ibid). Ultimately, Whitelaw describes the image of the figure that she and Beckett worked on in rehearsal as being made-up of a

slightly off-centre *curling* shape, the head at an angle, the waist at another angle from the body, the spine slightly twisted (ibid).

And it is her relentless pacing whilst adopting this posture that defines the central imagery of this work in performance. That, coupled with the complex, metatheatrical relationship with the disembodied off-stage voice and the literary embodiment of Mrs

Winter in May's later monologue, provided the basis for my own performance work on this text.

Sibiu International Theatre Festival (Romania) – June 2011

... into the little church by the north door [...] and
walk, up and down, up and down... (CDW: 402).

I embarked upon a rehearsal process for a production of *Footfalls* in the winter of 2010-11. In collaboration with the actress who agreed to play the character of May, we were able to renew our collective association with the Sibiu International Theatre Festival that had begun in 2001 when I had presented two Beckett pieces there at different venues. Claire Hind is a university academic and performance practitioner who specializes in performance composition and who has researched the idea of 'play' from within the aesthetics of live or performance art forms. She is also an experienced actress with a background in the written text and she was willing to explore my own ideas in relation to acting Beckett's works.

The festival in Sibiu has become well established since its inception in 1993. Since then, it has become the most important annual festival of performing arts in Romania and the third largest in Europe. Partly as a result of its success, Sibiu was awarded the status of European Capital of Culture in 2007. The annual programme attracts participants from around 70 countries into Sibiu, and successfully stages over 350 events taking place in 66 venues, and caters for upwards of 35,000 spectators. The festival lasts for ten days, and attracts well-known international companies from across the performing arts as well as Romanian and foreign film-makers and critics. It also provides a valuable stimulus for local and regional tourism. Myself, and Claire in particular, have had a lengthy association with the festival and some of the staff responsible for its operation. We were invited to perform *Footfalls* in one of the festival's most ethereal venues, perched on top of a steep hill outside Sibiu. The 'fortress' at Cisnadioara, 70m high in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains, is a ruined medieval church dating from the twelfth century. The stone interior has the potential to function as an atmospheric 'resonating chamber' that was ideal for this performance in that it was able to naturally amplify the vocal score developed for the piece.⁹ From the audience's perspective, the approach to Cisnadioara requires a significant investment on foot. With no alternative transportation available, spectators

⁹ See the performance footage of this production in Appendix (DVD). The opening line: "Mother. [Pause. No louder.] Mother." (CDW: 399) provides a good example of the acoustic properties of the venue.

are required to walk up the 70m ascent via a winding set of over 300 stone steps. We were more than happy to work in this venue as it was one that was already known to us in advance. The acoustic properties of the space, as well as its atmosphere and problems of accessibility was a feature that we wanted to exploit in performance. I was aware of the connections that existed between the venue and some of the textual references that exist in Beckett's text. As with my earlier experiences of working at other international festivals (with *Not I*, for example), I was keen for this production to resonate with its audience in ways that went beyond the linguistic meanings of the words themselves, or of any internal narratives that the audience might want to interpret.

Early rehearsals focussed on May's walk and posture. As outlined previously, this patterned sequence of movement lies at the heart of the play and was a priority for Beckett both in the writing as well as its realization in performance.¹⁰ It was important to acquire a detailed level of accuracy with regard to the timing of the paces across the width of the stage in addition to its co-existence with the spoken text – either off-stage or live. However, in addition to this initial focus on movement as a non-vocal, but vital, activity, it was important that we also created the appropriate conditions for a vocal

¹⁰ James Knowlson writes of the sound of May's pacing across the floor as an "auditory" inspiration for Beckett. He also goes on to describe "May [...] a spectral figure haunting the church where she used to pace at nightfall" (op. cit.: 614-615) and which provided us with a useful theatrical conceit for our production staged in a ruined Romanian church.

performance that could resonate and exploit the echoing acoustic offered by the venue. Perhaps differently to Beckett's overriding concerns over the pacing and posture of the actor, I wanted the vocal scoring to occupy a position of equivalence in combination with the movement of the piece. The opening dialogue, especially (between May and V), provided us with an opportunity to explore the text's musicality - including resonance, tone and timbre - as a means of providing the audience with an overall audio-visual experience that was not rooted in language but in something that was positioned between language and music.

Somatic movement and Claire's resting physical posture as a vital, element of the scoring for this performance needed to work in tandem with vocal delivery for reasons of practical expediency as well as aesthetic reasoning. Practically, we needed to establish a resting posture that would enable Claire to deliver the spoken text with a clarity and resonance that fully optimized the acoustic potential of the venue. Aesthetically, her posture needed to complement our approach to the musicality of the text in a way that took us away from the kind of grotesque rendering associated with Whitelaw's original performance and which, in effect, provided the audience with a neutralized, benign on-stage presence.

This approach would be echoed in the gait and rhythm of May's pacing. The stage surface at Cisnadioara was made up of rough and abrasive flag-stones that worked well acoustically with the rhythmic sound we wanted to project from the base of Claire's footwear. Our early rehearsals therefore placed an emphasis on looking for a walk that could optimize her abilities to scrape the floor with her feet using light dance pumps under which we attached a sandpaper covering for the soles. Working from the feet upwards, we were able to construct a neutral gait that maintained an emphasis on the rhythm and sound of her footsteps as a metronomic accompaniment to V, whose speeches would often run simultaneously, as May paced the stage.

Once early rehearsal work had established this basic posture and mode of walking that myself, and Claire, were comfortable with we continued by focussing on the spoken dialogue between May and V at the beginning of the play. It was May's side of this dialogue that interested me the most as it was the highly formalized, almost stilted approach to the dialogue that invited a similarly stylized performative response. May's lines from this dialogue are partially reproduced below:

M: Mother [*Pause. No louder.*] Mother.

M: Were you asleep?

M: Would you like me to inject you again?

M: Would you like me to change your position again?

M: Straighten your pillows? [*Pause.*] Change your drawsheet? [*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? [*Pause.*] Again. [*Pause.*]
(*CDW*: 399-400).

Structurally, the architecture of this opening passage is patterned according to a reductive shift from the naturalized “Would you like me to change your position again?” to the closing “Again.” I wanted to reflect that downward shift in the length of the sentences in the mode of delivery. We experimented with the sounds of the individual words and the ways in which they combined to form the ever-decreasing lengths of the sentences. This resulted in a gradual decreasing of tone from a relatively high-pitched “Mother” at the start of the play to a low pitched “Again” at this mid-point in the opening dialogue. For opening impact, the opening line “Mother” became an extended, de-naturalized, “Moooootherrrrrrrrr” that was extended for the duration of the breath. This resulted in a dramatic opening sound that exploited the resonant acoustic qualities of the venue and which set a tone for the rest of the performance.

The second half of this short piece contrasts significantly in terms of the two extended monologues that are delivered by V, and finally May, who closes the piece. V is an

unseen presence whose voice is heard from off-stage. Beckett's original production, and subsequent key performances of the play, mainly have seen two actresses cast in these roles.¹¹ I was keen to explore the possibilities of casting Claire in both roles, with V's lines being recorded for playback during the performance. I was interested in Beckett's 'doubling of the self' and the device of the 'pseudocouple' as described earlier in relation to not only *Footfalls* but also other prose and dramatic works in Beckett's canon.¹² I was also interested in providing the audience with a level of ambiguity in the presentation of May and V that forced them to reflect on their relationship. Having made this decision, I recorded Claire's delivery of V's lines and experimented with different styles of delivery. A deliberately 'aged' inflection was the approach that eventually made it to the final recording and was delivered as part of the performance. The recording of V's part was engineered in such a way as to impose an echo that was also in keeping with the overall acoustic quality of the venue.

¹¹ Notable productions include Juliet Stevenson as May and Debra Gillet as V, for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford (1997). Somewhat notorious is Deborah Warner's production for the Garrick Theatre, London (1993-4) (with Fiona Shaw as May and Susan Engel as V), in which Warner's decision to reassign some lines in the script led to the Beckett Estate withdrawing its license for the subsequently planned European tour. More recently, Lisa Dwan (as May), directed by Walter Asmus, has performed the play in major venues across Europe and used a recording of her own voice in the part of V.

¹² As mentioned earlier in this chapter, examples of Beckett's use of the pseudocouple can be found in his prose works, including: *Mercier et Camier* (1946) as well as his drama: *Waiting for Godot* (1955), *Endgame* (1957) and in later, more abstracted relationships such as Mouth and Auditor in *Not I* (1972) and Reader and Listener in *Ohio Impromptu* (1981).

The playing space for this performance was the altar space, an arched and enclosed section of the old church that also served to create the echoing acoustic that was this venue's main attraction.



Fig 3: The playing space at Cisnadioara - 2011 (credit: author).

The space not only has religious and spiritual connotations. Lining the walls of the playing space, immediately behind the performer and under the raised windows, are memorial plaques placed in tribute, mainly, to the German dead of the First World War. This is a space of reverence and remembrance, in addition to worship. That fact had an impact on the playing of the piece from a visual perspective. The ghostly qualities of both *May* and *V* that Beckett was so keen to emphasize in the original production suddenly came to the fore in this performance at Cisnadioara. The self-reflexive references to the “church by the north door” in *May*’s closing “Mrs Winter” monologue

gave the performance a sense of place and specificity that was added to on the night of performance by the rumbling sound of an approaching thunder storm in the distance, as well as the invasive sounds of cicadas chirping immediately outside the building as the house lights dimmed. These coincidental aspects of the playing space, as well as the overall environment in which the performance was set, were features of the venue that we were prepared to exploit in terms of their relationship to the play. However, every new production of this play is required to locate itself – to a greater or lesser degree - in the space provided. In his consideration of “Drama, Script, Theater, and Performance”, (2003), Richard Schechner sets out what he considers to be the key distinctions between the cultural, as well as aesthetic parameters that distinguish the ‘doing’ of a performance from its inscribed origins and its architectural, environmental and receptive conditions:

The drama is the domain of the author [...]; the script is the domain of the teacher, guru, master; the theatre is the domain of the performers; the performance is the domain of the audience (Schechner, 2003: 71).

It is those textual ambiguities, or that which is implied in Beckett’s dramas, that provide the actor working in Schechner’s theatre and performance domains with a raw material

that enables the kind of exploitation available in Cisnadioara, and which create the conditions for the audience to generate a perception of the performance at the moment of delivery which can be rooted in their own shared experiences both prior to, as well as during, the holistic entity defined by the event itself.¹³

In this regard, the pervasive, ambient atmosphere generated in the church, was broken by the sound of Claire's feet on the stone floor. The sound created by the rough surface under Claire's shoes impacting on the hard flagstones punctuated the spoken text from both characters. In addition to the encroachment of sound from outside, this had the overall effect of reminding the audience of their own journeys to this space. The climb up the hill from the bottom of the 300 winding stone steps requires a physical effort that is only rewarded upon arrival at the door of the church. The simple act of walking up these steps is a (sometimes painful) reminder of the levels of investment required by the festival-going audience and the extended ratio that exists between risk and reward. The pacing and ritualized advance of the audience up the hill is reflected in May's solo reflection of that individual 'act of doing'. Elinor Fuchs's premise for the death of

¹³ It is also worth considering Gay McAuley's work on the relationship between stage space and performance event. In formulating a taxonomy of spatial function in the theatre, she sets out key relationships between the physical and fictional, or architectural and imagined, that exist in an audience's engagement with the theatre event. Ultimately, these are seen as determining factors in the ways that meaning is created. See: McAuley, G., 2000: *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press).

character is supported in this instance. As discussed in Chapter two, Fuchs's ideas on 'a theatre of things' is prompted by her investigation of 'the death of character' in the wake of contemporary performance practices in existence during the 1970s and early 1980s. She identifies a secular self-reflexivity as symptomatic of a postmodern theatre that craves the identification with character present in traditional, narrative-based dramas. In its place, is an acknowledgement of form and space as well as a self-identification between spectator and performer. The audience's experience of walking up to the church at Cisnadioara is an example of this phenomenon, in which their own experience of walking "into the little church by the north door" is mirrored and replicated in the image of May's pacing.

Therefore, the preceding fictionalized and authorial construction of meaning for a passive audience experience is blended, blurred and distorted with Beckett's establishment of an acted 'persona' that serves to remind, provoke and enhance the quotidian act of walking. This potent distancing device – the constant act of walking as a means of reminding the audience of their journeys – is coupled with the musical delivery of May's spoken text. The audience is invited to suspend their desire for any narrative meaning embedded in the text, in favour of an appreciation of sound in space that exists in that moment and which has no sense of 'before' or 'after'. The actor, in

this sense, must be in a constant state of readiness to perform “the necessary”. To use Herbert Blau’s articulation: “consciousness that it must be seen, what would make even the word come even if there were no breath” (Blau, 1982: 86).

Beckett’s dramas have progressively sought to exploit the expressive impulse in Blau’s statement. For example, whilst scenographically prescriptive in its insistence on “*A country road. A tree. Evening*” (CDW: 11), the setting for *Waiting for Godot* has often prompted highly imaginative renderings, as well as literal. From the broadly suggestive approach taken in the original production at Théâtre de Babylone in 1953, to the filmic naturalism of the outdoor location used for the *Beckett on Film* project in the early 2000s, Beckett’s instruction is often used as an inspirational starting point for designers. The more recent invention of the Sean Mathias production (with Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart in 2009-10), in which the delapidated interior of an old theatre building was suggested and the tree was seen bursting out of the floorboards of the stage, implies a return to some of the original, but abandoned, sketches for Peter Hall’s first UK production in 1955. The creative potential for Beckett’s initial stage direction offers much to the scenographer albeit in the service of a simple stage image.

Later dramas become more opaque in their literal representations (the urns in *Play*, the bench and bare stage in *Come and Go*, for example), and offer the designer more in terms of the potential for lighting and the illumination of the actor's body than they do for the rendering of a specified location. As the plays reduce in terms of their immediate and identifiable on-stage environments, the actor's body becomes increasingly significant as the locus of meaning in combination with the text, the audience's perception and the wider performance environment.

Beckett's later dramatic works open up possibilities for actors and audiences to consider the importance of the location in which they are meeting and sharing the work presented. His prescribed sights and sounds in the text are imbued with a potential significance that render them worthy of cognition (or "necessary", for Blau). In these moments of engagement, it is the audience, as well as the actors, who are required to work at the application of those social, personal or cultural associations in which the triumvirate of actor, audience and place combine to generate meaning. Whether it be in a besieged theatre space in Sarajevo, a communal social hall in an American penitentiary, or the politically-charged environment of an impoverished theatre in Palestinian East Jerusalem, that which is absent from the text creates gaps for the audience to fill. The Implied Actor, as a liminal presence somewhere between character

and the developed self, is able to resort to the abstracted signifying structures of music and the sonic properties of the text in order to facilitate the audience's personal explorations of the implied meanings offered by the text. In the case of *Footfalls* in Cisnadioara, the textual musicality of the word along with the rhythmically punctuating sound of May's shoes pacing the floor combines with the environmental ambience of the mountain-top location in order to give the audience much to contemplate.



Fig 4: *Footfalls*: Sibiu International Theatre Festival – 2011 (credit: Scott Eastman)

***Ohio Impromptu*: “Little is left to tell”**

There is a five-year lapse between the original production of *Footfalls* in 1976 and the first performance of *Ohio Impromptu* in 1981. The piece was presented as part of a symposium to mark Beckett’s 75th birthday and was convened by the renowned Beckett scholar, Stanley Gontarski. In the preceding five years Beckett had worked on *A Piece of Monologue* and *Company* in addition to *Rockaby* (1980). He also wrote and worked on the production of two pieces for television in 1976, *Ghost Trio* and *...but the clouds...* and also worked on new theatre productions of his existing works, including *Footfalls* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*.

This was also a period in Beckett’s life characterized by a growing awareness of his mortality. Knowlson remarks that upon reaching his 70th birthday in 1976, he became more mindful of Psalm 90 and its warning that, should we live beyond our allotted “threescore years and ten”, “yet is their strength, labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” (Knowlson, 1996: 643). In this regard *Company*, the prose work published in 1980, can be seen as the text that comes closest to an autobiographical work that Beckett was ever to write. It is replete with remembrances and recollections of his childhood and early life.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Company* (written between May 1977 and August 1979) is one of Beckett’s most lengthy prose fiction works and was written originally in English. H. Porter Abbott, in seeking to re-locate

As with much of Beckett's most lyrical works, *Krapp's Last Tape* perhaps being the most apposite in this regard, so much of his work's most poignant qualities come from his own experiences and relationships. In *Ohio Impromptu* we see another example of this within a piece written in the last ten years of his life. It deals with what have, by this stage in his career, become familiar themes of love, loss and regret; set within a romanticized geographical location that resonates with the times spent in that place. In this instance, according to conversations held between Beckett and his biographer, James Knowlson,¹⁵ the "dear face" mentioned in the play is a direct reference to his wife, Suzanne.

For such a personal piece of writing it is also surprising to note that this is a work written to order. Stanley Gontarski's request that Beckett produce some original dramatic material for his symposium, in Ohio, to mark his 75th birthday was at first met with some reluctance on Beckett's part. However, perhaps in the spirit of his newly acquired mortal awareness, he offered the piece for performance at the symposium in April 1981. David Warrilow was selected to play the part of the Reader. By this time,

Beckett's fiction firmly into the category of autobiography (*Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996)), suggests that it was Deirdre Bair's biography of Beckett (published in 1978) that might have influenced his work on *Company*: "he can now admit to a truthful use of biographical self-analysis as the material for his fiction without any further need to hide behind layers of disguised prose devices." (Bair, 1982: 18).

¹⁵ Knowlson reproduces the exchange in his biography of Beckett: "I then told him that I had heard the 'dear face' who is evoked by the Reader referred to as if it [...] were the face of Joyce. 'It is a woman, isn't it?' I asked. 'It's Suzanne', he replied. 'I've imagined her dead so many times. I've even imagined myself trudging out to her grave.'" (op. cit.: 665).

Warrilow had become one of Beckett's most admired actors and one who Beckett thought was most adept at performing his work.

Although the Director, Alan Schneider, describes the title of the play as "a kind of a joke", in that "the title has no connection with the content"¹⁶, the text clearly follows the form of the impromptu drama, which for Pierre Astier,

deal[s] 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 (Astier, 1982: 332).

Beckett's impromptu follows on from a tradition that consists of the work of Molière (*Impromptu de Versailles*, 1663), Giradoux (*Impromptu de Paris*, 1937) and, in more recent times, the twentieth century work, *Impromptu de l'Alma* (1955) by Eugene Ionesco.

It is the Ionesco work that is perhaps closest to Beckett's attempt at the form, and not merely for the fact that the two men were contemporaries living in Paris. It could be argued that both Ionesco and Beckett belong to a school of dramatists whose work

¹⁶ Enoch Brater (1987) quotes Alan Schneider's words in an article written by Diana Barth and published in the programme notes for his productions of *Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where* at the Harold Clurman Theatre, New York, in 1983.

emerged in the 1950s and was documented in Martin Esslin's book, *Theatre of the Absurd*, in 1961. Equally arguable is the notion that here is where the similarity between the two writers ends, and indeed with the idea that Beckett might be positioned in the same category of dramatic writing as Esslin's book suggests.¹⁷ However, for the purposes of this analysis it is fair to highlight that the impromptu form offers both writers an opportunity to extend their dramatic experimentation with the self-reflexivity of drama/theatre within what is essentially an adapted musical form.

The premise for the play is one in which two men, a Reader and a Listener, are discovered seated at a long table, upon which rests a wide-brimmed hat, along with a book from which the Reader takes his story. The two men are "*as alike in appearance as possible*" (CDW: 445) with a costume stipulation that they both be dressed in a long black coat and have long white hair. The Reader reads a "sad tale" of a man who has left someone in order to live alone. In the tale, we learn that each night a lone figure

¹⁷ Beckett's position as a dramatist of the absurd is not only a matter of categorization. His work shares many of the attributes associated with Esslin's original description, and the authors included in his book, and much of these can also be applied to some of the later works. Defined essentially in philosophical terms, in relation to a belief in the meaninglessness or futility of human existence, consequent drama often emphasizes the author's impulse towards experimentation with form and language. Logical construction and argument is seen to give way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence. However, Beckett himself rejected the label. In conversation with Bram van Velde, he highlights the problem: "moral values are inaccessible. And they cannot be defined. In order to define them, you would have to pass judgement, which is impossible. That's why I could never agree with the notion of the theatre of the absurd. It involves a value judgment. You cannot even speak about truth. That's what's so distressful. Paradoxically, it is through form that the artist may find some kind of a way out. By giving form to formlessness. It is only in that way, perhaps, that some underlying affirmation may be found." (Beckett in Juliet, 2009: 63).

comes to his lodging and reads to him until dawn as a means of offering a measure of comfort. One day the visitor informs him that he will not come again as there is “No need”. The closing speech describes the end of this final reading and something of the atmosphere that exists between the two men as the tale is told for one last time. It describes the silence that exists between them and the possible “profounds of mind” that might exist in their thinking. The play ends with the line “Nothing is left to tell” before the Reader’s book is closed and he sits up to look at the Listener who reciprocates with the same acknowledging gesture. Throughout the reading of the “sad tale” (the duration of the play) pauses in the Reader’s delivery are punctuated by knocks on the table by the Listener, who says nothing throughout. It is ambiguous in the text whether the Listener is prompting or following the Reader. At key moments in the text, the Listener is seen to use his persistent knocking as a means of controlling the action of the drama:

R: [...] Then turn and his slow steps retrace.

[*Pause*]

In his dreams –

[*Knock*]

Then turn and his slow steps retrace.

[*Pause. Knock*]

In his dreams he had been warned against this
change...

(*CDW*: 446).

On the surface, it is possible to see the silent Listener as the figure in control of this scene. As the potential subject of the ‘sad tale’ in the Reader’s book, he works hard to maintain control over this biographical vignette that is highlighted as a key crisis point in his life. The knocking is used as a means of expressing and exerting this control through the way in which the Reader is consistently pulled back from delivering his tale using this unspoken and coded percussive language. In the same way as the subject of the tale is able to “turn” and “his slow steps retrace”, the Reader is asked, perhaps ordered, to do the same through this self-reflexive, distorting mirror.

Alternatively, it is possible to see the Reader as the one holding the upper hand in terms of power dynamics in this play. Reader is in possession of the power of language. His authority stems from the ability to shape and, ultimately, control the direction and overall shape of the performance through his manipulation of the words of the sad tale that forms the central focus. Even the seemingly complicit submission communicated in the extract above (in which the protagonist in the tale retraces his steps) can be seen as an act of existential free will in the truest Sartrean form. In good faith, Reader *chooses* to go back and retrace his delivery. Beckett confirms this inherent ambiguity in the text halfway through, when the Reader “*Starts to turn back the pages. Checked by L’s left hand. Resumes relinquished page.*” (ibid). Apart from the closing of the play when both

figures “*raise their head and look at each other*” (ibid: 448), this is the only significant physical action in the play. Minimal in its theatrical economy, this sparse gesture is meaningful. Enoch Brater talks of the influence of the electronic media on Beckett’s later dramas of the 1970s and 80s and the ways in which that influence serves to define his minimalism. In this instance, Listener’s arm becomes central or the ‘close-up’ on which the audience are required to focus. The same extremity that provides us with the knocking throughout is here seen to check the Reader mid flow. In perhaps a metaphorical echo of the “downstream extremity of the isle of swans” (ibid: 445) described in the opening lines of the play, Beckett allows his characters to play out their impromptu performance *in extremis*: length of clothing, length of hair, and the extreme “fearful symptoms” shown as a result of the night terrors described halfway. “Extremities are becoming important here” (Brater, 1987: 131-2).

It is the doubling and re-doubling in this play that becomes a significant feature of its overall structure. It becomes clear quite early on in the play that the Reader’s text from the book in front of him mirrors, or at least approximates to, the scene in front of the audience. We are left to wonder whether the Listener is either the protagonist referred to in the Reader’s tale or simply a coincidental character with no apparent relationship. The self-reflexive or metatheatrical qualities of this short play are therefore an integral

part of design. Aside from the biographical references that Beckett has admitted to in subsequent documented conversations,¹⁸ this impromptu piece in the form characterized by the genre is worthy of analysis. Beckett's treatment of the impromptu form is to use it as an investigation into the act of reading and reception. In that sense, it can also be seen as a further meditation on the act of performance and reception; acting and watching, as explored in those of his earlier and subsequent shorter dramas that invite the audience in the auditorium to implicate themselves in the action. In addition to *Not I* (the Auditor character as audience representative or tribune), we see this implicitly in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* in which implicit, perhaps coy, gestural references are made towards the audience in the form of dramatic asides. *Ohio Impromptu* invokes liturgical notions of the classical 'call and response' ritual as performed in services such as the Christian Eucharist,¹⁹ in addition to offering a more secularized and systematic deconstruction of the more prosaic and simple art of conversation. This is a deconstruction that is stripped down to the minimum of what might be deemed

¹⁸ See my earlier footnote on the identity of the 'dear face'. Knowlson also confirmed with Beckett in the same conversation that his references to the 'old world Latin Quarter hat' and walks along the 'Isle of Swans' were conscious references to his association with James Joyce in Paris.

¹⁹ Beckett's treatment of religion, and religious practices is a consistent theme within Beckett studies. His membership of a family with Church Of Ireland affiliations, and his attendance at church regularly as a child, is seen as a stimulus for many of the Christian allusions used in his writing. He is reluctant to acknowledge its influence, however. In conversation with Deirdre Bair, he asserts: "I am aware of Christian mythology [...] Like all literary devices, I use it where it suits me. But to say that I have been profoundly affected by it in daily reading or otherwise is utter nonsense" (Beckett in Bair, 1990: 18). In an unpublished research seminar on Beckett and musicality held at the University of Hull Scarborough Campus in 2000, Dr. Catherine Laws was keen to suggest that Beckett's knowledge of, if not religious adherence to, the delivery of the Irish protestant Eucharist may well have informed the writing and subsequent direction of his 'stream of consciousness' plays such as *Not I*.

theatrically valid. The Reader offers a rich and often lyrical exposition of the “sad tale” that invites more from the Listener than the stilted knocking he gets. Owing to an established level of ambiguity over whether this kind of action is a response to or a prompt for the Reader’s next line gives emphasis to questions of authorship, control and, to a certain extent, the political dynamics that exist in inter-personal, as well as public, relationships. The audience is invited to question who, or what, controls this dramatic situation. By extension, questions of theatrical control, direction or even authorship are prompted by the impromptu form. In Ionesco’s *Impromptu de l’Alma* (1955), he uses the genre to question the act of writing through the central premise that is established early on in the piece. In this play, Ionesco appears as a character – the writer Eugene Ionesco - who is visited by three doctors who feel charged with the responsibility to educate Ionesco in the craft of playwriting. Through a series of comic burlesque turns in which the play appears to re-start more than once, Ionesco’s status as author is questioned, as is the craft of authorship itself and the art of theatre criticism. The art of the impromptu lies in its illusory improvisational qualities in which audiences are asked to suspend willfully any pre-conceived beliefs they might have had that the piece was authored in advance of the performance. The act of performance fosters the illusion that it is not only being performed in the moment but that it is being *written* in

the moment by an ambiguous authorial presence through which the duration of the play is used to discuss, and aims to resolve, this dramatic conundrum.²⁰

Beckett's attempt at the form positions the characters of Reader and Listener as metaphorical representatives of the human inter-personal dynamic. The distorting 'hall of mirrors' effect of the text for the "sad tale" emerging simultaneously with the act of performance - a tale that effectively writes itself – not only questions the process of authorship and editorial intervention, but the processes through which it is received. It is this tension as expressed in the impromptu form that was to be re-visited in *Catastrophe* in the following year. In a more conventional dramatic format (by Beckett's standards, a relatively naturalistic, work), this work sets out to examine the power dynamics inherent in the relationship that exists between artist and society. Widely held by many to be one of the more overtly political statements Beckett made in his dramatic writing,²¹ this homage to the then imprisoned dissident, Vaclav Havel, is deliberate in its attempt to satirize the intervention of the state at every level of society, specifically in the socialist

²⁰ It is the illusory dimension of the impromptu form that is key to its understanding. Trish McTighe, in *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama* suggests it is "something that *gives the impression* of being off-hand, extemporaneous. In other words, built into the structure of the piece are elements designed to convince the viewer of its spontaneity." (McTighe, 2013: 136 – my italics). It is this metatheatrical quality in the form of the writing that leads to performances in which self-referentiality and illusion are key priorities.

²¹ This reading of the play as an allegory on the power of totalitarianism, and the struggle to oppose it, in which the protagonist is seen as representing those governed by autocracy, is confirmed by Zeifman, who describes the ways in which power and control is asserted through speech and humiliation by "tweak[ing] him until his clothing and posture project the required image of pitiful dejectedness" (Zeifman, 1988: 136).

satellites of the old Eastern bloc. If the satire made explicit in this play is serving a particular purpose in drawing the world's attention to the individual plight of a European prisoner of conscience, the more implicit satire of *Ohio Impromptu* is less keenly observed. The criticism implied through the impromptu form carries a subtlety that is easily lost on audiences and which abstracts its metaphorical depictions through the characters portrayed in a way that leaves many questioning its impact. When it came to the Edinburgh Festival in 1984, early critics of the play were left wondering as to its inherent meanings including B.A. Young of the *Financial Times* who confessed that he could "make nothing of it at all." This was contrasted with Michael Billington's review that emphasized the "Rembrandtesque" imagery as well as "language that is concrete and allusive at the same time." (Knowlson, 1987: 666).

David Warrilow's performance was crucial in determining the success of this first production in Ohio and later on tour in the US and Europe. When describing his preparations in rehearsal for the part of the Reader, Warrilow points to a common consideration when playing Beckett: "The greater the degree of accuracy of the parameters, the greater the freedom of action within" (Zarrilli, 1995: 317). In this particular play, "the parameters" that he speaks of can be defined as operating at the level of the visual as well as the verbal elements of performance. The verbal parameters

of tone, pitch, timbre and volume that are wrapped up in the overall delivery of the spoken text can be contrasted with a visual element that expresses an eye for detail, within a much-restricted plane of view (for the spectator at least) in which details such as the nature of the table, the hat, costume and lighting take on increased resonance when compared with other performances. Given the luxury of being able to work with the author on the initial première of this work, Warrilow can claim to have intimate knowledge of the correct “accuracy” to bring to both visual and verbal presentation. Knowledge of this can therefore be seen as part of a process by which the actor is given the confidence to allow his “freedom of action” to proliferate in performance. This is an important quality in any set of performance conditions however Beckett’s shorter works are in possession of levels of ambiguity and defiance of meaning such that it is the confidence and subsequent control of the actor – in the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, a resonating theme – that ensures an effective outcome. In that sense, Warrilow is keen to point out the apparent paradox of combining a strict choreographical sensibility combined with a level of improvisation in Beckett’s work that is aware of the limits, or parameters, that the author has put in place. In the same way as Beckett has progressively moved away from what he considers as the “grotesque fallacy” of representational art, Warrilow has modified his view of the actor’s craft so that the body is no longer considered an extension of the Cartesian body/mind; a physical as well as

logical manifestation of willed causation. Warrilow sees his body in more abstract terms. He “use[s] the body as a way of creating symbol and cipher and of depicting energy in action and in space” (ibid). This approach is in direct contrast to the generation of meaning through the *logos* or looking for the causal chain that binds mental stimulus with physical action. The body is representative of a more abstracted approach to “meaning” in which it can be used as a symbolic route to universal rather than literal representations. The idea of the “cipher” is well-chosen in this instance. The body can be seen as a ‘key’ that unlocks meaning that is perhaps obfuscated in the original text. What remains is a pure distillation of human experience: an “energy in action”. Warrilow, of all Beckett’s actors, comes closest to realising the musical analogy when describing his approach in performance. He consciously refers to the act of performing Beckett as being akin to realising a musical score. His body therefore functions as a musical instrument, to the extent that, for Warrilow, his career has progressed as a continual attempt at “self-mastery” (ibid) perhaps in the same way as a musician perfects his instrument.

Jerusalem Theatre Festival (Palestine) – July 2000

Sibiu International Theatre Festival (Romania) – June 2001

University of Hull Scarborough Campus – April 2008

My own work on this text developed as a performer in the role of the Reader, in three productions that took place between 2000 and 2008. Each of these performances took place under very different circumstances and within conditions that had their own very particular challenges.

The performance at the Jerusalem Theatre Festival in 2000 took place as part of a double bill alongside my production of *Not I* referred to in Chapter four. In this piece, I collaborated with Teresa Brayshaw who directed myself and Professor Noel Witts in the two specified roles. The performance was notable in terms of what it taught us about the impact of the piece on an audience. The narratives of difference inherent in the play; those that exist between Reader/Listener, author/output, text/performance, were subordinated to a large extent when performed in front of a largely non English-speaking audience. Whereas the performance of *Not I* (on the same bill) was able to capitalize on this sense of absence, and thereby use the music of the text as its *modus operandi*, the performance of *Ohio Impromptu* engaged its audience at a more scenic level. The stark visual images that Beckett creates in his later, shorter dramas are usually defined according to a sense of bodily fragmentation or spatial displacement in

which figures or stage properties are deconstructed or positioned off-centre. The figures in the urns in *Play*, Mouth in *Not I*, the Head in *That Time* or the Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue* are either dismembered abstractions of the human form and/or physically de-centred in their staging. Anna McMullan talks of the ways in which *Ohio Impromptu* subverts this trend in Beckett's writing through a "certain formal completeness" (McMullan, 1993: 115):

It has been compared to a Rembrandt painting. The white table visually unites the two figures – the elements of the image are not isolated and separated by space... The two figures are identical in costume and pose, seated diagonally opposite each other, across the table. Even the book is complemented by the round, wide-brimmed hat, completing the 'still life' (ibid).

It is this sense of unity and completeness that became a point of entry for our audience in Jerusalem. The rehearsal process had tended to focus on the text and, possibly due to the parallel rehearsals for *Not I* that were taking place simultaneously, it was the musicality of verbal delivery and the double relationship of Reader and Listener that was prioritized. During this process, a lot of time was devoted to experimentation with alternative modes and registers of delivery however, in performance, it was the scenic composition that intrigued our audience. The painterly, or deliberately 'composed'

scenography of this piece – albeit simple – was a feature of the production that allowed the spectator to interrogate those narratives of existence and creation on a purely visual level.

It was this experience of performing to a non English-speaking audience that provided us with the platform on which we mounted our follow-up to this first performance, in Romania the following year. We were invited to perform, along with *Not I*, at the Sibiu Theatre Festival and this opportunity would enable us to address some of the reception issues encountered in Jerusalem. We were scheduled to perform both pieces in a theatre venue, The Teatrul Gong (Gong Theatre), in the centre of Sibiu. The venue is a traditional Romanian puppet theatre that is consistently used by the festival each year as part of its main programme. Consisting of a raised thrust stage framed by a standard proscenium, the audience are seated at floor level in a capacity of approximately 200.

In this end-on formation, we were keen to retain the strong visual impact that the performance had already proven to demonstrate whilst also emphasising the dual centrality of language, and its delivery, that is implicit in the text. We experimented with alternative visual representations of the text in rehearsal and settled on a projection of scrolling text on to a front gauze that ran the width and height of the playing area and

behind which the Reader and Listener were positioned at their table. In advance, we obtained a published Romanian translation of the text however we were anxious not to invite the audience to follow the text exactly in time with its spoken delivery. We discovered that the positioning of the gauze in front of the performers meant that we were able to create a montage of the text as it moved upwards and across the *mise en scène*. This offered a suggestion of the potential meanings embedded within Beckett's writing at the same time as offering our own statement on the moment of textual creation and the status of the author. The following extract illustrates this:

[*Pauză.*]

Putine au mai ramás de spus. Intr-o noapte –

[*Bátale in masá.*]

Putine au mai ramás de spus.

[*Pauză. Bátale in masá.*]

Intr-o noapte, cum sta cu tapul intre mtini tremurînd din tot corpul, un om se infătișă și spuse m-a trimis – și rosti numele drag – să te con – solez. Pe urná scotind o carte uzată din buzunarul pelerinei lungi și negre se asezăși citi piná în zori cind dispáru fără un cuvînt.

[*Pauză.*]²²

(Bittel & Patlanjoglu, 1985: 84).

²² In the published English version:

[*Pause.*]

Little is left to tell. One night-

[*Knock.*]

Little is left to tell.

[*Pause. Knock.*]

One night as he sat trembling head in hands from head to foot a man appeared to him and said, I have been sent by – and here he named the dear name – to comfort you. Then drawing a worn volume from the pocket of his long black coat he sat and read till dawn. Then disappeared without a word.

[*Pause.*]

(CDW: 446-7).

This section, taken from the middle of the play – where the Reader’s ‘tale’ shifts emphasis from the opening description of his move to a “single room” to the point at which he is visited each night by the man with a tale to tell - became a focus for us in performance. Once we had arrived at the theatre in Sibiu, we were able to position the gauze in front of the table and project the scrolling text in such a way that live action shared an equal sense of prominence with the mediated text. As these two aspects of the production were balanced to their optimum level of visibility, the audience were able to engage fully with the action of Reader and Listener as well as having an approximation of the text in front of them.



Fig 5: *Ohio Impromptu*: Prior to Sibiu, a preview performance at the University of Hull Scarborough Campus – 2001 (credit: author)

In the same way as Billie Whitelaw talks of the actor's ability to allow their inner personalities to "grin through" a performance (Kalb, 1986: 241) – our performance was able to provide a physical manifestation of this metaphor.

Seven years after this first performance of the play, I was able to re-visit the piece as part of an evening of performances and presentations connected to an individual research project in the School of Arts and New Media at the University of Hull. 'P.A.T. Testing' was a one-hour performance event coordinated by Dr. Chris Newell as a means of illustrating his own research into 'synthetic actors' and the extent to which computer generated speech can be manipulated in order to acquire an increased perception of 'liveness' (as opposed to 'realism') in performance as well as everyday life.

I was invited to present *Ohio Impromptu* (as well as a rehearsed reading of *Not I*) at this event by way of a direct interrogation of the framework set up by Dr. Newell in his research. The idea of 'Place', 'Authenticity' and 'Time' is central to his research processes and questions and Beckett's play was seen as a useful tool to demonstrate possible approaches that the actor might take in negotiating this framework.

I was keen to pick up on the work we had started earlier in the decade that centred around the notion of doubling; both as a feature of the text and of Beckett's later work in a more general sense. I saw the potential, in the context of this performance/demonstration, to explore the role of media in articulating some of Beckett's ideas at the same time as exploring the interface of human and machine as a 'synthesized' entity.

I worked with a technician skilled in digital media technologies, especially with regard to video production, in order to try and realise a mediated representation of the character of Listener. In many ways, this was a relatively straightforward technological exercise that was created using a recorded image of my performance as Listener that was projected on to a screen positioned close to the table stipulated in the text. The hardest technical challenge was the timing of Listener's knocking and other limited physical actions in order to coincide with the Reader's live delivery.



Fig 6: *Ohio Impromptu* (technical rehearsal): 'P.A.T. Testing', University of Hull
Scarborough Campus – 2008 (credit: Alistair Edwards)

The overall impact of this technological intervention was to create an extra 'double' or layer of representation that added to the already complex web of representations existent in the text. Listener's mediated presence provided an extra level of ambiguity that questioned the locus or place of performance and/or associated narrative along with its temporal location and an overall challenge to authenticity. The liveness of this performance became a questionable phenomenon given the separation of human and media presence, but at the same time occupying a shared platform in a definable space. This challenge to the liveness of the spectacle was undermined by the points of intersection that existed between the two characters. Listener's check on the arm of the Reader as he talks of his night terrors, as well as the knocking that interrupts the Reader periodically, becomes a shared space that is open to contestation by the live audience. Clearly, we were unable to create a moment of physical contact between the two

presences – in which the divide between video screen and three-dimensional space was breached – however, we were able to create the illusion of same when dealing with the check on the arm. The audience were positioned in an end-on configuration therefore we were able to create a sightline between screen, Reader and audience such that there is no visible evidence of the two characters touching or not. Listener is seen to reach across towards Reader's seated position at the moment when he starts to turn back the pages in the book. My right hand moved down at that moment in order to coincide with Listener's gesture.

The pause that coincided with this gesture became significant. It was a genuine moment of 'contact' for the audience as well as the two characters – the only point of physical contact in the text and one that needed to be honoured in the context of the technological decisions taken in this performance. Similarly, the point at the end of the play in which Reader and Listener "*raise their heads and look at each other*" (CDW: 448) became a clear moment of recognition for the audience. Having spent the duration of the performance looking away from each other, this point of psychical or proxemic contact between the two figures provides another breach of the divide between a live, integral, embodied presence and one that is mediated as well as dislocated in time and space. Here, the immediacy of Beckettian poetics is thrown into sharp relief: the

immediacy of the impromptu form and the “readiness” of the performer “on the edge of a breath” (Blau, 1982: 86) combine with a deferred on-screen presence in order to defy acting orthodoxies and liberate the actor towards an alternative mode of presentation.

In conclusion, these three productions illustrate the significance of a revised notion of dramatic character in the light of shifting attitudes to both the ways and the means by which we choose to identify with other individuals in society. On one level, Beckett’s fractured piece of theatrical self-reflexivity can be read as a solipsistic rendering of a pessimistic worldview, in which Beckett suggests that true knowledge - of both ourselves or others - is never possible. Through a method that is drained of the ideological priorities of the later work, *Catastrophe*, in which Beckett carries out a momentary exploration of totalitarianism, ideology and the role of the artistic self, the critique in *Ohio Impromptu* is one that challenges the dynamics of contemporary relationships and the inherent ironies involved when contrasted with our own sense of self-understanding.

The challenge for the actor lies in providing the audience with the ‘cipher’, or key, that unlocks this enhanced understanding. Warrilow is clear with regard to his role as an actor in this regard, however my two later performances have resorted either to the

differently inflected delivery of abstraction (using a musical approach in combination with projected text as an estrangement device) or the use of media technology to place the actor at one remove from their live persona. The outcome of these approaches is one that can reveal much in terms of a commentary on the nature of human relationships, however it is the formal complexity of the work: its imagery, stage picture and dramatic structure – that potentially offers more in terms of our understanding of the limits of dramatic expression in the midst of an emerging postdramatic landscape. Rather than learning about ourselves, the outcome of this work, in its self-reflexive style, teaches more about the nature of character and its traditional usefulness in the face of ever-proliferating technological complexity. Beckett once again challenges the act of representation in a way that existed as a key concern from the earliest part of his career. Using a distorted, metatheatrical hall of mirrors (made yet more distorted in my latest production in which projection fragments this quality yet further), character arguably reaches its saturation point as a credible vehicle for representational meaning. Phillip Zarrilli, writing in the same context as his explorations of the Beckett text and the application of psychophysical approaches to acting, considers the work of Martin Crimp, an author who has become almost synonymous with a postdramatic tradition in recent drama. His thoughts on Crimp's play, *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), carry useful associations with Beckett's later work:

Crimp clearly puts into (theatrical) play on-stage the ‘play’ of representation(s) and images that bombard us in our cosmopolitan, mediated culture today. *Attempts on Her Life* ‘plays’ meta-theatrically with both the nature of (theatrical) representation per se, and with the ‘death of character’ – the (non) character who constantly ‘appears’ in various guises, even though ‘she’ never appears (Zarrilli: 2009: 207).

The circular self-reflexivity of Beckett’s *Ohio Impromptu* has given way to the fragmented play on representation offered by Crimp’s later work. As one who has often expressed his debt to Beckett,²³ Crimp’s late twentieth century response to the death of character and the potential of ‘play’ or an extemporaneous approach to dramatic writing and production is significant. For Zarrilli, Crimp’s work can be seen to continue the Beckettian tradition, with his use of the actor as a locus of meaning, as well as a formal instrument of pure expression, offering much to contemporary theatre practice.

²³ Clara Escoda Agusti writes that Crimp gained early inspiration for his writing when he saw *Not I* at the Royal Court Theatre in the 1970s. She also writes: “Crimp’s postdramatic theatre resembles Beckett’s because he is not interested in offering psychologically fleshed-out, naturalistic characters and because he turns the stage into what he calls “the reality of the skull” (Escoda Agusti, 2013: 114).

Conclusion

Through the years, Beckett's fiction has pared away narrative garb to zero-in on man narrating. Similarly, Beckett's drama is concentrated down to man acting (Cohn, 1966: 237).

This study proposes a theory of the Beckettian actor that in some ways nuances Ruby Cohn's relatively early attempt to articulate the parallel processes of reading and watching Beckett's work - either from the printed page, or as realized in performance. Still in the grip of a broadly Cartesian approach to literary criticism in the nascent field of Beckett studies, Cohn's reflections describe the beginnings of a familiarly reductive path towards abstraction, ambiguity and essentialist language play that would continue long after this idea was published. She evokes an image of a lonely, isolated figure: the actor who retains a valorized status as one that is best placed to articulate a human condition that, self-reflexively, is riddled with paradox. For Cohn, the actor stands as an artful metaphor for the laborious endurance of our time on Earth. Later articulations of the Beckettian actor would seek to move on from this Cartesian, quasi-Absurdist rendering towards a consideration of the actor's body in performance that would reify a complex set of issues surrounding subjectivity, representation and the status of the self within a postmodern paradigm. At the same time as Beckett studies embraces a critical language rooted in the theoretical discourses of poststructuralism, deconstruction and more recently the postdramatic, re-considerations of acting in the later twentieth century have moved towards a post-Stanislovskian ethos in which the Cartesian dualism of early Modernism has given way to a psychophysical approach that privileges neither the somatic or the vocal; thought nor action; cause nor effect. This phenomenological turn

towards a holistic actor that prioritises personal identity and the self as much as those traditional considerations of dramatic character, allows the Beckettian actor to converge with the psychophysical actor in a contemporary art-making landscape that is rich in its potential for inter-disciplinary nor, indeed, inter-medial experiment. The Implied Actor treads a tightrope of conflicting opposites: of presence and absence; of self and character; of sound and silence; of theatrical and non-theatrical space. In these liminoid states, the actor works hard to render material and present the audience with experiential potential that transcends those empathic responses rooted in the emotions, in order for the spectator to experience somatic, or kinaesthetic responses that are based in the reflexivity of the human nervous system, as much as those responses associated with intellectual engagement.

In seeking to describe some of the outcomes of this particular approach to acting; through analysis of the various responses to Beckett's works that key actors have offered, this study also identifies a poetics of performance that privileges a set of implied practices, or performative strategies, rather than an explicit programme of technical mastery in which rigorous training promises the most effective results. This rejection of an explicit programme offers a poetics that embraces the unsaid or the unspecified as one approach that, for Jonathan Kalb, makes a virtue out of necessity: "ambiguity as a positive performance value" (1989: 38). In this space, it is that which is unsaid, absent or obfuscated through the dramatic text that subordinates that which might usually have provided convenient meanings. It is also a space in which the self, or personality, of the actor is given license to express and not held back from communicating sometimes uncomfortable truths. As Lisa Dwan poignantly evokes in her memory of Billie Whitelaw, in the immediate aftermath of her death, Whitelaw's

response to Beckett was one that allowed her to “connect deep within” and that this should be at the expense of technique:

She explained that Beckett dealt with such truths that he had no room for an actor’s craft. He did want emotion, only he wanted all of it – the real stuff, the guts – not some polished fool’s gold (Dwan, 2014).

As this study goes on to expound, the history of contemporary performance from around the last decade of Beckett’s life until the end of the twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of a generation of artists and companies whose work has not only thrived in a not wholly un-Beckettian cultural climate of instability, dislocation and fragmented identity, but whose work has also positively benefitted from an aesthetic approach in which the politics of absence, ambiguity and implication has become enriched by a dynamic cultural landscape in which new technology and the Internet pose new questions in regard to our sense of self, how we perceive and the ways in which we communicate through art and everyday life.

In the midst of this new performance landscape, the Beckettian aesthetic, and with it the Implied Actor, endures. For a recent generation, it is the motif of failure (Bailes, 2011) or inability; of paralysis or futile repetition, that returns consistently to haunt arts venues on an increasingly globalized scale. Through the “impossible dance” of the American performance company, Goat Island; the hauntingly pervasive imagery of Sarah Kane’s grotesque stage pictures; or those defiant, laboured and celebratory ‘failures’ of Forced Entertainment’s early work, a postdramatic or performance theatre context for a continuation of the Beckettian aesthetic seems a hospitable environment in which it can thrive.

In this contemporary context, there is work remaining in terms of a thorough survey of the Beckettian aesthetic legacy as articulated through the actor/performer and a set of implied practices that valorizes the status of a quotidian or fallible stage figure in which processes of doing and failure fill the void left by representational art. This study argues that Beckett's Implied Actor can be seen to have dramatic currency and a performative longevity that offers the promise of a sustained future.

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