Beckett and being: a phenomenological ontology

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Beckett and Being: A Phenomenological Ontology

by

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis seeks to re-examine the philosophies of some key French thinkers, as it places these alongside both historical and contemporary theory and criticism, in order to launch a *new* phenomenological investigation of the theatrical and literary works of Samuel Beckett. The writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and his contemporaries were once applied to the Beckett canon in order that this might be placed firmly in its historical, post-war context, and the so-called "French existentialists" contributed greatly, though unwittingly, to the birth of that now rather dated conceptual framework which we have come to know as "The Theatre of the Absurd." This study, rather than enforcing notions of a theatrical age of nihilism, draws upon the theories of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and peers, not in an attempt to dwell upon the *meaning*(lessness) of being that is the focus of traditional existentialist analyses, but so that an ontology of the Beckett character can be established. Over the course of the five chapters which comprise this work, I aim to change the focus from that which has been categorised as "existential" and/or "absurd" in Beckett's *oeuvre*, to the *phenomenological* points of interest that are manifest in that same. I will demonstrate, for instance, that by employing Sartre's lengthy and intricate exposition of *being-for-itself* as a model for the human consciousness, and using this as something of a touchstone as both complementary and competing philosophies are also considered (including the subjective idealism of Bishop Berkeley and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida), we can begin to see some of the complexities inherent in the diverse *modes* of human being that can be discerned in Beckett's works. Existentialism has become, in reality, no more than the once-popular, *historically-situated* face of phenomenological philosophies which *actually* deal not so much in the overt pessimism that they (and Beckett) are charged with, but in explicating those facets of existence that we recognise as constitutive of the human experience; our being as both mind and body; our presence in temporality; our religious and/or spiritual being; our sense of "self" and "other"; and our gendered being or, more importantly, the lived, bodily experience of being a woman, the "second sex", in a patriarchal society. By exploring the regions of being that are made visible in the Beckettian landscape, this work layers phenomenological philosophy with, amongst others, philosophies of theatre aesthetics, of mind and of gender, and offers forth theories that contribute to the development of research in the fields of "Beckett and phenomenology/existentialism" and "Beckett and women/gender/feminism", whilst adding something both original and tangible to the vast spectrum that encompasses "Beckett and philosophy", even "theatre/literature and philosophy", as a whole.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to my two supervisors, Dr Catherine Rees and Dr Dan Watt, of Loughborough University's Department of English and Drama. Catherine, your constant and unwavering support has been appreciated more than you know over the last few years; your practical guidance and ability to remain calm when presented with my countless neuroses has kept me on track, and allowed me to compose myself in the face of crises both real and imagined. Dan, I never realised quite how much I didn't know about philosophy until I met you, and I could have woven a tangled web of theory indeed, had it not been for your gently and repeatedly pointing me towards so many means of unravelling it all. I could not have wished for a more encouraging and empathetic supervision team than the one that I was gifted in Catherine and Dan, and I would also like to thank Dr Jennifer Cooke for the sound advice and kind words that she shared with me, as she saw me through three progress panels alongside them.

It should be noted here that my long-suffering husband, Ray, bore the brunt of my frustrations, as well as sharing my small triumphs, as I composed the following work, and so I thank him from the bottom of my heart for remaining steadfast during the dark days (of which there have been many), and for sustaining me when I did not have the energy or the inclination to sustain myself. I look forward to our many happy years beyond the PhD, and without that third person (Samuel Beckett) playing quite such a leading role in our marriage. I will also take this opportunity to say how proud I am of my three daughters, Stephanie, Juliette, and Shannon, and their own incredible achievements to date; you are amazing, inspiring people, and I am blessed to have grown up with you. On that note, I must, of course, thank my Mum and Dad, not only for their good works over the last three years, but also for enabling over three decades of this kind of madness, and showing no signs of retiring as yet.

I dedicate this work to my Nannan, whose effervescence, pride, ferocity of spirit and indomitable Irish charm taught me more about beauty, and about life, than any philosopher could ever dare dream.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to revisit and revive the philosophies of some key French thinkers, most notably Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and place these alongside both historical and contemporary theory and criticism, in order to launch a *new* phenomenological investigation into *modes*, rather than the meaning, of being, in a range of the theatrical and literary works of Samuel Beckett. An analysis that uses the writings of Sartre and his peers to "unravel" some of the complexities inherent in the Beckett canon might not, at first glance, strike one as being particularly revolutionary and/or original; the "French existentialists," and their German predecessors, were relied upon heavily in the early years (or "first wave") of Beckett scholarship, and their teachings provided academics with the philosophical evidence that they needed to historicise the works of Beckett and his contemporaries and, in Martin Esslin's case, deem them "Theatre of the Absurd."[1] It is perhaps the ubiquity and, ultimately, over-use of the "absurdist" label that accounts for the current tendency amongst scholars[2] to move away from some of the philosophies that gave birth to it; the school of French existentialism, especially, might be considered dated, "old fashioned"[3] or lacking relevance in the world of literature and art today, just as it seems to be in the world of philosophy itself, particularly as is not old enough to be revered and sentimentalised, or recent enough to be thought of as cutting-edge. It is clear then (as a traditional "existentialist" examination of Beckett's work would not constitute a ground-breaking endeavour in itself), that the following chapters must offer a fresh perspective on the theories of Sartre and company if I am to use these to effectively contribute to the prolific field of Beckett studies. It is often a "trend" to look back to the Paris of the mid-1900s for aesthetic inspiration; I look back to this era with quite another purpose however, as I reconsider the *ontological* teachings of some of the figureheads of European phenomenology, with the hope of illuminating some of the shadowy corners of Beckett's work, and giving a twenty-first century twist to "retro" philosophy.

Over the course of the five chapters which comprise this thesis, I aim to change the focus from that which has been categorised as "existential" and/or "absurd" in Beckett's

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[1] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Methuen, 2001). This work was first published in 1961.
[2] There is much emphasis, at this time, on the so-called "grey canon", which consists of unpublished manuscripts, notes, letters etc., and on archival research and electronic collation of data rather than philosophical analyses. The "grey creep" is a dominant force in present "third wave" Beckett scholarship; I will expand on the division of the field into "waves" shortly.
[3] An inevitable consequence of its once being too fashionable perhaps.

oeuvre, to the phenomenological points of interest that are manifest in that same. I will demonstrate, for instance, that by employing Sartre's lengthy and intricate exposition of *being-for-itself* as a "model" for the human consciousness, and using this as something of a touchstone as both complementary and competing philosophies are also considered (including the subjective idealism of Bishop Berkeley and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida), we can begin to see the complexities inherent in the diverse modes of "human" being that can be discerned in Beckett's works. Esslin's "absurdism" appears to me as, essentially, a reduction of Sartrean phenomenology (and thereby the Beckett canon) to a short, easily-digestible text, *Existentialism and Humanism*[4], which is a transcription of a lecture Sartre gave in 1946 at the Club Maintenant, and which should not be taken for a synopsis of what is a fundamentally timeless phenomenology that the writer established a few years prior to this in his seminal treatise *Being and Nothingness*.[5] The emphasis Esslin places on "…the horror of the human condition…"[6], on a Sartrean "…recognition that at the root of our being there is nothingness, liberty, and the need of constantly creating ourselves in a succession of choices…" and the "…'bad faith'…"[7] which consists of our evasion of these truths, is that same "existentialist" emphasis which ties absurdist discourse to its post-war concerns whilst barring it from answering any of the "big questions" regarding our human ontology that are posed in Sartre's expansive, and far more comprehensive, *phenomenological* text.

In "Towards an Understanding of *Endgame*" (written in 1958, just a year after Beckett's *Endgame* was first performed) Theodor W. Adorno writes, in what we might interpret as the kind of quintessentially existentialist terms that are often used to "explain" Beckett, that:

> After the Second World War, everything, including a resurrected culture, was destroyed . . . In the wake of events which even the survivors cannot survive, mankind vegetates, crawling forward on a pile of rubble, denied even the awareness of its own ruin.[8]

Daniel Katz writes that, in Adorno's essay, "…one thing that is meant to be understood is that Beckett's resistance to understanding is precisely what makes him the supreme creative

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[4] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1973).
[5] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2009).
[6] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 59.
[7] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 61.
[8] Theodor W. Adorno, "Towards an Understanding of *Endgame*", in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame*, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 85.

figure of his historical moment, a moment which we must not attempt to 'understand' through the discredited frameworks of a humanist heritage which Auschwitz has thrown into crisis."[9] This study, whilst acknowledging and respecting the historical context of Beckett's early theatre and Sartre's 1946 lecture, seeks to examine both writers *outside* of the post-war, existentialist confines that now seem to suspend some of their works in a past culture, consumed by a quest for the meaning of being in a seemingly meaningless world. Existentialism has become, in reality, no more than the once-popular, *historically-situated* face of phenomenological philosophies which *actually* deal not so much in the overt pessimism that Esslin charges them (and Beckett[10]) with, but in explicating those modes of being (to be illustrated here) that we recognise as constitutive of the human experience; our being as both mind and body; our presence in temporality; our religious and/or spiritual being; our sense of "self" and "other"; and our gendered being. That said, it is important to take into account the philosophical heritage attached to a writer of Beckett's stature, and this work will admit a certain reverence for "first wave" existentialist critiques (not only Adorno's but also Lance St. John Butler's *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*[11], David Hesla's *The Shape of Chaos*[12] and Eugene F. Kaelin's *The Unhappy Consciousness*[13], an early "phenomenological" reading of Beckett which eschews the "absurdist" label) insofar as they act as the very springboards away from which the following discourse could be said to leap. These writings are very much of *their* time, and my intention is to incorporate Sartre and his contemporaries (along with select philosophical predecessors and successors) back into literary analyses which *avoid* fixation on the unquestionable misery, trauma and human suffering brought about by two world wars, and in this sense my work aligns much more closely, as it should, with recent studies on Beckett and phenomenology/the body than it does with its existential ancestors.

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[9] Daniel Katz, "What Remains of Beckett: Evasion and History", in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, ed. Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 144.

[10] Esslin writes, throughout his examination of Beckett's work, of "…the tragic difficulty of becoming aware of one's own self . . . the difficulty of communication between human beings . . . the tragic nature of all love relationships…" of "…hopelessness . . . depression…" and "…despair…"(p. 70), as well as "…the difficulty of finding meaning in a world subject to incessant change…" (p. 85) and the endless "…search for the self" (p. 89).

[11] Lance St. John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being: A Study in Ontological Parable* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

[12] David H. Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

[13] Eugene F. Kaelin, *The Unhappy Consciousness: The Poetic Plight of Samuel Beckett* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1981).

In the 2009 publication *Beckett and Phenomenology*, it becomes clear that there is a renewed interest in Beckett studies that seek to encompass "…themes that are central to phenomenological enquiry; consciousness, sensory perception and embodied experience."[14] One chapter of this volume actually boasts an essay, written by Steven Connor, entitled "Beckett and Sartre: The Nauseous Character of All Flesh"[15], which I (given my positing of Sartre as key philosopher in much of what follows) class as being of particular significance/cause for optimism as, when it comes to phenomenological discussion of Beckett, it would seem that Sartre is now largely overlooked in favour of the rather-more-fashionable Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In fact, Sartre scores more "hits" in the index of *Beckett and Phenomenology* than Merleau-Ponty, which comes as something of a surprise when, as Anna McMullan writes, Merleau-Ponty is "…the phenomenological philosopher who most radically theorized embodiment in the post-World War II era, and who is consistently cited in contemporary writing about embodiment[.]"[16] Merleau-Ponty's "embodied" phenomenology is the cornerstone of recent works including McMullan's *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, and Ulrika Maude's *Beckett, Technology and the Body*[17] (which sees the Beckettian body reinstated as an entity of paramount importance alongside the mind, and places it in the context of a scientifically advancing world), and the focus on "embodiment" in recent Beckett studies has made Sartre's peer something of a go-to philosopher for scholars today. Connor provides a wealth of plausible and compelling reasons why the, "…altogether less hostile and antagonistic view of embodied existence"[18] offered by Merleau-Ponty has been something of a breath of fresh air after Sartre's "brand" of existentialism had become so ubiquitous that "…only a massive and sustained act of philosophical cleansing could scour him so completely from the field of intellectual reference."[19] Connor also recognises however (and makes a convincing case for the re-examination of), Sartre's relevance as a *phenomenologist* whose theories are still of use to academics today. Connor draws our attention to the importance of the body in Sartre's ontology, and rightly so; Sartre's phenomenology *is* "embodied" (a short but vital chapter of *Being and Nothingness* entitled "The Body"[20] *influenced* Merleau-Ponty according to Dermot Moran[21]) as, under his terms,

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[14] Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman, "Introduction", in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, p. 1.

[15] Steven Connor, "Beckett and Sartre: The Nauseous Character of All Flesh", in *Beckett and Phenomenology*, pp. 56-76.

[16] Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 10.

[17] Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[18] Connor, "Beckett and Sartre", p. 56.

[19] Connor, "Beckett and Sartre" p. 58.

[20] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 327-382.

[21] Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, eds., *The Phenomenology Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 423.

for human consciousness a body is "…the necessary condition of the existence of a world."[22] It often seems as though Sartre does not receive the credit that he deserves, and it seems we do something of a disservice to his work then, there first and first forgotten in many cases, to leave it frozen in time and to exclude it, now, from studies of *being* in Beckett that might liberate it.

By exploring those modes of being that are made visible in the Beckettian landscape (embodied consciousness, temporal being, religious/spiritual being, being-with-others and being a woman), my current work marries phenomenological philosophy with, amongst others, philosophies of theatre aesthetics, of mind and of gender, and touches upon theories that contribute to the development of not only Beckett studies, but also, potentially, to wider avenues of current theatre research. Sartre, for instance, by the very nature of his extensive, detailed and rigorous exposition of the mode of being that *we* call human consciousness and *he* calls *being-for-itself*, has much to say that might contribute to the relatively new field of consciousness studies. By way of concise introduction to a broad and inclusive field, Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe's 2005 publication, *Theatre and Consciousness*, is a seminal text when it comes to highlighting the intersections of performance and/or literary theory and the equally multidisciplinary field of consciousness studies. As Meyer-Dinkgräfe writes:

> Many disciplines of scholarship are involved in the study of consciousness, often on an interdisciplinary basis. They include philosophy, neurosciences, psychology, physics and biology, and approaches focussing on human experience.[23]

The bi-annual International Conference on Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and the Arts stands as testament to an increasing interest in the exchange of ideas amongst scholars from differing academic backgrounds, and there is a successful journal and Rodopi book series,[24] as well as a working group, attached to this movement. There are also movements occurring within the field of Beckett studies which, whilst not naming themselves specifically as "Consciousness, Literature and the Arts" projects, are actually making substantial contributions to these. In 2012, a trilogy of symposiums took place at Reading University, Birkbeck College and Warwick University, entitled "Beckett and Brain Science", and these sought to unite academics from diverse disciplines, who would then participate in an AHRC funded project, aiming "…to produce collaboration between literary and theatrical scholars

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[22] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 352.
[23] Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Theatre and Consciousness* (Bristol: Intellect, 2005), p. 2.
[24] *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*.

and clinicians and researchers in psychiatry and neuroscience, and use the work of Samuel Beckett to interrogate current concepts of mental disorder."[25] Over the course of these events, papers were delivered which drew upon a wide cross-sector of academic disciplines including not only psychiatry and neuroscience, but also such philosophies as, most notably for this thesis, *phenomenology*; some of the same disciplines which provide key theoretical focal points for "Theatre and Consciousness" studies. It is perhaps important to note, too, that the aforementioned "Beckett and Brain Science" conferences were by no means "marginal" events; these were organised and attended by a number of today's leading Beckett scholars, many of whom are core members of the London Beckett Seminar (LBS), including Elizabeth Barry, Ulrika Maude and Laura Salisbury.

It could be argued that the research I have undertaken is of relevance to both "Theatre and Consciousness" and "Beckett and Brain Science" projects, and the fact that there has been a recent interest in the application of phenomenology to Beckett's work is significant when it comes to justifying my own. I use the above examples as a means of placing this fusion of consciousness and arts studies in the wider contemporary academic community then, as a means of *positioning* rather than *defining* my own work which, naturally, benefits from a rather more concentrated objective, being, as it is, a solid analysis of the work of one author, which is driven by the theories of a very specific philosophical school. Beckett's writings, we might argue, detail a writer engaged in a *comprehensive exploration of consciousness*, that realm of human reality that does allow us to question what it really means to *be*. I aim to view Sartre as the phenomenologist that he, at least at one time, considered himself to be, rather than the purely "existentialist" philosopher that popular culture has labelled him, and use his philosophy as a window through which the mechanisms of consciousness are made visible in the variety of forms and media employed by Beckett. I perhaps focus on Beckett's plays more than his prose in the following chapters, as these embodied entities lend themselves most readily to phenomenological analyses, but I have deliberately incorporated tele- and radio plays into this thesis, and even film, so that I might include diverse philosophies covering the full spectrum of media in what follows. This work deals in concrete theory rather than abstractions, and is at all times philosophically-led. A study of this kind cannot, and does not try to, offer a "phenomenology of performance" as such, but a *textual analysis* using a very specific set of philosophical tools; the dramatic *and*

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[25] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/currentprojects/beckettandthebrain/ (accessed 14th February 2013).

literary works, as well as the central theoretical works (*Being and Nothingness* and *The Second Sex* for instance) to be used here are, after all, *text*, and recourse to the text is the most reliable method of producing a tangible commentary on these particularly complex bodies of writing.

When I use the highly-charged term "being" in relation to Beckett's work, I do not do so in an attempt to probe the "whys" and "wherefores" of our existence, but more the "hows." Philosophers have debated the meaning of our existence since recorded time began, and we still lack a definitive answer regarding *why* we have been placed on this earth at all. Beckett seems to acknowledge our uncertainty and existential anxiety, as Esslin and others have shown, but what I seek out as particularly interesting in his writings is his depiction of *how* we go about enduring existence and/or reality as conscious human beings; how consciousness separates us from non-thinking being, or inert matter; how consciousness sustains and presents itself to being; appeals to higher levels of being; how other consciousnesses shape, inform, restrict, even torture our own; and how consciousness adapts itself to a recognition of the body's gender.

By way of briefest summary (each chapter has its own introduction and I would avoid repetition of material), in Chapter One of this thesis I will begin to view Beckett as a writer who illustrates the plight of human consciousness as it strives to differentiate itself from material reality; a mode of being which it cannot escape, as it is obliged to take on form in order to become visible. I will introduce the idealism of Bishop Berkeley in this chapter, as well as the materialism of Daniel Dennett (and touch upon Etienne Decroux's aesthetic theories of corporeality), so that I might forge a Sartrean "middle path" from which to contemplate Beckett's mime *Act Without Words I*, play *Endgame*, and novel *Company*. As the "ideal" and the "real" are unified in this chapter, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will also be brought into play, and a wealth of philosophical perspectives (those of René Descartes and Martin Heidegger for instance) will find their place here, as elsewhere, alongside a variety of classic and contemporary Beckett criticism.

In Chapter Two I will use Sartre's phenomenology of temporality, along with Derrida's deconstruction of *presence*, to suggest that Beckett's little-known prose piece *Texts For Nothing* can be placed alongside his stage works *Krapp's Last Tape* and *That Time*, in order to expose the emptiness of consciousness as it sustains and disperses itself as duration,

as a constant fleeing from being, or from being *present*. The inherent lack of presence in prose writing will be juxtaposed with notions of theatrical presence in this chapter, and the central figure of *That Time* will be taken for an evolutionary successor of Krapp, a much earlier Beckett creation. The diaspora of consciousness across the temporal dimensions that can be discerned in these works will raise questions about human reality's (in)ability to attain a concrete coincidence, or identification, with its "self", and problematize distinctions between *presence* and *absence* in time, in written language, and upon the stage (stage presence).

In Chapter Three I will explore the ways in which Beckett examines humanity's attempts to transcend the earthly, escape the body-prison, and assume higher states where, as its own witness, it can realise the "holy" or "divine" elements in its own being and manifest the invisible through art. In this chapter I will call upon not only Sartre's phenomenology, but also his writings on theatre aesthetics (which have nothing to do with the absurdist classification he invariably suffers in the history of theatre theory), and the performance philosophies of Antonin Artaud and Peter Brook will be foregrounded, whilst the religiosity/spirituality of Beckett's characters is exposed. I consider the radio play *All That Fall* and the teleplay *Ghost Trio* under the auspices of "Holy Theatre" in this chapter, before moving into an analysis of the late play *Footfalls*. Each work that I focus on in this thesis has been carefully chosen for its suitability when it comes to illuminating a particular phenomenological facet of Beckett's *oeuvre*. Often the medium that a work is written for is important to me in terms of its specific and unique features and the theory that surrounds these. I aim to include works from every chronological phase of Beckett's writing as I establish my own argument, and I look to certain titles for the simple fact that there is so little written about them already[26]; in this chapter for instance, I study *All That Fall* partly because, as Julie Campbell observes, "…Beckett's radio drama has . . . been neglected in comparison with the amount of critical work undertaken in relation to his stage drama and prose fiction, and *All That Fall* certainly deserves more attention than it has received heretofore."[27] Added to this, radio drama is intrinsically "Holy", in a Brookian sense, I will argue, as it has an unrivalled ability to make the invisible visible.

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[26] And avoid *Waiting For Godot* for the exact opposite reason.

[27] Julie Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine': Radio, the Listener, and the Dark Comedy of *All That Fall*", in *Beckett and Death*, ed. Steven Barfield, Matthew Feldman and Philip Tew (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 147-148.

Once I have taken a rigorous exploration of human subjectivity, on its own terms, to its limits in the first three chapters, the aim of the subsequent chapters is to illustrate the ways in which this mode of being is forced by Beckett to adapt and modify itself, first of all when it is faced with the concrete being of others who rearrange its world (Chapter Four), and secondly, when society imposes upon it a sex (Chapter Five). In Chapter Four I partner Sartre with Emmanuel Levinas in order to add an ethical layer to Sartre's explication of our mode of being-with-others, and Derrida's critique of Levinas' radical metaphysics of alterity is considered, as well as his writings on our relationship with the nonhuman (animal), as philosophies of "otherness" become intertwined with theories of perception. Berkeley also returns to Chapter Four as I argue that Sartre's notion of the "look" of the other is the tie that binds his *No Exit* to Beckett's *Play* and Beckett's only film (*Film*).

From the "first wave" existentialist/humanist studies of Adorno, Hesla, Butler et. al., through the "second wave" deconstructions of the prose carried out by, amongst others, Leslie Hill[28], Thomas Trezise[29] and Steven Connor[30] in the very late 1980s and early 1990s, to the "empirical" work of the "third wave" of Beckett scholars (the aforementioned interest in the Beckett archives or the "grey canon", the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project[31]) male literary theorists, and philosophies written by men (Sartre and Derrida included), have dominated the field, and this has been recognised by regular contributors to the London Beckett Seminar, who define themselves according to their "anti-orthodoxy" and encourage *new* studies, such as Maude's of Beckett and technology, and McMullan's of embodiment. At a meeting of the LBS in June 2013, Daniella Caselli noted the current "need for the new" in Beckett academia, adding that there is much scope for studies of "Beckett and gender" to be launched alongside the type of research that Maude is undertaking on Beckett and medicine, and Beckett and cognitive neuroscience (a focal point of the Beckett and Brain Science project).[32] Historically, "existentialist" readings of Beckett have offered an insight into works which raise essential questions regarding what it means *to be*, when normative metanarratives have ceased to govern, and "realist" escapism is denied. When it comes to discussions of

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[28] Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[29] Thomas Trezise, *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
[30] Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Aurora: The Davies Group, 2007).
[31] See: http://www.beckettarchive.org/
[32] These discussions took place during the following meeting of the LBS: "Beckett Studies: Tracing the Grain", a *London Beckett Seminar* event. London: Birkbeck College, 27th June 2013.

phenomenological existentialism and its proponents however, the writings of Simone de Beauvoir often seem to be eschewed, or assimilated into those of her male contemporaries, particularly Sartre. In Chapter Five, I will argue that, if we revisit Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, we can gain fresh insight into some of Beckett's *female* characters who, like Beauvoir, have a tendency to be overlooked, and a new *gendered* reading of parts of his *oeuvre* can begin to emerge. As I consider what it is to be a woman in stage works *Happy Days*, *Come and Go* and *Rockaby*, and contemplate Beckett's misogynistic representations of women in his early prose and beyond, I fuse Beauvoir's phenomenology of *being-woman* with more recent theories (including those of Luce Irigaray, Iris Marion Young, Sara Ahmed and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), in order to demonstrate that feminism is very much a phenomenological existentialism. The aim of this final chapter is to continue and enrich the phenomenological analysis of modes of being begun in the preceding chapters, and as I turn my attentions quite specifically to the mode of being unique to woman, I explore unchartered territory and establish a completely new avenue in Beckett studies: "Beckett and Beauvoir."

Chapter One

Beckett's Embodied Consciousness

The Physicality of Psychical Phenomena

This chapter marks the beginning of an exploration of Beckett's work that will touch upon a number of what we might call key, or recurring, philosophical themes, and one of the first of these, it could be argued, concerns our very existence as both conscious and biological agents. René Descartes' (1596-1650) theory that human beings, by their nature, are entities composed of two separate and elusive substances, namely mind and matter, and that our "…soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body…"[1] has long provided us with fuel for the philosophical fire, and I aim, here, to examine the literary consequences of this bifurcation of being into two distinct modes, and to establish the specific theoretical approaches to ontology that this study aims to incorporate. It is important to note from the outset that this chapter does not aim to reinvent the wheel, or offer to solve, via recourse to Beckett, the complexities of the mind-body problem, in other words, "…the problem of stating correctly the relation between the mind and the body."[2] It does seem appropriate however, to begin a work that speaks of the Beckett canon in the same breath as it speaks of "phenomenological ontology", with some discussion of physical and psychical phenomena as these appear in selected texts from that canon. I do not attempt to answer any "chicken and egg" questions here, or to state which region of being takes precedence in Beckett's work and beyond, as the rich tapestry of philosophy that has informed our thought since recorded time began has yet to provide a definitive answer to this most fundamental of human enquires. The purpose of this chapter is, rather, to "set up" the idea that we discern consciousness as a mode of being that is, in many ways, in conflict with the body and the material world in the works here discussed, whilst being inherently bound to these in spite of itself. This chapter will illustrate the plight of Beckettian consciousness as it strives to differentiate itself from a material being which it cannot escape, as it is, by its very nature, *embodied*, or obliged to take on form in order to become visible. Once we have considered the existential relationship between mind and body in Beckett's work, we will be better able to consider the writer's treatment of human consciousness in its temporal mode of being (Chapter Two); the transcendence of the Beckettian consciousness in its pursuit of the "holy" (Chapter Three);

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[1] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, trans. F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 76.

[2] Stephen Priest, *Theories of the Mind* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 210.

troubled relationships between "self" and "other" (Chapter Four); and the lived, bodily experience of being a woman, the "second sex", in a patriarchal canon (Chapter Five).

Across Beckett's work, it could be argued that we see a dualism of landscapes; the outer, objective, materialistic landscape (detailed in his stage directions, and realised by the physiological bodies and inanimate properties on his stage), and the landscape, design, or mapping of the mind (often *described* by his dysfunctional stage bodies or by the fictional narrators of his prose), which forms the world as it is known subjectively and idealistically through consciousness. Furthermore, the bodies that inhabit the Beckettian performance space, like the (dis)embodied prose narrators, quite often demonstrate, or give an account of, a radical discord between their physical situations and their psychical activities. In an overview of the vast field that is "Beckett and Philosophy", Dermot Moran suggests that: "[Beckett's] characters actually live through the Cartesian divorce of body from mind."[3] The ominous shadow of mind/body dualism in the early novel *Murphy*, to cite but one example, scarcely needs further emphasis here; Chapter Six of the work famously describes the central character's perception of himself as one, "…split in two, a body and a mind."[4] Whilst Beckett's interest in the dualist philosophy of Descartes is evident even before *Murphy* (in his depiction of the philosopher as a "…destroyer of the outworn and the architect of the future…"[5] in his "…first important work…"[6] of poetry, *Whoroscope*), this particular study does not view Beckettian minds and bodies so much as divided Cartesian entities, but as entities that are unwillingly and inextricably intertwined, as it approaches the body/mind from what we might call the "middle path" laid down by Sartre and subsequently cultivated by Merleau-Ponty.

To attempt a crude summary of Sartre's complex ontology (which the phenomenologist unpacks over some 700 pages of his *magnum opus*, *Being and Nothingness*)**,** consciousness, rather than being an entity entirely divorced from the body, can be thought of as a rising up of the psychical from a fissure, or a nothingness, *in the core of the physical being*. An awareness or *consciousness of being* constitutes, in part, what Sartre

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[3] Dermot Moran, "Beckett and Philosophy" in *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: New Island, 2006), p. 97.
[4] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 70.
[5] Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 34.
[6] Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 3.

would term human reality's mode of *being-for-itself* (*être-pour-soi*).[7] Without this awareness of being, human reality would lack any knowledge of its own existence, or the existence of other entities, and be rendered inanimate and senseless *being-in-itself* (*être-en-soi*),[8] which "…has no *within* which is opposed to a *without…*"[9] and, "…does not refer to itself as self-consciousness does."[10] *Being-in-itself*, unlike human consciousness, is precisely *what it is* at all times, never reflecting back on itself or projecting forward towards its future possibilities; it enjoys a complete fullness and totality of being, and an immediate coincidence with self. Put simply, there is, according to Sartre, a region, or mode, of concrete "being" (*being-in-itself*, which would include, for instance, objects such as rocks, tables and plant pots), and a region, or mode, of being which constitutes the "nothingness" of consciousness (*being-for-itself*); it is important to note, however, that these, rather than forming a Cartesian dualism, are intrinsically linked when it comes to humanity's unique mode of being. So, whilst we can hear echoes of Descartes in Sartre's philosophy, which also cites two distinct regions of being, for Sartre, these are *united* in the *human body*, as the body is an entity which is "…wholly 'psychic.'"[11] Sartre suggests then (in a short but vital chapter of *Being and Nothingness* entitled "The Body"[12]), that the human reality, the *being-for-itself*, is at all times an *embodied* consciousness.

Sartre recognised, before Merleau-Ponty developed his own philosophy of the body-subject, that "…the relation of consciousness to the body is an *existential* relation."[13] As we will see, in certain Beckettian worlds, "…consciousness *exists* its body"[14] and must rely on it as its sole vehicle of expression, in much the same way that thought can be said to rely on language and creativity on organised and transmittable form. Whilst many of Beckett's characters appear to yearn for a disconnection from the physical bodies which they would eschew in favour of a complete identification with their conscious thought processes, they are nonetheless slaves to form, as *embodied* beings who cannot whilst *living*, divorce their minds from their troubled biologies. In this chapter, I will suggest that in the mime *Act Without Words I* the body is depicted as conscious being's only means of interacting with its physical

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[7] This term will be used in its Sartrean sense throughout this study.

[8] As above.

[9] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 22. The italics here are Sartre's own.

[10] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 21.

[11] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 329.

[12] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 327-382.

[13] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 353. The italics here are Sartre's own.

[14] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 353. The italics here are Sartre's own.

surroundings, as it strives to secure those things that enslave it to existence, such as food, water and shelter. The body, here, is presented in its most primal sense first of all, acting without words and before spoken language, as a primary centre of reference, a means of manipulating (or failing to manipulate) the objects that constitute its world, until such a point where we *see* a recognition, in *the mind of the subject*, of the power of independent thought and prolonged reflection. The art of mime, I propose, truly enables us to see consciousness *embodied*.

In *Endgame*, I argue, Hamm takes up the story abandoned at the close of *Act Without Words I*, but he seems to will the *absolute destruction* of the physical world, in order that he might retreat even further than the central figure of the mime into subjective introspection. Hamm's struggle to establish himself as sole occupant of an esoteric realm is beset by complications as he is forced to face nature (in the form of his parents), and inert matter (his toy dog for instance), in all corners of a world that can be read, paradoxically, as the interior of his own mind. The character of Hamm, a void in the centre of the *physical stage world* of which he is undoubtedly ruler, if not creator, can be used to illustrate the Sartrean birth of consciousness from the annihilation of material being. Hamm's is a consciousness that wills its own end, an end that can only come when its anchorage to the physical and biological is fully severed. Hamm's evolutionary successor, the narrator of Beckett's much later work *Company*, speaks from a vantage point emancipated from the concrete, theatrical "thereness" that Hamm seeks to escape, as he inhabits the imaginary world of the novel. The movement from the physical stage world to the psychical world of prose betokens the progression that we might say the Beckettian protagonist has made away from his material shackles and towards an end. The subjective idealism of Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) reverberates loudly through *Company*, however there are hints that a physical world, or at least a body, *informs* this narrative, parts of which are taken from Beckett's own memory, or his own *lived*, bodily experiences. Added to this, the most persuasive evidence for the existence of matter in *Company* is the fact that the protagonist's story can only be communicated through a language expressed as words on page. Like *Act Without Words I* and *Endgame*, *Company* unfolds in a realm dominated by complex relations between mind and body, and it is unclear which, if any, of these Beckett posits as *initiator* of existence (as I say above, there is no question of choosing between chicken and egg here). What is clear is that, for the purposes of this chapter, *Company* seems to be the logical conclusion of a journey which will begin with the awakening of consciousness, or the conscience, in an

exhausted body, progress through a battle between mind and matter in a disabled body, and end on the reflections of a mind that *almost appears* to operate without one.

There is much scope, here, to launch "classic" existentialist readings of each of the aforementioned works (throughout all three works, there is an ongoing commentary on the creative process that mirrors Sartre's "existentialist" insistence that man must, at all times, create and "choose" himself for instance), however, this chapter will consider the wider and more complex phenomenological theories of certain "existentialist" philosophers, rather than reducing these to the usual discussions of "despair", "anxiety in the face of freedom" and similar "Absurdist" concerns. As I will demonstrate throughout this study, once we begin to use the theories of Sartre and company in a more rigorously philosophical, ontological sense (rather than confining these to a series of once-fashionable and easily-digestible terms coined immediately post-WWII), often placing these alongside the teachings of philosophers who both precede and radically succeed the French "school", we can begin to "open out" and liberate our conceptualisation of both the Beckettian literature we study and the phenomenology and/or philosophy of mind we layer it with.

Being-in-the-World and the Call of Conscience

The opening of Beckett's 1956 mime *Act Without Words I* sees a man "…flung backwards…"[15] into an alien landscape, where he finds himself alone, without guidance, ineffectual and insignificant, thwarted by nature at every tentative step, as he tries to find his footing on a terrain that will not yield to him. The protagonist is, perhaps, a representative for mankind, Sartre's existential man, or Martin Heidegger's[16] *Dasein* (the "…entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being…"[17]), and the scene is arguably one depicting everyman's unceremonious entrance to the world stage. Upon being hurled into life, the new and unsuspecting arrival, lacking foresight and little realising that his efforts will be in vain, "…gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects."[18] As the subject of Beckett's mime takes stock of his physical situation and,

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[15] Samuel Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 203.

[16] I introduce Heidegger's philosophy here as it is from this that Sartre's own phenomenological ontology is, essentially, born.

[17] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 27.

[18] Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, p. 203.

indeed, his *situatedness*[19], we might say that the audience are exposed to an illustration of existentialism-in-action and, on surface-level alone, there are certainly parallels with Heidegger's account of *Dasein's* "…'*thrownness*' . . . into its 'there'…"[20], or into facticity, and this particular Beckettian flinging of a *body* into being. Once he is on his feet, the protagonist, perhaps fearing abandonment (but also by way of ensuring that the spectator does not miss the significance of the gesture), returns to the wing that he was expelled from, upon hearing a whistle, only to be "…flung back…"[21] again. This business is repeated at the opposite wing and looks set to be enacted a third time until our hero realises, *upon reflection*, or upon allowing his mind to infiltrate and inform his physicality, that he does not have to continue with the game, as he has responsibility and freedom of choice when it comes to his own body, whether he wants them or not. "Man" is, from the outset, condemned, according to Sartre: "Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does."[22] Added to this, man, in spite of his freedom, is always already "thrown"; he is bound by facticity and placed in a *physical* situation (historical, geographical, sociological, and biological) over which he has little control, *but which will determine his choices.*

It would seem safe to say then, that the hapless figure cast into the desert, in the dazzling light[23] of *Act Without Words I*, somewhat resembles Sartrean/Heideggerian human reality/*Dasein* at the very origin of his existence. The protagonist is a reluctant creator of "self" who, despite using his wits, is hampered continually by his own facticity, and has to roll with the punches that befall him without explanation until he makes a conscious decision to take responsibility. Perhaps as Butler would have it, *Act Without Words I*, by the nature of its opening metaphor, is "…the *locus classicus* of thrownness in the modern theatre…"[24], but it is also much more than this. As a piece of, essentially, physical theatre, Beckett's *mime* is an exposition of human consciousness not only creating and choosing itself in classically "existentialist" fashion, but also fully inhabiting and *existing* the *body* that it must use in order to do so, before pitting itself against a seemingly unfeeling outside world. What is

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[19] A term used by some scholars to denote what is commonly translated from Martin Heidegger's philosophy as "state-of-mind". See: Einar Øverenget, *Seeing the Self: Heidegger on Subjectivity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), p.116.

[20] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 174. The italics here are Heidegger's own.

[21] Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, p. 203.

[22] Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 34.

[23] Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, p. 203.

[24] Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 37.

more, of all of the diverse artistic modes of representation that Beckett experiments with, the mime is perhaps the most perfectly suited to the illustration of an embodied philosophy, sharing, as it does, many of the key principles fundamental to the theories of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

A fundamental structure of human reality, or *Dasein* (which, in terms of its etymological construction, literally means: "Being-there"[25]), is its *being-in-the-world*[26], and according to Heidegger, "…Dasein itself – and this means also its Being-in-the-world – gets its ontological understanding of itself in the first instance from those entities which it itself is *not* but which it encounters 'within' its world and from the Being which they possess."[27] The protagonist of *Act Without Words I* is presented to us as a *conscious body* which stands out in the factical situation which constitutes its physical reality and, in its concrete *thereness*, as a biological entity which has literally been thrown into a stage world populated by inconsistent *in-itself* objects. As the *subject* of Beckett's mime moves through his world, he is informed at all times by the *objects* that are presented to him, in a seemingly haphazard way, from the flies above. The protagonist of this short play, in trimming his nails with the scissors that descend from the heavens, and stacking the cubes that appear via the same route in order to try to reach the carafe of water that is cruelly dangled out of his reach, attempts to utilise those few "…'Things' (*res*)…"[28] that he has access to in his "…concernful dealings"[29] with the world. The body, here, realises the will of consciousness, surpassing itself in order to manipulate those *in-itself* objects that it knows might passively enable it to fulfil its potential (quench its thirst for instance). Where the relation of consciousness to the body is existential then, "…the relation between the body-as-point-of-view and things is an *objective* relation…"[30], making the body aware of itself as subject and centre of conscious activity. A human body is the central organising perspective of each individual consciousness; it is the "there" around which other objects in the word are organised. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them."[31] The lone figure that Beckett throws into the desert in *Act*

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[25] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 27n.
[26] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 65. This quintessentially "existential" idea is important throughout this work.
[27] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 85. The italics here are Heidegger's own.
[28] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 96.
[29] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 96.
[30] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 353. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[31] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 94.

Without Words I attempts to engage his body in crucial projects that might ensure his biological survival in an environment that he did not choose to inhabit and, in between each burst of physical activity, he "…reflects…"[32] so that he might use his physicality intelligently, in order to outfox the malevolent governing power that would keep him from certain existential necessities and threaten his very *being-in-the-world*.

After a prolonged and futile effort to seize his physical possibilities, which include drinking water, taking shelter, and the ultimate act of existential agency, suicide, the isolated being in the desolate landscape, "…quickly learns the factical limitations of his situation."[33] The water, for this castaway, will always be out of reach in relation to *his* body, respite from the glare of the sun will never be anything more than fleeting, and the means of ending physiological existence will be removed before any definitive action can be taken, as an invisible puppet-master, of sorts, moves this world in mysterious ways. With this hard-won knowledge, however, comes what looks like dejection, and *Act Without Words I* ends with a seemingly-defeated protagonist "…lying on his side, his face towards auditorium, staring before him."[34] In such brooding states of mind, or *bad moods*, as Heidegger terms them, "…Dasein becomes blind to itself, the environment with which it is concerned veils itself, the circumspection of concern gets led astray."[35] Indeed, as the player's attentions turn from the unknown exterior forces that have dangled what Kaelin describes as "…nature's paraphernalia" before his eyes and signalled "…passing phenomena"[36] by the harsh blow of a whistle, to the *interior forces* of his existence, he becomes increasingly detached from his physical reality, his *being-in-the-world*, and lapses into what looks like inertia. Sartre suggests that when a connection with the plane of actuality becomes too great a demand on our psychic life: "When the task is too difficult and we cannot maintain the higher behaviour appropriate to it, the psychic energy released takes another path; we adopt an inferior behaviour, which necessitates a lesser psychic tension."[37] Our player, then, after presenting to us his version of the classic tale of man pitted against nature, lies "… defeated, having opted out of the struggle…"[38], and makes his retreat to the "…plane of reflection."[39] He "opts out"

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[32] Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, p. 203. This is by far the most common stage direction throughout.

[33] Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 37.

[34] Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, p. 206.

[35] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 175.

[36] Kaelin, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 222.

[37] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 18.

[38] G. C. Barnard, *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1971), p. 109.

[39] Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, p. 36.

of engagement with the unmanageable and arbitrary occurrences that create in him a "psychic tension" and render him unable to unite the instinct and the intellect, and instead seeks solace in the predictability of his thoughts alone. S. E. Gontarski suggests that: "From the first the protagonist is a thinker, but inadequately created or adapted to deal with hostile environmental forces."[40] The reflective consciousness could be viewed as the protagonist's downfall in *Act Without Words I* then, as his tendency to intellectualise his every move supresses the animal instinct that would perhaps serve him better than continuous reflection in his given circumstances. As his physical activity *decreases* however, we might say that the subject's psychical activity *increases*, and so we could equally see his introspection not as "an inferior behaviour" but as his salvation or rebellion. What is more, as this Beckett creation ceases his physical stumbling, we see mind inhabiting matter in a much more concentrated and potent sense.

So *Act Without Words I* ends with what looks like a despondent protagonist lying, face towards the audience, on the stage floor. The mime is not the first Beckett stage protagonist to end his drama horizontally however; Victor Krap, prototype male lead from Beckett's first full-length play *Eleuthéria*[41], also lies on his side in an act of rebellion in the face of the final curtain. Unlike his successor, however, Victor (a quintessentially "existentialist" antihero, who spends the entirety of the as-yet-unperformed play in a *self-imposed* imprisonment, isolated and confined to the small room he inhabits rather than live with his parents who represent a bourgeois, "inauthentic" society that he openly shuns, choosing to carve his own path, to "choose himself", in a Sartrean sense, even though this choice costs him his *being-in-the-world*), lies with "…his scrawny back turned on mankind"[42]. The central character of *Act Without Words I* may be "down" at the end of the play but, unlike an evidently "closed off" Victor, he is not out; he not only faces the audience but shows them his hand (literally, as the closing stage direction details his *looking at his hands*[43]), his consciousness of the situation, his awareness of his own body, perhaps even his contemplation of his mind's relationship with his body. This is a man who, despite being cast into a deserted landscape and buffeted relentlessly from pillar to post, will not be defeated, unlike Victor, who withdraws, plays victim, and adopts an "inferior behaviour" despite his

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[40] S. E. Gontarski, "'Birth Astride of a Grave': Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words I* ", in *The Beckett Studies Reader*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 31.
[41] Samuel Beckett, *Eleuthéria*, trans. Michael Brodsky (New York: Foxrock, 1995).
[42] Beckett, *Eleuthéria*, p. 191.
[43] Beckett, *Act Without Words I*, p. 206.

being born, or thrown, into circumstances that could hardly be more privileged. Victor has no life in him, and he chooses a living-death in the face of an easy ride. Our protagonist, on the other hand, is dealt many blows but chooses life, and he tells us this using the slightest movement of his *body*. As the player's attention turns from the world around him to the world of his own consciousness, as we watch him contemplate the existence of his own hands, perhaps we can discern in him "…that first intuition of our own contingency which Heidegger gives as the first motivation for the passage from the un-authentic to the authentic."[44] Victor is all extraneous spoken language (this play is, of course, an early work that Beckett did not allow to be published in his lifetime), whereas our hero cuts to the heart of the matter of existence using his physicality as the sole vehicle of communication, and what he communicates, what we can *see* is surely the inner-workings of his mind, a "…call of the conscience (*Ruf des Gewissens*), a feeling of guilt."[45] In hearing, from within himself, and responding to "…the call of conscience…"[46] of *his own consciousness*, man *chooses* himself[47], and this protagonist, unlike his predecessor:

> In his refusal to be driven by need, to devote himself to physical existence, solely to survival and pleasure (shade, water, the off-stage womb, for instance) . . . has created a free, separate, individual self. He has said with Camus' rebel, so far and no further.[48]

The player has used his mind to liberate himself in a way that Victor cannot, but this does not mean that his body has been entirely displaced; his body has informed us of his every shift in consciousness and of our own mode of *being* embodied consciousness. As he stumbles, as he drops to the ground, as he stares at his hands and recognises that *they belong to him*, the protagonist reminds us that the mime is, in fact, perhaps the purest medium through which the mind can be seen to inhabit and *exist* the body.

Acting Without Words

Etienne Decroux (1898 - 1991), "…father of modern corporeal mime…"[49]and Parisian contemporary of Beckett and Sartre, sought to express the inner-narrative, or music, of the artist using forms and images created by the *human body* rather than the written word.

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[44] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.104.

[45] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.104.

[46] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 319.

[47] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 334.

[48] Gontarski, "'Birth Astride of a Grave': Samuel Beckett's *Act Without Words I* ", p. 32.

[49] John Rudlin, "Jacques Copeau: The Quest for Sincerity", in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 75.

As I have written elsewhere[50], Decroux's performance philosophy, rather like Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, details a corporeal consciousness that is closer to "the thing itself", to a pure expression of artistic truth, than is normative speech. The notion that speech acts are subject to interference as they pass from pure thought to utterance is explored by a wealth of philosophers from diverse "schools"; not least Bishop Berkeley, who, like Beckett, Decroux, and the phenomenologists seeks "…deliverance from the deception of words…"[51] behind which might be found the truth of "…naked, undisguised ideas."[52] We might be forgiven for thinking, then, that Berkeley would approve of the mime, as it forces the performer to enact his/her truth in a "pure" sense, without recourse to falsifying words. Berkeley's idealist philosophy, as we shall see throughout this work, is at odds with the ontology used here in many respects, but shares certain principles with it nonetheless, as Berkeley, like Beckett and the French "existentialists" deals in *lived experience* rather than *abstract systems* such as structural linguistics or deconstruction. Beckett's placing of the body at the forefront of the action of *Act Without Words I* however, makes a "phenomenological" reading of the play more appropriate than a Berkeleyan one, as Berkeley, whilst aiming to pierce the Cartesian "veil of perception" (which would see our ideas taking on something of a purified or deified form in relation to the brute reality of the things themselves that actually exist in the world), actually denies that region of being that we would call matter (Sartrean *being-in-itself*) and posits phenomena as having no extended being outside of a consciousness directly informed by God. Berkeley does differentiate between what he calls the ideas of sense (physical sensations), and the ideas of the imagination (what we might call psychical phenomena), but he is adamant that both are *ideas* nonetheless, and that "…no idea . . . can exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it."[53] As we discuss mime we discuss concrete, physiological bodies, *bodies* that would *be* the existence of ideas; in Decroux's words: "The body is a glove whose finger is thought."[54] Minds *inhabit bodies* in the world of mime, and when the *body speaks*, gets behind words and directly expresses ideas, we can perhaps discern something closer to the articulation of unadulterated thought on the part of the performer than we encounter in text-based theatre. Beckett knew only too well the ability of words to displace the artist's meaning, and he

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[50] Susan Mower, "Etienne Decroux: A Corporeal Consciousness", in *Performing Consciousness*, ed. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe and Per Brask (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) pp. 194-212.
[51] George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 21. Berkeley's theories (particularly his theory of vision) will also be discussed in Chapter Four.
[52] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 23.
[53] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 37.
[54] Etienne Decroux, *Words on Mime*, trans. Mark Piper (California: Mime Journal, 1985), p. 12.

writes, in his monograph on Marcel Proust, of how a literary work "…takes form…"[55] in the mind of the creator, who then "accepts regretfully the sacred ruler and compass of literary geometry."[56] The mime, however, whilst free of what Berkeley would term the "…embarras and delusion of words…"[57] in performance, does not unfold in some purely esoteric realm but, rather, demonstrates what Merleau-Ponty would describe as, the "…fusion of soul and body in the act, the sublimation of biological into personal existence, and of the natural into the cultural world…"[58] being, as it is, a *physical means* of channelling *metaphysical ideas*.

Beckett's mime, of course, is not to be taken as a work of physical theatre, devised and enacted by the artist, in quite the same sense as Decroux's mime. Beckett's work *is* reliant on a written script, which can be repeated by an actor with the technical skill to follow the stage directions, whereas Decroux's pieces (*The Carpenter* and *The Washerwoman* for instance) have been "handed down" in rather more ephemeral sense from teachers to pupils; Decroux's pupils have, however, *theorised* these performances and the method, in a reversal, one might say, of the normative sequence of events.[59] Beckett's *Act Without Words I* treads the fine line between physical and physical phenomena, between the spontaneity of a live performer, and the encoded directions of a writer whose thoughts inform those of that performer. Through prescriptive authorship of stage directions, rather than dialogue, Beckett exposes the relationship between the signifier and the signified, as he transforms normative linguistic narration into dramatic action, and turns silence into man's essential discovery of self. It is the performing *body* that takes centre stage in *Act Without Words I*, as it becomes the medium through which the playwright's ideas are channelled, and Beckett manages to progress from mere substitution of the word by the deed, to a depiction of the awakening of the consciousness of man, as demonstrated by a decrease in physical animation of character; the resulting internal conflict is perhaps one which can only be demonstrated by a live performer in the theatre, *sans paroles*.

In a rather scathing criticism of *Act Without Words I*, John Spurling writes that, in the drama, Beckett uses,

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[55] Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 11.
[56] Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues*, p. 12.
[57] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 22.
[58] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 97.
[59] See, for instance: Thomas Leabhart's *Etienne Decroux* (London Routledge, 2007).

> …a single actor and a variety of stage machinery and props
> which are set against him by malevolent persons unknown off
> stage, the whole mime recalling the passage in *Waiting for
> Godot* where Vladimir and Estragon contemplate hanging
> themselves from a bough of their tree. But *Act Without Words I*
> is by comparison over-explicit, over-emphasized and even,
> unless redeemed by its performer, so unparticularized as to as to
> verge on the banal.[60]

Spurling seems to be making the mistake, here, of suggesting that Beckett's subsequent works must suffer the indignity of having their very worth measured only by comparison to the sacred monolith that is *Waiting for Godot*. *Act Without Words I* is a much shorter piece than *Godot*, and is written in a different medium; one that I hope I have demonstrated can be looked to on its own aesthetic terms. Certainly there are themes-in-common with *Godot*, *Endgame*, and other selections from Beckett's *oeuvre*, but what this piece does so skilfully is the representation of man's existential, *embodied* plight *in a microcosm*, and without relying on the conventions of theatrical dialogue. Rather than allowing its "truth" to be veiled by words, the mime speaks more earnestly of the contingent existence of humanity itself, an existence before spoken language; *Act Without Words I* captures "…the bare essentials of a human life subsisting in an environment that continually changes without regard to human purposes and which supports human life or not, depending upon man's ability to bring instinct and intelligence into effective harmony for the fulfilment of his needs and desires."[61] It is surprising that an essay written in 1972 has not tapped into a philosophy which was virtually its contemporary; the "banality" of the piece is surely a direct reflection of the routine, mundane repetition that comprises, and compromises, so much of our everyday lives, particularly when it comes to the fundamental necessities of watering and sheltering that physical element of ourselves that can seem to act as antithesis to the imaginative faculties of consciousness. Spurling further argues that,

> …when Beckett ceases to speak he ceases to speak to himself
> and begins playing charades. It becomes clear that the physical
> movements, gestures, comic routines which form an
> accompaniment to the words in all his plays are no more than
> accompaniment; the real action in Beckett's plays is in the
> words and between the words.[62]

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[60] John Spurling, "Into Action", in John Fletcher's and John Spurling's *Beckett: A Study of his Plays* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), p. 118.
[61] Kaelin, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 224.
[62] Spurling, "Into Action", p. 119.

Spurling seems to be proposing a purely academic form of theatre then, if, indeed, he is so bold as to suggest that action should be viewed as secondary in its employment as the very *embodiment* of the words of the playwright. Or perhaps his judgement is clouded by a particular production where the physicality of the lead failed to create the image that a *reader* of a linguistically-reliant performance piece can realise as s/he transfers the matter of the inscribed word on the page into the brain, where the subjective consciousness can proceed *freely* with the interpretation of that same. Drama is, however, written to be performed, not read, and *action* inhabits the universe of the play as the mind does the body. It is this unity of the physical (*in-itself*) and the psychical (*for-itself*) which is as crucial to the stage world as it is to the world we know as human beings. There is no real divorce of body and mind in the theatre even if such a divorce is the fiction being represented; theatre is about, and relies on, humans, and humans exist as conscious *bodies*.

Staging Consciousness

As *Act Without Words I*'s player detaches himself from his biological needs and ceases his "clowning", a new emphasis is placed on his psychological needs and impulses, and these are illustrated through a dynamically-charged, pensive reduction of movement. As Ruby Cohn states, over the course of the one act drama that she describes as Beckett's version of the myth of Tantalus: "The mime's wishes and flashes accrete into a farce-punctuated education - toward immobility."[63] There is something in the protagonist's immobility in the face of natural forces then, that allows his mind a greater freedom and, in this sense, he reminds us of Murphy, who cannot "…come alive in his mind…" until his "…body [is] appeased…"[64] or, to be specific, tied naked to his "…rocking-chair of undressed teak…"[65] by his own hand. Butler writes that,

> …Beckett is clearly very concerned to get people to stay still.
> He blinds and maims them, puts them in sand, jars, wheelchairs,
> dustbins and mud. Progressively his characters, talking or silent,
> grind to a halt. […] And is all this not an attempt to get rid of
> the spurious sense of purpose engendered by motion? To get the
> 'just-thereness' of a character on to paper or the stage?[66]

As we progress from the mime, through *Endgame*, to *Company* (where the narrator is the epitome of a character "just there" on paper, barely more than a generator of images born of

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[63] Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 219.
[64] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 4.
[65] Beckett, *Murphy*, p. 3.
[66] Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 11.

physical stillness and mental activity), the Beckett protagonist *does* become less physically able and more mentally agile, and the scope for discussion of a Cartesian discord between mind and body, or even a Berkeleyan refutation of the existence of matter independent of the mind, thereby broadens. I would argue, however, that these works, whilst "grinding to a halt" in a variety of ways, still place focus on "…embodied subjects"[67] whose varying levels of physiological incapacity do not render them immaterial but, rather, help to place the relationship that *human consciousness* has with the outside world that is at all times presented to it under the microscope. The "just-thereness" that Butler describes is, I would suggest, the elusive conscious being of the Beckett creation, which, in *Endgame*, is made visible in its mode of *being-for-itself*, as it *denatures* itself, in order to *differentiate* itself from what it sees as an opposing, natural or bodily, mode of being that would hold it hostage and subject it to biological processes.

The nucleus of *Endgame* is a physically-impaired Hamm who, in his wheelchair, centre stage, is like an *embodied* Murphy, but without the need for external restraints, as he has undergone an absolute *internalisation* of Murphy's desire for bodily paralysis. Hamm, who is blind, has closed the outer, biological eye, so that he might better see the interior of his own consciousness and, indeed, it is this troubled interior that may well generate the physical components of the play itself. Adorno does much to illustrate what we might call Hamm's Berkeleyan "ownership" of both the playing space and its contents, in his description of *Endgame*'s setting:

> The hybris of idealism, which enthroned man as the creator in the centre of the creation, has barricaded itself in this 'bare interior,' like a tyrant in his last days . . . Clov is his male nurse. Hamm lets him push him in his wheelchair into the middle of that interior, which is all that is left of the world and which at the same time is the interior of his own subjectivity.[68]

Endgame's "[b]are interior"[69] is mutable in its neutrality, and acts as a palimpsest, upon which can be projected our own subjective imaginings, as well as those of Hamm, our protagonist, and Clov, who acts as his/our eyes. The views that Clov claims to have of earth and sea *beyond* the remnants of the (stage) world, come from the "…*two small windows…*"[70] high up on the back wall, and, as William Demastes rather boldly states: "Easily construed as

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[67] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 236.
[68] Adorno, "Towards an Understanding of *Endgame*", pp. 110-111.
[69] Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 92.
[70] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 92.

eyes high up on the wall, the set literally becomes an 'inside-of-his-head' arrangement, and *Endgame* becomes – as do all of Beckett's plays – a study of how the brain/mind works to reach out to the world before our eyes, even those eyes that are sometimes closed shut."[71] When it comes to consciousness "reaching out" to a world that may or may not exist beyond it as extended being however, Alain Robbe-Grillet reminds us that the landscape *outside* the windows, or before Hamm's metaphorical eyes, is invisible to the audience, and "…uninhabitable in the strictest sense of the word: as much as a black cloth would be, on which might be painted the water or the sand."[72] The outer world of *Endgame* provides no refuge from, or anchorage for, subjectivity; it is as inhospitable as the play's interior setting, and so continually deflects our attention, turning it inwards. The enquiring mind searches within and without for a "way in" to the world of *Endgame*, only to find that Beckett has closed both the interior and exterior doors. In providing so little by way of recognisable setting, or given exterior circumstances, *Endgame* constantly refers us back to our own consciousness, which is guided by the narrative of an idealistic central protagonist whose skull is perhaps pictorially represented (Hugh Kenner, like Demastes, speaks of "…the great skull-like setting…"[73] of this play) by the set beyond which nothing tangible exists. We could say, then, that *Endgame* acts, on one level, as a Berkeleyan commentary on the primacy of subjective experience and the indeterminacy of that which may or may not exist outside it; this commentary, however, is ironically delivered to us by way of an inherently *physical*, concrete medium.

We could consider that the physical setting of *Endgame* is a mere technicality, a necessity for "staging consciousness", as it were, "presenting subjectivity", or allowing being to *stand forth*. Robbe-Grillet writes of the theatre's innate propensity for ontology in what we recognise as essentially phenomenological terms:

> 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*.[74]

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[71] William W. Demastes, *Staging Consciousness: Theater and the Materialisation of the Mind* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 59.

[72] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p. 123.

[73] Hugh Kenner, "Life in the Box", in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame*, p. 54.

[74] Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, p. 111. The italics here are Robbe-Grillet's own.

Hamm, however, perhaps in recognition of the incompleteness of his ephemeral existence as a *fictive* character, exclaims that he "…was never there"[75], fighting against the very medium that makes him manifest. We could argue that Hamm would cite consciousness, rather than physical *thereness,* as his "primary quality" as he tries incessantly to escape to some ethereal realm, and seeks to eradicate and/or control anything that brings him too close to concrete reality. Hamm has *deliberately* shut out the world beyond the cyclorama, and *Endgame*, as we have seen, possesses no definitive co-ordinates with which consciousness can plot its geographic location, or towards which it can reach. Elaine Scarry suggests that: "Beckett's primary interest . . . resides not in . . . exterior landscapes but rather in their equally elemental counterpart, man's psychic and existential landscapes."[76] It is worth remembering, however, that we would have no access to Hamm's "existential landscape" were he not presented to us as a performing *body*[77] amidst the world of the stage, and the deliberate reduction of that body and its "exterior landscape" is perhaps the very thing that *enables* us to "zoom in" on the human psyche. Jeremy Ekberg considers Beckett's reduction of both his characters' physicalities and their exterior reference points in the following way:

> Throughout his oeuvre, Beckett explores the effects reduced exteriorities have on his characters. These reduced exteriorities – whether in setting as in *Waiting for Godot*, or in physical mobility as in *Endgame* – enable the playwright to focus his audience's attention on the workings of human consciousness.[78]

Beckett's interest in "exteriorities" is as vital as his interest in "interiorities", then; the physical components of the stage are not *overlooked* in favour of their psychical counterparts, but *used* to foreground, and direct the audience's focus towards, conscious activity. Hamm's body, like the player's body in *Act Without Words I*, provides the key to the nature of his world. In *Endgame*, physical bodies are, like the exterior landscape, incomplete, and we could conceive, embodying consciousness as we do so, that the characters' *physical* symptoms are simply outward manifestations of *psychical* disturbances (if indeed the stage is representative of subjective space), as: "Consciousness does not limit itself to the projection of affective meanings upon the world around it; it *lives* the new world it has thereby constituted – lives it directly, commits itself to it, and suffers from the qualities that the

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[75] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 128.

[76] Elaine Scarry, *Resisting Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 92-93.

[77] For a more detailed discussion of "stage presence", see Chapter Two.

[78] Jeremy Ekberg, "The Chronicles of Endgame: Lost Narratives and Power Relations in Conscious Spaces", in in *Ethical Encounters: Boundaries of Theatre, Performance and Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe and Daniel Watt (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 34-35.

concomitant behaviour has outlined."[79] Hamm does not resist the Beckettian reduction of exteriorities but, rather, he helps implement that reduction and *lives* it. Hamm has shut down *Endgame*'s physical possibilities so that we might concentrate on the one mode of existence that *he* recognises as superior to its unthinking counterpart: consciousness.

Stilling Nature

The natural world and its finitude stand as a constant and unavoidable threat to the seeming infinitude of humanity's conscious life and, being subject to the laws of nature or "… being finite, Dasein's world is fraught with tragic consequences."[80] Hamm minimises his own facticity by attempting to fly from it, cutting his ties with nature, biology and, ultimately, life. The stilling of illogical nature (antithesis of the lofty intellect he would exercise), becomes Hamm's ultimate goal, and any signs that a natural world exists *outside of his mind* must, for him, be eradicated. When Clov announces that he has a flea, for instance, Hamm fears the worst:

> HAMM: [*Very perturbed.*] But humanity might start from there
> all over again! Catch him, for the love of God![81]

This unlikely sign of life may come as something of a surprise to the inhabitants of the barren landscape of *Endgame*, particularly as Hamm has worked hard on reducing natural phenomena, so that he might focus instead on the ideas of his imagination, which Berkeley would have us believe "…are faint, weak, and unsteady…"[82] in comparison with the sensory experiences that he claims are our direct perception of God. Once the flea powder is fetched, Hamm demands Clov let the creature, "…have it!"[83], launching a war against the biological with the chemical, and demonstrating his need for control of all creatures within his orbit. Clov's sighting of another "…potential procreator"[84] (a small boy), however, is met with incredulity, as the boy's chances of survival outside of the shelter are, to Hamm's mind, negligible. Hamm is perhaps trying to convince himself, as well as the audience, that there is nothing of import looming on the offstage horizon that would threaten the completion of his chronicle, when he states, in varied terms throughout: "Outside of here it's death."[85] Human mortality is foregrounded in *Endgame* then, as intelligent being and imagination are viewed

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[79] Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, p. 51. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[80] Kaelin, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 227.
[81] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 108.
[82] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 38. This theory will be tested on *Company* on p.40.
[83] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 108.
[84] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 131.
[85] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 96.

as fragile in the face of the rejected elements, and a boy's existence is judged to be transient in comparison to that of a flea.

The threat to Hamm's idealistic realm comes not only from offstage forces channelled through fleas and children, but also from an onstage biology that is derided and despised. Nagg and Nell are our strongest link to nature and the outside world in *Endgame*, as they recount past, shared, *bodily* experiences, in an earthly, dialogic style which is at odds with Hamm's cerebral monologue. They enjoy recalling their own temporal journey, their *being-in-the-world,* and even longingly reminisce about losing their "…shanks"[86]; they *once* had the freedom required to ride and crash a tandem. Nagg and Nell, like Hamm and Clov, possess bodies as dysfunctional and ravaged as the outer landscape, or the landscape of Hamm's mind, and now they are committed, as exhibits in a museum, to their containers, where they are left to rot, decline, and fester in sand, soiled with the waste products of human existence, steeped in the filth of their own crime: humanity.

Nagg and Nell are presented to us as antiquated relics of normative physical, human, and sexual relations, who can no longer reach each other to kiss, and who are cursed by their very offspring, Hamm, who refers to Nagg as an: "Accursed progenitor!"[87] These onstage reminders of the truth of biological reproduction, the conventional family unit, and sincere human emotion are an acute embarrassment and source of contempt for Hamm, and in his insistence that his parents be "…bottled…"[88] (shut away in their garbage bins), there are echoes of Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* (1932), in which sexual reproduction is beyond civilised comprehension, and birth involves the, "…trauma of decanting…"[89] each embryo from whence it is artificially "bottled" and its future "…predestined…"[90] by means of scientific engineering. In a line which may be music to Hamm's ears, and which could be taken directly from Sartre's *Nausea*, Huxley explains the reasoning behind the conditioning of the "decanted" infants against nature: "Primroses and landscapes . . . have one grave defect: they are gratuitous."[91] The idea of the gratuitous biological family, bound together by love and natural emotion, is viewed in Huxley's work as nothing short of pornographic,

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[86] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 100.
[87] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 96.
[88] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 103.
[89] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 9.
[90] Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 7.
[91] Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 18.

"…smut…"[92], just as Hamm denounces the lack of "…decency…" displayed by "…the old folks at home!"[93] The body's biological systems are not *allowed* to operate without intervention in *Endgame*'s Huxleyan dystopia, and Hamm has to be mechanically aided even to perform the most basic of bodily functions:

> HAMM: […] My anger subsides. I'd like to pee.
> CLOV: [*With alacrity.*] I'll go and get the catheter.[94]

Everything pertaining to biological existence is laboured in *Endgame*, everything is strained, and bodily fluids have to be extracted by force. Nell has to *try* to cry[95] in this denatured environment, perhaps in an attempt to reinstate the natural laws of cause and effect. Nell, like Hamm in his self-appointed role as tragic lead, attempts to assume emotion or, rather, "adorn" emotion as one would a coat, and emotion without the accompanying disorder becomes, "…mere signification, an emotional schema."[96] Perhaps Nell's attempt to apply emotion "from-the-outside-in", as it were, is representative of a human reality taking cover under siege, or an artificial reality *merely signified* by the schizoid consciousness of its main protagonist, Hamm. The days of man's emotional and physiological responses operating under predictable conditions, or even occurring in accordance to a particular set of stimuli, have long since passed either way, and we are in a world where nature is controlled, contained, and stifled by a subjectivity that is hesitating to end. For one who would escape the grim reality of physicality, the presence of a dying Nagg and Nell is too stark a reminder of the natural world, from which they are the remains; they, like the flea, and like all manner of inanimate being, must be eradicated from Hamm's conscious space.

By way of a comparative aside, Hamm's involvement with the *inanimate* objects in his environment goes some way towards highlighting the fundamental difference between Sartre's *being-in-itself*, the being of phenomena, and *being-for-itself*, the being of consciousness. When Hamm demands his dog, a three-legged toy of Clov's making[97], he is hoping for something more than a mere trifle; the dog represents, for Hamm, a fixed ideal. Hamm anthropomorphises Clov's creation, and the dog is a surrogate for actual physical companionship, loyalty and servitude, with the countenance of *denatured* passivity. Hamm desires the enactment of a master/slave or ruler/subject scenario with the dog, along with the

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[92] Huxley, *Brave New World*, p. 18.
[93] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 96.
[94] Beckett, *Endgame*, pp. 103-104.
[95] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 101.
[96] Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, p. 50.
[97] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 111.

dog's gratitude and dependence, just as he requires Clov to acknowledge his debt to him, the man who has been both father and giver of shelter to the orphan. Hamm seeks constant reassurance that he is in fact the centre, the nucleus, of the world ("Am I right in the centre?"[98]), and the dog helps him to further establish himself as the dominant entity in the play:

> HAMM: [*His hand on the dog's head*.] Is he gazing at me?
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: [*Proudly*.] As if he were asking me to take him for a walk?
> CLOV: If you like.
> HAMM: [*As before*.] Or as if he were begging me for a bone. [*He withdraws his hand*.] Leave him like that, standing there imploring me.[99]

Hamm is childish, tempestuous, and subject to wild fluctuations in mood (cause and effect no longer operating as they once did), so it is perhaps not surprising when, later, he directs an unprovoked outburst the unthinking object that has been lying at his feet:

> HAMM: Give him up to me. [CLOV *picks up the dog and gives it to* HAMM. HAMM *holds it in his arms. Pause.* HAMM *throws away the dog*.] Dirty brute![100]

Hamm still gains some limited pleasure from the reliance of others upon him, so perhaps his unprovoked anger at the dog stems from a momentary realisation of the fact that, whilst the dog is a physical, unchanging representation of an ideal, its lack of innate being, of consciousness, renders it fundamentally incapable of need. This "…brute beast…"[101], the opposite of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell, whilst reminiscent in his physical disability, is a cruel reminder of the contingent, inert, *being-in-itself*, which is juxtaposed with the ever-transcending *being-for-itself* of our protagonist. As Heidegger would have it[102], and as is demonstrated in *Act Without Words I*, we gain our ontological understanding of ourselves from the entities which we *are not* ourselves, but which we encounter within our world, and from the Being which they possess. Hamm experiences the dog as an object *present-at-hand* and, in this sense, it becomes "accessible" to him, to his body, but without offering any reciprocal relation. Heidegger explains that inanimate objects cannot "touch" in any real sense of the word as: "If the chair could touch the wall, this would pre-suppose that the wall

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[98] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 104.
[99] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 112.
[100] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 120.
[101] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 132.
[102] See p. 17, note 27.

is the sort of thing 'for' which a chair would be *encounterable*."[103] Hamm's world, as a thinking, psychical, sensing being, is rocked by the incapacity of the object to enter into conscious exchange; he knows himself to be touching an object which is not touching him. The humble passivity of Hamm's faithful companion is his very undoing, as: "The present-at-hand, as Dasein encounters it, can, as it were, assault Dasein's being."[104] If the dog is "present-at-hand" but not conscious, Hamm must accept the being of an inert matter that, in part, constitutes his own physical reality. Hamm is *not* a divided Cartesian entity, or a ghost operating a machine, he is an *embodied subject*, and it is only *as* an embodied subject that he is able to *touch*, hold and manipulate *in-itself* objects at all; as Antonio Damasio writes, "…when we see, or hear, or touch or taste or smell, body proper *and* brain participate in the interaction with the environment."[105] Hamm, then, lashes out in order to defend *being-for-itself* from the stark realism offered to him by the clearest example of *being-in-itself*, which "…is not subject to temporality" and "…can support no connection with the other"[106], in the play.

The Nihilation of Being and the Birth of Consciousness.

Hamm, as we have seen, seeks to destroy exteriority so that he might remain as that "…big sore"[107] in its centre, and in this respect it is possible to argue that his is an extended metaphor for the Sartrean birth of consciousness. For Sartre, human consciousness, rather than being an entity divorced from materiality, arises from a fissure, as it were, in the physical body: "The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself; it is like a hole of being at the heart of being."[108] Hamm, who would be a conscious mind untroubled by materiality, is the epitome of *for-itself* being, taken to its absolute limits on the stage, as he is nothing if not a gaping hole that threatens to consume all being from within its very centre. From Hamm, everything issues, his bleeding heart *is* that void from whence all desolation springs, and his subjectivity constitutes his disintegrating physical world. Butler suggests that Beckett's characters, post-Watt, are,

> …plunged into their worlds irrevocably and their worlds are
> indistinguishably real-and-ideal; their mental life, far from
> being cut off in some way from their physical existence, is so

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[103] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 81. The italics here are Heidegger's own.
[104] Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 21.
[105] Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (London: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 224. The italics here are Damasio's own.
[106] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 22.
[107] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 107.
[108] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 637.

> intimately bound up with it that we could claim that the two are one. […] In *Endgame* . . . Hamm's world is very definitely Hamm's complete world and questions as to its status according to the dualist criteria seem irrelevant."[109]

Butler's words, whilst rightfully establishing the inextricability of mind and body in Beckett's works, seem to imply a unity, a harmony, and a dissolution of conflict between the two modes of being, but Beckett's characters *are* ontologically conflicted; they are not in a state of holistic peace. There is a jarring between the physical and the psychical in *Endgame* which is perhaps *caused* by their dependence on one another, and this provides much of the action of the drama. Hamm hardly strikes one as the epitome of a being who has united the instinct with the intellect and discovered the key to the mind-body problem; he is *trying* to leave the physical behind by *consuming it entirely*. Demastes argues that "…Beckett's theater [*sic*] takes full advantage of the physicality of the theater to probe the interconnections between nature and mind, suggesting as a result that consciousness arises out of nature, rather than being, metaphysically and dualistically, something other than nature."[110] Mind and nature *are* interconnected in *Endgame*, just as they are in Sartre's, and Merleau-Ponty's, phenomenology, the one arising from the other, but they frequently engage in something that looks like a "dualistic" struggle nonetheless. Consciousness, according to Sartre, is the usurpation of the *in-itself* and the privation of being, and Hamm, a consciousness on a quest for absolute domination, would remove *all* traces of his attachment to materiality. The battle *against* the physical, contingent world (begun, we might say, in *Act Without Words I*), is a constant occupation for Hamm as: "The for-itself has no reality save that of being the nihilation of being."[111] Hamm, as we have seen, abhors nature (his is "…the life to come"[112], the "…hole of being at the heart of being") but he cannot escape it as it has *engendered* him: he is *in it*. Hamm might agree, with Descartes, that the dependency of the mind on the body is "…manifestly a defect…"[113] but he cannot be rid of the body itself, particularly as he, unlike the narrator of *Company*, depends upon bodies, conscious and otherwise, to people his creation. Rather than a "wholeness" in Hamm's psychophysical being there is a conflict, and Sartrean consciousness arises *as* a conflict and a destructive force.

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[109] Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, p. 26.
[110] Demastes, *Staging Consciousness*, p. 59.
[111] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 637.
[112] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 116.
[113] Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, p. 56.

Hamm, then, is the nihilation of being, or the birth of a consciousness that would consume all. The tragic upshot of Hamm's megalomania is that as he destroys his surroundings, first the outer world, and then the contents of his own shelter, he disposes of that which will *sustain* his own *for-itself* being. It is possible, of course, that Hamm seeks an end to consciousness and a return to nothingness, and so realises that he must sever his connections with nature, biology, and material being in order to finally gain peace, to end the narrative that is his only occupation. A slumberous Hamm states at the very beginning of the play that, "…it is time it ended and yet I hesitate to − [*he yawns*] − to end."[114] Towards the end of the play however, Hamm, who has exhausted the fuel which formerly fired his world, who has nothing of use, nothing *consumable* left, is finally forced to admit: "It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you anymore."[115] As the world of the play grinds to a halt, Robbe-Grillet writes:

> As a matter of fact, the companion's role does come to an end:
> there is no more biscuit, no more painkiller, there is no more
> *anything* to give to the invalid. There is nothing left for Clov to
> do but leave.[116]

Hamm, "the creator in the centre of his creation", realises that, if he is to close the curtain on his "…theater [*sic*] of the mind"[117] then: "To be in the middle, to be motionless, is not enough: he must also be rid of all useless accessories."[118] As Hamm divests himself of his physical objects (interestingly he hesitates before disposing of the dog), he resolves to "…speak no more."[119] Hamm, therefore, turns his back on the outer world and the spoken word, *his* primary and *physical* means of communication, and returns to his interior. Hamm's dependence on objects and on Clov, his sole means of maintaining biological survival, has only delayed his enactment of the simultaneous birth and death of consciousness, and at the play's ambiguous end Hamm, like Clov, heads towards a dubious freedom. Hamm and Clov's proposed separation betokens a termination of the physical and thereby psychical world (certainly for Hamm who cannot feed himself, and likely for Clov who knows that the world away from Hamm is death), and acts a suicide pact which, unlike that flippantly made by *Waiting for Godot*'s Vladimir and Estragon, is on the verge of fulfilment at the end of the play when, with Clov looking on, Hamm prepares for his difficult delivery into the ether. As

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[114] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 93.
[115] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 131.
[116] Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, p. 123. The italics here are Robbe-Grillet's own.
[117] Demastes, *Staging Consciousness*, p. 64.
[118] Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel*, p. 122.
[119] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 133.

a transient, fictive being, whose existence is measured by his time spent inhabiting a body upon a stage, Hamm ends his drama as he begun it; covered and motionless, awaiting his return to the intangible oblivion from whence he came.

In the gradual removal, or dissipation, of extended being that marks the end of *Endgame*, we see something resembling a transition from the physical world of the play, to the psychical world of the novel. The "narrator" of *Company* (1980) makes no recourse to the physical aids (or theatrical props) to storytelling which Hamm takes up only to dispose of, as he is able to generate a world that would *seem* to be born of consciousness alone. *Company*, a *prose* work, presents us with a world that has been radically decontextualized to a point beyond which any theatrical work can reach, and one which sees an active consciousness creating itself and eradicating not only that *bodily* action upon which theatrical performance relies, but also *narrative* action as we would ordinarily conceive it. *Company* does not present the reader with a fictive world governed by familiar laws; there is no linear structure to this narrative; no plot or "story"; no descriptive account of locale in the usual sense; and certainly no characters with accessible biographies or psychologies that we are encouraged to understand or relate to. The consciousness that we *see* in *Company* seems to be a free-floating consciousness *that sustains and multiplies itself* (from some unspecified region of being on the outer-reaches of our comprehension), whilst feeding off the imaginative capacities of the reader. When a piece of writing is staged, it is *given* a physical presence and significance not only by the writer, but also by a whole production team, and although no two people will "read" a performance in exactly the same way, the live performance is far more *suggestive* than the independent reading of a novel such as *Company*, by virtue of the fact that, as Jonathan Kalb writes, "…imagined darkness can be filled with a plurality of indeterminate visions, whereas actual theatrical darkness is broken only by one perspicuous vision at a time."[120] It could be argued that *Company* acts, in many ways, like a fictive representation of Berkeleyan idealism, free, as it is, of the latent objectivity of the stage world. I would argue, however, that despite *Company*'s relative liberation from matter, the narrator is, in fact, *embodied*, not only by the direct access he has to Beckett's own lived experiences and his descriptions of sensory phenomena (which Berkeley would argue are still, like imagined phenomena, *ideas* of the perceiving *mind*), but also by his very incarnation as words on a page, as a series of signifiers, transmittable from one brain/mind to another. Just as Sartre's

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[120] Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 121.

ontology treads a middle path between idealism and materialism, so too does the being of this Beckett creature, and the flights and fluctuations of consciousness that we see in both are always grounded in an essentially concrete mode of *being-in-the-world*.

From the Ideal to the Real

The basic premise of *Company* is encapsulated on its opening page with the following line: "To one on his back in the dark a voice tells of a past."[121] Our only guide throughout *Company* is a "narrator" (who describes both the aforementioned scene and the voice of the "speaker" who recounts tales from a past life), whose narrative is interspersed with the "speaker's" interjections, which seem to directly address the reader as much as they do the supine subject or "…hearer"[122] towards whom they are aimed. It is difficult for the reader to ascertain just how many voices inhabit the immaterial world of *Company*, as these come (without tangible context, explanation, or even visual reference point) out of the darkness beyond the prose.[123] Added to this, the "narrator" deliberately problematizes his own narrative, changing both tone and direction at will, as we attempt to follow a sequence of what seem like: "Unformulable gropings of the mind."[124] *Company* lacks a normative first person narrative, and we are convolutedly advised by the "narrator" that:

> Use of the second person marks the voice [of the "speaker"].
> That of the third that cankerous other [the "hearer" who *might*
> provide a first person narrative is, instead, narrated in the third
> person].[125]

The "hearer" *is* the *experiencing subject* at the novel's centre however, and it would seem that his confusion is equal to ours, as: "Though now even less than ever given to wonder he cannot but sometimes wonder if it is indeed to and of him the voice is speaking."[126] There could, it is initially implied, even be *another* hearer towards whom the voice is directed, and our "hearer" (the main focus of the narrative) could be, like the reader, nothing more than an *overhearer* of a narrative intended for that other. Amidst this confusion we might be

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[121] Samuel Beckett, *Company*, in *Company etc.* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 3.

[122] Beckett, *Company*, p. 5.

[123] Kalb discusses the importance of *Company*'s genre in the following terms: "While reading, one never entirely rids oneself of the impression that the singular character/voice is Beckett, at least in his narrative persona, and that "You" refers to the reader as much as to the character. It's as if a major portion of the book were written imperatively in order to intensify the reader's imaginative entry into the narrated world, an effect all but destroyed when one represents the narrator onstage and suggests that the "You" is him. In the prose, the narrator remains obscure, his singularity undecided." Taken from: Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p. 121.

[124] Beckett, *Company*, p. 14.

[125] Beckett, *Company*, pp. 3-4.

[126] Beckett, *Company*, p. 4.

reminded of Sartre's overview of Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) analysis of the "anguish of Abraham", where the following ethical questions are seen to issue from a human conscience:

> If an angel appears to me, what is the proof that it is an angel; or if I hear voices, who can prove that they proceed from heaven and not from hell, or from my own subconsciousness or some pathological condition? Who can prove that they are really addressed to me?[127]

The (dis)embodied voice could well proceed from the subconscious mind of the "hearer" as a psychological disturbance, but it will not *confirm* the latter's solitude; the existential crisis that Sartre describes above is mocked and trivialised, as the "speaker" is accused by the "narrator" of withholding this fundamental information from the "hearer": "Perhaps for no other reason than to kindle in his [and presumably the reader's] mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment."[128]

The "audience" of *Company* is given *nothing* by way of definitive exteriority, there is no theatrical "set", and *no bodies* which might reveal to us the identity of its elusive narrator(s) and enable us to discern consciousness as it lives and animates corporeality.[129] *Company*, instead, describes an experience, "…not far from the hallucinatory…" filled with "…the voices a poet hears, emanating from behind one's own, or from within, but nonetheless pure and disembodied."[130] As Daniel Watt writes, *Company* "…is an exercise in disorientation…" which, if viewed through a Berkeleyan lens, mixes "…the tasks of authorial creation with that of Godly maintenance of archetypal forms."[131] The "speaker" of *Company* posits images in the mind of the "hearer" and thereby the reader, in much the same way as the archetypal images maintained by a Berkeleyan god may be posited as ideas in the mind of a perceiving subject or, idealistically-speaking, "…an incorporeal active substance or spirit."[132] For Berkeley, whilst ideas have no existence outside of a perceiving mind, as *to be* is *to be perceived* (*esse est percipi*), the existence of certain perceived forms (those that we, unlike Berkeley, might call concrete objects, rather than the insubstantial forms that we would

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[127] Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 31.
[128] Beckett, *Company*, p. 4.
[129] For an in-depth discussion of the differences between "presence" in prose writing and "stage presence", see Chapter Two.
[130] Ileana Marcoulesco, "Beckett and the Temptation of Solipsism", in *The Beckett Studies Reader*, p. 219.
[131] Daniel Watt, "*Esse est Percipi*: Beckett and Berkeley's Silent Conversation", in *Beckett Re-Membered*, ed. James Carney, Leonard Madden, Michael O'Sullivan, and Karl White (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 83.
[132] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 35.

describe as mental imagery) is not thrown into jeopardy each time these are left unattended by human consciousness. God, for Berkeley, is the upholder of archetypal forms and the natural world, and his is the perceiving mind within which all other acts of perception are contained.[133] The identity of the creator and maintainer of ideas in the mind of the primary perceiving subject in *Company* is radically problematized however, as whilst it would seem to be the "speaker" that penetrates the consciousness of the "hearer" and *informs perception*, he operates at all times under the watchful eye of a "narrator" who, in *his* objective commentary on the authorial process, seems to assume a godlike vantage-point. The inevitable confusion we face when trying to identify the true author, the highest power at work in *Company* is only increased when Beckett teasingly suggests that the "narrator" is in fact:

> Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company.[134]

We come to realise, here, that the voice of the "speaker" does not issue from a point outside of the "hearer" at all, and that the narrative is not one of impartial observation; Beckett posits the "narrator" and, as such, *himself* as the source from whence all voices spring. The writer *replaces* Berkeley's god in the world of *Company* and it is his authorial voice that instils in the "hearer" (one of many manifestations of himself), both the ideas of sense and of imagination, and upholds archetypal forms. Beckett's is the perceiving mind within which all other acts of perception are contained, and *all voices*, "within" and "without", are made *one*, as speaker, hearer, and narrator gain their indivisible being from the overlord of this metafiction. An imaginative force governs *Company* then, but this force, unlike Berkeley's God, has a *human* face and a narrative that *is* tied to the "…real event[s] in retirement"[135] of his own *being-in-the-world*. In the revelation that Beckett, not "God", is creator of *Company*, in the realisation that the "…loved trusted face"[136] that the "speaker" describes is actually that of Beckett's father, looking up at a young "Sam" from the sea[137], that the images from the past detailed by the "speaker" are snapshots taken from Beckett's own memory, the *ideal* is

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[133] Our *reality*, in fact, is not under threat from Berkeley's idealism, whatever "…we see, feel, hear, or anywise conceive or understand, remains as secure as ever…", Berkeley is "simply" denying the existence of an extended mode of being that we might call corporeal substance or matter, a substance that, according to him, humanity can do without. See: Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 38.

[134] Beckett, *Company*, p. 16.

[135] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*, trans. Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 181. See also, p. 42.

[136] Beckett, *Company*, p. 11.

[137] Eoin O'Brien confirms the autobiographical nature of such instances thus: "Bill and Sam Beckett shared a love of nature and the invigorating pleasures of Dublin's mountains and sea. Together they walked the summits of the mountains, and swam in the Forty Foot." Taken from: Eoin O'Brien's *The Beckett Country* (Dublin: The Black Cat Press, 1986), p. 10.

filtered down through the *real*, just as it must always be, if it is to be communicated from one mind to another.

Despite its forays into Berkeleyan territory, *Company* is more than an empty projection of that *exterior* force that gives a worldly shape to irreal content as, autobiographical features aside, the work possesses an *interior* reality, or concrete situation, that would provide it with some anchorage to a materiality uniquely its own. It is evident that there *is* a biological body at the centre of *Company*, and that this body is situated in some physical reality; we know, for instance, that the "hearer" is "…lying on the floor…" of some "…hemispherical chamber…" and abstract "…form and dimensions…"[138], whilst not providing a fixed, detailed exposition as such, *are* described by the narrator. The locale of *Company* is, like the locale of *Endgame*, mutable, and the "narrator" muses on his "…composition" in "[b]lack basalt"[139] as it unfolds; when it comes to the *embodied consciousness* of the narrator/speaker/hearer however, we are provided with a *solid* account of sensory phenomena. All voices in *Company* radiate from the same godlike-yet-embodied consciousness, meaning that the "narrator" is able to give an account not only of the position of the "hearer", but also of the hearer's sensory experiences (notably the fact that he *can hear* the voice and at what volume and distance from his ear[140]) which would be inaccessible to him were they not one and the same being. The "speaker", being another aspect of the same consciousness, also describes the "hearer" in terms evocative of an *embodied*, perceiving being, surrounded in some past life by other such bodily creatures ("You *feel* on your *face* the fringe of *her long black hair…*"[141]), and Ulrika Maude goes so far as to say that:

> Whether we are dealing with the prose or the drama, it is the body, rather than the *cogito*, that gives [Beckett's] characters assurance of their existence. In *Company* . . . the narrated character is lying on his back in the dark, listening to a voice. He is aware of this 'by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again.'[[142]] His existence, in other words, is determined and even brought about by tactile, visual and acoustic sensations.[143]

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[138] Beckett, *Company*, p. 20.
[139] Beckett, *Company*, p. 21.
[140] Beckett, *Company*, p. 20.
[141] Beckett, *Company*, p. 31. The italics here are mine.
[142] Beckett, *Company*, p. 3.
[143] Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 10.

Whether existence, in this case, is actually *brought about* by physical sensations is uncertain; what is clear, however, is that, in what could (but will not) be interpreted as another Berkeleyan twist[144], the "hearer" *is more certain* of the ideas of sense than those of imagination. When he hears, for instance, that he is on his back in the dark, the "hearer" acknowledges the "…incontrovertibility…" of this statement *because of* the *physical sensations* described above; when it comes to the imaginative stimuli provided by the speaker's accounts of past events on the other hand, "…by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified."[145] So, whilst the descriptive account the hearer's surroundings (exterior landscape) is, like that given of his *memory* (existential landscape), subject to the vagaries of a wandering, creative mind, the hearer's sensory phenomena, right down to the "…faint sound of his breath"[146], are given over to the reader clearly and in full, and I would argue that these, rather than acting as confirmation of a ubiquitous Berkeleyan god, act, for him, as confirmation of *his own* existence. Whatever else remains uncertain in *Company*, an extended body, reduced but still living, *breathing*, and moving its eyelids, *does* exist and *is* verified.

By way of a materialistic aside, the consciousness at work in *Company* bears some resemblance to Daniel Dennett's "Multiple Drafts model" of consciousness, as it does *not* seem to benefit from one singular control centre (or linear narrative), a "Cartesian Theater" as Dennett would have it, but presents us instead with an illustration of a brain/mind undergoing a continuous "editorial revision" of information entering the nervous system. We might even say that the reader of *Company*, in analysing sensory and phenomenal experiences that do not belong to her/him, acts as what Dennett would term a heterophenomenologist, extrapolating data from the narrator/hearer/speaker, as though he were the subject of some kind of "cognitive study" designed to probe the workings of consciousness. According to Dennett, an experiencing subject, when probed, produces a "text" (usually by way of verbal or physical responses to stimuli) detailing his/her experiences which, when analysed objectively by a number of neutral theorists, can constitute a heterophenomenological world, "…a stable, intersubjectively confirmable theoretical posit…"[147], which can later be mapped onto the events of the brain or those of the "real" world in diverse ways. In this sense: "We can compare the heterophenomenologist's task of interpreting subjects' behavior to the reader's

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[144] See above, p. 28, note. 82.
[145] Beckett, *Company*, p. 3.
[146] Beckett, *Company*, p. 4.
[147] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 81.

task of interpreting a work of fiction."[148] The *reader* (whilst not being able to interact with the subject in quite the same way as Dennett's heterophenomenologist would) takes, like a heterophenomenologist, the *word* of the subject, as it is presented to him/her through (in this case written) language, as an "intersubjectively confirmable" *text*. Whilst we cannot access the body of *Company*'s "hearer", as such, we can grasp his phenomenological being through the reality of the language that delivers him to us as matter. The subject's (Beckett's) text, a composition of words, is the *objective* signification (*in-itself*), of the *subjective* mind (*for-itself*), or the metamorphosis of thought into language, without which consciousness would be incommunicable in art *or* science. The act of writing makes (like cognitive science) thought manifest, and makes accessible, as material, the immaterial; as Blaise Cendrars writes: "Poetry is mind into matter."[149] The "matter" produced by a writer (or subject) is then communicated to the mind of a reader (or cognitive scientist), who uses it as stimuli, or data, from which s/he can establish "…first a text and then a heterophenomenological world."[150] By virtue of this process the real is once again made ideal, and *words are given bodies*. The hearer/narrator/speaker of *Company is bodied forth*, given material being, as words on a page which, rather than rendering him invisible in their "…dress and encumbrance…"[151] give him a subjective body in the mind of the reader. In his appearance, through language, in a book whose pages can be turned with the human hand, the protagonist of *Company* enjoys a physicality different, but equal, to that of his theatrical counterparts. Whilst, for Berkeley (and, often, Beckett), words might seem to stand in the way of our accessing, *fully*, the truth of that which is expressed (and this is a possibility which will be explored at greater length in the next chapter), *language*, a *physical* phenomenon whether artistic or scientific, spoken, written, or embodied, *is*, as Heidegger states, "…the house of Being"[152] and our *only* means of communicating, interpreting, and *bringing to being* otherwise invisible consciousness.

The Ideal Real

Like Berkeley, Dennett proposes a monism, but the works of the two philosophers sit at opposite ends of the spectrum; where Berkeley propounds an *idealistic* theory of mind, Dennett's neuroscientific approach to consciousness studies is entirely *materialistic*. *Company*, like *Act Without Words I* and *Endgame* before it, provides an account of *both* the

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[148] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 79.
[149] Blaise Cendrars, *Modernities*, trans. Esther Allen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 102.
[150] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 156.
[151] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 22.
[152] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", trans. Frank A. Capuzzi in collaboration with J. Glenn Gray, in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 2011) p. 147.

physical sensations *and* psychical phenomena experienced by the embodied subject, and so implies that, as Merleau-Ponty writes: "Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts."[153] Memory, a personal act of consciousness, plays a key role in *Company*, and contributes to that fusion of the psychical with the physical that makes art possible; the "real" (past event) produces the "ideal" (memory) and Beckett himself suggests that when we recall the past event, bringing it out of its retirement to be relived in the mind in the present moment, "…the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal."[154] The physical body, ever present in *Company*, gives a reality to the ideal, channels it and provides for it a reference point; memory becomes, in a sense, *embodied*, as the "hearer", we are repeatedly told, lies *on his back* in the dark and *remembers*.[155] The grim reality of the hearer/narrator/speaker's situation may be the very thing that launches him towards flights of fancy; his body (whilst still his centre of reference) is virtually inactive and so he mentally *relives* episodes from an active past, where his body had a *real* engagement with the world. As Sartre writes: "It is the situation-in-the-world, grasped as a concrete and individual reality of consciousness, that is the motivation for the constitution of any irreal object whatever and the nature of that irreal object is circumscribed by this motivation."[156] The psychical is always bound to the physical then, and as we encounter Beckett's own past experiences through his fiction**,** we can discern the self-referential nature of a work that is part autobiography, part exploration of the creative process itself, part real and part ideal.

As we move from *Act Without Words I*, through *Endgame*, to *Company*, we can chart something like a false evolution of consciousness for the Beckettian protagonist as he tries, but fails, to flee his physical reality. In *Act Without Words I*, the protagonist is doomed to failure and humiliation until he turns his focus away from his physical needs and towards the awakening of his psyche; he communicates this shift in consciousness however, using the only means available to him: his body. *Act Without Words I*'s closing snapshot of man retreating into his psyche in order to attain sovereignty in an unyielding exterior wasteland becomes, we might say, the central image of *Endgame*; Hamm, has already reached a state of

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[153] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 101.
[154] Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, p. 75.
[155] Beckett, *Company*, p. 25, for instance.
[156] Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p. 185.

physical immobility at *Endgame*'s outset, and he seems to maintain *mental* mobility, an interior vision, at the expense of the exterior landscape and his own sight. The physical world of *Endgame* acts as arch-nemesis to consciousness whilst, in reality, supplying all of the material necessary for the birth and sustenance of *for-itself* being. The immobility of *Company*'s narrator, under his "last dust" as Clov would have it, leads one to think that he could almost *be* Hamm, at a later stage of physical decline, finally alone, finally allowed to dwell in a space over which he has full ownership. After all, Franz Brentano (1838-1917), founding father of the phenomenological movement, suggests that "…our mental phenomena are the things which are most our own."[157] In *Company*, external environment, exposition and context have been almost entirely erased, and the setting becomes the consciousness of the protagonist, outside of which lies a virtual nothingness; a fitting allegory, one might say, for the transition from the stage world to the world of the novel. The novel however (whilst lacking the physical presence of live performing bodies and objects characteristic of the theatre), speaks to us via a system of mental images, created by the transformation of "mind into matter" that is the author terminating thoughts through the *materialisation* of their being, as they become the written word: the "ideal real". The words on the pages of Beckett's prose, like the physical bodies presented to us on his stage, are "…the essence, the Idea, imprisoned in matter…"[158] and stand as testament to the fact that consciousness can gain recognisable and communicable being through the language of writing, as well as through that of the mortal, physical body. Sartre posits conscious existence as a mode of being that thrives on the destruction of, and flight from, its stabilising counterpart; *being-in-itself* cannot will its own annihilation after all, therefore "…it is the consciousness which *makes itself* conscious, moved by the inner need for an inner signification."[159] That said, it must also be remembered that for Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, as for Beckett, the body is so much more than a vessel usurped by consciousness; it is "…the necessary condition of the existence of a world."[160] Mind and matter are intrinsically related in Beckett's works, and although we see characters therein who appear to be fighting against the inert matter and natural environments that surround them, as they try to make Murphyesque escapes into consciousness, they never quite win that battle, as consciousness needs a body, ideality needs reality, *in order to exist*.

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[157] Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and Linda L. McAlister (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 20.
[158] Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, p. 76.
[159] Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, p. 33. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[160] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 352.

Chapter Two

A Present Absence

The Metaphysics of Presence and the Beckettian Dynamic of Temporality

In the previous chapter I suggested that the existential relation between the mind and the body that characterises, notably, the philosophies of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, can be transposed and used as a model for the embodied consciousness that inhabits select works from the Beckett canon. Now that the theoretical "position" (*between* idealism and materialism, *between* the monisms of, for example, Berkeley and Dennett) from which I intend to launch further analyses of Beckett's writings has been established, this chapter will progress from reflections on the mind-body problem, towards an examination of humanity's temporal mode of being, as this is presented in prose and theatrical creations that threaten to eradicate boundaries between the past, the present, and the future. It seems important to investigate, in the course of a study of "being" in Beckett (and in light of the internal bond between physical and psychical being, the very foundation of ontological study, having been duly explicated), the type of being and *duration* unique to the Beckettian mind/consciousness/*being-for-itself*, and the ways in which Beckett's painstakingly-crafted conscious minds demonstrate their endless divisions, or journeys, across time. The diaspora of consciousness across the temporal dimensions that can be discerned in certain Beckettian worlds raises questions about human reality's (in)ability to self-identify, as well as problematizing distinctions between *presence* and *absence* in time, in written language, and upon the stage (stage presence). As I consider consciousness' mode of (not) being in time in this chapter, I cannot choose but to conjure (alongside that of Sartre), the spectre of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), whose conceptions of *differance* [*sic*], the *trace*, and the *absence* of *presence*[1] in the written word or sign, can be used alongside Sartre's exposition of the inherent disjunction and perpetual flux constitutive of human duration, to form a clear picture of the Beckett character as one who lives *outside* of himself, always *deferred* from identification with any essential "self", always removed, divided, different, and transcendentally hollow.

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[1] For a detailed overview of Derrida's method of "deconstruction", to which these terms are crucial, see, especially: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). These terms will be discussed at further length over the course of this chapter.

A Note on Sartre, Derrida, and the Diaspora of Presence

As the term "present" is commonly used to denote one of the three major components of historical, universal time, or what we might call the temporal spectrum (if we reduce this to the broadly-accepted division of its "units" into past/present/future), no discussion of temporality can avoid recourse to an exposition of what it means to *be* in the present moment or, rather, to a contemplation of the notion of *presence*. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre ontologically defines the present in terms of human consciousness or, as he terms it, a *being-for-itself*, which gains a knowledge of itself through its *presence to*, and lack of full and positive identification with, material being (*being-in-itself*). It is in fact, according to Sartrean phenomenology, the very presence of consciousness *to* substantial being which allows "the present" to enter into the world, as inanimate *in-itself* co-presents are indifferent to their spatiotemporal relationship and "…their Present means only their co-presence in so far as a For-itself is present to them."[2] Consciousness is a "nothingness" that surrounds being on all sides, and it is this *not-being*, this insubstantiality, which enables the aforementioned manifestation of the present; put simply, "…the Present *is not*."[3] Temporally speaking, the present, in its absolute immateriality, is the interface of being and nothingness and the transient moment when the past is qualified as past, and the future is projected. As an elusive instant: "[The present] is a flight outside of co-present being and from the being which it was toward the being which it will be."[4] The human reality exists, in this case, as something of an "absence to", or failure to attain, its "self", and the fact that it can be present to itself only as duration, as flight, means that it is always somehow divided, always chasing an unattainable wholeness or stasis of being. This chapter seeks to highlight some of the incidences by which a diaspora of the *for-itself* across the temporal dimensions could be said to be illustrated in Beckett's work, and it is this diaspora, this absence at the heart of Beckettian presence, which calls for and encourages the unlikely pairing of Sartre's philosophy with that of his evolutionary successor and late contemporary Derrida, whose various reactions to Sartre can be summarised, according to Gary Gutting (and surprisingly given the affinities that seem to exist between certain aspects of their philosophies), as "…a deep sympathy and even affection, but total intellectual rejection."[5]

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[2] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 145.
[3] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 145. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[4] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 146.
[5] Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 80.

Where Sartre seeks to demystify presence and elucidate an ontology of temporality[6] in *Being and Nothingness*, Derrida aims to "…make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words 'proximity,' 'immediacy,' [and, above all] 'presence'…"[7] as he removes these same from their normative phenomenological contexts (like Sartre, Derrida makes frequent reference to the writings of Husserl and Heidegger) and redefines them according to his own poststructuralist project. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida "deconstructs" what he terms the "…*logocentricism*…" that has, throughout the history of metaphysics, "…assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos [the spoken word, thought, the word of "God", divine law or reason]…"[8] and confined "…writing to a secondary and instrumental function [as] translator of a full speech that was fully *present* (present to itself, to its signified, to the other, the very condition of the theme of presence in general), technics in the service of language, *spokesman*, interpreter of an originary speech itself shielded from interpretation."[9] Western thought, according to Derrida, is informed at all times by a logocentric *metaphysics of presence*, by "…the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as *presence*, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence [*ousia*], temporal presence as point [*stigmé*] of the now or of the moment [*nun*], the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self[10], intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth)."[11] To brutalise an infamously complex, controversial and frequently opaque philosophy by attempting to scratch its surface within so relatively few words, Derrida seeks to expose the fundamental *absence* that actually lies behind signs that would point to presence, to the logos; there is nothing *beyond* writing for Derrida, and writing (of which words on a page is only one manifestation), rather than presence, *is*, we might say, *first philosophy*. Speech, rather than embodying "pure truth" is itself an expression of a thought that it cannot fully *be*, therefore the written word is not so much a debasement of the logos as "…*the signifier of the signifier*…"[12] that is speech, meaning that "…the order of the signified is never contemporary, [it] is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by

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[6] See Part Two, Chapter Two ("Temporality") of *Being and Nothingness* for Sartre's "Phenomenology of the Three Temporal Dimensions", "The Ontology of Temporality" and "Original Temporality and Psychic Temporality: Reflection". Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 130-193.

[7] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 70.

[8] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 3.

[9] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 8. The italics here are Derrida's own.

[10] To be examined in Chapter Four.

[11] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 12. The italics here are Derrida's own.

[12] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 7. The italics here are Derrida's own.

the time of a breath – from the order of the signifier."[13] As Sartre purges self-presence out of *being*, when he suggests that whilst consciousness is always present to an intentional object (consciousness is always *consciousness of* something) it is never entirely present to itself, Derrida purges the presence out of *writing* and out of *signs* in general, going so far as to suggests that:

> From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs*.[14]

As Sartre describes consciousness as a fissure in material being then, Derrida highlights the fundamental fissure inherent in all meaning production.

As Sartre reveals the "nothingness" that underlies the presence of consciousness to itself, Derrida replaces a search for *presence as meaning* with the recognition of "…*differance*, an economic concept [of Derrida's own invention] designating the production of differing/deferring."[15] Meaning, for Derrida (like a coincidence of *for-itself* being with itself for Sartre), is always deferred, it presents itself in the usurpation of itself, in the movement from the sensible to the intelligible, from thought to speech, speech to writing, signified to signifier, ideal to real. For Derrida, a "… temporalizing synthesis, which permits differences to appear in a chain of significations…"[16] stands in place of the binary systems that Western thought relies upon, and each sign (each word for instance), rather than being complete in itself, carries a *trace* of the absent thing that it differs and defers from (the present carries a trace of the past, the word of the thought, heat of cold for example), as it points away from itself and towards further signs. The signifier (like Sartre's *being-for-itself*) is a presence that is marked by absence, by the traces of those signifiers that are absent, and that define it, as "…words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences…"[17] and: "Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear."[18] Human reality, as Sartre would have it, is absent to itself – it is *different* from the world of objects that surrounds it and that it surrounds, and it is always already different from itself, as the present continually defers the past and the future the present – it cannot make an object of itself and it cannot stop the endless flow, the dispersal

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[13] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18.
[14] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 50. The italics here are Derrida's own.
[15] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 23. The italics here are Derrida's own.
[16] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 66.
[17] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 70.
[18] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 62.

of itself across the temporal dimensions, that characterises it, until death, whereupon, devoid of consciousness, the body becomes a thing in the world, and the events of a life become "fixed" as history, their totality coming to rest as a thing complete at last. This dispersal, this diaspora of meaning/being/presence/the logos *underpins* the philosophies of *both* Sartre and Derrida then, and before we progress to an application of these philosophies to the works of Beckett, I will add, lest there should be any doubt, that, no matter how hard we try to pin down a Sartrean "present", we will never grasp anything more than a mercurial nothingness, a sight of transience, of absence from self, of possibility - an interface or trace. Similarly, no attempt to peel back the layers of signification from Derrida's work will reveal, at last, the logos as, for Derrida, there is nothing beneath the sign, and the self-identity of the signified, like that of the *for-itself*, "…conceals itself unceasingly and *is always on the move*."[19]

Now that a very brief outline of the theories that I intend to draw upon here has been painted (albeit in the broadest of strokes), I intend to pick up from where the previous chapter ended, in the esoteric realms of the novel *Company*, in order to consider the paradox of presence as this concept is applied to *Texts for Nothing*, a series of interconnected, shorter and much earlier prose pieces. *Texts for Nothing*[20] acts as an ephemeral illustration of absence from self, *and* the failure of writing to incarnate being. Set in the ungrounded world of prose, *Texts* freewheels in the immaterial, whilst presenting the reader with an insight into the divided nature of the reflection/reflecting, of *differance*, and of conscious being's failure to grasp, through reflection, complete identification with the self. The fleeting mention, in *Texts*, of a seemingly innocuous shaving mirror, an *in-itself* object which performs an extraordinarily ambiguous function, becomes a poignant and ethereal symbol of absence, and the failure of the *for-itself* to gather up, unify and inhabit its disparate parts, which are spread across the length and breadth of its own time. Moving into the material realm of the stage world, *Krapp's Last Tape* provides a *concrete* representation of an individual human reality's duration in the temporal dimensions, as we are given an insight into one man's constant fleeing from being present, and catch a glimpse of the nothingness that separates the *for-itself* from itself at all times, when: "Consciousness confronts its past and its future as facing a self which it is in the mode of not-being."[21] Interestingly, Krapp's tapes perform a similar function to that of the mirror in *Texts*, although they stand as a suitably more substantial

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[19] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 49. The italics here are mine.
[20] Hereafter referred to as *Texts*.
[21] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 146.

token, in terms of matter, of alienation from the self, and signify a disruption to stage presence in Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) age of "mechanical reproduction". Continuing the discussion of Beckett's theatre, it will be proposed that the protagonist of *That Time* is something of an evolutionary successor of Krapp, in much the same way that the narrator of *Company* can be said to have evolved from Hamm. In *That Time*, however, physical and psychical modes of representation collide, as the normative conventions of the stage are dismissed in favour of pure presence and the (dis)embodied voice, telling of a past. What remains is a spectral cipher of Krapp, who lacks the physicality necessary to control the past recollections which hold him hostage, and who seems to be denied projection into future possibility. *That Time*, I will suggest, depicts the inherent absence at the heart of theatrical representation and, indeed, *being*, as the Listener and his voice are read as being no more than signs pointing across a flat surface, deferring meaning, and substituting spectrality.

Pursuing Presence in the Prose

Human reality sustains and projects itself, according to Sartre, only as a result of the lack of concurrence between the "me" and the "here". Sartre's "…down-to-earth image…"[22] of the ass and the carrot goes some way towards illustrating what he sees as our circular attempts to "lock in" to a concrete self, to attain absolute assimilation with, for instance, an abstract value, a future possibility, or a moment in time:

> [An ass] attempts to get hold of a carrot which has been fastened at the end of a stick which in turn has been tied to the shaft of the cart. Every effort on the part of the ass to seize the carrot results in advancing the whole apparatus and the cart itself, which always remains at the same distance from the ass. Thus we run after a possible which our very running causes to appear, which is nothing but our running itself, and which thereby is by definition out of reach. We run towards ourselves and we are – due to this very fact – the being which cannot be reunited with itself.[23]

The futility of conscious being's efforts to collide with itself and solidify in the passage of time constitute, for Sartre, humanity's temporal mode of being, and this failure of consciousness to "seize" the present moment, to attain monumental presence, is something of a driving force behind the narrative of Beckett's *Texts*, first published in English in 1967. The narrator of *Texts* is, from the outset, unsure what is "…meant by here, and me, and

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[22] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 225.
[23] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 225.

being…"[24] (in his futile struggle to unite the three and secure identification with the "self"), and over the course of his broken and multidirectional monologue, he repeatedly postpones his "here and now", as he searches for himself *beyond* himself, on the page, in his past, and in a fiction that is exterior to his present. In his search for self, or for meaning, the narrator (who, like the narrator/speaker/hearer of *Company*, offers the reader something of an insight into the creative process itself) conjures a plethora of scenes and situations within which he thinks he might be found, and he tries, but fails, to make himself manifest, channel himself as *presence* through myriad and ultimately dissolute creations with which he will *never* be able to identify. The narrator indicates his inability to connect with himself as self-presence when he states that: "The first thing would be to believe I'm *there*, if I could do that I'd lap up the rest, there'd be none more credulous than me, if I were *there*."[25] The narrator can be seen then, to be a creature of the same species as Sartre's aforementioned donkey, as he (like the writer) constantly *defers* his own identification with being from his transient "here" to a "there" (a fictional persona, a past self) which will always be (like the future) "by definition out of reach"; one can, after all, never *be* "there", by virtue of the fact that one's here (like the cart), whilst never *fully* inhabited, whilst always slightly behind oneself in the process of becoming-past, cannot be shaken off. As Paul Stewart, in his analysis of the "disjunction" and the "…scepticism concerning the possibility of being and presence…" in *Texts*, succinctly puts it: "The [Beckettian] here varies in as much as it takes over what was once thought to be there."[26] There is a displacement at work in *Texts*, in that case, that illustrates not only Sartre's notion that humanity's mode of *being-for-itself* is a perpetual flight away from identification with any fixed point in time, but also Derrida's literary theories which suggest that presence cannot be made manifest in writing, and that writing, like consciousness, is a system of deferrals, an oscillation or chasm between poles, or states, of being.

In a reversal of the normative passage of time, one of the alternate realities that the narrator of *Texts* reaches towards (in his flight from his "here and now") is that of his (or Beckett's) own *past* self, sitting in "…the third class waiting-room of the South-Eastern

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[24] Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950-1976* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 4.

[25] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 23. The italics here are mine.

[26] Paul Stewart, *Zone of Evaporation: Samuel Beckett's Disjunctions* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 140.

Railway Terminus[.]"[27] For Sartre, the past is a place *behind me* that I can no longer go, something which I *was*, rather than something which I *am* and, due to its always already having "closed in" on itself,

> …from the content of the past . . . I can remove nothing, and I can add nothing to it. In other words, the past which I *was* is what it is; it is an in-itself like the things in the world.[28]

The narrator describes this past self in terms well-suited to the inert, brute matter that we might expect *in-itself* being to consist of, as a "…heap of flesh, rind, bones and bristles waiting to depart…"[29], and the distaste conveyed in these words for this superfluous biological machine, this accident of nature, suggests that, in *Texts*: "The surpassed in-itself lives on and haunts the for-itself as its original contingency."[30] As something present becomes something past, it solidifies, becomes *in-itself* being, and gains a place in history; the "dead" past cannot *become* the present and is discernible in the present only *as* contingency or, in its absence, as a *trace*. What we are presented with via the memory of *Texts*' narrator is a past *embodied* in writing, not as consciousness (presence), but as body alone; the series of empty signs (words), marked by the absence of that which they point to, denotes "…the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence."[31] The narrator betrays his awareness of the fact that one cannot attain self-presence by projecting, through writing, one's contingent *past* self when he states that, "…this lump is no longer me and that search [for self/presence] should be made elsewhere…"[32] and he describes the outcome of his attempted regress ("…my past has thrown me out, its gates have slammed behind me…"[33]) in *quintessentially* Sartrean terms. *Texts* demonstrates, then, a Sartrean insistence that: "Between past and present there is an absolute heterogeneity; and if I can not [*sic*] enter the past, it is because the past *is*."[34] The past remains in *Texts* only as a haunting facticity, as a Derridean *trace*, sealed off to the narrator, and reader, and offering no privileged access to the present/presence, which is transient and fleeting by its very nature, and which, unlike the past, *is not*.

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[27] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 30. For a commentary on the biographical nature of this episode see O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p. 36.
[28] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 139. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[29] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 30.
[30] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 141.
[31] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 70.
[32] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 31.
[33] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 33.
[34] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 142. The italics here are Sartre's own.

To consider presence in a work of prose is to consider a complex paradox and, in *Texts*, Beckett (via the narrator) exposes the medium itself as one which is characterised by its ability to produce images that "…mingle with air and earth and dissolve, little by little, in exile."[35] Unlike the world of the theatre, where we can see, as McMullan puts it, "…the characters phenomenologically inhabit[ing] the time and space of the stage"[36], the world of the novel invites us to *imagine* characters and their environments, shape the ether, and partake in the creative process, *without* the assistance/limitations of a "here and now". John Pilling writes that, in *Texts*, "…time and space have become impossibly confused…"[37] and we might add that time and space are invariably problematized in the very form of prose-writing itself. A prose work does not unfold in time and physical space in the same manner as the theatrical event, which is *dependent upon* its designation to a specific time and venue, and upon concrete objects and properties. The reader (rather than the playwright/director/venue) decides the duration of the novel, whose space is the furthest reaches of consciousness, and s/he controls the amount of time allocated to each session of reading its contents. Time and space become less clearly demarcated still in a work where even the narrator asks, "…how is it nothing is ever here and now?"[38] We could question whether or not there is any "present" in *Texts* at all, as the spatiotemporal evolution of its narrative is subject to variables which compromise its linearity from within (like *Company*, *Texts* does not follow any conventional plot and displays no reverence for the unities of time, place, and action) and without (according to the habits of the reader), and it is perhaps even more difficult to speak of *presence* in a work that highlights the inability of its sole protagonist to manifest as anything more than a "…voice without a mouth…"[39], a series of signifiers divorced from their signified.

A Reflection of Absence

The narrator of *Texts* exists for us *only* as an intentional object; he is an intellectual property or a creative abstraction, whose emotions are nothing more than "…affective images…"[40] so called on account of their lack of concrete existence, or the "…absence of the

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[35] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 23.
[36] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 132
[37] John Pilling, "*Texts for Nothing*", in James Knowlson's and John Pilling's *Frescoes of the Skull* (London: John Calder, 1979), p. 45.
[38] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 25.
[39] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 51.
[40] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 355. The italics here are Sartre's own.

quality of being *lived*."[41] We do not, we cannot, *physically* perceive a prose creation as anything other than markings on a page, but as we transform these imaginatively into psychical phenomena we realise that a literary character's lack of ability to "touch" our physical senses does not render him/her incapable of engaging with us on an intimate, emotional level. Perhaps it could even be said that there is a greater intimacy with a character that "belongs" exclusively to its reader in some way, as it infiltrates and *becomes* that reader's consciousness. The theatre is a public space, whereas the mind is as private a place to be as one can find; as McMullan writes: "[F]iction (like radio)[42] can give the sense of sharing the intimate inner consciousness of the narrator or characters, of being inside the head, rather than watching or hearing the character speak."[43] For *Texts*, then, the privacy of consciousness seems an eminently suitable setting, as we are given an insight into an intensely personal creative process, as well as into the true, human meaning of absence as it can appear, reflected, in the most domestic of settings. Several of Beckett's works, including *Texts* and *Company*, allude to the shadowy protection of the: "Father's shade"[44], and Leslie Hill details and analyses recurring motifs of the late father throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*, the "…long-running saga…" of the "…paternal greatcoat…"[45] for instance, in his illustration of Watt's struggle to accept that he cannot derive his identity, "…by incorporating the body and language of his father."[46] In *Texts* (particularly the end of *Text V* and beginning of *Text VI*), Beckett's likening of creative matter, or characters in embryo, to "…phantoms…"[47], could almost be seen as a metaphor for his reliving and recounting his late father's memory, as the father, here as elsewhere, becomes a "ghost" that haunts the work. The literary and ancestral apparitions in *Texts* fail to attain *being*, and a failure to incorporate the father's memory, along with the overall failure to incorporate that is the signature of this prose work, results in the loss of the father and the loss of the self, becoming poignantly and intrinsically linked.[48]

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[41] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 355. The italics here are Sartre's own.

[42] The medium of radio will be explored in the next chapter.

[43] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 32.

[44] Beckett, *Company*, p. 14.

[45] Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*, p. 26.

[46] Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*, p. 23.

[47] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 24.

[48] By way of a psychoanalytical aside, Sigmund Freud writes, in "Totem and Taboo", about the attempts of primitive fraternal clans to *become* the father that they had displaced and usurped in patricide by incorporating his surrogate (an animal sacrifice) into their totem meal. See: Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo", in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 505. For Freud, man's elevation of the murdered father into a god from whom the totemic tribe could claim their descent forms the basis of religious practice (as well as atonement for that murder) and "God is nothing but an exalted father" ("Totem and Taboo", p. 504). According to Freud, the hole that is left when the male child must give up an object-cathexis for his mother is most often filled with an intensified identification with his father which affords his release from the Oedipus complex. See: Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id", in *The Freud Reader*, p. 640.

The following passage from *Texts* (*VI*) is quoted at length not only as a means of illustrating the narrator's ongoing search for himself, for his father, and for being, but also as an emotionally-charged example of the inability of the "here and now", "present and past", "subject and object", even "thought and language" to coincide in this work:

> What can have become then of the tissues I was, I can see them no more, feel them no more, flaunting and fluttering all about and inside me, pah they must be still on their old prowl somewhere, passing themselves off as me. Did I ever believe in them, did I ever believe I was there, somewhere in that ragbag, that's more the line of inquiry, perhaps I'm still there, as large as life, merely convinced I'm not. The eyes, yes, if these memories are mine, I must have believed in them an instant, believed it was me I saw there dimly in the depths of their glades. I can see me still, with those of now, sealed this long time, staring with those of then, I must have been twelve, because of the glass, a round shaving-glass, double-faced, faithful and magnifying, staring into one of the others, the true ones, true then, and seeing me there, imagining I saw me there, lurking behind the bluey veils, staring back sightlessly, at the age of twelve, because of the glass, on its pivot, because of my father, if it was my father, in the bathroom, with its view of the sea, the lightships at night, the red harbour light, if these memories concern me, at the age of twelve, or at the age of forty, for the mirror remained, my father went but the mirror remained, in which he had so greatly changed, my mother did her hair in it, with twitching hands, in another house, with no view of the sea, with a view of the mountains, if it was my mother, what a refreshing whiff of life on earth.[49]

This uncompromising piece of prose is as painful as it is moving; the memory of the father pervades this extract, and the comparison between the aging, mortal, human subject and the constant, inanimate object is heart-rending. The father is gone, and yet the mirror which reflected him so faithfully remains. This might lead us to ask what the function of the mirror really is in *Texts*, and whether or not it retains something, a *trace*, of that which it has reflected. The mirror certainly retains memories for our protagonist, and it symbolises so much more, not least Sartre's "…phantom dyad 'the reflection-reflecting'…"[50], the unitary inner structure of the *for-itself*'s separation from itself, by which it makes itself exist.[51]

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[49] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, pp. 26-27.
[50] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 174.
[51] There is an interesting comparison to be made (outside of the scope of this thesis) between what follows and Jacques Lacan's writings on what he terms the "mirror stage". The infant, according to Lacan, recognises and exteriorises in his/her reflection an ideal, primordial, and permanent "I", which is at odds with the inadequacies of his/her biological being, and which s/he will strive to become via projections of "self" onto this imago, or

Beckett's mirror seems to stand as a barrier, as *differance*, between appearance (or absence), and self (or presence). As we *see* our reflection we may reflect, as the father here might have done, upon how we have changed, but the reflection is a cipher; the reflection is the self, given to the self, as an absence of self. The mirror is a concrete, *in-itself object*, which is present by virtue of a consciousness *being present to it*, yet its original *subject* (here the father) is absent, replaced by another subject (his son) who, in his turn, sees his own (as well as his father's) reflection, marked by traces of absence. The narrator, who wonders if he ever believed in himself as a bodily "there", *looks back* upon this reflection and *reflects*; he concentrates on his *memory* of the blue eyes, the "…eye of flesh…"[52], that recurring Beckettian symbol, by employing "…the eye of the mind…"[53], that other. Those younger, somehow "truer", eyes are seen as reflected in the mirror, but *in their reflection the narrator is reflected back to himself again*, in a circular and inconclusive fashion, in what Stewart, following a Derridean trajectory, might call "…a continual series of deferrals and disjunctions."[54] This failure to "lock in" to being is reminiscent of Sartre's explication of humankind's perpetual running towards self (the ass and the carrot), which is simultaneously a fleeing from the self, and from the present. Of our temporal being and its attempts to capture itself by turning back on itself, Sartre observes: "This effort [of the *for-itself*] to be to itself its own foundation, to recover and to dominate within itself its own flight, finally to *be* that flight instead of temporalizing it as the flight which is fled – this effort inevitably results in failure; and it is precisely this failure which is reflection."[55] It is also, we might add, precisely this failure, this constant deferral, which is *differance* and, to approach this excerpt from another perspective, Derrida, in his discussion of the reflexive nature, or the *play*, of representation, remarks that "[w]hat can look at itself is not one…"[56] and suggests, deconstructing its metaphysics of presence, that if it is possible for the logos (presence) to be reflected back to itself, through writing for instance, then it is not, after all, the totality that it would be. If signs, written, spoken, or otherwise are reflections of the logos then the logos, as a thing reflected, "…is split *in itself*…"[57] as, without these usurpations of its being, or:

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what we might call a dialectical synthesis. This ideality defines, for Lacan, the mental development of the subject, despite the fact that it will forever remain in discordance with his/her lived reality. See: Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 75-81.

[52] Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, in *Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950-1976*, p. 109.
[53] Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*, in *The Complete Dramatic* Works, p. 164.
[54] Stewart, *Zone of Evaporation*, p. 141.
[55] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 176-177. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[56] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 36.
[57] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 36. The italics here are Derrida's own.

"Without writing, the [logos] would remain in itself."[58] There is a comparison to be made here then, between the logos and the *for-itself* being of consciousness as, without the projection of the *for-itself* away from self (comparable to the projection of the logos in writing), away from stasis, away from facticity, towards a hollow future, the human reality would fall in on itself and solidify as *in-itself* being; it would *be* that reflection. Beckett's narrator, part conscious being, part sign, has no hope of falling back into himself or expressing anything other than perpetual motion through thinking and writing. As he is a temporal being, the narrator is trapped in the cycle of his own duration, and as he is embodied as words, signifiers rather than flesh, he can never be complete, he cannot be the logos; he cannot even die.

As an *in-itself* existent, the mirror performs a remarkable and paradoxical function by reflecting the mode of existence unique to *for-itself* being through its impassive surface. As Sartre's Antoine Roquentin demonstrates in *Nausea*, the mirror can offer us some proof of our existence, and can even be employed as a means of evaluating the body as contingent, *in-itself* matter ("…what I can see is far below the monkey, on the edge of the vegetable world, at the polyp level"[59]), but what the mirror cannot do is act upon, or question, its own existence, as it is an object that we would associate with the full positivity which characterises the *in-itself*. It could be argued that through some "failure", as it were, in its positivity, the mirror tricks the *for-itself* into believing that it contains something of the latter's being, despite the fact that what the mirror reflects back to its subject is, ultimately, absence, or its own *differance*. The memories of childhood that the mirror in *Texts* seems to contain are actually traces retained in the consciousness of the narrator, rather than in the object itself. The object can retain nothing. The mirror *seems*, however, to suffer the same type of existence as the *for-itself*, in its constant projection of possibilities that cannot be made concrete by any transformation into *in-itself* matter. As Narcissus found, one cannot enter into a meaningful relationship with one's own reflection, as it is ephemeral, uninhabitable: it is a phantom. The reflection, like the photograph, only more vulnerable, more malleable, is a *representation* of absent *for-itself* being, or a substitute for presence, just as the word is a substitute for the thought, the signifier for the signified/signifier. Reflecting on the memory of the father fails to reinstate him corporeally, and the security and wholeness that the child may have felt with the parents is notable by its absence in the adult world. In

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[58] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 37.
[59] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 31.

Text I, the protagonist seeks comfort in his memory of walking silently "…hand in hand…"[60] with his father and, in stating, "…I was my father and I was my son"[61] endeavours to incorporate the man who gave him life. Pilling writes of the mirror-searching that the, "…reciprocation that was once possible (in childhood) between subject and object has disappeared for good…"[62], and we might venture to infer that this is because the severance of the infant hand from the paternal hand stands as a metaphor for incompleteness, that break in the circuit, that only comes from adult reflection. The reader shares the revelation that there are no co-ordinates with which to map this parentless world, as: "Now the mirror has shattered into fragments, and the eyes are beginning to burn with tears."[63]

When we look into the mirror we are conscious of the reflection that looks back us, rather than the cold, glass surface of the mirror itself, just as when we read we might say that we are conscious of the characters of the story, rather than the words on the page. Beckett, in his rigorous examination of each medium he chooses to work with, actually makes us aware of the words on the page and, more importantly, the absence that they represent. Words, like the mirror, report us missing, to paraphrase the *Texts'* protagonist ("I'd like to be sure I left no stone unturned before reporting me missing and giving up"[64]), and if it is "…the end [that] gives meaning to words…"[65] then the same can be said of lives. There is always an absence in the language, just as there is an absence, or inherent lack, in consciousness. Thought and language cannot completely coincide, just as the *for-itself* cannot achieve coincidence with itself until the aforementioned end when, in death, the human reality attains that totality of being that it has been searching for, and takes its place as an *in-itself*, historical being: "By death the for-itself is changed forever into an in-itself in that it has slipped entirely into the past."[66] The lost father may be a phantom in *Texts* but, unlike the narrator, he has been fully reunited with himself; death *is*. In *Texts*, words, like the protagonist, *are not*, as they fail, like the mirror, to fully capture thought, being and, above all, presence. Words, like the mirror, merely reflect the absence of substance in the *for-itself*, "…the subject dies before it comes to the verb…"[67] and "…superlatives have lost most of their charm."[68] The unbroken "…flow of

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[60] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 6.
[61] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 6.
[62] Pilling, "*Texts for Nothing*", p. 51.
[63] Pilling, "*Texts for Nothing*", p. 51.
[64] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 29.
[65] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 33.
[66] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 138.
[67] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 8.
[68] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 9.

words and tears…"[69] has rendered words meaningless, "…time has turned into space…"[70], and there is seemingly no escape, for this protagonist, from liminality.

A Presence in the Theatre

In his introduction to *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*, Cormac Power considers some of the terms in which we most often contemplate the phenomenon of stage presence, and touches upon what we might recognise as a somewhat Sartrean principle when he states that: "In the most general sense, we could define presence as being the simultaneity between consciousness and an object of attention."[71] It is worth noting here that Power actually references Sartre on a number of occasions throughout his comprehensive analysis of presence in theatrical performance, and his inclusion of phenomenological theory helps to differentiate his work from that of other contemporary theorists (Philip Auslander, for instance), whose work moves away from "traditional" philosophical lines of enquiry into theatrical presence, and towards a re-evaluation of the notion of "liveness" in a performance culture dominated by mass media.[72] Power explains that *presence* (under whose banner "liveness" can also be investigated) is "…a key term underlying the articulation of theatrical experience within Consciousness Studies"[73] and his interest in Sartre's writings could indeed be explained by the fact that his is a title belonging to Rodopi's "Consciousness, Literature and the Arts" series. Despite his seeming exclusion from many current fields of philosophy, Sartre provides such a meticulously detailed exposition of the human reality as a dispersal of being across the temporal dimensions that we are forced, upon reading *Being and Nothingness*, to re-examine what we ordinarily deem the "present" in the light of the aforementioned *presence* of consciousness.

Sartre, a dramatist as well as a philosopher engaged in a rigorous study of human consciousness, writes that for "…human reality, to be is to-be-there…"[74], and it is similarly (as conventional theatre traditions would have it at least), the primary quality of the stage character to be present, *to be there* in front of an audience. It is apparent that upon entering

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[69] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 33.
[70] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 33.
[71] Cormac Power, *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), p. 3.
[72] See, for instance: Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008).
[73] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 3.
[74] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 332.

the theatre we step into a world quite separate from, and rather more tangible than, the world or medium of the novel, and Power argues that: "Discussions of theatrical presence need not be tied to idealism or celebrations of the unmediated, but can help us understand how theatre utilises its limitations as a medium tied to a world of 'things' *and* to the representational possibilities afforded by these limitations."[75] Phenomenology, as an inherently "worldly" philosophy, is ideally placed to assist us in our understanding of the theatrical medium then, and in a discussion of literary temporality and *presence* in the work of a writer who explores the full gamut of creative media, it seems essential, now, to progress from a discussion of the diaspora of the human reality as this is presented through prose writing, into a *concrete* examination of the ways in which temporal being can be depicted by conscious, biological agents, through *bodily* presence upon the stage.

A theatrical production of *Krapp's Last Tape*[76] (1958) demands an actor's presence and a solid stage world of "things"/objects through which the facticity of an aging Krapp's existence might be represented; for example (and most notably), "*…a tape-recorder with microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tape.*"[77] Krapp is a living, breathing example of consciousness, emerging as the hole at the heart of the *in-itself* being that constitutes his surroundings. Furthermore, much like the protagonist of *Texts*, Krapp is fragmented, existing as divided "selves" that have become displaced and dispersed in time. As Krapp listens to tape recordings of his past self, he obtains access to what we might call himself-as-object, and that part of himself which he makes object, or stage property, is none other than his own past consciousness. Krapp has captured and *made material* his own consciousness, by committing it to spools of audio tape, and the materialisation of his mind, now an *in-itself* entity, becomes a new type of presence in the theatre. This *in-itself* presence is a unique, dual-function presence, quite at odds with the live, human presence of a sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, whose only way of incorporating, or re-embodying, shards of his youth is to engage with them on an immersive level, as the nothingness of consciousness engages with any inanimate object. Memory, a key element of *Krapp*, is generally thought of as a subjective experience, belonging to the individual, and yet Beckett's play makes memory an *object* of study, by the means of mechanical reproduction. Beckett makes the past, the memory and, thereby, *the inner workings of consciousness*

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[75] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 3. The italics here are Power's own.
[76] Hereafter referred to as *Krapp*.
[77] Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 215.

present and visible in his theatre, and we, as an audience, join Krapp in *his* search for self across the temporal dimensions.

Focussing on *Krapp* enables us to undertake a concrete examination of bodily presence in the theatre, and of the body as the *for-itself*'s means of adapting to and *being in* the world. As Sartre writes: "Birth, the past, contingency, the necessity of a point of view, the factual condition for all possible action on the world – such is the *body*, such it is *for me*."[78] Krapp exists in the world, or his microcosm at least, with his body as an "…instrumental center [*sic*] of instrumental complexes…"[79] which must be continuously surpassed as the "…*point of departure*…"[80] for each new project, be that listening or recording. As the *for-itself* "…infinite pursuit…"[81] that he is, Krapp is present, and his is a *stage presence*, a body before our eyes, a figure amidst his ground, who knows how to operate his world, used, as he is, to his body, "…being-an-instrument-in-the-midst-of-the-world."[82] There is good deal of intrigue for the audience in simply watching the actor playing Krapp manage the stage business of loading, unloading, rewinding and winding on each reel of tape, not to mention his revelling in the physical articulation of the word: "Spooool!"[83] Krapp *is* a bodily creature, and his is a body coming apart at the seams, as it is both *aging*[84] and neglected. The all-but-expired writer is distinguished by his:

> *White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair.* [He is]
> *Unshaven.*
> *Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing.* [With a]
> *Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation.*
> *Laborious walk.*[85]

As Krapp "…fumbles…" and "…strokes…"[86] his way around the play's opening, the bodily functions of eating (bananas) and drinking (alcohol) are amongst his primary concerns, and it is probably this peculiar diet that is to blame for: "The sour cud and the iron stool."[87] The bodily solitude of Krapp is emphasized by the staging, which sees his lone figure wander laboriously into the void each time he takes the all-important drink that might ease his pains,

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[78] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 351. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[79] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 350.
[80] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 350. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[81] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 350.
[82] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 349.
[83] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 216.
[84] A worthwhile study of temporality in *Krapp* could be launched from this one point alone.
[85] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 215.
[86] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 215.
[87] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 222.

away from his spotlight, the "…*strong white light*"[88], and into the darkness that surrounds him, making him "…feel less alone."[89] Krapp's is a tactile world, a world of stage directions and movement, and he exists as an embodied consciousness, a stage presence clumsily attempting to gather up the pieces of his fragmented self from across the temporal dimensions for company.

Isolated, as he is, in his "…den…"[90], Krapp does seem to have sought a level of human interaction throughout the years, from listening to the songs of "Old Miss Glome…"[91] in his thirties, to giving sexual relations one last shot in his sixty-ninth year with Fanny, a: "Bony old ghost of a whore."[92] Fanny represents an intimacy devoid of sumptuous, bodily, pleasure; the description of her skeletal, ghostly frame is a far cry from the sensual remembrances of the lover on the lake with a "…scratch on her thigh…"[93] and the fleshly comfort Krapp might yearn to relive and recapture upon listening to the recorded line: "I lay down across her with my face in her breast and my hand on her."[94] It is as we *witness* this listening that we realise Krapp's story as one which has to be told in the theatre. As we *see* the changes in Krapp's emotional register, it becomes apparent that a prose work could not deliver this: "Farewell to . . . love."[95] The truly affective moments in *Krapp* are the ones in which we see Krapp transformed and transported by his own remembering. In Robert Wilson's 2012 production of *Krapp*[96], for instance, as the audience listened to a thirty-nine-year-old Krapp speak of his lost love, a dimensional shift seemed to occur, as lighting effects removed all sense of background, scenery, and extraneous properties from the stage picture. Sixty-nine-year-old Wilson, as the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, illuminated in bright white light, became almost suspended, floating in space as a solitary holograph, "…*leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, face front.*"[97] Whilst this production may have pushed the boundaries a little too far for Beckett purists, through his carefully constructed manipulation of the *mise-en-scène*, Wilson produced a stage picture that allowed Krapp to comment on the fragility of his, and our, present moment, which is, as Jane

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[88] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 215.
[89] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 217.
[90] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 217.
[91] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 218.
[92] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 222.
[93] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 221.
[94] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 221.
[95] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 217.
[96] Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, dir/perf. Robert Wilson, The Ardhowen Theatre, Enniskillen, 25th August 2012.
[97] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 217.

Goodall would have it, "…the vanishing point of time and space."[98] Goodall writes of our perceptions of stage presence: "The instant of the here and now is almost impossible to bring into focus, yet when some trigger causes it to occur to an assembly of people, the chances are that they will always remember it, as if it were a shift in consciousness resulting in a breakthrough to some normally excluded dimension of experience."[99] The theatre, then, can appear to allow the fictional character (and through him/her the spectator) to access a *present*, an almost *mystical* "here and now" that cannot be captured in prose writing in quite the same way. Furthermore, the anticipation experienced by the audience as it awaits the *presence* of a performer whose reputation for theatrical innovation precedes them, raises questions concerning the effect that an actor's "energy" or "charisma" has on the spectator, and studies of "stage presence" such as Goodall's and Power's cannot chose but to consider what may be called the actor's "*auratic*" mode of presence[100] or "mesmerism"[101]. The distinctly nontraditional (un-Beckettian), clinical setting and "other-worldly" rendering of the character of Krapp in Wilson's production, actually served to break through to, and capture something of, Krapp's essence or, in defiance of Derrida, his logos. The tragedy of Krapp is the removal of the human from his corporeal world, and the sight of him desperately clinging on to, and trying to relive fragments of, a time when he might have felt solace, wholeness, in the body of another only seeks to emphasise the fact that his only remaining interactions are dehumanised disjunctions. Krapp is reduced to communicating with "dead" voices from the past, which are present only as traces of absence via the *in-itself* being of his reels of tape, and are indifferent to their being utilised and physically, painstakingly, manipulated by a human agent, or, "…center [*sic*] of reference…"[102] as part of his wider projects. Krapp, like the actor, is a medium; a conjurer of spirits. The theatre is the space in which these spirits are made visible.[103]

Presence, The Present, and Mechanical Reproduction

Jane Goodall writes that: "If presence is quite literally about the here and now, technologies of representation may be seen as its enemies."[104] There is a rupture of presence in Beckett's theatre then, as *Krapp* is very much a work of art in the age of mechanical

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[98] Jane Goodall, *Stage Presence* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 159.
[99] Goodall, *Stage Presence*, p. 159.
[100] Power, *Presence in Play*, pp. 47-85.
[101] Goodall, *Stage Presence*, pp. 84-121.
[102] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 351.
[103] This notion will be explored further in Chapter Three.
[104] Goodall, *Stage Presence*, p. 4.

reproduction. The human reality's temporal existence is technologically represented by Krapp's recordings and aspects of the mercurial *for-itself* made manifest in *in-itself* being. The tapes symbolise the physicalisation of the psychical, whilst Krapp's relationship with these offers a tangible illustration of consciousness' perpetual forwards motion and on-going failure to fully attain totalisation of the self. In forever striving to escape the present moment by attempting, through listening to his old tapes, to re-enter the past whose gates, as we know, are closed, and by projecting himself towards his future possibilities as he records his "last tape", Krapp is perpetually absent, in flight, he is himself in the mode of *not being*; he escapes being on all sides, and yet *he is*. Krapp *is* the "reflection-reflecting", a fracture in the stream that flows from past to future, akin to the *hinge* that, for Derrida, denotes the "…hollow of difference…" between words and "…marks the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and absolute presence."[105] As he "…*assumes* [the] *listening posture*…"[106] and turns himself into an object of study, Krapp uses live technology (a road closed to the narrator of *Texts*) to foreground that denial of his own present that constitutes his very mode of being. Paradoxically, this rendering of his past self into an object of deferral from the present *is* one way of Krapp attaining some presence to himself, only, in encountering himself as "closed-off" and pre-recorded, Krapp relates to himself not as conscious being, but as a thing-in-the-midst-of-the-world. There is a "doubling-up", or a littering, of consciousness that comes from the inclusion of a reproduction of the human voice in *Krapp*. The tapes themselves, as material objects representative of a past self, seem to symbolise the end result of a literal enactment of Sartre's claim that, as we escape, or fly from, the present, the past closes in on itself behind us and becomes *in-itself* being.

An electronically solidified past consciousness stands in place of a second actor in the world of *Krapp*. Krapp converses with a dead or discontinued voice, rather than a spontaneous entity, and this sound effect has something of a split personality, cutting through binaries and acting almost as a conduit, a Derridean *hinge* between conscious and unconscious modes of being. Krapp must respond to "himself" as to another, but this substitute "self" has been dehumanised via the application of technology to the body; the "…voice, devoid of its interhuman function, has lost its meaning…"[107] and been transformed

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[105] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 69.
[106] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 217.
[107] Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 20.

into a sign, rendering normative "communion" between actors obsolete. The elderly Krapp interacts with an unresponsive voice divorced from the logos of present speech (a past *for-itself*, entombed in reels of tape as a relic), and: "The oscillation of the different audio-temporal levels . . . serves not only to make Krapp relive his past in a peculiar form of time travel; the tapes also enable the audience, because of the visualising quality of sound, to see the phantom of the younger Krapp on stage, side by side with the now decrepit Krapp."[108] The audience is even presented, at one point, with the spectacle of Krapp the elder joining with Krapp the middle-aged to scoff at Krapp the younger, in an interplay between the spontaneous stage present, and the codified presence of the recorded voice:

> Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus!
> And the aspirations! [*Brief laugh in which* KRAPP *joins*.] And
> the resolutions [*Brief laugh in which* KRAPP *joins*.] To drink
> less, in particular. [*Brief laugh of* KRAPP *alone*.][109]

Maude writes of this dialogue between the Krapps: "The audience is thus faced with three protagonists, two of them phantoms."[110] There is perhaps a Derridean "…*hauntology*"[111] at work in *Krapp* then, as the haunting of a (conscious) present by the (unconscious) past that acts as its impetus becomes the stuff of dramatic action, and technology allows for dialogue across the ages, between the living and those spectres which are *between* being and non-being, presence and absence.[112] It is perhaps worth noting here, too, that Colin Davis views Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* as "…an important, unacknowledged precursor…"[113] of *hauntology*, as the phenomenology therein "…entails a suspension of the separation between appearance and reality, material objects and mere illusions, spectral presences and living beings."[114] Krapp's recorded voice (sonically) *appears* onstage as one aspect, an *apparition*, of what was once a complete, live, present being and, for Sartre, perception is nothing other than the play of appearances (*apparitions* in Sartre's native French), phenomena presenting to us one dimension of their being at the expense of a multitude of hidden dimensions that we cannot grasp. Beckett stages a haunting in Krapp one might say, and by introducing phantoms to his theatre[115] he deconstructs binary opposites, placing the past and the present in absolute proximity, and blurring the boundaries between appearance and a reality about which we can

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[108] Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 18.
[109] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 218.
[110] Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 18.
[111] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.
[112] There will be further discussion of Derridean spectres in relation to *That Time*.
[113] Colin Davis, "Sartre and the Return of the Living Dead", in *Sartre Today: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. Adrian van den Hoven and Andrew Leak (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), p. 223.
[114] Davis, "Sartre and the Return of the Living Dead", pp. 222-223.
[115] Beckett's phantoms will be discussed further in the next chapter.

never be certain, which changes ceaselessly, as it presents to us one side of itself, and then another. The theatre, a space in which "real" beings create and "live out" non-realities, is perhaps the ideal laboratory in which to conduct experiments that test just how clearly defined the perimeters are that separate the temporal dimensions, the present being and the apparition, the living and the dead.

In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin considers the disruption caused by the type of technology that *Krapp* depends on, to the "presence" that we speak of original artworks being endowed with. According to Benjamin: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[116] It is interesting to note that Derrida speaks in similar terms, when he states that: "The coldness of representation not only breaks self-presence but also the originarity of the present as the absolute form of temporality."[117] It seems appropriate to apply these theories to the recorded human voice in *Krapp*, as this is a sonic representation, a sound effect, rather than a spontaneous "live", or *present*, means of artistic expression. Once reproduced mechanically, speech becomes "…ready-to-hand…"[118] sound with no accompanying biology; in *Krapp*, as we have seen, a "dead" voice is *manipulated* into "live" interaction with a vital being, who "…bodies forth"[119] a character, using the time and space of the stage world. Krapp's tapes are representative of presence without *being* presence, but the temporal disruption that they cause affords us direct access to the consciousness of another, or to the mind turned into matter. Benjamin writes that the reproduction, "…enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record."[120] Originary presence is problematized on Beckett's stage however, when Krapp beholds the mechanical reproduction of a voice for which he could be said to *be* (to some extent) the original source. Krapp *is* the past voice to the same extent that he is his body, "…the nihilated in-itself . . . [which] remains at the heart of the for-itself as its original contingency."[121] That said, *full* identification with the body is not an option that is open to reflexive consciousness,

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[116] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 214.
[117] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 309.
[118] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 99.
[119] Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 6.
[120] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", p. 214.
[121] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 332.

whose bond with being is born of an internal negation and whose presence is based on an awareness of its own *lack of being* that which it presents itself to; originarity equates to *differance* in *Krapp* then, to the reflection-reflecting, and the body, as a constantly surpassed contingency, bears a resemblance to the reproduction that speaks of a self that one no longer is. Krapp's tapes are not merely expressive usurpations of originary presence; they *are present as a past* from whence the present and the future must spring, and as a facticity (like the body) which Krapp both *is* and *is not*. Like the past and the body, Krapp can carry his tapes with him, but he cannot *as conscious, present being* disappear into complete identification with them, by virtue of the fact that *consciousness* (like the mechanical reproduction or the Derridean representation) "breaks self-presence".

Power speaks of the temporal disjunction in *Krapp* in the following terms: "Even as the play takes place in 'real time' (the action is not artificially divided into scenes or a specifically 'fictional' time and place) the voice on the tape exists in the past, just as Krapp's voice in the present is in the process of being recorded."[122] What we might deem "real time" is made a mockery of in Beckett's world however, and the voice on Krapp's tapes *does not exist in the past but in the present*, as the *in-itself* facticity from whence Krapp must, as *for-itself* being, flee. Beckett adds layers of contradiction and artificiality to an art form which already relies upon disruptions to the time-space continuum. As Power writes: "If the concept of presence implies a correspondence between consciousness and object [as it does in Sartre's philosophy], or viewer and stage, then theatre at once affirms presence by taking place *before* an audience, while simultaneously putting this correspondence into question: a fictional 'now' often coexists in tension with the stage 'now'."[123] It is not just Krapp's tapes that interfere with the notion of presence upon his stage, transporting us, as they do, across the temporal dimensions; Krapp's regularly-inspected watch also threatens to turn the entire theatrical illusion on its head. As Benjamin points out, the timepiece is no friend to theatre:

> A clock that is working will always be a disturbance on the stage. There it cannot be permitted its function of measuring time. Even in a naturalistic play, astronomical time would clash with theatrical time.[124]

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[122] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 141.
[123] Power, *Presence in Play*, pp. 3-4. The italics here are Power's own.
[124] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", p. 240.

Added to this, Beckett's opening stage direction (unbeknownst, no doubt, to many an audience member), reads as follows: "*A late evening in the future*."[125] It is as though Beckett is *mocking* the very notion of presence upon his stage, deliberately including elements guaranteed to cause temporal chaos in production. Perhaps it is this commentary on, and distortion of, the flow of time in *Krapp*, which makes Wilson an ideal candidate for its re-enactment. After all, as Power puts it: "The elongation of the present moment . . . is also evident in the spectacular theatrical works of director Robert Wilson, who, in rejecting the sequential time and psychological space of conventional drama, worked within a Bergsonian sense of time as flow and duration."[126] *Krapp* demonstrates that time is not simply a universal, abstract system but, as Henri Bergson (1859-1941) theorised it even before Sartre, *duration*; a sequence of personal experiences, unique to each individual, and a means of perception.[127] As a durational activity out of time with world time: "Theatre, with its mode of representation specifically grounded before an audience, is an art form whose *presentational* possibilities are especially suited to rupturing 'the fabric of presence'."[128] *Krapp* is *a threat to the very notion of theatrical presence*; one which dares to venture right across, and stage, the entire temporal spectrum.

Krapp demonstrates human reality's duration across the temporal dimensions and the dynamic of temporality, and his demonstration is a physical one, in a physical setting, for an audience now almost beyond the age of mechanical reproduction. Krapp is a *being-in-the-world* who must engage with and encounter the *in-itself* being that is all around him; he is deeply rooted in his own facticity, and yet we see him fleeing from his own presence, deferring his *present*, as he attempts not only to retreat into his past, but also to project, through his final recording, into the future. In the future however, these new recordings, these artefacts, these trappings of the psychical in the physical, will be nothing more than the past-turned-in-on-itself, the *in-itself*, suspended, and devoid of that spontaneity that is the perpetual motion between the temporal dimensions. As Krapp makes his last tape, presumably for some future self, he projects towards his potentiality, just as the *for-itself*

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[125] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 215.
[126] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 102n.
[127] See: Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: Forgotten Books, 2012). Gontarski applies Bergson's theories to Beckett in the following work: S. E. Gontarski, "Recovering Beckett's Bergsonism", in *Beckett at 100: Revolving It All*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 93-106. Anthony Uhlmann also writes about Beckett's artistic relationship with Bergson in the first chapter of his work, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 5-23.
[128] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 142. The italics here are Power's own.

endlessly transcends itself in its attempts to attain absolute positivity through coincidence with its uninhabitable and unobtainable values. As far as Krapp is concerned: "The future is the ideal point where the sudden infinite compression of facticity (Past), of the For-itself (Present), and of its possible (a particular Future), will at last cause the *Self* to arise as the existence in-itself of the For-itself."[129] Perhaps Krapp should have learnt the lesson from his thirty-nine-year-old self that the aspirations of the past self rarely collide with the reality of the present. The selves never coincide. The past Krapp that suspects himself to be riding the "…crest of the wave"[130] also reflects: "Perhaps my best years are gone."[131] Yet still the "…fire…"[132] in this younger man pushes him forward; he turns his back on his past. He wouldn't want it back: Krapp has been the ass chasing the carrot. Krapp's tapes exist as phantoms, ghost-voices, *traces* of his past self, trapped in a concrete reality, yet carrying an echo directly from the "…hole of being at the heart of being."[133] Like the mirror in *Texts*, Krapp's tapes stand as reflections of the *for-itself* in the *in-itself*, and both make visible an absence in presence, and serve as a conduit from the material to the ethereal world. Neither can "bring back", or reinstate, the lost loved one or the days gone by. The tapes however, unlike the mirror, actually *do* retain something of the *for-itself* subject, and betoken the past as facticity, and these retentions can be played back at will as a reflection of the present absence that is human reality.

A Collision of Forms

Krapp, as we have seen, is the living embodiment of a human existence dispersed amidst the temporal dimensions, and it this dispersal that, for Sartre, constitutes duration: consciousness' very *mode of being*. Krapp readily articulates *each stage* of Sartre's dynamic of temporality; his past has become *in-itself* being, which he literally carries around with him (his tapes are a suitably *physical* symbol of a past as theorised by a phenomenological ontology that deals with beings environed by "things"), his present is revealed by his *presence* to *in-itself* being, and his projection towards the future is seen in his creation of an *in-itself* future past present, for the potential future *for-itself* that he would be. The (Sartrean) reality of the human *present* is that it is an irremediable absence of a totality of self, whose *presence* is a direct result of simultaneity between consciousness and some object of

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[129] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 150. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[130] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 217.
[131] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 223.
[132] Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, p. 223.
[133] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 637.

attention. Power subscribes to these theories when he explains that "…Krapp's grounding on the stage (and the actor's 'contingent presence') is highlighted at various moments through the physical interface between the character and the objects and space which he occupies."[134] Theatre is, we imagine, an embodied medium, for which there appears to be a solid framework in place, where language is spoken through its physical enactment and the fictive character is steeped in his/her own facticity. In *That Time* (1976) however, facticity no longer remains to haunt the central figure (the Listener) in quite the same way as it does Krapp, and even the contingent body is all but absent. The Listener has a pseudo-facticity (a past detailed via a recorded voice), but no environment, and if we continue to think of presence as consciousness' interaction with material being, we might wonder (by way of formulating a comparison with, and charting an evolution from, *Krapp*) what, if any, level of presence may be attributed to him. If Krapp can be viewed as a hands-on representation of bodily presence in the theatre then the Listener, his descendent, appears as something closer to a hands-off representation of absence, as he draws us further into the realms of a Derridean *hauntology* than his ancestor ever could.

That Time undermines a multitude of theatrical conventions and, like *Krapp*, comments upon and distorts our perception of time and space upon the stage. As *That Time* opens, the spectator is greeted with a stage picture whose subject is one suspended in a *timeless void*, projected above and beyond a recognisable world:

> *Curtain. Stage in darkness. Fade up to* LISTENER'S FACE
> *about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre.*
> *Old white face, long flaring white hair as if seen from above*
> *outspread.*[135]

McMullan suggests that: "The presentation of a lit playing area surrounded by darkness in most of [Beckett's] late dramas undermines perceptual stability: the bodies we see on stage seem curiously provisional, and may disappear at any moment, as May does in the last section of *Footfalls*."[136] In *That Time*, the "playing area" is not only surrounded by a darkness that threatens to engulf its holographic focal point, but also radically reduced, perhaps to bring into focus Beckett's *absolute reduction* of the body to a face in this work, and of "playing" to an intermittent opening and closing of the Listener's eyes, as disorienting voices

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[134] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 140.
[135] Samuel Beckett, *That Time*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 388.
[136] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 106. *Footfalls* will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

enter the space "…*from both sides and above*."[137] Kumiko Kiuchi suggests that Beckett's lighting disturbs the boundaries between performer and spectator, allowing the Listener to transcend the performance space as darkness "…cancels out the border between the stage and the audience."[138] The world of *That Time* is all-encompassing then, and the performing "body" at its centre does seem provisional, appearing more as an unrestrained psychical phenomenon, a dream work, than a clearly defined, delimited physical phenomenon. The illuminated Listener looms large, like "…a cinematic illusion…"[139] standing in place of a protagonist whose past streams in via the division of his own pre-recorded *voice* into three *voices* (A, B and C), "…*without any break in general flow except where silence indicated*."[140] The ubiquity of this unpunctuated sonic flow (along with that of the pervading visual symbol) unifies all bodies within the theatre, as it infiltrates not only the consciousness of the Listener, but also that of the "…spectator [who also] inevitably plays a role of listener of this piece."[141] Furthermore, the voices that issue forth from *this* netherworld don't even have the body of the tape to act as a visual symbol of the *separation* of audience and Listener that is fundamental to *Krapp*, an unusually "realist" piece of the Beckett jigsaw. The lighting and sound effects of *That Time*, in their absorption of the audience into the dramatic action, serve to create a *direct communion* between fiction and reality, an absolute penetration of one consciousness by another: a total theatre.[142]

With the theatrical boundaries dispersed, and the audience immersed in its role as listener and interpreter, it is almost as though a collision of media has taken place in *That Time*. What should be a predominantly *theatrical* event, filled with objects and living, moving beings, becomes an unusually internalised experience for the spectator, as s/he channels and "gives body" to narratives (in the same way that a reader would the contents of a novel) by imagining those elements of the stage world which are absent. *That Time* confronts the viewer with what *feels like* an uncanny, purified stage presence, accompanied by a monologue that is not "bodied forth" by the actor. There is barely a body *there*, in fact,

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[137] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 388.
[138] Kumiko Kiuchi, "What is 'that' in *That Time/Cette fois?*: Spectralisation of the Listener/Souvenant", working group paper, *Samuel Beckett Working Group* (Southampton: University of Southampton, 7th-9th September 2012), p. 4.
[139] Kiuchi, "What is 'that' in *That Time/Cette fois?*, p. 5.
[140] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 388.
[141] Kiuchi, "What is 'that' in *That Time/Cette fois?*, p. 7.
[142] Much could be said here about the ways in which the staging of *That Time* could be argued to reflect certain of Antonin Artaud's theories, absorbing, as it does, the audience into a complete theatrical language; Artaud *will* be discussed more fully in the following chapter, in the context of "The Holy Theatre".

in some of Beckett's later theatrical works[143], and the Listener's lack of a solid, animated corporeality invites the audience to picture "…the old scenes…"[144] described during the confessionals of voices A, B and C *in their own minds*, having only this fragile *apparition* of a face in limbo as visual stimulation. Whilst the Listener has no *body* (and nobody) that we can discern, he *is embodied* in the same sense as the protagonist of the novel *Company* (or those of *Texts* and *The Unnamable*), as a "…site of subjectivity and imagining."[145] The protagonists of both works inhabit and exude the darkness, tell themselves stories as a means of endurance and rely upon the participation of the spectator in the creation of those aspects of themselves that are beyond direct perception. *Company* even picks up on certain of its predecessor's motifs: the drifting "…dead rat…"[146] that joins the young lovers in *That Time* reappears in *Company* as: "A rat long dead."[147] Unlike the prose narrator, however, the Listener, irreal as he seems, *is present* and his *stage* presence is pervasive, live, and transient: he is the supernatural melting pot into which the worlds of the theatre, the novel, and even the film have been thrown.

A planar surface replaces depth in the Listener's world, and the two-dimensional screen-effect (the "cinematic illusion" mentioned above) produced by the staging/lighting may draw us even further into his abyss, as: "Dramatic representation on film, by freeing itself from the excess baggage of physical presence, becomes all the more 'present' to consciousness by being virtually *nothing* in physical terms."[148] We could be forgiven for thinking then, that what we are *presented* with in *That Time* is the very truth or being of *transcendental presence*, the absolute coincidence of meaning with itself: the logos. In his detailed analysis of Berkeley's theory of vision, Branka Arsić writes that a theatre "…without a stage should serve as a metaphor for pure presentation, in which point of view and object fall into one…"[149] and the illusion of such a theatre of total consciousness can certainly be said to be created here, where no stage is visible as a reminder of our separation from the dramatic action. Whilst *That Time* may qualify as a pure *theatrical* presentation however, it cannot, by the very nature of its own medium, present us with *originary presence*, only a

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[143] Compare Mouth in *Not I*, for instance.

[144] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 389.

[145] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 4.

[146] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 391.

[147] Beckett, *Company*, p. 17.

[148] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 31. The italics here are Power's own.

[149] Branka Arsić, *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (Via Beckett)*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2003). This work will be discussed further in Chapter Four's section on *Film*.

stage presence, a *differance* and, ultimately, an absence. Whilst the Listener is, for the audience, an absolute vanishing (collision) point, or the present moment, *pure* presence, in the theatre as elsewhere, is simply unperceivable, as any "…rigorous analysis which would attempt to rid the present of all which is not it – *i.e.*, of the past and of the immediate future – would find that nothing remained but an infinitesimal instant."[150] *That Time* defers its present and substitutes its own past by *emptying the presence out* of the spoken word via mechanical reproduction; *the present is nothing* but a recounting of memories in this play, as the very title suggests. Added to this, the meaning-making projection towards the *future* that we see in *Krapp* has ceased here, and whilst the manifestation of the Listener as pure focal point, unhindered by stage objects and business, means that he is all the more graspable as *stage* presence and containable as a past, his lack of flight, and lack of being-in-the-*world*, render him a no more than a sign, a deferral of presence/logos, in comparison to his predecessor. The (proscenium) frame through which we viewed *Krapp* has been removed in *That Time* to filter the performance space directly into consciousness; this removal, however, leaves the absence of presence that is being-on-stage fully exposed.

Time Out of Joint

As we have seen, Krapp is the quintessential figure amidst his ground, utilising, coercing and manipulating all manner of objects around him via the medium of his body, and living out his projects and possibilities within the limitations afforded to him by his isolated setting. We might say then, that the Listener in *That Time* (another elderly figure existing at the centre of a void, who must give audience to a past in an isolated world surrounded by darkness) is in fact the very figure of Krapp without ground. This Beckettian phantom exists as consciousness untethered, unencumbered by the concrete facticity of the stage world, which is no longer a world with furniture in it. Even the lighting, that other Beckett character, functions in such a way in *That Time* that it liberates the Listener from actuality, as the boundaries between stage, character, and audience are blurred, and we are faced with a being suspended in nothingness. Added to this, there is no longer any *need* for live, human interaction with contemporary technology on Beckett's late stage: the voices play spontaneously, without the central figure having to touch or manipulate any object. The Listener may, in fact, be using thought in order to release himself from the constraints of phenomenal actuality and the conventional theatre setting as, according to Sartre, "…I escape

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[150] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 143.

through abstract thought the senses which I am; that is, I cut my bonds with the world."[151] The Listener, however, is at a disadvantage next to Krapp, as his lack of physical action means that he cannot stop, rewind, or wind his voices on, and the constant flight that is Krapp's signature seems to have come to an end. The Listener, with his aged, "…*white face,* [and] *long flaring white hair…*"[152] cuts an eerie figure, and we might suspect him already dead, the ghost of Krapp, post-last tape; *no more projection*, only reflection.

The stage and its contents exist as a juxtaposition of the real and the imaginary and, as McMullan writes: "Theatre incorporates fictional methods of evocation which intersect with the here and now of the stage and, indeed, can contradict it, setting up a tension between what is phenomenologically perceived and what is conjured in the imagination."[153] In *That Time*, the Listener's face is the sole focus for the audience as it hears the audio material that acts as its main creative stimulus, but his presence, in many ways, problematizes our perceptions of the fictive world that is presented to us. *That Time* provides an onslaught of mental imagery which is, if anything, *confused* by the omnipresence of a face that opens and closes its eyes with no definitive or decipherable correspondence with the content of the script, and that also, to round proceedings off, ends the piece with an unexpected and seemingly inappropriate toothless smile.[154] One might suspect that the joke is on the audience. Whilst the spoken word penetrates the minds of both spectator/listener and Listener, the voices are not spontaneous expressions of consciousness but, like Krapp's voices, pre-recorded, and although these are identified in the stage directions as being "…*his* [the Listener's] *own…*"[155] they seem to issue in an uncontrolled and disorienting stream from somewhere without, rupturing the fabric of presence, displacing the logos, and substituting *differance*. Although the Listener (who is, technically, the facticity of voices A, B and C) has some *connection* to a past which holds him hostage, he has no active, environmental *involvement* with a facticity of his own in the same way that Krapp does, and no "live" voice; he is a redundant signifier and a radicalisation of the "phantom dyad" that is the reflection-reflecting. If, in *Krapp*, a projection into the future somehow "…'holds together' the 'disparate'…"[156] multiple voices that fill its space then, in *That Time*, these have fallen asunder into a *haunting*. Where Krapp acted as a *hinge*, holding together past, present and future, for the passive Listener: "Time is

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[151] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 343.
[152] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 388.
[153] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 133.
[154] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 395.
[155] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 388.
[156] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 19.

off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted."[157] To follow Derrida in quoting Hamlet (Derrida uses *Hamlet* as a means of explicating his *hauntology* in *Specters of Marx*) "time is out of joint" in *That Time*, as a past haunts a disengaged present that runs concurrently yet separately alongside it in an increasingly spectral, non-present sense.

The Presence of Absence

In *Krapp*, we might say that the central character is haunted by his own *facticity*, and that this facticity is represented through his aging body and the body of his "spools"; in *That Time*, however, the Listener is haunted by what would be better described his own *spectre* as, in Derrida terms, a spectre is "…neither soul nor body…" it is a "…non-present present, [the] being-there of an absent or departed…"[158] and, unlike the voices that inhabit Krapp's tapes: "One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*."[159] The Listener's voice *comes back to him of its own accord*, to accuse him of, amongst other things, *being* this Derridean non-presence ("…you might as well not have been there at all the eyes passing over you and through you like so much thin air…"[160]), and such accusations of insubstantiality feed atmospherically into a work where a "…Listener hovers almost as a spectral presence on stage, a signifier without reference."[161] It could be argued, of course, that *all* stage presences are spectral, as they are by their very nature *supplementary*. Beckett's characters live outside of themselves in worlds where usurpation has always already begun; writing separates itself from speech and supplants it, and: "Theatrical representation, in the sense of exposition, of production, of that which is placed out there . . . is contaminated by supplementary re-presentation."[162] Derrida describes the spectre, the supplement, and the actor in very much the same terms; the spectre, which "…comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy…"[163], occupies, keeps, and usurps the place of another[164]; the supplement, like the spectre, is "…neither presence nor absence" is "…never present here and now" but takes and keeps "…the place of the other"[165]; and the actor (whose stage presence, we might say, betokens an absence of reality) similarly occupies a sight of *differance* which "…is born out of the rift between the representer and the

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[157] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 20.
[158] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 5.
[159] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 11. The italics here are Derrida's own.
[160] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 394.
[161] Kiuchi, "What is 'that' in *That Time/Cette fois?*, p. 14.
[162] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 304.
[163] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 5.
[164] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 8.
[165] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 314.

represented."[166] *That Time* exposes the supplementary mechanics, the "in-betweenness", of theatrical representation itself; the Listener is a signifier intimately present to consciousness, but behind which the signified (logos) is displaced. The actor is a decoy; stage presence erases presence; and theatre is the freeplay of signs which obscure the truth. The concept of stage presence is as paradoxical as that of presence in a prose text, and as insubstantial as humanity's presence in temporality. *Presence on the stage always signifies an absence*, as the theatrical performance, "…by being presented through actors and props which are physically present, clearly demarcates the absence and unreality of its representations."[167] *That Time* presents what looks like pure presence, a total theatre, whilst blowing apart the totalising structure of theatrical representation and exposing the disjunction, the absence at its very heart.

The Beckett characters discussed in this chapter all seem to suffer as a result of their *being* having been dispersed in time and in representational media. In *Krapp*, for instance, we are given an insight into the world of a lonely, perhaps depressed, man, living "…the many illusory lives that we typically live in our heads that involve futile attempts to anticipate nonexistent and unpredictable futures or that involve dwelling on, reliving, or reconstructing the nonexistent past that is gone forever…"[168] and medicating his misery with alcohol; another means of escaping the present. Krapp, like the narrator of *Texts* and the Listener of *That Time*, is a present absence, a transient being who cannot unite his disparate temporal incarnations and attain a totality of self. The Beckett character is not, as we have seen (Chapter One), wholly body or wholly mind, s/he exists as the "phantom dyad", as *differance*, and as reflection. Derrida's philosophy has been used in conjunction with Sartre's phenomenology in this chapter as there is a deconstruction at work in Beckett which speaks (in *Texts* for example) not only of human reality's inability to attain a fullness or completion of being ("…a deeper birth, a deeper death…"[169]), but also of the inability of the written word, supplement, or sign (actor even), to deliver total "presence" to the reader (or spectator).[170] Just as conscious being's projection into future projects continuously supplants

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[166] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 304.
[167] Power, *Presence in Play*, p. 31.
[168] T. D. Borkovec, "The Importance of the Present in Being a Human Being: Lessons from Generalized Anxiety Disorder", *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, vol. 2 (2005): 8.
[169] Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, p. 49.
[170] Interestingly, Derrida speaks (in an interview with Derek Attridge) of his feeling "too close" to Beckett, as an author, to be able to "respond" to his works; he also reveals that he has avoided writing about these because of what he terms his "proximity" to, or even "identification" with, them. See Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature", in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 60.

its "here and now", the written word displaces the logos (presence), replacing it with a chain of signifiers that point to each other and point to the truth *without actually delivering it*. Similarly, situations depicted on stage take on a reality of their own, which is ultimately divorced from the real-events-in-the-world that they may be said to represent.

Krapp, like the narrator of *Texts*, is *lost* in his own *search* for self-presence, and looks to his past in the hope of finding himself *there*. Furthermore, as *Texts'* narrator *writes himself into the future* so too does Krapp, as he literally *makes a record of himself*; both protagonists are *active* in their respective flights from present being. The Listener, on the other hand, is *passive* (as his very name suggests); he has ceased to play the game and thereby to act as the hinge around which temporalities converge. If *Texts* is an *immaterial* illustration, and *Krapp* a *concrete* illustration of the absence that is presence, and the absolute dispersal or diaspora that is the human reality, then *That Time*, which presents us with a ghostlike protagonist *haunted* by further phantoms of his own past self, could be said to be a *spectral* illustration of that same. As we have seen, *That Time* strips away much of the theatrical veil, exposing itself as raw material to the consciousness of the spectator, which it enters readily in its unique shapelessness. Despite the phenomenological reduction at work in *That Time* however (the Husserlian bracketing of the outside world), the juxtaposition of the Listener and his voice brings us *no closer to the truth of their origin*, and "…there is nothing hidden in the phenomena, no Being, Spirit, essence or identity that grounds reality and saves it from the ceaseless play of appearances."[171] *That Time* is a "…de-construction of the transcendental signified…", a disjunction, a temporal smearing, a haunting whose planarity forces signs *across* its flat surface towards other signs and defers depth, confirmation that, no matter how *seemingly* present to consciousness it might be: "The thing itself is a sign."[172] We skim across a surface of signs in Beckett's late theatre, looking (as we did in *Endgame*[173]) for a way in, for the logos, for *meaning*. The *search* for the logos, for the invisible truth *is*, however futile, *essential* to theatrical activity and to our perception and appreciation of art in its diverse forms. An intrinsic mode of human being *is* this launching of the self towards an idealised plane, which often manifests as the quest for an origin, the perfect creation and the creator that would endow all things with their reason to *be*. I have suggested that *for-itself* being can be viewed, in the works here considered, as an endless temporal movement, a projection

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[171] Davis, "Sartre and the Return of the Living Dead", p. 223.
[172] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 49.
[173] See Chapter One, p. 26.

which defines presence without ever attaining presence-to-self, and a mode of being-absent to self; in the following chapter I shall continue along the trajectory launched here, as I consider this projection of consciousness taken to its outer limits. Chapter Three, then, will explore Beckett's artistic response to the "divine", to "God", religion and, above all the "holy", as our search for the logos and for the self is extended to the heavens, in works that see us communicating with phantoms and trying to decipher the invisible.

Chapter Three

Beckett and the (Un)holy Theatre of Phantoms

Between Presence and Absence, Subject and Object, Religion and Consciousness

In the opening chapter of this work I argued that Beckett's characters are embodied, conscious entities, whose being-in-the-world is dependent upon the earthly materiality that gives shape to thought and acts as humankind's primary vehicle of expression. This preliminary exposition of the Beckettian body-subject launched an investigation into two phenomenological regions of being (*being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*) which, according to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, are inextricably intertwined in the unique mode of existence that is the human reality. Having established the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this study, I sought to present, in Chapter Two, a detailed account of the diaspora, or deferral from self-presence, that characterises the *temporal* existence of the Beckettian consciousness. Duration (the very mode of being constitutive of a *for-itself* presence) was explicated here as an irresistible, perpetual force, at the heart of which lies a disjunction or fundamental absence that Beckett makes the stuff of literary and dramatic (in)action. The Beckettian "hole" at the heart of presence is, I suggested, reminiscent not only of the Sartrean *for-itself*'s constant failure to coincidence with itself throughout the temporal dimensions, but also of that Derridean absence which would undermine traditional western philosophy's logocentric quest for presence-as-truth. The purpose of *this* chapter, in light of all that has come before it, will be to examine the ways in which Beckett's creatures *compensate* for their own inherent *sense of lack* (a natural consequence of transient, unfulfilled, temporal being), by engaging in behaviours that paradoxically serve to drive them *even further away* from any concrete identification with self. The flight away from the present that temporalizes conscious existence seems, when taken to its outer limits or "the heavens", to offer *meaning* to those who seek signification beyond their own facticity, and I aim in this chapter to capture something of the Beckettian consciousness, this reflexive insubstantiality, as it embarks on its ultimate, and profoundly human, projection away from itself and towards its imagined fulfilment in some "divine" or "unseen" sphere.

The protracted yearning towards a divinity that acts as subject matter for the works to be discussed in this chapter is, essentially, an *extension* of that endless pursuit of totality that was the focus of the previous chapter, and so the trajectory of this study seems somewhat predetermined. It feels necessary to progress from a consideration of the Beckett character's

embodied and temporal modes of being, towards an encounter with her/his, for want of a better word, "spiritual" mode of being, as no serious ontology which takes a stance on the mind-body problem as well as on being-in-time can avoid asking questions about our species' ongoing search for a source, or for the logos, however seemingly futile this search might be. As I sought in the previous chapter to establish a phenomenology of temporality for the Beckett character, I could not choose but to consider the elusive concepts of presence and absence, and the manner in which these are applied to the being-in-time of consciousness, as well as to diverse modes of artistic representation. It is important to note here, I think, that discussions of presence (even those instigated by philosophers who *seem* to seek the removal of "other worldly" qualities from philosophical discourse) often call upon what we might term a "spiritually-charged" vocabulary, peppered with references to supernatural energies, magnetism and the phantasmagoric. Even Sartre, perhaps one of history's most famous atheists, speaks in a somewhat "mystical language" throughout *Being and Nothingness*, as he illustrates the *transcendence* of consciousness from the present, describes "the *phantom dyad*"[1] that is the reflection-reflecting, and reduces, from the very outset, "…the existent to the series of appearances [Fr. *apparitions*] which manifest it."[2] Derrida, similarly, seeks to annul the mysterious hidden powers of the logos and to empty the *presence*, or transcendental truth, out of writing, and yet he speaks of a *hauntology*, of *spectres* and *traces* as he does so. Both philosophers then, seem to confirm an innately human mode of being-towards-spirit, even as they write towards its alternative, and the deconstruction of presence (or the logos) that took place in the previous chapter (far from disabling further discussion of those essences that may or may not be hidden beneath the veneer of the signs that we experience as constitutive of our world), *highlighted* that seeking-beyond-self that is the cornerstone of what we might term our spiritual mode of being both in and apart from that world.

A Note on Religion and the "Holy"

I should perhaps point out, here, that writings on Beckett and *religion* abound. In the year 2000, for instance, an edition of the *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* journal was, for the most part, comprised of papers from the international "Beckett and Religion" conference held at Stirling University in 1999[3], and these contributed to what was an *already well-established* avenue of research. By the early 1980s, in fact, Beckett's "…use of biblical

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[1] See Chapter Two, p. 54, note 50.
[2] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 1.
[3] Marius Buning, Matthijs Engelberts and Onno Kosters, eds., *Beckett and Religion: Beckett/Aesthetics/Politics* (*SBT/A* 9), (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

allusion…" had, according to Kristin Morrison, been "…charted throughout various studies by virtually every major Beckett Scholar."[4] I do not intend, therefore, to spend time inventorying the frequent references that Beckett makes to the bible and to Christianity in this chapter, as to do so would be to offer precious little to the current field. It would also be an exercise in futility if I were to speculate *now* on Beckett's theistic or atheistic agenda, as Butler advised readers some twenty years ago that: "About religion Beckett is unambiguously ambiguous."[5] I am interested not in "Beckett and Religion" so much as "Beckett and the Holy", or in manifestations of what we might call the *universally* "sacred" in Beckett's drama. Beckett, I will argue, creates an aesthetic of the "holy", rather than the godly, as he uses *diverse artistic media* to explore human reality's interaction with *unknown "celestial" forces*, in works that seem to speak to us from worlds beyond our own. It is necessary, of course, for me to clarify what is meant by words such as "holy" and "sacred" in this chapter (particularly as I have suggested that these will be considered outside of their usual "religious" context), but before I move into some definitions of these terms I would like, briefly, to outline some of the ways in which Beckett engages with Christianity *artistically* rather than *theistically*.

Statements that Beckett makes about Christianity often tell us more about his literary practice than his religious beliefs. Colin Duckworth records a now infamous example of Beckett's "religious ambiguity" in his *Angels of Darkness*, and this he takes from his own 1965 interview with the author himself:

> C. D: Is a Christian interpretation of the play [*Waiting for Godot*] justified?
> S. B: Yes, Christianity is a mythology with which I am perfectly familiar. So naturally I use it.[6]

This "…often quoted but sometimes unattributed…"[7] remark obviously (perhaps deliberately) raises rather more questions than it answers: are Christian references simply a *literary device* that Beckett uses, we might wonder, or is the provocative statement a direct

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[4] Kristin Morrison, "Neglected Biblical Allusion in Beckett's Plays: 'Mother Pegg' Once More", in *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, ed. Morris Beja, S. E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), p. 93.

[5] Lance St. John Butler, "'A Mythology with which I am Perfectly Familiar': Samuel Beckett and the Absence of God", in *Irish Writers and Religion*, ed. Robert Welch (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1992), p. 169.

[6] Colin Duckworth, *Angels of Darkness: Dramatic Effect in Beckett and Ionesco* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 18.

[7] Colin Duckworth, "Beckett and the Missing Sharer", in *Beckett and Religion*, p. 141n.

denial of "…some deeply-rooted spiritual motivation?"[8] By classifying Christianity as a "*myth*ology" Beckett as good as rejects the possibility that there is any *truth* in its teachings, and so it would seem that it is the *aesthetic structure* of his work (rather than the structure of any personal belief system) that motivates him to artistically assimilate scriptural fragments. Beckett is reported to have given the following insight into his methodology to drama critic Harold Hobson: "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them . . . It is the shape that matters."[9] Christianity, then, is perhaps a fecund source of artistic materials/inspiration for Beckett, its allegories and symbols working *sculpturally*, as figurative guidelines and points of departure for the creative process, rather than catalysts for theologically-driven, emotive compositions, penned as acts of Christian worship. Beckett *uses* philosophical ideas to shape his work similarly; Berkeley's *esse est percipi* is the springboard that launches his one and only cinematic work *Film*[10], and yet he denies any "…truth value…" that the Bishop's mantra might have, and states at the beginning of the script that this should be "…regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience."[11] Surely those *religious* signs that Beckett incorporates in fictional worlds can also be regarded in terms of their structural/dramatic convenience in that case, especially as these superhuman symbols are usually evoked so that they might materialise sublime subject matter. Christopher Innes, in his exploration of *Holy Theatre* suggests that Beckett uses "…*biblical* echoes…" in order that his works might "…gain *mythic* resonance…"[12], and it is precisely this creative economy that I will argue describes an artist committed to the merging of form (media) and content (or logos and sign), in his expression of those inexpressible human impulses whose reverberations paradoxically *exceed* the codes and confines of any organised system of faith that can do no more than *point to the sacred.*

When I speak of the "holy" or "sacred" in this chapter, I do not necessarily mean to refer to the focal point of any *particular* religious practice, but rather towards our perceptions of that universal essence, "mythic resonance", or logos, that *lies beneath all* forms of organised faith. Vital to this chapter is, naturally, the fact that this mysterious, indefinable

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[8] Duckworth, "Beckett and the Missing Sharer", p. 134.
[9] Samuel Beckett quoted by Harold Hobson in "Samuel Beckett: Dramatists of the Year", *International Theatre Annual*, vol. 1 (1956): 153, quoted in Judith E. Dearlove, "'Syntax Upended in Opposite Corners': Alterations in Beckett's Linguistic Theories", in *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, p. 124.
[10] Discussed at length in the following chapter.
[11] Samuel Beckett, *Film*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 323.
[12] Christopher Innes, *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 210-211. The italics here are mine.

force is sought out not only by the "religious", but also by a philosophy of *performance* which, as Auslander puts it, "…aspires to the communication of intangible, universal levels of experience…" via the creation of a "…therapeutic theatre designed to accomplish spiritual renewal by unmasking repressed psychic materials."[13] Theatre director/theorist Peter Brook famously describes such a "Holy Theatre" as a "…Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible…"[14] and he champions Beckett's as a theatre engaged in a pursuit of the unseen, esoteric forces which "…exist outside of…"[15] our earthly realm. Brook also writes that "…the invisible-made-visible is of a sacred nature…"[16] and the words "sacred" and "holy" are often used in conjunction with, as well as to substitute, one another in this way, as their accompanying conceptual frameworks are defined in varied terms depending on the contexts to which they are applied.

In Ralph Yarrow's *Sacred Theatre*[17], Carl Lavery details the diverse categorisations of "the sacred" made by sociology, psychology, philosophy and theology throughout the modern age. According to Lavery, sociologists such as Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) understand "…the sacred in secular terms"[18] and, indeed, historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) writes (in a language somewhat reminiscent of Sartre's) that the "…*sacred* and *profane* are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of history."[19] Psychoanalysis, like sociology, perceives "…the sacred as a phenomenon that is bound up with questions of individual and collective identity"[20] and we might argue, as Jade McCutcheon does, that religion also serves a sociological purpose as it "…invests life with sacred meaning and power through beliefs in myths and doctrines, through the practices of ritual and ethics, through personal experience and through forms of social organisation."[21] Whilst Christianity speaks of uncaused causes and a "holiness" which transcends our world, it communicates "…the radical alterity of the sacred…by the presence

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[13] Philip Auslander, "'Holy Theatre' and Catharsis", *Theatre Research International*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 16.

[14] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 47.

[15] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 68.

[16] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 64.

[17] Ralph Yarrow, ed., *Sacred Theatre* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007).

[18] Carl Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", in *Sacred Theatre*, p. 33.

[19] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1987), p. 14. The italics here are Eliade's own.

[20] Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", p. 35.

[21] Jade Rosina McCutcheon, "Theatre – Re-assessing the Sacred in Actor Training", in *Performing Consciousness*, p. 48.

of a God…"[22] and by making this "God" decipherable, by committing his "word" to a text (the bible) this monotheism actually nullifies the superhuman quality of that same and renders it an *object* around which societies can be structured. Theorists such as Eliade and Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Lavery explains, actually view Christianity "…as the antithesis of the sacred…"[23], or as that which rationalises the irrational by making of it a "text" that can be absorbed it into "the world". The logocentric system of faith (word of "God" > bible > subject) acts as a barrier between humankind and sacred experience proper, reducing "…existence to a search for unity and comprehensibility, as opposed to an adventure in otherness and inexplicability."[24] Beckett's theatre is no such reduction of the sacred; as we have already seen, attempts to comprehend it logocentrically generally reveal the inexplicability, the unknowable, unnameable absence behind its every sign. Beckett's is a "Holy Theatre" of the "invisible-made-visible" (*not* a theatre designed to serve Christianity or any other societal structure), and so the *sacred* quality of his drama is perhaps best revealed when it is aligned with an *aesthetic* philosophy that deals with those essences that cannot be contained in the theological/sociological/psychoanalytical terms detailed above.

As Lavery describes what he calls the "…mystic a/theism…" of theorists such as Eliade and Bataille, who prize "…sacred transcendence…" as an "…irrational cosmic truth . . . prior to God"[25], we might hear echoes of the *performance* theories of Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), which *influenced* Derrida[26], and acted as the impetus for much of Brook's directorial work.[27] When Artaud speaks of a theatre that seeks to "…rediscover a religious, mystical meaning…"[28] he does not mean to conjure spectres of the medieval, didactic church dramas (the ultimate form of logocentric art), but to contrast Christianity with "…paganism and other natural religions…emphasising with burning emotion, the splendour and ever present poetry of the ancient metaphysical foundations on which these religions were built."[29] Artaud's "…sacred…"[30] philosophy is integral to this chapter, and when I speak of the sacred

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[22] Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", p. 35.
[23] Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", p. 37.
[24] Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", p. 36.
[25] Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", p. 39.
[26] See Jacques Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 292-316.
[27] See Innes, *Holy Theatre*, pp. 129-144.
[28] Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (London: Calder, 2005), p. 35.
[29] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 85.
[30] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 41.

here I mean to speak of those "…holy ceremonies…"[31] that would give us access to "…the mind's most secret perceptions."[32] The (dis)embodied, temporal beings that we encounter in some of Beckett's *dramas* (and I consider radio and television, as well as stage, dramas as "Holy Theatre" works in this chapter, by virtue of their supernatural abilities to portray transcendent phantoms) conduct what we might call "holy ceremonies" as they project *their* attentions away from facticity and their respective surroundings, towards that which *they* deem to be sacred, or *elevated above and beyond* everyday modes of being-in-the-world. As Beckett sonically and pictorially details the transcendence of his most "spiritual", and spectral, characters through media that he suits to his subject matter, I propose that he creates an aesthetic which *resonates with* some "higher" level of being and raises questions about the innate divinity of human consciousness itself. Whilst the (non)presence of "God" haunts the Beckett canon, it is *human* consciousness that is its *divine* subject, and the *spiritual aspirations of earthbound beings* that it immortalises in "holy art".

In this chapter I will suggest that Beckett foregrounds and explores the "holy" qualities of the *radiophonic* medium in his play for voices *All That Fall*, as he presents the listener with characters whose supplications to the "maker" they have undermined and displaced threaten to immaterialise them entirely. *The listener is deified* by Beckett's radio play, I will argue, as s/he is forced (in the absence of "God") to act as the creator that *perceives* the dissolute protagonist Maddy and thus makes her *be*. Next I will consider the television play *Ghost Trio*, where a Male Figure (referred to simply as F) lives something of a "half-life" as he searches, like Maddy, outside of himself for that which he deems to be missing. For F (whose material presence is every bit as unstable as that of his aforementioned sonic predecessor) however, divine benevolence is associated with the memory of a lost loved one, rather than a conventional god, and it is the prospect of reunion with this absent female that limits his conscious existence. F's agency is further thrown into question as he is made *object* by a voice that narrates his shattered dreams from outside the scene, but I will suggest that this voice also performs what can be described as a "holy" function as it makes (with the help of a mirror) his *subjectivity visible*. Beckett's mastery of the televisual medium (a medium whose qualities both Artaud and Sartre reflect upon) provides a commentary on F's lack of definitive, bodily presence and his spectral suspension in indeterminacy. Finally I will propose that *Footfalls*, a play for "traditional" theatre, portrays the search for "religious"

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[31] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 42.
[32] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 43.

experience as being both futile and destructive. The character May is the only "body" that we are *physically* presented with in this play, and her wraithlike form speaks of a divided, unhappy consciousness, seeking its fulfilment in a sphere that would evaporate it entirely. Artaud, Sartre, and Brook all write of artworks which call for the sacrifice of the ego, of self-consciousness, and a sacred elevation or "…dissolution into oneness and indifferentiation"[33], and I aim to use *Footfalls* to demonstrate that theatre is, as these seemingly unrelated practitioners would have it, a medium that has the potential to dissolve barriers between individual audience members and the actors they are presented with, to unite them in "holy" communion, and liberate them (however briefly) from worldly concerns.

Towards a Theatre of Phantoms

The characters that this chapter will focus on almost defy ontological categorisation into regions of being, as they slip through fissures in the boundaries that separate not only life and death, subjectivity and objectivity, but also those of phenomenological philosophy, theology, and theories of "sacred aesthetics". I do not abandon the phenomenology of Sartre in this chapter (it has, after all, played perhaps *the* most crucial role so far in the overall structure of this "Beckett study"), but this needs to be supplemented by his writings on theatre and art if the gap between atheism and the sacred is to be bridged. The fragmentation of phenomena into a series of *traces* and *haunts* that characterises Derridean deconstruction is also remembered in the following analysis, alongside, crucially, those writings of Artaud that provide the blueprint for what I speak of here as an *irreligious* (*unholy* in Christian terms) and yet (in Artaudian/Brookian terms) "Holy Theatre" of Beckettian phantoms.

This chapter enters performance spaces governed by a playwright whose religious beliefs (or lack of) are under constant scrutiny, and yet remain obscure; theatres where bodiless souls seem to *haunt* the liminal spheres in which they have become suspended "…like so much thin air…"[34], paying no heed to a Christian doctrine that *depends* on *binaries* (such as body/soul, good/evil, heaven/hell) and so discourages their dissolution, *or* to the phenomenology that would see souls and bodies inextricably fused together. Sartre writes, in a predictably *unholy* fashion that "…it would be in vain to suppose that the soul can detach itself from this individualization [the body] by separating itself from the body at death or by pure thought, for the soul is the body inasmuch as the for-itself *is* its own

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[33] Lavery, "Modern Views of the Sacred", p. 39.
[34] Beckett, *That Time*, p. 394.

individualization."[35] As we shall see however (and as we have already seen, to some extent, in the shape of the Listener in *That Time*), in Beckett's works there is a loophole, a third region of being as it were, through which liminal beings, or bodiless "phantoms" can slip, and whilst Sartre implies that our presence, as *for-itself* beings ceases at our death[36], we may question whether or not death *can* actually be said to signify an end to presence in certain Beckettian worlds, where sacred communication transcends the realms of the living and the dead, the embodied and the disembodied. Added to this, Sartre contradicts himself, in part, in *Being and Nothingness*, as (pre-empting a Derridean *hauntology*) he also "…describes the dead as being with us always [as] an objective part of our situation, a factor which cannot be ignored in our decisions and actions."[37] The type of *presence* that the dead have in Sartre's *phenomenological* world is debatable, of course, particularly when the dead are described as having objective, rather than subjective, status; in Sartre's *artistic* world, on the other hand, spectral *presences* reign supreme, and it is because of this that I allow him to enter into the "holy" discussion. As we will see in the following chapter, Sartre speaks to the dead and stages phantoms in his 1944 play *No Exit* (which takes for its setting a hellish afterlife), and Davis, in his unusually "spiritual" reading of Sartre, details the "…supernatural story line…"[38] of the philosopher/artist's 1947 film *Les Jeux sont fait* (*The Chips Are Down*), which sees two dead characters return to earth in attempt to rectify past mistakes. Sartre simultaneously eschews and embraces ghosts in his ontological and theatrical works then; whilst he will not phenomenologically conceive of a soul (consciousness) adrift from a body he aims to make the invisible, impossible phantom visible in his theatre. "Sartre the intellectual" may well be one of the world's best-known atheists, but we could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that there is something of the "holy" about "Sartre the artist", and the Sartre who writes the essays collated in *Sartre on Theater*[39][*sic*] could, as we will see, hold the key to uniting the two, as he aids us in our understanding of Beckett's as an eminently "Holy Theatre."

Beckett's 1956 radio play *All That Fall* is exemplary of a "theatre" that cannot choose but to transport (dis)embodied souls between realms, *without* the aid of an actor's physical presence. Beckett, as we have seen, problematizes the concept of presence even in his live

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[35] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 334. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[36] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 303.
[37] Davis, "Sartre and the Return of the Living Dead", p. 222.
[38] Davis, "Sartre and the Return of the Living Dead", p. 222.
[39] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, trans. Frank Jellinek, ed. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

theatre; *That Time* presents us with a central figure whose *bodily* "thereness" has been reduced (and along with it his ability to *act*) to the point that only one aspect, or *apparition*, of the biological form serves to represent the totality which, despite the theatrical illusion, we know *exists* in the onstage darkness. Beckett places bodies under threat in many of his stage works in fact, confining them to urns (*Play*[40]), dustbins and wheelchairs (*Endgame*[41]), even burying them up to their necks in sand (*Happy Days*[42]), but is through *radio* drama that he manages to present characters who have not merely had their ability to act *reduced*, but who, in Sartrean terms, have had their ability to act completely *removed*. If the body is indeed "…the permanent condition of possibility for . . . consciousness…"[43] we might infer that the possibilities of the radiophonic *cipher* do not extend to action in, and interaction with, the physical world. Whilst *That Time*'s Listener cannot interact with an environment, or set, in the same way that a stage body like Krapp can, he does (unlike *All That Fall*'s protagonist Maddy Rooney) have the opportunity to communicate *something* to his audience *physically*, through his eyes and his smile, and no matter how discordant his facial movements are with his soundtrack they are nonetheless *present* as biological expressions of the possibilities of consciousness. The character that is *soundtrack alone*, on the other hand, has no recourse to such a pictorial representation of what Artaud might call the "…soul's athleticism…"[44] and so her expressive possibilities are tied to her ability to act directly on consciousness itself as its ideal *intentional* object, or as a "dead" voice[45] divorced from the logos or "spirit" of "live" speech and thereby alienated from the present as its spectre or "…ghostly double."[46] As the spectral characters of a radio drama are free from "the excess baggage of physical presence" however, they are "all the more 'present' to consciousness by being virtually *nothing* in physical terms."[47] These fictive beings communicate with their audiences by making the *literally* invisible, their *incorporeal worlds and psyches*, visible to the *mind's* eye, and so we could say that they create a "Holy Theatre" of the invisible-made-visible. The fictive beings that we meet in prose writing affect the *reader* similarly, but these cannot be said to people a "theatre", as they constitute non-performative *texts* (in theory at least) that are designed to remain stable and to resist the "othering" that the theatre/radio script must undergo once it is

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[40] See Chapter Four.
[41] See Chapter Two.
[42] See Chapter Five.
[43] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 351.
[44] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 94.
[45] See Chapter Two, particularly pp. 63-65.
[46] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 157.
[47] See Chapter Two, p. 71, note 148.

spoken/bodied forth. Although the novel is more open to the freeplay of independent interpretation than is the radio or stage drama, its characters, whilst *there* on paper and even embodied in our minds, are perhaps, generically, the *most* dissolute. There seem to be gradations of disembodiment in Beckett's work then, and whilst his radio creations are at very real risk of evaporation, actors' *voices* suggest (as they are reliant upon) bodies, and voices and bodies (however spectral) are not only more immediately indicative of embodied *for-itself* being than the written word, but also reified in sacred theatres as the very vehicles, or ghosts, of unseen essences that simply cannot manifest in prose.

The *body* of Maddy Rooney (whilst *absent* in physical terms) is *audibly* presented to the listener throughout *All That Fall* by the: "*Sound of her dragging feet.*"[48] Maddy's body is the epicentre of the dramatic action then, and yet it is illusory, a figment born of soundwaves and the listener's imagination, and references to her "…shoulders and other *senseless* places…" hint towards the *in*corporeality of her mode of being and an existence that *she* sees as no more than a: "Lingering dissolution."[49] Maddy could be trapped in the dissolute existence she describes as a result of an inherently Christian denial of human mortality, and I would argue that it is her historic faith in a Berkeleyan "God", an omniscient upholder of all things[50], that has led to the dispersal of her being in a sonic world of wind, sighs, turbulence and dust. An ethereal Maddy addresses her deity ("…thank God…"[51]) and appeals to the "Heavens…"[52] frequently over the course of a play that takes its very title from the bible, and David Loy suggests that humanity projects itself towards an everlasting "…god-ideal…"[53] in this way so that it might protect itself from the fearful truth of its own impending death and decay. When we deny death by positing an eternal life for the soul, however, we also deny life and our very birth, as such polar terms are, as Loy (in a somewhat Derridean sense) would have it, "…interdependent."[54] The meaning of life carries within it the absence, or *trace*, of death, just as there can be no death without a life to negate; life and death are not binary opposites then, but *reliant* upon each other, meaning that "…*our repression of death represses life*."[55] Christianity, with its promises of immortal transcendence to those who

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[48] Samuel Beckett, *All That Fall*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 172.
[49] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 175. The italics here are my own.
[50] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 90.
[51] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 172.
[52] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 175.
[53] David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism and Buddhism* (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), p. 19.
[54] Loy, *Lack and Transcendence*, p. xiii.
[55] Loy, *Lack and Transcendence*, p. xiii. The italics here are Loy's own.

transfer their profane agency to "God" is *the ultimate repression of death*, and this could explain why Maddy (who has been "…*destroyed* with sorrow . . . *and churchgoing…*"[56]) enigmatically declares: "I am not half alive nor anything approaching it."[57] Maddy's entrapment in this limbo between life and death also borrows its *shape* from Carl Jung's Third Tavistock Lecture which, as Julie Campbell writes, "…Beckett attended with his therapist [Wilfred Bion] in London on 2 October 1935."[58] Campbell writes at length[59] about the effect that this lecture had on Beckett, and his interest in the references Jung made therein to a girl who felt that she had, in Maddy's words[60], "…never really been born!"[61] Maddy's repression of life and death has led to her becoming the atomised entity she tellingly alludes to ("…oh to be in atoms, in atoms![62]), one who is not fully born and so cannot escape, through death, her suspension in an undecided state between presence and absence (the body and the voice that stands in its place). Ironically, as a piously-exhausted Derridean spectre that cuts through the heart of binaries, Maddy is a *threat* to the logocentric monotheism that has brought her to this purgatory. Emily McFarlan Miller explains (in "progressive" Christian magazine *Relevant*) that Christianity does not like indeterminate states between life and death, and that "…verses like 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Hebrews 9: 27 . . . suggest after death we go immediately to heaven or hell, leaving no room for the souls of the departed to roam the earth."[63] The "holiness" of the "Holy Theatre" is, according to Innes, "…unrecognisable by conventional standards…" and often "…where the links with religion are closest . . . sacrilegious."[64] Beckett's dramas couple biblical motifs *and* the kind of *un*holy "…supernatural imagery…"[65] that Artaud called for, *in order to present profoundly anti-Christian transitory worlds* (and what Loy would call a *nonduality* of life and death[66]) filled with roaming, unborn/undead souls who, like Maddy, have already been robbed of their *earthly* bodies proper by gods that "speak" to them of a celestial salvation that they are yet to deliver.

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[56] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 174. The italics here are mine.

[57] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 176.

[58] Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine'", p. 157.

[59] Julie Campbell, "The Entrapment of the Female Body in Beckett's Plays in Relation to Jung's Third Tavistock Lecture", in *Historicising Beckett/Issues of Performance* (*SBT/A 15*), ed. Marius Buning et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 161-172.

[60] Maddy remembers this girl's story from *her own* unlikely attendance at a lecture given by an unnamed psychiatrist.

[61] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 196. See also, pp. 103-104.

[62] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 177.

[63] Emily McFarlan Miller, "What Does The Bible Say About Ghosts?" in *Relevant Magazine* (30th October 2013). Available from: http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/worldview/what-does-bible-say-about-ghosts

[64] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 3.

[65] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 62.

[66] Loy, *Lack and Transcendence*, pp. 1-29.

Raising Up All That Fall

Beckett finds humour, often the bawdiest humour in fact, in the widely-accepted teachings of Christianity, and in the notion that any god that there may be is eminently good and competent. It is perhaps too much to say, however, that Beckett cuts all ties with a Christian "God", and Derrida suggests that theatre is, by its very nature, "…theological . . . as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance."[67] Beckett's dramas are dominated by words and sounds, they *are* logocentric in Derridean terms, and *All That Fall* certainly maintains a dialogue with a theology that can be seen to permeate all corners of the Beckett canon. That said; Beckett transcends the theological discourse that he establishes by acknowledging Christianity as an unavoidable influence on Western thought whilst refusing to lie prostrate at its feet. Beckett, in fact, a child of an Irish Protestant family, dares to confront the logos head on, to "blaspheme" (in *Mercier and Camier*, a furious Mercier turns his face to the sky and exclaims "…As for thee, fuck thee"[68], *Endgame*'s Hamm comes to the conclusion that prayers are not answered because God the "…bastard . . . doesn't exist"[69]), to mock the metanarrative and thereby destabilise it. There is a ferocious humour in the spirit world of *All That Fall* too, and this is demonstrated nowhere more so than in Maddy's utterance to her husband Dan, of the biblical proclamation that *gives the play its shape* and title:

> MRS ROONEY: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." [*Silence. They join in wild laughter. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.*] Hold me tighter, Dan![70]

The "stage" directions here speak volumes; the very idea that some "deity" will raise and uphold those that are stooped low under life's burdens is not only derided by the laughter of the "God-fearing" Rooneys, but also disproven immediately by the resumed struggle of the ageing pair, whose dragging feet sonically illustrate the "…excruciating corporeal labour…"[71] of their journey. Maddy's plea to *Dan* to hold her tighter also betokens her diminishing faith in a "supporting being", as well as demonstrating that it is wiser to call for *human*, rather than *godly*, assistance in the Protestant[72] parish of Boghill. As these characters

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[67] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 296.
[68] Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 19.
[69] Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 119.
[70] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 198.
[71] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 70.
[72] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 183.

provide comfort and stability *for each other*, rather than waiting for heavenly intervention, we might even say that they render "God" redundant in a profoundly Sartrean sense. The fissure in being that must remain if consciousness is to avoid becoming an inanimate object means that humanity is at all times *its own witness*, and if there is an overseer on the outside of Maddy's world then "He" is like a Berkeleyan God who has been displaced by a being that, by its very nature, performs both the literal (physical) and metaphorical (perceptual/ocular[73]) "upholding" services that he would provide.

Through the scourge of laughter ("…HUMOUR as DESTRUCTION…"[74]), Beckett *prepares the ground* for the kind of sacred, "…nontheological space"[75] that Derrida suggests Artaud's theatre produces; he does not use the stage (or the airwaves) as a platform from which to launch atheist propaganda, and "God" is not so much proclaimed dead in a Nietzschan sense as his supposed benevolence is notably *absent*. Beckett presents a *void* in *those empty spaces that a god should fill*, and in doing so undermines religious doctrine and deifies humanity in its place. Beckett brings to our attention the very *ineffectuality* of "God the upholder" here, and we might say that this exposure of "His" incompetence expulses "Him" from the "stage", just as Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" "…expulses God from the stage"[76] so that it might "…appeal to the whole man, not social man submissive to the law [and] warped by religions[.]"[77] Maddy *is* "bowed down", as we know from Mr Slocum's description of her being "…bent all double"[78]; if "God" is employed in the raising up of all that have fallen, it would seem that he has been rather lackadaisical in "His" duties. Mr Slocum offers Maddy a much-needed "…lift…"[79] in the *absence of a deity*, and the hole that she finds in her spectral garments (a dress that she can feel the wind "…whistling through…"[80]) once she is atop her *earthly* Samaritan's vehicle stands as a metaphor for the gaping "hole" at the heart of existence. Religion is a meaning system that *should* allow humanity to forget the emptiness, or *lack*, that underlies its mode of being ("…the sense-of-self …" is always "…'shadowed' by a sense-of-*lack*"[81]), but Boghill is a world *full of holes* that cannot be ignored, as the vaporous stuff it is made of is a direct reflection of the

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[73] Theories of perception/vision of self/other will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.
[74] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 69. The capitalisation here is Artaud's own.
[75] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 296.
[76] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 296.
[77] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 82.
[78] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 177.
[79] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 177.
[80] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 194.
[81] Loy, *Lack and Transcendence*, p. 21. The italics here are Loy's own.

immateriality of its supposed creator, who is himself only present as another *absence* in "…the void."[82] Miss Fitt (misfit), a fellow foot passenger on this journey into the abyss claims to be "…distray…" when "…alone with her Maker…"[83], and "…just not really there…" when in church (oblivious to the collection tray, naturally), where she perceives the barely-perceivable Maddy as nothing more than "…a big pale blur."[84] The characters of *All That Fall* comment on their own (and so "God's"), concrete *inexistence* then, as figments of the listener's, and "God's" (and Beckett's) imagination, immaterial creations born of an equally immaterial source, and in doing so they subtly begin to the difficult task of displacing the doctrine that has governed their world. Maddy and company exist as phantoms in the limitless space of consciousness, holes in perception, whose words and actions demonstrate that "God" is no more than a text that they have radically undermined and *dis*embodied, just as the medium of radio disembodies their most heavenly projections.

Whilst Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" is envisaged by its creator as a bodily theatre of *space and time*, I would suggest that the *radio* drama has a better chance than its physical counterpart of attaining *some* of its "holy" goals. Radio offers more than the mere "…surface of a spectacle…"[85] to its audience; it has a powerful and *penetrating* ability to enter intimately into the "now" moment of the listener (perhaps because of its spatial insubstantiality) and, as Campbell explains, to "…depict characters in motion . . . in the present moment of the performance."[86] Campbell illustrates this point as follows:

> …Maddy's journey is happening in the "now" of the performance, at the same time it is a journey presented to the listener through her consciousness: this acts as a kind of internal monolog[ue], but with a difference. It is not retrospective . . . Instead listeners experience a journey with Maddy in the present.[87]

All That Fall creates the illusion of a *unity of presents* by "emptying out" the consciousness of the listener, who forgets herself as she is "filled" by soundwaves that close the "…gap between life and theatre."[88] A "…total theatre…"[89] should enter "…the spectator's breast

[82] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 178.
[83] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 182.
[84] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 183.
[85] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 299.
[86] Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine'", p. 148.
[87] Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine'", p. 148.
[88] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 84.
[89] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 66.

rather than his ear…"[90], and perhaps the radio drama is best placed to affect the listener in her/his totality, as the sonic energy it produces is made of the same stuff as that human soul Artaud describes as "…a maze of vibrations."[91] If the individual is *infiltrated* by the radio play and temporarily loses self-consciousness, then the drama has served a "holy" function; Derrida writes that "[c]ruel representation must permeate…"[92] its audience, and as we listen to *All That Fall* we are *permeated* by a narrative in which the subjectivity of the central protagonist reveals to *us* the outer-world of *her* play, along with her *innermost* thoughts and feelings. Beckett plugs us directly into the mains of his "Holy Theatre" then, as he closes the gap between what is presented and our perception of it, in what feels like an attempt to reach to the very core of, and directly present, some original essence or truth. Of course originary *presence*, for Derrida, has "…always already been penetrated"[93] (and Artaud himself writes that to express is to conceal[94]), but Beckett's voices perhaps come as close to speaking the logos as the voices of *absent*/past bodies can, and whilst they cannot, *as spectres who begin by coming back*[95], choose but to betray the fissure in presence, in representation, and in being, they at least perhaps let us *glimpse* the blazing centre that can never fully be captured, by speaking to us of unknown worlds, from a superior, sacred vantage point *inside our own heads*.

The consciousness that allows itself to be permeated and taken over by the sonic vibrations that make the invisible visible to the eye of the mind *becomes* the "…hallowed place…"[96] (the "Holy Theatre") that Brook describes, where the profane can be transcended as the audience lowers its defences and allows itself to be "…perforated, shocked, startled…" and "…filled with a powerful new charge."[97] As Campbell writes, when we listen to *All That Fall*: "The *head* becomes a *mental theater* [*sic*]…" where "…the listener imaginatively translates sound and silence into a visual and sensual world."[98] We could even argue that "mental theatres" are perhaps best placed to stage some of the "…mental dramas…"[99] that Artaud sought (and failed) to realise in his own lifetime, and that, by providing the cerebral

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[90] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 100.
[91] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 90.
[92] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 299.
[93] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 314.
[94] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 53.
[95] See Chapter Two, p. 74, note 159.
[96] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 59.
[97] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 60.
[98] Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine'", p. 152. The italics here are mine.
[99] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 71.

performance space that Maddy and company need for the enactment of their story, *the listeners provide the body* for these phantoms. The characters of *All That Fall become* the listener, and through his/her "visual and sensual world", rather than through that of a Berkeleyan "God", they come to *be* (perceived). The radiophonic spectre is "…dependent on the listener for a sense of life…"[100], and so we act as the deity that gives imagined souls vitality, as well as providing that *completion* that even Artaud deemed to be integral to the artwork. The audience's experience itself *is* the sacred element of the "Holy Theatre" and, whilst Artaud believed that every aspect of the creative process was an integral part of the whole (that the means took precedence over the ends, and that no performance should become a *fixed* entity), he also recognised that: "A performance still has to be finished product; the 'process' takes place in the spectator's perception of it."[101] As *we raise Maddy up*, from the hazy depths of a liminal existence and offer her temporary accommodation in our own corporeal being, so she raises us to the level of that being that can form a totality from incomplete parts; as Campbell writes:

> Sound images . . . offer . . . a part rather than the whole. These parts include insubstantiality, an aural diffuseness, and a lack of fixity, as well as a slippage inviting a creativity in the listener which is personal and unique.[102]

We could conclude that the listener is invited to play the part of what Duckworth refers to as the "…universal witness…"[103] that is missing in Beckett's world, the "…sharer supreme…"[104] who might offer completeness to the incomplete; perfection to the imperfect. The listener, whilst unable to achieve a godlike coincidence with self, is able to assume a divine position as sharer of another's consciousness, and co-creator and unifier of phantom souls, which might make him/her forget, for a while, that lack which forms the basis of human reality; it is only through art, Artaud's "…higher form of reality…"[105], that such a privilege, such a shift in thought, can become possible. Art gives us access to the inaccessible (and the radio play stands as an unusually accessible means of "trying on" another's mind for size), and we might go so far as to say that a listener, spectator, or reader can *become a god*, as Beckett's diverse works allow them to peer into that region of another's being that is usually unreachable.

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[100] Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine'", p. 158.
[101] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 65.
[102] Campbell, "'A Voice Comes to One in the Dark. Imagine'", p. 153.
[103] Duckworth, "Beckett and the Missing Sharer", p. 141.
[104] Duckworth, "Beckett and the Missing Sharer", p. 139.
[105] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 61.

A Screening Off of Consciousness

Like Artaud[106], Beckett worked with a wide variety of media over the course of his career and, according to Katherine Worth, the mediums of radio and television gave him "…special opportunities for dramatizing the state of being haunted."[107] In Beckett's *Ghost Trio* (a play for television written in 1975), the screen, like the radio before it, becomes a holy transmitter of transient souls who do much to comment upon the very medium which gives them life. Sartre goes some way towards summarising what could be termed the "spectral" effect that the screen produces when he writes about film's lack of those spontaneous elements that characterise live theatre: "In the cinema the operator will run the same reel every night, the actors will act with exactly the same talent (or lack of it) and the only accidents that can prevent the showing will be technical; *there will be no human relations between actors and spectators*."[108] Sacred "communion" between actor and audience is radically compromised once dramatic action is *pre-recorded*, as the screen stands as planar intermediary between perceiver and perceived.[109] Film and television (unlike theatre) are "cold", two-dimensional mediums; there is an irreality about that which is presented to us on a flat, glass surface, and Beckett ensures the viewer's emotional/intellectual distance from his teleplays by making a concerted effort to replace conventional "realism" with an *austerity* of visual phenomena upon his screen. Instead of a world of warmth and colour, a world with families, homes and furniture in it, *Ghost Trio* takes place in a minimalist world of rectangular shapes (which we can, however, vaguely discern as objects in our own world, such as beds, doors and stools), all colourless, yet luminously, eerily visible, in their various "…shades of the colour grey."[110] The setting of *Ghost Trio* is not one that shocks those already acquainted with Beckett's works; its similarities to the stage world of *Endgame*, its inclusion of the all-important cassette player which might remind us of *Krapp*, its sparsity of both set and dialogue, its structure of repetition, and its intrinsic relation to the works for television and stage that will follow it (as well as those that have come before it), go some way towards justifying its narrator's description of the scene as: "The familiar chamber."[111] Just as there is much to suggest that *Endgame* is set within a skull[112], there is also speculation

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[106] Artaud's last major poem, *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* was realised as a radio production in 1948, and he worked as a screen actor for various films: see Innes, *Holy Theatre*, pp. 58-110.

[107] Katherine Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", in *Beckett in Dublin*, ed. S. E. Wilmer (Dublin: Lilliput, 1992), p. 63.

[108] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, pp. 139-140. The italics here are mine.

[109] There will be a more detailed discussion of this concept with reference to *Film* in Chapter Four.

[110] Samuel Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 408.

[111] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 408.

[112] See Chapter One, p. 26.

about *Ghost Trio* taking, for its setting, the "grey matter" of that "familiar chamber" that is the mind. Jonathan Bignell, in his comprehensive study of *Beckett on Screen*, explains that: "It has been argued that Beckett's television plays take place within a human consciousness and are therefore divorced from the concrete particularity of the real."[113] Artaud, like Beckett, recognised that, once captured on film, "…human figures could be stripped of their all too solid flesh and appear as phantoms in settings which were shadows of the mind…"[114] and it could be argued that *Ghost Trio examines* human consciousness through a decidedly *material* form whose ghostly, even "holy", qualities foreground that detachment of *for-itself* being from concrete reality that is its very subject matter.

Worth suggests that *Ghost Trio*'s set can be read as a visual representation of: "The tight, narrow enclosure of the human consciousness."[115] It could be argued that the *unfettered* human consciousness is anything but "tight" and "narrow" as it is, by its very nature, all-encompassing and free-ranging, surrounding inanimate being on all sides; the solitary male figure (F) at the centre of *Ghost Trio*, however, seems to have limited his world and his environment, as a result of *limiting the possibilities* of his consciousness. F inhabits a "tight, narrow enclosure" as his is a *tunnel vision*, directed towards a female who we suspect is an absent, perhaps even deceased, love (rather than a conventional god-figure), who he rather tragically hopes might return to his world. F, rather than transferring his agency to the cosmos, focusses his yearning on a very specific power source, and one which, at least at one time, is likely to have been worldly rather than heavenly; we might argue then, that the medium of television is particularly well suited to the enactment of such a secular reduction of the subject/object of worship, as the screen reduces not only the viewer's range of vision, but also the "cosmic space" of the performance. Initially, a female voice (V) that does *not* seem to belong to F's lost love, narrates and dictates both F's actions and the spectator's field of vision in this closed place from beyond the scene; she is, therefore, *another* exterior power that controls and limits F's world. By *directing* the camera and, with it, the witnessing eye, to various close-ups, medium range shots, and general views of the chamber and its constitutive parts (as well as to and from F himself), V takes advantage of the medium's ability to manipulate the focus of the spectator in a manner that the live theatre event cannot, by

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[113] Jonathan Bignell, *Beckett on Screen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 90.
[114] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 83.
[115] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 67.

replacing his/her multidirectional gaze with what Sartre would call: "*Guided vision.*"[116] In his servitude to V, his avoidance of the present moment, and in his passive willingness to become a part of the set, F is in danger of losing his autonomous being, and becoming a mere *object* for the perusal of the voyeuristic watcher. In choosing to remain enthral to a phantom, and by raising his head and going through a sequence of prescribed motions each time V announces that he thinks "…he hears her"[117], F chooses to throw a perimeter fence around his mind as well as his world, and the viewer is most compelled to enter into that space where s/he is most clearly denied access, knowing that there must be a subjective force bubbling beneath the carapace of his assumed objectivity. F's world *is* his consciousness (he is like Hamm, but with even fewer external references, and without a "live" audience), and it is that inner-world, his "…secret psychic impulse…"[118] that interests us as fellow conscious existents. The removal of the "live", interactive "sharer" from F's world, shut out by the wall that is the flattening, horizontal screen, is a fitting extension of his voluntary entrapment in a dehumanised void, or liminal space, whose governance comes from what seem like "…cosmic forces…"[119] who expand the diegesis without ever appearing. The impassive screen through which we view *Ghost Trio* is a perfect emblem of a mind turned in on itself (focussed, as it is, on one unlikely event), and acts as a blockade which cuts F off from humanity, from other consciousnesses, when he is most desperate for some supporting, unifying being (a Godot figure we might say) to enter his world and assume agency.

In *Ghost Trio*, V's "voiceover" stands, like the screen itself, in between F and the audience, and so presence is doubly ruptured by mechanical reproduction,[120] or by what Paul Sheehan terms "…asynchronous image and sound."[121] Although V directly addresses us, as well as instructing F, and the camera, to move to various parts of the scene, she is not directly present in either the world of the spectator, or the diegesis. V operates, like a deity, through a series of commandments to the viewer as well as to F ("Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly[122]") and yet remains, like a deity, absent from the worlds of both; there is no level of normative interaction, on either side of the screen, with this distant, empty

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[116] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 60. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[117] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 410.
[118] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 42.
[119] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 82.
[120] See also, Chapter Two, particularly pp. 62-68.
[121] Paul Sheehan, "Beckett's Ghost Dramas: Monitoring a Phenomenology of Sleep", in *Beckett and Phenomenolgy*, p. 164.
[122] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 408.

voice. V is *present only as an absence* from the scene, just as the female figure of F's musings is felt as an absent presence, or spectre, that haunts the drama from start to finish. There is, however, also a source of diegetic sound in *Ghost Trio*, namely a "…*small cassette…*"[123] which F clutches "…*with both hands…*"[124] as he plays excerpts from "…Largo of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Trio (*The Ghost*)…"[125], or "Ghost Trio", from whence the play gains both its title and its triadic structure. Brook states that, "…through the concrete in music we recognise the abstract…"[126] and as *Ghost Trio*'s music seems abstractedly to "…speak of a world beyond the room – perhaps a mystical world…"[127], it acts as an outlet from which we can project beyond this cell-like enclave. Where the asynchronous sound of V's voice acts as a controlling and oppressive force, at least for a time, the sound of the music is expansive and evocative as "…it seems to serve as a catalyst for F's meditations upon his absent other."[128] F's music may be said to bring him closer to that which *he* deifies and further away from a consciousness of his surroundings, just as hymns may be said to serve as catalysts for meditation upon a more generalised deity within the similarly cold, rectangular, barren setting of the church. It might be that F longs to transcend, to defer, the material world, to join his lost loved one in some afterlife, and Herren suggests that Beckett's use of *The Ghost* indicates the possibility that the ubiquitous, missing female has "…joined the spirit world of the dead."[129] F's being-in-the-world hangs by a thread then, as he yearns, like Maddy, to dissolve into sound, into the maze of vibrations that is also constitutive of the Artaudian soul, and looks set to remain suspended in a half-life, as he transfers his own inner drives and desires to higher subjectivities.

A Reflection of Subjectivity

Despite his initial inertia, and his ongoing supplication to the beyond, F does in fact *gradually* move towards a discovery of his own autonomy as a subjective, conscious being, over the duration of his trilogy. Bignell writes of the subjectivity/objectivity of the characters in Beckett's television plays (and the absences that cast divine shadows over these) in the following terms:

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[123] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 409.
[124] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 409.
[125] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 414 – note on music.
[126] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 47.
[127] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 67.
[128] Herren, *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television*, p. 77.
[129] Herren, *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television*, p. 77.

> The personae of these plays constitute themselves in relation to
> . . . absences, but this does not posit the absences as the origins
> or centres of meaning. Instead . . . the personae are constituted
> as subjects in relation to these absent objects of desire, and both
> subject and object are constitutive of each other.[130]

Bignell illustrates, here, the unity between subject and object which, we could say, forms the basis of conscious existence. Consciousness is always *conscious of* something, otherwise it would collapse in on itself like inanimate being, and we know that F is a conscious being because he *is* engaged in the projects that define him. We can place the absent "other" as object precisely because she *is absent* from the scene, but as soon as we are presented with *for-itself* being in the manner in which we are presented with F, it becomes difficult to impose upon that being a fully objective nature, even when it is given over to us via the seemingly closed-off medium that is television. *For-itself* being can never achieve that stasis, that positivity of being and coincidence with self at a fixed point, that defines *being-in-itself*. Interestingly, in spite of its lack of "liveness" and its dehumanising qualities, Bignell suggests that the televisual medium is perhaps equally incapable of attaining full objective positivity, as: "Arguments about the status of the television screen's image as a two-dimensional plane and the figuration of television images draw attention to the abstract composition of the television image as a moving pattern of dots and lines rather than the photographic assumption of a finished and concrete object."[131] Like consciousness, the televisual image is ever changing and fluctuating, only the televisual medium *appears* to abstract subjectivity at the same time as failing to attain objectivity. We are between subject and object in *Ghost Trio* then, just as we are between presence and absence, and our undecided state is made more complex and more interesting as the seemingly closed scene and the consciousness that is its very nucleus begin to expand and assert their fluidity as *for-itself* being.

In part II of *Ghost Trio*, the "Action" that follows part I's "Pre-action"[132], F begins to break free of the commands issued to him by V, and Sartre writes (in tones that are reminiscent of the thrust of his argument in *Existentialism and Humanism*) that: "The most moving thing the theater [*sic*] can show is a character creating himself, the moment of choice, of the free decision which commits him to a moral code and a whole way of life."[133] As F makes his first bold move towards freeing himself from V's control, we are given an insight,

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[130] Bignell, *Beckett on Screen*, p. 113.
[131] Bignell, *Beckett on Screen*, p. 160.
[132] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 407.
[133] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 4.

via the screen, into consciousness as it realises itself as subjective autonomy and emancipates itself from "higher" authority, and this could perhaps be *all the more affective* due to the medium's "… 'magical' ability to transform the world into an alternate reality" by virtue of those cinematic "…techniques which Artaud believed acted directly on the brain."[134] Focus, for instance, enables the audience to witness in its immediacy that moment when F, without any of the usual instruction from V, and to her surprise ("Ah!"[135]), *looks into the mirror*. Herren explains that F's "…unrehearsed, unsolicited, unsanctioned gaze into the mirror – an object whose very function is the reflection of identity – constitutes his first independent act, his first autonomous choice."[136] This "act" opens out the space and therefore the mind of F, and loosens V's grip on the "familiar chamber" whose dreamlike qualities are emphasised by abstract camera angles and a luminous, but faint, lighting state that casts no shadows and seems to exist without source.[137] Once F has made a stand against V's authority, his world and his mind begin to "leak out" of their confines readily, just as consciousness escapes from the fissure it creates in *in-itself* being. Part III, "Re-action", sees an end to V's voiceover, and "…in the silences between the haunting phrases the room begins to expand its limits, as if responding to the music."[138] A number of "outside" shots occur, that could not be seen through any other medium; we not only see F's face in the mirror, but also the rain outside the window, and we see the boy, descendant of *Godot*'s messenger perhaps, in the corridor, as though we saw him through F's eyes; as Bignell points out: "Each of these shots opens onto another space (in the case of the mirror it is a virtual space)."[139] The televisual medium already presents us with the ghost, or virtual representation of a protagonist as, in Sartre's (pre-Derridean) words, the screen actor is always "…on the screen in his absence…"[140], rather than being present to the audience in his "live" spontaneous being. In *Ghost Trio*, Beckett's mirror opens up a gateway through which this ghostly paradox can be played out endlessly as F, whose world is bursting at the seams and threatening to expand as pressure escapes from various fissures, views his likeness only to reveal himself as an endless reflection-reflecting, just like the narrator of *Texts* before him[141], one whose phantom image in the glass cannot fail to emphasise his inability to capture himself as object, or to contain

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[134] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 84.
[135] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 411.
[136] Herren, *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television*, p. 81.
[137] Beckett, *Ghost Trio*, p. 408.
[138] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 67.
[139] Bignell, *Beckett on Screen*, p. 96.
[140] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 7.
[141] See Chapter Two, particularly pp. 52-58.

his diaspora across the temporal dimensions. As we see F reflected back to us in the mirror, we realise the expansion of the diegesis and the permeability of its subjective boundaries, whilst the whole still remains safely contained, for us, behind the glass façade of the television set. The mirror allows Beckett to illustrate F's acknowledgement of *his own* subjectivity, even though mirrors, like the medium of television, are not receptive to subjective interaction. Sartre writes that: "Almost as soon as you recognise yourself, you are no longer an object."[142] It is this moment of recognition that the camera allows us to see in *Ghost Trio*, and I would argue that the screen makes subjectivity (the invisible) visible here, in the kind of intimate detail that simply would not carry across the crowded auditorium.

The world of television is far removed from the world of the radio, and that of the novel, by virtue of its (at least seemingly) objective, physical structures. As we listen to *All That Fall*, or read works such as *Texts* or *Company*, we may be able to temporarily embody the disembodied as we absorb both characters and events into our consciousness, unhindered by materiality. *Ghost Trio*, in its *concrete* examination of the mercurial nature of consciousness, presents us not so much with disembodied souls, but visual images of a body from which the soul has been abstracted and dispersed by the screen, as the distancing and removal of presence in the televisual medium is so complete and so spatially diverse. We remain on the outside of the action as V does; helpless witnesses of the *subjective object* of our attention. The viewer becomes an impotent god, like V, who tries to objectify that which cannot be object, whilst simultaneously observing acts of free will undertaken by a body that seems to possess a mind/soul that we cannot connect with. The witnessing beings, the viewer and V, are trapped in an undecided state between subjectivity and objectivity, which renders them ineffectual, as F becomes his own witness, realises his agency, creates new and unexpected spaces in *his* consciousness and in *the spectators'* consciousness of the visual field, and thereby seizes power. The pre-recorded figure of F exists, like Krapp's tapes, as an *in-itself* depiction of *for-itself* being; preordained, devoid of spontaneity, and yet still capable of penetrating the live consciousness of the observer who cannot enter into communion with the material, but can try to achieve "angelic" status as s/he presides powerlessly as an impotent object above the scene. This chapter has progressed then, from a world of souls without bodies, to a world of pictorial, abstract representations of bodies whose souls we cannot affect. What remains now, in that case, is to fuse together the worlds of bodiless souls

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[142] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 86.

and soulless bodies, and observe the "holy" impact on the audience when wandering souls inhabit "other" bodies in the three-/four-dimensional space of the theatre.

Sartre's "Holy" Territory

There is something sacred about the theatre, a place where (dis)embodied souls are conjured and channelled through the bodies of actors who are simultaneously themselves and someone "other"; *ther*e and *not there* as temporary inhabitants of a transformational space where the "spirits" of conscious beings are intertwined in acts of creation and transcendence. The entire theatrical endeavour relies on a Sartrean "bad faith", as the actor, like Sartre's celebrated waiter, both *is* and *is not* the character s/he portrays simultaneously.[143] In the theatre we are *between* presence and absence, appearance and reality, and being and nothingness; we are in a void, a liminal state, or a vacuum. It is also through the theatre that we can begin to see those elements of Sartre's works that are really "…*between* spiritualism and positivism…"[144], particularly as he writes so evocatively of the creation of fictional characters upon the stage:

> In the theatre it hardly worries you for a moment to see Madeleine Renaud as a twenty-year-old widow. For what counts is not that she *is* a widow of twenty, but is *acting* here. Where *are* the beauty and youth? They *are not there*. What is there is the *significance of gesture*. It is not a presence, but a kind of absence, a kind of intangible ghost; the absent object is enveloped in the gesture; you believe it is still there.[145]

Sartre is quite the conjurer of phantoms when it comes to talk of the theatre then, despite the fact that his embodied ontology of consciousness renders it foolish to ever consider the body and the soul separately. Sartre, it seems, is not afraid to step into the loophole between the regions of being, *providing he does so in the name of art* and, interestingly, Sheehan writes that: "Sartre may have pinpointed the 'absent present' [we might even say *differance*] at the heart of performance, its 'intangible ghost' quality, but it is Beckett who tests it dramatically."[146] When Sartre speaks of religion, or "God", we can comfortably describe him as an atheist, and yet when he discusses theatre's capacity for summoning "ghosts" he

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[143] Although the actor, on face value, appears to be the character s/he portrays, s/he can only externally "take on" that guise in a transient sense, and does not undergo a permanent inner-modification of being in order to "body forth" that role: "In a parallel situation, from within, the waiter in the café can not [*sic*] be immediately a café waiter in the sense that this inkwell is an inkwell, or the glass is a glass" (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 83).

[144] Annie Cohen-Solal, *Jean-Paul Sartre: A Life*, trans. Anna Cancogni (New York: The New Press, 2005), p. 67. The italics here are mine.

[145] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 60. The italics here are Sartre's own.

[146] Sheehan, "Beckett's Ghost Dramas: Monitoring a Phenomenology of Sleep", p. 174.

becomes a "holy" man, and Beckett *can* be said to be dramatically testing what Sartre sees as the theatre's capacity for sacred communication, particularly in his later works, when he presents the audience with figures such as *That Time*'s Listener, *Footfalls*'s May (the focus of the remainder of this chapter), *Not I*'s Mouth and *Rockaby*'s W[147], who foreground "…the ontology of performance as an oscillation between actual and fictional, the present moment and the past it is about to become, the actual, mortal body of the performer, and the body of the personae which may cross boundaries of time, space, perception and even the living."[148] As we enter the materiality that we *know* constitutes Beckett's stage world, all normative dimensional boundaries *appear* to dissolve and, paradoxically, we experience *immateriality* more keenly and consciously than we do when reading a novel or listening to a radio drama, as we are immersed in, dispersed amongst, and forced to bear witness to an (un)holy theatre of phantoms.

An Unhappy (Divided) Consciousness

Beckett's late play *Footfalls* (1976) is an almost-invisible haunting of the stage which stands as testament to Goodall's insistence that: "Ghosts like theatres."[149] May, the only *visible* or embodied character in the play, is a tangle of pale grey tatters[150] who paces a dimly lit strip of stage as she communicates with the *offstage* voice of her mother (another disembodied "V" in the darkness), and channels the transient souls of an "Amy" (anagram of May) and a Mrs Winter, who act as reflections-reflecting her own insubstantiality. May, like Maddy,[151] owes something of her conception to Jung's "Third Tavistock Lecture", and Billie Whitelaw,[152] who first played the role, reveals that a note written at the top of her script confirms: "'She [May] was never properly born.'"[153] Whitelaw details Beckett's source for this character note as follows:

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[147] See Chapter Five.

[148] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama*, p. 108.

[149] Goodall, *Stage Presence*, p. 170.

[150] Samuel Beckett, *Footfalls*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 402.

[151] See p. 89.

[152] It is interesting to consider (ahead of Chapter Five) that, despite female characters being somewhat outnumbered by their male counterparts on Beckett's stage, Whitelaw is perhaps the actor most closely associated with the original productions of his work. The very title of Whitelaw's autobiography (see below) alludes to her working relationship with Beckett, and her career is essentially defined by her portrayal of characters such as May, Winnie, W, and Mouth. James Knowlson writes that Beckett was "…bowled over by the rich vibrancy and musicality of [Whitelaw's] voice, her sensitive delivery of his lines and her remarkable flexibility as an actress." See: James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 518.

[153] Billie Whitelaw, *…Who He?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p. 142.

> That was something Beckett had said to me about a lecture he'd heard Jung give . . . Jung was talking about the case of a young woman. He used the expression that this woman had never been properly born. Perhaps that was the case with May in *Footfalls*.[154]

Not quite born and not quite dead then, at least not that Beckett would confirm, May exists, according to Whitelaw, "…in that ghostly spiritual half-way house between living and not living."[155] May, like Maddy, like F, although presented to us via the concrete actuality of the stage world, is only with us in part; she is *there* and *not there* simultaneously. Knowlson writes that May is "…Beckett's own poignant recreation of the girl who had never really been born, isolated and permanently absent, distant and totally encapsulated within herself."[156] Whilst this work does not seek to delve further into the already well-documented relationship between May, Maddy, and the girl who is the subject of the Jung lecture, it seems important to highlight, here, the "barely-there" quality that Beckett envisioned for May, her spectralisation, her nonduality between life and death and (although Knowlson describes her as "totally encapsulated within herself"), I would argue, also her pious *distance from* herself.

May displays the decidedly human trait (common to all of this chapter's protagonists) of positing a deity or a totality above herself, in whose light she exists only as a lack; in this respect she substantiates Loy's claim that "…we reach for what could be because we feel something lacking in what is."[157] *Footfalls* builds towards a climax of religious fervour, and Christianity is a presence that haunts the play throughout, with references to vespers[158], or Evensong, dominating a narrative that ends with a benediction: "The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and forever more. Amen."[159] In what she announces as her "Sequel"[160] (part three of the play), May details the activities of a spectre (a psychical projection, perhaps, of her own spirit), who manages to: "Slip out at nightfall and into the little church by the north door, always locked at that hour, and walk, up and down, up and down, His poor arm."[161] This phantom (and it must be a phantom in order to pass through

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[154] Whitelaw, *…Who He?*, p. 142.
[155] Whitelaw, *…Who He?*, p. 143.
[156] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 616.
[157] Loy, *Lack and Transcendence*, p. 29.
[158] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 402.
[159] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 403.
[160] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 402.
[161] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 402.

a locked door), perhaps feels herself to be walking up and down the arms of a dead or dying Christ, which could be said to be metaphorically outspread upon the cross that forms the shape of the traditional Christian church. May is intrinsically linked to death and the afterlife in a play that is governed by Artaudian "…dark powers…"[162], and James Acheson states that, "…if the ghost May fantasises about is her own, and if it indeed represents a wish fulfilment, it would appear that what May desires is her own death."[163] There is certainly a sense in the play that May has reached a spiritual malaise; she has (according to V, who narrates *for* May, or "ghosts" her in part two) worn the once deep pile carpet down to the bare floorboards[164] with the incessant pacing that defines her character and perhaps even represents a life spent "…venturing down passages within herself in search of a religious experience she has never had."[165] Acheson proposes that May has entered into a quest for the divine, and that she yearns for some religious epiphany to justify a life of devout Christianity which has so far only been rewarded in pain and suffering (both her own and her mother's). This coupling of religious seeking with psychological torment is reminiscent of Sartre's description of the detrimental effect on humanity's consciousness that striving towards a transcendent totality produces. Sartre explains that "God" is supposed to be a "…being who is what he is – in that he is all positivity and the foundation of the world – and at the same time a being who is not what he is . . . in that he is self-consciousness and the necessary foundation of himself . . . "[166] before reminding us that:

> The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state.[167]

The search for "God" is an extension of the search for a static, object-self which will always prove fruitless, and as May instructs herself to "seek well" (as she seems to when she pointedly repeats the word "sequel") we realise that May, like Maddy and F before her, has *displaced* herself, and jeopardised her very being-in-the-world, in her search for a meaning-giving god.

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[162] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 22.

[163] James Acheson, "The Shape of Ideas: *That Time* and *Footfalls*", in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 131.

[164] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 401.

[165] Acheson, "The Shape of Ideas: *That Time* and *Footfalls*", p. 132.

[166] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 114.

[167] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 114.

May and her creations (V might even be, like Amy and Mrs Winter, a projection of May's own psyche) could be said to be illustrations of consciousnesses/souls, untethered from the shackles of the material world, and Worth writes, in a somewhat Brookian tone, that: "The figure of May is the medium for the realisation of the unseen."[168] Through May's consciousness we *see* her world (just as we saw Maddy's before her), and the invisible is made manifest for us as disembodied souls are mediated through a body which does not belong to them (May's body, but also that of the actor). May, it seems, houses those souls which lack a separate body of their own, just as we do in reading a novel or listening to a radio play, and it may be that she does this in an attempt to alleviate the misery of worldly existence. As May seeks to compensate for that which is lacking in her world by *dividing* her own consciousness (as she allows V to speak for her in part two, as she "acts" out the exchanges between Amy and Mrs Winter in the "sequel") however, she actually only serves to *illuminate* her unhappy deferral of self-presence. May projects herself outside of herself as a "reflection-reflecting", and this enactment of the divide in human consciousness upon the stage is reflected in the auditorium, as the spectator fulfils her/his role in this metatheatrical interplay between perceiver and perceived.

Sartre writes that, in the theatre, the fictional "…hero is also ourselves, even if outside us."[169] We act as witnesses to ourselves/to our own consciousness then, when we step into the theatre, just as May could be said to be acting as witness to herself *as she narrates herself*, at the expense of actually *being* herself in the world of her play. May divides her consciousness into both subject and object, and views herself, in part, as the audience (and "God", a construct of *human* consciousness) views her. A kind of "double consciousness" exists in the theatre, just as it is a "doubling", a division in self, that forms the basis of *for-itself* being, but the "whole" that is formed through "incomplete", complementary parts (May and V/actor and audience) undergoing a shared experience is akin to the kind of "divine" unity that some might find in practicing religion. Worth writes of how, at the end of the first production of *Footfalls*, "…the ancient words ["The love of God…"[170]] fell into the audience's intent silence like a true Benediction"[171], adding that, for a time, "…the theatre became a kind of church; individual personalities were drawn into a unity of awe and human sympathy."[172] The

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[168] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 71.
[169] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 62. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[170] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 403.
[171] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 72.
[172] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 72.

theatre goes a step further than the church when it comes to uniting disparate beings however, as it *universalises* human experience, and creates a *oneness* that transcends religious denominations; it makes, like Artaud's plague, society's barriers fluid,[173] as it dissolves the boundaries that separate one audience member, one performer from another, erasing individuality and its ubiquitous double for a time and replacing them with what one might call a collective consciousness, or a "pure" consciousness that is beyond cultural determination. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe writes that: "If theatre is able to reach beyond the performer's and the spectator's intellect, even beyond their emotions, if theatre is able [to] stimulate the co-existence of pure consciousness with the waking state of consciousness . . . then theatre will have reached the level of language which is universal."[174] I would argue that Beckett creates a universal language in his theatre that transcends the logocentric delimitations that Derrida would throw around it. For Derrida, "absurdist" theatres are "…foreign to the theater [*sic*] of cruelty…"[175] and "…all the pictorial, musical and even gesticular forms introduced into Western theatre can only, in the best of cases, illustrate, accompany, serve or decorate a text, a verbal fabric, a logos which is *said* in the beginning."[176] May does not rely upon words alone, but on rhythm, geometry and *incantation*; she, like the audience, *has to hear the footfalls* "…however faint they fall"[177] as they are her means of accessing higher levels of being, of imposing ritual and structure on the mundane realities of existence and so transcending them. May's footfalls *are not decorative accompaniments to her text* but part of a "…pure stage language"[178], and Beckett's symbols and hieroglyphs, his numerous pictorial transcriptions[179] of his "…spatial poetry…"[180] come together to form a "…new theatrical writing."[181] The techniques used in *Footfalls* are Artaudian in the sense that they create an "…internal dynamism…"[182] that draws the audience into the eddy, and by the time Beckett writes *Quad*, a work that (like the *Acts Without Words*) *replaces* speech with "…patterning and tempo…"[183] of *physical* movement, it is clear that spoken language is only one aspect of an *oeuvre* that really aims to radiate

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[173] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 7.

[174] Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Theatre and Consciousness*, p. 158.

[175] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 307.

[176] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 297. The italics here are Derrida's own.

[177] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 401.

[178] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 83.

[179] See stage directions/notes for *Footfalls*, *Quad*, *Come and Go*, and the *Acts Without Words*, amongst others.

[180] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 28.

[181] Derrida, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", p. 303.

[182] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 66.

[183] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 68.

much wider than the societal facticity of a particular group of spectators in a given theatre building.

A Dissolution Into Darkness

Beckett's characters are born, one might say, from the offstage void, or what Shimon Levy would call the "…constantly present non-being that surrounds each and every stage [and] often sends various specific vocal and visual messengers to Beckett's onstage characters."[184] In the case of *All That Fall*, characters speak to us *as* messengers from an immaterial ("offstage") darkness, and *we* are both their stage and their bodies; *Ghost Trio* sees a central figure waiting for something, or someone, to come into his world from outside of *his* stage (set) and act as his saviour, and we are shown the futility of this waiting by way of the appearance, from that obscure "beyond", of the boy; *Footfalls* sees May channel exterior forces as she is literally enveloped by their shadows, and an offstage voice acts as a character in the play who may well be communicating with us from the afterlife that resides in the wings. All three of these plays seem to "end" in a manner oddly unified for works of the Beckett canon, as their characters manage to return to that absolution which they would always be, and from whence they came. *All That Fall* ends on the dramatic realisation that Mr Rooney may have killed a child and, as the tempest rages, the ciphers therein return to the shadowlands as their voices fade back into nothingness. *Ghost Trio* is surrounded by a darkness that it fades up from at the beginning, and fades back towards at the end, but only after we have seen a certain dramatic unity and development of agency on the part of F over the course of the three scenes. *Footfalls* goes a step further as it underlines *its* "holy" trinity of parts with a fourth scene, which serves only to illustrate May's absolute disappearance into darkness, or the void of the offstage world. The lights, at the end of *Footfalls* are brought up just enough to reveal "*No trace of May*"[185] and Beckett's manipulation of the darkness is eminently "holy." Artaud recognised that "…the true value of lighting [is] its ability to dematerialise stage action, transposing it into a primitive, subconscious key…"[186] and as we realise that May has literally exhausted herself in her final transcendent projection, *Footfalls* gives us "…the sense of a creation where we are in possession of only one of its facets, while its completion exists on other levels."[187] Beckett's characters seem to yearn towards a nonbeing, an existence that is, like consciousness, "in atoms", and May finally seems to

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[184] Shimon Levy, "On and Offstage: Spiritual Performances in Beckett's Drama", in *Beckett and Religion*, p. 25.
[185] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 403.
[186] Innes, *Holy Theatre*, p. 93.
[187] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 70.

achieve that atomisation, as she demonstrates that theatre is not the representation of fixed, substantial being, but the conjuring of otherwise-invisible spirits by an "…ancient ceremonial magic…"[188] that Artaud, Sartre, and Brook have all alluded to. The stage can take back, like a god, what it places upon the earth; all its souls are but leant to us, and must return unto it, and the spectator, according to Sartre, "…loses his awareness of self…"[189] as s/he is also allowed to disappear, like May, into what Junko Matoba calls that "…darkness of a different order"[190] which surrounds the performance space. Theatre elevates actor and spectator alike into "…another order of consciousness…"[191] as it erases self-consciousness during what Sartre would call its "…magical ceremony of annihilation."[192] As May gets ever closer to her offstage "mother", the spectator, forgetting him/herself in the cathartic act of witnessing the theatrical event, finds his/her "being-in" dissipated, as s/he becomes an omnipresent and yet impotent god, and the unity and vaporisation of being that is reached on the stage is reflected in the auditorium.

Beckett's sacred art brings about a catharsis by implementing the scourge of laughter, revealing the invisible (even the nonexistent), and presenting an unholy nonduality between life and death. Beckett's is not what we might call a theatre of the *godly* (just as Sartre's is not a philosophy of religion); his writings *could*, however, be said to be expositions of humanity's *primordial* desire to connect with an underlying, *originary* essentiality, as they plunge to the innermost depths of the human experience, and allow us to perceive something of the abstract (ideal) through the concrete (real). Human consciousness is, to a great extent, an ineffable type of being, like the "higher being" commonly regarded as "God" amongst the conventionally-religious, and neither "God" nor consciousness can, strictly speaking, be made manifest other than through material bodies, be they literal and corporeal, or metaphorical (the "body of the church" for example). Beckett is engaged in something of a divine conjuring act or mediumship then, as he makes the "nothingness" that is the *relationship* between consciousness and that which it deifies materially visible by marrying the form that his work takes, or the media that it is presented in, to its content. The characters that I have focussed on in this chapter live half-lives of fear and immateriality, as they project their own power towards "higher beings" outside of their scripts, and disperse themselves in

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[188] Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p. 28.
[189] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 9.
[190] Junko Matoba, "Religious Overtones in the Darkened Area of Beckett's Later Short Plays", in *Beckett and Religion*, p. 31.
[191] Worth, "Beckett's Ghosts", p. 63.
[192] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 9.

media which cannot help but emphasise their self-imposed spectrality. Beckett famously states that there are "no symbols where none intended"[193] in his early novel *Watt*, and Brook views Beckett's plays as pure and exacting symbols that stand as clearly defined objects on the stage, "…theatre machines" that demonstrate that "…a true symbol is specific, it is the only form a truth can take."[194] As Judith Dearlove puts it, Beckett "…pursues the linguistic theory . . . that form is a spatial configuration of meaning…"[195] and so perhaps studies such as this one seek to abstract those ideas which Beckett makes manifest so completely, as he closes down the gap between the logos and its sign, perceiver and perceived, in an attempt to *present*, rather than *represent* the shape of his ideas. In this chapter I have extended the notion of "theatre" to include "dramatic" media that connect us to other consciousnesses, to creative essences, sometimes more readily than their live, physical counterpart, and I think that it is important to consider Beckett as a pioneer of technologies that have, ultimately, played a part in delivering art to much wider audiences and uniting individuals who might be geographically dispersed by allowing them to access identical (tele-/radio) plays regardless of their location. Sartre writes that "…there is theatre only if all the spectators are united…"[196] and I would argue that Beckett reduces distances (and thereby closes down representation) between playwright/author, art, actors, characters and spectators/listeners/readers in such a way that the truly "holy" can be glimpsed in his writing, and our cultural, social, historical and religious facticity dissolved, like May, like Maddy, and like F, into the darkness.

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[193] Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 223.
[194] Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 65.
[195] Dearlove, " 'Syntax Upended in Opposite Corners': Alterations in Beckett's Linguistic Theories", p. 123.
[196] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 4.

Chapter Four

"Hell is Other People": The "Agony of Perceivedness"

The Look, Infinity, Totality, Ethics, and Aesthetics

In Chapter Three, I proposed that certain "holy" qualities intrinsic to Beckett's art have the potential to transcend organised religion and offer glimpses of the universal, "invisible" drives and essences that underlie our everyday modes of being-in-the-world. As I described Beckett's merging of form and content in his depiction of humanity's "spiritual" mode of being, I suggested that his theatre works have the capacity to produce a space in which audiences can experience the liberating dissolution of boundaries between "self" and "other", as they unite during what Sartre terms the "…magical ceremony of annihilation."[1] Whilst Sartre writes about theatre's ability to break down barriers between individual egos however, in his detailed examination of what he terms our *being-for-others* (which comprises Part Three of *Being and Nothingness*[2] and accounts for more than a quarter of the treatise), he states that, ontologically-speaking: "Unity with the Other is . . . *in fact* unrealizable."[3] Sartre assumes a position against Heidegger (as well as contradicting his own writings on theatre[4]), when he proposes that, in actual fact: "The essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not the *Mitsein* [Heidegger's *being-with*]; it is conflict."[5] As his philosophical writings once again contradict his aesthetic theory then, we could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that, for Sartre, drama points towards an imaginary ideal that cannot actually be realised in our concrete interactions with others.

To touch upon a theme which will be explored further throughout this chapter, Sartre explains that the impossibility of unity between beings stems from the fact that, "…the assimilation of the for-itself and the Other in a single transcendence would necessarily involve the disappearance of the characteristic of otherness in the Other."[6] This assimilation of one conscious existent into another could be said to explain May's final disappearance in *Footfalls*, the fading back to silence, or nothingness, of the characters in *All That Fall*, and the ultimate return to darkness of the protagonist of *Ghost Trio*. The listener assimilates the created being that penetrates her body and mind in the case of *All That Fall*, just as the

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[1] Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, p. 9. See Chapter Three, p. 109, note 192.
[2] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 243-452.
[3] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 387-388. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[4] See Chapter Three, p. 110, note 196 for instance ("…there is theatre only if all the spectators are united…").
[5] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 451.
[6] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 388.

spectator bears witness as F and May are consumed by an "otherness", or "offstage" beyond, which releases them from their worldly "difference", and makes of them a universal transcendence. The aforementioned characters are locked into cycles of projection towards idealised "others" (be they gods, or lost/deceased loves), and the perpetual flights that they embark upon in order to compensate for the sense of lack that is common to them all, in fact serve to disengage them further from individual lived existence. May, Maddy, and F embark upon journeys of evaporation, as a result of their displacements of "self" in elevated "others", and yet we might say that these dissolute three are the fortunate ones. This trio of lonely spectres is able to return to its dark, undifferentiated source by virtue of the insubstantiality that defines it; in a less ethereal reality, situated bodies simply cannot choose but to *live* their difference, their "otherness", as *being-for-others* is an inescapable, primary mode of being.

Chapter Three ended on something of a harmonious note, as *lone* figures were witnessed/heard projecting their supplications towards a void which would ultimately reciprocate and relieve them from the burden of facticity[7] and spectators were bound together by their shared experiences. This chapter, on the other hand, will focus on the discord of our *actual* relations and interactions with others, and Beckett's presentation of these on stage and screen. The search for the "holy", or the *logos*, will be replaced here with an acceptance of Hell on earth and, moreover, a recognition of the fact that both the divine *and the diabolical* are equally, quintessentially, modes of *human* being. The previous chapter saw fictitious "barely there" beings positing deified "others" as a sacred objects by placing them on imaginary planes from which they could not/would not directly interfere in the affairs of the earthly. In *lived reality*, however, the "other" does not leave me to my own devices (whilst enabling me to relinquish responsibility to an exterior force) but rather *confronts* me, as a disjunction, and an unwanted disruption, in my flight away from being, as s/he holds the key to an image which I cannot readily access and alter, and which fixes me as object. Where Maddy, F and May freewheeled in heavenly space, the characters that I will discuss in this chapter are steeped in dysfunctional relationships, and it scarcely needs stating that the often troublesome interactions that we, as humans, engage in with our fellow beings is a matter of shared interest not only between Beckett and Sartre, but writers and philosophers almost as a rule. This decent from the celestial realm does not, of course, oblige us to turn our attentions

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[7] Although there is more than one character in *All That Fall*, our focus is, essentially, on Maddy, who yearns for an invisible "other". Furthermore, as this is a radio drama, there is no *actual* interaction between the characters, as none of them can be said to *be there*, outside of the mind of the listener. See Chapter Three.

away from the theatre; there is, after all, surely nowhere better to interrogate the cruel world of living bodies *in conflict*, than here and, as I will argue, through the lens.

Sartre is both phenomenologist and dramatist, and the two positions are not always at odds with one another; the theatre, after all, can be used as a means of expressing philosophical and political, as well as artistic, agendas. As I have largely followed a Sartrean path through some of Beckett's works up until this point, it seems fitting, particularly now, to include one of Sartre's theatrical works, *No Exit*, in this chapter, as something of a forerunner to Beckett's *Play*, as the two dramatic pieces share some profound affinities, whilst benefitting from radically different modes of representation. *No Exit* is not only under the microscope because of the striking similarities that can be identified between its subject matter and that of *Play* however, but also because a study of this text enables what one might call an "embodied" illustration of Sartre's notion of "the look" of the other. Once it has been explicated then, Sartre's "look" will in fact be viewed not only as the tie that binds the three pieces to be analysed here together, but also as that essential principle of perception which underlies all theatrical and cinematic endeavour.

An inexorable element of human existence is, according to Sartre, *being-for-others*, and as I begin to focus on what this coexistence means for Beckett, an analysis of human interactions will become unavoidably interwoven with theories of perception and, most notably (through Sartre's "look"), vision. It is tempting, when speaking in overarching terms about Beckett and human relations, to dwell on the "co-dependence" of the "pseudo-couples" (for instance, Vladimir and Estragon, or Hamm and Clov), and to perhaps take this theme further, turning some much-needed attention towards characters such as Mercier and Camier, or *Rough For Theatre I*'s A and B. This chapter, however, will create a pathway of its own (rather than adding new footprints to old), as phenomenological theory will be used to highlight complex notions of perceiving and living with others, which are based on concepts not only of vision, but also of objectivity/subjectivity, infinity, totality, ethics, and aesthetics. In order to explore the aforementioned concepts fully, I will demonstrate the ways in which "competing" philosophies can actually be used in conjunction with one another, to add richer and deeper layers to our "understanding" of Beckett's work. Dorothy McCall writes of the direct relation between *No Exit* and *Being and Nothingness*: "The section [of the latter] 'Concrete Relations With Others' and, even more centrally, the chapter 'The Look' serve as

an ontological explanation of the play."[8] Of course, it is not difficult to argue that Sartre's literary works reflect and expound *his* philosophical teachings; if we view aspects of Sartre's theory alongside the philosophy of his contemporary, Emmanuel Levinas[9] (1906-1995), however (as well as "successor" Derrida's writings on Levinas) we can benefit from a fresh perspective on the play, which will lead to a more penetrating examination of Beckett's *Play* and, ultimately, his only foray into the world of film (*Film*). In *No Exit*, it will be argued, not only can we discern a clear illustration of Sartre's "look" in action, but we can also begin to view the other who looks at us as that Levinasian infinity whose face is the site of a transcendental call to ethics. That Sartrean/Levinasian "dissolve" that renders the other as a gap, a lack of totality, in our perception, also allows us to posit the Sartrean vicious circle, Inez, Garcin and Estelle, as existing in a kind of theatrical vortex, where they are always already *looked at* from all conceivable angles. It is, ultimately, *the look of the other*, the unknowable image of the self as "judged" in the mind of the other that provokes Sartre to affirm that: "Hell is – other people!"[10]

I will continue to partner Sartre with Levinas in my analysis of *Play*, where I will argue that there is something of a totalising vision at work in Beckett's stagecraft, which reduces the other to object through the aesthetic "look" (or, in Levinasian terms, the "other" to the "same"), suspending her/him in a purgatorial "meanwhile" that is common to the location of both *Play* and *No Exit*. The characters in *Play*, like the characters in *No Exit*, abhor the look of the other whilst feeding off it, and social torment is made metatheatre as experiments on vision and perception are pushed to their limits and interactions are dehumanised. *Play*, like *No Exit*, examines notions of ethics, morality and judgement; governing principles which cannot exist *without* being arising as always-already-looked-at-by-others. It is precisely the inevitability of being perceived by the other that becomes the focus as I progress towards an analysis of Beckett's sole cinematic work, *Film*. I will propose that a surprising compromise can be reached between Berkeley and Sartre through *Film*, as the co-dependence and interplay of perception and being (or being and *being perceived*) can be viewed as fundamental to the philosophy of both. In *Film*, the protagonist O (object) avoids the perception of an antagonist, E (eye), whose "look" *seems* to be represented by the

[8] Dorothy McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 111.
[9] A Lithuanian-born philosopher who adopted French nationality in the 1930s, Levinas was responsible for creating an interest in the work of founding phenomenologist Edmund Husserl in France.
[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit And Three Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage International, 1989), p. 45.

camera lens; the look to be feared, however, is ultimately revealed as the inward-facing glance of *self-perception*. I will suggest that it is the journey through the world of other eyes (during which Derrida will return to add an unexpected twist to the ongoing consideration of "the look" in this chapter), that gives O the terror-inducing image of himself as object with an outside that is an unavoidable result of the ubiquity of sight, and the filmic medium will be considered for its ability to manipulate vision and cut directly to the heart of perception.

A Note on Sartre and Levinas

The philosophies of Sartre and Levinas both place a key focus on the relationship between "self" and "other" that informs our very existence as beings who arise in a world where the "other" is always already *there*. According to Levinas, my relationship with the other *presupposes* being, and the other, for me, represents an unknowable infinity that I cannot subsume under my own totality. As the other reaches us as a divine transcendence (that affects us in our being but from which we remain separate), our respect for the being of others, for the "otherness" of the other, forms an ethics which Levinas will state as his metaphysics and *first philosophy*. It would be folly to omit the philosophy of Levinas from any study of "others" and "otherness", as his work is born out of the very concept of an *alterity* which, for him, precedes ontology. Levinas is, originally, of the same philosophical "school" as the "French existentialists" (although he, like most of his peers, ultimately parts company with that same in order to pursue his own radical advances), and by considering his theories alongside those of Sartre, an *ethical* layer can be woven into a consideration of our phenomenological encounters with others. Derrida seeks to prove, as we shall see, that Levinas' theories actually presuppose the phenomenological ontology that he endeavours to leave behind and, indeed, Levinas acts as an unlikely conduit between Derrida and Sartre in this chapter. A phenomenological ontology, a study of *being* and of *being conscious* (from the Husserlian origins of which Levinas' ideas have also evolved) always comes first for Sartre, and whilst some two hundred pages of *Being and Nothingness* are dedicated to our mode of *being-for-others*, these must, logically, *follow* his painstaking examination of human reality's original mode of being *for-itself*. In Sartrean phenomenology an exposition of the consciousness which would bestow being with an awareness of its own existence must come before we can contemplate our perception of the existence of other conscious beings. This particular study, therefore, continues along its *Sartrean* trajectory (whilst incorporating and emphasising the importance of Levinas' radical philosophy of alterity and Derrida's deconstruction of this), as I have been sure to establish a phenomenological ontology for the

Beckett character[11] *before* beginning, here, a more focussed description of *being-for-others* as it is made visible in Beckett's work.

A Theatrical Vortex

Sartre's 1944 theatrical work *No Exit* functions as an accessible "way in" to his theory of *being-for-others*. It seems fitting that Sartre decided to channel this aspect of his philosophy through the dramatic medium, as the other is "…outlined everywhere…"[12] in the theatre building, where spectators are seated *communally* in purpose-built auditoriums, their *collective* attention directed towards lit, often raised areas, specifically designed to house semi-fictitious others, who appear amidst "sets" that are populated with objects indicating their lived existence. *No Exit* opens to reveal a set in the style of a "…*Second Empire*…"[13] drawing-room (complete with a mantelpiece boasting a large bronze ornament, and three sofas of distinct colours), which immediately indicates the bodies that would inhabit it, bodies whose initial "…absence is [actually] a structure of *being-there*."[14] As Sartre observes, *objects suggest people*; the very door through which a person walks "…indicates a human presence when *it opens* before [the spectator], the same with the chair when he sits down, etc."[15] When Garcin and the Valet enter through *No Exit*'s auspicious door for the first time, their *presence* fulfils and validates the existential data that the audience have already semiotically collated from the objects placed before its consideration; as Sartre explains, however, the appearance of the conscious other also causes "…an element of disintegration…"[16] in my universe which *problematizes* my position as perceiving subject. Whilst s/he is present to me, in part, as object, the other's existence as an alternative point of view on those objects which surround me means that there is a "…permanent flight of things toward a goal which I apprehend as an object at a certain distance from me but which escapes me inasmuch as it unfolds about itself its own distances."[17] It is interesting to compare Sartre's argument, here, to Stanton B. Garner's description of "…theatrical watching…" as confronting "…a field that opens to competing perceptual configurations from within, a field

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[11] I established (in Chapter One) the earthly relation of consciousness to the body and the inanimate; the unattainable coincidence with "self" that constitutes the temporal being of Beckettian consciousness (in Chapter Two); and that projection towards "God", or an absolute "Other" (in Chapter Three) that characterises the Beckett character's deferral from self-presence and pushes it to its limits.

[12] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 365.

[13] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 3.

[14] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 365. The italics here are Sartre's own.

[15] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 366. The italics here are Sartre's own.

[16] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 279.

[17] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 279.

structurally destabilized by the same dynamic of intersubjectivity that characterizes perception outside the [theatre], whereby the Other represents the opening of an autonomous, differently oriented world within the perceptual boundaries of my own."[18] Theatrical spectatorship, in that case, is like a metaphor for the disruption caused by the emergence of the other into my perceptual field, and the "…fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world…"[19] that s/he betokens is enigmatically illustrated by Merleau-Ponty when he writes that: "Round about the perceived body [of the other] a vortex forms, towards which my world is drawn and . . . sucked in: to this extent, it is no longer merely mine, and no longer merely present, it is present to *x*, to that other manifestation of behaviour which begins to take shape in it."[20] Our perceptions of the drawing-room and its objects are quickly altered, for instance, as *Garcin* begins to surveys its contents; through *his* observations (notably, his enquiries regarding the absence of "…racks and red-hot pincers…"[21]), *we* begin to realise that *he* is in "Hell", and that our preconceived image of that place is perhaps at odds with Sartre's. We could conceive of *No Exit* as exemplary of a kind of *theatrical vortex*, as both the audience outside of the play, and the characters contained within it, can be said to experience the magnetic pull that is transcendence towards the other, as well as experiencing paradigmatic shifts of perception as the dynamics within the drama fluctuate and, ultimately, suffocate the onstage characters.

When Inez and, subsequently, Estelle, enter the world of *No Exit*, Garcin is exposed as part-object to their perception, just as he has been to that of the audience. The introduction of others to the scene causes conflict, the very stuff of drama, and further "disintegrations" in the onstage world, as Garcin becomes merely one perspective amongst many, both on and offstage. The complete lack of mirrors and windows that Garcin notes (coupled with the Valet's confirmation that there is no sleep to be had in Hell and that the eyes remain ever-open, filled with the unbroken glare of the electric light), immediately "sets up" the importance of vision and of seeing in this dystopia. Garcin, who has been alone, becomes aware of himself as having an "outside" only when he is viewed by Inez, who makes report of it to him:

> INEZ [*fixing her eyes on him*]: Your mouth!
> GARCIN [*as if waking from a dream*]: I beg your pardon.

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[18] Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 47.
[19] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 279.
[20] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 412.
[21] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 4.

> INEZ: Can't you keep your mouth still? You keep twisting it about all the time. It's grotesque.
> GARCIN: So sorry. I wasn't aware of it.[22]

This exchange demonstrates the way in which the other transcends my subjectivity and *fixes me* as an object in his/her subjective world. By *looking* at me, the other bestows upon me an "outside" and appears to me as a *human*,[23] as: "It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject."[24] Inez is keen to enforce *her* subjectivity on both Garcin and Estelle, whose objectivity she would reflect back to them as a mirror. When Estelle is horrified by the prospect of remaining forever unable to view her own reflection, Inez makes the following suggestion: "Suppose I try to be your glass?"[25] Estelle's reluctance to allow Inez to act as her mirror exemplifies the threat that other beings pose to us as *they look at us*, make judgements about us, and conceal the aforementioned objective images of us which we cannot gain access to:

> ESTELLE: […] You scare me rather [Inez]. My reflection in the glass never did that; of course, I knew it so well. Like something I had tamed . . . I'm going to smile, and my smile will sink down into your pupils, and heaven knows what it will become.[26]

Inez is tortured by Estelle's rejection of her advances (she has lived her life as a mirror, *stealing* and *sucking in* the subjectivities of others and replacing these with her own objective images), and she is also aware that an act of theft has taken place which has allowed the other to "have" a part of *her* which she cannot know. A spurned Inez realises Garcin as the obstacle that stands in the way of her despotic project (it is his presence, his *male gaze*[27] which steals the attentions of Estelle away from her), and as she reprimands him she declares: "Why, you've even stolen my face; you know it and I don't!"[28] Each character in this play must suffer the disappearance of their "outside" in the black hole that is the judgemental other. Inez, Garcin and Estelle have been thrown together in this room with no exit so that they might act as judges and tormentors *to each other*, evaluating each other's sins, getting in each

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[22] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 9.
[23] A robot, for instance, could not objectify me, make of me a *being-for-others*, by a look, and rearrange my world of objects via its own perspective.
[24] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 280.
[25] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 19.
[26] Sartre, *No Exit*, pp. 20-21.
[27] This term was coined by Laura Mulvey in her essay on the patriarchal psychology which reduces the female form to an erotic object in cinematography: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Visual and Other Pleasures*. 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 14-30.
[28] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 22.

other's way, stealing each other's outsides, and creating their own Hell. It is perhaps unsurprising that the inhabitants of this almost Beckettian "closed place" are denied access to *self*-reflection through looking glasses; there is *no way out* of this torture chamber, and an *object* which would expand the diegesis must therefore be prohibited.[29] Expansion of this particular world is a profoundly *subjective* experience on the part of the characters, and their *internalising* of objective images which they reflect back to each other demonstrates that, whilst consciousness is a "…hole of being at the heart of being"[30], the other is a hole, a vortex, in my very perception of being.

Totality, Infinity and Ethics

We cannot *know* the image that the other has of us, as we cannot access the contents of his/her subjective mind; we can, however, attempt to subsume it, and Inez, has made a Sartrean project of stifling the other's freedom through objectifying and containing it within her own, as she recognises that: "The objectivation of the Other . . . is a defence on the part of my being which, precisely by conferring on the Other a being-for-me, frees me from my being for the Other."[31] Levinas would argue that reducing the other to an object in my world in this way is, essentially, absorbing the other's infinite "otherness" into the totality of my "sameness", and Watt explains that: "For Levinas all self-consciousness attempts to appropriate the other into the order of the same."[32] Levinas suggests that Western metaphysics, with its emphasis on light, reason and rationality, "…designates comprehension [intelligence] – the logos of being – [as] a way of approaching the known being such that its alterity with regard to the knowing being vanishes."[33] Levinas' philosophy of *alterity* is the antithesis to what we might term the totalitarianism of Ancient Greek philosophy then as, for Levinas, the *face* of the "other" denotes a difference (we might even say Derridean *differance* or deferral) that always refers me to an infinity that I *cannot* logocentrically comprehend. According to Levinas, an infinite obligation to the "other" forms the foundation of my ethical and moral code as, in my chance encounters with his/her face, "…my own totality as a human being is called to respond to the otherness of that person."[34] This obligation, however, is one which I cannot entirely fulfil, and my encounters with other faces are always (like

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[29] See also, Chapter Three, pp. 100-101.
[30] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 637.
[31] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 292.
[32] Daniel Watt, "The Face in the Crowd: Levinas, Ethics and Performance", in *Ethical Encounters*, p. 155.
[33] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 42.
[34] Watt, "The Face in the Crowd: Levinas, Ethics and Performance", p. 155.

consciousness) incomplete, as the "…face-to-face relation [between self and other] cannot be subsumed into a totality; rather, it concretely produces a relation to the commandment and judgement of infinity."[35] Inez's confinement to Hell is a judgement upon her lack of *respect* for the *alterity* of the other; she "…crept inside…"[36] the skin of her cousin's wife, Florence, and forced her to see the world through *her* eyes, assimilating her autonomy and fixing her in an all-consuming love-triangle which resulted in the death of all three participants. Inez is driven by a totalitarian project, a project of "sameness"; others, to her, are perishable, acting as fuel to her fire; she "…can't get on without making people suffer…"[37] and acts as: "A live coal in others' hearts."[38] Rather than showing an ethical "…fear of occupying someone else's place with the *Da* of [her] *Dasein*…"[39], Inez is a Sartrean sadist, who thrives on the "…appropriation and utilization of the Other."[40] Inez is *without an ethics* when it comes to her treatment of others, as she shows no concern for the irreducibility of those others to the sameness of her own being; she is the only character who displays no signs of shame, and makes no attempt to *justify* her single-minded actions, and her punishment comes in the form of a realisation that the "other" will always break free of her, by virtue of his/her infinite being.

Despite Inez's attempts, she cannot fully consume the alterity of those *infinite* minds that surround her and create fissures in the totality of her perception. Garcin, Inez and Estelle, *all* possess a means of escaping the actuality of their surroundings (although their ability to do so is gradually reduced throughout the course of the play), when they individually access their own thoughts and act as voyeurs, as spectators, narrating scenes from the lives that they have left behind. These episodes act, in part, as expositions and character biographies, but they also cause disruption in the presence of the stage world and a breakdown of the "sameness" of the dramatic unities, as each of the damned narrates what s/he can *see* occurring *outside* of the time, place, and action of the *mise-en-scène*. As each character drifts into his/her "own world" (Estelle observing her own funeral and commenting: "The wind's blowing my sister's veil all over the place"[41] for instance), s/he betokens her/his own infinity

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[35] Sean Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 5.
[36] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 26.
[37] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 26.
[38] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 26.
[39] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", trans. Sean Hand and Michael Temple, in *The Levinas Reader*, p. 82.
[40] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 421.
[41] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 11.

and separation from the others, just as: "The presence of a being not entering into, but overflowing the sphere of the same determines its status as infinite."[42] When the characters of *No Exit* "tune in" to offstage worlds, they also seem to be enacting that disintegration or unknowable element of the universe which Sartre would affirm that they represent for each other (and the spectator). As each becomes submerged in his/her own insights, we can witness not only a Sartrean "decentralization of the world", but also an inability, on the part of the others, to fully grasp the Levinasian infinity that is the other whose *face* presents "the other" to "the one" as a difference/*differance* which cannot be assimilated into a sameness or totality of "self".

Asymmetry and Vicious Circles

In his substantial critique of Levinas' philosophy[43], Derrida reflects on what we might call the "holy" ethics that he sees as being fundamental to his predecessor's concept of originary alterity as follows:

> Face to face with the other within a glance *and* a speech which both maintain distance and interrupt all totalities . . . being-together as separation precedes or exceeds society, collectivity, community. Levinas calls it *religion*. It opens ethics. The ethical relation is a religious relation . . . Not *a* religion, but *the* religion, the religiosity of the religious.[44]

By way of direct contrast, and in a *refutation* of a Kantian (we might say Levanisian) notion of the other as separation and original solitude, Sartre writes that "…there is in everyday reality an original relation to the Other which can be constantly pointed to and which consequently can be revealed to me outside all reference to a religious or mystic unknowable."[45] Sartre and Levinas *both* acknowledge that our relation to the "other" is an "original" one, but rather than making of this relation a "religiosity" that precedes being-in-the-world, Sartre removes that same from celestial heights. Levinas, whose work is actually "…split between theological and philosophical texts"[46], makes of our relations with the other an *ontotheological* system (which should be considered outside of the context of his writings on Judaism) or, rather, suggests that these relations *are* the very system. There is an imbalance at work in Levinas' philosophy however, as my relation to the other is based on

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[42] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 195.
[43] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas", in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 97-192.
[44] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 119. The italics here are Derrida's own.
[45] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 277.
[46] Watt, "The Face in the Crowd: Levinas, Ethics and Performance", p. 154.

his/her godlike *primacy*, or supreme position in existence, and I am left somewhat apologetic for my usurpation of that "place in the sun" that anybody else (by her/his virtue of being the "other") would have been more worthy of. Sean Hand explains that:

> My presence before the face is . . . an epiphany. It creates an asymmetrical indebtedness on my part towards the Other's moral summons which is based not on a prior knowledge . . . but on the primacy of the other's right to exist, and on the edict: 'You shall not kill'.[47]

The other's existence always takes precedence over my own in Levinas' theory then, whereas, in Sartrean ontology (although we arise, like characters upon a stage, in a world where we are always already *looked at*), the other "…does not appear to me as a being who is constituted first so as to encounter me later; he appears as a being who arises in an original relation of being with me and whose indubitability and *factual necessity* are those of my own consciousness."[48] As Derrida writes: "*My world* is the opening in which all experience occurs, including, as the experience par excellence, that which is transcendence toward the other as such."[49] Before *any* being can be perceived, it is necessary that *I myself* possess a consciousness with which *I can perceive*, and *consciousness*, rather than the other, *comes first* in Sartrean theory. In *No Exit*, whilst the face does act as an "epiphany" or "moral summons", it is not symbolic of an *asymmetrical*, religious relation; *being-for-others* is illustrated as a democratic foundation of the upsurge of consciousness in this play, as each character plays the part of both prosecution (torturer) and the accused (victim) in turn. Sartre deals in disjointed circles rather than straight lines: Beckett, as we shall see, deals in both.

For Levinas, "…the proximity of the other is the face's meaning…"[50] and the fragile human essence that would hide and protect itself from harm cannot help but present itself there. Levinas writes that:

> Prior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expressions, which cover over and protect with an immediately adopted face or countenance, there is a nakedness and destitution of the expression [of "self"] as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defencelessness, vulnerability itself. This extreme exposure – prior to any human aim – is like a shot 'at point blank range'.[51]

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[47] Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, p. 5.
[48] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 299. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[49] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 164. The italics here are Derrida's own.
[50] Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", p. 82.
[51] Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", p. 83.

Garcin refuses to admit his own "vulnerability" to Inez and Estelle[52] yet, interestingly, it is he who repeatedly *covers and protects his face*, "…the original site of the sensible"[53] and thereby the original site of his "self", and suggests, initially, that they all cease interaction, *keep their heads lowered*, and adopt introspection, rather than interrogation, as a means of "working out" their salvation.[54] Garcin does not wish to have his face ("self") *exposed* to the judgemental *look* of the others. Estelle is also terrified, upon entering Hell, of experiencing an "extreme exposure" of human vulnerability as her first lines indicate:

> ESTELLE: [*to* GARCIN] No. Don't look up. I know what
> you're hiding with your hands. I know you've no face left.[55]

The possibility of *seeing* a horrifying "nakedness and destitution of the human expression" haunts Estelle as a result of that *lack* of ethics (or lack of "…fear for all the violence and murder…"[56] brought about by her existence) which led her to behave immorally in life. Estelle, we discover (each character here must provide her/his testimony *in the face of the others* if s/he is to have any hope of a fair hearing), killed the baby fathered by her extramarital lover, with her own hand and against his impassioned pleas, and this murder lead her lover commit suicide, an act which she evidently presumes (in an uncharacteristically moral judgement) will find him a place waiting for her in Hell; his method of dispatch was none other than a "a shot 'at point blank range'" to his own face. The face seems to be a significant feature of ethical encounters in *No Exit* then, and one which acts as a site for moral reckoning, but this has less to do with the fact that it speaks of the "…'resemblance' of man and God"[57] and more to do with the fact that: "It is also that which sees […] which exchanges its glance."[58] Rather than the face acting, as an *uneven* meeting place between the profane self and the transcendent other in this play, it becomes the hellish foundation of *the look* which betokens the *reciprocity* of our subjective and objective relation to each other, and stands as the *common ground* between persecuted beings.

The characters of *No Exit* are trapped, as the title suggests, in a cycle of looking and of being looked at (of subjectivity and objectivity), of judging and being judged, which could explain Garcin's and Estelle's fear of exposed, or even obliterated, human faces. Each

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[52] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 26.
[53] Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", p. 82.
[54] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 18.
[55] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 10.
[56] Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy", p. 82.
[57] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 126.
[58] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 122.

character in Sartre's play is forced to "…act as torturer of the two others"[59] yet, despite Inez's unabashed proclamations of herself as "… 'a damned bitch"[60], Garcin's pride in his misogyny and denial of his own cowardice, and Estelle's absolute ignorance of her own selfish and murderous actions, the three ultimately pull together, in their own dysfunctional way, in an attempt to act as each other's salvation. Hell is a downwards spiral for Sartre's characters, as each of them has lost agency, and lost the ability to affect the image held of them by the living humans on earth, as a result of becoming fixed, *in-itself* being in death. As Inez reminds Garcin, who is tortured by the judgements cast upon him by his surviving work colleagues (who have deemed the desertion from military duty that cost him his life as cowardice, rather than a moral stand), once cemented in death: "You are – your life, and nothing else."[61] With no other alternative then, the characters look for an escape route in each other, and when the opportunity arises for them to leave the chamber, when the ominous door opens, like so many Beckettian creatures Garcin speaks for them all when he states that he, "…shall not go."[62] The characters of *No Exit* are "…inseparables"[63] who would have their "outsides" fixed by each other, but who refuse the objective images that are offered to them by the other and wish to replace these with alternatives that better suit the images that they hold of themselves; Garcin, Inez and Estelle do not want to leave each other while there is a chance that they can influence each other's perceptions. The other's objective image of us is caught in his/her infinite mind, however *we cannot view it*, and after death it becomes unalterable by us as "…to die is to lose all possibility of revealing oneself as subject to another."[64] In their chasing of an impossible collision of their own subjectivities with the objective images of themselves held by others, this trio enacts an extended metaphor for the *for-itself*'s perpetual flight from being and, according to Sartre, our *being-for-others* is, in fact, an extension of that very mode of existence that sees us projecting towards the collision of our *for-itself* being with some *in-itself* totality. Moreover: "If we could manage to interiorize the whole system [of *being-for-others*], we should be our own foundation."[65] Of course, these efforts are doomed to failure; the other is a being of consciousness, and it is only *another consciousness* that can delimit my being, by *imposing on me* an outside; if I could make of myself an ideal finite totality of my choosing I would become "God." The

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[59] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 17.
[60] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 25.
[61] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 43.
[62] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 42.
[63] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 42.
[64] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 321.
[65] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 393.

constant fluctuation of the subject/object relation between myself and the other is a disjunction which joins us together. My *being-for-others* is, in essence, a *mutual* disharmony.[66]

Derrida writes of my relation to the other: "That I am also essentially the other's other, and that I know I am, is the evidence of a strange symmetry whose trace appears nowhere in Levinas's description."[67] A picture is beginning to emerge in *No Exit*, however, of a very clear symmetry in human relations, and that symmetry can be found in Sartre's "look" and the object it produces. There is a back-and-forth motion at work in Sartre's theory of the look, rather than a rigid binary structure of self and other, subject and object. There is a fluidity, a dissolution almost, in Sartre's description of *being-for-others*, and certainly a "disintegration" and "decentralisation" of traditional metaphysical structures. Derrida, whilst not specifically mentioning Sartre in his discussion of Levinas (referring to him only briefly in two footnotes), actually allows us to push Sartre forward as the phenomenologist who inhabits this middle ground between boundaries/binaries of self and other. Sartre suggests, as we have seen, that the other is present to me in part as object, or even that *objectness* is a modality of the other's being; as our relationship is a *reciprocal* one however, I also recognise the other as the subject for whom I am an object which I cannot know. It is this image of myself as object that forms the basis of the reciprocal relation between human beings as, according to Sartre, "…this Me [-as-object] produced by the one and assumed by the other, derives its absolute reality from the fact that it is the only separation possible between two beings fundamentally identical as regards their mode of being and immediately present one to the other; for since consciousness alone can limit consciousness, no other mean is conceivable between them."[68] It is, then, the very self-as-object as judged by the other that connects us as beings-in-the-world, and Sartre repeatedly stresses that this causes a conflict that is the original meaning of my *being-for-others*. Of course my revenge, as it were, on the other is my possession of an image of him/her which s/he cannot access, as "…the structures of my being-for-the-Other are identical to those of the Other's being-for-me."[69] As Derrida points out, by way of deconstructing Levinas' theory of infinite separation between

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[66] There are parallels, here, not only with *Play*, but also with Beckett's 1964 novel *How It Is*, which depicts a character whose encounters with others in the mud feed into an endless cycle of pain and torture (where each being will, in turn, play both victim and perpetrator), and yet seem to constitute his progression through/endurance of existence.

[67] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 161.

[68] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 310.

[69] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 362.

beings, "…the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I."[70] As conscious individuals, we recognise our essential *differences* as a direct result of our *identical* modes of being; inanimate objects have no awareness of any "self", of any positioning with regards to an "other", as they are without subjectivity and cannot, therefore, enter into interactive relations with being. *Human* relations are characterised by their circularity and, due to the ever-shifting power-dynamics in *No Exit*, Garcin, Inez and Estelle are caught in a circular vortex of subjectivity and objectivity, in spite of their attempts to use each other to purge their sins. In an impossible pursuit of the "me-as-object" which each would mould within the consciousness of the other: "Inez wants Estelle who wants Garcin who seeks the reassurance of Inez."[71] Garcin makes the following observation on the trio's conflicts and negotiations: "We're chasing after each other, round and round in a vicious circle, like the horses on a roundabout."[72] In spite of their differences, the characters of *No Exit* are reduced to, and suspended within, a totality of the same.

Whilst we can employ aspects of Levinas' theory to a reading of the plays and *Film* in this chapter, it is ultimately the Sartrean "vicious circle" that is "the look", that characterises human relations in each. Hell is a place where I can no longer influence the judgements that others make about me, rather than simply a place where others exist, and at the close of *No Exit* we are left with an image of three characters *gazing at each other*.[73] This cycle of judgement and of gazing will continue and, we might argue, *does* continue in Beckett's *Play*, and Garcin makes a beginning of the ending when he states: "Well, well, let's get on with it. . . ."[74] The audience might well suspect that this entire sequence will be repeated, that the "vicious circle" will continue to spiral away within the theatrical vortex. Furthermore, by our own watching, we have *fixed* the entire spectacle as a dissolution, but one which we have presided over subjectively and as a totality, as the look works *internally* in *No Exit*, and is not turned upon us. In this instance then: "The universe, the flow, and the drain hole are all once again recovered, reapprehended, and fixed as object."[75] In Beckett's theatre, as we shall see, we cannot afford to be so complacent, as we cannot always guarantee that we will be able to hold others looking at each other *within* our own look, and the look is not always safely contained within the world of the stage.

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[70] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 161.
[71] McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 114.
[72] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 30.
[73] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 46.
[74] Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 46.
[75] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 279.

Play: Beckett's Aesthetic Order of the Same

Beckett's *Play* (1964) opens to reveal three characters in darkness, with their bodies encased and their necks "*…held fast…*" in the mouths of what can barely be discerned as "*…three identical grey urns.*"[76] Like *No Exit*, Beckett's *Play* is billed as "A play in one act"[77], and the similarities between the two plays do not end there. Angela Moorjani briefly notes that the "*…cruelty…*" of Sartre's "*…gaze…*" is a refrain within the drama, and that each of the three characters, W1 (the wife), M (her husband), and W2 (his lover), "*…can be taken to be the others' tormentor.*"[78] Moorjani's focus lies elsewhere than on Sartre's philosophy however, and, indeed, it seems that references to *No Exit* in analyses of *Play* have been, up until now, fleeting. John Calder writes that, in *Play*, "*…there may even be some slight influence from Sartre's Huis Clos [No Exit], where three dead people in the hell of an enclosed room, each two not being able to stand the presence of the other, all see the truths of their past conduct gradually emerge…*"[79] without developing this argument, or even engaging in any further analysis of *Play*, or of the potential influence of Sartre (outside of one or two incidental references), in his entire monograph on *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett*. I would argue that W1, W2 and M, a "love-triangle" (like the triangles formed by Garcin, Estelle and Inez and, within this triangle, Inez, Inez's cousin and Florence, Estelle, her husband and Roger, Estelle, her husband and Peter, and Garcin, his wife, and various lovers), trapped inside their own "private" Hell with no exit, have tortured each other for so long that perhaps they could even *be* Sartre's trio, twenty years down the line, "*…a shade gone…*"[80], still testifying, still the "inseparables." Furthermore, we might consider that the radical staging of the characters in *Play* means that their somewhat Levinasian "being-together as separation" has evolved to the point where they are no longer bound in an "*…ethical relation…*" to one another; the "*…face to face…*"[81] is replaced by Beckett here (who once again merges *form* and *content*), with a total disjunction in human communications, and normative modes of reciprocal human interaction are usurped by the violence of light, interrogation[82], and

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[76] Samuel Beckett, *Play*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 307.

[77] Beckett, *Play*, p. 305. See also: Sartre, *No Exit*, p. 1.

[78] Angela Moorjani, "'Just Looking': Ne(i)ther-World Icons, Elsheimer Nocturnes, and Other Simultaneities in Beckett's *Play*", in *Beckett at 100: Revolving It All*, p. 126.

[79] John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder, 2001), pp. 35-36.

[80] Beckett, *Play*, p. 307.

[81] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 202.

[82] Interrogation is also a theme in Beckett's teleplay *Eh Joe*, where the central figure is forced to listen to a female voice that reminds him of his crimes against women, and in stage plays *Catastrophe* and *What Where*, which both foreground a conception of *torture and manipulation as theatre* in dystopian/totalitarian states; these works (particularly *Catastrophe*) also seem to metaphorically represent the punishment inflicted by a dictatorial writer/director on his/her actors.

repetition, as the characters are caught in the interval of a suspended death, and reduced by their creator to the order of the same.

The bodies of *Play*'s characters are rendered "…heavy and inert…"[83] by the centrality of a performance image which sees them entombed and impassive: "*Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns.*"[84] In a work which, for Beckett, revolves around an unusually *domestic* theme, adultery, the other is no longer available to us primarily as a free body; *Play* moves beyond the world of imprisoned bodies that *move* within the ever-decreasing circles of *No Exit*, towards an infinite space beyond humanity and embodied interactions, where imprisonment has become internalised, and a vortex not only surrounds the world of the play as a whole, but penetrates and makes hollow the existence of each individual within its parameter. In an examination of the "visual field" in Beckett's plays, Garner writes that: "With his radically visual conception of stage space, Beckett . . . sought the environmental and compositional control of a Robert Wilson or Richard Foreman, taking on himself the role of metteur-en-scène through an increasing imagistic use of the elements of performance."[85] The physiology of the performer constitutes an "otherness" in the artistic vision of the auteur, rearranging the formal structure of the *mise-en-scène*, and posing a "…danger to the aesthetic enterprise through its insistent naturalism."[86] By subjecting the performing biology (as raw artistic material) to the objectifying "look" and removing, as far as possible, its freedom (subsuming it under an overarching creative, *visual* concept) however, Beckett *assimilates the unwieldy other into an aesthetic order of the same*, and Watt writes that a "…'negation of the imperfect' might well describe the conventional rehearsal process as a trajectory of perfectionism; the eradication of flaw and failing, the reduction of the other to the same."[87] It could be argued then, that it is Beckett's "trajectory of perfectionism" that leads him to negate the imperfections of the actor's body by turning it to stone, grounding it and rooting it to the spot, restricting it, dehumanising it, and rendering it an almost incorporeal element within the totality of the theatrical image.

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[83] Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 77.
[84] Beckett, *Play*, p. 307.
[85] Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 54.
[86] Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 57.
[87] Watt, "The Face in the Crowd: Levinas, Ethics and Performance", p. 158.

Desire, Death, and Imprisonment in Art

       Play presents, in its dreamscape, three characters who are prompted to speak, or "fed", by a spotlight (shone at varying intensities according to which section of the play is being enacted) that obliges them to deliver their "dialogue" at a: "*Rapid tempo throughout.*"[88] *Play* is divided, as Cohn puts it, into "…three unequal parts, which Beckett termed Chorus, Narration, and Meditation, although he did not designate these divisions in the published text."[89] It is perhaps easier, at first, to decipher the script of *Play* as a reader than it is as an audience member, as conflicting lines are delivered simultaneously by the three characters as the play opens. As the "Narration" begins to unfold, however, it becomes apparent that the characters of this play are trapped in a vicious circle without exit, which, like Sartre's trio, they have placed themselves in as a result of failing to found their behaviour in life on the basis of a moral code or ethics. Sexual desire creates conflict between the characters of *No Exit*, and we learn that it is sexual desire (and the complications that arise when this is succumbed to at the expense of all else) that fuels *Play*, when W1 begins the difficult process of explication with a rather telling: "I said to him, Give her up."[90] The bodily language that is so vital to the narration (as W2 speaks of seeing W1 "…full length in the flesh…"[91] and W2 remembers the morning when M "…buried his face in [her] lap…"[92] for instance), betokens a focus on the body, and the embodied relations that prefigured the trio's confinement to urns, in what we suppose is a hellish afterlife brought about their infidelities. M, like Garcin, is a male character who is caught in a chase with two female characters, only he has been intimate with both, and rather than using his experiences to impart a moral lesson to the audience (or even *accepting* his role as perpetrator of the affair that caused him to deceive his wife and his "mistress") he proffers the following advice: "Adulterers, take warning, never admit."[93] M identifies as victim of his own affair (he even speaks of how he was "…frightened…"[94] by his wife's behaviour in the fallout of his betrayal), an oblivious innocent who was swept along by the demands of "…vermin women."[95] Sexual desire is a troubled mode of *being-for-others* according to Sartre, as it clouds the brain, and makes the man (and it is almost always the man with Sartre), unable to take responsibility for his

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[88] Beckett, *Play*, p. 307.
[89] Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, p. 282.
[90] Beckett, *Play*, p. 308.
[91] Beckett, *Play*, p. 308.
[92] Beckett, *Play*, p. 309.
[93] Beckett, *Play*, p. 310.
[94] Beckett, *Play*, p. 310.
[95] Beckett, *Play*, p. 311.

actions. Sartre writes: "Let any man consult his own experience; he knows how consciousness is clogged, so to speak, by sexual desire; it seems that one is invaded by facticity, that one ceases to flee it and that one slides towards a *passive* consent to the desire."[96] As Sartre would have it, nothing places us more firmly in our own facticity, our own body, than sexual desire, so perhaps Beckett's urns could be seen as representing the complete absorption of the *for-itself*, or conscious, intelligent being by inert matter. As desire, for Sartre, is the "…non-thetically lived project of being swallowed up in the body"[97], perhaps W1, W2 and M are paying the ultimate price for allowing their bodies to be taken over and their minds to be rendered opaque, as the process that "swallowed up" their thinking, and thereby their morals, now threatens to engulf them completely and root them to the very earth.

For Sartre, "…desire is not only the clogging of a consciousness with its own facticity; it is correlatively the ensnarement of a body by the world."[98] If we think of the urns containing *Play*'s trio as the world which ensnares then, we can see that a radical objectification is at work in this drama, as our protagonists speak to us as beings who barely register as thinking bodies, and embrace, instead, the link between sensual pleasure and death, "…which is also a metamorphosis or 'being-in-the-midst-of-the-world.'"[99] In *Play*, not only are the characters (and actors) encased in urns, heavy, unforgiving, immovable objects in-the-midst-of-the-world, signifying death and desire all at once, but their exposed faces also begin a metamorphosis into abject matter, robbing them not only of their most quintessentially human vehicle of expression, but also of the ethical reference point which may have allowed them to transcend containment in the living-death which is the play's setting. It is interesting to note that Beckett specifies in the stage directions of *Play* that, whilst the characters' faces should be camouflaged to the extent that they become "…*almost part of the urns*", the actors should not wear masks[100] in order to achieve this dehumanisation. Even in a play that that petrifies the living bodies of its actors, turning them into stone, in true Levinasian style: "The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it."[101]

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[96] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 409-410. The italics here are Sartre's own.
[97] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 411.
[98] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 414.
[99] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 414.
[100] Beckett, *Play*, p. 307.
[101] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 198.

Whilst the face *is* present in *Play* (or, as Derrida puts it, "The face is presence, *ousia*"[102]), the *face-to-face interaction* that the characters of *No Exit* are obliged to engage in is gone, and there is no "common ground", reciprocity or negotiation between Beckett's trio, even in language. Merleau-Ponty writes that:

> In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground . . . of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being . . . consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world.[103]

In *Play*, language, like the body, has broken down and lost its freedom and spontaneity, and *dialogue* is reduced to a series of *monologues* (reminiscent of *No Exit*'s character-led narrations of the world outside of the play, but with this device pushed to the absolute limit), and whilst these "chime" occasionally, chorally, in accordance with Beckett's rhythm, they betray an absolute separation of, and division between, beings. W1, W2 and M each work independently towards their own ends, offering different perspectives on the events that merged their paths in life, as though these were entirely out of their control, happening to others, or a fiction. In death, Beckett's characters, like Sartre's, experience a complete deprivation of agency; the "selfish" nature of their actions in life has condemned them each to an absolute solitude, where they must forever relive and recount their part, without the ability to affect any change upon it. W1, W2 and M, whilst reduced to the "sameness" of Beckett's vision when they appear as properties of his stage, operated as *individual* totalities in the world prior to the play, and their failure to respect each other as sites of infinite otherness has confined them to a punishment which we could suggest fits their original crimes. Just as each sought to plough a singular and self-serving pathway through life, treating the collisions and subsequent devastation inherent in this course as merely incidental, the *unified* auditory elements of the play (the "Chorus" and the cadence and crossovers of delivery of lines) are painstakingly constructed in order to portray a *discordance of individuals*, who are nonetheless all *suspended* as part of the *same* musical score. In capturing W1, W2 and M within a rhythm which acts as "…a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity"[104], Beckett demonstrates what Levinas saw as the ability of art to freeze time "…within images [and] doubles…" which immobilise the being of characters who

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[102] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 125.
[103] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 413.
[104] Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow", trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *The Levinas Reader*, p. 133.

subsequently "…suffer an eternal anxiety, imprisoned in an inhuman interval."[105] Art is situated outside of being-in-the-world according to Levinas, and there is no doubt that it is "beyond being" that we find W1, W2 and M (as well as Garcin, Estelle and Inez) incarcerated within a torturous artistic vision which robs them of their humanity. Levinas (rather like Artaud and Derrida[106]) critiques the artwork as a "…fissure in being between being and its essence which does not adhere to it but masks and betrays it"[107], and writes that, in art "…something like a death [doubles] the impulse of life."[108] Art is reality's deathly "other" then, as it objectifies the subjective and creates, via fixed images, a stoppage in time, and *Play* forges bonds between art and death, sexual desire and imprisonment, in the purgatorial "meanwhile" that is its (and *No Exit*'s) very setting.

Civility and Censure: The Look from Without

In *Play*, the spoken word objectifies characters and performers, as W1, W2 and M make themselves "other" by recounting their story as a melodrama, complete with stereotypical accounts of "The Mistress" ("That slut!"[109]), "The Wronged Woman" ("Poor thing"[110]), and "The Adulterous Husband" ("What a male!"[111]). The characters of *Play* resort to melodrama as a means of idealising, and so avoiding, reality, and sterilising interactions with others by making them art and fantasy. W1, W2 and M are accustomed to concealing their subjectivities and "playing roles", in order to conform to the dictates and expectations of others. Middle class pretension is revealed as a type of "play" then, in the world of *Play*, and it could be argued that this love triangle were as contained in life as they are in death, as the stereotyping of the characters, their reliance on romantic images ("…a little jaunt to celebrate, to the Riviera or our darling Grand Canary"[112]), and melodramatic language ("I lay stricken for weeks"[113]), serves to indicate the creation, on their part, of a "shop front", as it were, designed to mask what is, in reality, a rather mundane, messy and sordid state of affairs. The trio gets closest to genuine emotion when they abandon the refinements of a clipped, artificial mode of speech, riddled with cliché, and assume an animality which societal convention would not deem suitable for public display; W2, for instance, recalls

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[105] Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, p. 129.
[106] See Chapter Three, p. 93, notes 93 and 94.
[107] Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow", p. 137.
[108] Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow", p. 140.
[109] Beckett, *Play*, p. 311.
[110] Beckett, *Play*, p. 310.
[111] Beckett, *Play*, p. 309.
[112] Beckett, *Play*, p. 310.
[113] Beckett, *Play*, p. 311.

W1's flying at her, screaming, "I smell you off him . . . he stinks of bitch."[114] James Knowlson explains that: "The violence is expressed in animal or bird images, which, although lacking in freshness, still appear more vividly real than the glossy, novelettish world in which the adulterous affair took place."[115] When the time comes for "Meditation", M perhaps begins to view the situation as a member of his society might *look upon it* when he states: "We were not civilised."[116] The "civility" in *Play* is like a sterile abstraction, always threatening to burst at the seams, and whilst "the look" no longer operates between the onstage characters, as their reduced faces are directed to *the auditorium* throughout, the trio is subject to the censure, the look, of the judgemental world. Each character is at their "most human" however, when the carefully-constructed façade cracks, to reveal the chaos of flesh-and-blood being, in its passionate, selfish, vulgar and untamed glory. In *Play*, as in life, the unsightly aspects of lived being always threaten to announce themselves and defile even the most meticulously-crafted of landscapes, and we are reminded of this by M's repeated "hiccup"; a sign, perhaps, of his guilty conscience, but more likely a symbol of his humanity, and the difficulty he is having keeping up appearances *in the spotlight* or, rather, the look of the outside world.

In *Play* the objectifying, judgemental "look" of society is made metatheatre by the anthropomorphic spotlight, which illuminates "…its victims" from the footlights and acts as hellish "…inquisitor…"[117] as it places each character, in turn, in the dock. The glare of the spot mirrors the searching look of the audience, and Beckett's light enables and encourages the audience to partake in its Sartrean objectification of the other *and* Levinasian assimilation of the other into the same through knowledge. Levinas states that: "To illuminate is to remove from being its resistance, because light opens a horizon and empties space – delivers being out of nothingness."[118] The play of light upon Beckett's dark, boundless stage allows us to view, to *know* the being of the other, to act as voyeur and judge, and to grasp "…being out of nothing…" thereby "…reducing it to nothing, removing it from its alterity."[119] The light is torturer in *Play*, as the characters are forced to explain themselves to it (to negate their unknowable infinities and "shed light on" themselves as objects) as though it is *looking* at them, just as the characters in *No Exit* are forced to explain themselves to each other. In *No*

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[114] Beckett, *Play*, p. 308.
[115] James Knowlson, "*Play*", in *Frescoes of the Skull* , p. 115.
[116] Beckett, *Play*, p. 317.
[117] Beckett, *Play*, p. 318.
[118] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 44.
[119] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 44.

Exit, of course, characters can interact with each other face-to-face whereas, in *Play*, faces hover just above obsolescence, as humans come closer to defeat/objectification than they ever do in Sartre's theatre, a glaring light neutralising that *differance* that would allow them a perpetual escape from the onlooker in whose totality of perception they would be a constant deferral. M, perhaps more than anyone, questions the nature of the light and of perception itself, towards the "end" of *Play*, as he wonders whether the spot is searching for something in his *face*, and tellingly suggests that it (or the audience) functions as a mere eye, which has: "No mind."[120] *No Exit* closes on an image of three characters looking at one another and, as *Play* draws to a "close" (or prepares to begin again), M problematizes the dynamic of the look as it usually works within the theatre, challenging audience perception, and (in)directly addressing the spectator when he asks the light, or whatever force he supposes/knows governs it: "Am I as much as . . . being seen?"[121] *Play*'s trio appeal to a "blind" adjudicator or even the audience for understanding, atonement, and a fair hearing (perhaps even to a Berkeleyan "God" for a being-giving witness) and *Play* is like *No Exit*'s diabolical descendant, as it continues to explore its ancestor's themes of justice, morality, perception and otherness. *No Exit* ends on a note which implies that there will be a continuation of its torturous cycle[122], and one could argue that we actually see this continuation in *Play*, where the vortex pulls the audience in even more sharply as it enacts its death roll: a repetition of the entire performance.

The Artist and the Philosopher

Dorothy McCall suggests that: "What makes *No Exit* a masterpiece is that Sartre is able to translate philosophy into dramatic form."[123] I would suggest that the test of time challenges McCall's early proclamation of *No Exit* as a masterpiece however, as Sartre's theatrical work is rarely performed, and invites precious little literary criticism to it, today;[124] Tim Madigan writes in *Philosophy Now*: "For over twenty years . . . I have been using . . . *No Exit* in my Introduction to Philosophy classes, and yet in all this time I have never seen the

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[120] Beckett, *Play*, p. 317.
[121] Beckett, *Play*, p. 317.
[122] See p. 126, notes 73 and 74.
[123] McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 111.
[124] Sartre's 2005 centenary saw works such as Hoven and Leak's *Sartre Today* emerge (which contains a relatively short section devoted to autobiography, theatre and cinema), and what seems to be the only analysis *specifically* of Sartre's theatre, in English, since McCall's 1971 work: Benedict O'Donohoe's, *Sartre's Theatre: Acts For Life* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005). Gary Cox's *Sartre and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2009) does contain an introductory overview of Sartre's plays, as well as his philosophy and prose writing.

play itself performed."[125] In Sartre's theatre, dramatic form is used to *embody* phenomenological/existentialist theory, and so we might argue that *No Exit* pays a price for an invasion which would render it historically situated, or frozen, *in the past*. Beckett's ubiquitous theatre, rather than assuming a *specific* philosophical stance of its own, always seems to emerge as symptomatic of a writer who engages with a myriad of philosophical theories so that he might borrow, *eclectically*, the shape of their ideas as a means of structuring his own *timeless* work.[126] Beckett's work can of course be *interpreted* as being referential to many philosophers, from schools of thought as diverse as idealism (Berkeley) and existentialism (Sartre et al),[127] but for Beckett the combined form and content of the artistic creation are always first philosophy whereas, in Sartre's theatre, there are moments of discomfort as the philosophy can sometimes be felt to be *driving* the dramatic vehicle. Beckett uses cliché and melodrama in *Play*, *as a means of highlighting* the façade created by three characters whose existences have become, literally and metaphorically, stultified, and "…what is striking about Beckett's theatricalism is that he adopts such distinctive devices only when they accord closely with his themes and when they can be integrated into a highly personal dramatic vision."[128] Technical devices are also used to indicate the superficiality/artificiality of theatrical representation itself in *Play*, and a commentary on perception and on being perceived is facilitated by a spotlight which symbolises not only the diverse languages of theatre machinery, but also the role of the audience as voyeur/subject and the actor as object. Beckett makes *every* part of his theatre *work* towards his ends, and even though we cannot claim to know *exactly* what those ends might be, we can sense the clarity of vision in every living part of the drama, from lighting to movement (or stasis), to delivery of speech, set and costume. Sartre's intent is crystal clear, he means to illustrate his philosophy of *being-for-others*, but his artistry is not equivalent to that of Beckett when it comes to creating a "total theatre." *No Exit* is somewhat dated in its melodramatic *representation of* Sartre's phenomenological philosophy, whereas Beckett's theatre *presents* his vision, *lives* it and *is* it; once again, there are "no symbols where none intended"[129]. Sartre, in expounding his philosophical theses, is an *ethical* playwright; Beckett is an artistic

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[125] Tim Madigan, "No Exit to Portland", in *Philosophy Now*, issue 53 (Nov/Dec 2005). Available from: https://philosophynow.org/issues/53/No_Exit_to_Portland
Madigan finally saw the play performed, in Portland, for the centenary in 2005.
[126] See Chapter Three, p. 80.
[127] Indeed an inventory of these references would make for a voluminous body of work that could not be contained within the limits of this one.
[128] Knowlson, "*Play*", p. 114.
[129] Beckett, *Watt*, p. 223. See also, Chapter Three, p. 110, note 193.

visionary. Levinas, however, might hail Sartre the more honourable of the two playwrights as, for him, there is something shameful in the production and enjoyment of art *without* the intermediary of a philosophical perspective which would ground it in facticity; in refusing to "explain" his work, Levinas would write that: "The poet exiles himself from the city."[130] Madigan quips that: "Since his death in 1980 interest in Sartre's life and work has been on the wane – almost none of my students have heard of him, whereas for previous generations it would have been enough to just draw a pipe, a beret and a glass of wine on the chalkboard to signify this embodiment of existentialism."[131] I would argue that Beckett's self-imposed Levinasian exile is precisely the thing that has endowed his work with a *universal resonance*, and made it the subject of endless scholarly analyses (and new theatrical productions) that show no signs of slowing down some twenty five years after his death.

In Camera

Contemporaneous with *Play*, and enjoying a similarly straightforward, self-explanatory title, Beckett's only cinematic work, *Film*,[132] focuses on a single male protagonist, O, whose sole objective seems to be to defend himself against the look of the other at all costs, in order to avoid experiencing the "…agony of perceivedness."[133] O is the "…object…"[134] of perception in *Film*, and he is pursued throughout by what seems to be an all-seeing eye (E), which is initially represented by the lens of the camera. A spectator, of course, does not *see* the lens of the camera as such, and so *becomes* E as s/he enters directly into the world of the film, at least for the first two parts of the action (1. The Street and 2. The Stairs[135]), as the directorial gaze merges with that of the viewer, in the same way that, "…the *look* . . . appears on the ground of the destruction of the object which manifests it."[136] Interestingly, in 1964, the same year that *Film* was recorded, a BBC adaptation of *No Exit*

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[130] Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow", p. 142.

[131] Madigan, "No Exit to Portland".

[132] In 1963, Barney Rosset commissioned scripts from Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and Harold Pinter, which were to be a part of a film project for Evergreen Theater (see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 505-506). Michael Billington describes Rosset's project as "…a kind of Cinema of the Absurd…", adding that (in spite of the fact that Beckett's *Film* was actually made and shown at the New York Film Festival in 1965), "…the idea [as a whole] never really got off the ground." See: Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 191. See also: Mark Taylor-Batty, *The Theatre of Harold Pinter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 65-66.

[133] Beckett, *Film*, p. 325.

[134] Beckett, *Film*, p. 323.

[135] Beckett, *Film*, p. 323.

[136] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 300. The italics here are Sartre's own.

was aired under the title *In Camera*[137], an alternative translation of the original French title of Sartre's play, *Huis Clos*, which literally means "behind closed doors" in English, but is also equivalent to the legal term "in camera" (or "in chambers"), which is used to describe a judicial proceeding that is heard by a judge in his or her private chambers. The play on words is particularly striking here, as it is surely no accident that the title *In Camera* was chosen over and above the more straightforward (and so more commonly used) *No Exit* for a *television* production of Sartre's play. It could be said that each of the works under examination in this chapter places its characters in an enclosed space, in front of the lens *and* "in camera", whether that be the lens of the "embodied eye" of the spectator/judge, the lens of the abstracted, "blind" eye of the spotlight or, in the case of *Film*, the camera lens, which executes a "cinematic look" that allows viewers to enter the private chambers of its victim.

Beckett uses Berkeley's *esse est percipi* to give shape to *Film*, however he immediately throws into doubt the "…truth value…" of the Bishop's mantra when he states at the beginning of the script that it should be "…regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience."[138] Anthony Uhlmann suggests that Beckett's seeming dismissal of Berkeley's claim "…indicates elements of [his] *modus operandi* when using materials from philosophy (that is, not to take them seriously with respect to the systems from which they are drawn but rather to use them for his own aesthetic purposes)…"[139] reducing them, we might say, to the "sameness" of his artistic vision. I would also argue that we can see more than one philosophical perspective at work in *Film*, particularly as Sartre's "look" seems as relevant a motif here, where vision is everything (and sound is nothing[140]), as it has been throughout this chapter. As O moves through the world of objects and of others, we might reflect, on one level, that his reluctance to be *seen* denotes his reluctance to *be*, and yet Arsić, in his comprehensive work, *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (Via Beckett)*[141], which marries Berkeley's theories with those of Deleuze, Lacan, Foucalt and Derrida, thus contemporising them, provides an original, detailed, and convincing interpretation of *Film*, not so much as an exposition of subjective idealism, but as "…a

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[137] *In Camera*, dir. Philip Saville for the BBC, aired November 4th 1964. Available from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mshvqdva0vY
[138] Beckett, *Film*, p. 323. See also, Chapter Three p. 81.
[139] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, p. 120.
[140] *Film* (which stars Buster Keaton, star of *silent* films and idol of Beckett's), is completely silent, aside from an ironic "sssh!" in part one.
[141] See Chapter Two, p. 71, note 149.

remarkable interpretation of Berkeley's theory of vision."[142] Theories of vision and theories of "otherness" are crucial to this particular study, and whilst a full exposition of the enviably detailed account that Arsić gives of Berkeley's "…*'divine optics'*…"[143] is impossible here, it seems important to mention that such a work exists and has influenced the direction that this analysis of *Film* will now take.

In some respects, *Film* suggests that "Hell is other people" more than it enacts Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, particularly as O appears to be a man who lives in fear of the embodied other that *he encounters in the street*, whose gaze would perceive and objectify him, thus asserting his *being*. Whilst, according to Berkeley, "…unthinking things…" have no "…existence outside of the minds or thinking things which perceive them"[144] the conscious "…soul or spirit is an active being, whose existence consists not in being perceived, but in perceiving ideas and thinking."[145] For Berkeley, it is impossible for a "spirit" (conscious subject) to become an idea (object) in the mind of another thinking entity, and so O would presumably not *need* to avoid the embodied eye/I (and so his own objectification and the "agony of perceivedness"/being) as fervently as he does, if he inhabited the Bishop's idealist sphere. Berkeley writes that "…the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate . . . but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs."[146] The very existence of other thinking entities seems fraught with uncertainty in Berkeleyan idealism, where the "effects" and "signs" that we might attribute to their *being*, in fact point to the will of a divine "creator" whose existence is "…far more evidently perceived than the existence of men; because the effects of Nature are infinitely more numerous and considerable, than those ascribed to human agents."[147] Whilst the problem of our being for other like-beings, spirits, souls or minds, is far from being solved in Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*, an "absolute other" who will perceive us all is offered in place of something more concrete and, in Sartrean terms, "God" is "…the concept of the Other pushed to the limit."[148] The *shape* of *Film* may even persuade us that *it is*, in fact, the gaze of God that O *really* wishes to avoid, and the flatness of its surface, a by-product of its realisation as cinematic work, could be seen

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[142] Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, p. xiii.
[143] Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, p. 49. The italics here are Arsić's own.
[144] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 25.
[145] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 87.
[146] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 89.
[147] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 90.
[148] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 289.

to represent Berkeley's theory that: "Distance is not the experience of the eye."[149] God's eye, for Berkeley, rather than acting as a reflective lens which would transmit images to the mind, *is* his very mind, the mind and the eye operating as one and iconographically annulling the "…difference between foreground and background, figure and its ambient background."[150] As we see O "…hugging the wall…"[151] then, as he ventures through the streets, we could argue that he lays himself out as on a platter to the viewer, who assumes the position of not only lens but also God, the eye of God being similar to "…a camera that is forever rolling and behind which there is no other eye looking through it…"[152] and "His" gaze being "…the infinite mural of the world."[153] The "punchline" of *Film* however, is that it is not the totality of God's gaze that is being so desperately avoided but *the inward-facing gaze* of *self-perception*, and so Berkeley can only take us so far in a discussion of this work, before we need to call upon a philosophy that *is born of a consideration of the reflexive nature of human consciousness* for assistance.

A World of Mirrors

Self-perception is a making of the self "other", and commentaries on otherness and perception can be seen to underpin *Film* from the first scene proper, where all persons in the street are "…shown [to be] in some way perceiving – one another, an object, a shop window, a poster, etc…"[154], to the final revelation that E is in fact O, and that the protagonist has been "…sundered…"[155] into eye/subject/camera and object all along. When we (spectator and E) first identify O (who we may only view from "…behind and at an angle not exceeding 45° ..."[156]) amidst the crowd, he is "…hastening *blindly* along sidewalk, hugging the wall on his left, in opposite direction to all the others."[157] O also attempts to avoid being perceived by wearing a:

> Long dark overcoat (whereas all others in light summer dress)
> with collar up, hat pulled down over eyes, briefcase in left hand,
> right hand shielding exposed side of face.[158]

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[149] Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, p. 92.
[150] Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, p. 93.
[151] Beckett, *Film*, p. 324.
[152] Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, p. 94.
[153] Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, p. 93.
[154] Beckett, *Film*, p. 324.
[155] Beckett, *Film*, p. 323.
[156] Beckett, *Film*, p. 323.
[157] Beckett, *Film*, p. 324. The italics here are mine.
[158] Beckett, *Film*, p. 324.

O approaches others in his world with what Sartre calls a "blindness" or "indifference", and it is interesting to compare his behaviour with Sartre's description of s/he who attempts to shun, or deny, the being of others in a similar manner. Sartre writes that, by closing myself off to those that surround me:

> I practice a sort of factual solipsism; others are those forms which pass by me in the street . . . I scarcely notice them; I act as though I were alone in the world. I brush against 'people' as I brush against a wall; I avoid them as I avoid obstacles.[159]

The above excerpt from *Being and Nothingness* almost reads as though it could be our protagonist's interior monologue; O practices a "sort of factual solipsism" and displays a myopic indifference to others (a means of self-defence perhaps), as he brushes against those around him with no concern for their *being there*: "In his *blind* haste [for instance] O jostles an elderly couple of shabby genteel aspect, standing on sidewalk, peering together at a newspaper."[160] As he traverses the perimeters of the world in his protective layers of clothing, barely noticing the forms that pass him (or at least trying not to) O "…storms along in comic foundered precipitancy."[161] Despite his best efforts to obscure his sight, and himself as perceived site however, we might venture to suggest that it is O's very *being-for-others*, his *being seen* by others (or *percipi*), this mode of his being that he attempts to remain blinkered and unresponsive to, that is the *necessary foundation* for his final act of self-perception.

When O escapes the street, stumbling blindly past the "…frail old woman…"[162] on the stairs (who also experiences the "agony of perceivedness" when we direct our attentions towards her) and into the room, not only do we begin to feel that same "…sense of things closing in…"[163] that we feel throughout *No Exit*, but we also experience a shift, a complication, in our perceptual field, as we begin to see the world through O's "eyes" *as well as* E's. As Gilles Deleuze writes, in the third and final "section" of *Film*, "…the camera perceives the character in the room, and the character perceives the room: all perception becomes double."[164] Although O has managed to negotiate his way through a world of eyes to the indoors, this "double perception" indicates that he is not yet safe. O will not *feel* safe

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[159] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 402.
[160] Beckett, *Film*, p. 325. The italics here are mine.
[161] Beckett, *Film*, p. 324.
[162] Beckett, *Film*, p. 326.
[163] McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 111.
[164] Gilles Deleuze, "The Greatest Irish Film (Beckett's 'Film')", in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 24.

until he has "prepared" the room[165] to rid it of any traces of otherness. In O's world, all "…extraneous perception must be suppressed, animal, human, divine…", however, despite his precautions, "…self-perception maintains in being."[166] As O "…dozes off…"[167] after a burst of activity which has included covering, tearing up, and removing all potential "sites of the sensible" from the room, he does not realise that, "…perception lies in wait behind the rocking chair . . . And it seems to have lost the goodwill it manifested earlier [in the street], when it hurried to close off the [45°] angle it had inadvertently surpassed, protecting the character from potential third parties."[168] When he least expects it then, O is fully exposed, as the camera swings around to view him head-on. Not only do we, as E, see O's face for the first time but, as we change our view and assume O's position, we realise that the perceiving eye, E, has actually been his own all along: we are confronted with an image of E's face, which is actually O's, wearing a "…very different expression…" of "…acute *intentness*."[169] Sartre almost writes the alternative stage directions for this scene, when he explains that blindness towards the other (such as O has displayed) actually "…places me at the extreme degree of objectivity at the very moment when I can believe myself to be an absolute and unique subjectivity since I am seen without being able to experience the fact that I am seen and without being able by means of the same experience to defend myself against my 'being-seen.'"[170] As he sleeps, as he closes his eyes to the outside world *believing himself to be safe*, O exposes himself to the danger posed by a "…'wandering and inapprehensible' look…"[171] that would alienate him behind his back, and when we finally *see* O, through his own inner-eye, as it were, when he *comes to be*, we are offered further proof that a Sartrean reading of this film can be both fruitful and productive: he *is* blind. O has progressed through a world of eyes, his own eye covered by a patch, and *it is this progression through a world of eyes that has given him himself as object, as other*, as it is the look of the other that makes me aware of myself as an object with an outside. The manifestation of the "me-object" which the other *must* bring into being (I am unable to *make an object of myself* without surrendering my subjectivity) and which I must *be* without fully *knowing*, is, as we have seen, the ultimate outcome and effect of my *being looked at* and the very thing that binds me to the other in an original relation of reciprocity. O *sees* himself objectively and, as Sartre puts it: "If I am able

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[165] Beckett, *Film*, p. 327.
[166] Beckett, *Film*, p. 323.
[167] Beckett, *Film*, p. 329.
[168] Deleuze, "The Greatest Irish Film (Beckett's 'Film')", p. 25.
[169] Beckett, *Film*, p. 329. The italics here are Beckett's own.
[170] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 404.
[171] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 404.

to conceive of even one of my properties in the objective mode, then the Other is already given."[172] O has avoided others in order to avoid himself. Others are the mirrors that reflect the self and, as O has been exposed to these mirrors, he must now face the hellish prospect of receiving himself as unknowable and inaccessible object. Beckett, whilst stating Berkeley's *esse est percipi* as a point of departure for *Film*, actually illustrates something closer to a phenomenological perception of the self, a reflexive positing of self (which can be brought about only by the being of others in the world), than a portrait of subjective idealism. For O, *to be* has been *to be perceived*, but *by others*, in the street, on the stairs, and in his room, as it is *others* who have given him the outside that he must now face.

It is O's *fear of being seen* by others and, *as a result of this*, by himself, that motivates his actions then, and all manner of eyes are obstacles to be avoided by him, whether they be human (in the street and on the stairs), animal (goldfish, parrot, dog and cat in the room, and the script mentions a monkey in the street, although this does not appear in the film itself[173]), or symbolic ("…God's image…"[174], the mirror, the window, the photographs and the "eye" in the rocking chair, which are all to be found in the room). By way of an aside, "the look" is given an interesting twist in *Film* when O feels the need to eject the cat and dog from the room,[175] and Derrida provides us with a fascinating insight into what we might call our experience of the look of the "animal other" in his work, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.[176] Derrida speaks, here, of his experiences of being seen naked by his pet cat, and the effect that the look of the animal has upon the subjectivity of the human. There is something unashamed, according to Derrida, about the appearance of the naked animal, which sharply contrasts the shame felt by mankind, the inventor of clothing. Derrida suggests that, "…because the animal is naked without consciousness of being naked, it is as though modesty remains as foreign to it as immodesty."[177] The juxtaposition then, of the reclusive figure of O (who hides himself from the sight of the naked eye behind a lens and beneath layer-upon-layer of superfluous fabric, terrified of the brute fact of his *being-for-others*), with the animals (innocent, shameless and oblivious to their own nudity), is a masterstroke of comic poignancy. Derrida also reflects upon our objectivity, as given to us by the gaze of the

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[172] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 294.
[173] *Film de Samuel Beckett*, dir, Alan Schneider. DVD: TF1, 2011.
[174] Beckett, *Film*, p. 327.
[175] Beckett, *Film*, p. 327.
[176] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).
[177] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 5.

animal, and asks if the eyes of the cat, for instance, could function as our primary mirror.[178] For Sartre it would seem that the answer is a resounding "yes", as he writes: "The look which the *eyes* manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are is a pure reference to myself."[179] Embarrassment is a form of self-consciousness or self-reflection, and there would be no need to expel the animals if, as Merleau-Ponty suggests: "A dog's gaze directed towards me causes me no embarrassment."[180] O does, of course, expel the animals, so we might be forgiven for thinking that he recognises, like Derrida, that: "As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called 'animal' offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name he believes he gives himself."[181] The eyes of the animal, then, present me with an image of myself not only as object but, moreover as *human*.[182]

Reflections

As theatrical works, *No Exit* and *Play* are three-, even four-, dimensional, and the settings of both reflect this, each having its three protagonists/antagonists (and their three urns/sofas) arranged in such a way that the eye is drawn to the depth of the stage; a boundless depth in the case of Beckett's dark performance space, where characters seem to be illuminated and suspended in the void. These plays are also similar in that they are both circular in form and content, with *Play* fully embodying its circularity as it repeats in its entirety after its first "run through". Both plays work as vicious circles, and each "winds itself up" like a loaded spring coil, before slowly winding back down: in *No Exit*, the action builds to a revelation of each character's "sin", which is followed by a period of understanding/acceptance, even a refusal to interfere with "fate", and *Play* begins with a "Chorus", followed by a "Narration" (revelation), and then a reflective "Meditation". After a "winding down" of the intensity however, both plays "wind back up", and prepare the spectator for the likelihood of witnessing the entire spectacle again; *Play* literally repeats, and could indefinitely repeat, and *No Exit* hurtles towards an emotionally-heightened

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[178] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 51.

[179] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 282.

[180] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 420.

[181] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 12.

[182] Another interesting aside, here, might be a consideration of the mode of being of the inhuman/non-animal objects in *Film* (such as the sighted rocking chair which is situated, like the animals, at the horizon of the human), drawing upon the object-oriented ontology that is established in works such as Graham Harman's, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2011).

(melodramatic, but without the Beckettian self-referentiality) ending, which implies that a suspended *Play*-like existence of forced repetition is inevitable for Inez, Garcin and Estelle. In *Play*, humans have been made monuments, and in *No Exit* the characters are frozen, at the play's close, as *statues* that will realise "…the paradox of an instant that endures without a future."[183] There is no exit for any of the damned in these two plays, as time has suspended them *beyond being*, in purgatorial meanwhile that would fix them in stone.

No Exit and *Play* depend upon the look of the embodied *I*s and eyes of a live audience for their being, and each contains elements indicative of its focus on vision and watching (*No Exit*'s subjective "mirrors" and *Play*'s spotlight for instance). The theatre itself relies upon our very mode of *being-for-others*; in the auditorium the *spectator* is encouraged to *view* the performing other as a transcendence-transcended, to make him/her object, to transcend and subsume his/her freedom by witnessing and making subjective judgements about it. As an actor, one enters *voluntarily* into the role of object, of *other-as-transcended*, and experiences "self" as having an outside in a radical, literal enactment of Sartre's indictment that I am aware of the other first as a subject that transcends my freedom. Sartre, as we saw in the previous chapter, also suggests that the *theatre audience* might fleetingly experience the "we", or the camaraderie, of the *Mitsein*, as it is as a co-spectator that we can, for once, "…discover ourselves not in a conflict with the Other but in a community with him."[184] In the theatre we forget our "outside", our *being-for-others*, as our senses are filled with the imagined world of the performance, and we join together as co-participants of a shared experience of *focussed looking and judging*, which distracts us from our primary occupation of looking at and judging each other.[185]

Whilst *Film* is not a theatrical work, "the look" is still a driving force within it, and circularity still pervades its form. Uhlmann points out that *Film* opens *and* closes with a close-up image of a filmed eye (although this is not detailed in the published script), and we might say that this is suggestive of the "reverse-gaze" that would take place on Beckett's *stage* in *Catastrophe*, some twenty years later, demonstrating that "…the authorising power of the audience's spectatorship does not eliminate the disruptive potential of the performer's

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[183] Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow", p. 137.
[184] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 434.
[185] Our *being-for-others*, however, always presupposes any experience of the *Mitsein* for Sartre.

own gaze, or its destabilizing operations within and upon the performance field."[186] There is a gap in the circle of *Film* however, as O and E, whilst perceiving each other at the end, cannot be wholly "merged", just as Sartre's *for-itself* being can never attain full coincidence with itself, and "…the shape of Berkeley's formulation *esse est percipi* involves reflection between two sides of being, but reflection which never allows a simple coming together into a complete subject."[187] Like *No Exit* and *Play*, *Film* is a work which self-consciously arises in a sighted world, a world of mirrors and deferrals, and as O *cannot escape* the look which gives him himself as an unknowable object, perhaps he too will be condemned to forever repeat his futile struggle against the glare of the other's all-seeing eye. *Film*, however, takes certain precautions against the look of the other, which the theatre cannot; there is a "screening off" of consciousness, a barrier, in the form of a reflective lens, inserted between the embodied I/eye of the spectator and the protagonist suspended in time as *in-itself* being. The threat of the reverse gaze is not what it is in the auditorium, as: "The flatness of *Film* denies not only the presentness of a reality beyond or even *in* the surface of the silver screen but also our presentness to it."[188] Instead of depth and reciprocity, *Film* gives us a planar fixity in which we might even discern a reflection of ourselves, a phantom, upon that screen which presents a living-death to its audience via images of beings who *are not there*. Film, unlike theatre, is a "one-sided" medium (there is no possibility of exchange of glance between performer and spectator), and there is certainly no "communion" to be found in Beckett's *Film*, where a man flees from the co-present being of others as a means of refusing his "self." O is alienated from himself as the spectator is alienated and "cut off" from the action by the disjunction of an incomplete circle and a gaze that cannot be reciprocated. That said, and as Uhlmann reminds us: "The film is also a surface."[189] Vision likes surfaces, and in his very attempts at abstraction, at distancing himself from the viewer, O makes himself all the more prominent to perception by becoming an iconographic image. Theatre may be the ultimate laboratory in which to undertake experiments in what it is to endure "the look" – a proliferation of looks and of eyes – but film can cut directly to the heart of the matter, with clinical and definitive precision, as "…we are made conscious of the 'perception images' supplied by the various sets of eyes which watch O (the animals, the image of God, the

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[186] Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, p. 47.
[187] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, p. 122.
[188] Alan Ackerman, "Samuel Beckett's 'Spectres du Noir': The Being of Painting and the Flatness of 'Film'", *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 422. The italics here are Ackerman's own.
[189] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, p. 122.

mirror, the window)…"[190] in turn, and as intended, by virtue of Beckett's directed vision, a vision that cannot be altered once it is committed to the *in-itself* reels of archival cinema tape.

To be is to be perceived by others, and so to discuss "otherness" is, inevitably, to discuss perception. Beckett's contemporaneous film and theatre works explore and manipulate vision, and Beckett makes each medium comment upon its own ability to exploit and alter human perception; *Play*'s spotlight ensures that we see only what the playwright wants us to see for instance, just as the directed camera shots in *Film* reveal to us their subject with *focussed* accuracy. Berkeley, Sartre, Levinas and Derrida each have their own approach to theorising and illustrating concepts of perception and vision, and these, when used in conjunction with one another, can add deeper layers to an analysis of Beckett's work. These theorists assist and enable each other to make new advances, as they take their places in the lineage of a philosophical movement that is yet to end. As spectres, the philosophers and writers of the past speak to those of the present and inform their thoughts, and so death does not entirely rob them of the ability to effect movement and change; they are however unable to alter *our* perceptions of their lives and their work by *their* actions from beyond the grave (Beckett cannot challenge our academic meddling now), and it is our vulnerability as objects at the subjective mercy of those who might (de)contextualize us entirely (rather than the existence of others *per se*) which damns us for all eternity, and ultimately leads Sartre to declare that "Hell is other people."

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[190] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, p. 123.

Chapter Five

Beckett and *The Second Sex*

Cultural Immanence, Becomings, and Her Own (M)other

This work, so far, has explored Beckett's representations of humanity in some of its fundamental modes of being, by examining the writer's depictions of the troubled relationship between body and mind; his accounts of the failure of consciousness to make itself truly present in time; his illustrations of beings who would sacrifice bodily presence in order to achieve spiritual elevation and oneness; and, in the last chapter, his positing of the "look" of the subjective other as a disjunction, and an unwanted disruption in our perpetual flight away from objective being. In order to carry out this investigation, the phenomenological theories of philosophers whose work largely falls under the banner of "French existentialism" have been relied upon throughout and, notably, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* has acted as a central core holding this thesis together. It is no secret that the writings of the male "French existentialists" have long been used (and simplified), in an attempt to decode the enigmatic works of Beckett, a writer whose name, and face, have become synonymous with Esslin's trademark reduction of existential philosophy to a "Theatre of the Absurd."[1] One French philosopher, however, would appear to be conspicuous in *her* absence from Beckett studies and, moreover, her absence from wider discussions of the existential phenomenology which *she played a key role in developing*, and that is Simone de Beauvoir, whose contribution to gender studies is probably best and most succinctly summarised by the newspaper headlines that announced her death in April 1986: "Women, you owe her everything!"[2] Albert Camus' spectre can be sensed throughout Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*, and Sartre's phenomenology is reduced, in "first wave" Beckett scholarship, to "existentialism" (the tangible, once-popular face of French, post-war philosophy), in order to pair it off neatly with Beckett's works, which also seem to speak of a despairing humanity, searching for answers in the face of the void. More recently, Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology has been used to add "Beckett and the Body" to writings on "Beckett and . . . [add almost any word here]", and yet "Beckett and Beauvoir" still remains unchartered territory; in fact, the only thing that currently links the two is their sharing of a biographer in Deidre Bair, their contemporaneous residency in Paris, and an

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[1] See Introduction.
[2] Lisa Appignanesi, "Did Simone de Beauvoir's open 'marriage' make her happy?", in *The Guardian* (10th June 2005). Available from: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jun/10/gender.politicsphilosophyandsociety Appignanesi writes of how this phrase was repeated continuously by mourners at Beauvoir's funeral.

anecdotal reference in Knowlson's biography of Beckett, which details the latter's indignation at Beauvoir's refusal to publish the second half of one of his early short stories "Suite" (which later became *The End*), as she had believed the first half to be the completed work and felt that Beckett had deliberately sought to trick the editors of *Les Temps modernes* into publishing rather more of his work than they had bargained for. This misunderstanding resulted in Beckett writing Beauvoir what Knowlson describes as an "…injured letter…"[3] which Beauvoir duly ignored.

Being, as he is, a writer of the white, male, middle-class canon, perhaps it is inevitable that it is the philosophies of men of the same social strata that have been relied upon most heavily in critiques of Beckett's work and, admittedly, this study has perhaps been guilty up until now of universalising the mind and body, using terms which could be accused of reifying the male subject as totalising representative for all of (hu)mankind. If, however, as Sartre would have it, existentialism is a humanism[4], feminism is very much a phenomenological existentialism as, in the words of Demaris S. Wehr, "…feminism focuses on the *experience* of women."[5] As the aim of this chapter is to continue and enrich the phenomenological exploration of Beckett's modes of being begun in the preceding chapters, it would seem to be a grievous omission if I did not, now, turn my attentions quite specifically to the mode of being *unique* to Woman; particularly as the male existentialists have a perhaps unavoidable tendency to write about the human experience from *their own* (male) perspectives (the only immediate perspectives on existence that they have access to) and, broadly speaking, the history of Beckett criticism is divided into "waves" that are directed by philosophical movements *dominated by men*.[6] This work has charted such a path that now (in the wake of my analyses of ontological modes of being, human reality's embodied, temporal subjectivity, its "holiness", and primary identification of self and generalised other), should come a more detailed examination of gender, as an awareness of ourselves as gendered beings follows, if not merges with, our awareness of self and of other beings instantaneously. This chapter will argue that, if we revisit Beauvoir's writings, namely those feminist writings in her monumental treatise *The Second Sex*, we can gain fresh insight into some of Beckett's female characters (who, like Beauvoir, have a tendency to be

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[3] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 406. For full details of the incident see pp. 358-360.
[4] The title of Sartre's *Existentialism and Humanism* is often interpreted thus.
[5] Demaris S. Wehr, *Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. x. The italics here are mine.
[6] See Introduction, p. 9-10.

overlooked in favour of the men that surround them), and a new "gendered" phenomenological reading of parts of his *oeuvre* can begin to emerge as something more than a mere footnote to "Beckett Studies."

As well as being a figurehead of feminist theory, Beauvoir was a phenomenologist in her own right, and her theories can be applied to Beckett just as readily as those of her male existentialist counterparts. Margaret A. Simons explains, however, that Beauvoir's work has long been "…overshadowed…" by that of her lifelong partner, Sartre, and that: "By the mid-1950s, when Beauvoir was beginning her memoirs, the sexist assumption that that she was merely Sartre's philosophical disciple was deeply embedded in the scholarly literature."[7] Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949, not long before Beckett had his first "successes" as a writer, and this work secured her place in the history of twentieth century feminism[8] (if not European phenomenology more broadly speaking), as what Elizabeth Grosz would define an "egalitarian" feminist; one who assesses "…the reproductive imperative as a major defining feature of femininity…"[9], and the female body as that which limits women's freedom and capacity for equality, whilst providing a unique viewpoint on the world and a means of accessing knowledge about the processes of life.[10] As we have seen, Beckett's bodies are the focus of much recent scholarly research[11] (and I have been keen to foreground the embodied consciousness of the Beckett character throughout this study), and yet the *female* body is still most widely read in contemporary critiques through *male* theorists such as Merleau-Ponty[12], whilst Beauvoir, who offers phenomenological insights born of an *intimate knowledge* of the *female* experience, is ignored. Two works of the 1990s placed the spotlight on Beckett's female characters, Linda Ben-Zvi's *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*[13], and Mary Bryden's *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*[14], although Bryden's is not so much a sustained study of gender as it is a commentary (shaped by Gilles

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[7] Margaret A. Simons, "Introduction", in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 2.

[8] Beauvoir is considered a "second wave" (post-suffrage) feminist.

[9] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 15.

[10] Grosz provides a succinct summary of "categories" of feminism ("Egalitarian Feminism", "Social Constructionism" and "Sexual Difference") in *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 15-19.

[11] Maude's *Beckett, Technology and the Body* and McMullan's *Performing Embodiment* for instance.

[12] Merleau-Ponty's theories are the focus of both of the above works.

[13] Linda Ben-Zvi, ed., *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

[14] Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1993).

Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*[15]) on what she sees as the gradual *dissolution* of binarized gender identities in Beckett's work. Added to this, whilst the collection of interviews and critical writings edited by Ben-Zvi is more diverse in terms of theoretical approaches than Bryden's monograph, *neither* work makes so much as a fleeting reference to Beauvoir, which seems odd considering the aforementioned contemporaneousness of her writings with those of Beckett, and the potential that I will argue these have for placing a *new* focus on *female* lived experience as this appears in the canon.

Beckett's earliest prose depictions of man and woman conform to Cartesian dualist perspectives, which see the male occupying the luxurious sphere of the mind, whilst the female appears monstrously, slavishly, assimilated by biological functions. Bryden devotes a lengthy chapter of her work ("Space Invaders: Women of the Early Fiction"[16]), to Beckett's unique brand of sexism, and Ben-Zvi's review of the Beckett female contains such tellingly-titled articles as Susan Brienza's "Clods, Whores, and Bitches: Mysogyny in Beckett's Early Fiction."[17] It is well documented, by his early prose work and criticism of this, that Beckett held, at least at one time, some decidedly problematic views about women; in his earliest short prose of 1929, *Assumption*[18], to name but one such example, a male artist, creative and cerebral, is hounded to his death by the bodily advances of a woman who he cannot, as prey, resist, and we are left in no doubt when it comes to the author's "…fury against the enormous impertinence of women, their noisy intrusive curios enthusiasm, like the spontaneous expression of admiration bursting from American hearts before Michelangelo's tomb in Santa Croce."[19] Beckett's "first phase" of writing is characterised by its recourse to gendered stereotypes and a carnal eroticism that is embodied by female characters who plague their male counterparts with relentless advances; *Murphy*'s Celia, for instance, is a prostitute, who seems perpetually to scupper Murphy's attempted escape into some solipsistic, psychical realm, bringing him into contact with lived existence and corporeal desire against his "intellectual" wishes, and the narrator of *First Love* tells of his "union" with prostitute Lulu, whose sexuality disturbs his solitary bench dwelling and culminates in her bodily hijacking of

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[15] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[16] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, pp. 15-57.
[17] Susan Brienza "Clods, Whores, and Bitches: Mysogyny in Beckett's Early Fiction", in *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, pp. 91-105.
[18] Samuel Beckett, *Assumption*, in *The Complete Short Prose: 1929-1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), pp. 3-7.
[19] Beckett, *Assumption*, p. 5.

him ("…man is . . . at the mercy of an erection…"[20]) through a pregnancy ("…she kept plaguing me with *our* child, exhibiting her belly and breasts and saying it was due any moment…"[21]) that ultimately leads to his desertion of her.

Whilst Bryden recognises the "…essentialist and often deeply misogynistic construction of Woman…"[22] in Beckett's early prose, she seeks to gradually erode the existential issue of gender in his works, and even suggests that gender studies only serve to reinforce "…the iron mould of patriarchy"[23], promoting "molarity" (rigidly structured and fixed ideals/essences/poles) in our identification of female stereotypes. I would argue that Bryden *avoids* a study of women where she claims to be launching one (perhaps in an attempt to cleanse Beckett of his early misogyny), by suggesting that a Deleuzian *neutralisation* of gender polarities can be read in the evolution of his work, where there is actually a progression and development of his modes of representing character subjectivity *altogether*. Bryden understandably examines Beckett's female characters according to the phases of his work that they occupy (early prose and drama, where female biology *is* depicted much more aggressively and women are portrayed as corporeal succubi, and then later drama and prose where *men and women* appear to have been released from a preoccupation with carnal urges, sometimes by virtue of age and decrepitude, or by a detachment from concrete reality), and devotes a chapter to "The Mother", that Beckettian archetype *par excellence*, but her primary concern is with arguing that Beckett is engaged in a progressive "…experimentation in the area of gender molecularity."[24] Characters, male and female, *all* "evolve" in a certain sense, throughout the Beckett canon, as identities become ethereal and fluid, and boundaries between presence and absence, subjectivity and objectivity, self and other, blur. All characters, however (unless otherwise stated, as in *Quad*), *are* given a sex by Beckett, and gender is essential to understanding *something* about the fragments of consciousness that he presents to us. Even if the male/female dichotomy ceases to align so readily with that of the mind/body as we approach Beckett's later works (which *are* marked by an absence of the erotic and a reduction of desire), simply too much of the female stereotype/archetype remains, right up until the end, for me to admit of a "gender molecularity" in this chapter.

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[20] Samuel Beckett, *First Love and Other Novellas* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 70.
[21] Beckett, *First Love*, p. 84. The italics here are Beckett's own.
[22] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 7.
[23] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 119.
[24] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 118.

According to Bryden, the "otherness" of Beckett's female voices is neutralised once these begin to inhabit the stage, and: "Moreover, once the stigma attaching to womanhood is dissolved, it remains absent from not only the remaining stage drama, but also from most of the later prose fiction."[25] Whilst I will challenge Bryden's refusal to acknowledge the great gulf that divides the sexes (even in Beckett's latest works) throughout this chapter, I would agree with her assertion that: "In the dramatic medium as in no other, Beckett's people are empowered to speak as they may and can, their voices unfiltered, unassessed by a presiding narratorial compère."[26] When it comes to women in Beckett's *oeuvre*, we are not spoilt for choice, as the female is outnumbered and overshadowed by the male from beginning to end, but those that inhabit the stage have a certain substantiality that lends itself to feminist phenomenological appraisal. The stage, as we know, gives us bodies, and it is upon the stage that bodies are most evidently and unavoidable gendered; as dissolute as Beckett's stage women often are,[27] they are, in many ways, more tangible than any of his prose creations, as *they speak for themselves* from their own bodily situations, rather than "being spoken" by Beckett's (presumably male) narrative voice. There is, of course, a sense in which these women still "speak Beckett" rather than any authentic "self", his being their creator, but the usurpation of the creation by the *female* actor ensures that the stage woman experiences more autonomy than her literary sisters. In this chapter, then, my interests lie with the females who *can* speak for themselves, even if they chose to fragment these "selves" in order that they might become "others" and, as such, *women*.

Just last February, Susannah Clapp began a review of Natalie Abrahami's Young Vic production of a much-celebrated work of the Beckett canon as follows:

> You would have to go a long way to find a more intensely feminist play than **Happy Days**, which was first staged in 1961. It makes a woman the centre of a play that talks of the human condition. You can, it suggests, have a handbag and still speak for everyone.[28]

Whilst Clapp's rather bold proclamation is one that is shared, in a roundabout way, by a number of "Beckett scholars", who would agree that the great man himself condescended to allow a woman a potentially-philosophical voice once or twice, it seems, to me, rather more than an overexertion to begin speaking in terms that would hail *Happy Days* as a "feminist

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[25] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 58.
[26] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 70.
[27] *Footfalls'* spectral May for instance.
[28] Susannah Clapp, "Bring on the Odd Couples", in *The Observer* (9th February 2014), p. 31.

play", thereby asking the spectator/reader to conceive of Beckett as a feminist writer. It is true, of course, that *Happy Days* strikes one as being of particular interest and significance when it comes to a study of "Beckett's women", as it is a play that presents us with a focal point in the shape of Winnie, a woman of about fifty, who stands out in a body of work where the female protagonist has been, up until her birth, something of a rarity. It could also be proposed that, whilst in his early work Beckett reserves all things rational for his male characters, in creating the contemplative Winnie he begins to redress the balance. This chapter, however, will argue that, whilst Winnie may be, in some respects, privileged in her position in the *oeuvre* of a playwright/author who, as we have seen, began his literary endeavours with a decidedly troublesome approach to feminine portraiture, she does not speak as some unfettered representative of a universal humanity; she is a *woman* of her own situation and character, and these are informed and moulded by her specificity and adherence to the cultural script. Added to this, if we consider Winnie as a product of her time, a *married* woman who is mired in immanence and objectivity (those limitations placed on the female body from the outside), who narrates from an historical and cultural context that are uniquely her own, we can regard her plight anew, and employ those landmark feminist theories that betoken her entrance to the world stage alongside contemporary feminist phenomenology.

After a detailed account of Winnie's gendered, bodily situation, her "happy" conformity to the codes and conduct of polite society which encourage her to make of herself an object, or "other", this chapter will begin to focus on those women who inhabit roles that operate outside of the prescribed jurisdictions of "normality". In *Come and Go* we meet three women who, it will be argued, have formed a subculture rooted in a female solidarity established in their eternal "girlhoods", as the demands of patriarchal culture have left them in a position whereby they must either acknowledge themselves as having failed to fulfil their womanly duties (to *become* women, wives and mothers), or assume archetypal roles that will allow society to turn its back on them, to vilify them, whilst fully appropriating them and reabsorbing them into its culture once more. Beckett's *late* stage work *Rockaby*, rather than "molecularising" gender, continues to posit the female as "other", as outsider, as that which must make of itself its own object, its own company even, as the protagonist (specifically named W, signifying her role as generic Woman), bemoans her isolation from civilisation, and becomes another mythical archetype, linked, like her predecessors, to death and suffering as well as demonstrating that same childlike detachment from reality which typifies Winnie and the *Come and Go* trio. *Rockaby*, in one sense, closes the circle of female suffering in

Beckett's theatrical canon, as Woman, unused by man, ultimately returns to source, like an elderly descendant of *Footfalls'* May, and to the mother that is, for Beckett, death.

Cultural Bodies of Immanence

As *Happy Days* opens, the spectator is greeted with a stage picture that is, arguably, as alien and uncompromising now as it no doubt was at its unveiling over fifty years ago. Winnie is literally, and figuratively, centre stage for the duration of this two act performance and, when she is first seen, she is embedded "…*up to above her waist in exact centre…*"[29] of a mound of scorched grass, with a: "*Maximum of simplicity and symmetry*."[30] There is much in this first tableau alone that echoes Beauvoir's description of "Woman" as "…bound to her body…"[31], as Winnie's body is encased in an earthly womb-tomb, tying Woman to the very land which, amongst early tillers of the soil, was considered her mystical domain; an "…assimilation of woman to the earth…"[32] symbolically denoting birth, regeneration, and the propagation of life. If Woman, as egalitarian feminism suggests, is tied down or burdened by the reproductive cycle, we might render Winnie's entrapment *from the waist down*, as particularly significant, her reproductive organs acting, metaphorically, as the lead weights that fetter her to the "earth mother" and exclude her from society. Whilst we do not know whether Winnie bore any children prior to her incarceration (there is nothing in the text to confirm *or* disprove that she is a mother), the restrictions placed upon her as a stereotypical representation of Woman, marginalised from political and intellectual civilisation, certainly seem to reinforce what Grosz describes as "…a notion that women's oppression is, at least to some extent, biologically justified insofar as women *are* less socially, politically, and intellectually able to participate as men's social equals when they bear or raise children."[33] It could also be suggested that the enclosure of Winnie's lower body offers her a form of protection, or is a defensive structure as, in her passivity, which is juxtaposed to the male's self-fulfilling activity, the female is, according to Beauvoir's data of biology, "…the victim of the species."[34] Iris Marion Young, who writes engagingly on female body experience, often conjuring Beauvoir as she does so, reminds us that Woman lives not only the ongoing threat of being objectified by the male gaze, but also, phenomenologically-speaking, the threat of her body space being invaded, with rape being the most extreme example of such

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[29] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 138.
[30] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 138.
[31] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 97.
[32] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 99.
[33] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 16. The italics here are Grosz's own.
[34] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 52.

"…spatial and bodily invasion…"[35], and more subtle, daily invasions shaping her very body-consciousness. Young proposes that, as a defensive measure against these invasions, women "…tend to project an existential barrier closed around them…"[36] as a means of distancing the potentially-invasive other, adding that: "The woman lives her space as confined and closed around her, at least in part as projecting some small area in which she can exist as a free subject."[37] Winnie, then, strikes one as something of a visual representation of Young's confined woman, as well as Beauvoir's conception of the female body as "…a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence…"[38], limited to the processes of life rather than knowing the freedom of spirit, forbidden the animating transcendence afforded to the male, and offering forth, for his taking, his possession and consumption, the "…the inert and passive qualities of an object."[39] Where man's existence has been a projection, a striving towards creation and domination of the world and nature, woman's has historically been associated with stasis, with reliance upon, or enslavement to, nature, and with maintenance of a closed space, a retreat, that man may return to, in between bouts of exploration and endeavour. Winnie exists, on the one hand, as a subjective being, as a *human* being, but her mode of being Woman means that her existence, her body, is fated to remain closed in on itself, to become more object than subject, more immanence than transcendence.

The enclosure in immanence that marks the life of Beauvoir's Woman and reduces her possibilities in the wider world, leads to her creation of a private world or personal sphere of material items over which she can assert her sovereignty, and into which she can project her personality. Whilst man, for Beauvoir, is only superficially interested in his immediate surroundings (having outside projects through which he can change the face of the world), Woman, shackled to her conjugal duties in the home, must make of her domestic prison a realm in order to survive it. Winnie's day begins in the same manner that all of her days begin, with the piercing ringing of a bell that dictates when she may sleep and when she must wake, followed by immediate recourse to her infamous "…*capacious black bag*…"[40] containing the objects which both reveal and sculpt her identity, and populate her realm. From her bag, Winnie produces toothpaste and brush, mirror, spectacles, medicine, lipstick,

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[35] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 45.
[36] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 45.
[37] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 45.
[38] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 189.
[39] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 189.
[40] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 138.

"…*a small ornate brimless hat with crumpled feather*…"[41], a magnifying glass, a comb, a music box, a nailfile, and the auspicious revolver "Brownie", all of which could be seen as extensions of, or at least objects with which one can enhance/modify, the human body. The contents of Winnie's bag allow her, despite her insurmountable incapacity, to find accomplishment, or happiness, in the material extension of her body, and her belongings are shut up, as are her prospects, "…within the circle of herself."[42] As Beauvoir's Woman, like Winnie, cannot identify herself with what she *does*, in any tangible sense, she must seek self-realisation in what she *has*, and it is in this sense that such props can be elevated to a seemingly irrational level of importance, in life as on the stage. Winnie, like Beauvoir, is not as far removed from the present day as she may at first glance seem. It may be worth considering, for instance, that the age of the "material girl" did not reach its climax with Winnie in 1961; she is a mere novice in comparison to Madonna's 1980s version or today's WAGs.

During Act One, the stage business is very much focused on Winnie's mastery and manipulation of her objects, and each of these objects helps to foreground Winnie's bodily existence; as Grosz writes (with reference to Merleau-Ponty's fleshly phenomenology), the body "…is defined by its relations with objects and in turn defines these objects as such – it is 'sense-bestowing' and 'form-giving,' providing a structure, organization, and ground within which objects are to be situated and against which the body-subject is positioned."[43] The actor's body, amidst its set and properties, succinctly demonstrates corporeality as focal point, perspective, and conscious being's sole means of engagement with a world. The body, for Merleau-Ponty, is "…a central or organizing perspective…"[44], just as it is for Sartre an "…instrumental center [*sic*] of instrumental complexes…"[45], however Grosz raises a point which goes some way towards justifying the approach that this work takes (as it moves beyond the "go-to" canon of male phenomenologists for the purposes of explicating this particular Beckett work), when she suggests that, "…while Merleau-Ponty provides a number of crucial insights about the forms and structure of human embodiment, he nevertheless excludes or cannot explain those specific corporeal experiences undergone by women."[46] In order for us to empathise with Winnie, we must understand her as more than the universal

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[41] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 142.
[42] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 467.
[43] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 87.
[44] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 90.
[45] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 350. See also: Chapter Two, p. 60, note 79.
[46] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 108.

body of physiology; she is a female, *situated* body, a body inscribed and manifested by her *entire* existential experience. As Beauvoir writes, *engendering* the theories of Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, whilst maintaining a dialogue with them, a woman's body is, naturally, one of the essential elements of her being-in-the-world, and yet "…that body is not enough to define her as woman; there is no true living reality except as manifested by the conscious individual through activities and in the bosom of a society."[47] We must look then, to Winnie's activities, her objects, her micro-society, her *entire bodily situation*, if we are to understand the wider implications of her immanent confinement; as Grosz writes: "The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural; *the* cultural product."[48] Winnie's interactions with objects and with her one conscious, or semi-conscious, companion, Willie, do much to convince us that her body is the consummate cultural product of her time.

A Doll of Flesh

Like any good housewife of her era, Winnie polishes, wipes, and brushes (in her case lenses, eyes, and teeth), repetitively and ritualistically, perhaps by way of sharpening her senses and thereby her perception, but also as a means of controlling and arresting the flow of time within her sphere, where world time is meaningless and runs contrary to the relative temporal vacuum of her microcosm. Beauvoir writes that, in her cleaning and her preserving: "The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present."[49] As the cornerstone of her "housework", Winnie's personal grooming rituals seek to maintain rather than to create anew, and she inspects her newly brushed teeth, pulling back her lips and "…*testing upper front teeth with thumb*…"[50] as though they are impersonal objects, only to assert that, orally, the prognosis is "…no better, no worse…"[51] than it has been previously. Winnie's body is part and parcel of her home and possessions, and in the absence of conventional bricks and mortar, she cleans, renovates and organises it according to codes of custom. Winnie fights against physical deterioration by denaturing herself, as well as her belongings, with what little means she has at her disposal, and each prop is a symbol of her entire, gendered, cultural circumstance; it is surely something more than coincidence that this female protagonist has in an incredibly limited arsenal a lipstick and mirror. Beauvoir

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[47] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 69.
[48] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 23. The italics here as Grosz's own.
[49] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 470.
[50] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 139.
[51] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 139.

famously states that: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[52] Gender then (or the mode in which we display characteristics pertaining to the female or male according to societal and cultural conventions), is socially constructed, a learnt behaviour, unlike *sex*, which is biologically predestined. For Winnie, femininity is something that is worked at with tools that sculpt and order the flesh, and she uses her stereotypically-feminine props as a means of perpetually reestablishing her womanhood; her gendered identity. As Young would have it, Woman, used to being viewed as object and possession, becomes distanced from her body and renders it a thing to be crafted by her own objectifying look as: "She gazes at it in the mirror, worries about how it looks to others, prunes it, shapes it, molds and decorates it."[53] An extreme example of today's Woman augmenting nature and objectifying/molding her own body and thereby gender would be, of course, cosmetic surgery, the insertion of silicon into the breasts, or the freezing of the face with botox. Winnie captures "…fleeting joys…"[54] as she petrifies her physiology and becomes a woman in a less invasive and more familiar way; already adorned with bodice and pearls, she takes pride in painting her lips and donning her hat, even in her virtual isolation. Beauvoir observes that women's fashions "…are often devoted to cutting off the feminine body from activity…"[55] by prescribing restrictive corsets and impractical embellishments which contain the wearer and make of nature an artifice. Society requires Woman, in her inconvenient attire, to *become the fixed ideal* of her gender, a "…doll of flesh"[56], unless she wishes to stand out as nonconformist or anarchist, and there is something of the animated doll about Winnie, as she transfigures nature, whilst quite literally cut off from activity, to make of herself man's idol.

The Winnie of Act Two is "…*embedded up to neck, hat on head…*"[57], and what little bodily autonomy she had in Act One, where she enjoyed a precarious freedom through manipulation of/identification with objects, has been all but eradicated. A now completely immobilised Winnie must labour on to the end of the play with only her face and voice as vehicles of expression and, as she does so, she utters a telling fragment of a story concerning a little girl, Mildred, aged "…four or five…" who has "…been given a big waxen dolly."[58] Beauvoir writes at length about the symbolic significance of the doll as an object in which the

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[52] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 295.
[53] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 44.
[54] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 141.
[55] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 190.
[56] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 546.
[57] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 160.
[58] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 163.

little girl can incarnate herself. The boy, Beauvoir suggests, finds an alter ego, an "other" in the penis, enabling him to "…boldly assume an attitude of subjectivity…"[59] and take pride in this symbol of transcendence and power. The girl on the other hand, lacking this "…natural plaything…" gives her whole person to a foreign object, sets her whole "self" up as "other", and identifies with the doll, "…an inert given object."[60] Winnie creates and projects multiple objectified images of her femininity, one might say, as she conjures and presents images of Mildred and her waxwork double from within her own psyche like Russian doll miniatures of herself. Winnie's premature burial could even be viewed, again, as a protective measure, preventing her, as it does, from experiencing the potential invasion of her lower body that Mildred is subjected to when, as Winnie tells it, a mouse runs up her bare thigh, causing her to scream, and drop her passive playmate.[61] If Mildred could be taken for Winnie's infant self (either literally or, perhaps, in the shape of her own child), an innocent subjected to the invasion of her body by the aggressive forces of nature (menstruation and sexual initiation amongst these), then her doll, with her "Pearly necklace" and her "China blue eyes that open and shut"[62] (just as Winnie's seemingly automated eyes open and shut, and her smile, devoid of genuine, lived emotion, snaps on and off in mechanical accordance with the stage directions), could be said to be Winnie's ideal, incorruptible image.

Winnie is the epitome of the "literary doll"[63], as *she objectifies herself* in order to conform to abstract ideals. Ultimately, however, Winnie's objectification, her "otherness" is brought about as a direct result of her constant subjection to the look of the other (the objectifying effect of which was detailed at length in the previous chapter) or, more specifically, the *male*, patriarchal gaze of society, the occasional gaze of her disinterested husband and the ubiquitous gaze of god (to whom Winnie frequently pays tribute in Act One), the upholder of male supremacy. Winnie is also a mouthpiece for Beckett, a *male* writer, and she moves and speaks as a marionette who animates *his* preconceived notions of femininity. Bryden claims that, in Beckett's theatre: "Where women are referred to in terms of objects, it is generally from their own mouths."[64] Whilst the above description of Winnie

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[59] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 306.

[60] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 306.

[61] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 165.

[62] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 163.

[63] Some of the key ideas from this section of this chapter were presented at a conference which explored concepts of the "literary doll": Susan Mower, "*Happy Days*: Sinking Into Immanence", conference paper, *Literary Dolls: The Female Textual Body from the 19th Century to Now* (Durham: University of Durham, 8th March 2014).

[64] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 107.

as self-made doll would seem to be in accordance with Bryden's claim, I would argue that the objectification of women in Beckett's drama is rather more complex than she will admit. If Woman does objectify herself it is by way of adherence to manmade values and societal norms that have already objectified her, and which would have her do the same, lest she find herself unhappily cast out of the culture. Winnie may be given use of a mind that would drift, gossamer-like, "…into the blue…"[65] but Beckett is unambiguous regarding her vital, womanly, statistics in his description of her as "…*well-preserved, blonde for preference, plump…*" with "…*arms and shoulders bare…*" and wearing a "…*low bodice…*" revealing a "…*big bosom…*"[66] which is referred to throughout. In a revelatory section of her barely-broken sixty-minute monologue, Winnie recalls being approached, in her shallow grave, by a Mr. Shower or Cooker, she cannot remember which, who declared upon witnessing Winnie's waist-high interment: "Can't have been a bad bosom . . . in its day."[67] Winnie, like the women of Beckett's early prose, is still predominantly a biological, sexual creature, and she is assessed by Shower/Cooker accordingly. Young writes that: "In our culture that focuses to the extreme on breasts, a woman, especially in those adolescent years but also through the rest of her life, often feels herself judged and evaluated according to the size and contours of her breasts, and indeed she often is."[68] Winnie, in her immanent fixity, cannot choose but to be inspected in this impersonal fashion by Shower/Cooker, a representative of patriarchal society, and when her breasts are buried, their "disappearance" has a profound effect on her sense of self, their loss being noted, where so many, more obvious, losses are not.[69] For Shower/Cooker Winnie is little more than the possibility of sexual relations; he asks why Willie has not dug her out (a question we might all ask) as, to his mind, she is no use to her husband with her lower body buried.[70] Woman, in Winnie's day, is "best used" as man's counterpart, man's servant, and perhaps Willie has not dug her out of her hole because it is he who has placed her there. Winnie and Willie are not equals, and Winnie is not in a position of power simply because it is she who speaks to us; as Shower/Cooker neatly summarises it, the couple are not two sexed beings of the same species, man and woman, they are one subjective, autonomous being, and one object, designed for that subject's use: they are, "…man and – wife."[71] If Winnie sees herself as object then, it is because she does not have

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[65] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 152.
[66] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 138.
[67] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 165.
[68] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 76.
[69] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 161.
[70] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 157.
[71] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 157.

access to the same mode of being as her husband, a man, a *human*; she has had to resort to renouncing her own transcendence and assuming an inert passivity, so that she may, through him, gain a place in society and ensure her own happiness.

The Happiness Script

Beauvoir speaks of the married couple, in societal terms, as the "…original *Mitsein*, a basic combination…" adding that, "…as such it always appears as a permanent or temporary element in a large collectivity."[72] Marriage then, is an institution approved and endorsed by society, and one which makes certain promises to both participants in the union. We may marry, for instance, in the belief that doing so will make us happy, and Sara Ahmed, in her recent work, *The Promise of Happiness*[73] writes about how happiness can be used to justify forms of social oppression, marriage sometimes being one of these. Ahmed, who takes impetus from *The Second Sex*, writes of how Beauvoir "…shows so well how happiness translates its wish into a politics, a wishful politics, a politics that demands others live according to a wish."[74] Winnie lives according to the wish that Willie will look at or respond to her once in a while and, in doing so, justify her existence; so much as one word from Willie, can lead Winnie to declare: "Oh you are going to talk to me today, this is going to be a happy day!"[75] Small acknowledgements from a seldom seen husband delight Winnie and allow her to assume the role of happy, devoted wife more completely. Winnie remains cheerful, according to Shari Benstock, so that she might play out her role in the "…cultural script…" and "…she survives as most wives and housewives survive – by not questioning the givens of their existence but focusing on daily necessities, coping hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute."[76] Ahmed makes reference not only to Beauvoir's philosophy but also to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*[77], which was written in 1963, just two years after Winnie, and could almost be said to narrate Winnie's plight, when she writes that:

> The happy housewife is a fantasy figure that erases the signs of labor under the sign of happiness. The claim that women are happy and that this happiness is behind the work they do functions to justify gendered forms of labor, not as a product of

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[72] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 67-68.
[73] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[74] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 2.
[75] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 146.
[76] Shari Benstock, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Dramas", in *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, p. 174.
[77] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010).

nature, law, or duty, but as an expression of a collective wish and desire.[78]

The ideal of the "happy housewife" could even be said to be making a return according to Ahmed, as new generation of bloggers instruct each other on how to assume this identity via the internet. Ahmed writes: "Such blogs typically include recipes, tips on doing housework, thoughts on mothering, as well as belief statements that register the happy housewife as an important social role and duty that must be defended, as if the speech act ('I am a happy housewife') is itself a rebellion against a social orthodoxy."[79] In Winnie, of course, we see no such signs of rebellion, as hers is a *submission* to the cultural, gendered script of fifty years ago that dangles happiness like a carrot in front of her nose, the pursuit of which will lead her to *conformity*. Ahmed writes that "…gendered scripts…" can be thought of as "…'happiness scripts' providing a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy…"[80] and that, in such scripts, happiness comes to those who are deemed to be "good" in the eyes of society.

Winnie is rooted to the spot not just literally but figuratively, as she is ensnared in the cultural, gendered script that has promised her happiness in the shape of marriage, that primary happiness indicator[81], as well as being driven into the ground by the torrent of words and directions foisted upon her in the shape of a theatrical script, written by a man who works from the gender narratives handed down to him from less molecular times. Beauvoir writes of how marriage so often "…fails to assure woman the promised happiness…" as it "…mutilates her…" and "dooms her to repetition and routine."[82] Woman is man's commodity, his anchorage to immanence; through her he is assured the maintenance and progression of his tribe, the guardianship of the objects and status symbols that he has amassed and, in return, he assimilates her otherness into the order of his oneness, so that she may, vicariously, enjoy a position in the bosom of civility. Woman pays a high price for her most respected role in society, namely that of wife, as Beauvoir reminds us: "It has been said that Marriage diminishes man, which is often true; but it almost always annihilates woman."[83] Beauvoir herself, whilst not married to Sartre, suffered, professionally, one might say, from her lifelong partnership with him, as her work, her achievements, her contributions

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[78] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 50.
[79] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, pp. 52-53.
[80] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 59.
[81] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 6.
[82] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 496
[83] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 496

to the field of existential phenomenology are so often assimilated into, overshadowed and "…subsumed…"[84] by, those of her "more famous", but above all *male*, partner.

Shari Benstock suggests that Winnie might rewrite the patriarchal script that would see her subsumed by her husband, if we consider the possibility that: "Willie exists because Winnie claims he exists; he exists because she directs her words to him."[85] We *do* see and hear Willie occasionally ourselves, however, he is not solely narration, and I would argue that he fulfills the role of the absent male who rarely appears in the domestic sphere but is nonetheless its constant centre of reference. The presence of the male in Winnie's realm is an absent presence, *more* narrated than actualised, but all-consuming; Winnie refers to Willie constantly, and describes his movements and actions, and he only appears, "pops up", now and then, to assert his freedom and authority. Benstock raises an important point when she writes that: "In a reversal of traditional roles, it is woman here who asks the overwhelming philosophic questions, but she poses them in traditionally 'female' terms, in the language of the domestic."[86] Winnie's potential transcendence is always mired in the immanent, in the Shower and the Cooker, the child and the marriage, whereas Willie brings to the stage evidence of his transcendent contact with the *outside* world and world affairs in the shape of a newspaper, headlines from which he reads to her.[87] Willie is the authority in the marriage, and he educates his grounded, goodly wife, just as Beauvoir's provider feels superior upon returning home to his woman after a day of work with his equals and betters: "He relates the events of the day, explains how right he has been in arguments with opponents, happy to find in his wife a double who bolsters his self-confidence; he comments on the papers and political news, he willingly reads aloud to her so that even her contact with culture may not be independent."[88] Benstock further argues that gender roles are transformed in this play, as what would, traditionally, be "…Winnie's position of waiting, attending, crawling at the margins of the central, imbedded truth is transferred to Willie."[89] Willie is not "hanging" on Winnie's words however, *he has become immune to them*; Winnie repeatedly pleads for his attention, which he very rarely gives to her, and makes excuses for her "…poor dear Willie…"[90], authorising his neglect of her. Willie listens and speaks to Winnie as and when

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[84] Simons, "Introduction", p. 2.
[85] Benstock, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Dramas", p. 179.
[86] Benstock, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Dramas", p. 176.
[87] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 142.
[88] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 483.
[89] Benstock, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Dramas", p. 180.
[90] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 139.

he condescends to, and Winnie seeks his constant reassurance and approval, gratefully receiving what titbits he throws at her, and using them as fuel to prolong her journey alongside him. Even if there is any irony behind Winnie's asking Willie to command her to put down her parasol, as she cannot seem to relieve herself of the object autonomously but would honour and obey any order coming from him just as she has "…always done…"[91], the couple are still conforming to gender stereotypes that see Woman as man's puppet and servant. Presenting stereotypes ironically does not necessarily invert them; it may even enforce them. Without her domestic objects, her culturally-approved feminine fantasies, and without her husband weighing her down, Winnie would perhaps feel less "…held…"[92] in place by the earth, by the immanent body, and be finally "…sucked up…"[93] into the ether, into atoms, as her radiophonic sister Maddy would have it[94], and into liberty. Winnie *hangs on* to her marriage and to the script, protesting her happiness, whether through habit, a sense of duty or true desire, and she asks her husband if he does the same, as she senses that gravity is losing its once unquestionable power on them both: "Don't you have to cling on sometimes, Willie?"[95] Whether Winnie's marriage has failed to deliver or not, each day will be a "happy day" for her, lest she should find herself devoid of place and purpose; the tragedy is that Winnie's place and purpose is, ultimately, her annihilation.

For Winnie, spokesperson for her era, to become a woman is to forgo autonomous transcendence and to become fully absorbed into the cultural script, to be assimilated into the earth, into immanence, into her husband, and to be annihilated. Young writes that, whilst we are subjective beings by our very nature, there is a "…tension between transcendence and immanence…" which informs femininity: "While feminine bodily existence is a transcendence and openness to the world, it is an *ambiguous transcendence*, a transcendence that is at the same time laden with immanence."[96] As we have seen, Winnie's transcendence is "…*overlaid* with immanence…"[97] as her conjugal responsibilities consume her freedom. Ultimately, Winnie is smothered, as immanence envelops and absorbs her entirely. Perhaps Willie seeks to end his anchorage to this immanence, to the situation created by his wife (as

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[91] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 153.
[92] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 151.
[93] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 152.
[94] See Chapter Three, p. 89.
[95] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 152.
[96] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 36. The italics here are Young's own.
[97] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 36. The italics here are Young's own.

"…vagabond…" husbands and children according to Beauvoir[98] do), when, at the close of the play he "…*emerges completely…*"[99] and we realise that he, unlike Winnie, has been free to leave his hole all along. Up until this point, we have only seen parts of Willie's body, the back of his head as he read the newspaper, or a functional arm, but as the "action" draws to a close he reveals himself, albeit with some difficulty; he, too, has been firmly embedded in his designated, gendered cultural role. Even at this, the bitter end, Winnie is unsure whether Willie is reaching towards her out of affection, or for some other, more pressing reason. Whilst she hopes that her husband is finally going to join her in the nest that she has made, Winnie must ask: "Is it me you're after, Willie . . . or is it something else?"[100] When Willie climbs out from behind his mound it becomes clear that he, unlike Winnie, is free to end his suffering on his own terms; whether he is reaching towards his wife to kiss her, or reaching towards a more definitive ending to joint sufferings, namely the auspicious revolver which has remained in Winnie's sight throughout Act Two, is unclear, but we are left with no doubt that a woman has been made one with the earth, rendered entirely immobile and powerless, her uncertain fate to be decided, after the final curtain, by her male keeper.

An Unhappy Marginality

Woman, according to Beauvoir, always already finds herself on the outside of society, as she is denied "…reciprocal relations…"[101] with the men who hold political power and constitute civilisation, and even denied access to the *human*. As Beauvoir writes it, "…man is defined as a human being and woman as a female…" and when a woman "…behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male."[102] Where Woman is said to hold power (in the mythical "…Golden Age of Woman…"[103], as Beauvoir describes it, for instance), it is not a human power that she wields; even in primitive matriarchies, Woman was revered as "…Earth Mother, Goddess – she was no fellow creature in man's eyes; it was *beyond* the human realm that her power was affirmed, and she was therefore *outside* of that realm."[104] Winnie, as we have seen, makes herself "other", so that she might find happiness as such *within* the text handed down to her by a patriarchal society via Beckett. As she has "secured" for herself a husband, Winnie enjoys a precarious position in society; she is acknowledged, as

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[98] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 475.
[99] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 166.
[100] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 167.
[101] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 102.
[102] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 83.
[103] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 102.
[104] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 102. The italics here are Beauvoir's own.

a married woman, by her culture, yet excluded from it, and she has only that level of freedom that can be exercised in an enclosed space. Whether Winnie's repeatedly proclaimed happiness is genuine, or a part of her gendered make up, we can only speculate, although the smile that she can switch on and off in the blink of an eye ("… [*head up, smile*] . . . [*smile off, head down…*] …[105]), would seem to betray a concealed awareness, on her part, of the misery underlying the cheerful façade of the domestic goddess, or what Friedan would call: "The Problem that Has No Name."[106] If it is Winnie's duty to be happy then, because of her "privileged" yet alienated position as respectable wife and thereby pseudo-citizen, if Winnie's lot is about as fully-integrated into society and about as "human" as any that might be allocated to a woman, we might be forgiven for wondering what, if any, portion of happiness is to be set aside for those women who have been less fortunate than she, in securing their places in the confines of custom.

In 1965, just a few years after *Happy Days*, Beckett wrote his "dramaticule" *Come and Go*, a brief yet abundantly rich theatrical piece featuring three female characters, Flo, Vi, and Ru "(Ages undeterminable)"[107], who are far removed from the domestic trappings that are part and parcel of Winnie's genetic makeup, and yet experience no greater autonomy for their exclusion from the conjugal sphere. *Come and Go* opens, like *Happy Days*, to reveal an unfamiliar world, one which we might suspect lies somewhere beyond the very margins of society, however, the weird sisters that we find at its nucleus are denied recourse to the familial, and to the everyday objects that act as the fundamental building blocks of Winnie's character, as they sit centre stage, "…*side by side…*" as monuments to lives that never were, all three: "*Very erect, facing front, hands clasped in laps.*"[108] The opening tableau is silent until Vi utters the leading question: "When did we three last meet?"[109] Vi's question is abruptly dismissed by Ru ("Let us not speak"[110]), but carries telling echoes of *Macbeth*'s three witches, which transport us immediately to an unworldly, indeterminate plane, where, as Gay McAuley would put it, "…human experience is reduced to an absolute minimum…"[111] and what anthropologist Victor Turner might call "…liminal *personae*

[105] Beckett, *Happy Days*, p. 141.
[106] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, pp. 5-20.
[107] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 351.
[108] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 354.
[109] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 354.
[110] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 354.
[111] Gay McAuley, "Samuel Beckett's 'Come and Go'", *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Dec 1966): 439.

('threshold people')…"[112] undergo transformative rites of passage, as they come and go, join together and separate, confide and collude in a subdued, softly-lit space surrounded by darkness.

Flo, Vi, and Ru, without men, without even the remotest claim to societal influence, immediately fall under suspicion in Beauvoir's world, and unmarried women, women not being "used" constructively for the purposes of reproduction, run the risk of being reduced "…to the rank of parasite and pariah…"[113] in a culture that still holds dear its primitive values. We know that Flo, Vi, and Ru are unmarried, as Beckett makes this explicit in the two pages of notes that accompany the two pages of *Come and Go*'s dialogue and stage directions; Beckett explains that the trio's hands should be, "…made up to be as visible as possible" with: "No rings apparent."[114] As far as Beauvoir was concerned in 1949 (just twelve years before the birth of Winnie, and fifteen years before Beckett penned *Come and Go*), "...for girls marriage [was] the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain[ed] unwanted, they [were], socially viewed, so much wastage."[115] Although we might consider some of her views as outdated now (although not when applied to works contemporaneous with her own in order to better understand and contextualise them), Beauvoir could be writing today when she states that: "The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution."[116] To codify is to contain, and if a woman's presence in society cannot be justified by marriage, society may retaliate not only by turning its back on that woman, but by labelling her "type" so that it might be able to comprehend it, digest it, and fix it in place, lest it should disrupt the sanctified order of things. It is quicker and less problematic, for instance, as we observe their unnatural, noiseless drifting in and out of the light (each character leaving the playing area in turn, as the other two whisper about whether or not the absent one knows her terrible secret fate), to class Beckett's trio in terms of concrete archetypes of the supernatural, than it is to admit of their being, as liminal entities, "…betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[117] The regulated order of society, of patriarchy, does not embrace transience and flux, it favours clearly demarcated contributions from compliant subjects, and those who do

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[112] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Aldine Transaction, 2008), p. 95.
[113] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 446.
[114] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 356.
[115] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 447.
[116] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 445.
[117] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

not comply are ostracised whilst being allowed to inhabit subcultures, providing these do not interfere with majority rule. As the subculture operating in *Come and Go* is populated entirely by women, it is to be expected that these women might be portrayed and interpreted by patriarchal society as "other worldly", as witches, barren and embittered, or, predictably, as Kaelin would have it, lesbians ("…naughty girls" as he actually, unbelievably condescendingly, calls them), brought together, of course, by "…the absence of a fulfilling masculine attention."[118]

Woman without man is lacking according to Kaelin then, and Flo, Vi, and Ru *are* depicted by Beckett as yearning for that confirmation of their existence that marriage might bring (rather than as beings who are at liberty to come and go as they please), as they are locked in to some seemingly preordained enactment of ritualised behaviour, dependent on one another and on reminiscence about their childhood days spent: "Dreaming of . . . love."[119] Beckett's women are subordinated to a variety of forces beyond their control; the married (Maddy, Winnie) to, amongst others, their husbands, the unmarried to their mothers (May, W), to predetermined rhythms and structures (May, Flo, Vi, Ru but, arguably, all of Beckett's stage characters) most, in one way or another, to god (May, Maddy, Winnie, Flo, Vi, Ru, Mouth in *Not I*) and all to society, be they in its midst or at its edges. The unmarried women of *Come and Go* are perhaps less mired in bodily immanence than their married sisters, as they do not have the same reproductive expectations placed upon them, however their spinster statuses render their bodies sexless, as they are hidden under shapeless coats and hats, drab and nondescript[120], which describe them as indistinct, unfeminine, and potentially-suspicious beings, who might be concealing in their neutrality those unnatural powers that enable them to immaterialise and rematerialize in and out of the blackness beyond. Winnie may be incapacitated, but she is nonetheless a truly bodily presence and a "character" in the colloquial sense; she has an identity, even if she must identify with what she has, rather than what she does. Where Winnie's is an unquestionably "breasted" existence, Flo, Vi, and Ru are confined to an experience perhaps less informed by their sexual, physical objectification, but one which, by the same token, would deny them their very sexualities, moreover their gender, that mode of being that is, according to American

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[118] Kaelin, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 239.
[119] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 355.
[120] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 356. The women are virtually indistinguishable from one another, aside from the fact that Ru wears a dull violet, full-length, high-buttoned coat, Vi and Flo dull red and dull yellow coats, respectively.

philosopher Judith Butler[121], "…not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow…" but rather as "…an identity constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*."[122] As these women are not currently performing their assigned gender roles (those of wives and mothers for instance), we could argue that their endless, repetitive movements, the circular, painstakingly-choreographed, patterns that they trace upon the stage as they act out and exhaust the possibilities of their triadic sequence of one leaving, two "gossiping" (another stereotypically-female pursuit), are their attempts at securing the gendered identities that have been eluding them, and that have been denied them by outside forces.

The *Come and Go* trio are vilified by society, as those women who are not being used wisely in marriage, who are not performing the gender roles handed down to them by *his*tory, may pose an ominous threat to the very fabric of patriarchy. If Flo, Vi, and Ru have *deliberately* chosen to turn their backs on a world dominated by men for instance, they might be categorised and subverted as "Feminist Killjoys"[123] whose "…failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others."[124] As we have seen, these "unattached" women will undoubtedly be labelled, classified as man-haters, lesbians, or witches, as they fail to fulfil their "natural role" and thereby give the impression that they are operating outside of nature. There *is* something of the netherworld about *Come and Go*, and Sidney Homan, having directed and produced numerous productions of the play in diverse cultural settings, and collating audience responses to it, reveals that: "A good many people think all three characters are dead, having died from old age or from whatever unfortunate thing has happened to them."[125] This is perhaps no surprise, as Beckett's women, like Beauvoir's, are intrinsically-linked with the supernatural and with death, in fact, in *Ghost Trio* and *Assumption*, as well as in *…but the clouds…* and *Nacht und Träume* (plays for television that focus on a solo male protagonists seemingly lost in contemplation and yearning for a female muse to manifest), we might say that: "Woman is the siren whose song lures sailors upon the rocks; she is Circe, who changes her lovers into beasts, the undine who draws fishermen into

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[121] Whose ground-breaking contribution to gender theory *Gender Trouble* (1990) could be said to radicalise Beauvoir's conception of gender as a social construct.

[122] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 191. The italics here are Butler's own.

[123] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, pp. 50-87.

[124] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 66.

[125] Sidney Homan, "*Come and Go*: Samuel Beckett's Play for Women", *Women's Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4 (June 2010): 311.

the depths of pools."[126] In their ambiguity, their state of flux, which traverses the realms of the living and the dead and the normative gender roles, these ethereal women might be said to demonstrate a blurring of the boundaries between humanity and animality, corporeality and spirituality, and, in Deleuze's work: "There is a whole politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family not of religion nor of the State."[127] There is something of the "becoming-animal" in *Come and Go*'s assemblage of women then, it seems, as the trio seem to be "…on the fringe of recognised institutions…" and "…all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic."[128] Alienation, vilification, and codification are nothing if not an appropriation however, and we can recognise civilisation's propensity to declaim witchcraft and the supernatural in that which cannot be readily and immediately comprehended according to the overriding metanarratives of Western thought and culture, when we consider that "…societies, even primitive societies, have always appropriated these becomings in order to break them, reduce them to totemic or symbolic correspondence."[129] Married women, in Beckett's works, have innocently earthly, fleshly bodies, which pose no such threat and do not require such mythologies to be built around them, even if these have to be imagined (like Maddy's which is likened to a childlike "…big fat jelly…"[130]), as their roles in life are identified with the body and with immanence. The unmarried woman, on the other hand, either (like some dangerous and ungodly visitation or mythical figure), struggles to appear as a body (particularly in the case of *Not I*'s Mouth, who is, as the name indicates, reduced to lips and teeth, the vagina dentata that enunciates from a fixed spot in the darkness), or presents something of an implacable front, with clothing acting as a shield (the hats and coats in *Come and Go*, the "…high-necked evening gown"[131] in *Rockaby*, May's "…*worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing*"[132], to name a few) which defends the forbidden, virgin flesh from the gaze of the other, whilst arousing the other's curiosity and perhaps indignation. Maddy's dress is torn and it is hinted that it might also be see-through[133], and Winnie, before her burial, spills out of her clothes as she fully lives every part of the body that is left to her disposal. Maddy's and Winnie's are the rambunctious bodily presences of Beckett's earlier

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[126] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 197.
[127] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 288.
[128] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 288.
[129] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 289.
[130] Beckett, *All That Fall*, p. 174.
[131] Samuel Beckett, *Rockaby*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 433.
[132] Beckett, *Footfalls*, p. 399.
[133] See Chapter Three, p. 17.

writing - heavy, inescapable, bursting at the seams – which are a stark contrast to the physicalities of Flo, Vi, and Ru, concealed not only by costume but also by retreat into darkness, retreat into the margins of the playing space, the margins of society and the shadows within which they might exercise their mystical powers. If society cannot define these women as wives and/or mothers, it must marginalise them as, if they fail to perform their inherent womanly duty, there must be something unfeminine about them, underneath their unseemly garb or, better: *inhuman*.

Unfulfilled Becomings

According to Beauvoir: "Woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming…."[134] and, as we have seen, gender is a social construct and "becoming a woman" is a process of identity construction that begins in childhood. Luce Irigaray, contemporary French feminist philosopher, cultural theorist and linguist, who writes extensively on diverse topics including "sexuate difference", "becoming woman" and "otherness", taking inspiration from Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida and Deleuze, to name but a few, holds the view that:

> For . . . Beauvoir, becoming a woman amounts to submitting oneself to sociocultural stereotypes in relation to woman. For her, a positive becoming in the feminine does not exist, and entering a cultural world signifies adopting the culture in the masculine which, for centuries, has corresponded to our tradition. The cultivation of the self for a woman in a way implies becoming a cultivated man. The woman then becomes split into a female and a masculine belonging.[135]

Irigaray's problematizing of Beauvoir's theory leads us to question the polarity of masculine and feminine subjects; if it is, indeed, a man's world, and Woman man's object, we might be forgiven for wondering what, if any, ownership and investment Woman has when it comes to living and creating her own gendered identity. We have already seen that, for Winnie, to become a woman is to become an object of difference that can be readily subsumed by the order of the male sameness that dictates the ways in which that object should present itself for society's use. Woman, in that case, does not know herself and her possibilities in the same way as man (a free, transcendent subject, who writes his own destiny in an endless projection of himself into the world via his projects), as these are clouded by masculine appropriation. Irigaray seeks to liberate Woman from what we might call the "becoming-for-man" that Beauvoir has identified, as she asserts that "…it is better for a woman to cultivate herself in a

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[134] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 66. The italics here are Beauvoir's own.
[135] Luce Irigaray, *Conversations* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 78.

feminine way; that is, to cultivate her female belonging through feminine values."[136] The protagonists of *Come and Go* perhaps have a greater chance of becoming women on their own terms, to cultivate themselves according to their own values, being, as they are, removed from the society of men. Irigaray implies that a radical restructuring of society is necessary, in order for the "…scission between female and feminine identity…"[137] to be eradicated, as to "…leave a culture of only one subject to enter into a culture of two different subjects"[138] requires "…us to leave our past culture . . . to enter a really different culture based on the relation between two subjects not subjected to one another."[139] Flo, Vi, and Ru have certainly left, or been forced out of, one culture for another, which is founded on female solidarity and shared values and concerns; they are, however, still subject to interference from masculine values, still trapped in a state of becoming that would distort their genders and prevent them from becoming the women that they would have themselves be. Despite having the chance to cultivate their identities according to a new culture, this trio feel themselves to be incomplete as a result of *not* belonging to man.

Unlike Winnie and Maddy, Flo, Vi, and Ru find themselves cast *completely* out of the culture which, nevertheless, retains them at its perimeters by way of slotting them into whichever boxes it deems fit; whether they are exiles through their own choice or through circumstances outside of their control, they are consigned to the index of the cultural script, where they are filed "outsiders". There is much allusion to childhood in *Come and Go*, and the isolated trio therein find solace in exile by recreating the past experiences that once held them so tightly together as a juvenile micro-society. Vi questions why the three may not speak "…of the old days" and "…what came after", but all are willing to join silently together in a mathematically-precise personification of the Buddhist symbol of the "endless knot", when she asks: "Shall we hold hands in the old way?"[140] The entwining of hands in *Come and Go* could be seen as an attempt at conjuring that which has been missing from the lives of the three women since childhood, as they exactingly join together as though they were about to embark on some rite of passage that might transport them from the ambiguous situation that they inhabit, to a more definitive, more inclusive plane. Rather than being witches, or some other immovable female archetype with malevolent connotations, I would

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[136] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 78.
[137] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 78.
[138] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 77.
[139] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 78.
[140] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 355.

argue that Flo, Vi, and Ru are actually in a period of intervention, or liminal space, having left the "…earlier fixed point in the social structure…"[141] that was childhood, only to have failed to attain another "…stable state…"[142] such as marriage. Suspended in liminality then, they turn to each other, and McAuley writes that the closing tableau, "…suggests one of those Hindu statues of several bodies in complicated juxtaposition which are supposed to represent certain universal and eternal qualities."[143] Bound together by clandestine codes, these women, whilst appearing to be frozen in a statuesque unity, "…a 'moment in and out of time,' and in and out of secular social structure…"[144] are halted in a state of perpetual becoming (rather than a potent, decided state), an intermediate state, between the child and the woman, the state, perhaps, that Beauvoir attributes to the young girl.[145]

Girlhood, or the period from puberty to full adulthood, is, according to Beauvoir, an extended period of waiting and preparing to become a wife, a transitional phase, marked by inactivity and impotency:

> Throughout her childhood the little girl suffered bullying and curtailment of activity; but none the less she felt herself to be an autonomous individual. […] While the adolescent boy makes his way actively towards adulthood, the young girl awaits the opening of this new, unforeseeable period . . . She is already free of her childish past, and the present seems but a time of transition; it contains no valid aims, only occupations. Her youth is consumed in waiting, more or less disguised. She is awaiting Man.[146]

Flo, Vi , and Ru, like Vladimir and Estragon before them, appear to be waiting, to be filling their time with daydreams, and with gossip, a compensation for their inactivity perhaps[147] and, as Deleuze points out, a stereotypically "female" and potentially subversive pastime: "Men alternately fault [women] for their indiscretion, their gossiping, and for their solidarity, their betrayal."[148] In adolescence, young girls form strong bonds or "…'special friendships'…" with each other as they seek to discover the future fates that await them, they reveal to each other their innermost thoughts and exchange intimate confidences, as they assist one another in the shaping of their identities, and Beauvoir writes that, "…her friend is

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[141] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 94.
[142] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.
[143] McAuley, "Samuel Beckett's 'Come and Go'", p. 440.
[144] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.
[145] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 351-392.
[146] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 351.
[147] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 604.
[148] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 337.

at once an object that draws out the adolescent girl beyond the limits of her ego and a witness who restores that self to her."[149] Before our very eyes, Flo, Vi, and Ru create gaps in audience perception, as they whisper their "girlish" secrets and establish themselves as what Deleuze might call a "…secret society…", a minority in comparison to the majority that constitutes the audience, "…disrupting . . . hierarchy and segmentation…" [150] and presenting themselves with: "The celerity of a war machine against the gravity of a state apparatus."[151] Like a tiny, antagonistic unit of feminine solidarity, formed on the outskirts of an overbearing and dismissive power system, Flo, Vi , and Ru, "awaiting Man" indefinitely, are locked into a state of perpetual becoming and perpetual girlhood.

The "girl" is a "becoming" for Deleuze, as she is for Beauvoir, and he writes of "becomings" (including, most notably, *his* "…becoming-woman…"[152]), as movements away from what he would call "molarity", towards a "molecularity" of the subject and object: "What we term a molar entity is, for example, the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject."[153] As "…man is the molar entity [and majoritarian] par excellence…"[154], all becomings are a *deviation* from the masculine ideal, and (like the *Come and Go* trio) "…becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian."[155] We could deduce, from Deleuze's writings as well as Beauvoir's, that "the girl", like Flo, Vi, and Ru, is the epitome of the aforementioned becoming-animal, the becoming-minoritarian and, also in a more literal sense, becoming-woman, as "…girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through."[156] Where man is the ultimate molar entity and majoritarian, girl is a liminal being, the molecular being, the "other" *par excellence*, who dismantles polarities and obliterates fixed points. Deleuze and Beauvoir radically part company, however, at the point where it becomes apparent that, for Deleuze, the girl does not necessarily have to be female by birth, and the male too can become-woman, as: "Becoming-woman represents the dismantling of molar sexualities, molar identities, definite sexual

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[149] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 366.
[150] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 335.
[151] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 337.
[152] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 331.
[153] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 321.
[154] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 341.
[155] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 339.
[156] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 323.

positions as the prevailing social order defines them."[157] In fact, for Deleuze, because of "…the special situation of woman in relation the man standard…"[158] it is possible to say that "…all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman."[159] Writing is, in Deleuzian terms, a becoming[160], an oscillation between poles, and so, in writing his female characters *Beckett must become-woman himself.*[161] Deleuze's rhizomatics is disturbing to some feminists, as Grosz details[162], as it could be accused of neutralising Woman and eradicating sexual difference according to a man-standard, and there is no doubt that Deleuze's concept of becoming-woman is too expansive, indeed, rather too elusive to be contained in this study. It is worthy of note, however, that for both Beauvoir, in a more literal sense, and Deleuze, in a somewhat more metaphorical sense, the girl is always what Deleuze would call a "war machine", always somewhat subversive and imperceptible, as she defies molarity and constitutes "…an abstract line or a line of flight"[163] and a transgression, being, as she is, like Flo, Vi, and Ru, *between* definitive states.

Although Deleuze's poststructuralist discourse and Beauvoir's feminist phenomenology make for uncomfortable bedfellows at times, we might say that the phase of waiting, of liminality, the "betwixt and between" that is characteristic of girlhood symbolises a period of extended abstraction for both philosophers. For whatever reason, Flo, Vi, and Ru have been suspended in a state of "becoming", they are left "aside", marginal, having not fully "become" women, due to their failure to conform to the cultural script. They dream of love, speak of childhood relations with each other, and seem to seek solace in a sexually-ambiguous three-way relationship, which resembles Beauvoir's descriptions of juvenile female intimacies. It could even be argued that, if their "girlhood" has been extended past the point of menopause, which seems quite possible, their chances of becoming women are all but eradicated entirely as Beauvoir writes that: "It is sometimes said that women of a certain age constitute a 'third sex'; and, in truth, while they are not males, they are no longer females."[164] Beauvoir, then, is quite capable of instigating a distortion of gender identities in her own right, despite Irigaray's questioning whether (as "becoming woman" for Deleuze

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[157] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 177.
[158] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 339.
[159] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 323.
[160] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 280.
[161] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 322.
[162] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 161-166.
[163] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 322.
[164] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 63.

"…amounts to becoming what he is not by birth", which is at odds with that "becoming woman" which Beauvoir would resist as a submission to male stereotypes): "Deleuze would want to become the woman who Simone de Beauvoir did not want to become?"[165] In their "[l]ight shoes with rubber soles"[166] Flo, Vi, and Ru leave but a minimal imprint on the world they inhabit, and they barely make a sound during their silent exists and entrances, or with their voices, which are: "As low as compatible with audibility."[167] With no husbands, the characters in this dramaticule have no voice and no mouthpiece; they are shut out of the world, out of society, and out of the light, and are excluded from not only discourse but also humanity. They do, however, have each other. Unlike Winnie, this trio barely touch the earth, and even the bench that they sit on is: "As little visible as possible."[168] These women are not, like Winnie, defined by their possessions and *fully there*, they are unburdened by physical properties but captive in their situation nonetheless. The one prop that they "feel" and depend on is *absent* from the material world of the stage; as they join together at the close of the play, hand in hand, despite each of them being, as previously mentioned, without jewellery, Flo declares: "I can feel the rings."[169] The rings, here, are unfulfilled becomings, as are the lives of the three central characters. An unfulfilled promise or hope of marriage is indicated by the psychosomatic wearing of rings, and if Flo, Vi, and Ru failed to become women in the interval between childhood and menopause then they have truly lived out their lives in a zone of suspended transition, but not (as Bryden might use Deleuze to suggest about Beckett's stage work as a whole) a zone of gender multiplicity and fluidity.[170] *Come and Go* is set in a liminal state that is wholly dictated in masculine terms, as the characters therein live half-lives due to their *failure* to marry, and the rings stand as projections of the *incompleteness* that they feel as a result of their celibacy; the same story could not be told with three men at its centre, as the Woman of Beauvoir's time can never be more than an element in the life of man, whereas he is, for her, her destiny and the entire world.[171]

Her Own (M)other

Sole inhabitant of a world devoid of the feminine unity that can be felt in *Come and Go* and lacking, as she does, a male counterpart or human companionship of any kind, the

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[165] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 79.
[166] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 356.
[167] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 357.
[168] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 356.
[169] Beckett, *Come and Go*, p. 355.
[170] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 14.
[171] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 352.

female protagonist of *Rockaby*, W (Woman), could be said to be the unhappy descendent of Flo, Vi, and Ru, as well as an amalgamation of *Footfall*'s May and her mother. Sitting in her rocking chair, in the subdued light that illuminates her face as she rocks back and forth in the darkness that fills the surrounding performance space, W's is another eerie figure that speaks of a half-life, of death and isolation, of old age and unfulfilled expectations. W is described by Beckett as follows:

> Prematurely old. Unkempt grey hair. Huge eyes in white expressionless face. White hands holding arm rest.[172]

W is "…all eyes…" as she has spent a lifetime searching (we discover as the short, repetitive, verse that is her pre-recorded monologue accompanies her slow, mechanical rocking), for "…another creature like herself…"[173] with whom she might make a connection. There is an air of madness in the "…famished eyes…" that have spent years, we are told, staring out from "…behind the pane…" of her "…only window / facing other windows / other only windows…"[174] only to realise that deliverance in the shape of another would not manifest. To journey along what Irigaray would call "The Path Towards the Other"[175] however, requires a far greater leap of faith than remaining shut up in the sphere of self (the outer limits of which could be depicted, here, by the window W looks through), as: "Eyes alone cannot perceive the other at the crossroads of our paths."[176] If we are not willing to create a new world, a third world to act as a threshold between the radically separate worlds that divide the self from the other, we run the risk of simply reducing the other to our own sameness, and Irigaray writes, in what we immediately recognise as Levinasian terms, that: "Leaving one's own world in order to go towards the other first amounts to a meeting with the infinite, an infinite in which both I and the other risk losing ourselves."[177] Perhaps for W, who is almost like a reduction of the three characters of *Come and Go* to a single, lonely figure, who has lost, or never had, the little comfort that Flo, Vi, and Ru can find in an unnaturally prolonged girlhood blending of identities, the idea of confronting a world of total difference, respecting it as such and allowing it to coexist alongside her own impenetrable world, has in reality proven too much to bear. W, like the female Mouth of *Not I* as well as May in *Footfalls*, makes an "other" of

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172 Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 433.
173 Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 435.
174 Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 439.
175 Luce Irigaray, "The Path Towards the Other", in *Beckett after Beckett*, ed. S. E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 39-51.
176 Irigaray, "The Path Towards the Other", p. 48.
177 Irigaray, "The Path Towards the Other", p. 40.

herself rather than taking any real action when it comes to instigating interaction with human beings in the outside world, but where May and Mouth seem to externalise this otherness, projecting objectified images of themselves outward and creating a divide within their own psyches, W internalises her own otherness to the point where she is both creator and extinguisher of her very life source.

As W realises that it is "…time she stopped…"[178] her endless searching beyond the pane, her own voice comes to her from beyond, and she encourages it by demanding, intermittently: "More."[179] Just as *Not I*'s Mouth refuses to use the first person pronoun (spitting out the lines "…what? . . who? . . no! . . she! . . "[180] each time some outside force seems to urge her to take ownership of her own subjectivity), W refers to herself in the third person as "she"; this could be said to illustrate Woman's position as object, even for herself, in a world where her transcendence is "laden with immanence", as well as Irigaray's assertion that Woman is "split" into being both female, and "a masculine belonging."[181] Interestingly, Irigaray also writes that: "If feminisms or feminists use 'I' as is usual in our tradition, they cannot make a subject or a world emerge as different from those that men have promoted."[182] The world that W makes emerge *is* an essentially feminine one, created and peopled by a single female, as she, like Mouth and May before her, appears to have *divided herself* into both subject and object, but rather than projecting her object-self away from herself by speaking it from the inside out, declaiming it from her spot on the stage as Mouth does, or creating an entirely new character with a completely different voice that can be heard offstage as May might, W's *own voice* comes to her *from the outside*, by way of a recording, and she encourages it *in*, further and further, until the point where she implodes. W is, as she readily admits, "…her own other / own other living soul…"[183] but she is also much more than this; she is creator of her own simultaneous birth and death, as she, held by the arms of her chair, her "…mother rocker…"[184], becomes her own mother.

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[178] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 435.
[179] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 435.
[180] Samuel Beckett, *Not I*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 377.
[181] See p. 171, note 135.
[182] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 77.
[183] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 441.
[184] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 440.

Through her account of her mother's prolonged, crazed rocking in the same chair years before, dressed, as she, in "…best black…"[185], in mourning, one might imagine, for her own life, until the night of her death (her "…head fallen / and the rocker rocking…"[186]), W essentially describes her own fate. W has absolutely internalised that all-consuming relationship that May has with her mother, who is either alive and present on the perimeters of the playing space, or whose presence she conjures and projects from within her own being. W, like the mother whose end she narrates, appears to have "…gone off her head…"[187] as she sits and ruminates, aged, isolated, yet extravagantly dressed in black lace and sequins. This bedecking of such imminent mortality could be representative of what Beauvoir suggests is, according to man, "…woman's first lie, her first treason: namely, that of life itself − life which, though clothed in the most attractive forms, is always infested by the ferments of age and death."[188] An old woman, like her mother was at the end, W, "…withered, faded, as might be said of a plant" and well into the phase of her life, and Beckett's writing[189], that might make of her a "third sex", perhaps does, as Beauvoir suggests such women do, "…arouse hatred mingled with fear."[190] Beauvoir also writes that (once sexual allure has disappeared), in the elderly woman "…reappears the disquieting figure of the Mother, when once the charms of the wife have vanished."[191] The mother then, whilst being intrinsically-linked to birth and marriage, is also linked to death, decay and decrepitude, perhaps because, in Beckettian fashion, she "…dooms her son to death in giving him life…", and W, channelling her mother with every line she utters, "…appears, too, as the dreadful bride whose skeleton is revealed under her sweet, mendacious flesh."[192] If "[i]t is in maternity that woman fulfils her physiological destiny…"[193] then we may strongly suspect that W is, like so many of her sisters, unfulfilled. Lacking a child through whom she could extend, enforce and prolong her being-in-the-world, W directs her own identity back towards that of her mother (and thereby inverts her own lineage), and the fusion of mother/daughter identities that results

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[185] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 440.

[186] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 440.

[187] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 440.

[188] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 192.

[189] *Rockaby* was written in 1980, when Beckett was in his seventies, and W is his last female stage protagonist. W has much in common with the female protagonist of prose work *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), a similarly isolated old woman, who approaches death and fixates on mortality as she ventures out of her cabin only to make pilgrimages to a nearby tomb. These decaying women, shrivelled, androgynous carcasses of the fleshly, sexually-aggressive females of Beckett's early prose writing, have their male counterparts in the white-haired male protagonists of late theatre works *That Time* and *Ohio Impromptu*, as well as 1980 novel *Company*.

[190] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 192.

[191] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 192.

[192] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 197.

[193] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 501.

from this retraction of self from the world may well symbolise the co-dependent lives that these women led prior to their identical deaths. Beauvoir writes that:

> The little girl comes nearer [than the boy] to being wholly given over to her mother, and the claims of the latter are therefore increased. Their relations are much more dramatic. In her daughter the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste; in her she seeks a double.[194]

What W's mother placed on this earth, as her double, her own "doll of flesh", she can take back at will and, for W, it may be that the only freedom that can be gained from the matriarch may be that found in returning fully to her in death. After issuing forth the proclamation "…fuck life…"[195], *Rockaby*'s generic W(oman) comes to rest, and her "…head slowly sinks…"[196] forward in the rocker, as her mother's did before it. W, rather than producing a child of her own, *returns* to her own mother, her own (m)other, and womb becomes tomb in a radical reversal of the life-giving process, which sees the binaries, the molar entities, of subject and object, birth and death, mother and child radically molecularised and amalgamated *in the name of Woman.*

An End of Becomings

W, Flo, Vi, and Ru appear, potentially, as unfulfilled wives and/or mothers, incomplete, transgressional, liminoid, caught on the threshold of "becoming woman", and in that sense we see in each reflections of Maddy and May, or of the girl who was never properly born,[197] a molecularised entity denied access to a society which depends on hierarchies and molarity. If these women have deliberately chosen these ways of life, they are deemed by society to be witches, troublemakers, hags, or inhuman monsters, as their behaviour defies codified convention and thereby comprehension, and so must be vilified in order that it might be contained: these dangerous women must be made an example of, lest little girls get ideas about following suit. If there were ever loves in the lives of these women these are long gone, as is youth, though they, like Winnie, identify with childhood; perhaps more so in fact, as society has not permitted them to evolve beyond it. All of the women in this chapter would, it would seem, return to girlhood: Winnie through her ideal objectification of herself in the doll that remains untainted where Mildred is violated; *Come and Go*'s trio through the re-enactment of the playground rituals that saw them dream of love

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[194] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 532.
[195] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 442.
[196] Beckett, *Rockaby*, p. 433.
[197] See Chapter Three, pp. 89 and 103.

and marriage, and which release and imprison them simultaneously; and W through what we can describe as a metaphorical return to the womb which originally engendered her and perhaps never fully expelled her. Beauvoir, in her epic narrative of womanhood, speaks of the violence of sexual initiation, the slavery that is co-existence with man, and the isolation that comes of operating outside of the societal system: it is only in childhood that the female is free. In Beckett's works we have seen that in adulthood there is, for Woman, annihilation in marriage; evaporation and self-denial in subservience to domineering mother figures who consume the autonomy and independence of their daughters, subsuming it into the order of their same; or entrapment in an even more pronounced "otherness", perpetual transition, failure to attain any real place or being-in-the-world as spinster/lesbian/libertarian. If, as Beauvoir suggests, the infant is unaware of her/himself as "…sexually differentiated" until civilisation thrusts gender upon her/him, if "[u]p to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers…" being debarred from no field where she may engage "…in rivalry with them" [198] then surely it is no surprise that any woman would want to return to infancy, or even the womb, as her only other road to freedom is, as we saw in Chapter Three, through immaterialisation, or, as we see in *Rockaby*, through death.

Beckett's final word on the female protagonist is fatal; after burying Winnie alive years earlier (having already reported Nell to be dead in her bin in *Endgame*), after presenting women as ghosts (or at least spectral and prone to dissolution), in *All That Fall*, *Come and Go* and *Footfalls*, and alluding to them as missing-presumed-dead loves in *Ghost Trio*, *Eh Joe*[199], *…but the clouds…*, *Nacht und Träume* and *Ohio Impromptu*, Beckett goes so far as to kill a woman, one of his frail and wraith-like creatures, W, live on stage. In her extensive study of Woman's mythical connection with death in art, *Over Her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen writes that: "Though in the process of death anatomical sexual differences remain, a colloquial understanding of the corpse is that it is not gendered, that it is an anonymous, inanimate body, pure materiality without soul or personality."[200] Bryden of course argues that there is a "…gender evolution…"[201] at work upon Beckett's stage and we might say that, in her death, W actually signifies an end to all becomings and an end to gender if we consider

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[198] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 295.
[199] In which teleplay a female voice haunts a male protagonist in order to *reproach* him for a life of *misogyny*.
[200] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 63-64.
[201] Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, p. 58.

Bronfen's words. I would argue, however, that Woman, in Beckett's *oeuvre* does not evolve but, rather, she *dissolves*, as we have seen in her many manifestations her innate mutability, her oneness with the ether, her propensity towards evaporation, non-manifestation and, finally, the death which sets her free. I am indebted to Bryden for her highlighting of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy in relation to Beckett's work, as an exploration of their concept of "becoming-woman" has allowed me to reconsider Beauvoir's Woman as an unfulfilled becoming, and to view the *Come and Go* trio, in particular, in a new light. Bryden fails to note, as do so many others, however, the ghost of Beauvoir that surely looms large over any explication of womanhood as a becoming rather than a fixed essence/entity, and even if Beckett's drama is "less misogynistic" than his early prose, it still presents us with mythical archetypes of femininity, with "happy housewives", witches, and overbearing mothers, as well linking women to "otherness", to objectivity and the struggle for subjectivity, and marrying them permanently and in no uncertain terms to death.

I do not wish to reinforce gender molarities in my reading of Beckett's plays but, rather, recognise that sexual difference is integral to an understanding of the characters therein, as: "Man and woman are irreducible the one to the other: they cannot be substituted the one for the other, not because of a quantity . . . but because of a difference in being and existing, that is to say a qualitative difference."[202] Bryden, in her seeming eradication of gender in her analysis of Beckett's work, flattens the surface rather too eagerly, perhaps by way of attempting to liberate the writer from his earlier misogyny by liberating his later characters from their gendered identities. Deleuze writes that: "It is . . . indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics…", however he does add that, "…it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a [molar] subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow."[203] Beckett's concept of the "ideal real" means that, whilst there are fixed poles operating in his work, systems that would hold ideas together and render them manifest, there is also much in his writing that speaks of flux, mutability and incompleteness. A middle way is needed then, it seems, between declaiming gender stereotypes too readily and trying to prove gender indeterminacy in Beckett's work, and this chapter has attempted, in the tiniest of nutshells, to encapsulate something that could be used as a springboard towards much more detailed work on gender in Beckett and, indeed, on Beauvoir as a phenomenologist and

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[202] Irigaray, *Conversations*, p. 75.
[203] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 321.

theorist who has much to offer to Beckett scholarship. In a study of humanity, of modes of *being* in Beckett's work, it seems to me that to omit a consideration of the ways in which gender, a lens through which our position in the world is unavoidably viewed, shapes the human experience would be to tell only half of the already untellable story, and to attempt to swerve issues of gender by ironing it flat would amount to yet another assimilation of Woman by man.

Conclusion

Throughout this work I have applied the phenomenological theories of Sartre, Beauvoir and contemporaries (as well as a select few of their philosophical predecessors/successors) to the Beckett canon in a manner that I hope will be judged as being expansive and progressive, rather than "traditional" and reductive. I think it is important to reflect here, and particularly as I offer my "Beckett study" some fifty-plus years after Esslin wrote his seminal text *The Theatre of the Absurd*, that whilst a subject's historical, cultural, and social specificity is an integral part of any phenomenological study, it not essential that the Beckettian/Sartrean subject find him/herself situated in a state of post-war despondency and despair in order that we might understand them existentially. A subject's "situation" and "character" are dependent on their uniqueness to that individual so, at the same time that it is *possible* to read characters such as Vladimir and Estragon, or Hamm and Clov, through the "absurdist" lens (as spokespersons for a humanity stranded in a post-apocalyptic landscape, devoid of any governing metanarrative which would offer hope and meaning to their seemingly meaningless existences), this reading does not necessarily "work" as a general rule for all Beckett protagonists. Added to this, it is as plausible to examine Beckett's early works in terms of what they offer to the mind-body debate, or to evaluate what these say about our embodied, human interactions with both like beings and inanimate objects, as it is to argue their adherence to a condensed and even misunderstood summary of *some* of the more immediately graspable (and seemingly historically-specific) features of Sartre's vast body of work. I have deliberately avoided direct analysis of *Godot* in this thesis because of its overwhelming academic heritage, particularly as this really seems to bind Beckett's first "success" as a playwright so tightly to the time and place of its original composition and performance, and quite understandably; the play was "…one of the greatest successes of the *post-war* theatre."[1] Artworks, like people, however, do not remain rooted to one spot (Beckett's "success" has not remained confined to his own time), and I have sought, throughout these chapters, to provide a phenomenological/existentialist reading of Beckett that is mutable, rather than fixed, that explicates exposition (considers Winnie, for instance, as a woman of her time and societal status), but also recognises certain universal structures of being that can be applied just as readily now as they could when *Godot* was born over sixty years ago.

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[1] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 39. The italics here are mine.

As any work of (dramatic) literature must be penned at a specific time and in a particular place, a myriad of environmental and biographical factors contribute to what we might call our "contextualisation" of its contents. That said, once a work is removed from its original context, once it is read or performed in a subsequent era, it can take on new meaning, it can become a spectre addressing us from some past state of being that can be both alien and familiar to us all at once; *Krapp's Last Tape*, as I have demonstrated, embodies our ability to engage with a static past, to fold it into our active present and revive it, by looking upon it with fresh eyes and incorporating and enveloping it in our *immediate* projections of consciousness. *Krapp* is an illustration of humankind's relationship with past lives, of a decoding and a temporal layering of "self" that is both specific (to Krapp, in his den) and universal (relevant to anyone who has ever analysed or "spoken to" their past actions and behaviour). As spectators and readers we listen, like Krapp, to a discord of voices that were "written" in the past and, whilst we might know something of the one-time facticity of each, these speak to us not only of *their* immediate surroundings and temporal positions, but also of *our own* existence as conscious, biological agents who must endure those gendered temporalities that we seek to flee, and who must live in the gaze of others who create discord in the complex stratagems we employ in an attempt to do so.

As Descartes writes, "…to read good books is like holding a conversation with the most eminent minds of past centuries and, moreover, a studied conversation in which these authors reveal to us only the best of their thoughts."[2] Throughout this thesis, I bring philosophers together in a new and profitable way, often highlighting similarities between "the best of their thoughts," whilst recognising and respecting the fact that each has been entered into a conversation about Beckett's work that s/he did not consent to. The voices of past philosophers are as spectral as those heard by Krapp (and by the Listener in *That Time*), and these are most frequently conjured in literary criticism as their *ready-to-hand* eminence tends to give substance and credence to, or even *provide the foundation for*, the most rigorous and convincing academic arguments. I have made no apologies for the fact that Sartre is what one might call my "key theorist" throughout this work and, indeed, the structure of my argument (even the ordering of my chapters) is a direct response to my reading of *Being and Nothingness*, which I supplement, or complete, with my reading of *The Second Sex*, for the

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[2] Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, p. 30.

simple reason that gender is not addressed with enough clarity in either Sartrean phenomenology or Beckett studies.[3]

I am confident that this study is unique insofar as it *directly* places Beckett and Sartre side by side (rather than applying "existentialist/aburdist" generalisations in broad strokes), and surveys Sartrean *phenomenology* in such depth that it can be seen to provide an ontology for the Beckett character. In Chapter One, I considered Berkelian idealism and even Dennett's materialism, as I established, through Sartre, a "middle way", an unavoidable, non-dualistic unification of body and mind (an *ideal real*) for the Beckett character, whose attempts to eschew his/her corporeality are repeatedly proven to be futile. It became clear in Chapter Two that (despite possible misgivings on Derrida's part[4]) great affinities can be found between Sartrean phenomenology and Derridean deconstruction when these are brought together in order to investigate the unnamable absence which underlies all modes of presence in Beckett's temporality. Derrida and Beckett are, in many ways, kindred spirits who seek to dispel "meaning" from the language system, the former through a deconstruction of that same and the latter through an almost exhaustive, experimental exploration of its possible forms and configurations. There is so much evidence to suggest that Beckett's works illustrate his existential, *embodied* understanding of our *being* however (the very fact that he writes so prolifically for *theatre*, a medium which relies upon live, *bodily* presence, and his frequent recourse to an earthy language of corporeality for instance), that Derrida's fundamentally *textual* (and *all* is, of course, "text" for Derrida) philosophy, whilst profoundly relevant up to a point, falls short of capturing that *human*, dare I say almost *spiritual*, element that pervades Beckett's writings.

Sartre is, as I have said, a renowned atheist, and yet his innate spirituality reveals itself through his often mystical language; a language that we can in fact almost hear repeated by Derrida, who speaks of *hauntings* and *spectres* as though he would continue a discourse on *phantoms* and *apparitions* begun by his predecessor. Furthermore, as soon as we enter Sartre into conversation with Artaud and Brook, we begin to recognise him as a proponent of the kind of "Holy Theatre" that I charge Beckett with producing in Chapter Three. Beckett's creatures are of the earth, as is Sartre's phenomenology, yet they are also of the sky; they may have a foothold in the gutter but they are looking at the stars or, in the case of

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[3] See Introduction, pp. 9-10.
[4] See Chapter Two, p. 45, note 5.

Company's protagonist, their senses may confirm to them that they are lying on their backs in the dark, but they will nonetheless be escaping, like Winnie, May and Maddy, as gossamer into the blue. It is this often difficult oscillation between biological fixity and the reaches of ephemeral consciousness that, for me, announces the Beckett character as Sartre's *being-for-itself*; a body driven by a mind that would have no means of making itself visible were it not for its fleshly prison; a mind that would enjoy sovereignty over all other forms of being were it not surrounded on all sides by other conscious entities which, like itself, seek to objectify and consume. Beckett's ongoing interrogation of the inherently troubled, and yet essential, *existential* relationship between subject and object also exemplifies our Sartrean *being-for-others* then, and Levinas adds an ethical layer to a consideration of "otherness" that is linked to theories of perception in Chapter Four, as Sartre's notion of the "look" places complex, at times esoteric, philosophies (including, again, Berkeleyan idealism) firmly back in the world without entirely extinguishing their ethereality.

In terms of directions that this work might take beyond the scope of this thesis (bearing in mind that a significant amount of material has had to be cut from the end product in order that it might retain its cohesion), it scarcely needs stating that a continuation of the work begun in Chapter Five would be of great benefit to Beckett scholarship at this time. Beauvoir's writings are not included in this thesis as an afterthought but as a necessity and point of departure, and I hope to use the foundations that I have established for a phenomenological study of gender in Beckett here as a springboard from whence my future research will leap. Whilst *The Second Sex* allows us to contextualise characters such as Winnie historically, it also provides a blueprint for contemporary feminist phenomenologies, some of which (the works of Ahmed and Grosz for instance) I reference in my final chapter, and I feel confident that its inclusion here does much to enrich what is a radical new development in research on not only "Beckett and phenomenology/existentialism" but also "Beckett and gender/women/feminism" and the impossibly-broad spectrum that is "Beckett and philosophy" as a whole.

For every philosophical viewpoint included in this thesis there are, naturally, countless others that could just as readily be applied, and each chapter plants the seeds from which a multitude of new and conflicting analyses might shoot, even as I argue the relevance and validity of *my* particular theoretical framework. If I were to add a "bonus chapter" to this work, I should like to explore and theoretically analyse (in greater depth than I have been

able to here) the shadow of death that looms over Beckett's works as the ultimate counterpoint to *all* modes of being. As well as publishing a collection of papers on the theme of "Beckett and Phenomenology"[5] in 2009, Continuum also published a volume entitled *Beckett and Death*[6] in the very same year, and there is much scope to launch a *phenomenological* investigation of the significance that an awareness of death has for Beckett's characters. I have written about what we might call being-in-the-face-of-mortality, to some extent, in Chapter Three[7], and it is perhaps not unreasonable to say that human reality is indelibly marked from birth by its knowledge of the temporal limitations placed upon it. Heidegger writes of our *being-towards-death* at length in *Being and Time*[8], and suggests that it is the inevitability of an "end point" that gives life a sense of totality and brings with it the possibility of *being-a-whole*. If death provides us with a deadline, as it were, and a sense of urgency when it comes to our long and short term goals and projects, then Beckett's interest in the dead (the deceased mother in *Rockaby* and the lost loved ones in *Ohio Impromptu* and *A Piece of Monologue* form but the tip of the iceberg) and the dying or, rather, the *aging*[9] (Nagg and Nell, the aged protagonists of *Company*, *That Time*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, Krapp et. al.) is perhaps as understandably human as it is worthy of a detailed and sustained examination. Furthermore, Beckett is more than aware of our ability to execute the ultimate act of agency (he foregrounds the tendency towards self-destruction of his characters not only in *Godot* but also in, amongst others, *Act Without Words I* and *Rough For Theatre II*), so a philosophical discussion of *suicide* might be also incorporated into a chapter/paper that paired Heidegger's *being-towards-death* with Sartre's writings on "My death"[10], and even allowed Albert Camus' (1913-1960) *The Myth of Sisyphus*[11] to be contemplated outside of its usual "absurdist" confines.[12]

Death is not prejudice, it is the final word on any and all journeys of being, and surely nothing speaks so universally to each and every conscious being as the threat of a permanent

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[5] See Introduction, pp. 3-4.
[6] See Introduction, p. 8, note 27.
[7] See Chapter Three, pp. 88-89 for instance.
[8] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 279-311.
[9] "Beckett and the Phenomenology of Aging" strikes me as the title of a paper waiting to be written.
[10] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 552-573.
[11] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O' Brien (London: Penguin, 2005).
[12] Esslin means to use the word "absurd" in the same sense that Camus uses it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and it is the clear lineage from Camus' to Esslin's "absurdism" that has seen me omit Camus from this study; should Camus' writings be fed into the rather more expansive phenomenological studies of death established by Heidegger (in particular) and Sartre, however, then I believe that these could be revived and liberated from Esslin's shackles and applied to Beckett afresh.

state of unconsciousness, an end to temporality and a return to inanimate being or matter. Beckett's engagement with such universal themes as death, the relationship between mind and matter, the passage of time, the human preoccupation with religion and the "holy", our *being-with/for-others* and our experiential understanding of our gender allows his work to transcend the reaches of its original birthplace and time. The "timelessness" of Beckett's art is, of course, one of the many factors that have contributed to his literary *immortality*, and his ability to tap into the resonant cavities of human consciousness as readily now as he did in his own lifetime (coupled with his contribution, as an innovator, to the development of diverse artistic media), demands that any and all studies of his *oeuvre* be considered provisional; this study, one might say, is crying out to be enriched by *future* philosophical/critical perspectives, even as it is being written. As I search for a means of drawing this work to a close, I must paradoxically state that the only thing I can conclude with absolute certainty is that the study I have embarked on is one that is without a foreseeable end, one that cannot be succinctly concluded, and that could, and will, go on indefinitely. Death may be the final word on life, but there can be no final word on a living, breathing entity that shows no signs of aging, and that would gain charge and vitality as the decades progress and each new "wave" of its existence sees it incarnated afresh; Beckett's body of work is just such an entity, and I aim, here, not to do violence to it by endowing it with definitive meaning, but to play some small role in facilitating but one of its most recent cycles of regeneration.

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