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### The Evocation of the Physical, Metaphysical, and Sonic Landscapes in Samuel Beckett's Short Dramatic Works

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The Evocation of the Physical, Metaphysical and Sonic Landscapes  
within the Short Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett

Submitted by Theresa A. Incampo

May 4, 2012

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## Part I: History

### **Time, Space and Sound in Beckett's short dramatic works**

*The following chapter is an articulation of the theatrical landscapes of Samuel Beckett's short dramatic works.*

#### **Temporality:**

“That double-headed monster of damnation and salvation- **Time.**”  
- Samuel Beckett (*Proust*)<sup>1</sup>

In the theatrical worlds written by Samuel Beckett, time does not follow the Aristotelian model, which supposes a defined beginning, middle and end to the dramatic narrative. There is, only, the present: here and now. Existential philosophy hypothesizes that there is no perceivable end to existence. The characters in Beckett's work attempt to come to grips with the present but are thwarted by the elusive and perpetual present shifting into the past and are unable to verify an imaginary future. They simply “are,” left to fill their endless existence with habitual actions and memories of past moments used to stave off the fear of the infinite void of time and space. They try, uselessly, to employ the recollection of the past to capture the present. Beckett constructed artistic representations of time and space to convey his idea that nothing, not even art, can deliver man from his inescapably infinite existence. His dramatic works express, as the action of the play, the failure of the human conscious to exist, completely and presently, in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Proust*, New York, Grove Press, 1957, 1.



expansive universe of time and space while positioning an audience in a theatrical world that they cannot fully inhabit by virtue of the alien, indeterminable physical landscapes and soundscapes and so the spectators experience a failure of presence along with the dramatic subject. The play is not saving the viewer by making the situation visible. It instead pushes them to face the truth of their existence outside of worldly time and familiar space.

*Sense of time: the absence of worldly "reality"*

Beckett's plays call for an extinguishing of worldly time. This worldly time is posited in reference to "real time", which is structured through years, hours, minutes, and seconds: the past, the present and the future. "Most of us at least implicitly tend to believe in the normalcy and solidity of time and space..."<sup>2</sup> Beckett, however, in his writing, distrusted this solid experience of time. He suggests that "real time" is concrete and limits existence to the trivial markings of a calendar or clock. "All that is enveloped in time and space is endowed with what might be described as an abstract, idea and absolute impermeability."<sup>3</sup> Because "real time" maintains this solid structure it cannot account for the unparalleled capabilities and unknown limits of the human mind. "Real time" is not omnipresent although is often perceived as such. "The world of time and space at times gives us half-truths;

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<sup>2</sup> Rabinovitz, Rubin. "Time, Space and Verisimilitude in Samuel Beckett's Fiction." Ed. James Knowlson. *Journal of Beckett Studies* 2 (1977). *The English Department at Florida State University*. The English Department at Florida State University, 2000. Web. 06 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.english.fsu.edu/jobs/num02/jobs02.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 41

it is therefore a most deceitful sort of world, one which is inconsistent even in its mendacity.”<sup>4</sup>

It is evident in his early, fictional literature that Beckett gravitated towards the fluctuous and unstable qualities of inner-time: that which exists in the space of the mind. “The purely mental world seems unreliable and unpredictable.”<sup>5</sup> His characters Watt in *Watt* and Murphy from *Murphy* sought to break through to another, unexplored arena of time’s phenomena: one which is solely internalized and unable to know time through the act of simple counting. However, they are disappointed by the volatility of the inner world. “... the inner world can be gloomy, labyrinthine and perilous; the early cockiness of Beckett’s heroes usual gives way to despair.”<sup>6</sup>

*The boundlessness of temporality:*

“Moments of time cannot add up to infinity; they can only stretch on and on in finity.”<sup>7</sup>

Like the inner worlds of Watt and Murphy, the characters of the short plays exist in an unsolvable labyrinth of despair, never able to reach a destination. The inability to reach an end is due to the infinitude of the time-based landscape. Time and the bodies/objects occupying it are moving towards an un-seeable point that, itself, is in motion. “(Something) is moving relentlessly towards some tenuously receding end. It has been likened to the curve mathematicians call asymptotic: all

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<sup>4</sup> Rabinovitz

<sup>5</sup> “ “

<sup>6</sup> “ “

<sup>7</sup> Cohn, Ruby. *Just Play: Beckett's Theater*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. Pg. 42

the time approximating but never reaching the graph's bottom line."<sup>8</sup> The all-encompassing temporality in which the characters exist is never ending. Its perimeter is the receding horizon, stretching on and on with no concrete end in sight. Despite its mobility, time is suspended.

The difficulty in grasping the experience of an infinite temporal condition is that the infinite is only conceivable as an idea, as a word, but the actuality of size and matter is beyond human comprehension. It is easy to casually ponder limitlessness but, in the process, we intuitively measure it with "real time": means from our finite lives. Beckett sought to do so by dramatizing the infinitude of existence. He makes infinite time conceptually accessible by addressing it through the medium of theater. "For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something."<sup>9</sup>

### *The Present*

"For both the present and the timelessness of eternity share the same attributes: they are nonexistent, impossible states; they are literally nothing, a void in which there is no place for human consciousness, which can never hope to liberate itself from the flux and change inherent in time."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kennedy, Andrew K. *Samuel Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. Print. Pg. 23

Another way of approaching this concept would be to imagine a person walking for an undetermined distance on a treadmill. No matter how long they march no physical progress is made. Time passes but the ground continues to expand with each step taken.

<sup>9</sup> Beckett, Samuel, *Watt* from Cohn, 35

Although it is not the full expression of the infinite, which is impossible in and of, itself, it gives an indication towards the infinite. Once the hint is put out there it is then able to be expanded upon or, at the very least, be mused by the reader/audience.

<sup>10</sup> Hale, Jane Alison. *The Broken Window: Beckett's Dramatic Perspective*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1987. Print. p. 33

“What else can there be in this infinite *here*?”<sup>11</sup> The characters of Beckett’s theatrical worlds desire presence, to be at unity with their time and space. To move with time as it expands into the unknown is to occupy it with all attentive and physical states; to, simply, be there and nothing more. This peace with endless time demolishes any notion of a false future and instead carries the subject in time, forever.

As the edges of the time-based landscape expand infinitely wider, chased but never caught by present time, the characters exist in a purgatorial sense of being. Though physically mobile, they are metaphysically stuck “living in an unending present.”<sup>12</sup> This immobility comes from their inability to be present and so are unable to be in time. They are ever-present in space but never capable of being completely united with time because their consciousness is terrified by the notion of infinitude and therefore cannot occupy it without implementing the device of memory. “In [Beckett’s] world finite beings are incompatible with an infinite universe.”<sup>13</sup> They cannot escape their existence in the present because of their failure to *be* present.

The present is a limbo that suspends the characters. Left with an indeterminable amount of time to inhabit, they fill up their existence with repeated action. “Much of the play dramatizes habitual routines, repetitions that stretch and flatten time to an eventless continuum.”<sup>14</sup> These actions are attempts to not only fill

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<sup>11</sup> Beckett, Samuel, *Texts for Nothing*, as described in Hale, 18

<sup>12</sup> Cohn, 46

<sup>13</sup> Cohn, 35

<sup>14</sup> Cohn, 42

time but to reenact the events of the past. Reenactment is the character's method of warding off the fear of an unfamiliar world for indeterminable time. They are never able to achieve a unity with time and space due to their inability to focus their awareness solely on the present. Doing so fills them with anxiety and terror and so they revert to habitual gestures of speech and movement.

Beckett's characters attempt to act in this endless present in a manner they were unable to occupy in their pasts as a tactic to survive the endless unknown. For example, the character in *Not I* is forced to act as she didn't in life to fill the present silence. This particular play centers on a babbling mouth which cyclically recounts the lonely history of a woman who was silent in life and now, in the present, cannot stop "the stream, steady stream"<sup>15</sup> of fragmented phrases. The Beckett character's existence is "purgatorial in the compulsion to rehearse lives again and again, the characters of these worlds are impenitent and unredeemed."<sup>16</sup> The mouth spews a continuous stream of words to make up for its past passivity and meekness. "trying to... delude herself... it was not hers at all... not her voice at all... and no doubt would have... vital she should...."<sup>17</sup> The bodies that inhabit the urns of *Play*, two woman and a man who tell the story of a love triangle before expressing their terror in the present world, speak of their affairs, which ended with all respectively alone. They retell their romances hoping that it may bring comfort to their present condition but when the play comes to a close it ends with the words with which it

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<sup>15</sup> *Not I*, 379

<sup>16</sup> Cohn, 53

<sup>17</sup> 379

began. There is no solace. These actions recede further into the past, leaving the subjects with nothing but their empty memories to give them fleeting company. “It is from the pacing, from literal steps in time, that the first three scenes grow, and yet they gradually depart from time.”<sup>18</sup>

The characters satiate the despair of their situation by playing with words and gestures. Another example can be found in *Footfalls*, in which May paces back and forth, with measured and exact footsteps, while conversing with the imagined voice of her mother. May gestures with pacing to her attempt to breaking up endless time into portions. This playing is but a brief relief for the character. “... no matter how elaborately they are played and described, they always end by returning more or less to the initial situation; any resulting changes have no meaning...”<sup>19</sup> It is an mechanism to cope with their eternal fate: a way of passing the time in their present existence.

“... where to be lasts but an instant where every instant spills in the void the ignorance of having been...”

- Beckett<sup>20</sup>

The characters’ incessant compulsion to reenact their pasts through action and words is not just the task of filling up time but demonstrates the doomed fate of the characters in the “unending present.”

...the past self is reconstructed to accord with the present self, while the present self is imagined to be merely the repetition of this

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<sup>18</sup> Cohn, 55-56

<sup>19</sup> Hale, 35

<sup>20</sup> Cohn, 57

(misconstrued) past self. It is a process that Becket calls “the most necessary, wholesome and monotonous plagiarism- the plagiarism of oneself.”<sup>21</sup>

By accessing the past to create it’s present self, the character is doomed to never have unity with time. To ever be present “is negated by their compulsive attraction to a past and/or future in which they know they will never reside...”<sup>22</sup> As time is moving forward, the characters are reaching back. The only way for characters to cope in the present is by filling it with memory. This is the paradoxical shackle that keeps the characters from achieving peace; and their present existence continues to be diverted by the useless past.

For the audience there is no absolute knowledge of the past. The events told and retold are not presented as the action on stage. The viewers are never presented with the actual event but know of it only through its subjective retelling by the character. The characters extract from their burdened minds moments from the past that they want to recapture. This extraction manifests itself in their compulsion to bring the moment forth and rehearse it again and again. “gave it up gave up and sat down on the steps in the pale morning sun no those steps got no sun somewhere else then gave up... huddled on the doorstep in the old green greatcoat in the pale sun...on the stone the child on the stone...none ever came but the child on the stone...”<sup>23</sup> It is as if they believe by recounting and attempting to

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<sup>21</sup> Connor, 53

<sup>22</sup> Hale, 30

<sup>23</sup> Beckett, Samuel. "That Time." *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. 2nd ed. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006. 385-96. Print, 392 and 393

make present these moments they can rebuild their bodies, make themselves whole again. It becomes what they do as well as what they are: fractured from the present.

History can only move as far back as the subject's earthly existence and is dependent on the character's ability to remember. Beckett articulates this temporal problem when describing the inner worlds of Watt and Murphy. In these texts time, as related to the performance of memory, becomes unstable. "The way resonant memories and fictions are counterpointed against immediate stage presence is vivid... time can be static, liquid and saltatorial."<sup>24</sup> Unlike the steady stream of time's movement forward, as time reaches inward to memory it becomes erratic and eroded.

The erosive texture of time comes from the dissolution of a chronological world experience when placed within the eternally present world. "While on earth, people live through chronological events, but from the viewpoint of timelessness, finite moments crowd together and only the emotional memories linger a while."<sup>25</sup> Human time, reality structured by means of minutes, years, etc, crumbles when placed within the borderless landscape of infinite time. In fact, Beckett deliberately ignores any chronological structure by virtue of placing the expression of past biological events within a temporal realm of the absolute present. "*Not I...* plays the time of single against continuous events, only to blur the distinction in the swift rush of the stage discourse- itself a spurt of human time."<sup>26</sup> The single time from

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<sup>24</sup> Cohn, 57

<sup>25</sup> Cohn, 54

<sup>26</sup> Cohn, 55



Mouth's past, her walking in a field, standing in court, is brought forth for a brief moment before being ripped apart by the continuous landscape of present time.

Another method used to disrupt any structural order of the past is when "Beckett deliberately generalizes the time through such indefinite phrases as "one morning, one night, for the time being... again.""<sup>27</sup> Specificity of when events occur is impossible in a space absent of arborescent time structure. Past time exists not for when but what. The characters are not seeking the time of the event but the event, itself, and the emotional charge it held in their past. The problem is that the events of the past brought into the present have no lasting effect on the character.

The past manifests itself as action but these actions get the characters no nearer to their desire for unity in time, "any resulting changes have no meaning, nor do they allow the characters or plots to "get on" in time and space. Movement is circular, repetitive and insignificant..."<sup>28</sup> It is impossible for the past to alter the state of the character because these memories leave, as Cohn says, emotional imprints but manufacture no substantial progress. Quite simply, the past is empty of any efficacy or meaning when placed within the present landscape of time and it's endless borders.

"It'll never end. I'll never go."  
- *Endgame*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cohn, 53

<sup>28</sup> Hale, 35

<sup>29</sup> Beckett, Samuel. "Endgame." *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. 2nd ed. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006. 89-134. Print.

As the characters inhabit the eternal present, what lies beyond is not the future but, simply, the infinite. In Beckett's writing, beyond the present, there is no salvation or death. There is nothing but the never-ending, expansive limits of time. If the present is occupied with gesture and words, time beyond it is incomprehensible. "Infinity threatens with its darkness and silence."<sup>30</sup> Human consciousness, according to Beckett, cannot conceive of an infinity without framing it using finite methods. To make sense of an unlimited realm, without borders and measure, the conscious constructs a field of what it does recognize: the mystery of night, darkness, as well as, the absence of sound, silence.

What lies beyond the present is not death. There is no death because there is no end.<sup>31</sup> Beckett's characters are extratemporal; existing in a realm outside of time. The infinite surpasses time, it surpasses everything and anything. As Beckett wrote in his essay on Proust, "The Proustian solution consists... in the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because the negation of Time. Dead is dead because time is dead."<sup>32</sup> Time is dead in the sense that it, as definite method of framing the infinite, is destroyed by the vast expansiveness of existence.

It has been theorized that all of Beckett's characters are waiting. This is fairly obvious with some, such as Didi and Gogo<sup>33</sup>, who specify the mysterious Godot coming from a future point to meet them. Waiting, in Beckett's theatrical worlds, is presented as an illusory act. "Waiting... loses significance if the future turns into

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<sup>30</sup> Cohn, 42

<sup>31</sup> The concept of death is empty because the characters do not exist in concrete time.

<sup>32</sup> Hale, 20

<sup>33</sup> Beckett, Samuel. "Waiting for Godot." *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. 2nd ed. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006. 305-20. Print.

the past the moment one reaches it, only to be replaced by another future that will suffer an identical fate.”<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, the characters in Beckett’s later works<sup>35</sup> do not wait for something to come from the infinite abyss beyond their present existence but attempt to exist in their endless present. The characters understand that it is futile to look to the future for salvation or relief from the terror they feel. They understand that there is nothing beyond what they are. “Moreover, characters caught in a run-down cycle do not aspire to a future- they know that they do not have a future.”<sup>36</sup> Their only relief comes from reaching into memory, to events they remember as material, but in the present are unverifiable.

### **Space: Physical and metaphysical landscapes**

“The expanse of space harmonizes with a concomitant expanse of time.”<sup>37</sup>

The physical landscapes in Beckett’s plays are the visual representations of the character’s metaphysical, inner world, that is how their consciousness perceives the world to be. As time, for Beckett, is endless, space also is characterized by the infinite. However, the theatrical landscapes are constructed as a concrete forms through the use of light, object, color and texture. As a whole scenic tableau, it can be read as a metaphysical and material landscape representing the conscious, perceptive mind of the subject. What is inside the subjects mind is made perceptible via the physical landscape. “...individual consciousness becomes the arena for

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<sup>34</sup> Hale, 31

<sup>35</sup> By later I am referring to his plays written between 1963 and 1983.

<sup>36</sup> Kennedy, 23

<sup>37</sup> Cohn, 36

action.”<sup>38</sup> The exploration of Beckett’s physical and metaphysical landscapes must begin with a basic question: what is in the subjects’ conscious, mental space?

“Less is more.”- Samuel Beckett<sup>39</sup>

“Beckett’s landscapes represent and embody thought, abstraction- the contents of mind.”<sup>40</sup> As it is that Beckett’s characters exist in this unending present time, their minds, their stream of consciousness, too, continues to actively attempt to make sense or solve the conundrum of this infinite realm. The setting or space of the short dramatic works seeks to represent these characters’ mental arena. Space acts as a metaphysical illustration to the content of the character. “The Beckettian figure does not stand for an individual human being but rather, the whole stage microcosm stands for it: the setting with scarce ‘last’ things that remained and remain seen in a weak constellation of lights...”<sup>41</sup>

The physical landscape is simultaneously a metaphysical landscape. But how can the abstract contents of the individual consciousness serve as material on stage?<sup>42</sup> And how is this space constructed? What does it hold? The character/subject exists in the space. Objects also exist within the space as does

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<sup>38</sup> Kedzierski, Marek. "The Space of Absence: Image and Voice in Beckett's Later Plays." *Beckett and Beyond*. Ed. Bruce Stewart. Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1999. 155-62. Print. Pg. 158

<sup>39</sup> A note written by Beckett in the margins of his copy of *That Time*. Quote and description of context found in: Duckworth, Colin. "Beckett's Theater: Beyond the Stage Space." *Beckett and Beyond*. Ed. Bruce Stewart. Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1999. 93-101. Print. Pg. 95

<sup>40</sup> Amiran, Eyal. *Wandering and Home: Beckett's Metaphysical Narrative*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993. Print. Pg. 33

<sup>41</sup> Kedzierski, Marek. "The Space of Absence: Image and Voice in Beckett's Later Plays." *Beckett and Beyond*. Ed. Bruce Stewart. Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1999. 155-62. Print. Pg. 161

<sup>42</sup> Kedzierski, 158

light. But metaphysically all these objects are empty. In true Beckett fashion, the answer to the above inquires is simple: nothing.

While this is not materially true, the physical objects within the space are symbolically nothing. The physical landscape contains finite objects, which are then emptied of substance to signify the ineffective presence of the finite in a world of infinitude.

Bion reminds us that there is an essential difference between the geometer's space and the characteristic of mental images. In the latter, an infinite number of lines may pass through any one point but if one attempts to represent such a visual image by points on paper, there would be only a finite amount of lines.<sup>43</sup>

The landscape, as a physical representation can be thought of as a scenic tableau, the exposure of the inside of the character's mind. When placed within the theatrical space, the image is composed of geometric, three dimensional space. The geometer's space cannot depict mental space alone but must be verbally articulated. This awards the appropriate and necessary amount of emphasis on the importance of Beckett's words. "This 'limiting quality' that inheres in all representations of three dimensional space approximates to the points, lines and space of the geometer, does not inhere in mental space until the attempt is made to present it in verbal thought."<sup>44</sup> Beckett's language serves to suture mental and physical space together.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ross, Ciaran. *Beckett's Art of Absence: Rethinking the Void*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print. Pg. 134

<sup>44</sup> “

<sup>45</sup> This will be discussed later in the thesis. What is important to focus on, before it is possible to move further into the subject of the physical space (i.e. the subject, objects, setting etc.) is to redefine emptiness and the void, not in temporal terms, but in relation to the space of the mind.

“The development of a new poetics of empty space for post-war theater is largely based on the connection between the visible empty stage space and the invisible empty space of the mind.”<sup>46</sup> This emptiness of the mind is not in relation to lack of content but rather in relation to an immense spatial expanse where the echoes of what exists in the mind reverberate out. Consciousness exists within the emptiness of the mind; “... the primordial void underlying our consciousness.”<sup>47</sup> Consciousness exists only in relation to the primordial void. Consciousness represents presence, awareness of one's existence. The void is the absence of knowing; it is beyond what can be perceptually verified. They are mutually exclusive, dependent on one another for individual recognition. Together they form the mind space, which Beckett translates into stage space.

This aesthetic of the mind is not found solely in Beckett's short dramatic works but is a concept he began grappling with in his early fictions. “Murphy's sixth chapter is another superb attempt at the description of the mind as locus, in spatial terms, all the more so that it appears in the framework of the world external and heterogeneous to Murphy's mind- the world of big blooming buzzing confusion.”<sup>48</sup> Blooming is an especially appropriate term in describing the expansive quality of Beckett's infinite worlds; a constant pushing outward in all directions with no known barrier to contain its contents.

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<sup>46</sup> Essif, Les. *Empty Figures on an Empty Stage: The Theater of Samuel Beckett and His Generation*. Ed. Timothy Wiles. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001. Print. Pg. 7

<sup>47</sup> Essif, 9

<sup>48</sup> Kedzierski, 157

Even as the theatrical space exists within time and must obey the temporal rules, the emptiness of Beckett's space is constant and eternal. "There is no way out of the endlessness of emptiness; and the inward turn that Beckett's characters eventually take leads to entrapment within an inner empty space."<sup>49</sup> Beckett's plays are offered as an infinitesimal piece of the whole (and expansive) existences' of his characters; a peek into the infinite. The audience is a voyeur to this experience of the infinite, which in return forms a realization or understanding of their own existence in time and space. The lights physically illuminate the scene, giving beginning and ending points to this short episode but not a beginning or ending to the existence of the subject. As the lights come up the subject is already present in the theatrical space. They are brought out of the dark emptiness that they inhabit. They do not exist *in* the space but are *of* the space. The space is constructed based on their perception of their existence in the world.

These spaces defy naturalism or realism, apart from the presence of the physical body, by virtue of their very materiality. Particularly in the later works, Beckett abandoned any hint of realistic settings so as to completely displace the work from the sense time or space that one would associate with realism.<sup>50</sup> Even to describe these spaces as landscapes may be a betrayal to the playwright's intent.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Essif, 65

<sup>50</sup> "Samuel Beckett sees the world as a mysterious place where appearances are deceptive and ultimate reality is rarely perceived. In his fiction Beckett attempts to represent the world as accurately as he can, or as he might put it, to lie about it as little as possible. This is how things are; and if our world looks very different from the one Beckett describes, it may be foolhardy to assume that he is the one who is looking through the wrong end of the telescope."- Rabinovitz

<sup>51</sup> Cohn, instead, addresses the space as "candidly unreal landscape(s), an invisible soulscape... This seems a radical departure from drama as theatricalization of relationships in given time and space, but theatricalizes the embers of time and space and relationships within the mind of the protagonist..."- p. 24

“... as Beckett often suggests, there is nothing left to see, or at least no way of seeing whatever might be left...”<sup>52</sup>

Beckett’s empty stage works to present a finite image of the infinite expanse of the character’s existence. Physically, objects inhabit the space. However, these objects are drained of substance by virtue of their location in the past, which holds no significance in the present. There is no realistic setting for the plays, reflecting the uncharitable geography of the conscious mind. Any inkling of an interior setting is incomplete and ambiguous. Although it is necessary to dramatize the infinite, and thus present it in a finite and material form, Beckett pays tribute to the uncertainty of the infinite through indistinguishable settings: both physically and metaphysically empty spaces. For example: the theatrical landscape for *Waiting for Godot*, one of Beckett’s most famous “settings,” is described as gray landscape, empty of anything but a lone, leafless tree. Although it is clear they are somewhere “outside” by way of the tree, the full nature of the theatrical world is ambiguous and nameless.

The stage space is empty in respect to what we customarily expect in theater. This includes a backdrop, set pieces, and other signs of realism. “A realistic décor may appeal to the eye, but cannot compete with the suggestiveness of an empty one...”<sup>53</sup> In his earlier works, Beckett used objects or scenery to give the illusion towards his ideas on existence (i.e. the country road in *Godot*<sup>54</sup>). In his later work he sheds these symbols of emptiness in favor of the closest thing: the void, empty

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<sup>52</sup> Hale, 19

<sup>53</sup> Duckworth, 96

<sup>54</sup> Essif, 64



stage. Essif approaches the physically empty stage as an absence in his book,

*Empty Figure on an Empty Stage:*

From a physical point of view, one considers this space as potentially fill-able, believing that it is meaningful with respect to its potential to be filled. For the scholar or practitioner who approaches emptiness from this angle, the emptiness is essentially an absence, usually the absence of the “weight of naturalistic illusion- the lamp, the wall, the painting on the wall... or the fluid discourse of narrative.”<sup>55</sup>

The fill-ability of the space holds an important tension in relation to the existence of the character. The empty space isn't designed to give the potential to be filled with objects, but, instead, the character terrifyingly perceives it to be filled with words and memory. The empty space is fill-able in that the character perceives it as a void which is a vastly overwhelming concept and to distract from this terrifying possibility, is filled with their words and actions derived from the past. This action produces words, stories, the recanting of past events, put out into an empty space that does not retain but dissolves and disperses the words into eternity. As these memories are brought forth, so are the familiar, inhabited spaces of the character's past in their the mind and that of the spectator's, who associates their personal spaces with those described. These memories are ultimately dissipated within the sparse stage space of the “present.” “In Beckett's theater of the 1970's... tension grows between the spare invariant setting and the memory of lived-in spaces.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 64

<sup>56</sup> Cohn, 31

The few physical objects that are found in the settings of the later plays (the rocking chair in *Rockaby*, the window in *A Piece of Monologue*) give, not a hint at emptiness, but, are semiotically empty. These objects are brought forth from the past but have no meaningful place in the present. They are the objects that the characters use to act, to speak, staving off the spatial and temporal void. For example: in the play *Rockaby*, a woman (W) rocks in a chair as she recounts details of her life. The chair enables her to methodically escape to the past and attempts to rhythmically break up the infinite time with the action of rocking back and forth. They are the tools by which the character wanders eternally in indeterminable time and space.

The short works whose settings indicate a defined interior space have a very specific purpose for implicating a recognizable earthly space. For example, it is apparent that the character is existing in an interior setting in the play *A Piece of Monologue*. The protagonist explores his past while existing within a space constructed from wall, lamp and window. The window, especially, provides the experience of looking outwards from within. Similarly in *Endgame*, these interior spaces aren't random but spaces constructed from the protagonist's past, their lived-in space. "... the gray shelter... is a spatial metaphor for a box in time; though the shelter is the family living room, it cannot be confused with the living rooms of bourgeois drama..."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cohn, 42

The living space isn't fully fleshed out but gives only enough clues to an interior space. It is free of non-essential items. This stark quality highlights setting based on memory. The setting is created in relation to how the protagonist remembers his home, but, as it has been said time and again, remnants of the past disintegrate in the realm of the ever-lasting entropic present. The character's consciousness creates this setting as a sanctuary from the terror of wandering infinitely. However, this sanctuary does not console or aid him in any way because it lacks any long lasting effect on their state of existence.

In contrast to the few interior settings found in the short dramatic works, exterior settings are present in almost all of them. However, these settings are not presented as part of the material setting. They are present via the text repeatedly recited by the protagonist. The character fills the physically empty space with memories, many set in rural locations. Mouth in *Not I* speaks of an April meadow and of a mound of grass in "Croker's Acres." Krapp, through his tapes, revisits laying in the throws of young love making on a rock by the sea. *That Time* offers us a myriad of exterior settings from memory, including a train station, a wheat field with a young lover. The recantation of these exterior settings from the characters' human lives can be explained as more than just filling space. They represent an odyssey to the deepest waters of consciousness.

Voyages have been long used in literature as metaphors for human life, and Beckett often borrows this image to portray the character's movement through the space and time of their earthly existence. Sometimes, and most frequently in the early works, the journey takes place at least nominally in geographical space: Watt goes to Knott's house... Pozzo and Lucky are going to the fair; Maddy Rooney fetches

her husband at the train station. All of these trips, however, may be read on another level as descents into the inner realm of consciousness...<sup>58</sup>

The methods as to how these characters make these journeys is another important aspect of the exterior settings brought forth via memory. “Beckett’s heroes ride trains, trams, bicycles, auto-cycles; they walk with the help of sticks and crutches; they crawl through leaves and mud and rest in ditches.”<sup>59</sup> Trains, particularly, act as a metaphor for the inability of the past to effectively perform within the expansiveness of the infinite present. *All That Fall*, a radio play, bares a foreshadowing of what Beckett later makes clear in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. As Maddy waits to pick up her husband at the station the train doesn’t come on time. When it finally arrives Dan explains that the train was delayed by a halt during the journey, not far from the station, for reasons that are unknown. In *Krapp*, when the protagonist describes the old tram tracks, the train no longer running, the insubstantiation of these journeys is illustrated. Beckett uses the image of the desolate tracks, a memory of an exterior setting, to express the displacement of the past within the present landscape.

Although the landscapes of Beckett’s shorter plays represent the consciousness of the character, their inner realm, the exterior settings are located in the depths of that inner realm. They are at the core of the mind, stored in memory. The stone in *That Time* gives the protagonist a sense of presence in a time and space that used to be but the existence of the stone within the present is anything

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<sup>58</sup> Hale, 23

<sup>59</sup> Rabinovitz

but concrete or grounding. “If one were to gather the fragmented memories of the stone...one could suggest that *That Time* develops the sense of an irreducible and unchangeable solitude and solipsism, the stone serving as a permanent locus, a metaphor, and a metonymy of such a state of solitariness...”<sup>60</sup>

The memory of the exterior setting, the stone, gives the character momentary relief from the horror of reality. The ability to remember and focus on the stone allows for the protagonist to falsely believe that he isn’t completely alone. But when placed within the landscape of infinite space and time, emptiness overtakes the “ ‘... impressionist landscape of sunlight, blue sky “and wheat turning yellow”... ‘the feelings of confusion, solitude, desolation and death that flood in’”<sup>61</sup>

As Beckett continued to experiment with ways to visually represent the conscious perception of the mind in the theatrical space he moved, in his later plays, in a direction of complete ambiguity. These plays give no indication of interior or exterior but instead aim to manifest the space of the mind. The only objects within these spaces are the character and set pieces necessary for proper placement of the character in the space, as specified in painstaking detail by the stage directions. “[Lights] fade up on W in rocking-chair facing front downstage slightly off centre

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<sup>60</sup> Ross, 159

<sup>61</sup> The interior quote within the larger quote is from James Knowlson’s “Damned to Fame,” 1996. Knowlson is a well-respected and prolific Beckett scholar. He is the only writer that was authorized by the playwright to pen a biography, resulting in the completion of “Fame” seven years after Beckett’s death. I read the biography for preliminary background information during my early research stages but didn’t connect it back until I saw it used within Ross’ theory in “Beckett’s Art of Absence: Rethinking the Void,” 159.

audience left... Light subdued on chair. Rest of stage in dark. Subdued spot on face constantly throughout..."<sup>62</sup>

What remains the same in this ambiguous space, as was described previously, is the characters' obsessive compulsion to fill the infinite, empty space with their memory. The spaces of these works isn't a representation of worldly space, but a performance of the experience of a consciousness, which holds the characters as memory objects drained of meaning.<sup>63</sup>

Object: "... supportive companions against the threatening emptiness."<sup>64</sup>

Objects were not placed in the performance by Beckett without reason. The rocking chair in *Rockaby*, tape recording machine in *Krapp's Last Tape*, rubbish heap in *Breathe* are all personally connected to the protagonists' past. The chair is the link from the female protagonist in *Rockaby* to the memories of her mother. Krapp uses the machine to revisit his most cherished events of the past. The trash heap is the compost pile of earthly existence's remnants.

The past objects are used in the wanderings of the character as they attempt to gain peace. *Rockaby's* protagonist rocks so as pass the time of the present condition in a tolerable manner, to ward off the terror of the beyond. The faceless, shrouded figures in *Quad* pace in a puzzle of lines and circles, around one another.

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<sup>62</sup> *Rockaby*, 433 and 435

<sup>63</sup> The specific plays working towards this aesthetic include: *That Time*, *Not I*, *Rockaby*, *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *What Where* and even the brief *Breathe*, which is void of any human character and instead dictates the space of the mind as a garbage heap; unrecognizable of setting and presenting only that of decaying rot.

<sup>64</sup> Ross, 129

Krapp listens over and over again to his tapes, searching for a lost moment he wishes to recapture. Although these objects and actions exist in the present, they are derived from and used in the pursuit of the acquisition of the past.

Even the objects that frame the space, as in the use of windows in the lived-in-spaces setting of *A Piece of Monologue*, act in relation to the past. The window setting is based on the home the protagonist inhabited during his earthly existence, and functions as a portal, which connects the past to the present. It is left open for the past to invade the present and the past is constantly streaming in via the open window. The window in this short work represents the character's inability to stop revisiting his past. "Any object that may serve as a temporal link between present and past is quickly emptied of meaning, such as the 'unknown' tree which seems to function as a thing-in-itself, a place-in-itself that is unknowable but can be represented by phantasies, dreams and memories."<sup>65</sup>

The indication of the past by these objects does more than to empty the present from the space but counteracts the events within the space. The characters seek their goal of peace in the present but do so using objects which belong to the past, thus they are incapable of achieving their desire. "The stage reality within the mimetic space is often a pretext for evocation of another reality- another place, another time, another self- a negation of the importance (or solidity) of the events within the mimetic space."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ross, 133

<sup>66</sup> Duckworth, 95

Ironically, if the characters purged themselves of the past, the items, the setting, and their habitual need to repeat the moments of regret, they would finally gain their desire in the realization that the present nothingness is reality.

Subject: the body as object

“For Beckett the quintessential figure is the head, with the world as ground. The head, of course, is part of the body, a part of anti-mind, and not of mind. But the head is more than just a figure for the mind- it also contains the mind and somehow defines it.”<sup>67</sup>

In a number of Beckett’s short dramatic works the only object present is the protagonist.<sup>68</sup> As is demonstrated in the above quotation, Beckett appreciated the figure of the head for its use in performing and containing the mind. This is established in the setting of some of his earlier plays including *Endgame* where the house resembles a skull. In his later works he moved to using character, the body, itself, as the setting of the mind. *That Time* presents just the face and head of the character as he mulls over the beloved moments of his life. The head is the representation of consciousness.

It should not be assumed that the character is a literal person. The characters in Beckett’s works, their bodies, are simply a material representation of how they perceive themselves.<sup>69</sup> The bodily form of the character is a way of performing consciousness in a way that can be understood. “... dismembered or

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<sup>67</sup> Amiran, 34

<sup>68</sup> The only thing visible in the spaces of *Not I*, *What Where*, *That Time* and *Footfalls* is the body of the character gesticulating repeatedly in the endless present of time.

<sup>69</sup> Obviously it is impossible to exist as a just a mouth.



incorporeal creatures... It became a theater of body parts and ghosts..."<sup>70</sup> Like Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*, consciousness takes form in an object that is visually perceptible. In Beckett's case it is a corporal image, the body or part of it.<sup>71</sup>

The subject is not in denial or ignorant of its situation. "In neither case does perception cease; on the contrary, the souls in both realms are acutely aware of their condition, of the reasons for which they are experiencing it, and of its permanence and immutability."<sup>72</sup> They understand that their earthly existence was just one frame of the whole. This is why the characters do not ever attempt to physically escape the space. Instead they act, speak, and move in an obsessively habitual manner as a way of coping with their existence by passing the time. The habitual actions are a mechanism to push away the terrifying prospect of true endlessness. Habitual action, though empty, gives them a momentary feeling of accomplishment or significance. "They cannot rely on a past history to confirm their own existence, their own subjectivity; but they can define themselves, even if it is only from moment to moment, in the actions and the words that they perform day after day and night after night."<sup>73</sup>

Whether the action taken by the characters is verbal, as in the case of *What Where, Not I* and *That Time* or physical, *Rockaby* and *Footfalls*, opposing sentiments give a tension to the habits. The characters occupy the present state of

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<sup>70</sup> Ross, 158

<sup>71</sup> In some cases the body and voice are disjoint, separate from one another to further explain the anguish experienced by the character.

<sup>72</sup> Hale, 35

<sup>73</sup> Pattie, David. "Space, Time and the Self in Beckett's Late Theater." *Modern Drama* 43.3 (2000). *UTPJOURNALSonline*. Web. 12 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.Samuel-Beckett.net/space4a.html>>.

existence because living as a finite body in an earthly world is not what makes up all of existence. Beyond the earthly death of the body, one's consciousness continues to exist for all of eternity in time and space. Life isn't enough and the characters are aware of this. However they constantly recount their earthly lives because they long for the concreteness of a world that is familiar, a place and time that they understand. All the while they know this concreteness cannot be grasped again. "...we encounter characters whose subjectivity can never be fully incarnated, since their place in the actions and the words of the play can never be grasped, even from moment to moment. As Beckett told Billie Whitelaw, M in *Footfalls* is "not all there." The comment applies to all the characters in the later works, characters whose subjectivity is disturbingly evanescent, performed as it is in fragments of action that have no clear temporal or spatial connection with each other. These late plays are still studies in absence; now, though, they are studies of the partially absent self."<sup>74</sup>

In completing the empty space, the subjects themselves are emptied. The tool they use to perform their subjectivity is derived from the past, which means nothing in the present. "... the person long sought after, namely the Beckettian 'I... is being made absent by the action...'"<sup>75</sup> Aside from the fact that the physical form of the character is a mere representation of the mind, the actions that they exert themselves to do are purposeless. "The no-thing, the ever repeated and repeatable 'nothing to be done is everything but a negation- 'not doing anything'- but rather a

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<sup>74</sup> Pattie

<sup>75</sup> Kedzierski, 161

constitutive action, a doing nothing statement.”<sup>76</sup> It is clear that they are doing something. They are speaking, pacing, thinking, all physical actions but there is no substance or meaningfulness attributed to them in the present. The characters can continue to babble on forever, and they will, but it cannot and will not change their present condition.

These actions cannot alter the eternal present because they are derived from the past. To alter an entire universe with action gives a character powers beyond it’s abilities. In addition, numerous moments in the characters’ past were unfulfilled or failures during their earthly lives. Mouth in *Not I* woes on about “her” inability to speak in life. Happiness for the three lovers in *Play* never occurred and each wound up alone. And for Krapp “The here and now is empty, so he escapes into the there and then, the place and time of aspiration (failed) and Love (lost).”<sup>77</sup>

The protagonist is compelled to keep on with action even though it is not the way to achieve peace with being. This condemns them to change position constantly in attempting to see the un-seeable. This shifting position is the action, the repeated yammering of text and, in some plays, a physical wandering of the space. The characters, upon committing the action, realize that the consolation it offers has vanished and must seek another position. “Just as the right moment never arrives for Beckett’s characters, neither do they ever manage to find themselves in the right

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<sup>76</sup> Cohn, 131

<sup>77</sup> Duckworth, 94

place. Wherever they are, their desire transports them to another place, which, once attained, becomes another “here” from which they yearn to escape.”<sup>78</sup>

For text-based actions, like the Mouth’s confession and the lover’s story of betrayal, the new position results in rearranging the narrative. They do not just repeat but intermix parts as well; “...the wandering of the word.”<sup>79</sup> For the characters engaged in physical action the shifting is the wandering. May in *Footfalls* paces and *Rockaby*’s W must rock back when forth achieves nothing and vice versa. “Beckett’s subject moves out of one room, one container, only to find another shelter- or wanders to shelter only to leave again.”<sup>80</sup> Containers are places, spaces that the characters occupy while existing within the larger void but “Since all the places share the same inadequacy, they become one undifferentiated space which it is futile to attempt to leave.”<sup>81</sup>

The futility of the actions, emanates from the reality that in order to gain perspective and peace with their existence, the world in which they are, the ability to see the whole is necessary. One cannot come to an understanding by seeing only a fraction of the entity. But, once again the never ending nature of the world, the temporality, the space, existence, itself, negates this possibility. “...one may read them as a... lack of visual perspective, which has been hindered by his inability to stand outside the space he calls his “region” in spite of all his wanderings. The reason he offers for never leaving his region is simple: the boundaries seemed too

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<sup>78</sup> Hale, 33

<sup>79</sup> Amiran, 33

<sup>80</sup> Amiran, 35

<sup>81</sup> Hale, 33

far away.”<sup>82</sup> There is no standing outside of the infinite. They continue to act despite knowing its futility because they must heroically “go on.”

To surrender to time and space would mean to cease examination and analysis. Unlike the finite body, however, the thinking mind cannot kill itself but must consciously tell itself to cease analysis, something that Beckett’s characters are too terrified to attempt. Existence, in Beckett’s works, is a circular trap. “Beckett’s description of life in a closed cylinder where there are no names, no voices, no stories, no reasons- nothing but moving and resting.”<sup>83</sup> Beckett uses the circular quality of the character’s actions to represent the endless cycle of infinite existence or as Watt says “a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time.”<sup>84</sup> “Further, when the structure of action is nearer to a spiral moving inward than to an arrow moving outward, then the present moment- the here and now of action... becomes all-important.”<sup>85</sup> The circles, the individual character’s existence, swirl down into the larger realm of time and space that encompasses the character. They do not disappear or end but become faint within the expansive void. When the subject disappears at the end of the play it does not mean that he/she has found peace with his/her existence.

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<sup>82</sup> Hale, 24

<sup>83</sup> Hale, 25

<sup>84</sup> Beckett, Samuel. *Watt*. New York City: Grove, 1953. Print. Pg 128-129

<sup>85</sup> Kennedy, 22

Light: Illuminating and isolating the dark, infinite void

“The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness around me I feel less alone. (Pause.) In a way. (Pause.) I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to... (hesitates) ...me. (Pause.)”

- Krapp's Last Tape<sup>86</sup>

The play itself is a snap shot of the perpetual present; an infinitesimal segment of the endless state of being. Light signals when this snap shot occurs and performs an extremely important role in the construction of the physical and metaphysical landscapes. The illumination of the scenic tableau takes the work from being a solely audio/soundscape to an embodied theatrical experience. It deciphers what is known and unknown, what is onstage and off-stage, what is here and what is “beyond.” Illumination isolates one from the dark of infinite time and space, and creates a second space, the scenic representation of that character's consciousness. It can both permit and deny the presence of the individual. It decides when or if the subject is seen and heard from the dark or if they remain unnoticed among all the existent, one of immeasurable many who share their same fate.

The invisible is beyond the illuminated stage space; it is the whole of endless time and space. The visible, on the other hand, is performed as the here and now. It is not anti-space but “... the diegetic space- a very much ‘being,’ even though not visible to the eye.”<sup>87</sup> However, the space that is immediate in relation to a theatrical audience is that which is seen and therefore knowable. Beckett uses light “... to create dynamic relationships between the seen and the unseen areas of the stage,

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<sup>86</sup> 217

<sup>87</sup> Duckworth, 97

making the unseen a vital element in the dramatic experience. In the later plays, light is the chief tool for creating this sense of double space.”<sup>88</sup> Because the light appears, the unseen is, in a paradoxical way, illuminated as well and imbued with meaning. Tension between the double spaces activates the character’s impulse to act. The unseen, the dark, is unknown in its substance and limits, so it is terrifying. The character’s actions are to ward off this fear of the dark known.

The emptiness of the visible space is quite full in comparison to the barrenness of the unseen void. “The visible bareness already makes a powerful impact, but Beckett increases it by building up the impression of an off-stage area that infinitely extends the bareness and emptiness and multiples the opportunities for wandering freely.”<sup>89</sup> The illuminated space of the stage is not physically empty but is a representation of such. For example: the landscape in *A Piece of Monologue* includes the window, lamp, etc. that are physically present but which are items that the character associates with his past and, thus, are empty of meaning.

The character is also an object that when illuminated is contrasted with the expansive darkness. The physical landscape is constructed around the character to perform the perceived space by the character. Light further aids this effort by isolating the subject. For example, the landscape of *That Time* is made up of a singular object: the head of the protagonist surrounded by darkness. The landscape

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<sup>88</sup> Worth, Katherine. "The Space and the Sound in Beckett's Theater." *Beckett the Shape Changer*. Ed. Katherine Worth. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975. 183-218. Print. pg. 185

<sup>89</sup> Worth, 186

of darkness surrounding the head acts to present what the conscious self perceives the world to be.

The isolation of the subject by light also enhances the loneliness of the subject's current state of existence. The characters are isolated from the other elements that construct the theatrical world, alone in their own consciousness and kept company only by their memories. Within these memories there is also a common theme of alienation in numerous character's earthly existence. For example, the Mouth's speech in *Not I* is centered on feeling estranged from the world and people associated with her earthly, bodily existence. This experience is manifested in the plays through the physical isolation of her mouth [by light], as well as, the visible distance between the mouth and Auditor who is uncomfortable to the violent cries. "Movement consists in a simple sideways raising of the arms from sides and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion. It lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third."<sup>90</sup> The alienation of one body part by light gives the experience of lone consciousness in the present.

Finally, in *Play*, light not only has the capability to illuminate the narrative but, further, the characters are only able to be heard when the light shines upon them. The story of their ill-fated loves are crafted based on where the light shines and when. However, when the light turns off the story does not end, it is still being told but recedes back into the dark and is unknowable. Light acts as a sort of pseudo-narrator figure cross-weaving the different stories, producing echoes of

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<sup>90</sup> *Not I*, Note from stage direction on Auditor movement, 375



certain phrases or words.<sup>91</sup> Though the light does not allow for one character's entire story to be told, it does make visible the whole memory because singular events are told from the fragmented perspective of every character involved. "The spot is making the play, in fact, out of the individual narratives; it has to, the characters themselves are almost totally incapable of seeing beyond their own parts."<sup>92</sup> They can't see beyond their part of the memory because in existing as consciousness they are alone with themselves; they cannot share their consciousness with another's.

### Color

"Grey. Grey! GRREY! Light black. From pole to pole."  
- *Endgame*<sup>93</sup>

The basic color palette in Beckett's short works consists of black and white. The hair of many of Beckett's characters is white (as specified in the stage directions). Likewise, he also makes clear that the costumes or robes worn by several of his subjects are black. Black is the representation of nothingness while white is associated with light and visibility. Black and white: the two sides of Beckett's theatrical structure, known and unknown.

Grey, as the middle ground between black and white represents the decay of the earthly body but also the endless existence of the conscious. Where white is

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<sup>91</sup> concept detailed by Kennedy, 99

<sup>92</sup> Worth, 200

<sup>93</sup> 107

visible and full of meaning, and black is the unknown beyond, a death of knowing, grey is the decay. The urns in *Play* hold the lovers, frozen in decomposition, half ash with a head from which to speak and hold their conscious'. Likewise in *Footfalls*, "the daughter tattered and gray- give radiance to the darkness of eternity."<sup>94</sup> She (her conscious mind) is not dead therefore she cannot be black. Her existence, as all the characters' existences', in the present is, though infinitesimal, there within the infinite and cannot disappear. The grey color acts as definition, a muted highlighting from within the dark of the infinite realm of time and space.

### **Sound: The sonic landscapes and the presence of silence**

"The play turns into a spectacle of hearing and seeing, measured by a sequence of visual and aural signals that interact, join and split, mirror each other, showing agreement and conflict."<sup>95</sup>

The physical and metaphysical landscapes of Beckett's short dramatic works create a visual representation of the characters' minds, but how does the 'seen' interact with the 'heard' to construct a whole theatrical experience? The visual and the aural are not mutually exclusive elements, but compliment and bring out the other's efficacy. "In Beckett's case, his extreme economy of voice and image creates the ideal environment for optimum symbolic resonance."<sup>96</sup> The sounds present in

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<sup>94</sup> Cohn, 57

<sup>95</sup> Kedzierski, 159

<sup>96</sup> Lukehart, Robert. "The Subjective Imperative of Voice: Reflections on Samuel Beckett." *Free Hosting, Web Hosting, Domain Names and Web Design | Fortunecity*. Samuel-beckett.net, 1998. Web. 18 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/brambles/143/beckett.html>>.

Beckett's works, especially, play a crucial part in the completion of theatrical experience. To interact with the visual landscapes of the plays, Beckett took great care in creating soundscapes through his specificity of language and meticulous instruction on delivery. These soundscapes are created from the text, which, when delivered by the character, flows in a cycle of repetition, rhythm, tone and cadence that musicalizes the spoken word. The language is a sonic score punctuated by breath and the specific placement of pauses. Key to Beckett's construction of the soundscape is silence. Beckett's characters "... speak because of the difficulty in facing the very silence [they] crave."<sup>97</sup> The soundscape of text explains the character's inability to gain harmony with silence.

"Words fail us."<sup>98</sup>

It is not what is said that is significant, but the manner as to which it is expressed, in this lyrical, cyclical expression of sound. The words are meaningless because, as previously stated, they are rooted in the past. The material world of the character's past is an illusion of reality where words are regarded as a tangible object, making them part of this false materiality. They are treated by the character as a means of "doing something," as distraction from true presence. When brought forth they have no effect on the world, but, instead, extend the gap between the character and the unity with the world. In an existence that is infinite there is nothing to do or say. As Beckett wrote in agreement with Dante, there is "nothing

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<sup>97</sup> Frisch, Jack E. "Beckett and Havel: A Personification of Silence." *Beckett and Beyond*. Ed. Bruce Stewart. Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1999. 115-26. Print. Pg. 125

<sup>98</sup> Beckett, Samuel. "Human Wishes." *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. Ed. Ruby Cohn. New York: Grove, 1984. 154-62. Print.

with which to express” because there is “nothing to express.”<sup>99</sup> There is no physical form nor form of language that exists because by speaking about nothing as if it were something it is implied that there is something other than the here and now. What is to be done is nothing because in so doing one finally is one with existence. Text, language gives rise to the struggle of the character to achieve this immersion into the infinite realm of time and space.

Beckett is quoted as saying that “Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.”<sup>100</sup> Although it is antithetical to gaining their longed desire, the characters continue to ramble endlessly. The fear of the void [or silence] keeps them speaking. It is because of this existential terror, the possibility that existence is an endlessness of nothing that they stave off the void with speech. They doom themselves to repeat the words over and over again. While time and space are infinite, the words of their stories are not. Their material existence in “life” was only temporary and is capable of only producing a limited amount of matter so the text must be duplicated, retold and repeated from a finite number of angles and points.

Beckett creates cyclical text through the use of end caps at the start and end of the text. For example, in *Not I* the mouth begins with text about the beginning (her conception) of her life. “... out... into the world... this world... tiny little thing... before its time... what?... girl?... called... no matter... parents unknown... he having vanished... thin air... no sooner buttoned up his breeches...”<sup>101</sup> and the

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<sup>99</sup> Hale, 41

<sup>100</sup> Samuel Beckett. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved December 19, 2011, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/samuel\\_beckett.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/samuel_beckett.html)

<sup>101</sup> 376

language at the end of the play suggests her death but also quickly loops back to the text from the beginning at the very last lines. Although the play begins with her life's start, the end gives the impression that this linearity is not purposeful, that she just continues to loop back to her beginning when she reaches the end, all because she must continue to gesture with language in order to distract her terror of the world in which she exists. "In common with Beckett's longer plays, the work is cyclical, ending where it begins, expressing an eternity of mental torment."<sup>102</sup> There is no actual beginning or ending to her endless babble. She tells the story of her earthly existence, but because she must repeat it to ward off the void the end is an introduction to the beginning, exposing the repetition.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas Mouth only visibly tells her story once, looping at the very end, May [in *Footfalls*] punctuates small sections with the same words. May continues to pace and so she starts another section of text only to come to the same conclusion each time. "...revolving it all... in your poor mind" The very repetition of these words at the end of each section "suggests an infinite cycle," even a "spiraling into endlessness."<sup>104</sup> Beckett emphasizes this futile spiraling of the character's incessant need for words by writing several examples of the loop in *Footfalls*. "Will you never have done? Will you never have done...revolving it all? It? It all. In your

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<sup>102</sup> Baldwin, Helene L. *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1981. Print. Pg. 136

<sup>103</sup> This circling of the text, looping beginning and end of the story/text is also seen in *Play* and is can be argued for *That Time and A Piece of Monologue*. *Footfalls* make quite clear the circling of text through multiple repetition of the same section of text.

<sup>104</sup> Pountney, Rosemary. *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-76: From All That Fall to Footfalls with Commentaries on the Late Plays*. Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1998.

poor mind. It all. It all.”<sup>105</sup>

Repeated language in the soundscape takes on an additional layer of purpose beyond the looping structure. The articulated repetition of specific words or sections in the text creates a musical quality. Kedzierski says of Beckett that “While he had been primarily interested in the musicality of texts in general, rhythm of speech, articulation of words, now his interest took on the form of specific experiments... his concern with the materiality of vocal articulation was expressed in experimenting with specific articulatory processes, especially with continuity and discontinuity of the flow of words.”<sup>106</sup> The flow is interrupted by the finite amount that is capable of being told so in an attempt to continue their terrified stream of words they return back to a specific section of text, much like the device of the chorus in songwriting.

“The full replay of the sequences then reinforced an eked out the audience’s partial understanding of the first round: completing a verbal puzzle as well as a musical pattern.”<sup>107</sup> As the text continues to loop in its cyclical pattern, a musical round is constructed in the works with multiple characters. The round is performed (beyond the first repetition) in the hope that some order will emerge from the musical disorder. A musical round is a song that is performed by multiple voices, but never at the same time. The words and melody are sang by one, and then followed closely by another and another until the whole song is being performed at once by voices at different points. The words are repeated over by the multiple

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<sup>105</sup> *Footfalls*, 403

<sup>106</sup> 159

<sup>107</sup> Kennedy, 92

voices, giving different tones to the same parts. The text of *Play* is an example of music made from a linguistic round. The text is fragmented but ultimately leads to some semblance of a narrative, though still not completely clear. The speakers are “seeming telling the same story from different angles,”<sup>108</sup> attempting to tell the whole but cut off from being heard by the light. When one stops and another begins it often repeats sections that have already been said by another, sometimes word for word and then continues with his/her version. Although they are not in time with one another, nor ever heard speaking all at once, their stories come together to make a hazy whole. “We hear brief extracts from a story the three speakers proceed to tell in such a way that the three series of information ultimately converge, even though they diverge in timing. There is no unison; the sound effect is that of a round.”<sup>109</sup>

In his works involving multiple speakers, Beckett creates a linguistic score, a complex, multi-dimensional musical piece. “But Beckett’s interest in music went further than incorporating snatches of songs bars of music into his work, many of his plays and prose works actually resemble musical compositions, such as *Endgame* and *Play*, which he describes as “a string quartet” and “a score for five pitches” respectively.”<sup>110</sup> For the most part in the short dramatic works, the presence of the music went beyond the literal inclusion as part of the soundscape. Instead, the music is the articulated sound of the text being spoken. The voice is

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<sup>108</sup> Kennedy, 99

<sup>109</sup> Kennedy, 93

<sup>110</sup> West, Sarah. "Say It: The Performative Voice in the Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett." Thesis. Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2008. 2008. Web. 16 Dec. 2011. <<http://tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/7483/tsw.pdf?sequence=1>>. Pgs 117-118.

utilized as a musical instrument. The more instruments in the play the more full the song. It is not a score made up of single notes but "... the rapid polyphonic chant of the ghost-speakers."<sup>111</sup> The individual melodies, slightly different for each speaker, blend into one larger concerto. Each voice acts as soloist and accompaniment in creating the whole work.

The articulation of this musicality of the text is highly reliant on the tension between exactitude of timing in the delivery and the ability to express the words on an impulse driven by the indefinite nature of the present state. Beckett's characters speak out of a need to immediately act in the present. This impulse is then formed into words that weave a score from their sound. Without timing the musicality is lost but if the tone of voice becomes flat or rehearsed the audience will not believe that this voice is truly driven by inner turmoil. "As in music, precision balances spontaneity, and emotions find their highly formalised expression beyond the mimetic."<sup>112</sup> The vocal expression cannot merely imitate the emotions driving the sound but calls for authenticity from within the character, that which comes from a body remaining present in the theatrical landscape and allowing the rising emotions to inform it.

"The music of Voice resides in the alliteration, imagery and repetition of the most metaphysically suggestive words."<sup>113</sup>

The text and voice create the sound, the music of the character's endless state

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<sup>111</sup> Kennedy, 95

<sup>112</sup> Kedzierski, 159

<sup>113</sup> Lukehart



of being. Vocal fragmentation performs the experience of dislocation in time and space while repetition, by virtue of its infinite looping, allows for some gathering of a story to be possible. “They are speaking so faintly and quickly that only repetition... will allow an audience to connect those fragments into a text.”<sup>114</sup>

The repetition of text (and gesture: pacing, act of speaking etc.) during the performance is only that which is seen. “But it is mainly through verbal repetition that Beckett conveys the interminable length of time.”<sup>115</sup> It is incalculable how many times the character will loop and repeat. The repeated babbling no longer takes on any linguistic meaning but ultimately becomes pure sound. The repetition and fragmentation of the text makes clear that time is not linear in the “world” of Beckett’s plays. With each cycle of the text the characters moves further and further away from any earthly sense of time and space. The audience, listening to this broken and fluxous condition of language “is just as dislocated in time”<sup>116</sup> as the characters.

#### Cadence: Rhythmic flow and speed

“It is a rhythm that Beckett is to use repeatedly in the later monologues, and one can see why: it amounts to dramatisation of the inner voices of thought, that is, fragments of thoughts emerging out of solipsistic isolation, as if at the bidding of a cruel task-master.”<sup>117</sup>

Much akin to a musical score, where breath marks and breaks of sound are

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<sup>114</sup> Kennedy, 93

<sup>115</sup> Cohn, 45

<sup>116</sup> Pattie

<sup>117</sup> Kennedy, 98

indicated by notation. Beckett's scripts use punctuation and his infamous gesture of "pause" to conduct the flow of sound produced by the character's voice. "... he carefully selects and orders words to create a certain cadence or mood, and employs punctuation to alternate between pausing and uninterrupted gush of language."<sup>118</sup> This punctuation comes in the form of stage direction. "[Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible. After 3 seconds eyes open.]"<sup>119</sup> Whether it be the placement of pauses, silences or, as in *Play* and *A Piece of Monologue*, "the rhythm of light dictating the rhythm of sound"<sup>120</sup>, the flow is determined by the very specific pauses when otherwise the sound is written as a continuum. Although he sought to show the irrational human desire to ward off the void through sound, Beckett also demonstrates the musicality of sound as it punctuates silence.

"In the process, the language fragments and fissures even as it pours forth; whether truncated or percussive, or accumulative and speling, the effect is equally one of impending exhaustion..."<sup>121</sup> The rhythmic flow of the short plays fall on a spectrum ranging from violent and near constant sound to rapid alternation of sound and silence to long periods of both. *A Piece of Monologue* situates itself on one side of this spectrum. Silence frames sound, at the beginning and end, but once the sound begins to flow from the voice it does not stop for even one breathe or pause. The works of *Not I*, *Play*, and *Footfalls* "share the dominant staccato rhythm..."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> West

<sup>119</sup> *That Time*, 390

<sup>120</sup> Kennedy, 99

<sup>121</sup> Laws, Catherine. "Beckett and Unheard Sound." *Beckett and Nothing: Trying to Understand Beckett*. Ed. Daniela Caselli. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010. 176-91. Print. Pg. 176

<sup>122</sup> Kennedy, 98

There are numerous indications for pauses, breaking up the flow of sound; a rapid alternation of sound and break. The character's compulsion to make sound is ineffective, but they still need to do so. As Laws writes "something begging in the mind... begging the mouth to stop."<sup>123</sup>

### Breath

The role of breath within this soundscape of consciousness must be considered unusual when it appears as though these characters exist as an otherworldly existence beyond the finite term of a bodily life. The short plays are theatrical plays of the mind and not so much the physical life of the body. The production of sound requires breath and so Beckett acknowledges it through various indications, some being a lack of breath and others putting the sound of breathing in the forefront of the soundscape.

In *That Time*, the stage directions explain that the sound of breathing is present throughout, before and during various sections of the text. These sections of text are recitations of the character's memories from child and adulthood. The character grapples to capture the sensation of his bodily existence in life through these images. The audible breath is not his physical act of breathing because in the play he exists only as consciousness, the face and head of the character are just a metaphysical representation. The breathing sound is a memory, pulled from the past. He is attempting to remember how it felt to be of a body, to breath. This is, of

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<sup>123</sup> 142

course, in vain, but brings him brief solace and he smiles.

The Mouth in *Not I*, on the other hand, is completely breathless, lost in the need to create constant sound. As is evident via the text, the endless spewing from the mouth is the action the character did not take in her earthly, bodily existence. “She does scream on stage, but only to illustrate what she had meant to do and could not do... she who had been silent all her life, even when out shopping in supermarts.”<sup>124</sup> She did not speak or make herself a presence in the world. “... she would had never... on the contrary... practically speechless... all her days... how she survived... what had she to say for herself... stand up woman... speak up woman... stood there staring into space... mouth half open as usual... waiting to be led away...”<sup>125</sup> It is probable that the only audible sound she did produce in her past state of existence was her breath. However, this action is taken too little (or in the Mouth’s case far too much), too late. Her action of emitting near constant sound, performed in the staccato rhythmic musicality, leaves her exhausted, and out of breath, “- like gasps, as if the language as well as the speakers were getting short of breath- throughout the play.”<sup>126</sup> And yet she continues. She has to. If she were to stop she could lose all sense of herself, have nothing to verify that she exists, and would finally fall over the edge of madness and lose herself completely to her terror.

The presence of silence established by the pauses, makes clear the disjointed relationship between the character and their present state of being. For example:

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<sup>124</sup> Baldwin, Helene L. *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1981. Print. Pg 138 and 139

<sup>125</sup> *Not I*, 379 and 381

<sup>126</sup> Kennedy, 98

there are specific silences following the screams “what?... who?... no!... she!” During these silences the lips wait, quivering for something to be done now that she has confessed (only partly because she still cannot admit that she is “she”). In the silence that follows there is nothing that is done because there is nothing to be done. “All is silent... and she corrects herself: “What?... the buzzing... yes... all silent but for the buzzing...”<sup>127</sup> She listens to the silence and is unable to stand it. She hears the buzzing and is pushed to continue speaking on and on.

*Silence: The sound of the void*

“I shall state silences more competently than ever a better man spangled the butterflies of vertigo.”

- Samuel Beckett<sup>128</sup>

If the sound produced by the character is their action brought on from being too close to the void, then the absence of sound, silence is the representation of this void: infinite time and space, the ever present state of existence. Silence is the infinite auditory realm in which sound is released and dissolves. “Such instances bring a powerful juxtaposition of contradictory time and space to a stage moment. We hear the words, we expect an action, and we receive silence and inaction.”<sup>129</sup>

With the exception of *Breath*, silence is tainted by the compulsion of the

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<sup>127</sup> Baldwin, 138

<sup>128</sup> Samuel Beckett. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved December 26, 2011, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/samuel\\_beckett.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/samuel_beckett.html)

<sup>129</sup> Frisch, 117

character(s) to fill the silence in an attempt to avoid it. In explaining the infinite realm of time and space, silence is the closest experience to a nothingness achievable for the ears. "His fiction progresses towards a more and more total emptiness, in which plot, characters and language itself crumbles to nothing leaving only a voice awaiting the silence in fear and trembling."<sup>130</sup> The sound of silence for Beckett is complete stillness, sound not made by mouth or movement. It is as Beckett wrote in *A Piece of Monologue*, "Nothing stirring... Nothing to be heard anywhere... No. No such things as none."<sup>131</sup>

The term silence is used, in the context of Beckett's shorter works, to express the absence of sound via gesture. When the character gestures, whether with motion or speech, they work against an absence of sound. Silence does not mean the absence of hearing sound. It is the absence of the production of sound. The mouth in *Not I* is in the course of movement and articulation both at the beginning of the piece and as the light fades at the conclusion. The sound isn't audible, but it is still being made through the movement of the lips and tongue, they are stirring, not still. "No sound" is not the indication of meaninglessness. The character is purposefully gesturing to puncture the silence of the world whether it is audible or not.

Beckett didn't believe silence to be the absolute cutting off of sound. He knew that sound, beyond vocalization, continues to exist as thought. "With no paper

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<sup>130</sup> Baldwin, 2

<sup>131</sup> Beckett, Samuel. "A Piece of Monologue." *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. 2nd ed. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006. 423-30. Print.

before him, no intent to write, he took pleasure in following the course of the sun across the sky: “There is always something to listen to,” he said. So Beckett didn’t experience silence as silence: it was attention.”<sup>132</sup> As opposed to the character’s action of making sound, an articulation of the past, silence is the ability to be only aware or attentive to the present condition. The silence that frames the character’s actions is the already achieved, pure state of the present, being stained by the production of sound.

“... silence also has often been addressed as “dangerous” when it may entail acquiescence to an oppressive regime. To remain silent helps those in power; to speak out results in imprisonment... he creates characters who... spin a web of self-entanglement from which they cannot escape, especially since they themselves have done the entangling.”<sup>133</sup> It is by speaking that the characters become more and more imprisoned. They bar themselves from entering into a unity with the world. The world is not intentionally oppressive but calls for the character to address it in its actuality. However, by its very nature of infinitude, the world appears as such to the rebellious protagonist who feels compelled to break the silence. Although they understand that the production of sound does nothing to aid in their existence, the characters cannot embrace the strange indefinite silence. “Such silence becomes ominous and threatening...”<sup>134</sup>

The presence of silence within the short dramatic serves to emphasize the

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<sup>132</sup> Mitchelmore, Steve. "Beckett's Silence." Web log post. *This-Space*. Blogspot, 16 Feb. 2011. Web. 16 Dec. 2011. <<http://this-space.blogspot.com/2011/02/becketts-silence.html>>.

<sup>133</sup> Frisch, 120

<sup>134</sup> Frisch, 122

entangled existence of the character. Silence comes in the form of audibly perceptive pauses and breaks in the text as well as personification in characters present but inactive in the play. The small pauses placed within the text are used to, not only create a musical quality of sound, but also give the indication that the realm in which the character exists is made up of the lack of sound. The pauses act as windows to the outside, to see that which is beyond the actions of the character. These windows open wider when the pauses are extended into “silences.”

Silence exists as a punishment... that one's very sanity may be the price for trespassing the accepted frontiers of consciousness; and, of course, in penalties... metered out by “society” for the artist's spiritual non-conformity or for subversion of the group sensibility.<sup>135</sup>

Silence, the absence of sound, is the audio representation of the infinite universe juxtaposed with the finite, limited unit of sound. In the nonattendance of sound there is an indefinitude that permeates the listening senses. It is the transcendence of sound, the ability to exist without the presence of concreteness. “We experience the presence of the occluded bits even as we experience, plainly, their absence.”<sup>136</sup> It is known to exist because sound exists but that is all that is familiar about it; the emergence of the undefined out of the audible, recognized form. ““Silence” never ceases to imply its opposite... silence or emptiness must produce something dialectic: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or

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<sup>135</sup> Sontag, Susan. "The Aesthetics of Silence." *Styles of Radical Will*. New York: Picador, 1969. 3-33. Electronic. IV

<sup>136</sup> Noe, Alva. *Action in Perception*. Cambridge: MIT, 2004. Print. p. 61



eloquent silence. Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue.”<sup>137</sup>

Silence is the successful unity with the infinite if achieved by the subject, that is, if they can find silence within themselves. Through silence a dialogue of harmony occurs between the subject and universe. “Through it, the artist becomes purified of himself, and, eventually, of his art. Silence is the artist’s ultimate otherworldly gesture; by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world... a cleansed, non-interfering vision, in which one might envisage the making of artworks that are unresponsive before being seen, unviolable in their essential integrity by human scrutiny.”<sup>138</sup> By becoming internally silent, by purifying himself of his desire to create sound, meaning, association, the character can honestly and objectively enter into the universe and converse with it. This is a silence that accepts, as Beckett said, “... the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.”<sup>139</sup>

Silence appears as the petrified Beckett character sees it to be: an alien nature, a vast nothing. The universe returns to the character what it is given, an inability to understand; the reflection of the subjects breaking from nature. ““The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread.” The fearful silence of infinite space which no symbol can express, not even the garden as microcosm-

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<sup>137</sup> Sontag, IV

<sup>138</sup> Sontag, II and X

<sup>139</sup> Originally from “Three Dialogues” a private conversation Beckett had with George Duthuit, as found in Sontag, VI

crushes all vanity. True infinity can only be reflected in the mirror of faith...”<sup>140</sup> If there is no faith, the unified silence of the infinite and subject is lost. When the subject cannot liberate itself from its obsession with action and memory the perception of the universe is tainted and the universe continues to express this disjointment with silence. “Notoriously the sensuous, ecstatic, translinguistic apprehension of the plenum can collapse into a terrible, almost instantaneous plunge into the void of negative silence.”<sup>141</sup>

Silence is both peace and penalty.

Silence is also personified in character form. The character of the silent Auditor in *Not I* is there but barely seen. We know that silence, too, is present in this play, but never fully perceptible amongst the stream of sound spewing from Mouth. “The character is someone/something we *see*; we know it is *there*. Yet in important ways, because of its silence, it is *not* there.”<sup>142</sup> What little we can see of the auditor is the gesture of a “shrug” it gives the mouth. This is silence’s answer to sound. The Auditor is giving the mouth a response to its frantic screams. It cannot help her if she refuses to stop speaking.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Weiss, Allen S. *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17th Century Metaphysics*. New York: Princeton Architectural, 1995. Print. p. 77

<sup>141</sup> Sontag, XX

<sup>142</sup> Frisch, 118

<sup>143</sup> A similar personification of silence comes in the form of the old man character in *Catastrophe!* The director and assistant make their adjustments and fixes of the Protagonist, trying to make him a successful dramatic figure. At the conclusion, silence, itself, becomes most important part of the figures appeal. Despite all of the tweaks of his physical appearance made by the Direction and Assistant, the character’s performance of silence is the perfect choice. “Terrific! He’ll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here.” - Beckett, Samuel. "Catastrophe." *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. 2nd ed. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006. 455-62. Print.



## Part II: Theory

### Phenomenology and the conscious experience of existence

*This chapter is an explanation of Beckett's concepts of time and space outlined in the preceding chapter, using the philosophical theory of Phenomenology to examine his short dramatic works.*

#### Phenomenology: The Central Premise

“WHAT is phenomenology?... Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness...”

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>144</sup>

When defining “WHAT” phenomenology is: the characteristics, its place in philosophy, its message, as an introduction to this chapter, a larger question must first be addressed. Why use phenomenology as a lens to read and examine Beckett’s short dramatic works? Given that the characters struggle to exist in an essentially unknown and terrifying world, would it not have been better to approach this playwright through the more traditional lens of existentialism? In answering “why phenomenology” the characteristics of consciousness that manifest themselves in the theory of phenomenology become visible and make clear the rationale for the use of this philosophy in relation to the short, dramatic works.

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<sup>144</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962. Print. Pg. vii

Phenomenology pertains to Beckett from the start because it addresses *how* the conscious subject experiences the space of their existence. As stated in the previous chapter, the characters in the short, dramatic works are familiar with their situation. They know the condition of their being. It is understood or, at the very least, not a point of confusion that they inhabit a landscape of infinite time and space. These later works do not isolate the existential question of “why” we exist, but, instead, give a brief window into how the conscious mind exists when faced with the prospect of an infinite and unknowable world; how it interacts with the knowing that “this is it.”<sup>145</sup>

The visible, invisible and audible landscapes that compose the theatrical world appear as the subject experiences its existence to be. Everything the audience hears and sees is emanating from the character’s subjectivity. The experience of interacting with this state of existence is the drama. We come to know the state of existence by virtue of how the subject experiences it, how it is perceived. “... the perceptual experience of the world is but a rhetorical effect, and that aesthetics does not merely apply to art, but rather to experience in general.”<sup>146</sup>

Phenomenology, applied to Beckett’s short works, centers on the *experience* of existence. “Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view<sup>147</sup>, along with relevant conditions of

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<sup>145</sup> “it” meaning the world or state in which they are and cannot leave.

<sup>146</sup> Weiss, 91

<sup>147</sup> The first-person point of view refers to the conscious mind.

experience.”<sup>148</sup> It theorizes how we consciously experience when our attention is directed at a specific object or occurrence because of some meaning or substance it holds. The conscious mind experiences numerous types or “conditions” of experience “including perception, imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition, and action.”<sup>149</sup> The condition of experience that most encompasses the aesthetic Beckett produced for the stage is perception.<sup>150</sup>

*Phenomenology and Existentialism:  
“why?”, “how?” and shared themes evident in Beckett’s work*

The basic design of existentialism is aimed at man’s nature to question the purpose of existence; why he pertains to the [material] world in which he exists. The world inhabited by man offers little to no clues for the reason of individual being. If this meaning were explicit in the world then the questions raised wouldn’t exist [with any significance] in the mind of man because it would become a naturalized fact. As Edmund Husserl articulates in his phenomenological method for understanding the human subject is conscious of his own existence, but not the meaning of it. “Husserl’s efforts... had been directed towards establishing a descriptive science of consciousness by which he understood... the “transcendental” field of intentionality, i.e. that whereby our experience is meaningful, an experience

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<sup>148</sup> Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/phenomenology/>

<sup>149</sup> Smith

<sup>150</sup> This action of subjectivity is broken down and analyzed by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

of something as something.”<sup>151</sup> Quite simply: intentionality proves that man exists; he is in the world. The fact that man is a conscious being, and is aware of the world around it, precipitates intentionality. Phenomenology accepts the intentionality of consciousness, and thus the existence of consciousness, itself, as reason enough and doesn’t beg to question further.<sup>152</sup> “The ultimate absurd paradox is that an indefinite possibility of meanings accrues to a world without definition.”<sup>153</sup>

Another important link of Phenomenology to Existentialism can be located in Sartre’s belief in “existence over essence.”<sup>154</sup> Sartre believed, above all else, that existing, in and of itself, precedes any pre-destination based on personal history in man’s purpose in being. “... that existential playwrights are “not interested in arranging in advance motivations or reasons which will inevitably force” action.”<sup>155</sup> He shares the idea that past experiences do nothing to shape the current state of existence. While Sartre’s writings remained focused on constructing a reason for that current state of existence, as opposed to *how* the existence is experienced, the ineffective use of history is closely related with Merleau-Ponty’s purging of intellectualism and empiricism from an understanding of the action of perception-perpetual experience. Sartre thought only of the present act of existence; that the

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<sup>151</sup> Crowell, Steven. "Existentialism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The Metaphysics Lab Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 11 Oct. 2010. Web. 11 Dec. 2011. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>>.

<sup>152</sup> Some existential philosophers sought to answer the existential question of “why” through theology, giving the relationship between man and God as the objective for existence. Others, including Jean-Paul Sartre, concluded that the meaning of existence is simply to exist, sharing a confidence in intentionality with Phenomenology.

<sup>153</sup> Gordon, Lois. *Reading Godot*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002. Print. Page 69

<sup>154</sup> Vowels, Richard B. "Existentialism and Dramatic Form." *Educational Theater Journal* 5.3 (1953): 215-19. *Jstor*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Web. 10 Dec. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3204255> Pg. 215-216

<sup>155</sup> This quote is taken from the interior of an article but is a quote itself. Its only citation in the article is as “Forgers, p. 137.” The article is written by Vowels.

present actions of the characters form their identity here and now. “We feel no need for registering imperceptible evolution of character or plot...”<sup>156</sup> Sartre is only interested in capturing being in the present so as to give the experience of man as ““there,” already aware of himself, already free, already aware of the world, of Others, of facticity and so on.”<sup>157</sup>

Beckett’s early work and, most notably, *Waiting for Godot* can be considered existential rather than phenomenological because the subjects await a justification for existing in the theatrical universe. The purpose for Didi and Gogo to exist in the time and space of the play is to meet the mysterious Godot. Because Godot never arrives the two men are caught in a perpetual condition, waiting for a future that will not appear. *Godot* aligns with Sartre’s theory of existentialism in that neither Didi nor Gogo give substantial thought to their pasts but occupy themselves while waiting with action that forms identities. “If their past has provided no codes or figures to respect or emulate, their future is similarly disheartening.”<sup>158</sup>

The world in which Didi and Gogo wait in is unknown, and in chaos because there is no validation for any moment in time and space. Godot is the validation that they need to understand why they are waiting. “[That] there must be a Godot who will provide this is the ultimate focus of their everyday activities, and in their pursuit of this hope lies the paradox of their busyness in waiting.”<sup>159</sup> They exist so that they may learn the meaning of existing. However, the meaning will not appear.

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<sup>156</sup> Another interior quote from the larger article by Vowels, 216. This quote comes from “Ibid pp. 140-141.”

<sup>157</sup> St. John Butler, Lance. *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*. New York: St. Martin's, 1984. Print. Page 74

<sup>158</sup> Gordon, 57

<sup>159</sup> Gordon, 58



The characters of *Godot* exist in a present that is endless. Gordon's earlier paradox of infinite possibilities is especially meaningful in reference to Beckett's sense of temporality. The waiting characters "Lacking a social history or identity are being, or existence without essence. They stand before us asking to be understood, as they themselves try to understand, and they exist... in a context of virtual absence and its correlative, endless potentiality."<sup>160</sup> It is a present that never moves forward because there is no identifiable future. This can be identified as Beckett's aesthetic of suspended time, which is also evident in the short, dramatic works. But, through this articulation of Beckett's existential work, it is clear that as he progressed in his career he stopped asking the futile "why" and became more interested in the ways the conscious characters experience their existence in the unfamiliar world.

### **Phenomenology of Perception**

Although the space of the mind, that which houses consciousness, is not infinite, it is immense. Immensity is not a physical object because any object perceptual outside of our beings is large, yes, but is whole and its limits are visible. "In other words, since immensity is not an object, a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness. In analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination."<sup>161</sup> Immensity, therefore, is best attached to the limited yet mostly uncharted space of the conscious mind. "However paradoxical this may seem, it is

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<sup>160</sup> Gordon, 61

<sup>161</sup> Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1969. Print. Pg. 184

often this *inner immensity* that gives their real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world.”<sup>162</sup>

Merleau-Ponty’s brand of phenomenology describes conscious experience via the perception of the more-than-immense world which surrounds the body. When experiencing an event the conscious mind describes it through language.

Furthermore, our minds often describe what occurs in the present using past experiences. The speaker in Beckett’s *A Piece of Monologue*, for example, explains the present to himself using familiar descriptions of time, “...To now. This night. Two and half billion seconds. Again. Two and half billion seconds. Hard to believe so few... Thirty thousand nights... Sun long sunk behind the larches. In the room dark gaining...”<sup>163</sup> Merleau-Ponty, conversely argues for a pure description of present experience with no attachment to past knowledge, empiricism, and intellectualism. He urges for the conscious experience to remain immediate and as present in the occurrence in the world as possible. This pure description is outlined as the pre-objective realm of consciousness; to have a fully unmediated perception of the world, defined as ‘attention.’ He describes attention’s implementation in the phenomenal field (the space of the experience), the experience of the body, the situation of the body in relation to other objects, the motility of the body, and temporality.

It is apparent in Beckett’s short works that the characters’ inability to find peaceful coexistence in the world is largely due to their difficulty in perceiving the world objectively. Merleau-Ponty writes that phenomenology addresses

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<sup>162</sup> Bachelard, 185

<sup>163</sup> 425

consciousness at the moment before the initiation of interaction with the experience, not just accepting the method of subjective perception as precise. “[phenomenology] is, a study of the *advent* of being to consciousness, instead of presuming its possibility as given in advance.”<sup>164</sup> That brief flash before coming into consciousness, before perception begins, determines the objectivity of the conscious perception. It is clear that Beckett’s characters do not interact with their experience of existence in accordance with this prescribed process. “Hence the need for a movement... which carries back to the origin the resources of reflection... is able to give expression to both the original experience of the world and the process by which this experience is then covered up or forgotten in the very course of our coming to understand it.”<sup>165</sup> The character of W in *Rockaby* rocks in her chair as means of covering up her terrifying experience in the present world with a motion she finds comforting because it is associated with the memory of her mother. The characters move their attention backwards to the past so as to forget the condition of their present experience of existence.

### **The Body and the World Consciousness’ perception of infinite time and space**

“... it exceeds perceptual experience in one act of synthesis of horizons- as the notion of a *universe*, that is to say, a completed and explicit totality, in which the relationships are those of reciprocal determination, exceeds that of a *world*, or an open and indefinite multiplicity of relationships which are of reciprocal implication.”  
- Phenomenology of Perception<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> 61

<sup>165</sup> Macann, Christopher. "Maurice Merleau-Ponty." *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*. London: Routledge, 1993. 159-201. Print. Pg. 183

<sup>166</sup> 71. “It” is in reference to whole of the spatial realm of the perceptual experience, the space is which the experience, objects and body exist and the action of conscious perception takes place.

Merleau-Ponty makes clear in this quote that a world is a closed, whole object, while a universe is an open, indefinite space with implications beyond. As stated, the universe in which the characters of Beckett's short works exist is the temporal and spatial realm of infinite time and space. As presented theatrically, there is a subject, the character, and there is the world that encompasses it. The subject is actually consciousness, itself. The physical form is a "body," a complete figure, contained within a larger universe. How consciousness interacts with the universe is through perception. Beckett's works explicate the conscious mind's disjointed relationship with the infinite universe as it struggles to exist within the expansive realm.

*Body within the universe: perception of the universe, extrication*

"We make perception out of things perceived. And since perceived things themselves are obviously accessible only through perception, we end up understanding neither. We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world."

- Phenomenology of Perception<sup>167</sup>

This circular paradox explained by Merleau-Ponty describes the complicated condition of phenomenological perception. Perception is a subjective experience and so must be used to gain understanding of a second-level experience of the world that is outside of the subject. This tangled and obscure situation describes the body's ability to perceive the universe in which it exists. In the action of perceiving

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<sup>167</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 5

“something”<sup>168</sup> it is chief that the perceived object is whole and outside the perceiving body. To gain a holistic understanding of an object is to see its complete form. The landscapes of Beckett’s works are not complete.

Because the universe in which Beckett’s characters exist is borderless it is impossible for the body to extricate itself and be outside of the world. “There is no space or time outside of this universe for the body to occupy and perceive the whole. “... we take advantage of the fact that we have more immediate links to the world because we are in the world from the start...”<sup>169</sup> It is only possible to be in the world, however this knowledge is secondary to the fact that the universe is not whole in the first place, it is a continuously expanding, open arena. The character cannot understand the universe because it can’t escape its presence within the landscape. May in *Footfalls* paces back and forth, coming to an invisible point and unable to go further so must turn back. There is nowhere to escape to because there is no space outside of the landscape.

As demonstrated in the endless ramble of Mouth in *Not I*, the actions of the body are in correspondence with the universe. Just as the body is able to move, the universe is also in a constant state of flux. As the character unceasingly spews words with the motion of the mouth, the world expands further and further into the infinite, making Mouth’s words ineffective and causing her continued terror induced movement. Thus the body and its qualities are both in the world and of the world.

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<sup>168</sup> Something, as pointed out on page 71 by Merleau-Ponty, does not necessarily have to be an identifiable object but for the sake of this explanation I will use it loosely and in the context of a single object.

<sup>169</sup> Noe, 24

As part of this universe, if the body were to extricate itself, there would be a missing portion of the landscape. Likewise, the body would lose all significance and capabilities if taken out of the world because these qualities are based in the 'of the world' situation the body is attempting to perceive.

“For who will not marvel that our body, a moment ago imperceptible in a universe, itself imperceptible in the bosom of the whole, should now be a colossus, a world, or rather a whole, compared to the nothingness beyond our reach?”<sup>170</sup> The body is a whole, complete unit within the open universe. This is the major differentiation between the body and the “world”: open and closed, limited and perpetual. Because of both the limited scope of consciousness’ and the endless quality of the universe, there is an irreparable fracture in the relationship between body and universe. The universe cannot be understood thus causing the confusion and terror experienced by the perceptive mind trying to perceive the impercievable. If silence were to represent the universe, the very fact that the conscious mind is awake, that there is a constant buzzing of thought, makes achieving silence impossible. This buzzing of thought, made audible in *Not I*, is the terror that pervades the character and produces speech, which disrupts the understanding of silence.

... even without imputing objective intentions into the art-work, there remains the inescapable truth about perception: the positivity of all experienced at every moment of it... there is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> quoted from Blaise Pascal’s “Pensees” as found in Weiss, 64

<sup>171</sup> Sontag, IV. Quoting John Cage

Because it is clear that the body cannot fully perceive or understand the universe, Merleau-Ponty describes the relationship between the two as a “coexistence” or “coincidence.” This coexistence is an accepting of the ‘actuality’ of the universe and the conscious mind’s ability to partake in an objective relationship of give and receive. His definition of this interaction between the body and the universe describes how the finite form of the mind can perceive the universe. However one must note the importance of the physical body in the conscious perception of the world. Whereas perception is a condition of consciousness, which is housed in the mind, the process by which information about the perceived object is gathered occurs a great deal via the body. “... reject the idea- widespread in both philosophy and science- that perception is a process in the brain whereby the perceptual system constructs an internal representation of the world.”<sup>172</sup> He breaks this relationship into two parts.

The first is the fusing of the affection/sensation interaction between the subject and the perceived object into a whole experience. The body is built to sense the qualities being produced by the object. It receives information and responds with affection. The response to the sensation does not just store up in the body but is returned to the object. “The world offers itself to the sensory subject who, in turn, responds, thereby qualifying the world in such a way that what he sees is, in part,

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<sup>172</sup> Noe, 2

what he has already put into perception through his affective response to what offers itself.”<sup>173</sup> This melds the two actions into one connection with the object.

The second part is the reaction of the perceiver. The subject, the body, has sensory skills, which are activated when interacting with the object. Each sense informs the other creating a synesthetic unity. Merleau-Ponty defines this sensory unity in the body as the “natural self” which exists prior to the experience of interaction between body and universe. The natural self “is then taken to be the self-evident foundation of any reasonable understanding both of the self and the world.”<sup>174</sup> It is through these senses that the body interacts with and is affected by the object in/of the world.

The bodies with which the Beckett characters gesture to perceive their experience of existence are not full human figures, but parts of the body that have meaning based on memory. For example: Mouth of *Not I* experiences the space of her existence in the infinite universe through sound, releasing scream after scream into the endless [theatrical] space. The universe reciprocates with the shape she perceives it to be: nothing. Her consciousness appeals to using sound tirelessly in a vain attempt to gain an understanding of the infinite with the action she failed to grasp in her past, speaking up for herself. However this sound is made up of text drudged from her past, thus failing to create the present circumstance of pure perception and damning the character to further ontological confusion.

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<sup>173</sup> McCann, 182

<sup>174</sup> McCann, 182



*Representations of the body/universe perceptual experience by objects in the “visual world”*

“Every narrative space is a symbolic space revealing the formation of the narrator’s character as well as the relations of the social fabric that determine his destiny.”<sup>175</sup>

As it has been pointed out, the human mind cannot conceive of the infinitude of the endless universe nor is there one defining object that can summarize the capabilities of the mind, itself. “Thus the representation of infinity poses the epistemological problem of the limits of human consciousness...”<sup>176</sup> There is no exactitude in the process of creating an image of things that cannot be fully perceived. Much like Beckett’s use of interior and exterior settings as both aspects of the stage tableau and within the text as settings of memory, the best visual clues for the body-world relationship are the images of the house and the garden. The house is used to represent inhabited space or the space of the mind while the garden, as constructed by both man and nature, works to give an example of the eternal universe.

we must go beyond the problems of description- whether this description be objective or subjective, that is, whether it gives facts or impressions- in order to attain the primary virtues, those that reveal an attachment that is native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting.<sup>177</sup>

As Bachelard points out, describing why consciousness inhabits the space of the mind would be useless when the real performance is the relationship between subject and space. What is important is that the mind, within the body, exists in the

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<sup>175</sup> Weiss, 10

<sup>176</sup> Weiss, 61

<sup>177</sup> Bachelard, 4

universe. The house is represented by the closed world of the mind with consciousness inhabiting its walls. In Beckett's early plays, such as *Endgame*, the image of house was used as the setting for the action of the play. *Endgame's* scenic tableau calls for two windows, a chair with Hamm seated center, two cans to stage right and a door stage right. These directions create the picture of a skull and as such the proceeding words and gesture of the characters take place inside this skull. The house is presented as the figure of the head, a symbol of the mind, which stores the consciousness of human characters.

“...there is ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul. With the help of this tool, can we not find within ourselves, while dreaming in our modest homes, the consolations of the cave?”<sup>178</sup> The cave is in reference to psychologist Carl Jung's description of the mind as the dark, primal space of inhabitation. By addressing the image of the house, which is the container for our memories, we can come to understand the space and actions within our own bodies. “Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are “housed.” Our soul is an abode. And by remembering “houses” and “rooms,” we learn to “abide” within ourselves.”<sup>179</sup>

Bachelard describes in his first chapter of *The Poetics of Space*, “the house. From cellar to garret. The significance of the hut,” how the spaces of our first houses are how we forever come to understand all other spaces. Whatever other rooms or quarters we come to inhabit will always be seen in terms of how they compare to

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<sup>178</sup> Bachelard, xxxvii introduction

<sup>179</sup> “ “

our first rooms, whether we notice or acknowledge this comparison or not. “And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood,...”<sup>180</sup> The Beckettian characters cannot find any familiarity in their present landscape so they revisit their homes, the lands of their youth, through memory. They try to survive existence by imagining the spaces of their past in the new, indefinite world. The memories of how large or small, bare or full are the first spaces of our human existence are revisited in perceiving other areas. These memories of the house are stored in our mind. They are the pictures and knick-knacks known to be there but rarely examined. “Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them...”<sup>181</sup> By trying to perceiving the present landscape through a connection with the spaces of the past, the characters fail. When we enter into the spaces the past actions that were held there come from the depths of our mind and into the experience of how we inhabit it in the present. “Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain treasures of former days.”

The past dictates how the present is perceived just as the Beckett characters experience their present existence through their memories. The protagonist in *That Time* shuts his eyes to the present and, instead, imagines running to meet the train or sitting with a youthful sweetheart in fields of wheat. He is eventually forced to acknowledge the present world in which he exists is not relatable to his comforting

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<sup>180</sup> Bachelard, 5

<sup>181</sup> Bachelard, xxxvii

memories when he opens his eyes. “To illustrate the metaphysics of consciousness we should have to wait for the experiences during which being is cast out, that is to say, thrown out, outside the being of the house... an enveloping warmth welcomes being... When we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth...”<sup>182</sup> The house holds in its walls the memories formed within it as well as actions occurring at the moment. When taken out of what is familiar the conscious character uses the first home, its structure as well as memories to understand the new space. “We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection... And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle.”<sup>183</sup> When Beckett’s characters are cast out of their physical bodies, their home, and placed in the space and time of “the unknown infinite” they terrifyingly use their memories to perceive the current state of existence.

The space of the mind, filled with memories, is the shelter and refuge for consciousness. The cave, the first house for humans, was a similar shelter from the elements. It is the “original shell”<sup>184</sup> for human inhabitation. We rarely visit these caves of forgotten memories. “We always *go down* the one that leads to the cellar, and it is this going down that we remember that characterizes its onerism. But we go both up and down the stairway that leads to the bed-chamber. It is more commonly used; we are familiar with it.”<sup>185</sup> When descending these stairs we are diving deep into our mind, to the darkest and most primal places, to extract some

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<sup>182</sup> Bachelard, 7

<sup>183</sup> Bachelard, 6 and 7

<sup>184</sup> Bachelard, 4

<sup>185</sup> Bachelard, 25

sort of lost memory. W in *Rockaby* physically sinks down into the rocking chair and sits, holding tightly to the arms, as she rocks to pass the expansive time. She grasps the token of the past and falls into the memory of her mother rocking away in the chair.

“Nature was transformed into sign, symbol, and stage.”<sup>186</sup> The image of the garden goes beyond representing the spatiality of the mental arena, and moves into an wider image of the mind/body within the larger, vast world. The garden expresses a broader vision, expanding outward to see the whole of the body as it is enveloped by the realm of infinitude. “These walled-in gardens were microcosmic symbols of the macrocosm, cosmic diagrams of the sacred natural world.”<sup>187</sup> It gives an example of the earth with it’s closed off areas, but ultimately points to the wide, unlimited universe with the constructed prominence of the vanishing point. It is the place where the familiar disappears as the sun, a star in the expansive universe of space, lowers out of sight and the mystery of the cosmos takes over in the dark night sky.<sup>188</sup>The garden does this by creating a landscape that signals towards the expansive, infinite universe while engaging the body in the affectation-response interaction through objects. The open air of the garden, with the vanishing point signaling to an unknown horizon, places the body within its landscape, and invites it to then interact with the landscape’s objects through motility and the human sensory skills. While the actual object of the garden is not infinite in size or time, it

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<sup>186</sup> Weiss, 29

<sup>187</sup> Weiss, 13

<sup>188</sup> In the era that they were constructed, the French formal gardens sought to emphasize the sun so as to equalize the king with God but timelessly it symbolizes an indication at what was beyond the finite earth and the small period of human, bodily existence.

provides a significant representation of the spatiality of the universe as well as the finite body. This garden landscape is an appropriate image to use to explain the infinite worlds of Beckett's theatrical works because, like the characters of the short dramatic works, the conscious subjects within the garden are wandering in the pursuit of gaining an understanding of the limitless realm of nature through interacting with a world that points towards the infinite horizon.

A complete understanding of the garden is in vain because the garden ultimately points to the horizon<sup>189</sup>, to the universal realm that the body cannot extract itself from. Objects within the garden, while existing as separate, closed structures reflect the nature of the infinite realm. The motility of the body to wander amongst the world of the garden, being lost in the infinitude nature points towards on the horizon, sends the subject on a path inside a labyrinth. The garden, the body and the labyrinth are closed spaces that require the body to wander within to find some goal at its center. "The garden is often considered to be a microcosm, a symbol of the world; the labyrinth, in turn, may serve as a symbol of the garden, as well as the souls that walk within it."<sup>190</sup> Weiss goes on to explain that the things that the body lusts and loves make up the labyrinth of the soul. Synchronous with

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<sup>189</sup> The central axis of the garden that aligns with the horizon brings the infinitude of the universe into the closed garden and reaches the finite body. "On the central axis of the gardens of Versailles- leading from the chateau over the (lawn) extending the length of the grand canal to disappear at infinity..."<sup>189</sup> Because the infinite is one with the closed space and the body there is an interaction between not just the body and the world but with the infinite universe. The very use of the vanishing point invites the body to have a relationship with what is beyond. "The system of linear perspective organizes the visual field into a self-reflexive, self-referential, narcissistic system, insofar as the vanishing point-... always referring beyond the surface... back to the position of the spectator."<sup>189</sup> This was designed for Louis XIV so as to elevate him to the same level as God but in a phenomenological perspective this reflexive system acts as an establishment of the body in the infinite, enclosing the closed figure with the expansive, eternal realm.

<sup>190</sup> Weiss, 49

this theory, the character of consciousness in Beckett's short dramatic works wander in endless time and space, lost within itself because of the dooming compulsion it must obey even though it will never result in an effective change.

*The body as existing in the world in time*

“ Every object, cultural or natural, is caught within a web of symbols- these symbols themselves are altered, sometimes ravaged, in the course of time.”<sup>191</sup>

The body as it exists in the world, or, in the case of Beckett, in the universe, is articulated in this quotation. But space is only three dimensions. And, as Proust wrote in his epic *Remembrance of Things Past* and something Beckett considered himself in his essay on the French writer, specific spaces of inhabitation and existence are “... a four dimensional space- the name of the fourth being Time...”<sup>192</sup> To speak about how the body and the world interact is not complete without discussing how the body is acted upon by time in the universe. “... I would fail to stamp it with the seal of Time, now so forcibly present in my mind and in it I would describe men... as occupying in Time a much greater place than that so sparingly conceded to them in Space, a place indeed extended beyond measure, because, like giants plunged in the years, they touch at once those periods of their lives- separated by so many days- so far apart in Time.”<sup>193</sup> As C voice of the protagonist in *That Time* describes his present world, through association with past spaces and

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<sup>191</sup> Weiss, 9

<sup>192</sup> Proust, Marcel. "Swann's Way: Combray." *Remembrance of Things Past*. Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. Vol. 1. New York: Random House. 1-464. Print. Pg. 66

<sup>193</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 2

time periods, this is a space made of unperceivable limits and an absence of time. “not a sound only the old breath and the leaves turning... when you opened your eyes from floor to ceiling nothing only dust and not a sound only what was it it said come and gone was that it something like that come and gone come and gone no one come and gone in no time gone in no time...”<sup>194</sup>

The affectation/sensation interaction between the body and the objects that both make up and inhabit the universe occurs in the moment upon which the conscious mind becomes attentive to the object. That initial moment calls for a purely objective perception to create the original experience. What Merleau-Ponty describes as this pure perceptual experience is reliant on remaining objective, to be free of associations from past experiences. This looking back takes the body out of the present moment and thrusts it into a middle world of physical inhabitation of the present, but conscious inhabitation in “what was.” This produces an ontological disembodiment from reality. The pure perceptual experience is a full body/mind inhabitation in the state of the present. “...all these perspectives together form a single temporal wave, one of the world’s instants.”<sup>195</sup> The moment of attention turned fully and objectively to the object, to the universe, generates an experience that can only occur that instant of time.

“Silence is equated with arrested time...Time, or history, becomes the medium for definite, determinate thought. The silence of eternity prepares for a thought beyond thought, which must appear from the perspective of traditional

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<sup>194</sup> 395

<sup>195</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 331



thinking and the familiar uses of the mind as no thought at all.- though it may rather be an emblem of a new, “difficult” thinking.”<sup>196</sup> ‘Difficult thinking’ in Beckett’s plays is the character’s ability to suspend their obsession with the past and attention placed on the present.

The conscious condition of perception does not call for simple, passive observation. The phenomenology of perception explains an interaction made through a conscious, meaningful direction of attention and the use of our sensory skills. “... merely to be given visual impressions is not yet to be made to see. To see one must have visual impressions that one understands.”<sup>197</sup> To understand, one must have perception, which is gathered through active sensory experience. The experience of pure perception is action in the present moment.

Nor can such images as these be transported into just any consciousness. No doubt there are those who will want to “understand” whereas the image must first be taken at its inception... They suddenly appear and, in a twinkling, they are completed. This is why, from my standpoint, these expressions are marvels of phenomenology. In order to judge them, and to like and make them our own, they oblige us to take a phenomenological attitude. These images blot out the world, and they have no past. They do not stem from any earlier experience... In fact, it is not a question of observing, but of experiencing being in its immediacy.<sup>198</sup>

The experience, the world, and the object become comprehensible through the content that is only available in the here and now. “[It] must endure the indignity of all apocalyptic thinking: namely, to prophecy the end, to see the day come, to outlive

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<sup>196</sup> Sontag, X

<sup>197</sup> Noe, 5-6

<sup>198</sup> Bachelard, 233-234

it, and then to set a new date for the incineration of consciousness...”<sup>199</sup> This includes not only the acknowledgment of the passage of time, that the present will in an instant be the past, but to remain with time as it pushes on. “...Thirty seconds. Fade. Gone. Stands there staring into the beyond. Into dark whole again. No. No such things as whole... From the word go. The word begone. Such as the light going now. Beginning to go. Unnoticed by him staring beyond.”<sup>200</sup> The body/mind inhabiting each moment, and, without becoming so attached then to be sucked with the moment into the past, then move and inhabit the next. With presentness of body and mind, the perceptual experience flows with time. “The synthesis of horizons is essentially a temporal process, which means, not that it is subject to time, nor that it is passive in relation to time, nor that it is has to prevail over time, but that it merges with the very movement whereby time passes...”<sup>201</sup>

The characters in Beckett’s short works exist in a constant state of present temporality. They cannot move, physically, backwards, and there is no future, no endpoint or goal, to which they can move forwards towards; “an unwholesome time,”<sup>202</sup> a time that is never finished. Whereas their bodies, that is the physical figure through which their consciousness is expressed, the representation of consciousness, occupy the present, their perceptual experience is far from present. These consciousness’ perceive the infinite universe in which they exist by gesturing with the past. They are terrified when they direct their attention at the universe

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<sup>199</sup> Sontag, XX

<sup>200</sup> *A Piece of Monologue*, 429

<sup>201</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 330

<sup>202</sup> Sontag, V

and so they retreat into their memory to distract themselves from reality. For example: Mouth in *Not I*, in the throes of a crazed rant about her present existence, filled with the obsession to speak, reigns herself in from the edge of madness with a memory. “like maddened...all that together...straining to hear...piece it together...and the brain...raving away on its own...trying to make sense of it...or make it stop...or the past...dragging up the past...flashes from all over...walks mostly...walking all her days...day after day...where was it?...Croker’s Acres...one evening on the way home...home!”<sup>203</sup> While they are physically positioned in the present, their conscious states of awareness are diving back into memory so to distract them from the reality of the world.

### **The Pre-objective Realm**

#### **Purging of the past so as to experience pure perception**

“And it is this pre-objective realm that we have to explore in ourselves if we wish to understand sense experience.”<sup>204</sup>

Merleau-Ponty positioned phenomenology as a study of what occurs before consciousness is directed at an experience. This belief is relayed in his *Phenomenology of Perception* as a “pre-objective” or “primordial” mentality that exists and must be examined by the self prior to the sensory experience of interacting with objects in the world. “All of this can be accommodated by a proof to the effect that a realm of the primordial does indeed antecede, and so ground, our

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<sup>203</sup> *Not I*, 380

<sup>204</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 12

taken for granted conception of the world...”<sup>205</sup> Without exploring this pre-objective realm, the self is incapable of acknowledging its natural tendencies of association and impulse to connect with intellectualism and empiricism in the perceptual experience. To enact pure perception we must reject our Cartesian Ego, which houses presumption. Beckett’s characters must disassociate their consciousness from memory to have any chance at a clear perspective of the world in and of which they exist.

The first step to ceasing ones use of association and memory is acknowledging that it is there and that one will have an innate inclination of doing so. The process by which this recognition occurs is through a pre-perceptive action of communication with the self. “...Knowing must therefore be accompanied by an equal capacity to forget knowing. Non-knowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult transcendence of knowledge.”<sup>206</sup> In knowing itself, the conscious mind can directly eliminate what will deter it from an original experience.

And what deters the original experience is the mind’s want to connect what it perceives with intellectualism and empiricism. These are the trapping of common sense and science, the information, facts and knowledge collected by the mind from past experiences. They create the perceived object with language, words that label and connect what is to what has been learned. The mind wants to associate the object with these items of past experience.

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<sup>205</sup> McCann, 186

<sup>206</sup> Bachelard, xxxii-xxxiii

Language is experienced not merely as something shared but something corrupted, weighed down by historical accumulation. Thus, for each conscious artist, the creation of a work means dealing with two potentially antagonistic domains of meaning and their relationships.<sup>207</sup>

It is an instinctive propensity that the primordial realm fights by acknowledging that it does so. Without knowing its own draw towards association the mind/body cannot have a purely perceived experience, nor be united as one object in the universe with another. “Association, therefore, never comes into play as an autonomous force... it acts only by making probable or attractive a reproduction intention; its operation only in virtue of the meaning it has acquired in the context of the former experience... grasps it in the light or appearance of the past.”<sup>208</sup> However, association comes into question again in regards to how we perceive objects in the world in relation to each other in space. The unity of things in perception is not arrived at by association, but is a condition of association that occurs in the unity of time. What is important to derive from association is the mind’s use of it as a relation of the present object in time and space with pieces of information rooted in the past. “For here the cultural past doesn’t count. The long day-in, day-out effort of putting together and constructing his thoughts is ineffectual. One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears: ... to be exact in the very ecstasy of the newness of the image.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Sontag, VIII

<sup>208</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 18

<sup>209</sup> Bachelard, xv

The ability to be receptive of the actuality of the world is never achieved by Beckett's characters because they are unable to overcome their terror long enough to cease associating the world with their pasts. They defensively guard themselves against the world they do not know with memory. In *Rockaby*, W, the physically present figure demands that V, the voice, keep speaking "more" so that the present will not invade her consciousness. "W: More. V: so in the end close of a long day went down in the end went down down the steep stair let down the blind and down right down into the old rocker mother rocker where mother rocked all the years all in black best black sat and rocked rocked..."<sup>210</sup> Taking themselves out of their habitual action would allow for the unfamiliarity of the world to invade their attention. This is a prospect they cannot fathom nor allow because they are ruled by their human emotions. They cannot and refuse to acknowledge that this association of past to present is futile. When V tries to urge W that it is "time she stopped, *time she stopped*,"<sup>211</sup> W just continues to demand "more." Reason is overpowered by the roar of emotions, by the incessant buzzing, therefore they are unable to wipe clear their perspective and surrender their consciousness to the present. The protagonists, instead, continue to compare their world with the past, only causing further terror which they cannot ignore, not even to acknowledge the endless cycle taking place.

The primordial mentality asks the body to relearn how it interacts with the universe. "For it requires that we first unlearn what we have already taken the

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<sup>210</sup> 440

<sup>211</sup> *Rockaby*, 435

trouble to learn, that we become once again the child we once were whilst, at the same time, retaining the critical acumen needed to set this original way of seeing off against the intellectual prejudices of both empiricism and intellectualism...”<sup>212</sup> The act of analyzing ones own mind and tendencies is a “a radical reflection on the unreflected.” It calls for the mind to approach the world as it is, not what it must or might be, and to then move through it via sense experience. “Here we are made aware of the function of a seeing eye that, having nothing to do, has ceased to look at anything in particular, and is looking *at the world*.”<sup>213</sup> It asks that one remains receptive to the range and wealth of how the body senses as perception. “And once the primordial realm of an originary experience has been discovered, or better, re-discovered, it then becomes possible, for the first time, to account for the emergence of that very object world which is ordinarily taken for granted.”<sup>214</sup>

The world, as experienced by these characters, is made up of dark and light, silence and the sound of their own thoughts and actions. They are confused by it only because they do not take the step of acknowledging their need to produce these descriptions in connection with what they know as familiar. They expect this world to be similar in nature to the world they inhabited in their pasts. When it is not so they desperately retreat attention inward and do not look *at the world*, but at a world that had been.

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<sup>212</sup> McCann, 183

<sup>213</sup> Bachelard, 209

<sup>214</sup> McCann 183

*Unity as the goal of pure perception*  
*Peace for the Beckett Character in the infinite universe*

“And the poet continues this love duet between dreamer and world, making man and the world into two wedded creatures that are paradoxically united in the dialogue of their solitude.”<sup>215</sup>

The original experience, a pure perceptual experience with the universe is marked by a unity of the body/mind and the universe. The Beckett characters want to be at peace, to exist without suffering, “... all that pain as if... never been,”<sup>216</sup> but are overwhelmed by the inexplicable nature of the universe. They desperately want to be free of suffering, but, when faced with the actuality of the state in which they exist, torture themselves by evading the truth. Their refusal to access a pre-objective mentality dooms them to endlessly exist in terror and pain even though they crave peace. Through the accessing of the primordial realm of the self, the body, and the world/universe can be free to communicate freely and interact upon one another; they can become one. Just as the body is one immense being that can communicate with itself so the body is then capable to do so with the world. “... the disclosure of a genuinely primordial realm beings to light a dimension of coincidence, coexistence or communion of perception with the perceived, a ‘primary faith’ which binds us to the world. Indeed, the world itself can be regarded as ‘one vast individual’ with which I am in constant communication, as that in which our own body is ‘as the heart is in the organism.’(Merleau-Ponty, 203)”<sup>217</sup> The world in

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<sup>215</sup> Bachelard, 189

<sup>216</sup> *Play*, 312

<sup>217</sup> McCann, 190



which the Beckett characters exist is an infinite state of space and time, all objects existing in and of the world. What Beckett presents in his play is the world as experienced by the character: an unclear, dark, undefined and foreboding landscape that they refuse to address without relation to the past.

Pure perception occurs through interaction with the universe without the referencing of past knowledge as a base, through use of sense and attention by the body. As the object is perceived it is built by the content gathered in the perceptual experience. The way the image is perceived is through sensory apprehension of what it offers. "... it is in the opposite of causality, that is, in *reverberation*... that I think we find the real measure of the being of a poetic image. In this reverberation, the poetic image will have sonority of being."<sup>218</sup> The body becomes unified in space with poetic image by purely perceiving its nature through these reverberations. The presence of light within Beckett's landscapes expresses an affectation offered to the protagonist. The traveling beam acts as the reverberations that the conscious character physically senses, revealing the actuality of the object's and, when expanded, the world's nature.

As the primordial realm acts to halt the influences, associations, and tools of past experiences, it also acts to create unity between the body and time. Because each object is understood by its relation to what else inhabits the "world," including the body, this completed dis-association seems impossible. However by all objects being united in space and time solves this dilemma. "... but the contradiction

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<sup>218</sup> Bachelard, xvi

disappears... I co-exist with all the other landscapes which stretch out beyond it... Through my perceptual field with its temporal horizons, I am present to my present..."<sup>219</sup> With attention focused solely on the world and its objects here and now, everything within the landscape is existing together and can be perceived through relationships with one another.<sup>220</sup> The characters in the short plays do not consciously exist in the present with the rest of the world. A communion between world and subject is broken by their retreat into the past, making it impossible to form a relation of itself with the rest of the world. "...April morning...face in the grass...nothing but the larks...another few...what?...not that?...nothing to do with that?...nothing she could tell?...all right...try something else...think of something else...oh long after...sudden flash... not that either?..."<sup>221</sup> The character cannot sense itself because it cannot sense the other with present attention.

The subject, freed from association, words and labels, is able to be in the universe. There is no need to create words or thoughts, but to simply exist in the vast realm. "Like some soft substance, it receives the balsamic powers of infinite calm. With it, we take infinity into our lungs, and through it, we breath cosmically, far from human anguish."<sup>222</sup> Unity with the universe becomes "sensual speech" the unmediated expressive instrument of the senses, proper to beings integrally part of

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<sup>219</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 330-331

<sup>220</sup> Weiss, in the introduction to his book (p. 11) on French formal gardens, explains this unity of time and space in terms of Zen philosophy: satori. "*Satori* consists of pure intuition of the nature of things as an organic whole, including the spectator, the contemplator, man himself."

<sup>221</sup> *Not I*, 382

<sup>222</sup> Bachelard, 197

sensuous nature.<sup>223</sup> However, silence must first be achieved by the subject, within itself before it can connect with the grandeur of the infinite. This silence is one that Beckett's characters do not allow within themselves. Instead of addressing the world in the present, through sensual communication with the objects, they try to separate themselves from the world and compare it with the past. The voices within the Listener in *That Time* simultaneously address the present world's desolate landscape by associating it with an abandoned train station while also avoiding this hard truth by clinging to memories of warmth and companionship. He is aware of the present world and consciously tries to remove himself via the act of remembering.

The Beckett character's inability to have inner peace, the silence of pre-objectivity, results in a loss of unity with the world. A perception and understanding of the whole is broken because the subject does not see itself as "of the world" and acts only for itself as if it were a separate entity. Although the universe, itself, is not whole because it is continually expanding time and space, accepting this actuality would mean that the character would be at peace knowing that this is the eternal nature of existence.

### **Empiricism and Intellectualism: Trappings of the Beckett character's past**

*Past knowledge and experience act as a tool of disjunction with the phenomenological experience of the universal landscape*

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<sup>223</sup> Sontag, XIII

Intellectualism and Empiricism are the concepts formulated from past experience, the memories that Beckett's characters use to associate their present state of existence with some semblance of familiarity. Memories derived from the past taint the characters ability to be one with the theatrical world because they veil the objects of the landscape in presumption and distract from the world's actuality. The dilemma of involving notions of intellectualism or empiricism into the original experience is that neither has any attention or understanding of objectivity. They take the world to be a defined space, which because of prior experience in this world and through the knowledge gained by the body in the world, objects, and experience is set. There may be variations, but the object is still, from the point of observation, associated with another object or experience. The opportunity for a completely original premise is obliterated by association and description. Through intellectualism and empiricism there is no active interaction between seer and object, but a one-way commentary on the object.

Empiricism, for example, derives its knowledge from the body's past experience of the world. It emphasizes the body's sensory experience but limits this sensory experience to a one-time definition of what something can be, and then bases the following sensory experiences from that. "By turning inside out like a glove an overworked complex that has become debased to the point of being part of the vocabulary of statesmen, we might say that the literary critic and the professor of rhetoric, who know-all and judge-all, readily go in for a simplex of superiority."<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Bachelard, xxv

For example: the darkness and silence of the theatrical landscape is perceived by Beckett's characters as such because it does not resemble the world they remember. "Parts the dark. Slowly the window. That first night. The room. The spill. The hands. The lamp. The gleam of brass. Fade. Gone. Again and again. Again and again gone. Mouth agape. A cry. Dark parts. Grey light..."<sup>225</sup> Because it is unfamiliar they experience it through what they associate with the unknown: absence of sound and light. "Empiricism retains an absolute belief in the world as a totality of spatio-temporal events, and treated consciousness as a province of this world."<sup>226</sup> The body, as an object, itself, does not change because there is no inventive communication between world and body. "Space is a physical setting, which is passively registered by an embodied subject that has its place in such a space, just like any other thing."<sup>227</sup>

Whereas empiricism perceives the world through the "sensing" of it and relation with past experience, intellectualism completely discounts the role of the body and acts to perceive the space mathematically and construct it in the logical brain. "For the intellectualist, space is a geometrical construction put together by a disembodied subject who, as such, has no specific location in the spatial construction for which he is responsible."<sup>228</sup> The intellectual mind does not see itself as part of the world because it is creating it in its body. When the space is recreated in the mind it is outside the world and so does not involve the body as the base of

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<sup>225</sup> *A Piece of Monologue*, 428

<sup>226</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 40

<sup>227</sup> McCann, 184

<sup>228</sup> McCann, 184

perception. The space does not include all the sensory elements attached to it. It simply becomes a box.

Intellectualism does not talk about the senses because for its sensations and senses appear only when I turn back to the concrete act of knowledge in order to analyse it. I then distinguish in it a contingent matter a necessary form... Therefore there are not the sense, but only consciousness. For example, intellectualism declines to state notorious problem of the contribution of the sense to the experience of space, because sensible qualities and the senses, as materials of knowledge, cannot possess space in their own right...<sup>229</sup>

With the lack of a body or credit given to its sensory skills as separate from knowledge there is no definition, no grounding, “lacks a point of anchorage.”<sup>230</sup>

Without sensation attached to the perceptive experience it is impossible to experience the world in its actuality. Beckett’s characters experience this when they are unable to form a relationship with the objects of the world. They do not allow their consciousness to get close enough to objectively sense the objects because the landscape is unfamiliar if addressed without association. They do not sense them as they are, but, instead, react to their affectation by associating it with memory. “...all the time the buzzing...dull roar like falls...and the beam...flickering on and off...starting to move around...like moonbeam but not...”<sup>231</sup> The inability to sense the objects forces them to “turn back” to the knowledge they gained in their past and form a false perception of the object.

“If we now turn back, as is done here, towards perceptual experience, we notice that science succeeds in constructing only a semblance of subjectivity: it

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<sup>229</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 217

<sup>230</sup> McCann, 184

<sup>231</sup> *Not I*, 381

introduces sensations which are things just where experience shows that there are meaningful patterns; it forces the phenomenal universe into categories which make sense only in the universe of science. It requires that two perceived lines, like two real lines, should be equal or unequal, that a perceived crystal should have a definite number of sides, without realizing that the perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous, the shifting, and is shaped by its context.”<sup>232</sup> The universe is constructed as it “should be” instead of how it is in actuality. The theatrical worlds of Beckett’s short plays express how the characters perceive the world based on their assumptions as well as resulting from their failure to connect with and sense the other object’s forming the world. When they cannot relate to the world, out of terror of the unfamiliar, they are forced to make it somehow comprehensible using notions they have from past knowledge. Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue* tries to describe the present world by filling it with images of a bedroom including a window, lamp and bed. “Nothing stirring. Nothing faintly stirring. Stock still eyes glued to pane. As if looking his last. At that first night. Of thirty thousand odd. Turn away in the end to darkened room. Where soon to be. This night be. Spill. Hands. Lamp. Gleam of brass. Pale globe alone in gloom. Brass bedrail catching the light.”<sup>233</sup> This holds him for a brief period before the present world comes flooding over his ineffective use of the past. “Once white. Least...give and head rests on wall. But no. stock still head haughty staring beyond. Nothing stirring. Fainting stirring...Beyond that black beyond. Ghost light. Ghost nights. Ghost rooms. Ghost

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<sup>232</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 11

<sup>233</sup> 428-429

graves. Ghost... Stands there staring beyond at the black veil lips quivering to half-heard words. Treating of other matters...Never were other matters. Never two matters..."<sup>234</sup>

*Attention: Recognizing the disruption of the original experience by intellectualism and empiricism*

"Thus the "light of attention" is needed to bring to light the truth of the objective world... For both empiricism and intellectualism take the objective world for granted."<sup>235</sup>

The characters in Beckett's short plays focus their attention inward so that they can continually use their memory to deal with existing in a world that terrifies them. The pieces of their pasts are destroyed when placed into the present world because they create a false perception. For example: *Rockaby's* W must keep demanding V to speak because the memories that are brought forth are quickly dispersed. "V: ... going to and fro time she went and sat at her window quiet at her window... another like herself a little like another living soul one other living soul. *[Long pause]* W: More. V: till in the end the day came... sitting at her window..."<sup>236</sup>

The characters experience momentary relief before seeing that their actions were fruitless, forcing them to repeatedly direct their attention to memory for another piece of the past. The terror of the experience rips their awareness from realizing the futility of the action.

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<sup>234</sup> 429

<sup>235</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 11

<sup>236</sup> 437-438



In using intellectualisms' tool against itself, attention reveals the flaws in both patterns of thought when used in the perceptual experience. This is the mind's acknowledging of its tendency to associate in the primordial realm so as to abolish the traits of past experience during the present moment of experience.

Phenomenology describes the perceptive experience as being outside of the body as much as inside. Intellectualism and empiricism refer to perception as a process occurring within the mind, gaining understanding of the world based in pulling from memory and attaching to the outside world. What is lost is the role of the world in perception, which is the actualization of experience within the world rather than the world described with examples or associations. "There's no need to build up a detailed internal model of the world. The world is right there and can serve as "its own best model (Brooks 1991). O'Regan (1992) makes the same point when he proposes that the world can serve as an "outside memory"; there's no need to *re-present* the world on one's own internal memory drive."<sup>237</sup> Understanding the world comes from experiencing it, as its own being, not recreating it with allusions to an "other." Empiricism's need to take a piece of the internal memory drive and place it on the world for the purpose of understanding is unnecessary. The best way to know the world is to reference itself through pure perception of sensory skills. This reference is the gaining of information about that specific object in that specific world through the affectation/reaction process performed with the senses.

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<sup>237</sup> Noe, 50

“The “association of ideas” which brings past experience into play can restore only extrinsic connections, and can be no more than one itself, because the original experience involves no others. Once consciousness has been defined as sensation, every mode of consciousness will have to derive its clarity from sensation.”<sup>238</sup> The character’s construction of the world through connections to the past is a false world. Characteristics pulled from past experience are thrust upon the surface of the present world, merely masking, but never altering it’s true nature. “that time in the end when you tried and couldn’t by the window in the dark and the owl flown to hoot at someone else or back with a shrew to its hollow tree and not another sound hour after hour hour after hour not a sound when you tried and tired and couldn’t any more no words left to keep it out so gave it up gave up there by the window in the dark or moonlight gave up for good...”<sup>239</sup> The ability for the past to exist within the present is temporary because the infinitude of the present world overcomes the weak associations from the past. The original experience, that of the world’s actuality, must take place through sensing that which forms the landscape. Beckett’s characters cannot sense that within the world because their fear of the unfamiliar pushes them to turn their attention away from the present and retreat into the past.

Both intellectualism and empiricism discount the synesthetic possibilities of the body in the new experience. They encounter the world through sight only. They take in the object visually and immediately fill in the rest of the figure’s properties

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<sup>238</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 14-15

<sup>239</sup> *That Time*, 394

with memories of the whole sensory experience or construct an image that attempt to make an object whole. “The illusion is an illusion of consciousness: You don’t really experience them all, even though you think you do...”<sup>240</sup> There is no experience but the creation of an internal image that fools the conscious mind into thinking it knows the object.<sup>241</sup> The world is, in this model, the universe: a three dimensional realm with textures, sounds, smells, tastes, and angles, and other affectations begging to be explored by sense. The experience of the world cannot be captured in a single moment but comes from a series of interactions using sensory perception.

At the heart of attention is the understanding not just that we use these past-experiential properties to perceive but that we do so habitually. “As Nietzsche said: “Our pre-eminence: we live in the age of comparison, we can verify as has never been verified before.” Therefore, “we enjoy differently, we suffer differently: our instinctive activity is to compare an unheard number of things.””<sup>242</sup> It began as a cultural trend of comparison that then moved inward to the mind. As the sharing of information and language expanded globally it became easier to connect objects with similar characteristics to one another, grouping them under larger labels. These groupings were internalized and evolved as a means of sorting the vast amount of objects encountered in the conscious experience of human existence. The

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<sup>240</sup> Noe, 55

<sup>241</sup> Intellectualism and empiricism short-change the mind and body’s full potential to experience. Not only does it render the body useless by denying it’s job of sensory perception but also halts the mind’s incredible ability to create new forms through imagination. As we learned more through time, by having bodily experiences and intellectual pursuits, we ceased to imagine and began to take short cuts through experience.

<sup>242</sup> Sontag, VIII

mind, at this point, no longer needs the body. This manifested itself in the subconscious of the mind and influenced how the perceptual practice occurs. “It's impossible for the artist to write a word (or render an image or make a gesture) that doesn't remind him of something. Up to a point, the community and historicity of the artist's means are implicit in the very fact of intersubjectivity: each person is a being-in-a-world.”<sup>243</sup> The way to extract ourselves from this world of comparison is to acknowledge it and disassociate our consciousness from such snares. “All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”<sup>244</sup> The philosophical implication of Beckett writing about failure to be objective in a world is that the act of writing, itself, is a failure to act objectively. The medium by which he expresses his ideas of disjointed existence acts as an actualized gesture of that failed experience. He explains the futility of the character's actions through his own inability to remain objective when writing.

The failure of Beckett's characters is that they can't achieve perception without association, they are unable to experience the world in its actuality of being. They are too terrified of the original experience, to see what is out in the infinite dark of time and space. This terror drives them to pull from their memory experiences and stave off the horror. They speak so as to associate, “... all words being abstractions, only roughly based on or making reference to concrete particulars...”<sup>245</sup> therefore they can't form the actuality of what is being described.

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<sup>243</sup> Sontag VIII

<sup>244</sup> Beckett, Samuel. *Worstward Ho*. London: Calder Publishing, 1983. Electronic.

<sup>245</sup> Sontag, VIII

This ultimately dooms them to never find peace. "... there is nothing to be gained by saying the imagination is the faculty of producing images. But this tautology has at least the virtue of putting an end to comparisons of images with memories."<sup>246</sup>

Beckett's protagonist in *A Piece of Monologue* frames the dark, vast unknown of the world with memories of watching the night sky from his window. "No. No such thing as no light. Starless moonless heaven... There in the dark that window. Night slowly falling."<sup>247</sup> He creates a false landscape of window, bed leg, and lamp against the expansive nature of the world. What would lead to unity for the character is to detach themselves from the past and face the actuality of the world without terror or memories, open to the landscape with all senses. Beckett explains this trapped existence through the characters writhing and the ceaseless need to associate with their past. "Compensating for this ignominious enslavement to history, the artist exalts himself with the dream of a wholly ahistorical, and therefore unalienated, art."<sup>248</sup>

**Motility of the body in its perceptual experience of the world:  
Action as the Beckett characters' habitual gesture**

"The dynamism of this landscape becomes apparent only when one enters the garden and walks amongst the pools."<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Bachelard, xxxiv

<sup>247</sup> *A Piece of Monologue*, 427

<sup>248</sup> Sontag, VIII

<sup>249</sup> Weiss, 83

In existing in the world, the conscious mind wants to understand what the nature of the world is. It explores the world through perception and the action of the body's senses. This active perception occurs in a present state of awareness, an occupying of time and space fully in the effort to understand the world as it is, not what we expect it to be based on past-experiences. The action of the perception is the body's activation of movement so as to sense the world. "M discovered pacing towards L (left). Turns at L. paces three more lengths, halts, facing front at R (right). Pause."<sup>250</sup> The manner as to which the Beckett characters activate the body in perception is by speaking or gesturing in ways that are linked to the past. They scream out into the universe hoping to find any clue of what is out there, to break up the indeterminable stretch of time. They do not approach the world with objectivity, but with fear. The motility of their bodies is not used for original exploration, but for petrified grappling in the dark. They are compulsively clinging to memory. "Or how, when one talks less, one starts feeling more fully one's physical presence in a given space...- speech disassociates from the body (and, therefore, from feeling), speech not organically informed by the sensuous presence and concrete particularity of the speaker... Unmoored from the body, speech deteriorates. It becomes false, inane, ignoble, weightless."<sup>251</sup> The characters act in speech and gesture as a habit founded in the terror deep within their consciousness. "Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull

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<sup>250</sup> *Footfalls*, 399

<sup>251</sup> Sontag, XIII

inviolability, the lighting-conductor of his existence.”<sup>252</sup> It is not an action informed by the character’s sense of presence in the world, instead it is a reaction to how they cannot sense their presence in the world so they speak to verify that they exist.

What the conscious mind perceives is determined by how the body acts. “Motion is not a hypothesis, the probability of which it co-ordinates. That would give only possible movement, whereas movement is fact... It does not presuppose any relationship to an expressly perceived object, and remains possible in a perfectly homogeneous field.”<sup>253</sup> Merleau-Ponty speaks of motility in connection with the sensory perceptual process of the body with the world. In interacting with the object of the consciousness’ attention, the body activates its motility to perceive it: physically moving the body to insight the senses. “Once again, therefore, Merleau-Ponty appeals to an “anonymous,” “pre-personal,” “natural” self which generates space by its own action in a world which antecedes thought.”<sup>254</sup> The world is created by the action of gaining content. This takes the process of perception solely out of the mind and into the body in what Noe calls “the enactive approach” of perception. Mouth in *Not I* acts by continually, obsessively speaking, and, at one point, screams out into the landscape knowing that there will be no response, but still listens intently with a small shred of hope that something familiar will be revealed by her action. “... no screaming for help for example... should she feel so inclined...

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<sup>252</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 8

<sup>253</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 277

<sup>254</sup> McCann, 185

scream... [Screams]... then listen... scream again ... [Screams again]... then listen again... [Silence]... no... spared that... all silent as the the grave..."<sup>255</sup>

"Perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do..."<sup>256</sup> The body's ability to move, to respond to affectation with motion, gesture, and incitement of the senses is a facility that doesn't stem from thinking but is a primal reaction. The less we assume the more we are able to objectively, naturally discover. The body is built to act this way. "... we modulate our sensations with movement in a way that is responsive to thought and situation... A ball rushes towards us and we reflexively duck... In this sort of way, and in countless ways like this, sensory impressions are immediately coupled with spontaneous movement."<sup>257</sup> Our intellectual minds do not tell us to act; our body's simply act on impulses from the objectively curious, perceptive consciousness. Beckett's characters do not act out of this impulse, but are ruled by their intellectualism. Their motility is planned, habitual movements rather than inspired by the affectations offered by the world. This motility ultimately dooms them from ever achieving coexistence with the present world.

Motility of the body allows for the whole to be perceived because it can physically bring about interaction with the object and senses. The complete world is not given to consciousness in one glance or perspective so the body must bring consciousness into the world by moving. "It is not part of ordinary phenomenology

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<sup>255</sup> *Not I*, 378

<sup>256</sup> Noe, 1-2

<sup>257</sup> Noe, 6



that we experience the whole wall, every bit of it, in consciousness, all at once.”<sup>258</sup>

The object and the world are not understandable from just one perspective. The body has the power to move so as to fully comprehend what is around it. It is activated so that all the senses can be in communication with the object, as opposed to giving one snap shot of the object and using solely one angle of sight to gain a false perception of the real. “It has been wrongly asserted that the edges of the visual field always furnish an objectively stable point. Once again, the edge of the visual field is not a real line. Our visual field is not sharp edges like the landscape framed by the window.”<sup>259</sup>

Just as the deaf and blind use action to orient themselves, moving and touching to perceive their world, so must any conscious mind/body in order to gain understanding of the object of their attention. It is not enough to rely on notions or impressions of the world because they do not know this world and its particular characteristics. “I am not a spectator beholding a visual panorama but an actor staging an ever-changing scenic drama.”<sup>260</sup> Through the motility of the body, the body can touch the object, move so the body position closer or further to see the whole, smell, hear, and, if necessary, taste the object of attention. It allows the senses to be engaged in the perceptual experience, to do their job for the mind by gathering affectations given by what is perceived. “By moving yourself, you can come to occupy a vantage point from which, say, better to see your goal. And then,

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<sup>258</sup> Noe, 56

<sup>259</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 277

<sup>260</sup> McCann, 188

having seen your goal, you can better decide what to do.”<sup>261</sup> Beckett’s characters Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* wander the bleak landscape, changing their body’s position amongst the other objects in the world such as the lone tree, country road and each other. This action shifts their perspective on the world as they attempt to understand the world in which they wait. It is the action of the body in the sensory experience of pure perception.

We see as far as our hold on things extends, far beyond the zone of clear vision, and even behind us. When we reach the limits of the visual field, we do not pass from vision to non-vision: the gramophone playing in the next room, and not expressly seen by me, still counts in my visual field. Conversely, what we see is always in certain respects not seen: there must be hidden sides of things, and things “behind us,” if there is to be a “front” of things, and things “in front of” us, in short, perception. The limits of the visual field are a necessary stage in the organization of the world and not an objective outline. But it is nevertheless true that an object crosses our visual field, and changes its place in it, and that movement has no meaning outside of this relationship.<sup>262</sup>

The meaninglessness of action when it is not in direct relationship with the objects of the world is precisely why the speech and gesture of Beckett’s characters is false and futile. They do not act intending to gain information about the objects because their terror keeps them from approaching the world objectively. Their actions are, such as in the case of the voices who recount stories of “That Time” to a horrified Listener in Beckett’s play of the same name, an ineffectual mode of distraction from the reality of the present landscape.

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<sup>261</sup> Noe, 2

<sup>262</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 277

*The character's false action in perception*

“Furthermore, no symbol exists in a pure state: we bring to any symbolic system the “impurities” of our own understandings and misunderstandings, as well as the desires of our most utopian hopes and cataclysmic fears.”<sup>263</sup>

The action, the movement of the Beckett characters, does not have the reactionary, primordial, subconscious characteristics outlined by Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. What they see in the universe is determined by what manner they move. The universe continues to appear strange and alien because they move through it with a desire to recognize elements from their past in the landscape of this universe.

“... speech is both an immaterial medium... language is the most impure, most contaminated, the most exhausted of all materials...”<sup>264</sup> The manner as to which these characters act is by speaking and moving towards the reenactment of memory.<sup>265</sup> They experience this universe by connecting it with the past experiences of their memories. This action is a language that denies present consciousness and pure perception. “Consciousness, experienced as a burden, is conceived of as the memory of all the words that have ever been said.”<sup>266</sup> Memories of the past block any objective perception of the world because the pre-objective mentality, created by acknowledging our habit to associate, is never achieved for these characters’

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<sup>263</sup> Weiss, 9

<sup>264</sup> Sontag, VIII

<sup>265</sup> The projection of these memories by the conscious mind into the open universe is manifested through dreaming, daydreaming or imagining. “They make us sense clearly the progressive expansion of the daydream up to the ultimate point when immensity that is born intimately, in a feeling of ecstasy, dissolves and absorbs, as it were, the perceptible world.”<sup>265</sup> Dreaming implies a semi-consciousness. The conscious character is not fully present because it is existing through a memory. In the midst of an unknown infinite realm the mind seeks refuge in the house, descending into the primal cave to stave off the mysterious universe.

<sup>266</sup> Sontag, XIV

consciousness. They are unable to disassociate from their past experiences so as to approach the unfamiliar universe neutrally. "In losing its grounding in a more primordial realm, objective thought has lost much more than it knows. It has lost the richness and fruitfulness of an original experience which is a kind of continual creation, a recreation of the world from moment to moment in an endless transfusion of thought and action and emotion."<sup>267</sup> The character of Mouth in *Not I* experiences the world through hysterical emotions, which invokes subjective thoughts and the action of endless speech based in her past. This imposing of the past in the present does nothing but further her frustration, never altering her false experience in the universe. "...oh long after...sudden flash...not that either...all right...something else again...so on...hit on it in the end...think everything keep on long enough...then forgiven...back in the-...what?...not that either?... nothing to do with that either?...nothing she could think?...all right...nothing she could tell...nothing she could think..."<sup>268</sup> The world, namely the Auditor, is making it clear to Mouth that her use of the past is not going to work, but she is unable to break her habitual action and so continues on despite the fact that it is obviously futile.

The experience of pure perception calls for a deferring of association. The universe of Beckett's work is never created as itself by the imaginative, conscious mind. For example: M in *Play* is unsatisfied with the world because it is not the peaceful existence he expected. "It will come. Must come. There is no future in

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<sup>267</sup> McCann, 186

<sup>268</sup> *Not I*, 382

this.”<sup>269</sup> It is unfulfilling because he constructs his perception on assumption and not objective consciousness. By understanding the world through pure perception, consciousness comes to know it’s actuality, its original characteristics, and feels connected and at harmony. However, because of the subjective perception of the characters, the world is unable to be experienced as it is and therefore continues to feel peculiar to the characters. The expression of their subjectivity is what dooms them from ever achieving it because it only severs an original, untainted perception of the world, which would ultimately lead them to accept and “be” of the world, and thus reaching that peaceful state of coexistence with the universe.

The only way they can cope with this existence is by re-creating their past-experience in the present moment. They recreate their memories in the moment through ritualized speech and motion such as pacing, rocking and the retelling of lost love and satisfaction, such as in *Krapp’s Last Tape, Play* and *That Time*. “The royal acts were repeated and reified into distinct rituals and ultimately transformed into myths.”<sup>270</sup> They continue the rituals so as to give themselves proof that they exist and have meaning. The ability to gesture leads them to believe that they are “doing something” and instills just a moment of accomplishment before it dwindles amongst the actuality of the universe. They enact the rituals to avoid the truth: their actions are void of meaning. They exist as what they literally are: sound and movement. This is punctuated through the metaphysical soundscapes Beckett wrote. “The narratives of Kafka and Beckett seem puzzling because they appear to

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<sup>269</sup> *Play*, 313

<sup>270</sup> Weiss, 71

invite the reader to ascribe high-powered symbolic and allegorical meaning to them, and, at the same time, repel such ascriptions. The truth is that their language, when it is examined, discloses no more than what it literally means. The power of their language derives from the fact that meaning is so bare.”<sup>271</sup> Beckett’s works are best understood without attaching ideas of meaning or purpose, free of association or presumption, and, instead, an understanding is built by accepting the presence of language and action as nothing but what they actually are.

The shape that these character’s actions take on is a circle, both literally and symbolically. The movement, the speaking and movements occur cyclically: the story is told over and over again, never broken, no beginning or end but just continuous speech. The paced movement of gesture, walking, rocking, goes from one point to another before turning back again, creating an elliptical motion to and fro. May in *Footfalls* walks five steps left before returning back to the right with four more steps. She paces in a thin oval pattern, sometimes pausing but never completely halted, around and around forever. “[Beckett] employ[s] a language whose norms and energies come from oral speech, with its circular repetitive movements and essentially first person voice... One even senses the outlines of subliminal rationale- that it might be possible to out talk language or to talk oneself into silence.”<sup>272</sup>

The characters, such as Mouth in *Not I*, isolate themselves from the universe through these ceaseless and empty actions of the past. Their bodies are cycling wheels against the dark abyss, round, closed forms stuck in themselves. Mouth

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<sup>271</sup> Sontag, XVIII

<sup>272</sup> Sontag, XVII

separates herself by focusing her attention within herself, telling memories of her earthly existence, from birth to death, only to reach the point where she must keep speaking and so must retell the same loop of events again. “[A poet] knows that when a thing becomes isolated it becomes round, assumes a figure of being that is concentrated upon itself.”<sup>273</sup> The failed attempt, the impure perceptual experience they engage in with the universe, moves in a circular pattern from terror of the unfamiliar universe to past experience in the perceptual process to the inability to understand the world and being terrified once again.

*Composition of the universe through perception of Object  
Including the subject as object*

The perceptual experience is enacted by the mind and body, by directing its awareness on the individual object and gathering content from the affecting object. What the object “is” comes to be known when the body senses the characteristics of the figure. Each object, in a pure perceptive state, is made up of aspects that are sensible for the body.

“A THING has “characteristics” or “properties” which are stable, even if they do not entirely serve define it, and we propose to approach the phenomenon of reality by studying perceptual constants. A thing has in the first place *its* size and *its* shape throughout variations of perspective which are merely apparent. We do not attribute these appearances to the object itself, but regard them as an accidental feature of our relations with it, and not as a being of it. What do we mean

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<sup>273</sup> Bachelard, 239

by this, and on what basis do we judge that form or size are the form and size *of the object*.”<sup>274</sup>

What Merleau-Ponty points out here is that in our causal perception we do not attribute what we sense from that object as being a property of it. In subjective perception we attribute the affectations of the object, color, size, etc, by relating them to the affectations of objects so as to compare. In fact, every affection we encounter is a direct result *of the object*. What the body senses belongs to the object, and is what composes the object. The properties of the object affect the senses, which gather this interaction as content, and the conscious mind construct the object based on how it is in the present. Thus, the object comes to be known as itself. Aside from shape and size, this includes: color, texture, odor or taste, and sound. Furthermore, by disposing of spatial associations between the object and what surrounds it, the object is perceivable from *anywhere*<sup>275</sup>, from infinite distances and angles. “Thus the positing of one single object, in the full sense, demands the compositive bringing into being of all these experiences in one act of manifold

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<sup>274</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 299

<sup>275</sup> By virtue of the primordial mentality in the perceptual experience, the world becomes a universe of endless perceptual possibilities. Objective thought clears the relationship of the object with the space as well as its placement among other objects, including the perceiving subject. “... the object is defined as if it were seen from nowhere, as an infinite of possible perspectives- the object seen from here, from there, from everywhere. But an object seen from *everywhere* is an object seen from *nowhere*, an object conceived in abstraction from the very condition of its perceivability... the world conceived as a totality of objects defined by this way is not a world at all but a universe.”<sup>275</sup> (McCann, 170) The natural world then would be as Pascal writes in *Pensees*, “Nature is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.”<sup>275</sup> (Weiss, 63) As the object becomes clearer through perception the communication between it and the self only grows louder and more full. Now the message is not just what this object is but what the universe could be. “What immensities flow from objects that may be opened.”<sup>275</sup> (Bachelard, viii)



creation.”<sup>276</sup> This composing of the universe is the act of experiencing the universe in its actuality through interacting with its affectations.

It is precisely this infinitude of possibilities revealed in the perceptual experience that terrifies the Beckett characters. They cannot create the objects that inhabit the universe along with them because the very act of moving gives way to the endless nature of the universe. *Rockaby's* W can only move when rocking in her chair, by attaching it to an inward memory because moving outwardly, in relation to the universe, is too vast and unpredictable. They revert to their memories for comfort, and retell and move over and over again, without fail, in a manner that feels familiar because it is derived from the past as opposed to forcing themselves to move in a world with endless possibilities. “These procedures seem analogous to the behavior of an obsessional neurotic warding off a danger. The acts of such a person must be repeated in the identical form because the danger remains the same and they must be repeated endlessly because the danger never seems to go away...”<sup>277</sup>

This repeated act creates false, empty objects instead of the objects as they are. This is represented theatrically in Beckett’s nearly bare, sparse stage spaces. The tableau is one of absence because it is built from the characters’ subjective vision, and all the characters see is the expansive, unfamiliar universe. What objects that are included in the space are empty objects, without meaning. They are void of meaning because the conscious characters do not interact with them through pure perception and create them through affecting content gathered by the senses,

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<sup>276</sup> Mealeau-Ponty, 71

<sup>277</sup> Sontag, XVI

but instead associate them with the objects they knew [and what cannot exist in the present].

“ The self exists within the specular unity of represented and representing subject, between seeing and seen, between thinking and thought.”<sup>278</sup>

The perceiving mind/body is considered the subject because of its self-awareness. As opposed to the Cartesian Cogito of “I think therefore I am,” the acknowledgement of the self in the primordial realm reverses this notion to I am therefore I act. In existing as a conscious being, the mind is self-aware and experiences existence from the perspective of the body. “There are two modes of being and two only: being in itself, which is that of objects arrayed in space, and being for itself, which is that of consciousness.”<sup>279</sup> In recognizing its body, consciousness understands it is held in a physical form. This body not only carries sensory skills for perception, but also is made up of properties and characteristics, just as those that are “of” other objects. These characteristics do not exist for the purpose of the mind to perceive itself; it is already aware of it. The body has a physical form for the sake of affecting the other objects that compose the world. Its properties are perceptible content calling for to be read by the senses of some “other.” The existence of the body as a physical, affecting form which can produce sound, odor, flavor and has texture and color makes clear that it is a perceptible content while also a perceiving subject. The body represents the mind by being its physical realization and thus becomes an object capable of interacting in the

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<sup>278</sup> Weiss, 70

<sup>279</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 349

affecting/sensing experience with other objects. “Each self- in its representation- is the vanishing point of a multiplicity of gazes.”<sup>280</sup> The physical forms of the characters in Beckett’s short plays are the way by which they express their experience of the world, which is a fractured perception. Their actions are affectations that the audience, another object in the world, perceives, but cannot understand because they are ineffective. The audience’s inability to help the character is the performance of the characters’ failure to be perceived by the universe.

The body knows its placement in the world by interacting and perceiving the other objects that make the universe. “... vision is not merely a function of the radical isolatability or individuality of the perceiving subject. Rather it is determined by the manner in which vision itself is a mode of placing the body in the world, among its objects, within its scenes...”<sup>281</sup> Here vision could be substituted for perception: that to perception is not a condition that works when limited to the self, but can not only take place when the physical object of the body is of the realm, having communication between itself and other objects.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> From Marin’s “La critique du discours,” 227-28, as found in Weiss, 70

<sup>281</sup> Weiss, 37

<sup>282</sup> The ability for the self as object to interact with the object of attention comes from the primordial acceptance not to assume that the object’s existence is the same as mine. “For if I am able to conclude to the existence and experience of others on the basis of observed analogies between their behaviour and my own, this is only because I presuppose a consciousness animating the other body in a manner equivalent to that in which my consciousness is known to animate that body which I find myself united. But with what right do I make such an assumption?” (McCann, 191) It can’t be assumed that every object has the same experience of existence as I do let alone that they all have the same as each other. Instead of continuously guessing whether the object does or does not exist in the same manner as the self, the primordial mentality allows for the possibility that it does. “If, for myself who am reflecting on perception, the perceiving subject appears provided with a primordial setting in relation to the world, drawing in its train that bodily thing in the absence of which there would be no other things for it, then why should other bodies which I perceive not be similarly inhabited by consciousness?” (Merleau-Ponty, 351) It does not make definite that an object is a certain way but gives a resolution through potentiality. The self can expect that the power

The Beckett characters and, particularly, the bodies through which they act are objects. These bodies give off affectation, giving out sound, and motion that is perceptible to other objects in the space. However, the character does not do so for the sake of affecting because it cannot and does not perceive anything but the dark, black abyss of the infinite universe. *Rockaby's* stage directions indicate "Light: subdued on chair. Rest of stage in dark."<sup>283</sup> Then as the character of W rocks to and fro in her chair she imagines finally "dying," existing in this world as being over, though it will not. "... no harm in her. Dead one day. No. night. Dead one night. In her rocker..."<sup>284</sup> She corrects herself because the universe, to her, is as dark and still as night. The character does not position itself among the other objects because it cannot perceive the objects. This is because it is not aware of itself in the world and so it cannot have a pure perceptive experience or interact with the objects that construct the universe. The character's mind is aware of itself and its body but is terrified to interact with the unknown and so remains eternally frozen as an isolated, alienated object that holds a petrified consciousness. "In the room. Where else? Unnoticed by him staring beyond. The globe alone. Not the other. The unaccountable. From nowhere. On all sides nowhere. Unutterably faint. The globe alone. Alone gone."<sup>285</sup> The Beckett character is fated to never understand or find unity with the present realm in which it exists and, likewise, the audience will be

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it has to objectively perceive through action with the object may cross with conscious powers of other objects "... so to form a common ground on the basis of which mutual understanding and communication becomes possible." (McCann 191) It leaves an open end, which is necessary to maintain the objective, pure perception.

<sup>283</sup> 433

<sup>284</sup> 440

<sup>285</sup> *A Piece of Monologue*, 429

unable to perceive the entirety of the theatrical landscape due to the character's purposeful separation from it. The audience is an object of the universe as well and the affectations they extend towards the character seals their fate of doomed coexistence because they fail to comprehend the habitual actions that break from the nature of the theatrical world. The audience's experience in the theatrical space is a mirroring of the character's failed perception because the affectations they receive from the manic protagonist are not produced objectively. The spectator cannot understand the entire theatrical landscape because of the fracture formed by the imperceptive subject.

### Part III: Performance

#### **Constructing the theatrical expression of Beckett's landscapes in the plays "Not I" and "Play"**

My goals for the performance became exceedingly clear throughout the process of reading, researching, and writing the first two chapters of this thesis. I wanted to create a performance of Beckett's short works that presented the conscious experience of a character in a world that is unfamiliar and indefinite, so as to inform and connect with the phenomenological experience of the spectator; to create an experience for the audience that mirrors the failed perception of Beckett's characters. The inability to perceive objectively a universe that is intrinsically unfamiliar is expressed by both the unhinged, flailing language, and physical actions of the characters, but also by the audience's incapacity to complete the character and the world which is built into the narrative structure of the plays I chose to direct, *Not I* and *Play*. The broken, uncompleted narrative forms make it impossible for the audience to provide solace because they cannot comprehend the subject's expressions. Both the subject and the audience experience failure but honorably continue in "... the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on. I'll go on."<sup>286</sup> The experience of perceiving this world is marked by encounters with object, sound, and light that are equal to the faltering characters. This manufactured experience was built with two main elements in mind. First, the experience of the actor, which was

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<sup>286</sup> Beckett, Samuel. *The Unnamable*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010. Print. Pg. 176

evoked through exercises that challenged the ability to sense their bodies in the rehearsal space. This translated to how they specified the use of voice, physicality, and movement, and characterization as a means of melding the impulses of the character with their own. Second, the physical, metaphysical, and sound landscapes of an unfamiliar world in the theatrical space for an audience to encounter in the production: set, light, props, costume, sound, and media. While outlining the process by which the performance evolved I will explain my unique interpretation of the works, and the ideas and decisions that eventually led to the creation of an interactive experience of conscious perception in the theatrical landscape of Beckett's worlds.

### **Personal interpretation and selection of the plays**

The worlds of space and time that Beckett wrote for the theater are conceptually complex, while calling for a "simple" physical landscape that is constructed with both very few and very specific objects. This meant that whatever is perceptible in the performance, everything that was in and of the world, had to be necessary and affecting in the performance. Each aesthetic piece of the world is equally important to its creation and so every gesture, word, set piece, light, sound, and object had to serve a purpose in, either specifying the landscape of the theatrical world or play a role in manifesting the character's avoidance of the present. Although this fact made for a fairly small list of props and scenery, every decision made was philosophically specific. This took a great deal of decisiveness

and cruelty, a core element to directing that, up until this point, I had struggled to master.<sup>287</sup>

My extensive research, completed prior to the production process, enabled me to have a level of clarity and confidence that I brought to working in partnership with the actors and technical staff. Because my vision of the world was so highly specific in theory and aesthetics, I could effectively describe it to my actors, answer their questions and enable them to discover, for themselves, how they can presently exist in the theatrical space with mind, body, voice, and energy. Furthermore, the technical aspects of the production provided me with ample opportunity to practice with these choices. It forced compromises between my aesthetic goals and practical reality. It became a balance of how to best produce the look and effect of the world with physical, temporal, and financial veracity.<sup>288</sup>

The greatest balance that was necessary to strike was between remaining truthful to Beckett's words and intentions, with the desire to exercise my imagination and create a performance that bares the stamp of my personal aesthetic interests. This is an especially sensitive subject in regards to Beckett, whose literary foundation is famous for allowing very little diversion or interpretation of the script, from stage directions to gender neutral casting. Although I knew that my senior thesis project would not be reviewed by the Foundation, and so felt some freedom to alter elements for the sake of achieving my

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<sup>287</sup> The cruelty innate in decisiveness was a concept that first became clear to me when reading Anne Bogart's *A Director Prepares, Violence*, New York City: Routledge, 2001. 43-60. Print.. It required a balance of focus and taste that challenged my nature to second-guess and hold on too tightly.

<sup>288</sup> Creating the look of the mouth floating by suspending the actor from the ceiling with a harness may not be possible or practical but there are other tactics to create the effect.



desired effect, I had no interest in minimizing or extracting Beckett from the work. It was a blending of my intentions for the performance with the elements Beckett already includes in the theatrical world. I did not erase any aspect of the plays. I, instead, translated certain components to produce the specific experiential performance I desired.

Leading up to when it came time to choose what plays I wanted to stage, I was overwhelmed by the massive amounts of the philosophical matter packed into these brief works. It came to a head when the words I obsessively pored over began to infiltrate my dreams. The plays began to, literally, haunt me.<sup>289</sup> When I would reflect on all I had written and read for the first two chapters of my thesis, *Not I* and *Play* continually jumped from the dark of my own mind space and begged to be touched, to be given attention. They became the works I regularly used as examples in the previous chapters, but that wasn't enough to satisfy my inquiry. They continued "poking and pecking<sup>290</sup>" at me and finally I gave myself over to them. If I were going to undertake and do justice to this massive project I felt an obligation to act on my compulsion and do, in a very Beckett fashion, what felt present. I kept this concept of presence at the forefront of the production as it began to be built in, both, the rehearsal space and in technical construction.

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<sup>289</sup> In day and night, my eye and mental focus began to gravitate towards the mouths; those of my friends, strangers as they mesmerizingly twisted and stretched this gaping hole. I also became attracted to odd numbers, particularly the triplet groupings of people in proximity to one another.

<sup>290</sup> *Play*, 312

## Not I

*Not I*, written by Beckett in 1972, consists of seven unbroken pages of text performed by a disembodied mouth. This mouth is isolated as the sole form, floating in darkness, expressing these words, by a single, concentrated "...ray or beam...like moonbeam...now bright... always the same spot..."<sup>291</sup> Mouth speaks almost non-stop for the duration of the play, except where directed by the text to pause and listen. The words she speak drift in and out of present consciousness, wavering between an extreme awareness of her incessant chatter and escaping into memory, "...and no response...as if hadn't heard...or couldn't...couldn't pause a second...like maddened...all that together...straining to hear...piece it together...and the brain...raving away on its own...trying to make sense of it...or make it stop... or in the past...dragging up the past...flashes from all over...walks mostly...walking all her days...day after day...Croker's Acres...one evening on the way home...home!...sitting staring at her hand..."<sup>292</sup> She never speaks of herself in the first person, only able to bear this existence by attaching it to some other "she." There is no rhyme or reason to her storytelling. Once she has verbalized the memory she dragged up she is once again conscious of her position in the present landscape, becomes terrified by it's immensity and escapes into the past over and over again. Present in the theatrical landscape with Mouth is a cloaked figure named the Auditor who silently urges Mouth to acknowledge herself as the subject.

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<sup>291</sup> *Not I*, 378

<sup>292</sup> 380

*When Mouth refuses and lashes out at the Auditor, "...what...who...no...she!..."<sup>293</sup> the faceless figure simply raises its arms in a gesture of helplessness towards the unstoppable protagonist. This pattern continues seemingly for eternity, that as Mouth tells every moment she can remember from her birth to death, she must simply loop back again.*

*Beckett wrote the play to be presented on stage as just the two figures, Mouth lit by the strong beam and Auditor by a faint spread of light, and the lone sound of Mouth's ranting voice. My production included some elements that were specific to my interpretation including a constant humming sound that was based on "the buzzing" Mouth harps on in her speech. I also added two television screens to the landscape which displayed a soundless image of Mouth twisting and contorting. The color and visibility of the image was manipulated during the live performance. The appearance of the televised mouth was based on the vocal intensity expressed by the actress playing the role. Mouth was placed at center and at a distance from the seated audience, raised about 12 feet above the ground. The Auditor was positioned closest to the audience and also at center, facing the elevated Mouth. The two television screens stood between and flanked left and right of the two centered characters. We performed every word of the text as written and did not stray from the specified directions on gesture and the live characters' appearance.*

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<sup>293</sup> 377

## Mouth

The process of producing *Not I* began with acknowledging that this play would require an actress who has an understanding of intensive text work, dedication, bravery, and an iron will. It would also involve an uncommon physical mastering of every muscle of the mouth: “lips, cheeks, jaws, tongue.”<sup>294</sup> I asked Lindsay Walker to take on this role for a multitude of reasons. She is a performer who holds the integrity of her craft to the utmost importance. I also knew that she had been studying the role of language and its expression in theatrical texts. But most importantly, I recognized when working with her in other productions that she trusts the director, and truthfully believes in the theatrical world of the play. I knew that she could perform the technical aspects of memorization, and trusted that she would give everything to this world and attempt to breath every word with truth and presence.

Before the semester began I sent her the script and a few articles I had found about *Not I*'s history as a performance<sup>295</sup> and the techniques some actresses used to complete the marathon monologue effectively. These included an anecdote about Jessica Tandy, who first performed *Mouth* in New York, and was berated by Beckett for “ruining” his play because she took 23 minutes to finish the performance. Billie Whitelaw’s ‘classic’ taped version from 1972 lasts approx 14 minutes. Lindsay got the hint. The pace of *Not I* is not a casual stroll, but a “stream,

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<sup>294</sup> 380

<sup>295</sup> Lezard, Nicholas. "Play Samuel Beckett's Mouth? Not I." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 06 Aug. 2008. Web. 17 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/jul/08/samuel-beckett-not-i>>.

steady stream,” burgeoning forth from the lips, persistently threatening to fall off the edge into a hysterical scream. I described this and my desire for a fast yet clear expression of the text.

The expectation for a quick, unbroken pace informed the central concept for establishing this character: the unwavering, desperate need to remain. This remaining occurs through speech. If the Mouth doesn't speak she becomes enveloped in the silence and cannot verify her existence. When she speaks there is sound, the sensation of the mouth forming words is felt. For Lindsay, as the performer, the possibility of stopping means that the audience is lost, the engaged attention is broken. Both actor and character are unable to be silent for fear of losing efficacy and so must fill the landscape with words. The silence of the spectator signifies its rightful places as a part of the world as well as its inability to aid the flailing character in her mission for a peaceful existence.

During the process of creating this character, Lindsay went through a terrifying yet breath-taking transformation. At our first table meetings and discussion of characterization, she acknowledged that this character's nature was unlike any she'd ever had. The Mouth is extremely fragile, irrational, and just a few straws short of complete madness. We talked about her compulsion to cling to memory and her disjointed relationship with the world in which exists, and her fear of being lost. In the early stages of rehearsal these characteristics were separate from Lindsay. She saw them as belonging to “Esther” as she fondly named the

Mouth. However, the deeper into the process we went the more Lindsay became infected with the Mouth's anxiety, terror and resistance.<sup>296</sup>

What we most wanted to achieve, however, was an underlying tone of disembodiment that pushes Mouth to become so hysterical. I choose to enact such an experience for her by going through an exercise in which she laid on the floor, letting her body go, and sink into the ground for an extended period of silence. I asked her to simply breath and focus on what she felt, which she explained as "cold." After the long period of silence I had her engage the text, again in just small sections, and speak to the silence and to evaluate if her voice gave any clues to her placement in the room; what can her senses pick up from the sound of her speech? She experimented with volume, tone, and length of speaking, all without using the rest of her body. She very much liked this rehearsal tool, and employed it in her warm ups and performance strategies for this role.

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<sup>296</sup> Lindsay described to me that she began to feel terrified of rehearsal, and to have to speak the words; the fear that she wouldn't be able to do it. She was hyper sensitive of her emotional turmoil and felt out of control when she had an emotional outburst because her rational brain couldn't understand it. The confidence she usually holds for her ability to perform began to break apart. She told me she was scared because she didn't want to forget something and become lost. The more she gained ownership over the text and the memorization became rooted, the less it was her performing a character. The words did not sound memorized, but she gained the ability to speak each as if it had just come upon her. The Mouth was Lindsay and she, it.

While it is difficult to watch a performer suffer so deeply, I was secretly thrilled to witness this melding of actor and role. It did not have to push my performer to reach those honest, present moments of speaking. This was not the Mouth acting but her mouth. It was emotionally volatile for her, but eventually she learned to let it drive her performance rather than inhibit. I asked her to channel the resistance she had into her voice. We took a few rehearsals to sit in the darkened studio, close together and wait as long as it took for her to muster the courage to speak. Her mouth twitched and lips rubbed together in anxious anticipation of the inevitable. Once she reached that moment and the first sounds emerged they came as desperate whisper. The texture of the sound was incredible and so we repeated fragments of the text so she could develop a taste for it. Eventually the mixture of struggle and need to speak became clear in her voice and the anxiety she felt towards the role became her greatest tool.

She spoke loudly and with intensity, but never slipped into a constant yelling. She harnessed the intensity and the words began to assume a controlled frenzy, standing on a precarious edge that I could not imagine being produced artificially. The ability to achieve an effective and appropriate tone for Mouth's terror in the present came from Lindsay's experience as a performer.

For further articulation of the actor's experience *See Appendix*.

Despite the amplification by the microphone, the quality and volume of both the screams and Mouth's ironic chuckles were important. There was extensive time spent finding an image that induced an authentic scream from within Lindsay. We went into open areas and I asked her to send her voice to every corner, and also squeezed into very intimate places where there are associations with childlike giggling during games of hide-and-go-seek. She felt most honest employing a nervous whimper such as during awkward social interactions. The scream developed when we began rehearsing in Garmany Hall, the black box theater, and she was able to express the scream in response to that physical space.

Distinguishing variations in rhythm, tone, speed, and volume was important so the audience would not fall into complacency or feel battered into submission. By mapping the text's landscape it was clear that there are distinct sections of memory and those of terrified presence. The play opens with Mouth's memory of birth, "Out into this world... this world... tiny little thing... before it's time..." moves to the image of her death, "sink face down in the grass... nothing but the larks..."<sup>297</sup> before she is ripped into the present by the Auditor's insistence that she address herself as "I." Throughout the play she sinks into memory for a few brief moments of relief before the past inevitably dissolves and she is forced to return her attention to the present. We therefore established that when Mouth falls into a memory that her speed slows as she tries to savor each word that describes the event. Because the speed has been slackened, the rhythm that is so clearly defined during the sections

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<sup>297</sup> 383

of present as a “stream, steady stream”<sup>298</sup> begins to sputter and change as the character attempts to stop it from disintegrating in the present. The volume drops as she turns her attention away from the exterior world and drops into herself, taking refuge in the sanctuary of the mind. Finally, the fragility of Mouth came out as sound in these snippets of the past. “...dusk... sitting staring at her hand...there in her lap...palm upward...suddenly saw it wet...the palm...tears presumably...hers presumably...no one else for miles...no sound...just the tears...sat and watched them dry...all over in a second...”<sup>299</sup> She speaks of them with both regret and nostalgia, holding them in her mouth, knowing that at any moment they will shatter.

Because Lindsay became more and more enveloped in the character, I thought it would be interesting for her to create memory attached to the images described by Mouth. We had two site-specific rehearsals in which we visited locations similar to “in a field...April morning...wandering aimlessly around...looking for cowslips to make a ball...a few steps then stop...stare again...”<sup>300</sup> and “out shopping...busy shopping centre...supermart...just had in the list...with the bag...old black shopping bag...”<sup>301</sup> Both memories express the lonely alienation of the Mouth in her earthly existence, but in two very different sites. The first, in an open space park, was completely deserted and I left Lindsay to wander alone with instruction to speak when it felt appropriate. Similarly, we went to the

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<sup>298</sup> 397

<sup>299</sup> 381

<sup>300</sup> 376

<sup>301</sup> 379



West Farms Mall on a busy Saturday and I gave her two hours to walk amongst the masses, but this time, to not speak at all. Both produced interesting discussion and it was my goal that the vocal change brought on by the memory sections of the text could be informed organically by these personal rehearsals. Having generated imagery that was connected to her own bodily experience gave Lindsay textured memories that she could cling to, "...grabbing at the straw...straining to hear...make some sense of it..."<sup>302</sup> when performing in the present.

The twisted physicality of the mouth's movement began to emerge as the voice work found its footing. Once Lindsay was able to perform the text without complete focus on memorization, I asked her run through the performance stretching her mouth as wide as she could imagine. I noticed that she is a speaker who pushes her lips out and frontwards rather than spreading them widely. We worked on altering this by choosing some words in the script that require this motion such "writhe" or "breeches." I also gave her permission to engage motion in every aspect of the mouth, not just the lips but the "cheeks, jaws, tongue." We did exercises working on contact surfaces in the mouth<sup>303</sup> so as to make clear not just the physicality of speaking the words but clarity as well. With some experimentation, the physicality of the mouth was dramatic, full of tension but not so much as to feel painful or unnatural for the performer.

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<sup>302</sup> 381

<sup>303</sup> Including the ninth step of Kristin Linklater's progression for vocal freedom: articulatory surfaces which I have been studying this semester in Bob Davis' voice course.

What became very clear during the process of lighting the mouth was that there was very little forgiveness for full body movement. If Lindsay were to pivot her chin even one inch in any direction, half of her face and mouth would be in darkness. She would have to remain completely still everywhere in her body except for the mouth. This meant locking her stance and, especially, her neck into place while exploding from the mouth. We achieved this with the help of built in handlebars so Lindsay could ground herself to one spot. The control over the neck, however, was her own will power, which is difficult with such an emotionally driven text that begs to be engaged with a body. She had to learn to stop herself from throwing her head forward when laughing and twitching to the left during “what... who... no... she!” Once again, it was as if Lindsay had to forget that she has a body by letting go of her body’s capability to act out the words, all while having the strength to keep it completely still.<sup>304</sup>

I choose to follow Beckett’s directions for the Mouth’s physical placement within the theatrical landscape and have it appear as if suspended “8 feet above stage level.”<sup>305</sup> I decided to do so for multiple reasons. First, the distance from the audience and high level makes for a dynamic image that expresses the disembodiment of the Mouth from it’s whole form and explicates the Mouth’s terror

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<sup>304</sup> A realization I eventually had to make was that the performance of this text would never be the same and to give notes on liking or wanting to alter certain phrases were superfluous. Because this role requires so much control over multiple things at once Lindsay would enter an almost trance-like state to perform. Different things would happen every time she did it, which I loved because it was so alive every single time and never sounded rehearsed. I had to stop myself from giving notes on specific phrases, but instead found it more effective to give suggestions on speed or volume, which produced differences that aligned with the sound I wanted. Eventually I stopped giving notes all together and, instead, would just encourage Lindsay to do her best and reassure her that every performance she gave was, yes different and what I image something Beckett would have liked, as did I.

<sup>305</sup> 376

as it is threatened by the enveloping darkness. It also creates distance between the audience and Mouth, which aids in the inability to comprehend her actions. The distance from the action also gave a perspective of the expansive quality of the world because the darkness disguises any walls we physically know are part of the space. The suspension also had an effect on how the words were spoken. Lindsay enjoyed the idea of being elevated because she couldn't see anything but darkness and had no sense of what surrounded her. However, she was less than comfortable with how high she was which mirrored Mouth's uncomforted sense of in her environment. Both character and actor were unbalanced by their lack of grounding as well as alienated from any familiarity outside of their own memory. Perching the actor atop this ladder gave her no way out, trapping her in the theatrical landscape and forcing her to speak. The position of actor organically infused the anxious tension into the impulse that urges the character to continuously deliver the words.<sup>306</sup> "...the brain flickering away on its own...quick grab and on....nothing there...on to the next...bad as the voice...worse...as little sense...all that together...can't-.." <sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> The suspension effect was achieved by having Lindsay stand on a six-foot ladder, which was disguised by a black tower. With the combination of the ladder and actor's height, Mouth was approximately eleven feet up and illuminated by a pin spotlight. I asked for the tightest beam of light possible on the unit and this resulted in a circle that spanned from nose to chin, cheek to cheek. Despite early regret that it could not be tighter on the mouth, I realized that this light already tolerated barely any movement and any smaller would require an unrealistic level of control by Lindsay. It was either strap her into a head vice or live with portions of her face visible. Because she would have to transition quickly for *Play*, the make up for which needed to be applied prior to show time, I choose to forgo covering the visible portions of the face with a mask or paint. We instead focused on keeping the surrounding area around the light black by having Lindsay's hair tied back and costuming her with a black turtleneck.

<sup>307</sup> 381

## The Auditor

The script for *Not I* describes a shrouded figure that shares the theatrical landscape with Mouth. “AUDITOR, downstage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose back djellaba, with hood, fully faintly lit, standing on invisible podium about 4 feet high shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across the stage intent on MOUTH, dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated.”<sup>308</sup> The note on movement describes “a simple sideways raising of the arms from sides and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion. It lessens with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third.”<sup>309</sup> Ironically, Beckett himself, when time came to stage *Not I*, decided that he couldn’t find a position for the Auditor in the landscape that appealed to him and so gave permission to omit the figure.<sup>310</sup> I, however, found the relationship between the Auditor and Mouth too important to sever and never considered eliminating its presence from my production.

I consider the Auditor to be a physical manifestation of Mouth’s rational brain and the audience’s rational perception of the hysterical cries. It is what induces Mouth to plead “what... who... no...she” with, what I imagine is an insistence that Mouth address herself as “I.” If Mouth were to “admit hers alone... her voice alone”<sup>311</sup> is the character she speaks of then she might take the first step

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<sup>308</sup> 376

<sup>309</sup> 375

<sup>310</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. "Beckett with Lacan Part 2." *Splash28*. Web. 10 Apr. 2012. <[http://www.lacan.com/article/?page\\_id=102](http://www.lacan.com/article/?page_id=102)>.

<sup>311</sup> 379

in understanding the world she is trapped within. The Auditor, with its unheard persistence that she say “I,” is “the whole brain begging... something begging in the brain... begging the mouth to stop... pause a moment... if only for a moment...”<sup>312</sup> But instead the Mouth pushes back with a “vehement refusal to relinquish third person”<sup>313</sup> therefore the Auditor gestures with the sideways raising of the arms which I interpreted to being a shrug. The shrug communicates there is no helping her if she won’t cease her raving. Furthermore, it is a gesture that expresses the audience’s failure to understand Mouth. The gesture becomes smaller and smaller as the performance goes on, eventually stopping all together, reflecting the fatigued efforts of the spectators.

It was vital to me that the presence of the Auditor be a part of the production because I believe the energy and tension between the two figures is imperative to Mouth’s performance. If Mouth is to be present, speaking the lines presently, there had to be a presence pushing her towards the outbursts and spitefully reminding her “the buzzing? ... yes... all the time the buzzing... so called... in the ears...”<sup>314</sup> I wanted to make visible this character, who is the last shred of evidence Mouth holds as verification of her existence.

Unlike for Beckett, my landscape for *Not I* was completed *because* of the Auditor’s placement within the world. By having Mouth pushed so far back in the space and elevated there was a great deal of space between the audience and that

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<sup>312</sup> 380

<sup>313</sup> 375

<sup>314</sup> 378

character. In my production, this space was filled with two television screens placed as wings on either side of the Mouth's tower. This presented a perfect place for the Auditor who could be lit fully yet faintly by the light emitted by the screens if placed squarely in the middle of them. This would also put the figure in the same line as the Mouth but lower down and on the audience's physical level, which is why I choose to cut the four-foot podium. This placement also meant that both Mouth and Auditor were in the center of the audience, making the Auditor a buffer between the Mouth and spectators, a frustrated witness to the madness, as well, but still of the world. The figure of the Auditor reflects the audience's inability to understand the obsessive actions of Mouth and so having the figure on the same physical level with them made clear that it was not separated from their experience but an ambassador between the world and the spectators.

A long, hooded robe was used to shroud Caitlin Crombleholme, who played the Auditor, including her hands and feet. I had little interest in procuring the djellaba, specified by Beckett in stage directions, and opted for an anonymous, black robe with exaggerated hood. The hood's size was used to distort any clue of identity. She appeared as a dark pillar, matching the tower atop which Mouth rested.

### Multi-media elements

The use of multi-media technology in my production of *Not I* is probably the greatest deviation from what is specified for Beckett's staging. I was inspired by my own past experience of viewing the performance, which had been exclusively

productions for film. My first encounter with *Not I* came from watching the 1972, made-for-film version featuring Beckett's muse Billie Whitelaw my freshman year in "Foundations of Theatrical Performance." Not having any clue who Beckett was and little appreciation for the philosophical context of the piece, I walked away from this first run-in both mesmerized and disgusted. I couldn't rip my eyes away from the contorted mouth even though I was unable to grasp what exactly was occurring. It was so beautiful and, yet, grotesque. For the years that followed, I have held on to the grotesque-ness of the Mouth and so when I chose to produce this play, I had, somehow, to capture that bizarre quality and communicate it to an audience.

Because I had decided to set the live performance by Mouth far from the audience, I knew that there was little chance they would be able to really see the hypnotic gesture of the moving mouth. I wanted to engage the audience's gaze as intensely as mine had been in watching the film, so much so that they can't look away and even if they did there would be nothing else to see but the seemingly eternal darkness. The solution was to employ television monitors as a projected, enlarged image. I had originally wanted the image to be of the live mouth transmitted via video camera to the televisions, but this proved too complicated technologically and so the image was a recorded video of Lindsay from just below the nose to the chin. This proved to be the best choice, not only technically, but, because it allowed for the video of the mouth to be playing as the audience enters, alluding to the concept that the Mouth has long been speaking and the first audible words uttered in the play were not the beginning of her existence in this world.

The use of the screens in the landscape was intended to activate the motility of audience in their perceptive experience of the performance. As opposed to when it is solely the live Mouth in the landscape, the visual multiplication of the mouth image asks the audience to make decisions about where they are going to direct their attention. These are not large actions, mostly accomplished without even having to move the head, but still required a conscious decision to shift the eye from the recorded video to the live action of the Mouth to the Auditor's gesture. In attempting to force the spectators out of a passive observation and to approach and discover the theatrical landscape through a sensory-motor experience, the screens presence was imperative. I knew when choosing to produce *Not I* that it expresses an overwhelming amount of text through an unusual visual tableau that could easily push an audience into submission and cause them to stop engaging the performance. Including additional media objects that not only improved the visual texture of Mouth but also changed in color and dimension throughout the performance, enacting the bodies of the audience by offering additional affecting information. The objects activate physical impulses in the conscious perception of the audience, shaking them from passivity as their attention is directed at the present, theatrical world and the actions taking place within it.

The danger in using multi-media in theater is that the audience, as members of our overly mediatized culture, might stop watching the live performance and become fully engrossed into the screens. Although it was my intention that they have the option to watch the recorded mouth so as to become more intensely



engaged, I wanted that engagement to be directed at the whole landscape and especially the live bodies. To insure that the audience doesn't forget that they are in a theater I manipulated the image during the performance using the interactive performance software "Isadora."<sup>315</sup> The mediatized image of the mouth was altered at key points in the script as well as improvised based on the intensity and vocal quality of Lindsay as she was performing. The effects were also intentionally staggered with the live performance so there was little to no moments of synchronicity which I feared would tempt the audience to pay more attention to linking the live sound and recorded video.

I used video of static to mask the mouth during the beginning of the performance so that the audience would engage with the live Mouth at the get-go, and wanted to end with just the live Mouth alone in the dark. I gradually brought the mouth back into clarity, but would occasionally mask it with light fuzz during the portions of the text that slip into the past so as to symbolize the character's disconnection with present time and space. The use of extreme color occurred as I listened to Lindsay's intensity grow during the sections of mad raving, such as "... just the mouth... lips... cheeks... jaws... never... what?... tongue?... yes... lips... cheeks... jaws... tongue... never still a second... mouth on fire... stream of words... in her ear... practically in her ear... imagine! ... no idea what she's saying!"<sup>316</sup> This color was a mixture of two images of the same video overlapping. It emphasized those moments when Mouth is teetering over the edge of insanity before pulling

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<sup>315</sup> "TroikaTronix - Isadora." *TroikaTronix*. Web. 17 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.troikatronix.com/isadora.html>>.

<sup>316</sup> 380

herself back with a memory by disconnecting the recorded image from itself and from the live performance.

The monitors, as objects in the theatrical landscape, were not only used to enlarge the image of the mouth, but symbolize the action of the mouth through the relationship of light and darkness. Mouth's intention when speaking is to, somehow, make sense, to see something, in the mysterious world. The screens omit light. Light illuminates what is hidden or unknown in the world. However, the light from the screens do not spread throughout the whole landscape and reveal but a small portion of the space. They do not even have enough power to reveal who the figure is beneath the shroud but barely make seeable that the Auditor is there at all. The words and the screens' light bravely attempt to puncture the world but are mercilessly consumed by the vast, silent darkness.

The placement of the monitors within the theatrical landscape was determined through both technical and aesthetic deduction. I choose to include two monitors so as to balance the space. The quality of light and image coming from the screens was so good it would have been blinding to the audience's eyes if too close and although I intended to induce an overwhelming and uncomfortable reaction during the performance it was not aimed at being physically painful. Also, the monitors needed to be mobile so they could be removed for *Play* and so were placed on four-foot high carts. The size of the entire unit would have proven cumbersome in the visual field for the audience and so they were placed about three feet from the suspended mouth. This also gave the illusion that the image was floating in the

darkness because the carts were masked in black. This created an aesthetically pleasing mixture of height and depth. The live mouth is furthest from the audience and the highest visible object, the monitors then are slightly closer and medium high, and, lastly, the Auditor is closest to the spectators, low and on their level. This construction of visible objects within the landscape resembled a haunting face: the screens as beaming eyes, Auditor a faint nose and Mouth speaking from within the head. The physical landscape morphed into a metaphysical representation, similar to the set of *Endgame*, of the contents of consciousness, that which is housed in the head.

### Sound

The soundscape of *Not I* was constructed from two elements: the voice of Mouth and the buzzing that antagonizes her raving babble. To enhance the vocal work being done by Lindsay, I decided to amplify the performance. The ability to make slight changes to the sound of the voice by adding just a touch of an echoing effect made the words sound as though they were traveling beyond the walls of the space and disappearing into the infinite darkness. Too much reverb would have distorted the already fragmented text beyond any comprehensibility, and putting too much emphasis on the effect would overpower the pure, live quality of sound that makes the performance so intense. The other manipulation that was made possible was spreading the sound through the speakers so that the voice surrounded the audience in all directions, making it impossible to escape the world. The un-

amplified voice would only be capable of attacking the front of the audience, but with help from the mic the words filled the ears for brief, brilliant moments before being consumed by the boundless landscape, such as when Mouth tries, knowing it won't have an effect but needing to do so, to send her voice in a cry of help. "couldn't make a sound... no sound of any kind... no screaming for help for example... should she feel so inclined... scream... [Screams]... then listen... [Silence}... scream again... [Screams again]... then listen again... [Silence]... no... spared that ... all silent as the grave..."<sup>317</sup>

Because Beckett's works are the theatricalization of the conscious experience, I felt it necessary to include every element that drives the action, including the ever present "buzzing." The buzzing is the sonic manifestation of Mouth's fear of the infinite world. "yes... all the time the buzzing... so-called... in the ears... though of course actually... not in the ears at all... in the skull... dull roar in the skull..."<sup>318</sup> It is the sound of her emotional brain's compulsive impulse to act which is acknowledged by her words as they begin to spill out. Mouth is able to slowly quiet the buzzing by retreating into her memories, but the Auditor reminds her of it and it roars again. It wasn't enough for her speak of the buzzing because the production sought to create her complete experience, what she sees, hears, and assumes the world to be.

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<sup>317</sup> 378

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The tone of the buzzing came about through various experimentation with the music generating software Audacity.<sup>319</sup> I initially played with low tones, around 400 Hz which had a dulled humming texture. I gave it a try for Lindsay, but she felt as though she couldn't forget that it was there and therefore it made little sense that she is reminded of it by the Auditor: "what?... the buzzing?... yes.... all dead still but for the buzzing..."<sup>320</sup> The realization of a higher tone occurred by accident one rehearsal when the electrical box in the studio began ringing, just loud enough for us to hear but not overwhelmingly. I went back to the software and raised the level to 2000 Hz, which is much closer in sound to a whistle. The texture really became much like buzzing by making the waveform square shaped as opposed to rounded. The high pitch ringing came out with an undertone that buzzed.

I made the choice to have the buzzing present from the moment the audience entered so that I could continue the concept began with the screens: Mouth doesn't enter into this world when she begins speaking. She is already there and has been there. The presence of the buzzing was fortified when the audience acknowledged it and matching it with their own need to understand, the buzzing inside their own minds. Varying the volume as to which the buzzing appeared in the performance made audible the Mouth's awareness of the present and when she turns her attention inwards again so as to avoid the present world experience. Each time Mouth is reminded of the past the buzzing volume rose to a blare and, depending on

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<sup>319</sup> "Audacity: About Audacity." *Audacity: Free Audio Editor and Recorder*. Web. 17 Apr. 2012. <<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/about/>>.

<sup>320</sup> 379

how soon she falls back inwards, the lowered to a perceptible but subtle level.

During pre-show the volume of the buzzing was set at a low level so that it would be heard but subtle enough to be made an after thought which played well knowing that my audience is around technology often and, probably without knowing it, would not notice a machine's minor humming unless it was pointed out.

### Positioning of the audience and order of performances

The ability to create the physical landscape within the space first depended on where the audience would be positioned. Every object in the world has equal importance and that includes the bodies of the spectators. Wanting to create an intimate theatrical experience I decided that there would be no more than 40 people at each showing. To create the effect that the dark landscape surrounding the performance is limitless and expansive, it seemed antithetical to fill it with too many objects. I also decided that they should sit in a single area to facilitate the shared experience of the world and the witnessing of Mouth's consciousness within it. The lighting also helped determine that the audience would be able to see Mouth best from the front.

Although I first considered having the audience standing, it became clear that there would be very little need for the audience to use their whole body to actively perceive this piece so I choose to save their energy for the *Play*, and utilize chairs for *Not I*. Furthermore, the amount of energy required to perceive the plays was a factor in deciding to stage *Not I* as the first performance. It made sense that

there should be a progression from small actions in the eyes, head, and neck to the larger, full body movement called for the spectator to engage in *Play*. Beginning with standing and moving to sitting would make for a drop in energy instead of continuing the momentum built by the first performance. Also, starting with these smaller movements gives the spectators a taste of the activity in perception before asking them to jump into a full bodily interactive version.

In considering how to make the best use of, not only the audiences', but, the performers' energy, it was clear that Lindsay should perform *Mouth* before her role in *Play*. With so much physical, mental, and emotional focus necessary in performing *Not I*, I wanted to give her plenty of time to prepare and gather focus. Because the experience of performing this play is so demanding and intense, this gave her the opportunity to unleash everything in a brilliant and violent torrent of energy. The same idea was applied for the audience, who, having just experienced an incredibly forceful event first, would return for the second performance expecting something similar and be surprised by the emotional difference and black humor of *Play*. As Lindsay articulated it: "After performing *Not I*, *Play* is like enjoying light dinner banter."

Changing the audience's expectations for the performance forced them to re-address the theatrical landscape they thought they had gained a grasp of during the first play. My interpretation called for a different physical placement to view *Play* so when the audience re-entered they were met with a chair-less space and instructions to stand amongst the characters. I wanted to play off their assumption

that they had again be sitting and distanced from the action and characters. Performing *Not I* first allowed for the extreme darkness to hide the pre-set objects for *Play*. Having *Play* first would have shown all our “cards” and left no room to continue exploring the landscape. In this order, the world would reveal itself further, unfolding more objects, affectations and information begging to be interacted with by the audience’s attention, the phenomenological experience of perception. The revelation of unexpected and unknown portions of the landscape produced the experience of attempting to understand the vast theatrical world for the enacted spectator.

## **Play**

*Play is written for three characters, two women and a man: W1, M, and W2. These three subjects open the play by recounting the story of their spoiled love affair. This narrative is structured with one character giving their side of an event before being silenced and another beginning their perspective. This shift from one character to another is dictated by the presence of a light which allows the characters to be heard when it shines upon their face, but when taken away the subject falls silent. W1 is the committed partner of M who has an affair with W2 which W1 learns of and all three ultimately end up alone in their present state of existence. The first half of the script is the retelling of the past while the second is the character’s reactions to their current existence in a world that is uncomfortable and unfamiliar, “If only I could think. There is no sense in this...either, none*



*whatsoever. I can't.*"<sup>321</sup> *While brought into awareness by the light of the world the characters avoid its true nature by concentrating on elements of the past such as each other, "That poor creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose?- I can hear her. Poor thing.*"<sup>322</sup> *Eventually the characters come to a point where they must retell the story again to distract themselves for a while longer, therefore the script calls for the entire play to repeat. The three characters, in Beckett's stage directions, are presented as three heads protruding from erect urns, "The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium of W2, M, and W1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play."*<sup>323</sup>

### W1, M, & W2

The rehearsal process for the actors in *Play* centered on the ability to react to the impulses activated within them by the affecting objects that construct the theatrical landscape as both character and performer. This is similar to the progressive blending of self and role Lindsay experienced because both actor and character exist in a world where time is not in the past or future but of the present moment. The actions and words spoken are performed as a desperate reaction to the stimuli existing here and now. Both actor and character are forced to be 'live' to this theatrical landscape, and so experience the internal impulse to "do something" when called upon by the external presence of the light, which they interpret to

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<sup>321</sup> *Play*, 314

<sup>322</sup> " "

<sup>323</sup> 307

mean they need to speak. The actors must speak because the only way they know how to exist [for the audience] in the theater is to act. If they did not do so then they would fail to grab the attention they need to verify their existence in the world. It is as W2 demands, “Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?” These characters have a specific, ‘fictional’ history that is important to the action of the play, but what drives the performance is the very human need to act which is not exclusive to the character but within the actor’s body, as well. The way they speak these words is derived from their own inability to sense their bodies in the space as opposed to having to imagine what that fear feels like. The process to arrive at this came from performing exercises in conscious awareness of the self and the space through physical sensation, memorization of the text and analysis, and specificity of the voice and body.

The script can be divided into two sections: the first half is the retelling of the affair (the past), and the second is their experience of the present which they address as “this.” The actors discussed with one another how they each believed the affair happened and eventually ended. There were disagreements as to whether M left W1 for W2, vice versa or whether he left both at the same time and this ultimately led to their deaths.<sup>324</sup> It was great that each actor had a different version

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<sup>324</sup> Lindsay was convinced that M left her for W2 but upon running into him a short time afterwards lured him to her seaside home, drowned him and then “drank a bottle of champagne, dressed in my nicest diamonds, drew a bath and slit my wrists.” Caitlin, on the other hand, was sure that M left her for W1 and while burning his belongings in a great heap, threw herself into the fire as suicide. Austin believes, as his character said, that he “made a clean breast of it”<sup>324</sup> and ran away from both. He doesn’t know exactly what led to his physical death, but said he had a sense that he died near or in water, explaining his spontaneous hiccups.

of events because it only reinforced the characters' impulse to retell the story over and over, never able to find the actual narrative due to its subjective perspective.

Through further text analysis, each actor also developed a vocabulary of how the characters experience their present state of existence and their individual relationships with the theatrical landscape. This includes what about this world causes them discomfort and forces them to continue speaking as well as how they more broadly experience the world. Beckett wrote in the stage directions that the characters are to be incased in "three identical grey urns about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth."<sup>325</sup> My production presented the bodies as half disintegrated forms, leaving only their heads, that which houses the conscious mind, to sense the world around it. I did choose to expose the hands, in which were placed small props that were symbolic tokens from the past, items mentioned in the memories. They cannot feel with their bodies where they are in space and so can only respond to the beam of light that calls upon them and the encompassing silence pervading their hearing.

Lindsay described that W1 wants to exist in the quiet darkness, but can't stop obsessing over feeling scorned by the affair. "Silence and darkness were all I craved. Well, I get a certain amount of both. They being one. Perhaps it is more wickedness to pray for more."<sup>326</sup> These thoughts keep her from embodying silence and although she wants it badly she knows that by asking for more she will just continue to think about the past. She sees herself as the victim in the past while also carrying

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<sup>325</sup> 307

<sup>326</sup> 316

absolutely no guilt for her violence and possible murder of M. When the light appears W1 feels interrogated; its persistent beam is there to torture and keep her from the darkness she wants. “Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out? Would that placate you? How the mind works still to be sure!”<sup>327</sup> Not knowing how to evade its beam she reacts by offering every flippant response, “Is it something I should do with my face other than utter? Weep?”<sup>328</sup> and a refusal to admit any wrong doing, “Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that doesn’t seem to be the point either.”<sup>329</sup>

W1s unyielding front against the light was expressed vocally with consistent tone and volume. Throughout the entire performance, she speaks loudly, not screaming, but with an aggressive edge. She also remains in control of her tone, not giving anything away accidentally, but adding in hints of sarcasm and snobbery to elevate herself, in her own mind. As *Play* repeats, looping back to recounting the love affair, there is no emotional change in W1. She recites it knowing exactly what she will tell and not tell, having repeated the words so many times already. This came across with a strong tone of control that bites here and there, but is never unrestrained. Losing hold of her believed control over her existence would allow the present world to flood in and jeopardize her last shred of sanity. She wants to sound as if she has the upper hand and can’t be broken down by the endless call of the light, and forced to acknowledge the vast, present world. The pace used when

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<sup>327</sup> 314

<sup>328</sup> “ “

<sup>329</sup> 316

addressing the light in the present was quick, giving the “hellish half light”<sup>330</sup> a linguistic jab of resistance. She spoke as if wanting to just say something so the light would go out and she can left in the dark silence, knowing it won’t last long. Pacing for the sections of memory were a touch slower, produced as a balance of all three actors’ desire to dwell on the past.

Because she addresses the light as an interrogator, W1 would physically react to being plucked out the dark by presenting a face free of panic or fear. Her eyes would open slowly as she took in a breath, collecting herself before speaking. The level of her stubbornness and sense of entitlement came across in her little turns of the head and lazy shifting of the eyes as if trying to shrug off any annoyance or anxiety the light brought. Lindsay portrayed W1 as a woman fond of nothing but herself. She didn’t move her eyebrow, blink or shift her gaze unless it was pleasing to her. She occasionally takes the effort to stroke a pearl adorned razor blade, symbolizing her obsession with holding onto the past. This movement consisted of just one finger, the last working digit of her crumbling hand, lightly and slowly grazing the object.

W2’s clings to the light’s presence, terrified of being alone in the darkness. As the second portion of the script progresses she becomes more and more anxious about the light abandoning her. She finds this present world to be “less confused. Less confusing” and “At the same time I prefer this to... the other thing. Definitely.

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<sup>330</sup> 312

There are endurable moments.”<sup>331</sup> However, it is not a peaceful existence because she cannot experience the present world without associating it with her past. “To say I am not disappointed, no, I am. I had anticipated something better. More restful.”<sup>332</sup> Caitlin explained that she related her connection with the light to that of being left by M, such as when W2 says “Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else.”<sup>333</sup> The sporadic presence of the light reminds her of M’s comings and goings so she desperately tries to make it stay with her by interacting with it via the action of speaking, conversing with it as if it will answer and keep her company. This association of the world with M causes her to further divert her attention to the past as she imagines “That poor creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose? I can her. Poor thing.”<sup>334</sup>

As *Play* progresses and repeats, W2 becomes increasingly anxious, sometimes slipping into a complete loss of emotional control. Caitlin worked on creating a voice that showed the character’s manic shifting of attention, panic at being left alone without producing a caricature of madness. She spoke the words rapidly, expressing the mile-a-minute speed as to which the character is thinking. Her tone of voice was as if she were speaking to herself, even when she asked things to the light. It was the tone of self-narration, constantly saying what is running through her mind, past or present. The quality of the sound was tired, as if her vocal chords are breaking down from always being used; her voice crumbling away with the rest of her body.

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<sup>331</sup> “ “

<sup>332</sup> 312

<sup>333</sup> “ “

<sup>334</sup> 314

When in the depths of her terror, a hysterical cry rung out. When she would retreat into thinking about M or W1 it became soft and turned inward. The voice rides the tumultuous waves of her emotions as grapples with existing in this world.

The overall hysteria that runs through W2 was embodied in Caitlin's eyes, breath, and lips. Whenever the light beam broke upon her she would grab at breath so as to make sound right away and while she spoke she would breath erratically in an almost staccato manner. This produced a crazed, spasmodic motion in her abdomen, a portion of her body that is otherwise inanimate, as if her emotions are trying to break through dead body and reach the surface of the skin. Her hands would make just a small clinching, grabbing at anything to keep afloat. She would continuously shift her squinted eyes, as if looking for something in the light that she might recognize or cling to for comfort. This eye movement was expanded to how she turned her head, slightly in angle but almost always pivoting in one direction or the other. Even when not illuminated by the light, her lips were relentless moving, providing an endless narration of the self to the self.

M thinks that he is experiencing a finite phase, that his existence in this world will somehow end and "It will come. Must come. There is no future in this. All this, when will all this have been... just play?"<sup>335</sup> He believes the events of the past were a playful game until it had to end in death, and that this current world, too, will eventually be done and there will be "Peace, yes, I suppose, a kind of peace, and all

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<sup>335</sup> 313

that pain as if... never been.”<sup>336</sup> This peace he desires is a comfortable forgetting of the pain in both the past and this present existence. He sees the light and silence as a presence that will grant him peace, but he must give it something, say something to be awarded his desire. “Why not keep on glaring at me without ceasing? I might start to rave and [Hiccup] bring it up for you.”<sup>337</sup> He is constantly trying to find the right thing to offer the light: admitting his lies and fantasies, benevolent pity for his scorned lovers but, inevitably, it goes out again, “Have I lost... the thing you want? Why go out? Why go-“<sup>338</sup> His unsuccessful effort to escape this world leave him terrified that he may be alone, “Am I as much as... being seen?” and he seeks refuge in remembering when he had much company. Austin, as the actor, spoke these lines with the intention of insuring he was being perceived by the audience as means of verifying his own existence through their attentive gaze.

M experiences moments of existential terror, moments where the realization that a meaning for his existence in the present world is unknown, that he then suppresses with memory. As the play repeats his terror becomes intensified [but never to the hysterical level of W2.] M’s voice, instead, expresses this building of anxiety by becoming increasingly stumbling. As with the other two characters, he speaks at a fast pace, trying to rapidly throw every strategy out so he can move on from “this.” M’s tone of voice is of attempting to placate the other and himself. He speaks to light with the same air of placation as when he assured each of his lovers

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<sup>336</sup> 312

<sup>337</sup> 316

<sup>338</sup> 315



that he needed them. “So I took her in my arms and swore I would not live without her. I meant it, what is more. Yes, I am sure I did.”<sup>339</sup> He is, in his voice, trying to momentarily avoid failure with a false sense of reassurance.<sup>340</sup> The terror that restrains the characters from acknowledging and interacting with the original objects of the unfamiliar landscape causes them to repeatedly fail in pure perception and possible coexistence with the universe. The physicality that M had was a subtle externalization of his internal hope that this uncomfortable existence will be over soon.<sup>341</sup>

All three characters closed their eyes when the light shifted away from them. This represented the action of retreating inward to memory. When the light abandons them, the dark world is a vast, unfamiliar abyss and they must escape into their memories so to retrieve a scrap of the past, used to distort the present world, though it is always in vain.

### *Costume and make up*

The choice to expose a great deal of the actors bodies, especially from the waist, up, came from wanting the dissolving of their bodies into the wood to appear gradual: flaking off at the head, face and chest and crumbling into pieces further

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<sup>339</sup> 309

<sup>340</sup> This specificity of tone often created an issue of comprehensibility of the text for the listener because the self-doubting texture of the voice and the speed as to which it was delivered made it difficult to understand at times. I stressed to Austin that I would rather he speak with clarity and maintain tone, and the pace could slow a tad to allow for this. The want to produce the right tone resulted in a lower volume, which was appropriate, but needed to be adjusted so the audience could hear.

<sup>341</sup> His breathing was short and shallow, a controlled gulp of air to keep the anxiety at bay as he speaks again. His pointer and thumbs would shake a small amount as they atrophy. He would also shift his eyes but less erratically than W2, more in the sense of planning what he should say to the light. He held a writing pen, trying to rewrite the rules of the world with an object from his past; a futile and pitiful action.

down the body. When placed in urns, the actor's body is hidden with only the face exposed, but my interpretation required elements of costuming as well as make up that created the effect that the characters' skin is peeling away. Beckett wrote in the stage directions that the characters' "Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks."<sup>342</sup> Because I decided to contain the character in a box made of natural materials the use of make up would have to look as though the skin of the faces were peeled away by time, flaking off in sections.<sup>343</sup>

Color was paramount when choosing costumes. Again, it was my intention to carry the aesthetic of dissolving into every element of the characters' appearance. This included shying away from bright colors and choosing muted, lifeless shades of white, grey and brown. I also tried to keep away from a certain style of dress so as to avoid any clue of one period of time in a landscape that represents endless time. Instead, we chose items that felt appropriate for the individual characters. Lindsay portrayed W1 as woman who took great care in her dress and appearing attractive to others therefore we put her in a slate grey, form fitting night gown with a moth eaten stole. Caitlin described her character as less sophisticated and a bit plain, though would want to wear a dress. We found a beige and dark blue piece that hung a bit loose on Caitlin's body and paired it with a skin-toned lace overlay, which was literally falling apart at the seams; the cloth hanging in shred off the dress. M's clothing came from Austin's image of him as a mediocre office employee. We choose

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<sup>342</sup> 307

<sup>343</sup> This look was achieved using liquid latex that formed a false surface layer of skin that was plucked, wrinkled and peeled back before attaching small pieces of the bark to the newly opened "wounds." Both Lindsay and Caitlin applied cosmetic make up as well.

a dark brown suit and tie that blended with the texture of the wood chunks as well as a stained white shirt.

### Soundscape

The soundscape in *Play* is derived solely from the voices of the characters. The world of sound in this play is expressed in the character's tone of voice as well as specific stage directions and punctuation written by Beckett that I interpreted as opportunities to extend the character's failed perceptual experience as sonic representations and reverberations.

Although it was important to give enough room for each actor to develop their individual character's voice, an overall tone expressing urgency and anxiety was the basis by which the complexities of each character's sound could grow. "Few artists in world history have produced so genuinely a spectrum of solitudes in the medium of human Voice, or have sheltered them in a more compelling space in order to render them as vital, humorous and clear as Beckett has done."<sup>344</sup>

The voice expresses the sounds that occur inside the conscious mind. There is an outer voice, which performs and audibly articulates and then there is "the regions of consciousness which exhibit the implicit and explicit soundings of the interior Voice."<sup>345</sup> The inner voice of consciousness is an anxious one, uneasy but knowing of its endless state of being. This angst is performed in the outer voice. The

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<sup>344</sup> Lukehart, Robert. "The Subjective Imperative of Voice: Reflections on Samuel Beckett." *Free Hosting, Web Hosting, Domain Names and Web Design | Fortunecity*. Samuel-beckett.net, 1998. Web. 18 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/brambles/143/beckett.html>>.

<sup>345</sup> Lukehart

text works to linguistically match the tone of urgency through repetition and fragmentation such as the thrice spoken chorus, “We were not long together” “I said to him, give her up- “One morning as I was sitting-”<sup>346</sup>

The tone of the voice conveys the textual impulses driving the characters actions and struggle to exist in their constant state of present being. The tone for the characters is that of urgency. The act of creating sound through the voice is the characters attempt to ward off the void. Infinite time and space is threatening and so they stain the silence through words imbued with immediacy. “These short plays are rarely presented as an intimate theatre of mind, endowed with primal human vitality and urgency of Voice. Instead, they have been presented as monotonal intellectual puzzles due, no doubt, to all the philosophical hype surrounding Beckett’s mystique.”<sup>347</sup> The mistake to produce one of these short works with a toneless, robotic tune gives the impression that this is the intended state of the character’s existence, which evokes passivity in both the actions of the characters as well as the audience perceiving the performance. While it is fair to say that, not all of the short works require an extreme tonality of immediacy such as that of *Play*.

All the characters in *Play* speak so as to bring forth what they remember and thus are able to bear the idea of the infinite expanse for even a few moments. The character M experiences hiccups when he begins to become overwhelmed by the concept of the endless world. He interrupts himself with the violent intake of air. It is a nervous tick that occurs as he attempts to ward off the void, a habitual action

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<sup>346</sup> 308

<sup>347</sup> Lukehart

used to break up the endlessness of time and expressed from the impulse to ‘do something’ in expansive space.<sup>348</sup> The hiccups add a slight of humor to a concept that could overwhelm an audience with impending doom. These characters aren’t just talking heads, but complex minds and have personalities that are not simple, monotonal, or humorless.

The hiccup is a pause and Beckett reflects this in his punctuation. He wrote some lines broken by ellipses, such as “I can do nothing... for anybody... any more.”<sup>349</sup> M, in this line of text, acknowledges the futility of his false actions that corrupt his perception of the universe. We addressed these as emotionally charged lines that, in W1’s case, were suppressed with a swallowing. W1 needs to maintain the notion that she is in complete control, especially over her own body and emotions. She suppresses any rising energy that might crack the unyielding façade she has built by physically pushing it back down her throat. The same emotional turmoil W1 pushes away with a swallow also boils up the throat of W2 such as in “When you go out- and I go out. Some day you will tire of me and go out... for good.”<sup>350</sup> Her anxiety of being abandoned in this world is expressed by the punctuation and Caitlin and I worked on how to best explain it audibly. She came upon the reflex to gag or have a subtle heave whenever faced with the possibility of being left alone. The gag made for muffled, glottal clicking sound. Whereas W1 has

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<sup>348</sup> It took some time for Austin to discover the best sound, a spasm that is audible, but not false sounding. He began to approach is more as a gasp, his throat closing before he can take a full breath. This tactic made it possible for him to build muscle memory so that he could recreate the same sound over and over again.

<sup>349</sup> 313

<sup>350</sup> 312

the self-control to keep these emotions at bay, W2 is “... a little unhinged already...” and cannot keep her manic energy contained.

W2 also experiences the impulse to laugh as Beckett wrote in the stage directions, “Pause. Peal of wild low laughter from W2 cut short as spot from her to W1.”<sup>351</sup> I wanted to take this direction a step further. This character flirts for the entire performance with the line between completely losing herself to madness and retaining a last shred of sanity. I was interested in showing that even if the character were to finally crack and stumble over the edge she would not disappear from the world, she must and will always be of and in the expansive world. Therefore I asked Caitlin to explore a journey from “wild low laughter” that becomes out of control and results in an agonizing cry of desperation. She began with soft chuckles that escape her lips and instigate a hyperactive breathing pattern. The chuckle gets the breathing into a motion that can’t be stopped and she quickly shifts from laughter to overwhelmed, anxious hyperventilation. This anxious breathing is her finally losing all sense of herself, which causes her to break out into a manic scream. Her breath becomes involuntary just as all of her becomes involuntary. The scream itself was a single, shrill note that she sustains until the light cuts her off.<sup>352</sup>

The only non-vocal element of the landscape was the sound of a skipping record that played during both pre and post performance. In asking the audience to

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<sup>351</sup> 317

<sup>352</sup> Caitlin described being able to find this note when she imagined the sensation of being burnt, using the character’s habit of remembering.

enter into such close proximity with the characters, I wanted the theatrical landscape and soundscape to engage, but not alienate the audience. Like the presence of the buzzing in *Not I*, the sound of the record represents the continual and unstopped actions of the character's speech; that, although the performance of the habitual action has not begun, it is false to believe that it is not already occurring in the world. These characters and this world exist beyond the boundaries of the performance. The continually telling and retelling of the same story to distract them from the present is the sound of the broken record that pops and skips as the audience enters and exits the theatrical space. The texture of the sound, the hissing and crackling, also mirrored the texture of the character's faces, which are dissolving and peeling away.

The rhythmic, musical variations of the soundscape were created by Beckett, who wrote the script as score dependent on the changing of light from one character to another. The duration and audibility of a certain voice in the space is based on when the light plucks the character out of the dark and reveals their obsessive babbling. The specificity of when and where the light shines creates variation of different pitches, volumes, and tone that constructs one audible landscape pieced together from three different perspectives. There was never a temptation to alter Beckett's written directions because I know that he choose these words, phrases, and timing very precisely and when I heard it aloud I was taken in by the moments of musicality he wrote with language. It is clear that the light is a fourth character

in *Play*, an essential presence that dictates the other characters' ability to be perceived and the score of the soundscape.

### Light

The choice to have small, contained use of light and keeping the remainder of the theatrical landscape in darkness was an extension of the expression of light used in *Not I*. Having the walls of the physical space masked by the darkness was meant to express the expansive, boundless quality of space and time in the world of Beckett's plays. The soft, yet spread out, light set up for when the audience re-enters the space reveals to the audience that there is more to this landscape than they perhaps witnessed during the first play including the three boxes and a chalk circle. It disrupts their expectation for a similar space than what they just perceived, and asks them to acknowledge and let go of this presumption so as to engage with this expanded and expansive world.<sup>353</sup> When darkness becomes an overwhelming presence in the landscape, the space is transformed, the walls disappear and the audience is in a world of metaphorical infinitude, represented by silence and black.

The three spotlights that pluck the characters from the dark world and reveals their incessant actions exposed the entire box containing the character, but did not expand any further into the space than the limits of that object. The exactitude of where the light shone, never spreading beyond the boxes, enabled the

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<sup>353</sup> It was also practical so that the audience would be willing to walk around the landscape because they were able to investigate it before the darkness encompasses the space.



objects to appear isolated and alone against the dark abyss. It illuminated the texture, color, and size of the “urns” so that it could be interacted with by the audience’s senses, enabling the enactive perception to construct the object through sensing their content. The light, itself, is an object, a character whose affectation informs consciousness of the existence of the other objects that are and of the world. The illumination of the light makes visible the constructs of the world so that their affectations may be interacted with by attentive, objective perception. Its relationship with the objects of M, W1 and W2 is a misunderstood and painful one in the perspective of the characters, in that they fear, hate and want something more from it, some answer or companionship, rather than accepting its presence and their own in the expansive universe.

Beckett specifies the use of “faint” and “strong” light in the script, which corresponded with variations in the voices’ volume. I, again, honored this, enjoying the different levels of light that fade in and out of the dark, such as when a vision begins to appear in the imagination of a dreamer. When the light shone on the individual characters I choose to use the “strong” level of light. The brightness of the spotlights was important because it would be the affecting object causing the audience to react with an active perception. When the light is cast at that high degree in a completely dark space, the eye is immediately drawn to its presence. The quality of the light also gave the actors an extra layer to their relationship with the light. It was so bright they could not see anything but the beam, which, depending on the character, was torture, companionship, or confusion.

### Objects within the landscape

The presence of the chalk ellipse drawn surrounding the three characters, the boxes, and the audience was an element original to this production. The concept stemmed from “The Phenomenology of Roundness” described in Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, in which he describes the relationship between human existence and its environment as a united world in which one’s offerings to the other is reciprocated with an action that is then reciprocated with another offered affectation. He makes this clear through an example of a bird who uses twigs from the earth to build its (round) nest, giving it a place to live, and through its action of reseeded the land continues the cycle of coexistence.<sup>354</sup> This mirrors the affecting/reacting interaction Merleau-Ponty describes as the original experience of pure perception. This pure perception is the ability to objectively receive the information offered by the world, as it actually is, and react with affectations that then build and complete the world. Beckett’s characters, however, do not experience pure perception or unity with the world because they are driven to reject the affectations. They reject them because they are unfamiliar and, instead, perceive the world through experiences that occurred in the past. They try to separate themselves from the world so as to stave off the terror they encounter by not experiencing the world in its actuality. I strove to explicate this fractured roundness with a physical object in the theatrical landscape so I included an incomplete container, the chalk ellipse with a gapping hole which represented the

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<sup>354</sup> Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1969. Print. Pg. 237

disconnection between subject and environment. The ellipse was drawn with white chalk on the black floor of the performance space. Its lines were fairly thin and faint but perceptible within the production's physical landscape.

To create the theatrical landscape I drew inspiration from other man-made landscapes that articulate the phenomenological experience of perception through objects that are often assumed to be one thing, but, instead are original forms begging to interact with the senses. One of these inspiring landscapes is the French formal gardens of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The garden provides the experience of the phenomenological conscious' perceptive experience because it places the body within a world that offers itself to all the senses of the body, is filled with objects that are perceptible, as well as reflect the perceptual ability of the seer. "The French formal garden is a study in depth and an incitement to motion..."<sup>355</sup> It is a world designed for the body's motility and wandering so as to gain perspective. The philosophy behind my performance was to incite motility in the audience's perception of the theatrical landscape, to activate their experience of the plays in their bodies. I, like the gardens, sought to design a world that called for the perceivers to move about the landscape in order to interact with the affectations being offered by the objects.

Upon interacting with the objects of the garden the body comes to perceive endless space, although never fully. Such objects include the three pools located in Versailles along the central axis so as to reflect on their surface the line of the horizon, infinity. The famous garden of pools at Chantilly while reflecting vast

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<sup>355</sup> Weiss, 33

nature also refracts the image of the body. This not only shows the seer's body to himself as firmly placed in the landscape but also echoes to the seer his own phenomenological experience. "The major difference between Chantilly and other, more common, catoptric machines of its epoch is that what is reflected at Chantilly is primarily nature itself, and, most importantly, the spectators ever-changing place within the scene."<sup>356</sup> The audience perceives a world whose nature is expansive and infinite but never completely understood because the character, an object of the world, is incapable of accepting this vast possibility and so is disconnected. The character and audience are each other's pools, reverberating the others' failure to achieve objectivity while experiencing the world.

I began to find a clearer direction for my theatrical landscape by way of these natural landscapes. The circular shape of the garden's pools gave me a doorway through which I could approach the inclusion of an ellipse in my landscape. The presence of the ellipse was used to reflect, like the pool physically showing the seer's body, the perceiving subject's frustrating and, ultimately, unfulfilled experience of the world despite the incitement to actively sense its affectations. Just as the character and audience form a reflective relationship so does the audience and the physical landscape of the theatrical space. The play's character, audience, and landscape all express the unfulfilled perception of Beckett's infinite world.

The ellipse structure, as an object that the audience would interact with when inside of its form, informed the audience of their role in the theatrical

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<sup>356</sup> Weiss, 87

landscape. They are given the opportunity to understand, by sensing the ellipses characteristics, its color, material, size, etc, their ability to act within the world. The audience generally treated it as a boundary. This gave them the same feeling of inescapability that the characters experience because they both fail to realize that their presumptions about the world are what is keeping them from fully understanding it. Just as the characters are incapable of being united with the world due to their utilization of association, so does the audience experience difficulty encountering the theatrical landscapes affectations when they assume they must stay within the ellipse. If they were to inspect it with objective perception they would recognize it as fractured border.

What occurs inside the ellipse is the ability to take any number of active paths to access the affecting content offered by the world. The audience members, when stepping into the circle, enter into a 'labyrinth' in which they could wander forever between bodies trying to unite with the play's narrative and landscape. "It is named Labyrinth because the infinitude of little paths found there are so intermingled that it is nearly impossible not to get lost."<sup>357</sup> Beckett and I constructed such a maze in my production of *Play* through the obsessive speech the characters and the physical movement of the audience within the ellipse.

Further inspired by the garden landscapes, I choose to contain the characters in boxes rather than the "urns" that Beckett calls for in his stage directions. The boxes were positioned lying down with the actors fit inside, facing upwards directly

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<sup>357</sup> cited in the notes to the republication of Louis XIV's guide to Versailles. Weiss, 73

into the spotlights. Having the characters lying down made it so that an audience could not stand away from the landscape because they would be unable to perceive them visually or audibly. These positions alters the way the audience must approach the performance because they must actively move their heads to just look down at the performer instead of remaining comfortably seated and able to take in the entire performance by staring straight ahead. The boxes are used in these landscapes as containers and were representative of containing consciousness, just as the head holds the mind. Just as the chalk ellipse contained the audience, the characters are held in their terrified experience, drifting through endless time via their habitual actions. They cannot escape their self-containment because they are unwilling to acknowledge the world without comparing it with the past. “No doubt I make the same mistake as when it was the sun that shone, of looking for sense where possibly there is none.”<sup>358</sup> Both the audience and the characters let false presumptions contain their perception thus dooming any uniting roundness with the world.

The boxes not only contained the character, but materials representative of the decaying bodily form. Beckett’s urns create the image that the characters’ forms are dissolving into ash. Wanting to create the same effect, but connected to the natural quality [water, air, earth etc.] of the physical objects in the garden structure and the characters’ incomplete phenomenological experience, I choose to cover my actors in bark nuggets. The use of a natural object was intended to challenge the

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<sup>358</sup> *Play*, 314

audience's objectivity. These are not only wood chips but also represent the fractured, flaking piece of the characters body. Because this object is positioned in relation to a body the wood chips take on a different intention, they become an original object. "Wood chips" are one thing, but these pieces of wood are the fragmented remains of a body. The audience must interact with the objects, sensing them beyond visual affectation by exploring their texture, smell, and spatial relationship with other objects, to comprehend their actuality.

Using a natural object, like wood chunks, also expressed the experience of the characters body, as they perceive it to be. They experience losing the ability to feel their body by relating it to an earthly decaying of the body after death. The body breaking into the wood chunks, becoming absorbed by nature, is their method for understanding this lack of sensation. They want to think of it as decomposition because that is a concept familiar and less terrifying than entertaining the notion that they are losing a sense of their physical form in infinite time and space.<sup>359</sup>

The position of the boxes within the theatrical landscape was intended to create a spatial relationship between the audience and the objects that would instigate an active, full body perception of the world. To fulfill this the spacing of the boxes made it so that not all the bodies could be seen at one time. Because they would be unable to see everything at the once, the audience was forced to move so to encounter all the objects, especially if they felt an impulse to touch any objects,

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<sup>359</sup> The box containers also took on this characteristic of decay. The physical objects were made from light colored wood that was stained with a greenish tint, morphing the texture and appearance of the wood so it looking molding or moss covered.

which I welcomed and encouraged a few friends to try. The triangular formation of the three boxes allowed the light to be cast on only one object at a time would not bleed onto another unintentionally. The shape of all three also symbolized the love triangle that is dragged up during their retelling of the past. This geometric shape does not inform the characters of their position in the world because they are utterly alone, unaware of any other presence but the light. The shape is, instead, perceptible to the audience who can then activate their senses via motility. Having the boxes at spread apart made room for the audience to change the position of their body based on what impulses they sense from the affectations offered by the world.

With the boxes spread far apart and in three different directions, large open spaces were made for the audience members to stand, especially towards the interior of the ellipse. However, the probability that another audience member stood in another's line of vision was high which activated their perceptive impulse to crane their neck, bend in a certain direction, and move their body to an entirely different location in the landscape so they were able to better sense the affectations being offered. This proximity brought into the play the necessity that the perceiver would have to acknowledge that the other audience members were part of the theatrical world, objects just like the characters, boxes and ellipse. Addressing the other audience members as objects meant that their perceptive actions could affect one another. If a person in the spectator's line of vision knelt down to sense an aspect of the landscape this might alter how the spectator directs their perceptual attention.



## *Time*

Beckett wrote for *Play* to loop and repeat though left several options of how this repeat could occur. I interpreted this choice as an opportunity to make the presence of time, its indeterminable length, a perceptible, present object in and of the theatrical landscape. Having the entire play occur twice not only gave the audience another chance to piece together the fractured, confusing narrative, it also made clear the habitual quality of the character's repetitive action to speak. The redundancy of the text creates an awareness of time because consciousness recognizes that it is the same thing just experienced, blurring present and past as well as looking toward an unknown future point when it will "all have been... just play."<sup>360</sup> The third repeat of the beginning chorus, "we were not long together..." "One morning as I was sitting..." "I said to him give her up..." at the conclusion of the play provides the appearance that the play is about to repeat once again. The possibility of a third repeat suggests that this play may never end, synchronizing the panic felt by the characters in the conscious minds of the audience.

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<sup>360</sup> 313

## Appendix

*This essay was written by Lindsay Walker, who performed the role of Mouth and W1 in my production of Not I and Play, and submitted to her European Theater course in the Spring of 2012 taught by Professor Mitchell Polin. It is her first hand account of taking on the role of Mouth and her experience as both actor and character as the self and role became one in the theatrical landscape.*

### Not catching the half of it...

The first time I ever read Samuel Beckett's *Not I* it was January, and I thought I would get a start on memorizing the piece Teri Incampo had asked me to perform as part of her senior thesis. My vague understanding prior to that reading was of the play as a long monologue that focused on the speaker's mouth. I remember thinking, in my delusion, that my monologue and memorization skills were strong, so I saw no reason I would not be able to tuck it into memory with my usual efficiency.

What followed were three months of the most intense theater work of my life. There are numerous things to discuss concerning what Beckett was trying to achieve with *Not I*, what philosophical and theatrical effects it has, how those are achieved, and what it is about, but my interest lies in relating these things to my personal experience. I feel I should take advantage of being able to offer the unique perspective of having learned and performed this piece, but also because doing this

work on Beckett pushed my ability and understanding of what it means to be present while performing in a way no other performance had made real. There is so much discussion of the audience's experience of *Not I*, and I would like to focus on the route I took and experience I had as a performer of Beckett's work. Time, disembodiment, and fear of speech being halted overwhelmingly loomed over, confused, and consumed moments of my mental and physical existence within the fourteen-minute world of the monologue, and throughout the process of trying to learn the play. It became an integral part of my daily life, always a point of tension. Because no matter how much time I spent on it there was no definitive way to "know" the piece, the potential for new discoveries, for getting lost, is a constant possibility.<sup>361</sup>

As Ruby Cohn puts it, "Time and place tend to coalesce in this evocation; light and sound tend to coalesce in this evocation (Cohn, 30)." After searching and searching for context clues to construct some kind of "story" in the traditional sense, it became apparent that this was not how I would be moving through the piece. It was not about a story, but the moment-to-moment overwhelming fear of having fallen into something completely unknown, and using the only means of solace, the mind as brought forth by the mouth, to fill the nothingness outside with the voice; trying to articulate what used to be known, and what seems to be in the present,

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<sup>361</sup> It is not customary for me to advocate the saying "Ignorance is bliss," but ignorance and its bliss may have been two of my best qualities when Teri enlisted me for the performance. Had I heard Billie Whitelaw<sup>361</sup>'s quote that performing *Not I* was like "falling backwards into Hell," I might have reconsidered agreeing. My illusions of approachability began to shatter quickly. After reading the text aloud the first time, I shied away from any attempt at memorization because I realized I had not comprehended at all what I had just said.

with the two intermingling to keep the momentum constant. I had no idea how I would be able to do this. I asked Teri to send me articles that might give me a better understanding. I read the first, *The Orphic mouth in 'Not I,'* with interest, but found it difficult to apply to my understanding at that point. I can so easily recall that afternoon, reading sitting on the couch in my father's house. No one was home and I was prepared to start working on memorizing. Instead, I got up to read the second article at the computer.

The second article was Nicholas Lezard's write-up for the Guardian on Lisa Dawn's 2009 performance for the South Bank's London Literature Festival. This article triggered the first fit of overwhelming panic and dismay (FOPD), my own technical term for the phenomenon, and it would hardly be the last. Panic and dismay set in as I read the following excerpt:

"If *Not I* is intense for the audience, it is much, much more so for the actor. It is, by immediate consent, the most difficult part an actor can ever be called on to play. For a start, it is very hard to learn. Not only does the text repeat itself, loop in and around itself allusively, it contains very precise instructions on the length of pauses between its disjointed phrases. And then there is the speed of delivery: Jessica Tandy, in its New York premiere, delivered the whole in 24 minutes ("You've ruined my play," Beckett told her in an uncharacteristic moment of ungallantry)...

The Mouth must not move away from its spotlight, a discipline which can only be achieved by physical restraint. To speak at such a pace without pausing for breath requires circular breathing; even more difficult, Dwan says, is managing not to swallow. She ends up, she says, feeling like a pelican. There are other difficulties, too: the face must be blacked out using matte makeup and, in Dwan's case, a pair of tights; she is also blindfolded and has her ears blocked..."

There was this moment where all at once I realized that my initial comprehension issues were the smallest of problems, how physically far I had to

go<sup>362</sup>, and a second after that I began to repeatedly gasp/cry/incredulously laughing. In thinking about it now, that response was the first step in approaching feeling that just has to get out. It was not text, but it was a step toward it. Uncontrolled, believe me I had never before hyperventilated, cried, and laughed in whirling trio and it would not be my first choice as a mode of expression: it burst out of me. I began to pace between the living room and the dining room. While this was happening I started memorizing, because that seemed to be the only thing that could possibly make me feel better. The end of March suddenly felt very close. That was also when the most consistent fear during the process took hold: disappointing Teri. Thankfully the practical side of my brain kicked in to force the thoughts of physical restraint, speed, lack of swallowing, and the ghost of Samuel Beckett haunting me for ruining his play, out of my mind and turn my attention to the first, and most important obstacle, the text.

Memorization for theater has always been a combination of talking and walking for me. Repeating something out loud over and over again as I pace around a room, and link it to prior and subsequent text is a usually very effective process. It was not that this method did not work for *Not I*; it was simply more difficult because the progress of the piece is more challenging than a more traditional monologue's narrative arc. There is no clear-cut blueprint to help recall a sentence that would logically come next, but touches of thoughts that are flitting around a deranged mind. Until I became more accustomed to that structure, it was

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<sup>362</sup> And that I really had no idea whether or not I would be able to do it.

painstaking to try and get the words precise, and then make sure the sequencing was correct. It helped early on to create designations for different areas: memory, imagery, emotion, self-interruption, exploration, reasoning, and desperation were the main categories I attached to various parts of the text.

Creating these attachments were helpful later on as Teri and I worked in rehearsals to find the arc of feeling in the piece, and they were crucial for me in starting to work toward a feeling of disembodiment. I have never considered myself a strong performer physically, but with the realization that I would not have my body for this piece, and the gradual attempts to cease my pacing while memorizing, I began to feel the enormous impact of not having it available to me. All the expressive energy would have to go into the text, with only the physicality of my mouth facilitating it. Thus, another one of the main issues I felt toward *Not I* emerged, dread concerning my ability to create the effects required of the play. I did not feel capable, it seemed very clear that I lacked the endurance to get through it. Now, I can recall that and think it was useful in trying to approach the futility of the mouth's endless ranting, but at the time it was terrifying. It is a feeling that still terrifies me.

Often for me it is easy to disguise fear as anger, and for a long time that was one of my key defenses toward the piece. I was angry with myself for not being better, angry with Teri, a person I love, for asking me to perform it and constantly maintaining faith in me, angry with every damn person, people I am closest to in my life, who said they knew I could do it. In a very angst filled and melodramatic

way I wanted to scream, “You don’t know shit!” Of course the brunt of my anger went to Samuel Beckett. All of his words strewn together like that, tricking my mind with the variations on phrases and the incompleteness of this mouth’s story, making it so hard for me to remember what I’d agonized over memorizing the day before, I hated him. In the end it was the text that changed this. Saying words like “writhe” and imagining the image “a ray of light came and went... came and went... such as the moon might cast... drifting... in and out of cloud... but so dulled...feeling... feeling so dulled...(Beckett)” ultimately recalled every painful moment I could remember in some abstract way that felt intimate but distant, while connecting to my love of poetic imagery. Tears falling into a palm, moments of being completely unable to speak, wanting to scream to feel some kind of reverberation that would justify my existence, these are all moments I have felt, and to articulate them while letting myself feel became the best way for me to enter into the mouth’s world. The rest of my body no longer mattered, though forgetting it was difficult.

However, bodies became a major issue for me outside of the piece, when Teri and I first began to rehearse I could not imagine speaking the words in front of her. It had become such a private act. The idea that Beckett’s theatrical worlds cannot exist without an audience is certainly crucial, but it was a point of conflict for me. Part of me was becoming so withdrawn, so isolated by this talking with nothing to stop me, talking out into nothing that it seemed people watching were not something I should concern myself with. Yet I was so affected by any one else’s

energy in the room with me. I wanted them to feel the intensity of what I was feeling, even if I was removed from them. “A mouth has spouted an intimate alogical stream of words, whose meaning resonates outward from an unacknowledged self, and forward from pale past events into actual theater presence (Cohn, 71).” There was no acknowledgement of me speaking these words, whether that refers to me as the Mouth, or me as the performer, but still it had to be an immensely intimate sharing of that isolated part of my body as it was forced to create a theatrical presence for those in the room. As Teri and I worked together to craft the volume, pace, and feeling for each part of the text I felt more enmeshed and also more distant, withdrawing into the mouth solidified my bond with the text and removed me from feeling a connection to the presences around me except for foisting that test upon them, and that action destabilized me emotionally.

The importance of behaving in a professional manner is something I have had drilled into my head for years. Notions of proper behavior and rules for what is appropriate in the rehearsal setting have always been standards I work to adhere to. *Not I* completely disrupted my attempts to do so and that may have been one of the best things for building my performance of the mouth.<sup>363</sup> To spew an onslaught of words in total isolation from the surrounding world required a state of agitation. After a rehearsal where I broke out in tears or had to stop because I simply felt like I could not carry on speaking, I would feel very guilty. Guilty because of the frustration I imagined I was causing Teri and Morganna, guilty that I just could not

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<sup>363</sup> Esther, as I call her



seem to keep myself together. Rather like Esther, I grew to dread those moments where I would be required to open up my mouth and articulate what was expected of me. Writing of audiences Ruby Cohn states, “In *Not I* Beckett withholds knowledge of the speaker but involves us all the more emotionally, forcing each of us to assume the unspoken ‘I’ (73).” That emotional involvement and same withholding of information is felt, putting it mildly, on an amplified level as a performer of the play. Every time it was I fighting that “I,” who became closer and closer to my self with each rehearsal and each page I added to my memory. On one occasion I began the monologue crying through it. I had explained to Teri how much I dreaded it, and we decided it was a good way to confront that. So I cried “Out into this world...this world...tiny little thing...before its time...(Beckett)” feeling like this was not a moment I was ready for, but one that I was confronting anyway.

It was unusual for me to experience a lack of will to perform. Coming into rehearsal feeling tired and unmotivated on the odd bad day is one thing, but physically dreading a play that one is entirely responsible for is a different problem. Leading up to the performances, that was where I felt myself faltering the most. After working on memorization since January, and finally finishing just as it became March, and Esther felt like a specter that stayed with me all the time, which was draining. However, there were moments that were refreshing and wonderful.

When Teri and I had our site-specific rehearsal in an isolated field, far from any formal theatrical space, my entire energy seemed to change. Feeling the long

grass brushing against me and hearing the wind gave me a very distinct place to return to when I performed the piece. No longer was it some vague field, but a field near my own home. It may not have been Esther's Croker's Acres in Ireland, but New Jersey managed to provide a version of that, my own version. Finding those intense moments helped bring out my motivation because the experience was new for me, and then I was able to imagine what it might be like to impart that experience from myself to an audience. Philip Seymour Hoffman has a quote from an interview<sup>364</sup> on the current production of *Death of A Salesman* discussing the challenge of playing Willy Loman:

“I tell you, it's not the first thing you want to do in the morning, to do that. You have to find your way there, every morning, to do that. You have to find the reason why, and you have to find the will to do it, and then you do. And then you're reminded why you do, because you finish and—whether it went well or not—you hope that some people will find it satisfying and memorable.”

The process of negotiating my own internal map on the way to performing every day was extremely helpful. Instead of trying to hide from the issues I was having, I acknowledged that it was an entirely unique piece that often made me feel out of my depth, but that it was ok, and I could get through it. Doing this forced me to deal with the obstacles I was setting up for myself, as well as figuring out my reasons for being there and trying to perform.

When the time of the performances actually arrived, it seemed unbelievable. I actually felt an understanding toward Beckett's lack of faith in time, how could I have spent three months learning this piece and still feel such a lack of confidence,

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<sup>364</sup> Healy, Patrick. "Searching for the Life of a Salesman." *New York Times* [New York] 8 Mar 2012, n. pag. Web.

still be so scared every time I stood up to do it? Now it is very clear to me that there is no other way to perform *Not I* (but right before facing my first audience, it was not something I was interested in analyzing). At the tech rehearsal, when a microphone and the pin light were introduced I wanted to freak out, the reverberations (which were adjusted to be much better) scared me and disrupted the patterns I had so carefully constructed with my voice, and I could not believe it was supposed to be my responsibility to keep myself in the light. The entire process felt like too much, and my time, unlike Esther's, was running out. "Overwhelmed with the speech 'she' comes to acknowledge as her own, Mouth compulsively tries to explain it, even though she reiterates that 'she' has 'no idea what she's saying' (Cohn, 130)." This is precisely what I felt as I tried to get through the tech process and articulate the problems that could be helped while accepting how out of control I felt of this thing that was now reliant upon me.

That pin light was terrifying. Each time its glow started to come out of the dark, I knew I had to stay within its circle until I had brought forth every last syllable in my head.<sup>365</sup> The experience would never be full for me, or her, until I felt myself with these words, among other people. I will not say I felt ready, it was not a feeling of comfortable preparedness, but the edge of a precipice (I do not care if that sounds cliché, that is how it was), knowing there was no choice but to jump, without any certainty of what would happen.

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<sup>365</sup> After a very stressful tech rehearsal, Teri and I waited until everyone had gone and I did the piece for the last time in the quiet and light of the space, and it went well, but I also realized in that moment that I needed the terror. It was time to go beyond the work Teri and I had done, beyond the two of us in a room dealing with Esther.

Before Friday night's performance I did everything I could think of to give myself some kind of reassurance. I had cut dairy out of my diet for the week, had not touched alcohol, excused myself from strenuous work, exercised, gave myself time warm-up, listened to Nicki Minaj and Rihanna, tried to breathe, and be centered. It really did not matter. None of those things had any impact on what I felt when I realized the house was closing, and took the last steps up the ladder. Nothing mattered except where I was at that precise moment, and I was so afraid. Even so, when that horrid little pin light started to shine out of the dark, it was a force to make me speak. That was the night I got lost. It was not just lost inside the text, though. The best way I can put it is to say that I lost myself for a few moments, and when I came back I did not know where I was. Meditation has been a casual interest of mine for a few years in large part because of the idea that the mind can become so present in a moment that all other things disappear; I have never achieved that in sitting meditation. However, for that period in *Not I*, something akin to it happened. When I came out of it, to find myself lost, I became aware again of my body, of the sheer terrified panic I started to feel, and of the need to keep speaking until I found my way back. It sounds strange to try and describe it, but I feel I have to because the further away it gets the more difficult it is to try and grasp the feeling. Coming out of it I felt so alive, so aware of every part of myself, and so exposed. Despite being shrouded in darkness it seemed that the audience could see my every pore, and I could feel their presence rush through them. It was my favorite performance, not for technical reasons perhaps, but because I have

never felt those things. I finally embraced loss of control and threw myself into the moment, into the mouth. That night I went to have dinner with my parents and ordered gin, wine, and a cheese plate, and thanks to the experience of Friday, Saturday was the best goodbye Esther and I could have shared.

Nothing else came to matter for me more than that willingness to fully release myself into the presence of every moment of *Not I*. It is not a particularly pleasant state, and I fought very hard against it. Thinking I could tame it with a memorization schedule, all of the crying, self-doubt, anger, and fear, these were all necessary phases, because they brought me closer. Closer to the realization that surrender is key to embodying the unceasing speech that goes on into infinity, with no closure, no security, and always the possibility that the slightest shift will distort what once seemed understood. To make the audience feel powerless and overwhelmed against the sea of words, I had to let myself drown in them for fifteen minutes. I think I may still be coming back to the surface. I swore I would be so relieved to have *Not I* done with that I would never utter those words, never even think them, again. But I do still live with the words. They run through my mind, and sometimes I even mutter them to myself. Perhaps this will cease as more and more time passes (though Beckett might ask if it is passing at all), except I have a strange inkling that Samuel Beckett may have the last laugh in allowing the performer to think she has the choice to make the mouth stop. It may very well be that my mind never stops waiting to “pick it up (Beckett)-“

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