Evaluating Samuel Beckett's visual stage language: viewing the aesthetic of failure through the lens of visual art

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that Beckett's engagement with art enabled him to develop a visual stage language through images which fed into his staging and through an understanding of the principles and elements of art. Therefore using the lens of visual art enables us to focus on the staging of Beckett's plays as evidence of him experimenting with new visual forms for failure. An extensive use of comparisons with modern art and the Old Masters builds on current scholarship, introducing fresh insights. I propose the concept of subversion as an element of Beckett's minimalism as a result of investigating the differences between Old Master paintings and his visual stage language. This systematic and wide-ranging investigation introduces many examples of how Beckett used the components of the *mise-en-scène*, such as lighting, costume, make-up, movement and gesture to create a visual aesthetic of failure. Use is made of a broad range of material including Beckett's production notebooks and records from actors, directors and designers.

Beckett's writings on art emphasised the failure of representation and the need to show failure in the work itself. The visual elements I include under the aesthetic of failure are: abstraction, failed figure, figure in the stage construct, fragmentation, grotesque, liminality, minimalism and repetition. Merleau-Ponty's grounding of perception in the body's experience of its world and his linking this to visual art is used to throw light on aspects of Beckett's problematization of embodiment.

This thesis demonstrates that Beckett's theatrical experimentation created a visual body of work: it aims to recalibrate the relative importance of the visual versus the spoken text, and therefore promote further scholarly debate.

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This is dedicated to my wife, Louise Bouvier Tippett, who has inspired me since day one.

NOTE

For consistency all productions are cited using the English names of the plays.

Due to copyright restrictions art works used are not reproduced in this thesis: website links to view the art works online are provided in the appendix.

Chapter One

Introduction

In this thesis I explore what I term Samuel Beckett's visual stage language as a series of experiments in his drama for finding a new visual form for failure. In this examination I am led by the plays themselves, which comprise iconic visual stage images, distinctive for each work, but which taken together can be seen to offer a recognisable body of work. I argue that it was Beckett's engagement with art, a visual language that uses colour, texture, line, and so on to communicate ideas and feelings that led to him thinking in visual terms for his staged works. This introduction lays out my methodological approach; definition of key terms; and critical theorists' concepts which feature in my analysis.

This introductory chapter is followed by: Chapter Two, a literature review; Chapter Three, a discussion of his engagement with art and his art criticism and an exploration of the links between the visual stage language and art, with four case studies; Chapters Four, Five and Six analyse in greater detail four plays each, focusing on figure in the stage construct; movement, gesture and stillness; and light and dark. The concluding Chapter Seven is followed by my Bibliography; the Appendix comprises a Timeline showing Beckett's engagement with art and an alphabetical listing of the artwork used in the thesis, with web links.

1.1 Methodological approach

This thesis is focussed on the particular way Beckett conceived of his *mise-en-scène* and how his engagement with art was instrumental in him building a visual stage language from the theatrical components available. My research mines Beckett's texts, *Theatrical Notebooks* and records from his collaborators and from other scholars to argue that Beckett sought to implement an aesthetic of failure on stage in visual terms. The approach which follows from this task I set myself means that the investigation of other dramaturgies is outside the remit of my thesis. Also I do not cover the spoken text, which means not analysing images represented through the words: in considering the visual stage language separately I aim to highlight how Beckett creates a visual body of work, although this is not to deny that Beckett of course created the spoken and visual to interact.

Visual art

My methodological approach is based on the proposition that using the lens of visual art will allow us to focus on the visual stage language. This is based on the idea that Beckett's immersion in visual

art provided images which fed into his theatrical staging. In addition, I go beyond this to argue that he developed a capacity to understand the principles and elements of art, and therefore to implement a visual language in the different setting of the theatre. Building on other scholars' insights and based on my own observations I have followed a rich seam of art for an analysis of the visual stage language, for example linking Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* painting *Supper at Emmaus* (1601) with the seated figures in *Ohio Impromptu* (1981) and Gerard Richter's (born 1932) *Grey (Untitled)* (1968) with *Godot* (1953). I investigate Beckett's art criticism as well as his comments on art in letters and diaries, and his friends' comments on his knowledge of art. These sources are used both to build up the argument for a visual stage language and also to examine how engagement with art fed into his aesthetic of failure.

Beckett's friendships with artists and art experts continued throughout his life and I mine this information in order to show how he was creating a visual stage language from the post-war period onwards, at a time when he was visiting artist friends in their studios and attending their openings. Examples include the artists Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) and Joan Mitchell (1925 –1992), who both had studios in Paris, enabling Beckett to see their work in progress before exhibition, and also to observe the process of continuous refinement of images over time. The Timeline (see appendix) gives evidence of Beckett's immersion in art which continued throughout his life.

This analysis uses specific art works by artists whose work Beckett would have known, primarily Old Masters and modern art. This is based on Beckett's having mentioned these artists in his published letters, diaries or art criticism or because of his documented frequenting of art galleries, and more widely his continuing active interest in contemporary artists. Although this thesis does not concern itself with Beckett's influence on artists, I use work from Bruce Nauman (Born 1941) and Robert Morris (1931-2018), both of whom were active during Beckett's life time, drew inspiration from him and directly acknowledged it. The work I draw on consists of two art installations in my analysis of *Endgame* (1957) in Chapter Four and a video piece for *Footfalls* (1976) in Chapter Five.

My research is not based on the idea of a simple, stable correlation between an art work and a visual stage image, but rather involves examining potential parallels. James Knowlson has rejected the concept of direct influence of specific art works, in favour of "recognition – of affinities and resemblances" (Knowlson in Croke, 2006, p.70). My methodological approach is to compare similarities, such as the disposition of a figure, and qualities such as the emotional charge of a work. For example, Knowlson's comparison of the "unusual perspective" of the seated figure at the table in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's (1880-1938) *Self Portrait as a Drinker* (1915) and the positioning of the table and seated figures in *Ohio Impromptu* (Knowlson in Croke, 2006, p.70) led me to examine an

affinity of mood of melancholy and loss which they share. Kirchner's mask-like self-portrait shows impotence in the face of the outbreak of World War I, whilst the fragmented figure of Reader and Listener act to conceal rather than reveal. Both play and painting show a tension between being immobilised literally brought to the table; both the figures in the play and the painting are precariously positioned in a liminal state (see definition below).

I have used the extensive range of art to which Beckett was exposed, with an emphasis on modern art and the Old Masters, split roughly equally between the two in my analysis. The latter term is defined as "widely applied to painters and their works which come from the period between the 13th and 18th centuries" (National Gallery, London, website). One sub-set of artists I have drawn upon are those whose work Beckett saw during his German trip of 1936/7. As he kept diaries listing his visits to galleries, private collections, museums and cathedrals as well as artists' studios this intensive period of studying art provides a key source of his interest in specific art works, artists and art movements. Of the modern artists, I make use of art by Ballmer, Beckmann, Dix, Klee and Schlemmer, which in different ways challenges representation of the figure through abstraction, fragmentation and repetition. However, I include a much wider range of modern art in line with Beckett's own continued engagement outside of this early involvement.

Two key ideas which I pursue in my thesis derive from my investigation into the links with the Old Masters. Firstly, that repeated viewing of stock images of key figures in the Christian drama fed into Beckett's staging. Secondly, that Beckett's visual stage language can be seen as subverting such art which rests on faith and ultimate salvation. The representation in art of the physical and mental suffering endured by the well-known cast of Biblical characters constitutes the staple of most galleries of Western art. Repeated viewing of such art, which shows the characters in stock poses, making stylised gestures has been linked to his life-time's contemplation of such art (see Chapter Two). I argue that we should consider Christian iconography of a saint as a whole when we link Beckett's visual staging to specific iterations of an image (see for example my argument on Mary Magdalene in Chapter Five). In this context it is important also to recall that Beckett was steeped in the Bible stories from his reading and background, "Christianity is a mythology with which I am perfectly familiar … so naturally I use it" (Beckett in Brater, 2011, p.8).

My argument takes account of Beckett's engagement with the art world throughout his life, rather than solely focusing on the formative years (late 1920s-1930s) or the period when Beckett was writing and translating articles on art for Georges Duthuit (late 1940s). From the 1950s to the early 1980s, when Beckett was actively involved in the theatre world, as he wrote and directed his plays, he was also still involved with the art world. The artist Avigdor Arikha who was his friend from the

mid-1950s onwards described how Beckett "often sat gazing at a painting, print or drawing a long while without uttering a word. He would simply gaze, marvel, nod, and sigh" (Arikha in Knowlson and Knowlson, 2006, p.145). I argue that Beckett's continued links with the art world while he was becoming a hands-on theatre practitioner is relevant to his developing a visual stage language. In the 1960s Esslin noted, "He avoids literary coteries and is more at home among painters" (Esslin, 1968, p.43); that Beckett gravitated towards the artistic community when he himself was grappling with new visual forms for showing failure on stage reveals a cross-fertilization process at work. However, this does not detract from the strong links Beckett made from working within the theatre world; where information is available I draw attention to the collaborative effort required as he worked with actors, directors, and designers to help him realize his vision.

I contend that the way Beckett worked on his plays in rehearsals, refining the *mise-en-scène* before he allowed the later play scripts to be published (see Gontarski's comments in Chapter Two) can be compared with the practical process of making incremental changes to art works. As a director Beckett worked intensively with actors on pose, movement and gesture, to get the visual impact he wanted. Billie Whitelaw has written of how in rehearsals for *Footfalls:*

> Sometimes I felt as if he were a sculptor and I a piece of clay. At other times I might be a piece of marble that he needed to chip away at. He would endlessly move my arms and my head in a certain way, to get closer to the precise image in his mind … As this went on, hour after hour, I could feel the 'shape' taking on a life of its own (Whitelaw, 1995, p.144).

Plays chosen

Along with a wide ranging survey of art work by different artists, my methodology also involves examining the majority of the stage plays; this breadth of focus seeks to probe similarities which help to conceptualize the aesthetic of failure as a visual one. Investigating Beckett's staging throughout his theatrical career reveals him experimenting with a visual stage language. This can be seen in *Godot*, his first produced play; Beckett continued to explore this language in a more concentrated way in his shorter plays and he kept on refining the elements of his visual stage language in his earlier plays. For example, Beckett started writing what would become *Footfalls* with its acute concentration on the difficulty of the act of walking whilst directing his 1975 production of *Godot* (Beckett in Craig et al, 2016, p.387). Whilst the problematization of walking is present in *Godot* from the outset, Beckett increased the patterning of repeated movement in this 1975 production (see Chapter Five).

1.2 Definition of terms

The upper level terms of my thesis, as given in the title, are visual stage language and aesthetic of failure; the latter is an umbrella term for the elements that I have identified in this visual aesthetic. These comprise: abstraction, failed figure, figure in the stage construct; fragmentation; grotesque; liminality; minimalism; and repetition.

Visual stage language

In making the link between Beckett's life-long immersion in art and his iconic stage images it is evident that there is an artistic drive behind his staging. Beckett's working practice shows that he is committed to producing an act of visual communication; this is discernible from his initial concept through to the refinement of the visual on stage. There is a lack of terminology in the scholarship for this, which is not surprising given the pre-eminence of the spoken word "the privileged status of written texts – and the attendant experience of listening to words – functions at the expense of a theory of visual perception in the theatre" (Johnson, 2012, p.3). The term 'visual stage language' has some currency within recent academic literature, but it is used in a way that appears to be synonymous with the term *mise-en-scène,* which carries with it the suggestion of a secondary process, in which a text is rendered in theatrical terms. Examples of the use of the term in the literature include John Astington's use of it in relation to monarchical ceremonial display in Renaissance drama (Astington, 2017, p.177) and Brenda Murphy's analysis of the directorial changes by Elia Kazan in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, in particular the use of movement and proxemics (Murphy, 1992, p.117).

However, I use the term visual stage language to go beyond the term *mise-en-scène*, encompassing all the visual elements of the staging, which taken together compose what can be considered an experimental visual form. This act of visual composition was part of Beckett's creative process and it led in the final outcome to what can be read as a challenging visual text. I examine all visual components of the *mise-en-scène* such as movement, gesture and stillness; lighting and shades of darkness; use of stage space; perspective; and the setting which in Beckett's drama fixes the figure on stage, including costume, make-up and properties. The term visual stage language gives due weight to the foundational role of the visual: in creating new forms for failure. I do not address the dramatic form in total which of course, apart from the mimes, includes spoken text which interacts with what is seen on the stage in complex ways.

Beckett's visual creativity was fostered by his immersion in art, but it was honed by his practical involvement in the theatre. Pierre Chabert, who worked as an actor with Beckett, also directing some of his plays, stressed that in Beckett's theatre the body:

> is worked, violated even, much like the raw materials of the painter or sculptor, in the service of a systematic exploration of all possible relationships between the body and movement, the body and space, the body and light and the body and words (Chabert, 1982).

This attention to visual stage language, evident in the play texts, *Theatrical Notebooks*, correspondence and other documents, can be seen at all points in Beckett's process, when he was creating and revising his plays and in rehearsals. Beckett's use of the visual was a way of rejecting the idea that his work should provide answers. Beckett acknowledged the difficulties of trying to express 'being' in theatre, "There are too many conventions (i.e. forms) that must be accepted and that restrict" in contrast to art, "painting being does not lead to doctrine and form" (Harvey in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, p.135).

Aesthetic of failure

I argue that it was his engagement with art in the 1930s as evidenced in his correspondence, and his published art criticism of the 1940s, that fed into his developing a visual aesthetic to show failure when he began his career in the theatre. The term 'aesthetic of failure' has been applied to Beckett's creative work for a long time. Scholars have used Beckett's art criticism specifically to extrapolate from it an aesthetic which expands on the sense of the impossibility of artistic expression and makes much use of the word 'failure'. Eric Levy used the term in his analysis of Beckett's prose piece *Texts for Nothing* (1950-51), "Through the Text narrator, Beckett fulfils his aesthetic of failure". Levy links this aesthetic to the 'Duthuit Dialogues' (1949), Beckett's analysis of "the dilemma of the artist in this century" (Levy, 1980, p.75). Levy's critique of *Texts for Nothing* focuses on the failed narrator's inability to capture reality through language. At the same time as Levy's analysis, John Pilling in *Frescoes of the skull: the late prose and drama of Samuel Beckett* (1980) discussed *Texts for Nothing*, highlighting the primacy of failure: Beckett's "aesthetic at this time was predicated on failure and the unavoidability of failure … he has always been more interested in disintegrative forms than integrative ones" (Pilling in Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, p. 41). In the post-war period Beckett's correspondence on art with Georges Duthuit and his writing and translating work for Duthuit's art periodical *Transition*, led to a fertile period of thinking about visual art and the philosophy of aesthetics. Amongst other writings, I make use of the 1948 essay 'Peintres de l'Empêchement'

*('*Painters of impediment/ hindrance'*)* and the 'Duthuit Dialogues' (1949) (also called 'Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit') which contain key statements: the impossibility of artistic expression; the need for the artist to keep on trying; and the imperative to show failure within the work itself (see Chapter Three). I argue that Beckett's finishing the writing of *Godot*, his breakthrough play, in 1949 at a time when he was praising modern art for showing failure, highlights the role of visual art in developing what can be identified as a visual theatre aesthetic. Beckett's repeated use of the word 'fail' and 'failure' in his praise for Bram van Velde is a good example of this, writing that he was: "the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living" (Beckett, 1983, p.145).

Although Beckett never expressed a fully developed aesthetic position for his work, these essays have been mined for evidence of this; Anthony Cronin for example called the 'Duthuit Dialogues' "the nearest Beckett ever came to writing a manifesto or a statement of what he felt to be his own position" (Cronin, 1996, p.398). Cohn goes further commenting on, "Beckett's radical esthetic [sic] of failure" in this essay (Cohn in Beckett, 1983, p.15). That Beckett continued to think about forms for failure, in this case in his own work, can be seen in notes that the literary scholar Lawrence E. Harvey made after having conversations with Beckett during 1961-2. For Beckett, there was a need to show through the artistic form itself the powerlessness, not just of 'being', but of art and the artist too, hence the paradox involved in artistic expression:

> Art = strength, creation, ego, form.
>
> Man = weakness, surface illusions, words, accumulation/accretion from outside chaos, *le neant* [nothingness], abortive being
>
> (Harvey in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, p.135).

Beckett continued to draw comparisons with visual art, commenting on the "creative act as unfinished, as portraying man's inadequacy", he "mentioned how much greater the unfinished sculptures of Michelangelo are than the complete works like *David*" (p.134). The fact that in the 1960s Beckett was still thinking about how to express failure adds weight to my use of the term aesthetic of failure for his search for new visual forms.

Scholars continue to discuss Beckett's work as permeated with a sense of failure; some such as McTighe note his "aesthetic of impotence and ignorance", concluding that his "aesthetic of failure "shows that, "Humanity continues to attempt the impossible" (McTighe, 2013, pp.153-4). The term aesthetic of failure provides a framework within which to group the visual elements of Beckett's

theatrical output, which are constants throughout, as he experimented with a range of visual stage components. Definitions of these visual elements are given below.

Abstraction

I use the term abstraction to mean the quality which results from Beckett's continual reduction (see also minimalism below), including his technique of fragmentation, and his patterning use of repetition: this opens up the possibility of different meanings, but at the same time deflects meanings. As I am investigating the visual stage language in the light of visual art, it is useful here to consider definitions of abstract art. The definition from the Tate Gallery website states, "Strictly speaking, the word abstract means to separate or withdraw something from something else … The term can be applied to art that is based [sic] an object, figure or landscape, where forms have been simplified or schematised" (Tate Gallery website, 2019). This accords with Beckett's visual stage language, which involves taking a part of the body, a partial scene or a simple action out of what could be considered a complete visual whole. Gontarski has indicated that in Beckett's work, "Abstraction itself is a formal element, a means of emphasizing the fact that we are watching a work of art, a representation" (Gontarski, 1985, pp.19-20).

I argue that Beckett creates a specific effect of tension between abstraction and figuration which relates to his formal interest in the challenges posed by questions of being and representation. The radical fragmentation in *Not I* (1973) for example makes Mouth stand for the whole body, in a metonymic way, which is heightened by the effect of the otherwise empty, dark stage which creates a minimalistic blank canvas (see definition below for minimalism). The Tate Gallery definition of abstract art states that, "It is also applied to art that uses forms, such as geometric shapes or gestural marks, which have no source at all in an external visual reality" (Tate Gallery website, 2019). Beckett uses such techniques, for example artificial movement, which creates patterning through geometric shapes. Beckett scholars use the concept of abstraction including links to visual art, when analysing his work. For example, Gontarski examines Beckett's "tendency towards abstraction" comparing it with "Picasso's late work" (Gontarski, 1985, p.3). Oppenheim states that "reductionism enhances the visually evocative power of the text", stating in the context of the prose works of the 1960s and 70s (she notes also here the "formulaic choreography" of *Quad*):

> Many and varied … are the cases to be made for Beckett's Cubist affinities: the dismembered and otherwise geometricized bodies; the overlapping configuration of "I's"; the discourse patterned by serial, repetitive and contradictory syntax (Oppenheim, 2000, p.127).

Failed figure

Beckett shows the debilitated body on stage, exploring it as the site of life and death; however, the 'failed figure' goes beyond this as a formal part of the aesthetic of failure. Gontarski positions the "inability, ignorance, and impotence Beckett speaks of" as going beyond simply "helpless characters. The problem is more formal, a fundamental aesthetic problem with which Beckett struggled for years" (Gontarski, 1985, p.7). I use 'figure' rather than 'character' as it corresponds to the quality of Beckettian drama, emphasising the physicality of the body rather than psychologically-driven narrative. My use of 'figure' reflects a perceived need for a term for how embodiment functions in Beckett's drama. For Pierre Chabert, Beckett's focus on the body enabled him to "systematically explore theatrical space", to create on stage "a physical and sensory space, filled with presence of the body" (Chabert, 1982). However, despite this emphasis on the body, its presence is problematized: Walter Asmus who worked with Beckett as assistant director in Berlin in the 1970s, has stated that what Beckett wanted on stage were "ghosts", or "figures" which come out of the dark, (Asmus, 2015). McMullan characterises what she calls the 'personae' as "ghosts … exiled between presence and absence" (McMullan, 2010, pp.105-6).

The term figure is also appropriate as it is used in visual art, in which context it retains the etymological meaning of 'figura meaning a shape, fingere to mould' (Collins on-line, 2020). This idea of shaping the body fits with Beckett's rehearsal process, as Billie Whitelaw's comment stated earlier in this chapter reveals. Figure rather than character is also apt because it suggests a moulding by outside forces, which implies that free will and reason are problematic. As well as decrepitude and debility, the failed figure conveys the fundamental condition of human weakness, including the failure of perception. The embodiment in the flesh of the inexorable breaking down of the figure challenges actors physically to reveal how the body is wearing out, but is unable to complete that process of dissolution, in a world which is itself advancing towards entropy. The figures are also illustrations of the artist's own inevitable fallibility when faced with the creative task: the failure of representation.

Figure in the stage construct

I have created the term 'figure in the stage construct' to encompass what I argue is the interlocking nature of the image created by the relationships between the failed figure and its setting and objects, and also between the figures on stage. In Beckett's theatre there is a very precise relationship between the components of the *mise-en-scène*; this fixes the quasi-abstract figures in a liminal space (see below for definition of liminal). Gontarski writes that Beckett's drama is "a theater

of body parts and ghosts, a theater striving for transparency rather than solidity. And the playing space is always delimited, ritualized, circumscribed, framed" (Gontarski, 1997, p.93).

This inter-connectivity between the figure and its world accords with Merleau-Ponty suggesting that the body inhabits a "primitive spatiality … which merges with the body's very being … To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world … our body is not primarily in space: it is of it" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.171). McMullan has drawn attention to how Jocelyn Herbert's designs for *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) responded to these interlocking relationships. Herbert had an "interest in opening up an abstracted stage space that highlights the visual kinetic relationships between actors, set and props" (McMullan, 2012, p.8). The closeness of the figure with its setting can problematize the animate/inanimate binary, leading to 'grotesque' as defined below.

Fragmentation

Beckett experimented with fragmentation in different ways, to show the erosion of the viability of the figure, emphasising the part rather than the complete body. This conveys visually the idea of humans as fragmented beings, both physically and psychically, unable to become whole; fragmentation is also a technique to show the failure of the dramatist to represent completion. McMullan gives the mouth in *Not I* and the head in *That Time* (1976) as examples of the technique of "fragmenting it" [the body], whilst she sees the presentation of "barely seen, ghostly bodies" in *Footfalls* and *A Piece of Monologue* (1980) as a different technique (McMullan, 2010, p.109). However, the graduated lighting used to de-emphasize the head in *Footfalls* or the partial concealment of faces in *Come and Go* can be seen as other ways of achieving different levels of fragmentation. Drawing attention to Estragon's bare feet and his boots at the start of both acts of *Godot* can be seen as an early example of Beckett's intense focus on parts of the figure. Investigating the visual stage language and using art comparisons brings clarity of focus to the role of fragmentation. The painter Avigdor Arikha commented on how Beckett looked intently at sections of a painting, noting simply "*Peter's foot"* in his museum catalogue entry for Caravaggio's *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (1605) (Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, p.144).

There is an overlap of this term with 'abstraction': fracturing the body is a way of examining the tension between figuration and representation. The fragmented body problematizes the binary opposites of presence/absence and embodiment/disembodiment, which are central to Beckett's aesthetic of failure.

Grotesque

Beckett's figures often violate boundaries for example between organic/ inorganic, in a way which questions what it is to be human. The definition of the grotesque I use is based on the concept of "transgression of limits and boundaries", as the grotesque is "a discourse that is, perhaps more than any other, concerned with questioning and unsettling assumptions about what is human and what is not human" (Edwards & Graulund, 2013, p.86). The philosopher Noël Carroll, who has written widely on visual art and media, likewise uses this idea of the confusion of boundaries. He develops a list of structural tropes to elucidate the grotesque, defined as "an image, whether verbal or visual, of an animate being that violates our standing biological or ontological concepts and expectations" (Carroll in Connelly, 2003, p.298).

The first of Carroll's tropes is the "fusion figure", based on the origin of the word 'grotesque' to describe the art-work at Nero's villa, such as combinatory "plant-boys – humans from the waist up and foliage from the waist down" (ibid., pp. 295-6). This "fusion figure" can be seen in Beckett's visual stage language in various guises, such as the head-funeral urn combination in *Play* (1963), an image which combines the animal and the mineral orders, or Nell and Nag in their dustbins in *Endgame*, their bodies already ashes and dust. Another trope which violates categorical expectations relates to the "incomplete instances" of a "standing cultural category" such as showing amputees (ibid., p.300). In Beckett the grotesque overlaps with the radical fragmentation which unsettles expectations of what it is to be human, such as Mouth in *Not I*.

I recognize a quality of the grotesque in the comparison of Beckett's figures to statues, puppets and automata: inanimate representations of the human they confuse the boundaries being organic and inorganic. In rehearsals for the 1971 production of *Happy Days* Beckett referred to Heinrich von Kleist's 1810 essay 'On the Marionette Theatre', which proposes the puppet's superiority because of a lack of self-consciousness (discussed further in Chapter Four). The theatre theorist Edward Gordon Craig had disseminated von Kleist's ideas in his book *The Marionette* (1918), in which he developed his idea of the Über-marionette and its application to the actor (Huxley & Witts, 2002, p.166). However, Beckett read von Kleist's essay in the original German: Knowlson noted how Beckett's interest in it for his stage work showed his "increasing emphasis on severe restraint and economy of movement and gesture" and was also evidence of his "sense of the disaster of self-consciousness in man (and the inadequacy of the human intellect to arrive at any form of salvation)" (Knowlson in Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, pp. 282-4).

For Edwards & Grauland the grotesque "offers a creative force for conceptualizing the indeterminate"; this opens the work up to multiple interpretations (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p.3). This captures the quality of Beckett's grotesque condensed images in his visual stage language, which suggest a multiplicity of ideas whilst not tying down specific meanings.

Liminality

The word liminal derives from the Latin for limen (threshold) and is defined in the dictionary as "at a boundary or transitional point between two conditions, stages in a process, ways of life, etc." (Collins on-line, 2020). The term liminality comes from anthropological investigations into cultural ritual, and was developed by Victor Turner, whose definition of liminal space and time stresses their in-between nature:

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial (Turner, 1969, p.95).

My use of the terms liminal and liminality is not in the context of the anthropology of performance, communal ritual or cultural identities. Instead it is grounded in the physicality of the body in terms of mortality: the liminal draws attention to how the figure inhabits an in-between state, between life and death, conveying an unsettling quality of indeterminacy. The ghost-like attributes of Beckett's figures, already mentioned, is redolent of this sense of being trapped between the two states of the living and the dead. This is also conveyed by funerary sculpture, an example being Ancient Egyptian striding figures with one foot in death and one in life, such as *Standing figure of a king*, which I compare with May in *Footfalls* (see Chapter Four). The liminal rests on the opposing binaries of life/death and presence/absence: these are conveyed visually through stage lighting, the fragmented, abstract figure caught on the minimalist stage. Katharine Worth has noted how Beckett's practice involves "'wasting' large areas of stage to produce icons of light in surrounding dark" and how he "shapes the dark and light around the figures" (Worth, 2001, p.42). Beckett problematizes the light/dark binary, often showing the failed figure at risk of being engulfed by the darkness, in effect making it visible (see Chapter Six). There is overlap with 'minimalism' as defined below; note in particular Lucy Bell's use of 'liminality', which coincides with this problematization of presence/absence.

Minimalism

As a term minimalism is commonly used in the context of design, as can be seen in the dictionary definition, "Minimalism is a style in which a small number of very simple things are used to create a particular effect" (Collins on-line, 2020). I use the term minimalism to investigate how Beckett's continual process of reduction stripped away what is seen, so that fragmented figures with restricted movement and a few, simple objects feature on otherwise empty stages. Stage lighting to create tension between light and dark, and monotones of black, white and grey are also part of the minimalist aesthetic. As discussed in Chapter Two, Rosemary Pountney has written about the process of reduction Beckett employed and Stanley Gontarski has also focused on what he calls a process of 'undoing'.

The term minimalism as I use it has some overlap with abstraction, fragmentation and repetition, all elements Beckett uses to create a concentrated visual form for failure. Writing primarily about the shorter fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, Lucy Bell makes use of the visual artists of the 1960s Minimalism movement in her analysis of, "Beckett's minimalist aesthetics". Quoting "Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's famous motto 'less is more'",[1] Bell finds in Beckett an "ethical affirmation of the irreducible residue". She compares this aesthetic with sculptures by the Minimalist artist Robert Morris, stating that his work shows "liminality, this quasi-absence arguably constitutes a positive affirmation. Only by hovering on the brink of nothingness, by removing so much, can minimalism capitalise on what is obdurate and obstinate because it is a tiny, ungraspable remainder" (Bell, 2011, pp. 33-4). Beckett himself quoted Mies van der Rohe's dictum "less is more" in his notes for the premiere of *That Time*, which shows simply a man's face and white outspread hair at the top of a darkened stage. His defence of minimalism reads, '"To the objection visual component too small, out of all proportion with aural, answer: make it smaller on the principle that less is more'" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1999, p.360). My use of the term minimalism is founded on the idea that it is an aesthetic that maximises the impact of what is seen: Beckett's visual stage language privileges the sparse yet intense, to convey the entropic process on the human figure which nevertheless endures.

Subversion

I use the term subversion for an analysis of what James Knowlson suggests are the "crucial" "disparities between the different worlds" of the Old Master art works and what Beckett created from them (Knowlson in Haynes & Knowlson, 2003, p.83). I investigate the differences between

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[1] Mies van der Rohe, Bauhaus Director 1930-33, https://www.bauhaus100.com/the-bauhaus/people/directors/ludwig-mies-van-der-rohe/

specific art works from the Old Masters and Beckett's visual images which drain vitality from them, in the context of Beckett's process of reduction and his minimalist aesthetic. Knowlson has written "if we could take X-rays of some of Beckett's own later plays, we would surely be able to detect some of the ghostly images of the Old Masters lurking beneath the surface" (Knowlson, 1996, p.196). In Chapter Three I discuss subversion more fully in relation to *Godot*. Beckett's use of radical minimalism strips away the comforting illusions of the Old Master paintings to show the resulting ruination of the human figure. The idea of making a comparison between two entities to show the decay or falling apart from an original state also brings to mind what Steven Connor calls the "entropic decline" (Connor, 1988, p.121) which Beckett shows in those plays which show a worsening state in the second part. Connor's ideas are discussed in Chapter Two.

Repetition

Beckett shows his figures as being caught on stage in a repetitive cycle; the tedium of repetition which denies any development or completion is imaged in different ways, and works on many levels. In *Footfalls* it is through the precise, de-limited pacing up and down along a strip of light; in *Godot* the cycle of day and night and the long act of waiting signal repetition; whilst *Play* re-runs the action of the first part to create the second section which is called "Repeat" (Beckett, 1986, p.320). This repetition functions to show the failure of autonomy, an inability to impose human will on the situation. Beckett himself told the actors of his Berlin *Endgame* production in 1967, "There are no accidents in *Endgame*; everything is built on analogy and repetition". Cohn gives details of how this is not simply the structure of the play, built on two couples, two windows and so on, but also how actions are repeated, for example how, "In Hamm's opening and closing soliloquies he folds and unfolds his handkerchief with the same four limited, symmetrical movements" (Cohn, 1980, pp.241-2). I focus on the use of repeated physical actions, such as pacing or hand gestures, as minimalist techniques which emphasise the idea of the figures as trapped on stage, caught up in patterns which offer no resolution.

In his essay *The Intent of Undoing*, Gontarski sees repetition as part of Beckett's use of abstraction in this struggle with being and representation, stating:

> One reason for second acts in *Happy Days* and *Waiting for Godot* and for the *da capo* ending of *Play* is not only to destroy logical continuity, cause and effect, and to emphasize theatricality and performance, but, more important, to strengthen pattern, symmetry (or near symmetry), and, finally, form through repetition (Gontarski, 1985, p.19).

The terms I have defined in this section are used throughout; they reflect my focus on the visual in Beckett's drama and specifically his foregrounding the physical body on stage in order to question embodiment.

1.3 Critical theorists' framework

The writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) investigating perception through embodiment, and linking the way perception works to the practice of visual artists, add theoretical under-pinning for Beckett's aesthetic of failure. In addition, for the same purpose but to a lesser extent, ideas from Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) are introduced. Ideas from the work of both philosophers have been used by Beckett scholars to inform readings of his plays; these are discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two.

Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty grounds perception in the body's experience of immersion in the world, rejecting the Cartesian primacy of the mind. Merleau-Ponty wrote in 'The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences' (1964) that his repositioning of "rationality or the absolute" means attempting to "bring them [humans] down to earth" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.13). In another of his texts, 'A Prospectus of his Work' (1964), Merleau-Ponty wrote of the need "to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world" (ibid., pp.3-4). This stressing of the organic primacy of the material body in the physical world has parallels with Beckett's failed figures. They are expressions of a similar attempt to bring humanity back down to the grubbiness of earth and to deflate pretensions of being supremely rational creatures.

It was in his *Phenomenology of Perception* first published in 1945 that Merleau-Ponty developed his theories that perception is pre-reflexive, deriving from our physical embodiment in the world of things, rather than from "objective and detached" knowledge which comes from a subsequent process of thought. As a result it is necessary to re-establish "contact with the body and with the world", so that "we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.239). This corresponds to Beckett's focus on the corporeal body in the physical world; his perspective on embodiment reveals the failed nature of the figure.

In describing how perception is dependent on the body's experience in the world Merleau-Ponty uses language that resonates with Beckett's aesthetic of failure. In *The World of Perception* (2004)

for example, a series of radio lectures given in 1948, Merleau-Ponty describes the relationship we have with our world as:

> an ambiguous one, between beings who are both embodied and limited and an enigmatic world of which we catch a glimpse (indeed which we haunt incessantly) but only ever from points of view that hide as much as they reveal (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.69-70).

 The idea that bodily limitations mean we act like ghosts, our minds unable to grasp the world we inhabit, has an interesting correspondence with what Beckett shows us on stage. Likewise Merleau-Ponty's view of "a world in which every object displays the human face it acquires in a human gaze" (ibid., p.70) accords with Beckett's visual stage language which shows an interconnection between the figure and its surrounding objects. The fluid relationship between subject/object is also paralleled by the power of vision: in 'Eye and Mind' (1961) Merleau-Ponty writes that human beings are both subject and object, as "my body is simultaneously seeing and visible. The one who gazes upon all things can also be gazed upon" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.354). The fluid nature of the subject/object relationship also aligns with the concept of the grotesque in Beckett's visual stage language, which violates boundaries between the human figure and its physical setting and surrounding objects.

The space which the body inhabits and what that means for the embodied gaze is central for Merleau-Ponty as he wrote, "Though we see it only from a limited perspective – our perspective – this space is nevertheless where we reside and we relate to it through our bodies" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.69-70). The constriction in the stage space and spatial relationships between figures and objects as well as the contingency of perception are important for Beckett's visual stage language. However, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the power of being able to reach out beyond the physical bounds of the body through vision and motility. That we learn to perceive the world through the experiences of sight and touch is crucial to our understanding of what perception is. It allows us to learn the structure of objects, such as a nearby lamp "I can touch the lamp … I have only to extend my hand to hold it" so that we can mentally grasp such objects as "presences" rather than "truths like geometry" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 14). Whilst objects in the plays have a sense of being "presences", Beckett closes down the options his figures have for interacting with them, by fragmenting the body, hindering vision and imposing immobility.

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on bodily situatedness means that both space and time are approached differently to the "world and time of Descartes" which provided "certainties" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002,

p.388). Human beings inhabit time, "It is in my 'field of presence' in the widest sense … that I make contact with time … It is here that we see a future sliding into the present and on into the past" (ibid.,p.483). This accords with how Beckett situates his figures in a liminal space between life and death, in which time is experienced as a continuum of past-present-future.

Given that this thesis argues that Beckett developed his aesthetic of failure for his visual staging through his engagement with art, it is particularly apt that Merleau-Ponty saw art as providing important parallels for how perception works through physical embodiment. In 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' (1952) he links the act of painting with the act of perception: both are creative and based on "what is designated by the terms "gaze," "hand," and in general "body"" . Merleau-Ponty conceives of painting and of perception as physical acts: the act of painting therefore is the act of perception writ large, as the artist "amplifies, but also prolongs, the simple marvel of oriented locomotion or grasping movements" which is the basis of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, pp.266-7).

In *The World of Perception* (2004) Merleau-Ponty draws parallels with modern art and perception: both encourage us "to rediscover the world in which we live, yet which we are always prone to forget" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p.39). The fragmented view of reality in modern art shows that neither the artist nor the viewer is a "medium of pure intellect", but both are embodied in space which is "no longer a medium of simultaneous objects capable of being apprehended by an absolute observer who is equally close to them all" (ibid., pp.53-4). This truth of how we perceive the world corresponds to Beckett's aesthetic of failure, which is based on the inability to grasp reality whole and which is shown visually through elements such as abstraction and fragmentation.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Beckett had an intense response to Paul Cézanne's (1839-1906) radically new paintings, which had a profound impact artistically and in terms of wider culture, as Conor Carville has discussed (see Chapter Two). For Merleau-Ponty and Beckett the paintings revealed an important new paradigm of embodiment and perception. In his essay 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945), Merleau-Ponty praises Cézanne for painting "this primordial world" of nature from "the lived perspective, that of our perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.73). His art inhibits our customary way of thinking of the "man-made objects" that surround us as existing "necessarily and unshakably … reveal[ing] the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.76). As I discuss in Chapter Three, for Beckett Cézanne's 1905/6 watercolour of Montagne Sainte-Victoire revealed the estrangement of humanity from nature, rather than a domination of it. Merleau-Ponty writes that in rejecting Impressionism, Cézanne did not choose between "chaos and order", wanting to capture both "the stable things which appear before our gaze and their fleeting

way of appearing" (ibid.,p.73). This idea of the tension between "chaos and order" can be seen to underlie Beckett's thinking in the 1960s about his own creative practice and the need for a new visual form for failure (see Chapter Three).

Cézanne "thought of his entire *oeuvre* as an approximation of what he had been looking for" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.111-2). Indeed Cézanne's obsessive painting of his local mountain shows this; from 1885 he "painted it many times from different positions and under different light conditions" (Tate Gallery website). Merleau-Ponty specified that the "unfinished and ambiguous" are virtues in modern art works which although they "sometimes seem to be no more than preparatory sketches" (ibid., p.106) are revelatory. For example still lifes by painters such as Cézanne and Picasso enable us to "encounter objects" that "hold our gaze, ask questions of it" expressing "in a bizarre fashion … the very mode of their material existence and which, so to speak, stand 'bleeding' before us" (ibid., p.93). This description could be applied to the visual stage language of Beckett, which through its minimalism seeks to express something of the human experience of being in the world.

Derrida

Although Merleau-Ponty is the main philosopher I draw upon, Jacques Derrida's theories which question the privileging of presence over absence and the stable construction of meaning can also help elucidate Beckett's focus on weakened embodiment and his visual form for failure. Derrida's ideas on the instability of time are pertinent to Beckett's aesthetic of problematizing time and space. In talking about his work in English for an interview, Derrida explained what he considered to be "the real future":

> In general, I try and distinguish between what one calls the Future and "l'avenir".
> The future is that which – tomorrow, later, next century – will be … But there is a
> future, l'avenir (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is
> totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally
> unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their
> arrival" (Derrida, in Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2005, p.53).

Derrida's unsettling concept of the future and his sense of a past-present-future time spectrum help to shed light on Beckett's visual stage language which shows the instability of time. Beckett's creation of liminal spaces inhabited by ghostly figures, haunted by both the past and the future, problematize presence and absence. Derrida wrote of this presence/absence binary in his analysis of

cultural texts such as photography and film, in terms which bring to mind Beckett's ghost-like figures:

> What has, dare I say, constantly haunted me in this logic of the specter is that it regularly exceeds all the oppositions between visible and invisible, sensible and insensible … The spectral logic is de facto a deconstructive logic (Derrida, 2002 p.117)

Derrida's theories of deconstruction stress that there is always a decentring of any attempt at an authoritative meaning in all texts; this comes not from outside the work but is integral to it. As Derrida stated according to a transcript of a Question and Answer session in 2002:

> Everything requires deconstruction. Not only texts in the narrow sense, but everything … Deconstruction is already at work … always already at work within the thing to be deconstructed. When you deconstruct you don't use a tool to deconstruct something. You find in the thing itself – the text itself, if you want – something already self-deconstructing (Derrida in Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2005, p. 111).

This idea can be invoked in relation to Beckett's visual stage language that shows failure within the play itself thus revealing his own failure as the creator. A comment by Derrida suggests that he found some affinity between his and Beckett's work, which explained why he had not written on Beckett, "This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; but also too close" (Derrida in Royle, 1995, p. 163).

Beckett's use of decentring, repetition and deferral can be compared with Derrida's ideas on these themes. In his essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1966) in the collection *Jacques Derrida - Writing and Difference* (1978), Derrida contested any fixed centre, which anchors structure and is based on certainties such as the unified subject. Derrida emphasises that despite the "desire for a center in the constitution of structure … a central presence which has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute" (Derrida, 1978, p.280). In his visual stage language Beckett disrupts authoritative control from within, undermining representation through techniques such as physically decentring figures on the stage. Repetition is one of the main elements of Beckett's aesthetic of failure according to my methodology. In another essay in this collection, 'Ellipsis', Derrida challenges the idea of the origin or its opposite, "It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun" (ibid., p.295). Instead there is an:

elliptical essence. Something invisible is missing in the grammar of this repetition

… Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has

exactly the same center, the origin has played. Something is missing that would

make the circle perfect (ibid., p.296).

This is suggestive of Beckett's failed figures, trapped in the patterning of imperfect circles and lines which convey repetition without closure. Another way in which the sense of being caught in a cycle is shown in Beckett's plays is through deferral, in which the visual stage language deflects the revealing of narrative meanings. Derrida's description of one of the meanings of his term *différance* in *Positions – Jacques Derrida* (1981) refers to this concept, "the (active and passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving" (Derrida, 1981, p.8).

In conclusion, this introduction has laid out the principal ideas which support my argument: that Beckett's engagement with art helped to set his aesthetic position and led him to experiment with a visual stage language to show failure. In the following chapters I demonstrate how the relationship between the visual stage language and the aesthetic of failure can be brought to light through the lens of visual art.

The next chapter comprises a literature review which shows the academic roots for my own research and where I stand in the subject's intellectual currents.

Chapter Two

Literature review

Introduction

This literature review comprises those ideas from Beckett scholars which I have found to be relevant to my thesis; I explore these ideas throughout, showing how I have developed them according to my methodology. My study primarily uses Beckett's engagement with art and specific examples of art works to interrogate the components of his *mise-en-scène* in depth. Beckett did not propagate a theory for his drama, famously refusing to provide explanations for his work. For example, when asked by Alan Schneider if he could provide some explanatory background for *Endgame* in 1957 to give to the press Beckett roundly rejected the request:

> I feel the only line is to refuse to be involved in exegesis of any kind … we have no
> elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making … If people want to
> have headaches … let them. And provide their own aspirin (Beckett in Craig et al,
> 2014, p.82).

However, many scholars have used his writings on art, in which he grapples with fundamental issues about representation, to shed light on Beckett's aesthetic. I too use Beckett's critical writings on modern art to probe the concept of failure: the movement away from representation in art which accelerated in the early twentieth century speaks both to Beckett's critical concerns and his practical theatre-making. Scholars have also written on Beckett's challenging of representation in his visual staging, using terms such as abstraction, fragmentation, repetition and minimalism: these are amongst the elements I investigate as part of the aesthetic of failure.

In addition, from early on scholars responded to Beckett's visually composed staging to make comparisons with visual art; a 1972 public lecture from James Knowlson published as *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett* is one such example. In this study Knowlson made use of Beckett's directorial notebook for the Schiller-Theater production of *Krapp's Last Tape*; this was later published in 1992 under his editorship. Knowlson used the notebook to investigate how the visual had a "thematic" and structural" role throughout Beckett's work, "Light and darkness … white and black with an intermediate grey, together with images of vision or blindness … are all obsessive features (Knowlson, 1972, p.12). I have chosen not to cover the spoken text in order to focus on the visual stage language. This means that I do not analyse verbally-constructed images in the spoken text, nor do I examine how the spoken text and the visual interact. Although this latter aspect is

outside the parameters of my research I include some of the discussions about this here for a more comprehensive review. My thesis concentrates on an in-depth analysis of the *mise-en-scène* in order to test the idea that Beckett created visual forms for failure. My contention is that Beckett created a visual body of work which can be compared with that of a visual artist. Others have made this comparison, in particular Knowlson developed the idea that the link between Beckett's love of art and his stage imagery "makes a good case for considering Beckett as an important visual artist" (Knowlson, 2003, p.43). By building on the existing scholarship I aim to further open up this critical field of enquiry, so that what I call a visual stage language can be thrown into relief and further evaluation carried out.

This chapter is structured according to six broad areas which the scholarship has addressed that are pertinent to my study: visual art links to the visual stage language; the aesthetic of failure and art criticism; questioning embodiment; representation/presentation on stage; visual stage language - minimalism; and the theatre context. Scholars' work where relevant is analysed across different sections to take account of how it relates to my thesis; for example Hugh Kenner's ideas are covered under the sections 'Aesthetic of failure – art criticism' and 'Questioning embodiment'.

2.1 Visual art links to visual stage language

In this section I discuss writings from James Knowlson, Mark Nixon, Enoch Brater and David Lloyd. These scholars have provided, in varying degrees, the impetus for my research in linking Beckett's engagement with visual art to his going beyond the norms of the *mise-en-scène* to create a visual stage language.

James Knowlson

James Knowlson is the pre-eminent scholarly inspiration for my thesis, providing the context for my using art to examine the composition of stage images. The authorized biography *Damned to Fame* (1996) revealed the extent of Beckett's engagement with art, his friendships with people in the art world and his own involvement with that world through art criticism. Knowlson has advanced the idea that immersion in visual art led Beckett to create stage images. One example from the biography illustrates this, when Knowlson writes of the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* (1982) as "a living human being [reduced] to the status of icon of impotent suffering" (Knowlson, 1996, p.679):

> The flesh of the protagonist is whitened to approximate to stone or white marble and his hands together raised to his chest like the praying, stone-like figures in a

> Mantegna painting. Behind Beckett's image, even if evoked only obliquely, lie
> centuries of an iconography of a martyred Christ or martyred saints (ibid., p.826).

Knowlson is here referring to Mantegna's fictive relief sculptures, paintings which create the illusion of being sculpture, using different gradations of greys (Langmuir, 1994, pp.62-3). Knowlson raises very important points in this short analysis, which I expand upon in this thesis. These are: the comparison of stage images to works by specific artists, but within the context of repeated viewing of images from Christian iconography; the sculpted stage figure; and the use of greys. The idea of crossing-over from one medium to another, shown in Mantegna's fictive relief sculpture paintings, can also be linked to Beckett's "dazzling array of images" which prove that Beckett could "draw on his knowledge of one artistic medium and see its possibilities for transformation and use in another" (Knowlson, 2003, pp.51-3).

In *Images of Beckett* (2003) Knowlson makes the compelling argument that stage images inspired by the Old Masters are "much more deeply problematic, more desperate and more anguished than his sources of inspiration" (Knowlson, 2003, p.83). In saying that the "disparities between the two worlds are crucial" (ibid.) Knowlson seems to suggest that the differences between the art work and the staging warrant further scrutiny. I carry out further investigation on this, introducing the concept of subversion to examine Christian iconography in art works by painters such as Mantegna and Caravaggio and secular works by artists such as Vermeer. The example Knowlson probes is the difference between Caspar David Friedrich's *Two Men Observing the Moon*, in which the "moon is used as a symbol of Christ and his promised return", whilst in *Godot* "the echo" to this painting "seems rather to be making an ironic comment on the protracted wait for a Godot, who in the end, of course, never comes" (ibid.). I discuss the link between *Godot* and this painting further in Chapter Three.

Knowlson analyses how Beckett's writings on art fed into a visual aesthetic, for example his reaction to one of Cézanne's paintings of his local mountain, *Montagne Sainte Victoire* (1905/6), fuelled his ideas about finding an "appropriate form" for a new aesthetic, which recognised alienation in nature (Knowlson, 1996, pp.196-7). The biographical background is illuminating: the fact that the 28 year old Beckett saw this painting at the Tate in London in 1934 when he was undergoing psychotherapy after his father's death (ibid., pp.174-6) must surely have impacted on his impassioned analysis. Knowlson likewise provides the biographical context for Beckett's relationship with Jack B. Yeats: he met with him frequently in the 1930s, visiting him at his studio where the painter would show his work and where discussions about art took place (ibid., pp.164-5). I analyse Beckett's critical reaction to this painting by Cézanne and also his comments on the work of Yeats in Chapter Three.

Making use of the six notebooks comprising Beckett's diaries from his German trip in 1936/7, Knowlson reveals how much of Beckett's journey through Nazi Germany revolved around his passion for art, both the Old Masters and the modern art which was being disappeared by the regime (ibid., p.748). In an essay in the National Gallery of Ireland's publication for its exhibition *Samuel Beckett: a passion for paintings* (2006), Knowlson proposes that Beckett's full exposure to modern paintings, when he was at an impressionable age, had a great impact on him. Beckett was introduced to German Expressionist art during visits to his uncle William Sinclair, who was a modern art collector and dealer in Kassel from 1928-32, and during his subsequent 1936/7 German trip (Knowlson in Croke, 2006, p.62). Knowlson states that, "It is tempting to see certain specific Expressionist or Cubist techniques – unusual perspectives, distortion, isolation and fragmentation, for example – as actual influences on Beckett when he created his own later stage images". However, he rejects the concept of influence between specific works of art and Beckett's *mise-en-scène* as being too simplistic, opting instead for "*recognition* – of affinities and resemblances" as being "much more appropriate to the ambiguity, subtlety and suggestiveness of his artistic world" (Knowlson in Croke, 2006, pp. 69-70). This forms the context for my own approach which uses comparisons between art works and visual stage language to examine physical or emotional similarities, as well as differences through subversion.

Mark Nixon

In *Samuel Beckett's German diaries 1936-37* Mark Nixon suggests that the six-month German trip "offered a new impetus for his writing, as Beckett studied, and took notes on, literally hundreds of paintings he saw in German galleries" (Nixon, 2011, p.2). A previous listing taken from these diaries, which Nixon published in German in 2005 and in English in 2010 in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* provides specific details in a tabular form of the art he saw and his introduction to people in the art world. Appearing as if "written by an art critic and not a creative writer", the diaries show that Beckett was "consciously undertaking an educational trip, perhaps with a view to expanding his knowledge for future employment" (ibid., pp.132-4). Nixon's suggestion that Beckett could have been thinking of a career in art recalls the fact that in 1933 Beckett had applied unsuccessfully "for a job as assistant curator at the National Gallery in London" quoting Jack B. Yeats as a referee (Knowlson, 1996, p.173). Nixon conveys the urgency of his trip at this time, as Nazism was increasingly closing down Modernist culture and persecuting artists; Beckett's desire to see the "vast collections before the political skies darkened further" (Nixon, 2011, p.134) surely added an emotional impetus to this pursuit.

Beckett's meeting with the art historian Will Grohmann, whose writings were banned and later exhibited at the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition in Munich in 1937, is one example of Beckett's engagement with the art world in the German cities he visited. Through this connection and others Beckett was able to gain access to private modern art collections, for example the Weise collection in Halle of works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Nixon argues that it was the "immediacy of emotive expression within form and colour" that Beckett admired in such German modern art (ibid., pp.139-40). This adds weight to my argument that art showed Beckett the possibilities of evoking an emotional charge on stage through visual means; modern art in particular emphasises inner feelings as well as ideas. Nixon also argues for a breakthrough in emotional expression in Beckett's work being facilitated by this period of diary keeping. The diary form discloses a "concern with notions of authenticity" and "the inadequacies of language" so that, "From 1936 onwards, a growing emphasis on irrationality and incompetence contributed to a shift in Beckett's aesthetic thinking, and he began to seek a way to express his emotions without concession or loss of substance" (ibid., p.2).

As Knowlson has done, Nixon also shows that whilst modern German art was an important motive for his trip, the collections of Old Masters and art available in churches and cathedrals accounted for a major part of Beckett's study. For example Nixon highlights the importance of German ecclesiastical sculpture, stating that, "Beckett must have spent a long time studying sculptured figures, endeavouring to unravel the symbolism and to cross-reference styles", stating that he was "always sensitive to gesture within sculpture" (ibid., pp.149-50). As I detail throughout, gesture is a key part of Beckett's visual stage language and I draw on sculptured figures in my investigation.

Enoch Brater

In *Beyond minimalism: Beckett's late style in the theater* (1987) Enoch Brater highlights how in "his late theater images" Beckett uses what he calls "the other stage languages"; he lists these as "movement and blocking, sound and silence, costume and set design, gesture, and, above all, lighting" (Brater, 1987,p.13). In *10 ways of thinking about Samuel Beckett: the falsetto of reason* (2011) Brater argues that art was "the foundation and formulation of his image-making" for the stage (Brater, 2011, p.75). An example of this is Beckett's use of the seated figure as being derived from the "portrait of the seated figure … from Raphael to Rembrandt to Van Gogh and contemporary painters such as Francis Bacon and Louis le Brocquy (or Picasso … the cubist conundrum of the 1939 'Dora Maar in an Armchair')" (ibid., p.76). Brater links the interiority of portrait painting, what he calls "the profound mystery of inwardness and the dislocation caused by private thought" present even in Medieval depictions of the Madonna, with Beckett's plays which show "that endless and elusive drama known as human consciousness" (ibid).

In Chapter Three I discuss the art of portraiture in relation to *Rockaby* (1981), including an analysis of Brater's which links the play with Vincent van Gogh's painting *La Berceuse*.

David Lloyd

In *Beckett's thing: painting and theatre* (2018) David Lloyd uses Beckett's art criticism and an in-depth analysis of the paintings of Bram van Velde (1895-1981), Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957) and Avigdor Arikha (1929-2010) to examine the congruence between these artists and Beckett's aesthetic. Lloyd concludes that the works of these painters appealed to Beckett because they "haunt the line between figuration and abstraction, between the emergence of the image and its disappearance" (Lloyd, 2018, p.11). Lloyd chose this group because they were "painters on whom [Beckett] wrote and with whom he had a long and sustained engagement, both as a friend and as a critical interlocutor" (ibid., p.8). For Lloyd, Beckett praises Bram van Velde because of his "painful turn to an increasingly non-representational mode of painting", in contrast to the other painters in the 'Duthuit Dialogues', who Lloyd investigates in depth, Pierre Tal-Coat (1905-1985) and André Masson (1896-1987). Bram van Velde's paintings possess qualities that coincide with Beckett's visual aesthetic in their "shattering of 'possessive' pictorial space and of the subject-object relation" (ibid., p.9). Lloyd finds that this artist problematizes the gaze and the subject's relationship with things, creating a "drama" of:

> a subject constantly displaced by the gaze that meets it as a thing that eludes it …
> this unsettling gaze is a thing that registers the fate of the subject in a world
> relentlessly subjected to circulation, reification, possession and dispossession
> (ibid., p.133).

Lloyd's main analysis of Beckett's work in the light of this analysis is of *Film*, with briefer explorations of the subject/object indeterminacy in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Play* (ibid., pp.133-143).

Making use of Beckett's letters to his friend Thomas MacGreevy about Jack B. Yeats, Lloyd writes of Beckett's:

> perception of the paintings as images of alienation, suspension, disjunction …
> Beckett's view of Yeats resonates rather with the post-Cartesian predicament of
> scission and disaggregation, between mind and matter, subject and object, that
> notoriously informs all of the writer's early work (ibid., p. 33).

Lloyd concludes that what attracted Beckett to Yeats's paintings, as with those of both Bram and Geer van Velde was "the enactment of a failure of representation, a failure either to retrieve or to

abandon the object" (Lloyd, 2018, pp.64-5). Stressing Yeats's radical aesthetics and politics, Lloyd argues against the idea that his art provides a Romantic nationalist view of "Irish rural life" (ibid., p. 42). What he finds of particular relevance in the linking of Yeats's *Two Travellers* (1942) to *Godot* is not the subject matter of two men on a country road but rather the way the painted surface problematizes the gaze, leading to the "oscillation of the eye between material and representation" (ibid., p.57). In my discussion of Beckett's sense of the alienation he saw in Yeats's work, I stress the abstract and liminal qualities of the visual stage language in *Godot*, which can be elucidated through abstract art (see Chapter Three).

Lloyd characterizes Beckett's plays as "above all visual artworks"; he aims to avoid "textual interpretation" (ibid., pp.6-8). Lloyd writes that what Beckett learned from art allowed him to use the "visual resources of the stage – depth and foreground, lighting and darkness, movement and stillness, colour and gesture" (ibid., p.205). Whilst the value of researching art links to the visual stage language is of course central to my thesis, Lloyd questions the value of looking for "iconographic affinity" in paintings (ibid., p.70). This includes the case which Beckett himself acknowledged, Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, "Other than anchoring *Godot* in a visual source that may be of use to a set designer, what does the allusion to Friedrich or to Yeats establish about Beckett's meaning or intentions?" (ibid., p. 4). As discussed above, Knowlson has argued specifically about this case that a comparison can shed light on the visual staging. I build on this using the concept of subversion; for example, Beckett drains the glowing light of the painting by using grey which undermines the comforting gospel of salvation (see Chapter Three). Despite his demurral, Lloyd does offer some affinities between visual staging and paintings, as for example with *Catastrophe* and Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo* (1605) which I discuss in Chapter Four.

Lloyd emphasises the importance of Caravaggio and *chiaroscuro* to both Arikha and Beckett. Lloyd writes that Beckett's "strikingly lit" plays, in which "action seems to take place along a flattened frieze and figures emerge from and disappear into a pitch-black void" (ibid., pp.20-1) reflect the paintings of both Caravaggio and Arikha. Both painters create a sense of drama, of the suspended moment before or after action (ibid., p.191). This can be compared to the late plays, with their "visual patterns of repetition" and the "periodic suspension of action in the tableau", which make them "appear as if they were paintings" (ibid., pp.199-200). Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* paintings can aid an understanding of Beckett's visual stage language: I make use of two such paintings in my analysis of *That Time* and *Ohio Impromptu* (see Chapter Six).

2.2 The aesthetic of failure - art criticism

In this section I discuss writings from Hugh Kenner, Ruby Cohn, Lois Oppenheim, Ulrika Maude and Connor Carville. These scholars have engaged with Beckett's critical writings on art, including the links with Merleau-Ponty's writings on art and perception. These have fed into my understanding of the term aesthetic of failure and its link to visual art.

Hugh Kenner and Ruby Cohn

As detailed in the Definitions section, the term 'aesthetic of failure' was used by Eric Levy in 1980 in his analysis of *Texts for Nothing*, in which he linked the aesthetic to the art critical writing in the 'Duthuit Dialogues'. However, other scholars had previously focused on the sense of failure and incompetency, found both in Beckett's art criticism and in his creative work. In *Samuel Beckett – A Critical Study* (1961) Hugh Kenner proposed that Beckett "plays the clown" to Duthuit as the expert, in the 'Duthuit Dialogues'. As such B. "is appalled by competence in all its forms" (Kenner, 1961, p.29), and at the end B. "simply recants, by prearrangement ("Yes, yes, I am mistaken, I am mistaken") and slips away" (ibid., p.88). In *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (1973) Kenner argued that in both the 'Duthuit Dialogues' and in his creative work there is evidence that, "Art always fails …But … we may discern a principle which will not disregard the inevitable component of failure, but will embrace it" (Kenner, 1973, p.187). I discuss Kenner's "Cartesian clown" concept below under Questioning Embodiment; I deal briefly with the concept of the artist as clown in *Godot* in Chapter Five.

In her first study, *Samuel Beckett: the comic gamut* (1962) Ruby Cohn characterized Beckett's "awkward comic artist-heroes" as existing "in tragic isolation rather than comic consolidation" (Cohn, 1962, pp.7-8). She compared Beckett to Kafka, "both are impressive creators of a cruel cosmological comedy, revealing man's awkward situation in an absurd universe" (ibid., p.222). In *Back to Beckett* (1973) Cohn writes that the "outrageous fact of death" is pre-eminent for Beckett, who created images of "'idea-feelings': a concentration on time, the split between body and mind and the limiting nature of words" (Cohn, 1973, pp.5-6).

In her editorial introduction to the critical essays collected in *Disjecta* (1983) Cohn justified their re-publication, despite Beckett's resistance, stating, "Like other scholars, too, I believe that the miscellany harbors an esthetic [sic]" (Cohn in Beckett, 1983, p.7). The title Beckett chose playfully suggests disorganized body fragments: 'scattered limbs' from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (book VI), (Ackerley & Gontarski, 2006, p.144). However, Cohn talks explicitly of the "radical esthetic [sic] of

failure" that the 'Duthuit Dialogues' (she uses the alternative title 'Three Dialogues') discloses (Cohn in Beckett, 1983, p.15).

Lois Oppenheim

In *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's dialogue with art* (2000) Lois Oppenheim accepts that Beckett's creative output can be "better understood" when his art criticism is taken into account, one example being that, "Beckett's "discovery" of Bram van Velde's painting of impossibility … surely stimulated his own privileging of abstraction over figuration" (Oppenheim, 2000, p.66). In a later essay, Oppenheim drew on this artist again to highlight Beckett's ideas on the inevitable failure of artistic representation, stating that he valued the, "Sisyphus-like effort" and success in "failing better than most" which he saw in Bram van Velde and "the artist's ability to face in the art work itself the impossibility of any true representation" (Oppenheim in Croke, 2006, pp.77-8). However, Oppenheim is uneasy about the term aesthetic of failure, rejecting the idea that she appears to find implicit in it that Beckett's writings on art provide "some sort of unified theory" (Oppenheim, 2000, p.65). Whilst acknowledging that Beckett rejected such theorising, and agreeing with her point about the "fundamental role played by negation and paradox" in Beckett's art writings (ibid., p.199), I nevertheless believe that the idea of an aesthetic in his art writings which links to an aesthetic in his visual stage language is a valuable concept.

Oppenheim is also wary of the word 'failure' although she concedes that, "Needless to say, narrative correlates of an aesthetic of failure are everywhere to be found in Beckett's creative works" (ibid., pp. 69-71). Drawing on Beckett's writings on the art of the van Velde brothers, she interprets his view as being of the "world as phenomenon of disclosure and resistance at once", in which "the impossibility of expression does not definitively obstruct it" (ibid., pp.76-7). For me, the paradoxical way that Beckett used the word 'failure' is to be understood as this kind of complex interaction, which however ultimately has to fall short of success. I discuss Beckett's use of the word 'failure' in his art criticism, including on the van Velde brothers in Chapter Three. As detailed in the Definitions section of Chapter One I discuss scholars' use of the term aesthetic of failure, such as Ruby Cohn and more recently Trish McTighe, and make the argument for my use of it.

Oppenheim links the problematic act of seeing and the uncertainty of being in Beckett's work, using "the visual paradigm, the specular concretising of ontological indeterminacy" (ibid., p.29). In her examination of both his art criticism and his creative output Oppenheim considers, "Beckett's struggle to express verbally a visual reality" (ibid., pp.124-5). In what she calls a "bird's-eye view", Oppenheim draws some general parallels with German Expressionism, Cubism, Dada and Surrealism

(ibid., pp.126 –30). In a more detailed analysis Oppenheim writes that Beckett has often been compared with the artist Alberto Giacometti in terms of, "Similarities of purpose and comparable obsessions (with alienation, mortality and the failure of art)" (ibid., pp.148-9). Oppenheim compares the way that they share an "anxiety of remembrance" which drives their process of disappearing their figures through reduction; one example is the way Giacometti focuses on the head and eyes (Oppenheim, 2000, pp.149 –52). The links between Beckett's visual stage language and Giacometti's art are illuminating; I discuss this in relation to one of Giacometti's portraits in Chapter Three and a sculpture in Chapter Four.

Oppenheim's comparisons with visual art are primarily focused on language rather than visual staging. An example of this is her comparison of Marc Rothko's (1903-70) abstract art with the subversion of language in Beckett's late prose pieces:

> Beckett's unwording of literature resembles Rothko's invisible art, the painting of nothing to see, insofar as it is precisely, if paradoxically, the visual paradigm – what I have defined as the concretization or figuration of seeing itself – that is the impediment of sight (ibid., p.48).

Oppenheim investigates this problematization of vision through a comparison of Beckett's and Merleau-Ponty's writings on art. For Oppenheim, Merleau-Ponty's view of perception challenges the Cartesian dualism of "mind/body, self/world, thought/language, and so on". Therefore "the visual work of art comes to be revealed not as object or thing, but *agent* of both artist and spectator's seeing". She compares this to Beckett's writing on art which draws on "the subject-object dichotomy in the play of perception and perceptibility" (ibid., pp.99-100).

Another manifestation of this is "the overlapping of visible landscape with seeing artist" which she finds in Merleau-Ponty's 'Cézanne's Doubt' (Oppenheim, 2000, p.109). Drawing on Beckett's own writing on Cézanne, she finds that despite, "Estrangement" being "the unifying affective register of Beckett's fiction and plays" it is in his "critical focus on alienation in painting that the link to Merleau-Ponty is most profound" (ibid., pp.114-6). As discussed in Chapter One, I make use of a range of Merleau-Ponty's writings on visual art, as well as other writings on perception which help elucidate Beckett's aesthetic of failure.

Ulrika Maude

In an essay comparing Beckett's art criticism with Merleau-Ponty's writings on art and perception, Ulrika Maude examined the similarity between the idea of "inhuman nature" in 'Cézanne's Doubt'

(1945) and Beckett's view of nature as alien in his comments on Cézanne's *Montagne Sainte Victoire* (Maude in Maude & Feldman, 2009, p.84). For Maude, Beckett's praise of Cézanne for escaping from "received modes of representation" expresses his own need to do something similar in language (ibid., 2009, p.85). Maude notes that both put forward the idea that the object resists representation (ibid., 2009, p.80) and both challenge the idea of the detached subject viewing the world at a distance, in favour of the "embodied nature of vision" (ibid., 2009, p.89). Beckett's comments on *Montagne Sainte Victoire* show him "protesting precisely against the falsifying view of 'landscape', depicted as if it existed in relation to the viewing subject" (ibid., p.82).

Conor Carville

In *Samuel Beckett and the visual arts* (2018) Conor Carville's proposition that Beckett's art criticism should not be seen as "analogous to his creative work … as examples of a profoundly distinctive imagination" (Carville, 2018, p.23) is a necessary reminder that Beckett was thinking about art and art history during a specific period, and therefore used the language of critical debate at that time. Carville characterises Beckett's writing about painting as "intimately related to broader philosophical accounts of the image as an interaction of sense impression and conceptual form" as "absolutely typical of his time". He states that Beckett's interest in "the aesthetics of the subject-object relation" was the way in which discussion about the "correlation between painting and beholder" was framed in the 1920s and 1930s (ibid., pp.8-9). Carville also argues that Beckett's comments on Cézanne should be read in the context of the politicised debate around landscape painting in France in the 1930s, when the critic Waldemar Georges argued that Cézanne's painting was part of the French canon which showed "the distinctively human purchase on, and domination of, nature" (ibid., p.84-5). Taking this into account, Beckett and Merleau-Ponty are clearly on the other side of the debate from Georges, as they both saw in Cézanne's landscapes a radical new art which showed alienation rather than domination by humanity.

Tracing Beckett's engagement with art, ideas and the philosophy of aesthetics, Carville pinpoints some interesting clues; for example, Beckett's reading of the art scholar Wilhelm Worringer on his German trip in 1936/7. This exposed him to theories about the "opposition between empathy and abstraction" and the idea of, "Egyptian art as the purest form of abstraction" (ibid., pp.92-3). I discuss comparisons with Ancient Egyptian sculpture in relation to *Come and Go* in Chapter Four and *Footfalls* in Chapter five. Carville argues that Beckett "is not attracted to purely abstract painting" being drawn to works by Ballmer, Kirchner, Yeats or Picasso's work of the 1920s which "hovers on the very edge of abstraction … yet never forgo the body" (ibid., p.215). For Carville, Beckett's "readings" of paintings from different periods show that it is "the way that a definitive psychological

reading is both suggested and frustrated that appeals to him … ultimately it is the withdrawal or undecidability of the central figure that is his focus" (ibid., p.120). Indeed, it is an argument of mine that Beckett's prioritisation of physical embodiment over disclosure of psychological narrative is elucidated by comparisons with figures in visual art.

2.3 Questioning embodiment

In this section I discuss writings from Hugh Kenner, Ulrika Maude, Anna McMullan, Stanton B. Garner, Steven Connor and Trish McTighe. These scholars have analysed Beckett's positioning of the material body on stage as a questioning of embodiment. These have informed my focus on the failed figure in terms of the primacy of the body, the fragility of subjectivity and the problematizing of presence/absence.

Hugh Kenner

In the early 1960s Hugh Kenner's perspective on the problems of embodiment made use of Beckett's own early interest in Descartes, to investigate his characters as exemplars of what he calls the "Cartesian clown" (Kenner, 1961, p.42). The incongruous nature of this hapless figure is revealed to be caused by mind/body dualism, the body is "an intolerably defective machine … whose union with the pure intelligence puzzled Descartes" (ibid., p.119). The clownish actor is shown to be continually struggling and failing, enacting on stage the clumsy mechanics of movement, demonstrating "his own inability to walk a tightrope" (ibid., pp.33-4). In contrast it is the cycling figure which fuses man and machine to overcome this imperfect body "Monsieur Godeau", the "veteran racing cyclist" whose name recalls "Godot", "typifies … the Cartesian Centaur, body and mind in close harmony". However, his "solving" arrival is always deferred (ibid., p.56).

Subsequently, the idea of a binary Cartesian split between body and mind, with the mind as pre-eminent, was superseded by ideas on embodiment from twentieth century philosophers. More recent Beckett studies have employed ideas from various thinkers, including those which I use, Merleau-Ponty and Derrida.

Ulrika Maude

In *Beckett, technology and the body* (2009) Ulrika Maude focuses on Beckett's foregrounding of the body, his interest in "prereflective physicality" and the "maiming and fragmentation of the body" (Maude, 2009, pp.1-4). Maude draws on Merleau-Ponty who in her words argues that the body constitutes "subjectivity itself" and "forms the foundation of all forms of human experience" (ibid., pp.4-5). In a similar vein Beckett's concern with the material body reveals how it "grounds

subjectivity" (ibid., p.22). Beckett's emphasis on motility shows both the strength and weakness of the body which "not only threatens identity in Beckett's work, but also functions as its peculiar refuge" (ibid., p.136).

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's "concept of the phantom limb … based on an idea of corporeal memory" (ibid., p.5) Maude examines the idea that Beckett's work shows the "past sedimented in the body itself" a "haunting of the present by the past". This confusion of time as manifested through the body means that "bodies seem … to have a time-arresting stative aspect and an active, dynamic one that is almost time itself" (ibid., p.21). The working of time on the body and the past-present-future continuum is something I explore at various points in the thesis.

Anna McMullan

In *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2010) Anna McMullan uses Merleau-Ponty's theories to explain how Beckett "stages this process of the embodied subject attempting to articulate being through a corporeal effort of uttering and/or producing visible and audible traces (footfalls, for example)" (McMullan, 2010, p.11). Using phenomenology and psychoanalysis McMullan critiques the idea of the Cartesian split between mind and body to argue that Beckett's work "explores not so much a dualist conception of embodied existence, as a fractured, multi-layered one, composed and recomposed of flesh and imagination" (ibid., p.7). Highlighting the "complex ontology of theatre, with its layering of presence and illusion" (ibid., p.11), she argues that Beckett "exploits these ambiguities of theatrical presence" to undermine presence. As explained in my definition of 'failed figure' in Chapter One, McMullan rejects the term 'character' in favour of 'personae' or 'subject'; these are "more appropriate to refer to Beckett's creatures" (ibid., p.147). In the late theatre the "personae … have no stable sense of self or body, and are continually seeking to construct the evidence of an embodied life". With *Play* McMullan finds that Beckett uses "an even greater de-naturalization of the actor's body and formal patterning of all elements of the *mise-en-scéne*: delivery of the voice, movement, gesture, spoken text, space, light and sound" (ibid., pp. 105-6). I discuss the visual stage language of *Play* in Chapter Six in terms of how the elements of the aesthetic of failure, including the abstract, liminal and grotesque, are conveyed through the *mise-en-scéne.*

Stanton B. Garner

In *Bodied space: phenomenology and performance in contemporary drama* (1994) Stanton B. Garner considers Beckett's work through the lens of "bodied spatiality", focusing on the relationship between space and the human body. Garner draws on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty "on the world as

it is perceived and inhabited, and the emphasis on *embodied* subjectivity" (Garner, 1994, pp.1-4). Garner argues that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ideas and post-structuralist ideas, such as those of Derrida can jointly help us understand Beckett's late drama. Whilst Derrida has elucidated "such signature Beckettian principles as deferral, dispossession, repetition and absence" (ibid., pp.22-3), Merleau-Ponty also problematizes embodiment; he has a "view of presence as constituted by vanishing points and dissociations" (ibid., p.39). As explained in Chapter One, I use certain of Derrida's concepts in addition to my main focus on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty; these include ones mentioned by Garner - repetition, deferral and presence/absence. Garner finds that Beckett's drama reveals "the instability between a profound material inherence in the physical body and a corresponding alienation, and it dramatizes the subject's futile pursuit of any means for overcoming its own noncoincidence" (ibid., p.31). Garner's list of Beckett's "consistent principles of visual organization" encompasses aspects of what I call the visual stage language:

> figures poised between character and object … illumination caught between light and darkness; color warped into the black-and-white continuum; movement and depth subordinated to the two-dimensional fixity of the frontal plane; the elements of that plane charged with the tensions of imbalance and ex-centricity (ibid., p.78).

Steven Connor

In *Samuel Beckett: repetition, theory and text* (1988) Steven Connor analyses Beckett's use of repetition in the context of Derrida, amongst other thinkers. He argues that "repetition is a central and necessary concept within all attempts to understand individual and social being and representation". As Beckett was dedicated to "the exploration of what is meant by such things as being, identity and representation" it is "no accident" that there is "at the centre of his work so strong and continuous a preoccupation with repetition" (Connor, 1988, p. 1). Derrida's idea that the copy both stabilizes and threatens the original means that both repetition and origin are caught up in "an unending process of mutual definition and redefinition" (ibid., pp.3-5). Connor argues that an "entropic decline" or a "kind of repetition-with-decrease" can be seen in plays with a two part structure such as *Godot*, *Happy Days* and *Play*. This "prevents us from seeing the first time through as necessarily primary, or the second time through as terminal. Both are repetitions, and we are therefore deprived of the sense of priority or finality" (ibid., p.121). Repetition is a key element of the aesthetic of failure in my analysis; I investigate this through the visual stage language throughout, including for example abstract repeated movement and gesture, which traps the figures on stage and inhibits any closure.

Trish McTighe

In *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2013) Trish McTighe discusses the plays in the context of the haptic, from the Greek "pertaining to touch", a term which derives from the study of visual art. McTighe explains its use in the nineteenth century by Alois Riegel in his discussion of Egyptian relief carvings which "evoked materiality and encouraged the eye to traverse the surface of the image" (McTighe, 2013, pp.1-2). In this context McTighe compares Beckett to a sculptor, "Beckett as sculptural artist carves out his figures without allowing them to be fully realized" (ibid., pp.2-3). McTighe makes use of ideas from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who drew on Riegel's linking of the gaze and touch (ibid., p.4). She also draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty, for whom touch "functions … as the sign of the moment at which bodies and world come into contact" (ibid., p.6).

As well as the stage plays, a major part of her study is of Beckett's work for the medium of film: the television plays *Nacht und Träume* and *Eh Joe* and his work *Film*. A wide-ranging exploration of the haptic aesthetic allows McTighe to focus on the works' "materiality, their disruption to the visual and to narrative logic" and "the ways in which the dramas present touch itself, as ghostly or dreamlike imagining and as aesthetic figure" (ibid., p.3). Sight is therefore a key aspect of the haptic, with "the dimness of the imagery, their partialness and invisibility" being central to his work, as well as the "fleeting, often failing moments of tactile connection" (ibid., p.1). As well as the reach of vision, McTighe probes the real and imagined act of touching and its function as a verifier of presence. Proximity can both guarantee presence and problematize it through disruption and separation (ibid., pp.7-8). In my thesis touch is concerned with its primary meaning; tactility is considered from the point of view of how hands, so important in Beckett's staging, make gestures, reach out, manipulate, pose or are rendered useless, and what is communicated thereby.

McTighe proposes that the interface between the visual and the spoken text is a haptic one, for example in *That Time* "extraneous detail" is cut away "to allow close attention on the point/limit/threshold where language and image touch" (ibid., pp.77-9). The end of *Rockaby* shows the figure being as it were re-absorbed into the maternal image summoned up by the visual and the spoken text "an embrace of the haptic shroud of mother-voice-chair … the darkness ready to close in, is like a cover being drawn" (ibid., p. 98). In contrast, I focus solely on the visual stage language and not the interface with spoken text, drawing on specific examples of art, in this case portraits by Picasso and Giacometti, to elucidate the liminal quality of the figure trapped by the mechanical rocking of time.

2.4 Representation/presentation on stage

In this section I discuss some of the writings which have reflected on the tension between representation and presentation on Beckett's stage. Jonathan Kalb argues in *Beckett in performance* (1989) that "presentational and representational action is blended in his theater" (Kalb, 1989, p.3). Comparing Beckett's comment on James Joyce, "His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*", Kalb writes of Beckett that, "His dramas are not *about* experiences; *they are those experiences themselves*" (ibid., pp.3-4). Anna McMullan, Ruby Cohn, Enoch Brater and Lois Oppenheim have examined this tension, with McMullan being the most relevant for my study of the visual stage language and the aesthetic of failure.

Anna McMullan

In *Theatre on Trial – Samuel Beckett's later drama* (1993) Anna McMullan argues for Beckett's "continual interrogation of the act of representation" in the late plays (McMullan, 1993, p.2). These reveal a tension between "the characters' attempts to represent themselves" and the plays' "draw [ing] attention to their own status as performances" (ibid., pp.4-5). McMullan investigates elements of the visual staging, for example showing how Beckett's foregrounding of darkness draws attention to the processes of representation and perception, with "space" used to fragment, "preventing the presentation of a totalized structure" (ibid., p.10). In *Come and Go* for example, McMullan examines the binary of presence/absence, and the patterning of what she calls "the figures" moving in and out of the light, creating a ghost-like quality (ibid, pp.89-90). For McMullan the use of fragmentation, repetition and the undermining of binary opposites signal a challenge to the idea of a fixed centre of authority. I make use of these concepts to build my idea of how the aesthetic of failure is composed visually. McMullan highlights how Beckett decentres the figure on the stage in several plays, for example the head in *That Time* (ibid., p.115) and links this to Derrida's concept of decentring (ibid., p.4). I also make this link to Derrida, but in addition I introduce decentring as seen in visual art.

McMullan's book draws attention to, "Beckett's preoccupation with questions of representation, authority and power" (ibid, p.26). She writes for example that *Play* "foregrounds the framework of discipline and control" (ibid., p.17) and *Catastrophe* shows the "subjected body" as a "resisting body" within a play which "exposes the apparatus of spectacle in its collusion with forces of authority and subjection" (ibid., p.33). These two plays suggesting interrogation and torture are discussed in Chapter Six and Chapter Four respectively.

Ruby Cohn and Enoch Brater

In *Just Play: Beckett's theater* (1980) Ruby Cohn writes about the tension between presentation and representation, suggesting the concept of 'theatereality'; she investigates the interaction between the spoken text and what is seen on stage. An example Cohn gives is from *Endgame* in which, "Hamm's story on a cold, bright, windy, dry December 24" is in stark contrast to the "flat gray background" which is seen on stage (Cohn, 1980, p.23). For Cohn differences between the "fictional and theater situation" can diverge in this way or, as she explored in a later essay, they can converge, as in *Footfalls*. Cohn's analysis focuses on the interplay between spoken and visual texts, in this case the technique of "verbally paralleling the image", as V's "Will you never have done …revolving it all?" comes after "We have seen M revolve seven times on the stage strip" (Cohn in Boireau, 1988, pp.98-9). In *A Beckett Canon* (2005) Cohn returns to *Footfalls*, seeing the activity of walking on stage as a performative act which merges with images from the spoken text, "The play's power lies in the tattered gray tangle, where places, times, and words are fused in a stage presence that revolves around absence" (Cohn, 2005, p.337).

In Enoch Brater's discussion of a "coincidence of all that is audible and visible" in *Rockaby* (Brater in Gontarski, 2014, p.295) Stanley Gontarski references Cohn's 'theatereality' in his editorial note, drawing attention to the interplay between spoken language and visual image (Gontarski, 2014, p.298). For Brater *Rockaby* is "a performance poem in the shape of a play … in which the language we hear not only offers us the background exposition for the image we see, but describes it neatly and precisely" (Brater in Gontarski, 2014, p.295). In a similar vein, for Brater the spoken text works with what is seen on stage to bolster the minimal image in *That Time*, "Language … offers us a new scenic space … it is language that not only underlines and follows the psychological journey of the character, but also precedes and creates it through an unveiling of the body by the words" (Brater, 1987, pp.41-2). For Brater therefore the spoken text works to complete the visual image on stage: the two converge rather than diverge.

Lois Oppenheim

Lois Oppenheim introduces the concept of "contextualism" which she defines as "the nonrepresentational intrusion of reality into the text", saying that, "Contextualism (like "theatereality") … results from the admitted failure of the expressivity of art" (Oppenheim, 2000, pp. 52-3). Oppenheim considers Cohn's 'theatereality' as a "collapsed distinction between the imaginary representation of reality and reality itself" and links this to "the idea that art can reveal only its own

revelatory process and not a reality beyond it" which she finds in Beckett's art criticism (ibid., pp.67-8).

For Oppenheim the "late plays … tend to be *about* the making of that reality"; this is comparable to American Pop art, such as Jasper Johns's paintings of objects such as flags:

> Inasmuch as Johns's experimentation revealed mimetic representation of the real
> to be one and the same with its subject, the link to Beckett is striking: iconoclasm
> in its most literal sense. In the subversion of mimesis by mimesis, the image
> becomes the real. No matter how much Beckett's "theatereality" puts reality on
> the stage, however …. it remains irreducible to it (ibid, p.61).

Oppenheim's use of Jasper Johns's paintings of the US flag, such as his first one entitled *Flag* (1955) is a telling example of how visual art can confuse the boundaries between representation and presentation, in this case querying whether it is painting or flag, or both, without providing answers.

Rather than the representation/presentation dichotomy, my analysis of the visual stage language is based on those elements of the aesthetic of failure I have defined in Chapter One; these I argue provide a framework within which Beckett's deliberate undermining of representation can be explored.

2.5 Visual stage language - minimalism

In this section I discuss writings from Martin Esslin and Ruby Cohn which introduce the twentieth century avant-garde movement and experimental theatre as a context for Beckett's spare visual style. Rosemary Pountney and Stanley Gontarski analyse Beckett's process of reduction and the increased abstraction, repetition and fragmentation which ensue. In contrast to Enoch Brater's dismissal of the idea of Beckett as a minimalist, I consider essays by Sarah Garland and Robert Reginio linking Beckett's work and Minimalist art.

Martin Esslin

In *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1968), originally published in 1961, but revised and enlarged in 1968, Martin Esslin positioned the visual and its link to the avant-garde as central to the work of Beckett and the other playwrights he categorised under this term. These dramatists were creating new forms for a theatre which "tends towards a radical devaluation of language, towards a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself" (Esslin, 1968, p.26). Such stage images were created by "the simultaneous use of visual elements, movement, light, and

language" (ibid., p.396). In linking this type of theatre to twentieth century avant-garde movements Esslin calls attention not only to the importance of art but also the multi-disciplinary nature of Surrealism, Dadaism and German Expressionism, in which art, poetry and theatre overlapped (ibid., p.346). One important aspect was the fragmentation of the body, seen for example in Picasso's play *Le Désir Attrapé par la Queue* (*Desire Caught by the Tail*) (1941) in which the protagonists are "disembodied feet" complaining with grim humour of war time shortages (ibid., p.382). This has some resonance with the importance of the boots and the state of feet in *Godot*. In a later essay in his collection *Mediations* (1983) Esslin returned to the use of bodily fragmentation, seeing the "mouth, eyes, feet" in *Not I*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*" as functioning like "mathematical formulae which sum up a life; they … can be retained, *must* be retained, by formalized repetition" (Esslin, 1983, pp. 119-20).

Ruby Cohn

In *From Desire to Godot: the pocket theatres of post war Paris* (1988) Ruby Cohn, who saw the 1953 production of *Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone as a student, wrote an examination of *Godot* in the context of these small, experimental, so-called pocket theatres in Paris. Run as a "workers' cooperative", the Babylone was set up to be "a home for avant-garde artists in music, painting, and film as well as theater" (Cohn, 1998, pp.19-20). These "scrubby theaters" (ibid, p.23) can be seen as epitomizing both the poverty and the multi-disciplinary artistic experimentation of post-war Paris. Having written a play based on a minimal design, it is noteworthy that the first production of *Godot* took place in a theatre which was both experimental and austere.

Rosemary Pountney

In *Theatre of Shadows* (1998) based on her 1978 doctoral thesis with later additional material, the actor Rosemary Pountney analyses draft manuscripts to provide evidence of a process of continual reduction, by which Beckett shed naturalistic narrative details. The discovery of a one word note 'vaguen' on a typescript of *Happy Days* is "explicit testimony to Beckett's policy of 'vaguening' the later drafts of his plays" (Pountney, 1998, p.149). From *Happy Days* Beckett places "increasingly startling" images on stage "in settings that have no pretensions to be representational, except in so far as they are dramatic metaphors, accurately reflecting a human predicament" (ibid., p.165). I discuss Pountney's analysis of *Not I*, her experience of acting Mouth in the Oxford Playhouse production of 1976, and the technical challenges creating this image presented in Chapter Three. In her investigation of the genesis of *Come and Go* Pountney shows how Beckett began with the structure of the three women's exits and entrances, and then radically reduced the spoken text

"combining an obscure minimal text with precise and explicit stage directions" (ibid., p.86). She draws attention to how such reduction, together with precise patterning and cyclic repetition led to increased ambiguity in the play.

Pountney stresses the mathematical nature of the patterning in Beckett's work, drawing a comparison with the prose work *Lessness* (1970) (first written in French as *Sans* in 1969), which consists of sixty sentences, repeated in variations, based on numerical sequencing (ibid., p.15). Examples from the plays include *Quad* (1982) which is "presented in the text like a mathematical formula" (ibid. p.208) and *Play* and *Come and Go* which are structured around the number three. Pountney refers to an article by Beckett in which he discussed James Joyce's "preoccupation with the significance of numbers" and Dante's obsession with the number three (ibid., p.33). I discuss Beckett's use of numbers and geometry to achieve qualities of abstraction and repetition, in *Come and Go* in Chapter Four and *Quad* in Chapter Five.

Stanley Gontarski

In *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's dramatic texts* (1985) Gontarski argues that an analysis of drafts reveals Beckett's process of "undoing" which led to patterning and abstraction. Gontarski compares *Not I* and the 1963 fragment *Kilcool*, arguing that Beckett strove to "undo the realistic sources of the text" in accordance with his "antinaturalistic" aesthetic and a repudiation of mimesis. For Gontarski "the substitution of more abstract patterns of numbers, music, and so forth to shape a work" has a "universalizing" effect (Gontarski, 1985, pp.2-5). Beckett's use of patterning and abstraction is "a blow against content itself, or at least a devaluation of, if not meaning, at least fixed meaning" (Gontarski, 1985, p.15). In an essay in his collection *Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's decadent turn* (2018) Gontarski argues that Beckett's innovation in the theatre grew out of restricting the body on stage "limiting movement, posture, expression, and the vocal repertoire" thus exploring "the possibilities of character fragmentation and disembodiment to the point of disappearance" (Gontarski, 2018b, pp.196-7).

Enoch Brater

In *Beyond minimalism: Beckett's late style in the theater* (1987) Enoch Brater was concerned that Beckett's work should not be seen as minimalist, speaking of "the limited and often de-humanized sphere we recognize in the chilling reticence of minimalist art" (Brater, 1987, p.ix). In a later essay Brater writes that Beckett's focus on the "remnants" of a "naturalistic set" leads us to value naturalism; *Rockaby* for example is "anything but [abstract] in performance" (Brater, 2011, pp.137-8). In my analysis of *Rockaby* in Chapter Three I argue that abstraction and minimalism are key

elements of the visual stage language, which create a complex image of the failed figure. However, whilst the figure in Beckett's work is fragmented and ghost-like it nevertheless persists; in the words of Lucy Bell, as discussed in Chapter One in the Definitions section, "the minimalist stance is an affirmative one", which "affirms … the something that resists annihilation" (Bell, 2011, p.51). A sense of the resistance of the human figure, a mixture of organic and abstract, has been noted in other recent papers linking Beckett and Minimalist art. I find this approach to be a persuasive one in terms of the visual stage language and the elements of the aesthetic of failure. This is discussed in the next section.

Robert Reginio and Sarah Garland

A collection of essays, *Samuel Beckett and contemporary art* (2017) traces Beckett's legacy in the work of artists of the 1960s and 1970s as well as artists working today (Reginio in Reginio, Houston-Jones & Weiss, 2017, pp.9-10). Robert Reginio finds that issues central to Beckett are also key to these artists "the problem of temporality, the problem of recurrence and the individual's relationship to fragmented histories" (ibid, pp.18-9). My argument for a visual stage language is not predicated on Beckett's influence on artists, but rather on the impact of visual art on him. However, two essays examining Beckett's influence on Minimalist artists throw light back onto the minimalism in his visual stage language.

In her essay Sarah Garland seeks a new perspective on Beckett's prose work *Texts for Nothing* by analysing *Texts for Nothing*8, the 1967 "double "Minimalist Issue" of the *Aspen* magazine. This art work comprised a box containing art objects "to prompt new and exciting alignments between the disparate materials" (Garland in Reginio, Houston-Jones & Weiss, 2017, pp.37-9). Objects included a recording of the eighth section of Beckett's prose work, a film of Robert Morris's *Site* (1964) and choreographer Merce Cunningham's "recorded lectures" (ibid,. p.38). It also included "Duchamp's lecture, "The Creative Act" (1957), read aloud by him" (ibid., p.50).

In her analysis of *Texts for Nothing* in this context Garland emphasises Beckett's use of silence as a "minimal form of expression" (ibid., p.41). She compare's Beckett's voices which speak of "confinement and closure" with the work of Robert Morris, whose writings on art quote Beckett (ibid., pp.44-5). Garland finds that the "juxtaposition" with artists like Duchamp emphasises Beckett's "abstract impulses", whilst his "pulling back against formalism" is emphasised by juxtaposing him with artists like Morris "who look to bring formal elements into collision with more chaotic, organic environments" (ibid., p.57). Robert Morris's *Site*, the film of which was included in *Texts for Nothing8*, was a performance piece he choreographed for the Judson Dance Theater

(Guggenheim website, 2020). I discuss one of Robert Morris's Minimalist sculptures, based on three simple beams, in relation to Beckett's visual stage language in Chapter Four. In this context it is interesting to note that, "Morris created his earliest Minimalist objects as props for his dance performances—hence the rudimentary wooden construction of these boxlike forms, which reflected the Judson Dance Theater's emphasis on function over expression" (Guggenheim website, 2020).

Robert Reginio's essay focuses on the artist Sol LeWitt, who like Robert Morris acknowledged Beckett as an influence. This can be seen for example in his work '*Come and Go*. Drawing for a play by Samuel Beckett' (1969), which blocks the text of the play across a grid of squares (Reginio in Reginio, Houston-Jones & Weiss, 2017, p.130). Reginio compares Sol LeWitt's use of serial strategies to Beckett's use of repetition to show failure. An example is the comparison between LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974) in which despite repeated permutations no cube is completed, with *Come and Go* (1966), in which the three "specters" are, despite their memories "unable to be made present, unable to coincide with or substantiate a self" (ibid., p.124). In my analysis this instability of identity is part of the failed figure, which Beckett shows visually through all the elements of the aesthetic of failure, as detailed in Chapter One. Reginio finds "an ethical resonance" in both Beckett and LeWitt, as their works "assert that legibility is predicated, in such a reified world, upon the spectral nature of the particular, its resistance to reification or its vulnerability to erasure" (ibid., p.127). This emphasis on what remains is an important part of Beckett's aesthetic and it accords with Billie Whitelaw's comments about what Beckett did in rehearsals for *Footfalls*:

> Having done all this detailed direction of movement, he would sometimes rub it all out, so that what grinned through (as they say in the wallpaper trade) was something never strident but faint, i.e. something that was not quite there (Whitelaw, 1995, p.145).

2.6 Theatre context

In this section I discuss work by scholars researching Beckett's plays in the context of how they were produced in the theatre: these have provided valuable insights into Beckett's experimenting with the *mise-en-scéne* to realize his visual stage language. I include studies by Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, James Knowlson, Ruby Cohn, Jonathan Kalb, Stanley Gontarski and Anna McMullan.

In addition to the work of scholars discussed in this literature review, my thesis also makes use of primary sources of information from Beckett and directors, actors and designers who worked with him, such as Walter Asmus, Billie Whitelaw and Jocelyn Herbert. I have made use of Beckett's

production notebooks both as a primary published source, but also as a source of scholarly insights from the editors' comments.

Beckett's production material

In 1993 Beckett's production notebooks for his Schiller-Theater productions in Berlin (*Endgame* 1967; *Krapp's Last Tape* 1969; *Godot* 1975) were published as the *Theatrical Notebooks*. These included amendments showing what had been revised, added or cut to the spoken text and the visual staging, as well as facsimiles of the notebook pages and explanatory notes by the editors. The *Happy Days* production notebook had been published earlier without a revised text as *Production Notebook* (1985). These notebooks for later productions of his first four plays show how Beckett continued to shape his plays visually, through the practical process of working with others in the theatre. Along with other primary sources such as interviews with Becket and his theatre collaborators, these notebooks are central to my investigation into Beckett's composition of a visual stage language.

In the case of the plays written after *Happy Days*, Beckett strongly resisted publication of the texts before he had been involved in rehearsals and had made changes based on this practical experience (see below in section on Gontarski). Therefore the *Theatrical Notebook: The Shorter Plays* (1999) which covers *Play* (1963), *Come and Go* (1966), *Footfalls* (1976) and *That Time* (1976), plays included in this thesis, provides little that is extra to *The Complete Dramatic Works*, the Faber & Faber 1986 edition.

Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld

Prior to the publication of the *Theatrical Notebooks* for the first three plays in 1993, Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld brought together information from the production notebooks and from Beckett's own comments as revealed for example in assistant director rehearsal diaries. In *Beckett in the Theatre* (1988) the authors examine the production history, the "evolution of the plays from the original concept to more and more refined forms worked out in performance" (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.11). Using the production notebooks the authors describe and analyse the technicalities of how the *mise-en-scène* was envisaged. For example they discuss how the *Godot* notebook "shows his preoccupation with giving the play a visual form" (ibid., p.91), with details on movement, lighting, make-up and costume. They reproduce Beckett's movement diagrams for *Godot* and comment on them, showing for example how, "A coordinated set of arcs and chords forming halves of a divided circle suggest an existence which is endlessly repetitious" (ibid., p.99). This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

James Knowlson

James Knowlson's in-depth analysis of Beckett's theatre uses insights about productions gathered from his research, as well as from his own later attendance at rehearsals and correspondence with Beckett. Knowlson was the General Editor of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, edited *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days: Samuel Beckett's Production Notebook,* and was co-editor of *Waiting for Godot*. Knowlson also edited *Theatre Workbook 1 Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape* (1980), which contains interviews and studies. *Frescoes of the skull: the late prose and drama of Samuel Beckett* (1980) contains essays by Knowlson on the plays after *Godot* and *Endgame*. Knowlson shows how in the early 1960s Beckett was learning how to use technical components of the theatre to create his visual stage language. In rehearsals of *Play* with Jean-Marie Serreau in Paris, then with George Devine in London in 1963, Beckett became:

> intensely preoccupied with the effects that could be obtained by varying the intensity and the speed of both speech and lighting in the repeat of the play. George Devine was widely recognized as an expert on lighting techniques and Beckett worked very closely with him on this aspect of the production (Knowlson in Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, p.112).

Knowlson argues that "*Play* laid the foundations for Beckett's later emphasis on a subtle choreography of sound and silence, light and darkness, movement and stillness" (ibid, p.112).

In the biography Knowlson also discusses productions; the precision which Beckett required during rehearsals led Knowlson to compare him with an artist, "The attention that Beckett devoted to every element of visual detail was as minute and painstaking as one of the seventeenth-century Dutch masters that he so much admired" (Knowlson, 1996, p.625). In *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett* (2006), which Knowlson called "a companion volume to that biography" (Knowlson, 2006, p.xvii), he provides unpublished interviews with Beckett and others, amassed from his research for the biography. This additional material gives valuable insights into Beckett's working practice in the theatre and his aesthetic. For example insights from the Lawrence E. Harvey's interviews with Beckett in 1961-2 are used at several points in this thesis, as they show Beckett grappling with the idea of disabling form in his work. Beckett's quote, "I don't know any form that doesn't shit on being in the most unbearable manner" reveals the powerful hold that the idea of needing to finding a new form had on him (Harvey in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, p.134).

Ruby Cohn

Ruby Cohn corresponded with Beckett about his new writing and the preparation for productions of his plays; she also attended rehearsals, documenting practical and technical issues in the late 1960s to late 1970s. These first-hand details are expounded in *Just Play: Beckett's Theater*; she supplemented this with information from Beckett's then unpublished production notebooks (Cohn, 1980, p.230). Cohn records five stages of pre-rehearsal preparation which Beckett undertook. Aside from the German language text issues, she lists point two as being "intense visualization of the play in theater space – what Beckett calls "trying to see"", point four "composition of a director's notebook" and point five "transmission of design ideas to his friend Matias, who does a first rendering while they are still in Paris" (ibid., p.236). I have incorporated some of her comments about movement, lighting and design changes, relating to Beckett's productions of *Endgame* in Berlin in 1967 in Chapter Four; *Come and Go* in Paris in 1966 in Chapter Four and the 1975 *Godot* in Berlin in Chapter Five.

Cohn is attentive to Beckett's visual patterning devices, noting that Beckett already had strong ideas about using movement as a formal device in 1962, "When in a text, actions are repeated, they ought to be made unusual the first time, so that when they happen again – in exactly the same way – an audience will recognize them from before" (Beckett in Cohn, 1980, p.231). Cohn also provides insights into how Beckett responded to visual design possibilities which occurred in rehearsal; an example is the 1977 Berlin production of *Krapp's Last Tape* with the San Quentin Drama Workshop (Cohn in Craig et all, 2016, p.470). Cohn noted how on changing Krapp's listening position "the metallic rotating tape was reflected on Cluchey's left cheek – a kind of shadow pulse. San Quentin technical men Hauptle and Thorpe conferred on how to eliminate it, but Beckett told them softly, "I love it"" (Cohn, 1980, pp.249-50). Although Cohn does not elaborate on this, the use of a flickering shadow can be interpreted as an additional visual connection between Krapp's body and the machine which holds his memories. I discuss the relationship between Krapp and the tape machine in Chapter Six.

Jonathan Kalb

In *Beckett in Performance* (1989) Jonathan Kalb investigates what makes the "poetics of [a] Beckett performance" (Kalb, 1989, p.38), arguing that the plays' "physicalizations" are at the core of "the radical originality of his work", this includes "movement and settings" (ibid, p.91). Kalb praised the balance between "presentational and representational action" in Beckett's Schiller-Theater production of *Godot* which created "a consistent atmosphere of ambiguity" (ibid, p.35). He includes

interviews he carried out with actors and directors such as Walter Asmus, who provided illuminating commentary, for example arguing that in rejecting naturalism there was "a link, too, with abstract painting, where Beckett comes closest in literature. If you look at a Picasso, he doesn't tell you about real life, in that sense, but he tells you about reality, different forms of reality" (Asmus in Kalb, 1989, p.180). In an interview with Kalb, the actor David Warrilow stated that he did not look for "character motivations" when performing as Reader in *Ohio Impromptu*, saying that "there are questions but no answers to any of them" (Warrilow in Kalb, 1989, p.59). Kalb comments of his performance, "I saw a multi-layered exploration of paradoxes specific to writerly existence" (Kalb, 1989, p.54)

Stanley Gontarski

Stanley Gontarski edited the *Theatrical Notebook* for *Endgame*; in his editorial commentary he argues that Beckett's work in the theatre allowed him to "develop his text visually … Beckett discovered that theatre allowed him to paint (or sculpt) that is to work directly with form, as a plastic, a visual artist" (Gontarski, 1992, p.xix). In an essay in his collection *Beckett Matters – Essays on Beckett's Late Modernism* (2018) Gontarski develops his argument that Beckett "served a fourteen-year theatrical apprenticeship" between 1953- 1967, the year he officially became the acknowledged director for one of his plays (*Endgame*) (Gontarski, 2018a, p.106).

In his essay collection *Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Decadent Turn* (2018), Gontarski argues that from *Krapp's Last Tape* onwards "the physical theater became a testing ground for him … the creation of a dramatic text was not a process that could be divorced from performance" (Gontarski, 2018b, p.161). As a result:

> By the early 1960s, then, working directly in the theater became an indispensable part of his creative process, and he wanted those direct theatrical discoveries incorporated in his published texts, before initial publication (ibid. p.163).

Gontarski details Beckett's increasing requests that Faber & Faber should delay the publication of *Play*, writing that on 23 November 23, 1963 Beckett wrote to them, "I suddenly see this evening, with panic, that no final text of *Play* is possible till I have had a certain number of rehearsals" (ibid. p.163).

For Gontarski, from *Play* onwards Beckett's plays are "as much paintings, snapshots or since they are textured and three-dimensional, as much bas-relief sculptures as drama" (Gontarski, 1997, p.93). In the introduction to *The Shorter Plays Theatrical Notebook* (1999), entitled 'Detheatricalizing Theatre: The post-*Play* plays' Gontarski argues that due to Beckett's continual revisions of the first four plays

during the time he was writing these shorter plays "all of Beckett's theatre works are finally late plays, written in the late style, that is, all of Beckett's stage plays are written (i.e. completed) after the publication of *Play* – even *Play* itself" (Gontarski, 1999, p.xv). Gontarski eschews the term 'late plays' for what he calls this "new theatre" (ibid., p.xvi). My approach is to cover *Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days* as well as the subsequent shorter plays, as I argue that Beckett was experimenting with visual stage language from the beginning. However, the revisions that Beckett later made to the visual staging of the first four plays is important as it shows his development from being involved in the theatre: I therefore make use of the production notebooks and revised texts.

Gontarski stresses the importance of Beckett's relationship with The Royal Court Theatre in London (hereafter 'Royal Court'), especially with the director George Devine and the designer Jocelyn Herbert. During the Devine years Beckett was "playwright and shadow director … both tutor and tutee, master and apprentice" (Gontarski 2018a p.255). Gontarski notes an altercation between the National Theatre's literary manager Ken Tynan and George Devine, the artistic director of the Royal Court, who had licenced the National Theatre to produce *Play*. Tynan disapproved of Beckett's advice to the director "the lines are chanted in a breakneck monotone with no inflections … many of them will be simply inaudible", whilst Devine insisted, "To play the play as you indicate would be to demolish its dramatic purpose and turn it into *literature* (emphasis added)" (Tynan and Devine, in Gontarski, 2018a, p.264). This difference of opinion highlights the importance of having a sympathetic institution for the implementation of Beckett's experimental drama.

Anna McMullan

Anna McMullan also analyses the common radical purpose between Beckett, Herbert and the Royal Court under George Devine's leadership "the performance and visual aesthetic which Devine and his team were developing at the Royal Court coalesced with Beckett's spare, iconoclastic and poetic theatre" (McMullan, 2012, pp.5-6). McMullan examines the role of the theatre designer Jocelyn Herbert in fulfilling his "radically minimalistic dramaturgy", through a new approach "one attuned to his intense focus on the performing body in an almost bare stage, where every detail of the costume, props, visual environment and lighting signifies and resonates" (ibid., p.2). McMullan reveals Herbert's role in working physically on the "detail and texture" of her designs so that they give a "sense of layers of time, repetition and 'usedness'"; examples she cites are May's dress in *Footfalls* and the urns in *Play* (ibid., p.12). When Herbert presented Beckett with a "clown-like drawing" of Krapp, as implied in the stage directions of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett "didn't really like it so we just made Krapp an old man in raggedy clothes; he wasn't exactly a tramp, he had fairly

formal clothes that had gone to seed" (Courtney in McMullan, 2012, p.14). Herbert's role in creating a sense of worn-out figures through costume and make-up in these three plays is discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

In conclusion, I have laid out in the six sections of this literature review the different areas of scholarship which provide those ideas which I have combined together to build my argument. I expand some ideas and develop others further in order to interrogate the visual stage language. In systematically exploring parallels between specific art works and the visual staging I aim to provide a fuller assessment of the established view that art fed into Beckett's visual staging.

In the following chapter I develop and apply these ideas, providing case studies examining how the visual stage language conveys the aesthetic of failure, and how making links with art works can elucidate this.

Chapter Three

Visual stage language: making failure visible

In this chapter I examine what lay at the roots of Beckett's visual stage language, in terms of his frustration with language, his engagement with art and his critical writings on modern art in the 1930s and 1940s. Later comments that Beckett made on the need for a new form in his own creative work are also probed. I introduce examples of how Beckett's visual stage language creates the elements of the aesthetic of failure that I have laid out in my methodology, such as figure in the stage construct, abstraction, liminality and minimalism. These case studies link his visual staging to art works, both modern art, in particular portraiture, and paintings by the Old Masters. The concept of subversion of Christian iconography is discussed in relation to *Godot*. Much has been written about the technical difficulties of staging *Not I*; details about these practical matters and how his collaborators dealt with them are included as they show how Beckett's radical new visual form tested the capacity of live staging.

3.1 Engagement with art – art criticism

'Duthuit Dialogues'

In his art criticism essay 'Duthuit Dialogues' (1949) Beckett provides important statements for his own aesthetic of failure; that these were channelled through an analysis of three modern artists, Tal Coat and Masson being contrasted with Bram van Velde, illustrates how Beckett's engagement with art fed into his own work, and is especially pertinent for his visual aesthetic. Beckett praised Bram van Velde for going beyond "the field of the possible" or "the plane of the feasible" (Beckett, 1983, P.139). This artist friend of Beckett created paintings which combine the abstract with ambiguous suggestions of the figurative in works such as *Expression ou composition* (1948); the title itself implies uncertainty about content versus form. In rating Bram van Velde as "the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world" (ibid., p.145), Beckett is underlining the importance of finding a form for failure. I argue that this is an artistic pursuit that he himself would be engaged in for his dramatic works. Another statement from this essay can be seen as central to Beckett's lifelong artistic experimentation:

> 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 (ibid., P.139).

The rhetorical repetition combines a declaration of the failure of perception and representation, with the compulsive imperative to attempt to express, despite the inevitability of failure. Beckett was drawn to the power of the negative, and through the repetition of "nothing" and "no" he builds up a foundation for the word "obligation". The concept of nothing is very important for Beckett's work, for example *Godot* begins with the words "Nothing to be done" (Beckett, 1986, p.11). In his own later productions of *Godot* Beckett emphasised this "passive description of a non-existent action or remedy" by having Estragon make a "large sweeping gesture of the arms" (McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.91). This play embodies through the figures' waiting a continual frustration of dramatic forward momentum, revealing instead the seemingly random alternation between nothing/something. The original *Godot* (in French) "was written between October 1948 and January 1949" (Knowlson, 1996, p.378), in the period when Beckett was discussing art with Georges Duthuit and around the time of the 'Duthuit Dialogues'. This shows Beckett's break-through as a dramatist (although the play was not produced until 1953) coinciding with a major piece of work on his aesthetic position.

Godot shows the figures as trapped within a minimal stage enclosure, formed by mound (changed to "stone" in the 1975 revision), tree and moon. Failure of representation was built into the design of the tree for *Godot's* 1953 premiere at the Théâtre de Babylone: the director Roger Blin "designed a tree that his stage manager made by covering wire hangers with crepe paper, and stood the whole on a foam-rubber base" (Aslan, 1988, p.30). Subsequent productions followed this abstract tree design, including Blin's 1961 Odéon Théâtre production in Paris, for which the artist Giacometti made the tree out of thin plaster pipes. Walter Asmus's 1999 production had a design by Beckett's friend the Irish artist Louis le Brocquy (1916-2012), a one-dimensional construct, like a cardboard cut-out (Brater, 2011, p.35). These are examples of the practical collaboration with designers and others which was an important aspect of Beckett's stage work. Gontarski has emphasised how working in the theatre became a key stage of Beckett's compositional process, as he reworked the plays in the light of stage experience. This for Gontarski makes Beckett a "theatrical artist" rather than simply a "playwright" (Gontarski, 2018b, p.157).

Power of the visual

Beckett's engagement with art had a crucial impact on his stage compositions, both in terms of conceiving a visual language and developing it practically by using the stage components. Anna McMullan has written that "we might argue that scenography translates Beckett's interest in the visual arts into the plastic medium of the stage" (McMullan, 2012, p.3). Beckett's long-term practice of engaging with art intensely which is well-attested to, meant that he learned a visual sensibility

and how to use the principles of art such as space, form, line and colour. This led him to experiment with gesture, movement and stillness, lighting, costume, properties and spatial layout to create new visual forms.

In her biographical reminiscences, the poet Anne Atik has written of how in his many conversations on art with her husband the painter Avigdor Arikha, Beckett spoke "of painting past or present in terms used by the pictorially articulate", analysing paintings using "terms like 'space', 'form', 'light', 'surface tension', etc., lifting or lowering his hands to show which part of the canvas he was referring to" (Atik, 2001, p.4). Beckett's many annotated art catalogues from galleries and museums, which he gave to Arikha, "bear witness to an attentive, passionate viewer" (ibid). That Beckett acquired through this engagement with art a fundamental understanding of the plasticity of figures within compositional frameworks, which he then transferred to the stage, is central to my argument.

Although Beckett meticulously shaped his *mise-en-scène*, creating iconic images, without theorising about why this was so important to him, I would suggest there are two primary reasons: his increasing frustration with language, which led to a desire to show up its inherent flaws and his interest in the possibilities of visual art as a way of transmitting ideas and emotions which would by-pass the need to provide answers. In a letter of March 1949 to Georges Duthuit Beckett again analysed what he liked about Bram van Velde's paintings, the "gran rifiuto" or 'great refusal', shown in the art itself:

> There is, if you like, refusal and refusal to accept refusal. That perhaps is what makes this painting possible. For my part, it is the *gran rifiuto* that interests me, not the heroic wrigglings which we owe this splendid thing (Beckett in Craig et al, 2011, p.140).

Art's role of provoking questions rather than providing solutions is central to Beckett's aesthetic of failure, and is demonstrated in thinking about visual art. According to Ralph Rugoff, the director of the Hayward Gallery in London art's "great strength" is that it is "able to explore meanings that are ambiguous and complex, that leave you with questions rather than answers". Art can also "help us become more comfortable with the grey, the shady areas, the places where identity isn't clear cut." (Rugoff in Higgins, 2019).

Beckett's distrust of words, documented from the early 1930's, together with his increasing interest in visual art, and use of it to formulate his aesthetic meant that when he began to create plays he experimented with both spoken text and with the *mise-en-scène*. In a letter of July 1937 to Axel Kaun, Beckett describes his frustration with language:

> More and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn
> apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it…As we cannot
> eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that
> might contribute to its falling into disrepute (Beckett, 1983 pp.171-2).

At the time he wrote this letter Beckett had recently returned from his long German trip (1936-7). This was an intensive period of exposure to a wide range of visual art at a time when Beckett was suffering from writer's block; it fed into an in-depth engagement with art expressed in his letters and diaries of the time. I argue that there is a link between Beckett's experiencing the potential of visual language at a time when he himself was struggling with his own writing, the development of his aesthetic and his subsequent experimentation with what could be shown using visual images on a theatre stage.

Allied to the critique of language which Beckett enunciated throughout his life, is his critique of human reason. During rehearsals for his Berlin Schiller–Theater production of *Endgame* in 1967, his assistant Michael Haerdter recorded Beckett's dismissal of the so-called Age of Reason in the eighteenth century as one in which "they're all mad … They give reason a responsibility which it simply can't bear, it's too weak" (Haerdter in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.231). Commenting on how unusual it was for him to talk about what lay behind his work, Haerdter captures here Beckett's desire to puncture the idea of the supremacy of human reason. This can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's belief that rather than seeing "human reason as a reflection of the creator's reason", human intellect "should measure itself more honestly, against the darkness and difficulty of human life and without losing sight of the irrational roots of this life" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.71-3).

Cézanne and alienation

An interest in ideas to do with the problematic nature of representation and the need to reveal failure in the work itself was apparent from Beckett's early engagement with modern art. In two letters he wrote to his friend and art mentor Thomas MacGreevy in September 1934 Beckett gives his reaction to one of the many versions of Cézanne's rendering of his local mountain landscape in Aix en Provence, *Montagne Sainte Victoire* (1905/6). For Beckett it revealed that harmony in nature is an illusion and that there is a need for a radical change in the standpoint of the artist relative to both their own self and their subject matter. Knowlson sees Beckett's reaction to Cézanne's painting as a major turning point in his search for a new aesthetic for his own work (Knowlson, 1996, pp.195-7). Beckett's response to Cézanne's water colour of the mountain landscape, with its ghostly, insubstantial flecks of pale brush strokes, is one of radical estrangement.

Writing of the Cézanne landscape Beckett issued what could be called a call to arms: artists had to find a new form, as Cézanne had done, to express authentic emotion. This form would be opposed to the "anthropomorphized" quality of the classic Dutch landscape painters, whose work he nevertheless loved. For Beckett, Cézanne had understood that landscape had "to be something by definition unapproachably alien"; his landscapes function "as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever" (Beckett in Dow Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, pp.222-3). Beckett elaborated on what he found to be in Cézanne, an expression of humanity's alienation from itself, "What I feel in Cézanne is precisely the absence of a rapport … even with life of his own order, even with life … operative in himself" (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, 2009, p. 227). Although Beckett and Merleau-Ponty used their engagement with Cézanne's art, and the ideas of perception and representation which it gave rise to, in different ways in their own fields, a quality of alienation was noted by both. Merleau-Ponty's praise for Cézanne's close observation of nature led him to describe the artist's vision which "penetrates right to the root of things beneath constituted humanity", creating "an unfamiliar world in which one is uncomfortable and which forbids all human effusiveness" (Merleau-Ponty,2007, p.76).

The simplification and fragmentation of Cézanne's painting, although not the use of colours can be compared with Beckett's visual stage language. Writing of their version of the landscape, Montagne Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine, 1887, the Courtauld Gallery, London stresses Cézanne's "interest in form and line", the "simplification of the landscape" and "the structured parallel brushstrokes that fragment the surface of the composition, as well as the bold colours … [which] paved the way towards abstraction" (Courtauld Gallery website, 2020). In the early 1960s Beckett built on ideas about finding a new form which he had located in Cézanne's art in terms of his own creative work:

> There will be new form, and this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.14).

The radically new visual forms that Beckett created encapsulate the elements of the aesthetic of failure to expresses the inability to capture the chaos of life. The analysis of a profound rupture of humans from their environment, from each other and within their own psyche fits with the visual aesthetic of failure in Beckett's plays. The authentic response of the modern day artist had to be to

show-up the falsity of believing a strong human race to be at the centre of a universe set up for their benefit. Beckett's visual stage language shows fragmented figures inhabiting a liminal space which signifies lack rather than sustenance; food, shelter, comfort of community or co-operation are all notably absent. Beckett saw the experimental possibilities of the stage which allowed him to exploit the visual form of the figure within a framed space, "There, for me, lies the value of theatre. One turns out a small world with its own laws" (ibid.,p.231). There is a tension in Beckett's theatre between the physicality of the figure and a sense of the body's impending dissolution into abstraction.

3.2 Modern art and subverting the Old Masters

Jack B. Yeats – the "inhumanly inorganic"

As with Cézanne, Beckett interpreted the paintings of Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957) as evidence of a lack of rapport in human life; it is this shaping concept of a profound disharmony which Beckett was to explore in his drama. In a letter of August 1937 to Thomas MacGreevy, who had introduced him to the Irish painter, Beckett compares Yeats with Cézanne, seeing them both as painters who revealed humanity's alienation "the heterogeneity of nature & the human denizens, the unalterable alienness of the 2 phenomena, the 2 solitudes, or the solitude & loneliness" (Beckett in Dow Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, p.540). Beckett found "something terrifying" in Yeats's paintings of figures in the landscape, a radical alienation the "awful acceptance of 2 entities that will never mingle", and therefore "the impassable immensity between the solitude that cannot quicken to loneliness & the loneliness that cannot lapse into solitude" (ibid., p.540).

Beckett responded to Yeats's paintings using an analogy with theatre, seeing in his work "nature almost as inhumanly inorganic as a stage set" and the "stillness ... almost petrified, a sudden suspension of the performance" (ibid., p.540). Beckett's own abstract and liminal staging that offers no hope of change also conveys a sense of a suspended and then repeated set of scenarios. Beckett's figures are alienated from each other and from themselves; the unnatural pauses, or freezing accentuate the troubled, conflicted self, as if a mechanical process had stopped working, showing the limits of human awareness. In his 1945 review of Thomas MacGreevy's book on Jack B. Yeats, Beckett positions this artist, as one who understood that the task was to illuminate the "issueless predicament of existence":

> The being in the street, when it happens in the room, the being in the room when it happens in the street, the turning to gaze from land to sea, from sea to land, the backs to one another and the eyes abandoning (Beckett, 1983, p.97).

There is a feeling of missing or losing something or someone and of inhabiting a liminal space which cannot be grasped or recognised. Merleau-Ponty has written of our fraught relationships with each other and the world, in which both "reason" and a "meeting of minds" are desired but "we are no more able to reach them definitively than we are to give up on them". The species is "charged as it is with a task that will never and can never be completed, and at which it has not necessarily been called to succeed"; this is "both cause for anxiety and a spur to courage" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.87-8). In his creative output Beckett's failed figures caught in liminal spaces suggest an ontological questioning of being in the world, as a physically embodied object relating to events, nature and others.

Citing Beckett's visits to Yeats's studio when he returned to visit Dublin after World War II, Peggy Phelan has linked *Godot* to *The Graveyard Wall* (1945) comparing the two figures in the painting with Vladimir and Estragon. Phelan interprets a narrative in the painting with one "tramp" leaning into the wall lighting his pipe whilst "his companion" walks on still talking. Reading this back into the play, Phelan interprets a naturalistic background for Vladimir and Estragon, which has the effect of situating them in a familiar space (Phelan, 2004, pp.1280-1). However, Beckett's reading of Yeats's paintings as revealing a dreadful alienation should give us pause. In *Godot* the spoken text keeps returning to the figures questioning why, when and even whether they are/were present in this space. The visual stage language reinforces this: his figures are both present and absent, flickering on and off, as their life force seems to rise and fall, and blankness keeps breaking through.

Rather than a rural scene of figures in a landscape, Beckett's visual minimalism creates an abstract space within which his figures are unable to impose themselves to resolve their predicaments. One of the ways in which the visual stage language conveys the abstract and liminal in *Godot* is through the use of grey, a border state between black and white. In his 1975 Berlin production of *Godot* Beckett, in collaboration with his designer Matias Henrioud, known professionally simply as Matias, intensified the use of grey, with a "slightly raked, grey, painted floor", a "grey, oblong" stone, and a tree which "was skeletally thin and ashen" (McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, pp.88-9). It is illuminating to compare this use of grey with how artists make use of it. Affinities can be seen with the grey abstract paintings of Gerhard Richter, for example his painting *Untitled (Grey)* (1968), about which Richter said that grey allowed him to mediate between the visible and the invisible; grey "has the capacity that no other colour has, to make "nothing" visible" (Richter in Hodge, 2012, p.79). In *Godot,* as in other of his plays, Beckett's use of grey conveys the mixed polarities of presence/absence and life/death, a liminal state between black and white; it also expresses the impossibility of expression.

Subversion of the Old Masters

I have built the idea of what I call Beckett's subversion of visual art on Knowlson's argument that it is the discrepancies between the stage world of *Godot* and Casper David Friedrich's (1774-1840) painting *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819*)*, as discussed in Chapter Two. The *Godot* case is one of only two occasions when Beckett acknowledged a visual art influence on his *mise-en-scène* (the other is *Not I* and Caravaggio, see further down in this chapter). When Beckett was rehearsing his own production of *Godot* at the Schiller-Theater, Berlin in 1975 he went with Ruby Cohn to view Friedrich's painting *Man and Woman Observing the Moon* (1824). According to Cohn, Beckett said about this painting that, "This was the source of *Waiting for Godot* you know" (Knowlson, 1996, p.378). Friedrich's painting *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819) which is a very similar composition with different figures, had made an impression on Beckett during his German trip in 1937. Beckett wrote that he had a "pleasant predilection for 2 tiny languid men in his landscapes, as in the little moon landscape, that is the only kind of romantic still tolerable, the bémolisé" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1996, p.254). Knowlson translates this French word as "the minor key" (Knowlson, 1996, p.254); this musical mood of melancholy is contrary to the self-willed Romantic figure, sure of his place in nature, powerfully standing at the top of the summit, which can be seen in Friedrich's most famous painting, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818).

In the *Theatrical Notebook* for this production, the facsimile shows that Beckett has written "K.D. Friedrich" at the top of page thirty, where he gives detailed instructions on how Vladimir and Estragon should perform the moon scene. The rising moon at the end of Act One, which is also the backdrop for the tableau which ends Act Two, are key scenes which Beckett carefully choreographs in terms of movement and speech, as the two figures at separate points turn their gaze to the moon, "V contemplates moon … E after tasteful arrangement of boots to contemplate moon" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, pp.30-1).

Godot is his only play in which all the major elements of a painting are used: the two figures, stone, tree and moon are key visual images for both play and painting. As Beckett drew attention to the link, his subversion of the painting could have been intentional, although he himself did not give any such interpretation. Friedrich's painting shows the Romantic concept of a harmonious Nature, with the friends held in the warm glow of the moonlight. The mood of the painting is one of optimism, as the tree and the rock are well-known Christian symbols of the Resurrection and Salvation, with the tree representing Christ's Cross and the rock the foundations of the Church. In contrast in *Godot* Beckett drains the colour so there is no warm glow, the tree is spindly and leafless in Act One, with just two leaves in Act Two, and the alpine granite dwindles to a solitary stone. The brief appearance

of the moon at the end of both acts is not a unifying force but rather exists in isolation, as do the tree and the rock and indeed the two men, who do not look up at the moon together, but at separate times. Beckett is showing here, to paraphrase his own judgment on the Cézanne painting, an un-anthropomorphized landscape which exists independently of humanity. Beckett shows the elemental animal/mineral/vegetable states, which do not form an organic whole, but are fractured and separate from each other. The minimalist visual stage language therefore creates the fundamental underpinning of the play, subverting the lushness of the nineteenth century painting.

Beckett's link to the Friedrich painting does not obviate other possibilities: I argue for a multi-layered interpretation, which is not dependent on one specific painting only, but can key into a much wider set of pictorial allusions. Beckett saw repeated images of Christian figures in their own specificity and settings, with subtle variations displayed, according to the artist, because Christian iconography consists of the repeated production of set images of the human body, as the known Biblical figures act out their predestined dramas. For example, stock images in 'Agony in the Garden' paintings illustrate the act of waiting itself, depicting Christ's alertness as he has foreknowledge of his imminent Crucifixion, whilst his Disciples unheedingly sleep at the foot of the rock. I take two Renaissance examples, both titled *Agony in the Garden,* one by Giovanni Bellini (About 1435-1516) and the other by Andrea Mantegna (1430/1-1506), which have been owned by London's National Gallery since purchase in the nineteenth century. Although Beckett visited this gallery many times during his stay in London in the early 1930s (Knowlson, 1996, p.195) there is no comprehensive list of art works he saw at this time, as there is for the German galleries during his trip of 1936/7. Carville is of the opinion that the lack of any lists of works seen by Beckett from the National Gallery in the Beckett archive is due to the fact that he "knew the collection there so well … he didn't need to remind himself of what it contained" (Carville, 2018, p.2). In both paintings the prominent rock upon which the bare-foot Christ is praying is the dominant image; the spindly tree to one side is more reminiscent of the tree in *Godot* than the imposing tree in the Friedrich painting. The contrast between Vladimir (who is alert) and Estragon (who is sleepy) mirrors the Christ/disciples duality of wakefulness/sleeping, or awareness/obliviousness. The association of Estragon with the rock rather than Vladimir, who is associated with the tree, (Asmus in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.89) confuses any potential equation of one of them with the dominant Christ figure. Subversion of the Christian iconography of art reduces and confuses the identity and presence of the figures, refusing the Christian drama of salvation.

3.3 *Rockaby* and *Piece of Monologue*

Abstract and figurative

Beckett's stage figures are undermined by the elements I have defined under an aesthetic of failure; these create a tension between representation and abstraction, which Beckett saw and engaged with in modern art. In his reaction to *Kopf in Rot* (1930-1) by the Swiss painter Karl Ballmer (1891-1958), which he saw on a visit to the artist's studio in Hamburg in November 1936, Beckett admired what he saw as its refusal to create a narrative and its autonomy as a visual object. Beckett commented on the painting, "Wonderful red *Frauenkopf*, skull earth sea and sky … Object not exploited to illustrate an idea … The communication exhausted by the optical experience that is its motive and content". The tension between abstraction and representation in this painting is pronounced, as an oval-shape, created by red paint can be perceived as a head, with what could be seen as sky, sea and shore within the shape: the boundaries of inner and outer worlds, of subject and object, are confused. Beckett rejected the idea that it was abstract and applied a paradoxical term to it, "Would not occur to me to call this painting abstract. A metaphysical concrete" (Beckett in Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, p.392).

The need not to represent a narrative that explains what is seen, or to even make figures clear and distinct, can be seen both in the Ballmer painting, and in Beckett's work, through the different medium of staged performance. Beckett's visual stage language undermines a clear understanding of any narrative content, allowing multiple, fragmentary meanings to emerge. Beckett's experimental visual forms for his plays cannot be reduced to merely being the carrier for the spoken text; they help to destabilize meaning, flaunting this failure, each in their specific ways. Susan Sontag (1933-2004) writes in her essay 'Against Interpretation' (1964) that attempting to dig out the true meaning of a work of art destroys it; she includes Beckett's drama in her study. Sontag argues against what she saw as a widespread critical assumption that "a work of art *is* its content" (Sontag, 1982, p.96), that it exists to say something and that the act of interpretation can translate this in an almost algebraic way, "Look don't you see that X is really – or, really means A?" (ibid, p.97). An analysis of Beckett's visual stage language helps to avoid narrow interpretations which would in Sontag's phrase "tame the work of art". Sontag claims that if, "Real art has the capacity to make us nervous", then replacing it with an interpretation of its content "makes art manageable, comfortable" (ibid, p.99).

Rockaby

In *Rockaby* (1980) the rocking chair functions as both concrete stage property and metaphorical, abstract conveyor of potential meanings. The image of the woman in the rocking chair, within a pool of light, creates the visual form of the play: the precise relationship of the minimal subject and object on a dark stage creates a tension between abstraction and representation. The designer Jocelyn Herbert is quoted as saying about the plays she was working on (not just Beckett's) that "leaving space around the actors" and the "minimum of scenery and props" meant that, "Perhaps it was the beginning of what I call 'considering the actors as part of the design'" (Herbert in Findlater 1981 pp.84-5). Whilst the spoken text may create naturalistic images, the visual stage language does not present a domestic interior, but rather shows simply a seated figure looking outwards as in portrait painting. This focus on the figure conveys Merleau-Ponty's view as discussed in Chapter One that it is the body which is primary rather than a controlling mind; human experience grounds perception. McMullan argues that Beckett focuses on the body "as visual material rather than as centre of identity"; using the chair in *Rockaby* as an example she maintains that "apparently inanimate props" on stage "are in a close symbiotic relationship with the body" (McMullan, 1993, p.11). This moulding together of the woman with the rocking-chair is an example of my concept of the figure in the stage construct, "White hands holding ends of armrests" grip the, "Rounded inward curving arms to suggest embrace" of the chair. This image, situated on a dark stage, within a liminal space, emphasises the weakness of the figure who endures the "mechanical rocking" (Beckett, 1986, pp.433-4).

The visual image is one of entrapment as the frozen figure's hands clearly visible throughout, do not move from the armrests. She repeats one word, "more" at intervals; after a pause each time this is followed by the rocking of the chair and a recorded voice speaking (Beckett, 1986, p.435). She is a fractured self: there is a split between the figure and the disembodied voice of memory, and between herself on the rocking the chair and the agency of rocking. The conflation of the image of the rocking chair (in which one rocks oneself) with the cradle (which is rocked by a carer) is undermined by the mechanical rocking which creates a feeling of alienation. This cradle-to-grave image conveys a life-span, enacted in the play's brief period. Enoch Brater compares *Rockaby* with a work by a painter Beckett admired, Vincent van Gogh's *La Berceuse* (1889), the portrait of a woman in a rocking chair, making the point that *Berceuse* is also the title of the French version of Beckett's play. Brater suggests that, as the term in French "means cradle, lullaby *and* rocking chair" and "can also refer, as it does in Van Gogh, to the seated figure herself", that there is a conflation of two opposites, that is babyhood and old age, and by extension birth and death (Brater, 2011, p.83).

However, there is an important difference between the figures in the painting and the play; in the former the figure has agency as she holds the chords of the cradle and she is the one rocking it. In contrast, the figure in the play appears trapped in the chair; this can be compared with other portraits in which the sitter is captured by the artist, such as Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) painting of *Dora Maar in a Yellow Jumper* (1938). In this painting the emotion of the sitter is shown through her bunched hands, tensed on the arm rests, which they grip; this can be compared with the hands of the figure in the play who likewise clasps the arm rests.

Another portrait, Giacometti's *Annette, Sitting* (1957), also creates the image of a figure imprisoned by the chair on which she sits. Giacometti's use of the colour grey places the figure in a liminal space, between life and death; the sketchy, dark-grey figure is enclosed within different grey tones, creating an image which seems to flicker on and off, rather like an x-ray photograph. Beckett too uses a grey/black/white spectrum in both costume and lighting to create a failed figure, unable to break out of what seems to be a force field which holds her in place.

In *Rockaby* the figure entrapped in the chair is an embodiment of the conjunction of birth and death in a condensed image. Merleau-Ponty describes the individual's bodily experience of time as being one in which "the living present is torn between a past which it takes up and a future which it projects" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, P.388). The art of portraiture, which aims to fix the person's bodily image at a specific time, is used to memorialise the individual: the death of the subject is implicit in the purpose of creating the art work. The idea that the act of representation necessarily prefigures mortality is one found in Derrida's discussion about his own anxiety at being filmed for a documentary. The act of filming heightened his acute awareness of his own mortality "these images will most likely live longer than I... Death is here. We are filming someone who we know will die before the archive" (Derrida in Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2005, p.46). The collapsing in of time, to encompass past, present and future, is a familiar theme in Beckett's stage images, encompassing the life-span of his figures.

Piece of Monologue

Beckett was drawn to the visual saying he believed "the image was more powerful than the word and superior to it in its greater clarity and precision" (Knowlson in Haynes & Knowlson, 2003, p.49). Knowlson gives the example of Beckett comparing the word "knife" with the image:

> "knife" has no meaning, it's a blurred image. You have to say "butcher's knife",
> "kitchen knife" "knife to cut the bread" so that the word takes some meaning.

> But when it is shown you see at once what kind of knife it is: the image is then
>
> stronger than the word (Beckett, cited in Haynes & Knowlson, 2003, p.49).

Beckett's visual stage language makes use of concrete and recognisable stage properties, but he undermines their solidity in a way which problematizes perception and representation. Beckett's failed figure is juxtaposed with objects in a minimalistic stage construct; this creates an intense visual image of the connections between the subject/object. This brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the idea that we have a neutral, commanding relationship with things, rather it is that, "Humanity is invested in the things of the world and these are invested in it". He quotes Cézanne as speaking of "the particular 'halo' of things which it is the task of painting to capture" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.63-4). *A Piece of Monologue* illustrates this complex relationship between the human body and the things in space and time around it: the figure in the stage construct, in which the body becomes one more almost abstract shape amongst the other things in the frame with it. In this play a "Faint diffuse light" creates a ghostly effect in the darkness, as it plays over the three elements which comprise the *mise-en-scène*. A standing human figure, the Speaker, all in white is mirrored by the standard lamp which is the "same height" as him, and has a "skull-sized white globe, faintly lit" (Beckett, 1986, p.425). McMullan highlights how the subject/object seem to change places as the:

> objectification of the body is accentuated through the direct parallel with the
>
> inanimate lamp … While the body is reduced to a barely visible form, the lamp
>
> assumes a certain animacy, so that any trace of human presence is displaced
>
> from the body to the globe (McMullan, 1993, p.62).

This transposition of the animate and inanimate suggests the grotesque confusion of the boundaries of the organic and inorganic.

The visual stage language in this play shows resemblances and affinities of mood with Edvard Munch's *Self Portrait – Between Clock and Bed* (1940-3). Knowlson has written that the German diaries of 1936/7 "reveal how much he admired the paintings of Munch" (Knowlson in Croke, 2006, p.68). As this painting is composed of two verticals (his standing self and a grandfather clock) and the horizontal of the bed frame, so the visual form of the play is also built on the horizontal element of the bed, "Just visible extreme right, same level, white foot of pallet bed" (Beckett, 1986, p.425) in juxtaposition with the two vertical forms of figure and lamp. Both Beckett's play and the painting create images of mortality through minimalism. In this play the dimming standard light, the standing

human figure and the end of the bed form a composition which shows the figure poised in a liminal place between life and death.

3.4 *Not I* and the "broken form"

Revealing impediments

The impossibility of representation due to the limitations of perception were key concepts in Beckett's 1948 essay 'Peintres de l'Empêchement', which can be rendered as 'painters of impediment or hindrance', but which Beckett himself translated as 'The New Object' for a catalogue for a 1948 New York exhibition of the work of Bram and Geer van Velde (Maude, in Maude & Feldman, 2009, p.91). Beckett praises the art of the brothers Bram and Geer van Velde for revealing failure using a term which carries connotations of shackling of the feet. This term is striking given that the difficulty of walking is used repeatedly by Beckett to bring the failed body to the fore; it therefore links bodily failure with the failure of perception and of artistic expression. In this essay Beckett sets up a binary opposition, supposedly embodied by the two brothers, to account for what he sees as the necessity to show the impossibility of grasping reality in one's art work. Beckett's description of the two types of artists is a very physical one: either there are artists of the object-obstacle (*l'empechement-objet*) or those of the eye-obstacle (*l'empechement-oeil*). Either the object blocks itself off from being represented or the subject, who is attempting the representation, has obstructed vision, being unable to get past their own subjectivity:

> L'un dira: Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le representer, parce que'il est ce qu'il est.
> L'autre, Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le representer, parce que je suis ce que je
> suis.[2] (Beckett, 1983, p.136).

This brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on how perception is grounded on bodily experience and therefore is limited, "It is not accidental for the object to be given to me in a "deformed" way, from the point of view [*place*] which I occupy … This subject, which takes a point of view, is my body as the field of perception and action [*practique*]" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp.15-6). In Beckett's visual stage language things perceived are fragmented, never complete, and in that sense ungraspable; perception itself is an abstracting activity.

Beckett's engagement with issues of perception and the rendering of reality were important concepts in the visual art discourse at the time. Giacometti wrote of the problematic nature of

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[2] One will say: I cannot see the object in order to represent it, because it is what it is. The other, I cannot see the object in order to represent it because I am what I am (my interpretation).

capturing even a simple object such as a glass, "You never copy the glass on the table, you copy the residue of a vision"… the glass "really always is between being and non-being. And that is what one wants to copy" (Giacometti in Peppiatt, 2010, p.205). This idea of a residue is apposite for Beckett's minimalistic visual stage language: the problems inherent in the act of representation are especially acute when trying to represent a human being, a figurative object possessing internal consciousness, faced with external reality. The minimalism which Beckett employs shows the failed figure obstinately persisting. The sense of a residue or that which has left a faint imprint pervades his work; there is a feeling of something that has happened, some ghostly cause which lies at the back of the work, which itself shows the ruination.

Beckett discussed his continual search for a theatrical form which would erode any strength or support for the figures on stage with his friend, the academic Lawrence E. Harvey. These conversations took place during the period 1961-2, a time when Beckett was speculating whether with *Happy Days* he had gone beyond what was possible in the theatre. Harvey's notes from these conversations show Beckett applying his ideas about the purpose of art being to reveal failure, as developed through his engagement with visual art, to his own theatre practice. According to Harvey's notes, "He spoke of having come to feel the need for a disordered form, a broken form", because "Being is chaotic – the opposite of ordered form". Therefore Beckett is reported as saying that "in his work he had been searching for a syntax of weakness'" (Harvey in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, pp.134-5).

Not I

In *Not I* (1973) Beckett shows Mouth, a radically fragmented image which vomits forth a torrent of words; it is poised between the polarities of, presence/absence and light/dark. Beckett wanted this play to have an emotional impact, by-passing reason, "I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope my piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not on the intellect" (Beckett in Connor, 1988, p.157). Rosemary Pountney's analysis of earlier drafts reveals how Beckett's process of reduction led to the image of Mouth. Starting with Kilcool (1963), which she considers to be "the first fragment related to *Not I*", she notes the focus on the face:

> Woman's face alone in constant light.

> Nothing but fixed (crossed out) lined lit face and speech" (Pountney, 1998, pp. 92-3)

With the 1972 draft (holograph 2) Beckett's aim was to make visible just the disembodied Mouth in the darkness:

> "MOUTH: back (crossed out) up stage audience R, convenient level, faintly lit
> from close up and below, as little as possible of rest of face (ibid.,p.254).

When asked by the director Alan Schneider if Mouth is dead or in limbo, Beckett denied the idea that this was a question that could be answered:

> I no more know where she is or why thus than she does. All I know is in the text.
> "She" is purely a stage entity, part of a stage image and purveyor of a stage text.
> The rest is Ibsen (Beckett in Harmon, 1988, p. 283).

This insistence on the primacy of the text, visual and spoken, and denial of an authoritative meaning, returns us to the materiality of the fragmentary, constructed image which problematizes representation. Merleau-Ponty's description of the contingency of perception and fragility of the subject can be applied to Mouth which is strangely persisting as a "perceptual field, a surface in contact with the world" despite the fact that "the world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck on the shore" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp.240-1). This body fragment is the failed figure, a grotesque physical remnant which endures and projects an abstract sense of an embodied subjectivity. By unlinking the organs of speech from an identified subject, and placing them in the upper region of a darkened auditorium Beckett creates an almost mechanised image which combines with the torrent of fragmented words to show the destruction of language. McTighe writes of the "haptic interface" between "language and the material body" in this play, with the stage image as "a hole within a hole, the end of vision, defying perspective" (McTighe, 2013, p.62). The visual stage language suggests that consciousness itself is mechanical, as enunciation becomes primarily a physical act. In isolating the mouth Beckett focuses intense concentration on it, creating a grotesque image from the mouth in movement; its changing shape, lips, tongue and teeth problematize the organic nature of the image.

Not I is the only other play apart from *Godot* for which Beckett reportedly acknowledged a link to a painting, in this case Caravaggio's (1571-1610) *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (1608) which Beckett saw in St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, Malta. The painting shows a small group of spectators observing the dramatic violence of the decapitation of the saint (Knowlson, 1996, p.588). The *chiaroscuro* effects of being in the darkness and of unspeakable horrors being perpetrated on the body is transferred to the play. The figure of the Auditor in *Not I* proved problematic in production, and Gontarksi points out that Beckett omitted the figure in the 1973 Royal Court

production with Billie Whitelaw, and in the 1978 Paris production with Madeleine Renaud. Gontarski quotes from a letter in his possession to the two directors in which Beckett writes, "I should have … advised you simply to omit the auditor. He is very difficult to stage (light – position) … I can do without him. I have never seen him function effectively" (Beckett in Gontarski, 2018a, p.116). The removal of the witness who listens in silence increases the abstract nature of the piece, and also heightens the aloneness of Mouth, which inhabits an atmosphere of what Walter Asmus called "absolute torturous loneliness", "floating in space" (Asmus, 2015).

Beckett's visual stage language to convey emotion can be compared with the art of the Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell (1925–92), of whom he wrote, "I have great friendship for Joan and admire her work enormously" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2014, p.215). Mitchell's painting *Bonhomme de Bois* (1962) creates an emotional tension between abstraction and the figurative, as its ambiguous title seems to play on the concept of 'snowman' (*bonhomme de neige*). Mitchell has exploded the figure in this abstract painting as Beckett almost obliterates the figure in *Not I* leaving only the organs of speech within the darkness. Beckett used the image of the snowman in his conversations with Harvey, which were taking place at the same period as Mitchell was working on this painting, in relation to his own creative endeavours, "Children build a snowman. Well, this is like trying to build a dustman" (Harvey in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, p.137). The destruction of the figure and the failure of the artist are inherent in this 'dustman' image: the insubstantial materials and futility of the task ensure failure.

Not I is one of the most technically demanding of the plays, requiring as it does an extreme fragmentation of the body through concealment and the use of lighting. The technical and design challenges meant that Beckett was dependent on his theatre colleagues and on an experimental theatre context to produce it on stage. A comment from Jocelyn Herbert suggests Beckett also drew on the collaborative nature of such relationships when envisioning this play. In a visit she and George Devine made to Paris in late 1971 "Sam and George were debating the extent to which you could remove human beings from the stage and still write a dramatic text: the idea of *Not I* was germinating in Sam's mind" (Herbert in Courtney, p.87).

After offering *Not I* to Alan Schneider's Beckett festival in New York in 1972, Beckett wrote in a letter "dubious about mouth play imperfectly tested… opening late fall unless they discover it's unperformable which I strongly suspect" (Beckett in Craig, Dow Fehsenfeld et al, 2016, p. 302). Schneider, whilst acknowledging the "Technical difficulties galore" detailed in two letters to Beckett how, with the "good technical help" of the Lincoln Centre, they were managing. Their plan involved using a lamp "which lights paintings in galleries", a "full mask" and, "We're building an entire unit to

roll on in dark. She's standing, propped up against back-support, mike around her neck, lamp unit fastened on with her so making sure she'll be lit exactly" (Schneider in Harmon, 1998, p. 276-9).

Billie Whitelaw describes how these technical difficulties were addressed in rehearsals for the first English production at the Royal Court in January 1973. Jocelyn Herbert designed the black-out make-up, hood and black costume, and initially Whitelaw stood on "a rostrum high up on the stage". However, due to her feeling "disorientated", a new plan was worked out with Herbert and the stage manager, Robbie Hendry, for Whitelaw to sit on a chair, with a rod "to give me something to hold on to". In order to stop her head shaking which made her mouth move "in and out of Jack Raby's very precise lighting" she was "strapped to the chair", with her head "held in a vice" (Whitelaw, 1995, pp.124-5)

However, Pountney states, "it became possible for audiences of this production to distinguish black from black, so that the faint outline of a solid figure behind the mouth became apparent". In order to avoid this, for the second English production at the Oxford Playhouse in 1976, in which Pountney played Mouth, the lighting director David Colmer came up with the solution of moving the actor behind a black-out curtain which covered "the entire stage area". Positioned on a scaffold eight feet up, a hole was cut in the curtain for her mouth; "elasticated material" was sewn onto the curtain to keep the head still. Pountney observed that a complete black-out is problematic due to the legal requirement for exit lights (Pountney in Murray, 2009, pp.72-6). However, this problem was overcome by the lighting designer James Farncombe in Walter Asmus's production at the Royal Court in 2014, when the lights were turned off, giving a hypnotic concentration on Mouth (Royal Court website). This shows how technical expertise and a willingness to experiment were necessary to fulfil the process of reduction which Pountney revealed, so that the Mouth can appear to hover near the top of the stage space, suggesting a fragment caught in a liminal space.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have sought to demonstrate how combining ideas generated from Beckett's engagement with art, explicit elements of the aesthetic of failure and specific examples of art works can facilitate a focus on the visual stage language. This change in emphasis can draw attention to the physical specificity of the failed figure in a way that art works do. Comparisons between stage images and modern art are based on a correlation as such art shows a stripped-down, tension between abstraction and representation. In contrast links with the Old Masters paintings reveal Beckett's reduction and abstraction of their images. Merleau-Ponty's ideas on embodiment and perception provide another perspective which highlights the figures as grounded in their own world.

As demonstrated in this chapter, Beckett's plays employ a permutation of the different elements of the aesthetic of failure to build up their visual forms, using the different resources of the theatre stage. The next three chapters explore how this is implemented across a wide range of plays, with a focus in turn on the figure in the stage construct; movement, gesture and stillness; and light and dark. However, as all visual components of the *mise-en-scène* are combined in the plays to create the visual stage language, it is not possible or desirable to isolate these broad categories, which are therefore discussed throughout all three chapters.

Chapter Four

Figure in the stage construct: the interlocking relationship

In this chapter I investigate the 'figure in the stage construct': as defined in Chapter One, this is the interlocking relationship of the figure with the world it inhabits on stage. This includes the connections between the figure's setting, the objects that surround it, and also how it relates to other figures in terms of the visual stage language. This can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception as an embodied experience, in which we can only see the world from our own viewpoint. This world then is necessarily fragmented, composed of things with which we are closely interconnected and of fractured relationships with other people. Whilst the body is both subject and thing, the subject cannot get outside of itself to observe itself. This accords with the feeling that Beckett's figures are split subjects, trapped on the stage in liminal spaces.

I discuss these matters in relation to four plays: *Endgame, Happy Days*, *Catastrophe* and *Come and Go*.

4.1 *Endgame*

Sepulchre and skull

In *Endgame* (1957) Beckett creates a minimalist space which problematizes any idea of a domestic interior "*Bare interior. Grey light. Left and right back, <> two small windows, curtains drawn. Front right a door*" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1992, p.3). Beckett's first ideas for the play were to set the action specifically in "Boulonnais….near Wissant" in Picardy after World War I, as can be seen in the document which Beckett titled 'Avant Fin de partie'. Gontarski makes the point that Beckett was also drawing on his own experiences of the devastation in France during World War II (Gontarski, 1985, p.33). Although the anchoring details of time and place were erased, the sense of human-induced destruction looms over the play, both in the spoken text and visually. The compulsion to destroy any form of life can be seen for example in the clown act of Clov when he puts insecticide down his trousers. This has a specific trace of the Holocaust and of camps such as Mauthausen, where Beckett's friend Alfred Péron had been imprisoned (Cronin, 1996, p.346): for a prisoner to be caught with lice on their body led to their execution (Mauthausen audio-guide, 2014). Clov is both victim and executioner as he wields the insecticide to stop the possibility that "humanity might start from there all over again!" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1992, p.19)

The minimal stage construct which the figures inhabit strongly suggests a liminal place between life and death. Clov's mime sequence which opens the play lays out the relationships between the figures and objects on stage, firstly by means of his gaze, which moves from Hamm, to the bins and windows, and secondly by a series of precise unveilings. These start with his drawing back the curtain of each window, removing the sheet covering the bins, the sheet from Hamm, and the lifting of a "corner of the handkerchief" from Hamm's face (ibid., p.3). Gontarski considers a draft mime, 'Mime du rêveur, A', (Dreamer's mime) as a preliminary version, pointing out that both have "bare interior with two high windows" (Gontarski, 1985, pp.45-6) and that the coffin next to the chair in the draft mime is an "early version of the trash cans" (ibid., p.51). The different connotations of unveiling include dust-sheets on art objects, the magician's theatrical reveal and the curtain 'going-up' at the theatre. Clov's objectification of Hamm, uncovering him as though he were a piece of furniture, or a sculpture being unveiled, is a grotesque violation of the boundaries between human figure and inanimate objects. The revealing gesture also suggests the reversal of the covering of a dead body with a sheet; of an unsettling boundary transgression between life and death. The sense of being buried in a sepulchre has been identified by Ruby Cohn who sees the set as "the family coffin" (Cohn, 1980, p.22). For her "this eschatological play" shows "the last of the human race" (ibid. p.238-9). However, the closure of death is a resolution which Beckett refuses; his plays "pivot on death" although "we witness no actual death on stage" (ibid., p.7). The idea of a sepulchre suggests that Hamm trapped in his chair occupies the principle tomb, with Nell and Nag's dustbins as minor graves. Clov functions in this sense as a servant who tends the graves.

The visual staging also suggests a charnel house where bones from previous graves are stacked. Such images link to Beckett's own experiences during World War II, the Holocaust and post-war forebodings of a nuclear war; Vladimir's cry of, "A charnel house! A charnel house!" in *Godot* (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.57) suggests that all human life is vulnerable to destruction. The entombment of the figures in a claustrophobic, grey stage construct creates a mood of confinement with the near presence of death, which has affinities with Picasso's *The Charnel House* (1945). This painting uses a grey/white/black palette and fragmented bodies to portray the bombed-out kitchen of a Spanish Republican family during the Civil War in the 1930s. The contorted corpses in the painting are the result of instant mutilation and death through the horrors of aerial bombing. The monotone colouring creates a feeling of life being obliterated, whilst also adding to the sense of abstraction which works with fragmented figurative elements. Abstraction and fragmentation are present in the visual stage language of the play too, suggesting the failed figures occupy a liminal place between life and death.

The image of the disarticulated bones of the charnel house also suggests the *memento mori* concept of the skull, the repository of human consciousness which conjures up the mind which it previously held. The sense that the grey set with two windows is like a skull, was recognised by Blin for the premiere in 1957, when he requested of the designer Jacques Noël "a curved set, with a concave back wall … creating the impression of the interior of a human skull, with two windows like eye-sockets" (Taylor-Batty, 2007, p.111). The size and positioning of the windows do not suggest the possibility of looking outwards onto an external vista. The idea that they are windows is undermined by Clov's exaggerated stage business with the ladder and the telescope at various points in the play, ostensibly to look at "the without" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1992, p.39). This creates a sense that there is nothing to be seen, and no outside; Clov, an unreliable narrator, is playing a cruel joke on Hamm, as part of the strategy in the struggle between them. Connor writes that, "*Endgame* plays notably with the audience's conceptions of inside and outside"; the spoken text suggests that only the place represented on stage continues to exist, and that its limitations are emphasised especially through, "Hamm's blind experience of it" (Connor, 1988, pp.142-3). The windows function as a parallel to the dark glasses that the blind Hamm wears, in that no light penetrates from the outside. This double image of blocked vision problematizes the act of looking and reveals hindrances to perception of the outside world. Oppenheim has noted Beckett's "recurring images of closing and opening (of eyes, windows, blinds)" that "reveal the rupture that separates the inner and outer domains … while the motif of "looking" … marks the quest for a unity between them" (Oppenheim, 2000, p.37). The blocking of vision through the eyes and windows in this play has affinities with Marcel Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* (1920, replica 1964) in which a free-standing French-window, with black leather panes instead of glass, subverts the motif of window paintings. Traditionally such paintings show the viewer part of the outside world, acting as a threshold between the interior and exterior and channelling the viewpoint in a stable way (Mueller-Schareck & Vietmeier, 2012). The idea of the stage construct as a grey skull, with empty eye sockets, problematizes the concept of inside and outside, and encompasses the obstruction of vision and perception.

Minimalist construction

Beckett's minimalist aesthetic maximises ambiguity through its use of abstraction, fragmentation and repetition. The set is composed on vertical and horizontal axes, in which the two windows set high above establish a relationship with the two dustbins on stage right below. Both vision and touch are closed down in these images, which show blocked sight and the impossibility of touch as Nell and Nagg are tantalisingly just too far apart for them to make physical contact. Beckett employs minimalism, precisely placing figures and objects on near-empty stages as part of his aesthetic of

failure, showing the limitations of embodiment and perception. Beckett's American director, Alan Schneider was alert to this aesthetic, stating that when directing Beckett you had "to make sure the nonessentials don't creep back in" (Schneider in Brater, 1987, p.4).

The foregrounding of the body and the carefully delineated space which it occupies on stage means that Beckett's figures inhabit their own constructed boundaries: this emphasises the material body as the primary site of perception. This can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on physical embodiment as a prerequisite for consciousness "far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.117). The so-called Minimalist artists of the early 1960s were also interested in the sense of embodied perception. Robert Morris's (1931-2018) interest in the relationship between his work, the space and the viewer stems partly from his reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Morris's sculptures of geometrical forms, such as *Untitled (Three L-Beams)* (1965) bring to the fore "the fact that our bodily based experience of objects, even the most regular ones, is inevitably partial or contingent" (Hopkins, 2000, p.139). These three identical beams provide a simple installation which provokes a questioning attitude to embodiment and perception.

In *Endgame* the spare setting and the way the figures relate to it also provoke questions. The personal space around the figures extends the idea of the body as a material object in space, whilst it also remains a subject, in relation to other figures and objects. The materiality of the body in space can be seen in the trajectories that Beckett's figures follow on stage, the permitted spaces that their bodies inhabit. In Beckett's 1967 production "Clov always takes eight steps from the door to Hamm's chair" (Cohn, 1980, P.243); this line which he can follow holds him in a position of mutual estrangement and dependency with Hamm. In a 1975 essay Morris reflected on the impossibility of separating the subject from the object in a way which is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty and of Beckett's art criticism:

> Our encounter with objects in space forces us to reflect on ourselves, which can never become the objects for our external examination. In the domain of real space the subject-object dilemma can never be resolved (Morris in Lejeune, 2015 p.109).

This split within the human being, as both object and subject, unable to fully perceive ourselves, is part of the aesthetic of failure. Garner argues that *Endgame* combines a "geometric strictness of line and plane, arranged with an almost gridlike regularity", combined with the opposite effect of "scatteredness of object (toque, rug, toy dog, gaff), the muting gray light, and the bent

shapelessness of human form" (Garner, 1994, p.53). This tension between precise control and the messiness of the human body and its objects shows the body as the site of failure, which has the shaping patterning of geometry imposed on it. Nevertheless, the play shows that subjectivity is not completely erased.

Cold extermination

After the tableau which begins the play, the first words spoken signal a desire for it all to be over and done with, suggesting a wearied repetition of actions on the part of Clov. The impossibility of an outside means that the figures are trapped in an inside, with no hope of escape; they are forced to participate in an almost, but not quite, exhausted cycle of meaningless activity. The quality of an oppressive, cold, constrained space, which creates a feeling of nothingness and powerlessness, has affinities with Bruce Nauman's *Room with My Soul Left Out, Room That Does Not Care* (1984), a site-specific installation at the Hamburger Bahnhof's Rieckhallen gallery, Berlin. This work cites a quotation from Beckett's novella *The Lost Ones* (1970) as a source, placed at the entrance to the installation:

> Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one. Vast enough for search to be in vain, Narrow enough for flight to be in vain. Inside a flattened cylinder fifty meters round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony. The light. Its dimness, Its yellowness (Beckett, 1999, p.55).

The work consists of interlocking corridors, creating performance architecture, leading nowhere, as you walk through a construct of emptiness. It is sited within the old brick former railway building, and is thus doubly enclosed in a subterranean, cold, comfortless structure. The dim light adds to the oppressive feeling; the vertical cylinder together with the connotations of the railway, suggest the gas chambers of the Holocaust. *Endgame* also reveals a lack of a way out; Clov's "making an exit" at the end of the play for example, in which he appears "dressed for the road", fails as he remains static within the tableau, "eyes fixed on Hamm" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1992, pp.41-2).

In his Schiller-Theater production Beckett emphasised the importance of creating the feeling of cold constraint, calling for "more coldness" in the lighting rehearsal (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.237). In addition, the use of grey was intensified, as the designer Matias set to work. Beckett employed Matias for his productions at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin after being introduced to him by Roger Blin in 1963, when Matias designed the first production of *Happy Days* in France. Matias was also a visual artist, and he "was recognized for his ability to construct painterly atmosphere and location in his designs" (Taylor-Batty & Taylor-Batty, 2008, p.68). In Matias's design the walls were

light grey, the curtains at the windows grey, "the ashbins were gray-black" and "Hamm wore dark gray and Clov light gray" (Cohn, 1980, p.244). In a letter of 25 September 1967 Beckett praised the technical team "Lighting, stage & props people very good" saying of the designer, "Matias arrived Monday and is a great help. He spends his time spraying everything with grey" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2016, pp. 95-6). Matias again was the designer for Roger Blin's 1968 revival in Paris; the overall grey-theme was continued "according to Beckett's wishes" (Taylor-Batty, 2007, p.119).

Hamm was first played by Roger Blin, who also directed the play in its first production, which was the French version at the Royal Court in London in 1957. In a 1958 letter Beckett wrote of Blin's linking Hamm with Francis Bacon's (1909-92) 'screaming popes' series of portraits, "Blin's conception of Hamm physical [sic] was influenced by Bacon's pope series" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2014, p.125). Bacon's variations of Diego Velazquez's *Pope Innocent X* (1650) included his *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953). Beckett's use of the disfigured body has a parallel in Bacon's visualisation of the body seen in this portrait; both of them foreground decay and bodily sensation. Hamm's violent and cruel outbursts have affinities with the Pope's screaming mouth in the painting: both viscerally suggest the monstrous and ultimately futile nature of power. Bacon believed that his art should not be narrative and should bypass the rational brain he said "anything 'that can be told through the brain before it makes an assault on the nervous system' – invariably weakened the enduring impact of the image" (Bacon cited in Peppiatt, 2008, P.233). The fragmented body in both portrait and play, with an emphasis on the head, accentuates a feeling of entrapment within the skull. The grainy, vertical lines downwards over the figure in Bacon's portrait suggest instability and ephemerality, which can be compared to the failing figure of Hamm, whose power drains away in the space of the grey staging.

The seat that Hamm cannot get up from traps him in a throne-like chair: Roger Blin requested from the designer of the first production that Hamm be seated on "an armchair evoking a Gothic cathedral" (Blin in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1988, p. 171). "Hamm's throne" was still present in Beckett's 1967 production (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.205), although Blin changed it in his own 1968 production to an office chair on castors, writing that Beckett thought of Hamm as a "a worn-out bourgeois, disoriented, trapped in a kind of pillbox" (Blin in Taylor-Batty, 2007, p.119). However, the idea of Hamm seated on his throne as the king in chess supports the sense, which derives from the play's title, of the failed figure as a manipulated chess piece.

Confined by the game

Whilst Beckett does not create a chess board on stage or have his figures act as chess pieces, the title's reference to the endgame in chess, where few pieces are left on the board carries suggestions of the game. For Kenner chess is a metaphor which lends itself to a play about the "end of humanity" "It is a game of leverage, in which the significance of a move may be out of all proportion to the local disturbance it effects". Although the chess game metaphor is not "yielded up with clarity by any conceivable performance", it is possible to see Hamm as the failed king who aims to be the last piece on the board, Nell and Nagg as pawns and Clov as a Knight (Kenner, 1961, pp. 157-9). The title draws on the allegorical power of chess, as a metaphor for the game of life; in discussion with the actors for his Schiller-Theater production Beckett elaborated on this theme:

> Hamm is a king in this chess game lost from the start. From the start he knows he
> is making loud senseless moves… Each of his gestures is one of the last useless
> moves which put off the end. He's a bad player (Beckett in Bair, 1990, p.494).

In the cruel game in which they are engaged there is a suggestion of punishment for unspecified crimes. Hamm seated on his chair, as if on a throne as the chess piece king is a powerless figure, dependent for his movement on Clov. The image of the disabled Clov pushing Hamm's wheelchair encapsulates a cruel joke, showing the weak, failed body duplicated. The extreme difficulty Clov has in walking was stressed by Beckett when directing at the Schiller-Theater, saying of Clov that he is, "Trying to walk but can't". In rehearsal Beckett acted out Clov's entrance himself, "Upper body bent, arms hanging loose, he trots out onto the stage as if his legs couldn't keep up with his head and his will" (Haerdter in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.205).

The emphasis on the disabled figures trapped inside together with the concept of the outside being a grey place of absolute destruction links the play to Beckett's original location of the action in the aftermath of the mechanised slaughter of World War I. The appearance of Hamm, blind and crippled, has resemblances to paintings by Otto Dix, which portray the impact of that conflict on the mutilated bodies of war veterans. Dix's 1920 painting *Match Seller 1* depicts a limbless, blind man, on a pavement, flanked on either side by the fragmented legs of the bourgeoisie who rush past, as the dachshund urinates on him. The feeling of a cruel, harsh world in the painting is also one found in the play. The stark contrast between mobility and immobility in Dix's painting is problematized in the play as Clov, the only one who can walk, does so with difficulty his "Stiff, staggering walk" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1992, p.3) accentuating the gruelling nature of labour as he fetches and carries. During his 1936/7 German trip Beckett saw work by Dix; some etchings in Hamburg showed

"a nightmare talent, a Georg Grosz of mutilation" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1996, p.236). Beckett's reference here is to the painter and caricaturist Grosz, who was also involved like Dix with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) artistic movement after the war. The failure of human reason, shown through images of the brutalised, butchered body, has affinities with Beckett's fragmented failed figure.

The extreme limitations of the journey they take round the stage, the "little turn" as Beckett called it intensify the idea of failure. Clov wheels Hamm around the constrained stage space, "Right round the world!" (Beckett in Gontarski, 1992, p.15) as Hamm says; this ridiculously circumscribed journey creates an image of the impossibility of mobility. The sense of being entrapped in a game is further emphasised by the figures being caught up in repetitive patterns of movement. Beckett's diagram for the act of pushing Hamm around gives instructions for a "complete clockwise circle" from the initial point of Hamm's chair, which is positioned "slightly off-centre". Later in the play this circle is reversed so that Clov wheels Hamm in a counter-clockwise direction (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, pp.198-9). Connor writes that Hamm's "centripetal" and "centrifugual" movements, between the peripheral walls and the original position of his chair, are "obsessive attempts to stabilize himself" (Connor, 1988, pp. 143-4). The patterning of the movement which is repeated with variations, accentuates the failure of space itself to provide enough amplitude. The doubling of the paired movements, clockwise and anti-clockwise, provides a visual sign of repetition which shows the failed body weakly repeating a cycle of moves with no resolution.

Hamm's interaction with the wall through his sense of touch focuses on the boundary of the stage space, emphasising the inside the figures are trapped within. The different actions Hamm performs of first placing his hand on the wall, then his ear against it and lastly rapping it twice with his knuckles emphasises the physicality of touch, in the context of Hamm's blindness and his dependence for information on the unreliable Clov. The importance of the sense of touch for grounding embodiment and perception was stressed by Merleau-Ponty, who contrasted it with the illusory nature of sight "visual experience" allows us to "flatter ourselves that we constitute the world…giv[ing] us the illusion of being immediately present everywhere and being situated nowhere". With touch however "I cannot flatter myself that I am everywhere and nowhere; I cannot forget in this case that it is through my body that I go to the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.369). The physical constraints on Beckett's figures hem them in, so that their sphere of action is reduced to a narrow zone around their bodies. The blind Hamm's reach is the limit of his power. Hamm knocking on the wall suggests a quest for a sense of solidity and certainty whilst contesting the reality of his embodied experience.

4.2 Happy Days

Grotesque fusion figure

Happy Days (1961) is the first of Beckett's plays in which the form is based on radical fragmentation of the body. Called originally *Female Solo* (Gontarski, 1985, p.69), the image of Winnie, seemingly baked into the ground, creates the stage construct which entraps her, a grotesque fusion figure of flesh and earth. Beckett's letter to Alan Schneider, who directed the global premiere in New York shows that he felt he was moving into new terrain, questioning whether this play could work in the theatre:

> I am interested in the "professional" reaction in the sense that it will help me to
> decide whether this is really a dramatic text or a complete aberration and
> whether there is justification for trying to push further this kind of theatre
> (Beckett in Harmon, 1998, p.110).

The image of Winnie's fragmented body being swallowed up by the earth resembles a funeral mound, but on a set which "represent[s] unbroken plain and sky" (Beckett, 1986, p.138). Winnie's mound is positioned on this pitiless plain on an "Expanse of scorched grass" (Beckett, 1986, p.138) under a blazing light. In his examination of early versions of the play Gontarski identifies Winnie and Willie as survivors of a nuclear war on a set which Beckett called a "battlefield" (Gontarski, 1985, p.36). Jocelyn Herbert, the designer of Beckett's Royal Court production in 1979 said "It's important that the set provides a complete void and gives the impression of unremitting heat" (Herbert in Courtney,1993,p. 55). The sense of heat was intensified in this 1979 production by the lighting designer, Jack Raby, who created "extremely powerful" lighting by using "aircraft lights… with about 14 strong, tight spots focused on Billie Whitelaw in the mound and about 60 other lights almost all hung from the grid over the stage." (Knowlson, 1985, pp. 21-2). Although Winnie voices the desire that someone should be watching over her, this cruel lighting has overtones of Jeremy Bentham's concept of the 'panopticon' (Foucault, 1995, p.200) which allows maximum surveillance of inmates, who consequently never know when or if they are being watched. Herbert's 1979 design intensified the idea of the mound as having been laid waste: according to the *Production Notebook* the set had a "surface covering of treated painted canvas, hessian, shredded string and sisal" which had the effect of a desert or "scorched earth" (Knowlson, 1985, p.21). McMullan has drawn attention to how this design made the mound "much rougher and more layered and more textured", a style which Herbert increasingly employed for Beckett's plays (McMullan, 2012, p.12). The encrusted effect

conveys a sense of mud, ashes and material decay; in Act One this contrasts with the exposed flesh of Winnie's upper body and in Act Two with her fragmented head.

The grotesque fusion figure of Winnie and mound, flesh and earth, is further complicated in the play by other binaries. McMullan has written of how this play "reproduces gendered associations between women, earth and body" whilst also complicating them, as Winnie "is also associated with the transcendent desire to escape material embeddedness". In his rehearsals, "Beckett foregrounded Winnie's bird associations in her way of picking objects out of the bag" (McMullan, 2010, p.55). In contrast Willie's animal nature is emphasised, "Like an animal, he crawls on all fours and retreats into his hole" despite his "being bound up with cultural codes" as seen in his boater, top hat and so on (ibid.,p.56). Another reading which builds on the image of the mound is that both Winnie and Willie are grotesque human/insect fusions: Winnie as the Queen ant in the termite heap, with Willie crawling, insect-like, around the mound at the end of the play. The word-play around "formication" ("sensation of insects crawling on the skin") (Collins on-line, 2020) misheard as "fornication" (Beckett, 1986, p.150), underlines this imagery. Their seeming blindness to what is happening to them calls into question their human nature and shows a failure of perception. Winnie's obliviousness is shown by the fact that she never acknowledges, by word or action, her predicament of being trapped in the mound. Beckett said of Winnie in rehearsals, "She's not stoic, she's unaware" (Beckett cited in Knowlson, 1985, p.17).

Decentring the protagonist

In his 1971 Berlin Schiller-Theater production of *Happy Days* Beckett made a significant design change, applying a decentring technique by moving Winnie in the mound to a position "stage left" (Knowlson, 1985, p.21). His 1979 Royal Court production kept to this amendment. This was a significant change from his original stage instructions which required, "Maximum of simplicity and symmetry" in positioning the mound (Beckett, 1986, p.138), and from his sketches sent to Schneider for the 1961 premiere which show a centred mound (Beckett in Harmon, 1988, pp.86-8). In making the decision to go for asymmetry instead of this original symmetrical concept, Beckett is using visual stage language to show the failure of the principal figure. By physically depriving Winnie of the central position on stage Beckett problematizes her role as the protagonist, the central figure. In terms of showing the failure of the body and consciousness the decentring is significant, as it reveals the displacement of the figure within the world it inhabits. This decentring technique can be compared with Derrida's ideas of decentring as a disruption of authoritative meaning, as he wrote:

it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could

not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site,

that it was not a fixed locus (Derrida, 1978, p.280).

The metaphorical dethroning of the supreme subject, as Winnie is displaced from the position of control, can be interpreted as reflecting a decentring in an alien universe where certainties of God, human reason or consciousness are no longer available. Affinities can be seen between Beckett's moving the attention away from the centre by decentring his figures and creating empty spaces on the stage and a technique used in modern art to draw attention away from the centre of the canvas and focus on the margins. Artists like Morris Louis (1912-1962) explored concepts of a decentred universe, with no fixed points or absolutes through his abstract 'stripe' paintings, such as *Delta Iota* (1960). Louis emphasised unfinishedness and contingency in this painting, which confines the bands of colour to the edges, leaving the central area completely blank. Beckett's own shift towards the margins can be compared with Louis's challenge to authority and conventional modes of representation.

Concealing and revealing mound

Winnie's enforced immobility and Willie's lack of agency and inability to break out of the vicinity of the mound problematize the relationship between them. Merleau-Ponty describes how the power of the gaze works:

in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the

gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may

become his master and, in my turn, look at him (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, P.193).

Immobility and fragmentation show how embodiment results in a partial view on the world from a specific space; subject and object are both concealed and revealed in different ways. The visual stage language is set up to obstruct the gaze between Winnie and Willie: in Act One Winnie has to crane her neck back over her shoulder in an attempt to see him. In Act Two Willie's effort to sustain his gaze on Winnie as he crawls upwards falters, only for the two figures to finally lock eyes in the final scene. The spatial dynamics and the fragmentation show their estrangement despite their physical nearness.

The restricted mobility imposed on Winnie as she is held fast by the waist in the mound in Act One paradoxically emphasises the impact of her upper body movements. This enables an exploration of embodiment as a performative act: the choreography of her movements as she tries to engage with

Willie shows the difficulty of motility and human communication. In her interactions with Willie, who remains only partially visible until the end of the play, Winnie moves through a restricted 90 degree angle in carefully specified stages, as for example, "[Turning a little towards WILLIE] … [Pause. Turning a little further.] … [Pause. Back front] … [She cranes back and down]" (Beckett, 1986, p.147). This shows the physical effort Winnie has to make in order to try to establish visual contact with Willie and therefore the difficulty of communication. After her attempt at turning around, Winnie is forced back into her default position, which is facing forward. This rigidity together with her slow and deliberate movements, are structured in a mechanical way: the fracturing of body movement is an element of the fragmentation of the body. Representing this fracturing of motion is a technique which can be seen in Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). This painting creates a construct of the figure, which resembles an artist's mannequin, and the stairs; they are meshed together to form a series of repeated movements through fragmentation. Winnie's attempt at turning around to see Willie resembles the action of a cog-wheel mechanism, cranking her neck and head in stages. This artificiality of movement, together with the immobility imposed by the mound, creates an image which conveys ideas of the figure as an object, trapped within the stage construct.

Winnie depends on Willie to substantiate her own presence, but throughout Act One he remains largely unseen. Beckett sequences precisely the parts of his body that appear: starting with the "Top back" of his skull, then his hand with handkerchief, then the boater, followed by the newspaper but "hands invisible" (Beckett, 1986, pp.141-3). This refusal to show Willie on stage, instead drawing attention to properties which signal a concealed presence, is an example of Merleau-Ponty's characterisation of the subject/ object relationship. He writes that "my body is a thing among things; it is one of them … But because it sees and moves itself, it holds things in a circle around it". This means that, "Things are an annex or prolongation of my body" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.354). The main example of this close but troubling relationship between subject and object is Winnie herself, with her possessions acting as extensions to her body.

Winnie's possessions

The immobilised figure of Winnie could entail the body's physicality being downplayed on the stage. However, in Act One the opposite is the case as the focus is on Winnie's physical actions, as she prepares to face her day, with toothbrush, lipstick, mirror and comb. Garner, calling this "Beckett's most object-conscious play", notes the way that "As objects abandon their humanizing instrumentality … the body itself reverts to the status of quasi object within its field of awareness" (Garner, 1994, p. 108).

Beckett elevates these banal, repetitive actions by making them performative in themselves: Winnie's engagement with the objects she extracts from her bag becomes the visual focus of the play. Winnie's relationship with her properties, the extreme focus on them and their emotional connection to her, reveal the subject/object association in terms reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's description:

> In the action of the hand which is raised towards an object is contained a reference to the object, not as an object represented, but as that highly specific thing towards which we project ourselves, near which we are, in anticipation, and which we haunt (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 159).

Beckett's referencing Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre (*1810) to the actor Eva-Katharina Schultz in 1971 rehearsals suggests that he wanted an artificiality of gesture to convey a puppet-like action rather than basing these actions on psychological analysis. According to Schultz Beckett asked for a "musicality of gesture" and for a "precision and economy" which "would produce the maximum of grace" (Schultz in Knowlson, 1996, p.584). The argument in von Kleist's essay revolves around the idea that only animals and puppets retain a state of innocence, which humans lost after the Fall. Self-consciousness led to a fragmented disunity which puts human beings off-balance; von Kleist argues that puppets are superior to humans as dancers because they are mechanical beings. The "negative gain" of the puppet is that it cannot think of its actions and therefore it stays true to its centre of gravity. In contrast, "consciousness creates disorder in the natural harmony of man" (von Kleist, 1972, p.24). Winnie's physical interactions with the bag, which Beckett accentuated by concentrating on the choreography of gesture, reveal Winnie as the failed figure acting out a puppet-like obliviousness towards her own predicament.

The channelling of concentration onto a few simple objects is part of the minimalism of Beckett's visual stage language. It means that a few isolated properties acquire significance, are invested with an importance in a way that is similar to visual artists' intense concentration on objects. In her investigation into the plays as "the enactment (as opposed to re-enactment) of life experience", Lois Oppenheim finds that, "Winnie's persistent tallying of her possessions" is "an inventory of self", showing an "obsessive need to confirm one's own existence by that of the material world" (Oppenheim, 2000, pp.51-2). Oppenheim argues that Beckett's "testing of both aesthetic convention and the limits of expression" can be compared with Duchamp's 'Readymades'. Her focus is on language rather than the use of stage properties, as she writes of the "suspension of narrative closure" and that "Beckett resists anecdotal progression in much the same way that Duchamp did in reconnecting art with objects of everyday life" (ibid., p. 53). Marcel Duchamp created the concept of

'Readymades', mass-produced everyday objects such as the ceramic urinal which he designated as *Fountain* (1917). This re-positioning of common material objects takes them out of their usual context, thus altering our perception of them. By turning the urinal upside down and giving it the title *Fountain* Duchamp suggests the urinating body as a fountain: transgressing the boundaries of object and subject.

Winnie's engagement with properties such as the tube of toothpaste has parallels with this idea of taking ordinary objects out of their everyday usage and presenting them for scrutiny as art objects. In a similar way to Duchamp's *Fountain*, the depleted tube of toothpaste merges subject/object as it signifies Willie's impotence. Beckett's detailed stage directions create performative acts by breaking down simple stage actions, slowing them down to emphasise them:

> Poor Willie – [examines tube, smile off] – running out – [looks for cap] – ah well –
> [finds cap] – can't be helped – [screws on cap] – just one of those old things –
> [lays down tube] (Beckett, 1986, p.139)

Winnie's wonderment as she "rummages" (Beckett, 1986, p.143) in the bag and brings out the objects to inspect has connotations of a stage magician's routine of showing ordinary objects, such as a hat, which is then used to make things appear or disappear. That this is performative rather than representational was suggested by Kenner's idea of Winnie as "an actress steeling herself to play the part one more time", thus repeating the gestures of putting up an unburnt parasol and breaking a new mirror again on successive nights. For Kenner, "Beckett has invoked the repeatability of the play before, the plight of actors trapped in parts, but never so deftly, never with such buoyant pathos" (Kenner, 1973, p.149). That Winnie puts the objects back into the black bag in the reverse order to which they were taken out (Knowlson, 1985, p.136) shows repetition with variation; an imposition of controlled patterning that Beckett used when directing his work. For his 1979 Royal Court production Beckett introduced six "arrests" or "aborted actions" in which Winnie interacts with her bag: looking at it, turning towards it, moving her hand towards it, and hovering over it (Beckett in Knowlson, 1985, pp.134-6). Everything in her bag is there to keep her going through a repetitive cycle, except the gun which signals finality.

Both Winnie and the objects she depends on are shown to be almost used-up, in a twinned image of entropy. Although Winnie is shown interacting with her belongings, there are affinities with 'vanitas' paintings which assemble personal possessions to symbolise a life, without the human owner being represented. One such example is Harmen Steenwyck's (1612-1656) *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* (about 1640), in the National Gallery, London. This painting depicts the

brevity of life by means of the fading light from the lamp and the prominent skull, symbols of mortality which negate the power of the objects represented. In a similar way, Winnie's possessions function as *memento mori* objects which act as reminders of the transitory nature of life. In Act One for example the looking glass, which holds the image of the face and the bottled elixir, which sustains life, clearly relate to the passing of time. Winnie's deliberate smashing of these two properties, with a sudden quasi-ritualistic, purposive energy, demonstrates the significance that these objects assume. By Act Two only her head appears, as an image of the human skull; the bag containing the objects which allowed her human agency to be manifest is now obsolete. The image of the musical-box, which Winnie winds up and sways along to in Act One suggests the repetitive cycle of the failed figure, which is continually running-down. At the end of Act Two, Winnie who is reduced to a head which cannot move sings the musical-box tune; although we do not see the box at this stage, this picks up the image of a mechanical object, which is winding-down. This image of the music-box, which is conjured up by her song, reflects on the grotesque image of Winnie's singing head: it emphasises the objectified fragment of the figure in the stage construct.

4.3 Catastrophe

Mute witness

The central action of *Catastrophe* (1982) is of the Protagonist's body being manipulated by the Director's Assistant at the Director's request: the concept of a sculpted figure on a plinth sets the figure in the stage construct, questioning representation through a grotesque mixture of the animate/inanimate. However, there is also a political dimension to this manipulation, as *Catastrophe* was commissioned to support the playwright Vaclav Havel, to whom the play was dedicated. Beckett wrote it in response to a request from the International Association for the Defence of Artists, which was organising a series of events for the imprisoned Czech writer and dissident at the Avignon Festival in 1982. Rather than giving an explicit political message or tying it down to one specific case, Beckett made the manipulation of the body the central action of the play to express support for the individual artist suffering under a totalitarian regime.

That the Protagonist is able to hold centre stage by virtue of his having no voice and through his immobility is a striking example of Beckett's use of silence and freezing to explore an image of political resistance. Beckett subverts the traditional role of the 'protagonist', meaning the principal character, by freighting the body itself with the emotional power of a central figure, rather than creating him as a character who speaks and acts out his defiance on stage. Beckett's intense engagement with sculpture gives us a route into this play, which makes use of the statue as a mute

witness to the brutal impact of the forces of repression upon the body. Because of its political context this play has affinities with the sculpture of the Russian dissident artist Vadim Sidur (1924-86). Beckett had one of his small sculptures, *The Crippled One,* a gift from the artist, of which Beckett said, "It is a powerful and moving work, a speechlessness of indignation and compassion. It moves me deeply".[3] Beckett had placed this sculpture on his outside windowsill "exposed to the elements" (E. Beckett in Craig et al, 2016, p.409). This positioning is interesting: it suggests testing the sculpture's fragility and endurance by subjecting it to a weathering process. It also sets it in opposition to the Santé prison, which Beckett could see from his study window; he had a strong antipathy towards incarceration and sympathy for prisoners (Knowlson in Gontarski, 2010, p.15).

Sidur's main theme was the physical impact of war and repression as seen in sculptures such as his *Wounded Torso* (1963): a fragmented upper body, with bandaged head revealing only a gaping mouth. Whilst not fragmented in this way, the Protagonist's strange intermediary state, between flesh and marble, also partakes of a mixture of the abstract and figurative. Beckett does not show physical force on the body, instead the forces of repression acting upon him create through a performative act the very process of a controlling regime. A deliberately slow-paced uncovering and positioning of the figure gradually reveals the face, hands and so on, from what appears at the beginning to be almost an empty suit of clothes. Beckett shows the figure being prepared for display purposes, for example when the Director says "Bare the neck" the Assistant "[undoes top buttons, parts the flaps, steps back]" (Beckett, 1986, p.460). McTighe has drawn attention to how this process is both creative and destructive for the Protagonist, "The creation that is the making visible of P is simultaneously destructive of his autonomy and subjectivity … The process is one of objectification" (McTighe, 2013, p.117). The act of objectification is part of the grotesque combination of human subject and physical object in the play; transgressing the boundaries between what is human and what is not, questioning what it is to be human.

Enduring monument

The idea of the figure as an inanimate object is undercut visually right from the beginning, as the bare feet of the Protagonist signal flesh and blood and therefore a live human being. The revelation of the body has affinities with paintings of Christ, as Lloyd has suggested in his example of Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo* (1605), in which "an 'assistant' removes a dark cloak to expose [Christ] to the crowd" (Lloyd, 2018, p.223). Like Christ, the Protagonist is portrayed as a suffering, subjugated figure that also retains some power of overcoming. Throughout his work Beckett's figures show the signs of wear and tear on the body at a primary level: they are not explained through a narrative of

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[3] Unfortunately, despite extensive research I have not been able to trace a picture of *The Crippled One*

social, economic or psychological drivers. This brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's project of grounding humanity:

> back upon the soil of the sensible world and the soil of the worked-upon world such as they are in our lives and for our bodies, not that possible body … but this actual body I call mine, this sentinel standing silently under my words and my acts (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.352).

The failed figure of the mute Protagonist, with skull the colour of "ash" and his "crippled" and "clawlike" hands (Beckett, 1986, pp.457-8), shows the ravages of time on the body. Grey suggests skeletal remains after death, as well as the funerary monument which acts as the mineral memorial. Statues embody frozen poses which have connotations of solidity, combined with a long lasting mineral endurance. However, statues also strongly suggest the non-living and non-reactive; these qualities of endurance and of death, confuse the boundaries of the human being and of representation of humans. Beckett's German diary entries for February 1937 detailed his reactions to the fourteenth century tombstone sculptures of bishops in Würzburg and Bamberg cathedrals. Beckett praises the work of the sculptor known as 'Wolfskehl Meister', calling him the, "Master of [the] senile & [the] collapsed. Another man for me. Remember "WOLFSKEHL-MEISTER" (Knowlson in Ben-Zvi & Moorjani, 2008, p. 29). The *Tomb of the Bamberg Prince-Bishop Friedrich von Hohenlohe* (1352) is an example of such figurative monuments to the once-proud bishops, placed on top of their tombstones, which evoke the skeletal form within as a reminder of the inevitably of death. Beckett's emotional response to the dissolution of the human form, as shown in medieval funerary sculpture, is linked to his visual aesthetic of showing the failed body, marked by death, which however never comes as a release. The Protagonist in his "old grey pyjamas" and "ash-skull", motionless on a "black block" (Beckett, 1986, p. 457) has connections with such funerary monuments. The way in which sculptured figures seem to hover between living-likeness and stony-death, is also part of the Protagonist's metaphorical power: his persistence in the face of time, inhabiting a grey, liminal space between life and death.

Embodying dissent

The Protagonist's role is to carry out the physically demanding performative act of standing-up throughout. When he played the Protagonist in the US premiere, the actor David Warrilow commented on how keeping the "sculptural" pose required "an infinite amount of delicate muscular work" (Warrilow in Kalb, 1989, p.225). The act of standing has multiple connotations. Beckett's interest in the power dynamics of the stronger being able to sit whilst the weaker is made to stand,

was evident from his first play, *Godot*, with the Pozzo/Lucky relationship predicated on the master sitting and the debilitated servant having to stand. The armchair the Director sits on for the first part of the play functions as a symbol of supposed power, similar to Hamm's chair in *Endgame*. In the context of political repression it has links to the torture carried out on concentration camp prisoners, who had to stand for hours in all weathers as part of the ritualised cruelty of dehumanisation at Nazi regime camps. The way that the Protagonist is handled, and his costume of gown and pyjamas also carry connotations of the Soviet regime's detention of dissidents in psychiatric hospitals.

The Protagonist and the space he inhabits on the plinth is a mixture of representation and abstraction, suggesting the fragility of human presence. Giacometti said of his sculptures such as *Piazza* (1947) that what interested him was the space between figures. In this work, which shows four male figures walking towards a central point and a female figure standing motionless, the spatial relationships between the figures in the empty space suggest alienation. The sense of immobility of the sculptures is emphasised by the stride, and their positioning on solid plinths (Guggenheim Collection, 2017). Colm Tóibín has identified a similar mixture of figuration and abstraction in both Giacometti and Beckett, writing that they were both engaged in a "serious game": playing at creating the sense of a real presence, whilst at the same time negating it. For both of them the body inhabits a "void", as an object: the "thingness of self" is always in tension with "the questing and mystified human presence", which means that the work "evades easy interpretation". Tóibín sees this type of representation of the human figure as an artistic solution to the problems of creating art faced by the survivors of World War II (Tóibín, 2015). The figure in the stage construct conveys this sense of the body as a particular subject and a thing inhabiting its own space, and the liminality of presence/absence.

Beckett shows the refusal to accept repression, even when silenced, through the decrepit figure of the Protagonist; in this way he suggests the inherent instability of power. The complex abstract/figurative combination of the Protagonist provides a visual means to express the failed figure that is a silent epitome of inaction, but through this signals an obstructive force. The tension between bodily presence and absence is mirrored by a tension between who has power, the one who speaks or the one who is silent. The complex visual interplay of figures on-stage and off-stage, figures in light and darkness, and the use of voices in a command-and-obey chain of control uses the idea of theatre itself as a fitting metaphor for the role of the dissident playwright. As the Director moves off-stage half way through and the Assistant fades in and out of view at the end, the stage is increasingly left to the Protagonist, and the light, operated by the disembodied Luke ('lux' or light), shines on the Protagonist's body and then on his head. Positioning her term 'theatereality' as "a

distinctive form of metadrama" Cohn notes of this play, that although it is framed as a rehearsal, "As always in theatereality the actual and the fictional *only nearly* converge" (Cohn in Boireau, 1988, pp.103-4). Whilst the ambiguity of what is rehearsal and what is the real performance questions representation, this framing device is itself problematized by the manipulation of the Protagonist as if he were a statue, or an artist's dummy. Using a visual art approach we can investigate the tipping-point at which power is seen to move from one locus to another, in the context of Beckett's familiarity with the principles of art.

In the play's grouping of figures Beckett sets up his visual stage language to suggest a subtle questioning of power. The way in which this play is structured around three figures in terms of their power can be compared with the placing of figures in Christian iconography. An example is *The Heavenly and Earthly Trinities* (1675-82) by Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1617-1682) at the National Gallery, London, in which the bare-footed Christ-child stands raised up on the stone between Mary and Joseph, on the horizontal axis. On the vertical axis, God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit hover above Jesus' head; Christ is positioned at the centre of the cruciform shape. Although unlike the Christ-child the Protagonist is an aged image of suffering, he too occupies the central position "mid-stage", creating the main vertical element as he stands on the "black block 18 inches high". The Director is seated in an armchair "audience left" and has his "female assistant" "standing beside him" (Beckett, 1986, p.457). In McMullan's words the Assistant is "the mediator" who crosses between the "space and spectacle of power and the repressed, unrepresented space of suffering"; she is "a fellow-victim, also under the power of the Director" (McMullan, 1993, pp.31-2). However, if we consider the focal point which the Protagonist's body inhabits, we can see that the positioning of the three figures form a shape that leads upwards from the front of the stage creating a rising arc which directs the gaze upwards to the figure on the plinth. The lowest point of the line is therefore the seated Director, with the Assistant, moving between him and the Protagonist, being the mid-point in terms of height. Power over the Protagonist's body is mediated through this hierarchy: the lines of action pass from the figure of the seated Director, through his Assistant to the seemingly passive Protagonist. However, his central position alone in the light at the end shifts this hierarchy at the culmination of the manipulation process, "[Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies...]" (Beckett, 1986, p.461).

As the Protagonist defiantly demonstrates a spark of volition, Beckett poses the question of where control really lies. However, this question is also suggested by the stage construct created by the positioning of the three figures and the relationships between them. Departing from his usual refusal to explicate, Beckett took issue with critics who considered the ending to be ambiguous,

stating that the Protagonist is saying in his one and only gesture, "You bastards you haven't finished me yet" (Beckett in Glanville, 2009). This enduring figure brings to mind Reginio's comment on Beckett's minimalism, as discussed in Chapter Two, that it shows the "spectral nature of the particular, its resistance to reification" (Reginio in Reginio, Houston-Jones & Weiss, 2017,p.127).

4.4 *Come and Go*

Stylised movement wrapped in stillness

The title of *Come and Go* (1966) encapsulates the visual form of the play, as the three figures create an interweaving of being seated, standing-up and sitting down, walking off and back on to the stage. The figures' interactions create the stage construct: their default position is stillness, facing forward, hands in lap, rather like a frieze, or a fragment of sculpture. Whilst it could be read as a meditation on life, dealing with memories of childhood from the perspective of old age and approaching death, an image of abstraction and liminality prevails.

The visual stage language accounts for the major part of the play: the spoken text amounts to 130 words, whilst the stage directions comprise almost 200 words, plus a table of "successive positions" for seating position and hand clasping, and additional notes on the *mise-en-scène* (Beckett, 1986, pp. 354–7). The stage direction 'Silence' is repeated 13 times, including before and after each figure leaves the stage, which emphasises their exits:

> *[Silence.*
> *Exit FLO left.*
> *Silence]* (Beckett, 1986, p.354).

The calm, meditative nature of the play, as the figures repeat the same movements and gestures in an ordered cycle, suggests a ceremonial quality, an enactment of the cycle of birth and death, as the figures come and go on the stage, entering and leaving the lit-up area as if fading in and out of the scene.

These figures are abstract, shorn of any particularity, despite their familiar, short-form names – Vi, Ru and Flo; apart from the different colour coats they wear, Beckett specified "three figures as alike as possible". Beckett uses a technique of fragmentation by concealing the body under these buttoned-up coats and their, "Drab nondescript hats" (Beckett, 1986, p.356) which obscure their upper faces so that the eyes are not visible. The figures do not appear to make eye contact with each other, instead visual communication is through the hand gestures they make and the hand clasping

at the end. Derrida has stated that we are mainly known by our gaze and gestures, and that paradoxically it is the Other who can know, better than we can ourselves, what these aspects of ourselves are like, "It is the eyes and hands that are the sites of recognition, the signs through which one identifies the Other" (Derrida in Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2005, p.69). Beckett problematizes these abstract, fragmented figures as sites of recognition, undercutting any message that is being communicated and received.

Each of the figures occupies in turn the right-hand, central and left-hand sitting position, and each functions as the whisperer, the listener and the absent one, who is supposedly being talked about. The lack of differentiation was further accentuated when shortly after helping with a production of the play at the Odéon Theatre in Paris in 1966 Beckett directed his own production there, using three shades of grey for the costumes, instead of the original muted-coloured coats. Ruby Cohn's comments on this production suggests that the effect was as if the figures were statues whose natural state was to be frozen "the women exuded a mineral quality … each gesture seemed wrested from stillness" (Cohn, 1980, p.235). Uniform in their greyness the figures function as quasi-effigies, in a liminal space between life and death, embodying the circularity of repeated time. As with the seated figures common in Ancient Egyptian sculpture, the stillness of the pose and emphasis on the hands at rest placed centrally in their laps has a quality of memorialising the dead, as can be seen for example from Berlin's Neues Museum sculpture *Family portrait.* Beckett commented on his interest in Ancient Egyptian sculpture after visiting the Neues Museum in Berlin in January 1937 (Nixon, 2010, p.259). This collection also contains fragments from sculptures, such as the two hands clasping in *Ancient Egyptian Hands*; enigmatically this fragment could show one figure clasping its own hands, or to two figures holding hands. The survival of small fragments of a sculpture such as this over millennia creates a moving image of the reduced human figure, which recalls Beckett's use of minimalism as an expression of the particularities of what survives of human experience. Ancient Egyptian sculpture has religious, funerary and memorial functions, which focus on the links with the afterlife, whilst *Come and Go* suggests a place between life and death, an unsettling image of inexorable repetition.

Three haunted figures

The sense of the figures inhabiting a liminal space gives an abstract sense of presence and absence. The effect of the bodies being seemingly suspended in darkness was important for Beckett, who specified that the bench should be "As little visible as possible. It should not be clear what they are sitting on" (Beckett, 1986, p.356). Having been present at Beckett's 1966 Odéon Theatre production, Cohn comments that, "Since the bench was invisible, the three women were seated in a void ...

rendered almost palpable through strict pattern" (Cohn, 1980, p.235). Cohn suggests this is an image of mortality, as she stated that "death is not mentioned, but it is the invisible fulcrum for this mortal equilibrium" (ibid., p.7). Wrapped-up in their costumes and enveloped in silence, the figures sit motionless or disappear like ghosts into the surrounding darkness. Although the idea of a bench can be intuited from the bodily positions of the actors, the bench itself is present through its absence: this eliminates any possibility of support, comfort and consolation, which the familiar image of say a park bench would trigger.

The title *Come and Go*, relates not only to the women's movements in and out of the darkness, but also to the coming and going of time, the past-present-future continuum, which the figures inhabit. The ghost-like nature of the figures in this play is emphasised by the silence interspersed with a few incantatory phrases; as well as having ghost-like attributes they are also haunted by traces of past and future. Beckett's visual stage language captures this unsettling lack of certainty, shot through with anxiety, as the brief moment of 'now' disappears into a future, which replays on a loop of repetition. The haunting is shown visually through the repeated bodily movements and gestures, the whisper into the ear, the placing of the hand to the mouth and the finger to lips to impose silence. The whispered words are intuited through the shocked reaction to the assumed revelation about the absent figure; the repeated question/answer spoken text sets up the idea that tragedy awaits each of the figures in turn. Beckett's visual stage language shows here that each of the figures knows something about the other two, but is unaware of their own fate, thus revealing a blindness in perception as it relates to one's own existence.

The visual form of the play with its concentration on the number three, is created by an interlocking triad: as the three figures absent themselves in turn, and each go through the act of whispering and shocked reaction, the form of the play is composed of these three chains of actions. Three is an important number in numerology throughout Classical and Christian culture: the Three Fates, the Three Graces, the three Marys and the Holy Trinity figure consistently appear in painting and sculpture. The three figures in the void of *Come and Go* can be seen as an example of subversion in relation to *Primavera* (1482) by Sandro Botticelli (about 1445-1510). This allegorical painting, which Beckett would have seen in his visit to the Uffizi gallery in Florence in the late 1920's (Mercier, 1977, p.91), is composed of two sets of three figures, in a background showing the beauty and fecundity of nature in Spring. Reading the painting from right to left, the first set of figures includes Flora, who turns into Primavera (Spring) on impregnation by the breath of Zephyrus, then the goddess Venus. The second set depicts the Three Graces dancing hand-in-hand in a circle (Uffizi website, 2017). Beckett subverts the grouping of the youthful figures under diaphanous robes; the free and open

movement across a fruitful world, full of re-birth and plenitude, is closed down so that the figures could be seen as the decayed ghosts of their previous selves, caught in the darkness. In the hand-clasping at the end of the play there is a trace of this painting, a spectral imprint, which suggests the three Graces. This is discussed in the following section.

Hand gesture

As we have seen, the hands are the most prominent parts of the actors' bodies in this play, used to show the act of communication and the impact of emotion. As the play begins the three figures sit with their "hands clasped in laps" (Beckett, 1986, pp.354-5), a pose repeated three times throughout. Merleau-Ponty has drawn attention to the relationship of the body and perception through the example of the hands "when I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.106). The withdrawn figures clasping their own hands convey this sense of the border between subjectivity and object. A repertoire of hand gestures interrupts this default pose: the covering of the mouth, the index finger to lips, and the set-piece of the inter-twining hand-clasping at the end. This last image is unusually cohesive: the idea of joining together again in a repeated, patterned loop takes precedence over the breaking apart.

The eternal reoccurrence that the figures embody is underlined by the last words of the play before the final silence, as they hold hands Flo says, "I can feel the rings" (Beckett, 1986, p.355). The idea that the words relate naturalistically to hand-clasping is undercut by Beckett's specifying, "Hands made up to be as visible as possible. No rings apparent" (Beckett, 1986 p.356). This is an example of how Beckett creates a tension between his visual stage language and spoken text. Knowlson has written that the final image of the three holding hands together creates "the pattern of an unbroken chain, an emblem that, traditionally, has been used to symbolize eternity" and that the ring is itself a "common symbol of eternity (Knowlson in Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, pp.122-3). This image of the figures caught in a loop, or a ring has an intimation of Derrida's concept of deferral:

> The trace is not only the disappearance of origin-within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin (Derrida, 1976, p.61)

As each identical figure repeats the same hand gestures, playing the part of the silent messenger who then enjoins silence on the listener, the ambiguous message is deferred. Beckett's use of hand gesture can be related to Old Master paintings which use Christian iconography to tell well-known

narratives, making use of stock gestures. The hand gestures in the play can be interpreted as a subversion of art depicting the moment when the Angel Gabriel delivers the message to Mary that she is going to bear the son of God. One example is Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* (1472-5) which is in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence: Gabriel's gesture of blessing and Mary's open-handed acceptance of the message is depicted in the painting. Whilst Gabriel brings the message of birth and salvation, the repeated gesture in the play of covering the mouth to whisper encapsulates the idea of language failing. The figures are caught in a loop of concealing and revealing; the gestures predominate over speculation about the whispered words, as the abstract patterning prevails.

Puppets and automata

As they revolve in and out of the light on stage, along prescribed lines, these identical figures take on the grotesque nature of mechanical automata or puppets. Beckett wrote in a letter to Alan Schneider, who was directing a revival of the play in 1981, "I see *Come and Go* as very formal. Strictly identical attitudes & movements … Stiff, slow, puppet-like" (Beckett in Harmon, 1998, p.417). The closing-down of the human expressivity of the face, in particular the eyes, adds to the sense of an automaton-like figure. The only sign of emotion is the shocked response as their mouths, which are faintly visible, open to exclaim "Oh!" Beckett specified the spoken text to be "colourless except for three 'ohs' and two lines following" (Beckett, 1986, p.357). This sequence of actions, linked to the concept of time, brings to mind the automata clock, in which mechanical figures appear, often to strike the hours at set times, before disappearing again. The puppet encapsulates the subject/object dichotomy of the human as both material object and subjective consciousness. The puppet acts as a metaphor for the questioning of free will, as it is operated by outside forces; this emphasises the constraints placed upon the failed figure. Present on the stage for a brief time, the puppet also suggests concepts of presence/absence, of lack of awareness and fragility. As the face is obscured it is not the site of emotion; the mouth-shape of creating the 'Oh' expostulation mimics the puppet's sole mouth movement as the hinged jaw can fall open to suggest a voice. However, it is the movements and gestures that the three figures undertake in turn, interspersed with the lapse into stillness, which creates a sense of controlled emotions at work on the body. The performance creates a patterning effect as a range of habitual actions, which can be interpreted as mechanical have an impact which expresses emotions of melancholy and grief.

The three figures function both as physically embodied humans and as stylised images which interact with each other through the patterned movement. This can be compared with Oskar Schlemmer's painting *Stairway Scene* (*Treppenszene*) (1932) which uses the human figure as a patterning device, mixing the abstract with the figurative. Beckett saw work by this artist during his

German trip of 1936/7; for example on a visit to meet with the eminent art expert Will Grohmann he found him "hanging pictures by Klee, Kandinsky … and Schlemmer" (Knowlson, 1996, p.250). All three of these painters were part of the Bauhaus movement; the school was multi-disciplinary covering art, architecture, design, theatre and dance. Schlemmer was a teacher and head of the stage workshop at the Bauhaus school from 1923; in his pedagogical essay, 'Man and Art Figure', Schlemmer references both von Kleist's essay and Edward Gordon Craig's Über-marionette (Schlemmer in Huxley & Witts, 1996, p.368). The five variously fragmented, identical figures in his painting are positioned on a grey, white and black background which suggests a stairwell with bannisters. They repeat a pattern in abstract terms, which confuses the concepts of going up or down, and therefore the idea of purposeful movement on stairs. The three most prominent figures in the central panel are looking down with no expression on their faces; a mood of inwardness is created by the repetition. The only differentiation of the figures is in the clothing on the upper bodies, which is dull red, purple or blue; the dull red, violet and yellow of the figures' clothing as originally conceived in the play bear an interesting resemblance to this colour scheme in the painting. Beckett also problematizes the purpose of movement through the coming onto the stage and exiting it into the darkness. What predominates is the geometric patterning of figures in movement, alternating with stillness, through simple repetitive sequences of physical actions. Artificiality of repeated movement problematizes the human figure, implicitly asking whether it is an automaton or a human being; the geometric patterning emphasises the circular habitual round of the failed body, which keeps going despite itself.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how the body's grounding in its world is explored visually through the concept of the figure in the stage construct. Visual ideas such as the sepulchre, the burial mound, the statue and the automaton clock are important to this concept. However, the interlocking nature of the stage construct is more complex than this, including the delineation of spatial relationships between figures and objects, which includes the grotesque violation of biological boundaries. The use of art as a comparative tool reveals Beckett's minimalist visual stage language which brings to the fore the failure of representation and the questioning of perception.

Chapter Five

Movement, gesture and stillness

The objective of this chapter is to explore Beckett's use of precise movement, gesture and stillness as part of a visual stage language for failure. The figures walk along set lines, creating abstract patterns of incomplete geometrical shapes; their postures and the shapes they form as they come together are part of this abstraction of the body. The repetitive nature of the movement, which suggests a mechanistic compulsion, creates a sense of being trapped in a liminal place. The act of movement, fast or slow, can alternate with abrupt halts, when figures freeze, suggesting a sense of entropy as energy wanes. Beckett's use of the moving figure and stasis can convey the grotesque, questioning the human condition. Gesture too is highly stylised and combines with a closing down of gesticulation, as the prime sites of hands and head are concealed through fragmentation.

Comparisons with how artists depict the body support this argument throughout, building on the work of scholars, such as Knowlson for example, who traced Beckett's "virtual obsession" with gesture, stating that it "almost certainly resulted from his deep immersion in the visual images of the Old Masters" (Knowlson in Haynes & Knowlson, 2003, p.77).

I examine these aspects in relation to the following: *Act without Words 1 and 2, Footfalls, Godot* and *Quad*.

5.1 *Act without Words 1 /Act without Words 2*

Act without Words I (1957) and *Act without Words II* (1960), sub-titled as mimes, were written during a period when Beckett was experimenting with movement. Both *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, open with scenes of mute movement and gesture. By the time Beckett was writing *Endgame* he was starting to think of the movement of his figures before he wrote the spoken text, and by 1962:

> he had been aware of every movement of the actors even before he wrote the dialogue, and he knew which direction his actors would face before they spoke because what he made them say depended upon it (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, pp.90-1).

McMullan argues that Beckett's experimental mimes, including these two works, "fed into much of Beckett's later dramaturgy which subjects the body to a restrictive physical environment or system

of movement" (McMullan, 2010, p.57). An investigation of these two mimes is therefore important for understanding Beckett's use of the expressivity of movement, gesture and stillness within an aesthetic of failure.

Act without Words 1 - figure in a pitiless arena

Act without Words 1 was commissioned by the classically trained dancer Deryk Mendel; it uses movement, gesture and stillness, as a figure responds to a series of sharp whistles to interact with a set of properties. Mendel both performed and directed the premiere at the Royal Court in April 1957, when it ran with the premiere of the French version of _Endgame_. Beckett linked the two works, calling _Act without Words 1_ "in some obscure way, a codicil to End-Game" and telling Mendel that the figure in the work is, "Clov thrown into the desert" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2014, pp.64-5). _Endgame_ itself starts with a mime and ends with a tableau of Clov frozen, seemingly about to exit the stage. In the introduction to the _Theatrical Notebook_: _Endgame_ Gontarski argues that, "The importance of mime to Beckett's drama is difficult to overestimate" and "underscores the dominance of the visual" in his plays, in which silence and tableaux are key elements (Gontarski, 1992, p.xx). Beckett's work for and with the ballet dancer Mendel surely influenced his use of movement and gesture; it is shown in his later directing work, in which he made use of words such as "balletic" and "choreograph" (McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.xii). Their working relationship went much further than this one production, as Mendel subsequently became a director of Beckett's plays. In 1963 Mendel directed the premiere of _Play_ in Ulm, acting in the mimes _Act without Words 1_ and _2_ in the same programme. Mendel also directed a production of _Godot_ in 1965 and one of the first productions of _Come and Go_ in 1968. Beckett was involved in all of these productions over the course of these several years working with Mendel, which exposed him to the aesthetic of the dance practitioner in relation to physical movement.

The dynamic of the piece is based on the moving figure interacting with a series of properties; the figure and its relationship with the objects become both the content and the form of the work, demonstrating the cruelty and frustration of life caught in the alien environment of the set "Desert. Dazzling Light". The man being "flung backwards" onto the stage four times (Beckett, 1986, p.203) is interpreted by Cohn as man being born and attempting to "return whence he came" (Cohn, 1973, p.156). Of the seven pratfalls, Cohn highlights that four "are caused by offstage forces, but the other three recall the clown tradition of the hostility of intractable objects" (ibid., p.157).

Movement is primary and it is this which carries the emotional charge of the piece as the figure repeatedly tries to get a drink of water. The original title of the piece was 'Soif' (thirst), in

McMullan's words "emphasizing Beckett's conception of embodiment as a condition of need (corporeal or metaphysical) that cannot be satisfied" (McMullan, 2010, p.62). One of humanity's most basic needs proves an insurmountable challenge; the physical impact on the failed figure as it makes the attempts becomes the predominant image. This accords with Merleau-Ponty's challenge to the view "that there is such a thing as a fully-formed man whose vocation it is to be 'lord and master' of nature, as Descartes put it" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p.71). The man's expenditure of vast amounts of personal mental and physical energy are shown to be puny, ineffectual and of no concern to an alien universe.

Act without Words 1 – thwarting of purposeful activity

The dynamics of *Act without Words 1* are propelled forward by a three-fold sequence of movements, 'reflect – react – renounce'. The figure's movement towards the objects and his interaction with them creates an acute sense of the embodied act of perception:

> Whistle from above.
> He looks up, sees carafe, reflects, gets up, goes and stands under it, tries in vain
> to reach it, renounces, turns aside, reflects (Beckett, 1986, p.204)

The staged interaction with each object fragments the experience of the subject-object relationship; it emphasises the repetitive movements and the inexorable nature of the series of failures. Being grounded in the failed figure, this recalls Merleau-Ponty's description of the subject/object relationship as a physical reaching out "to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp.78-9). The French dancer and choreographer Dominique Dupuy who directed it in 2013, has written that the simplicity of the piece reveals the physicality of body and objects in space:

> ces actes muets déterminent une rare présence physique à l'espace et aux objets, autrement dit une très forte présence au réel, ainsi porté à incandescence[4] (Dupuy, Théâtre-Chaillot, 2013).

However, the relationship between figure and objects in constricted space is one of continual frustration providing an incontrovertible demonstration of failure, set up as if it were an experiment to test human intelligence and endurance. Knowlson has suggested that the piece "reflects his [Beckett's] reading" in the 1930s of Wolfgang Köhler's *The Mentality of Apes;* the book describes an

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[4] these mute acts bring a rare physical presence to the space and to the objects, in other words a very strong presence of the real, to the point of incandescence (my translation).

experiment in which apes had to stack cubes on top of each other to reach bananas (Knowlson, 1996, p.419). The implication that Beckett was drawing on this experiment on apes, our close relations, to make a point about the hubris of humanity is apt. Merleau-Ponty also mentions this work by Köhler in the context of seeking to bring humanity down to earth through a "rehabilitation of the animal world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p.77). The figure in the play makes use of the cubes to build a structure to reach upwards: as he interacts with three differently sized cubes he makes the mistake of placing a large cube on top of a smaller one and therefore destabilising the structure. The role of the geometrical cube in the play functions to show the limits of reason.

The final section of the play shows the figure lying prone and unmoving, as he faces forwards; he has been brought down by the big cube being removed from under him. This non-movement contrasts sharply with the purposeful activity which precedes it. The dichotomy of movement and stillness which pervades Beckett's plays shows up how the body's prowess can be short-circuited in a random manner, in this case revealing the figure stretched out like a fallen object. The last gesture of reflecting takes place before he moves to sit on the big cube; after his fall there are no more "reflects", but instead four repeats of, "He does not move", the most acute being when he does not respond as the water carafe "dangles and plays about his face" (Beckett, 1986, p.206). The play consists of lots of futile action by the figure, with his last movement being to look away from the audience, towards his hands. The slight movement of the figure's gaze to his hands, without any preceding instruction of "reflects" is ambiguous. Gontarski has suggested that, "The climactic ending of the mime may signify not a pathetic defeat, but a conscious rebellion, man's deliberate refusal to obey. Lucky has finally turned on Pozzo" (Gontarski, 1976). Beckett himself called the figure in the play "this last extremity of human meat – or bones" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2014, p.64). McMullan writes that, "It might suggest a posture of defeat or a stoic, resigned self-reliance or (n)either [sic]" (McMullan, 2010, p.62). Although ambiguous, the final looking at his hands after he has been physically brought down to earth, suggests a defeat. Maybe, as with Merleau-Ponty citing Köhler's criticism that "classical experiments" set "the animal world … tasks that are not its own" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p.75), this is an illustration of how humans too are faced with impossible "tasks".

Act without Words 2 – repetitive frieze

Act without Words 2, written in French in 1956 (Pountney, 1988, p.42) was also written for Deryk Mendel, showing Beckett's great interest in mime at the time; he also proposed a third mime to complete a set, although this never came to fruition (Craig et al, 2014, p.77). The play is "A mime for two players" which explores movement and gesture in terms of mathematical permutations, using carefully measured time and space. Beckett's plan and detailed instructions provide for an

assemblage, created by two figures, their sacks and a pile of clothing, moving in a controlled sequence across the back of the stage creating a "Frieze effect" (Beckett, 1986, p.209). Beckett's use of the word 'frieze', the primary meaning of which is a "horizontal band … esp. [sic] one that is decorated with sculpture" (Collins On-line, 2020) gives an indication of the visual effect and the link to art. Its first performance at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London in January 1960, rather than a theatre positioned it at the time as visually experimental. As its name implies the ICA was focused on being "at the forefront of art and culture", ranging across different contemporary art forms (ICA website, 2017). Sarah Jane Scaife who has performed in and directed the play has spoken of the "sculpture of repetition" in Beckett's work, with the moving figure as part of what she considers to be "installation pieces" (Scaife, 2015).

The figures labelled A and B have to move and place the empty sack and the pile of clothing in a linear fashion, because they are "on a low and narrow platform"; this establishes a strict sequence across the "back of stage", as the body in the sack is carried to the next section. This together with the fact that the line they move along is "violently lit in its entire length, the rest of the stage being in darkness" (Beckett, 1986, p.209) shows Beckett experimenting with the depth of the stage space. Merleau-Ponty has written that it is only because "we are glued to our bodies" that we perceive spatial depth, whilst in reality "[s]pace remains absolutely in itself, everywhere equal to itself, homogeneous" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.363). Beckett's flattening effect distances the figures, making them more abstract, as they repeat their actions. In his diagram detailing the three sequential positions of the figures, Beckett labels the sequencing, where C is the one pile of clothing which the figures share, as: Position 1: CBA; position 2: CAB; position 3: CBA (Beckett, 1986, p.211). The play is divided between two figures: A, who enacts the daily routines in a slothful and unfocussed way, whilst B is more active and exact. The time allotted to each figure is the same, so that the quicker figure, B, interacts with more props than A, such as the mirror, map and compass. In contrast A's time is taken up in a kind of slow motion, in which simply getting dressed is an achievement. Beckett employs symmetrical patterning, as A "broods" eleven times during his performance, whilst B "consults" his pocket watch eleven times. The instruction "broods" creates a pause before the next physical action, whereas consulting the watch is a dominant gesture which seems to drive B's actions, as time regulates each of his tasks. Despite their opposing physical actions and temperaments, both figures are shown to be filling up the same amount of waking time, and both end up in the sack. McMullan writes that it is "the contrast between the corporeal rhythms of the two … that produces the cruel comedy since both are equally subjected to the system" (McMullan, 2010, p.63). The mime shows that irrespective of their different approaches the ultimate end for both is the same.

Beckett's precise patterning is shown in the sequencing of each of their actions being repeated in reverse order, as each figure enacts the day/night, wake/sleep, life/death dichotomies. This creates a repetitive structure which could continue in a ceaseless loop, as the days and nights are strung together. The effect of repetition and the limiting effect of just having one set of clothing to share between them, implies that whatever the attitude, positive or negative, the end result is failure. The rudimentary object of the sack conflates the image of life and death, and the paradox of embodiment. The figures' repeated movements into and out of their sacks, and their carrying them as burdens over their shoulders, has metaphorical associations of the body itself. The sack evokes both life and death: it is where the figures crawl into to sleep, and by association it is the grave, becoming both the receptacle of disposal and the dead body itself.

Beckett mixes abstraction and figurative, as the two interact with the one suit of clothing, hat and boots; rather than a naturalistic reading, such as for example poverty reducing them to having to share, they function in a metaphorical way. The figures alternate their act of putting on and taking off the one set of clothing and boots, with pointedly no responsiveness between them. The title of, "A mime for two players" therefore takes on an ironic subtext: the only interaction between the two is for each to carry the other in the sack, with difficulty, to the next stopping-point. This repetition without resolution creates precise images which are like fragments of a frieze moving across the back of the stage in a sequence which questions the daily rituals of living.

Act without Words 2 - the function of the goad

In acting out their everyday routines the figures demonstrate their continued existence through a relentless sequential movement; the goad which prompts them into action is both a controlling instrument as well as a device for externalising what could be seen as an inner compulsion to keep on living. Whilst A has to be goaded twice, B reacts to the first goading. The goad can be compared to the peremptory whistle directing the figure to take action in the first of the two mimes; Cohn compares the "mysterious offstage forces" of *Act without Words 1*, to what she calls the action of the "goads" in this play (Cohn, 1973, p.177). The goad which makes the figures get out of their sacks and move is itself a very precise instrument, which takes careful aim at its target, calibrating each of its moves:

> Enter goad right, strictly horizontal. The point stops a foot short of sack A. Pause.
> The point draws back, pauses, darts forward into sack, withdraws, recoils to a
> foot short of sack. Pause (Beckett, 1986, p.209).

The force exerted by the goad and the intention behind it, is therefore accentuated by its staged movements, which appear like the action of a snooker cue. This suggests the figures are snooker balls, a grotesque blurring of boundaries between subject and object. The sack too functions in this way: as one figure reveals himself as a human, the other is completely concealed, motionless in the sack, as if he were an inanimate object. Each figure takes the role of both subject and object: when the figure is in the sack he disappears, the sack remains a passive receptacle, not offering any sign of life.

The figures are propelled onwards in a brightly lit procession at the back of the stage by the implacable goad, which reveals more of itself in each of the three positions: in position two it shows one wheel, in the next position it reveals two wheels. At position three the figures are extreme stage left: if there had been a position four, the figures would have disappeared, and the goad would have taken over the stage completely. The importance of the goad is shown by its role in generating the movement of the figures on stage by means of its own movement and by its own reveal of itself. This can be seen as a subversion of depictions of Christ's procession to Golgotha, for example the engraving of *Christ Carrying the Cross* (c. 1475–80) by Martin Schöngauer in which Christ, falling under the weight of the Cross, is propelled forward by the horizontal wooden beam at the centre, which is being pushed from the right. Prints of this work are in various collections, including Berlin's State Museums, which Beckett visited during his German trip of 1936/7. The multiple spears held at various angles also suggest a goading to the left. Both the art work and Beckett's play evoke the sense of being pushed along a trajectory, which you are compelled to follow by an outside violent force.

The goad can be seen as the force of Nature or Time, with the brightly lit stage as life whilst the wings are the dark areas of pre-birth and death. Writing of the cyclic patterning in this work, Pountney sees the goad's wheels as having a "symbolic function", adding to the sense of the cyclic, repeated action of the figures which suggests "an infinite progression of the wheel of life" (Pountney, 1998, p.43). However, there is a sense, despite the repeated actions of the daily round, of an implacable, unidirectional force propelling the figures into an uncertain time and space. The goad as Time propels everything forward into a future which, although experienced as repetition is essentially unknowable. Beckett explores the tension between the everyday and the unknown, as the repeated routines are abstracted into something more indeterminate.

5.2. *Footfalls*

Walking the narrow strip of light

In rehearsals for the German premiere of *Footfalls*, which Beckett directed at the Berlin Schiller-Theater, in October 1976, he reportedly told the actor, Hildegard Schmahl, that, "The walking up and down is the central image … The text, the words were only built-up around this picture". Beckett reiterated later in rehearsals that the "life-long stretches of walking" which the repeated steps represent are "the centre of the play, everything else is secondary" (Asmus 1977). The compulsive pacing up and down, which in rehearsals Beckett measured out with a metronome to get the exact rhythm, and the frozen pose of the body suggest suppressed grief, a bodily process which is a reaction to absence and loss. In this context it is illuminating that walking was for Beckett a way to try to deal with his father's sudden death, "I can't write about him. I can only walk the fields and climb the ditches after him" (Beckett in Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, p.165).

The figure of May pacing up and down the tightly circumscribed lighted strip in the darkness reveals the difficulty of the physical act of putting one foot in front of the other. The ability to move is a sign of life, but the way in which walking is problematized by Beckett also reveals the body's limitations, as he severely limits the extent and form of movement which is permissible. The figure is dimly lit, with the light strongest on her feet, thus accentuating the painful ordeal which mobility entails. This minimal act of walking within confined boundaries combines numerical precision and patterning to express indeterminacy. Knowlson has argued that the formal patterning of repetition means "we can never be quite sure of what we are looking at or to what we are listening"; it creates "various levels of ghostly representation" (Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, p. 227). The play's radical reduction with the concentration on one reiterated fragment of pacing in the dark void, led Beckett himself to question during rehearsals whether the theatre was the right place for it. Billie Whitelaw's response was to say, "I thought, well perhaps he should be in an art gallery or something. Perhaps I should be pacing up and down in the Tate Gallery" (Whitelaw in Kalb, 1989, p.235). Walter Asmus compared Beckett's minimalism to that of "the artist's reduction"; when discussing his *Footfalls/Rockaby/Not I* (2014) production at the Royal Court he commented that in these plays the reduction was "extreme" (Royal Court website, 2014).

As discussed in Chapter One, Beckett wrote *Footfalls* during rehearsals for his German production of *Godot* in 1975, (Beckett in Craig et al, 2016, p.387). Movement at this time had clearly become of prime interest for him, as an element of his visual stage language, as he increased the patterning of movement in *Godot* and made the repetitive act of walking in this play an abstract activity. The

concentrated visual image of pacing up and down, interspersed with standing still is what predominates: an embodied summation of a life composed of the repetition of movement.

For Brater, the ghost-like figure of May functions as a "theatricalized enigma", occupying the space between being and non-being "May is a presence, not a person – certainly not a person who has ever properly been born outside of the imagination" (Brater, 1978, p.39). When Billie Whitelaw asked in rehearsals if she was dead, Beckett replied, "Let's say you're not quite there yet". Whitelaw said that this was all she needed to enact the part, "I then knew I was in a sort of strange no-man's-land, grey, neither here nor there … the no-man's land of life and death" (Kalb, 1989, p.235). May's precise pacing back and forth along the lighted strip, "length nine steps" (Beckett, 1986, p.399), suggests that she inhabits both liminal space and time, measuring-out the length of her life. This recalls Merleau-Ponty's description of time as "evident … not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.483).

Comparisons can be made between the figure of May and Ancient Egyptian sculpture, which has a funerary, memorial function. The striding figure in this tradition, for example the Ancient Egyptian *Standing figure of a king* has the left leg and foot placed forwards, symbolising the deceased person having found a foothold in the world of death, whilst still linked to life through its right foot. Beckett's interest in the Egyptian collection in Berlin's Neues Museum (Nixon, 2010, p.259) meant that he saw such sculptures which exemplify with powerful simplicity the purposive act of walking; the solidity of the upright figure has a sure-footed relationship with the liminal space between life and death. In contrast the shuffling figure in the play is ambiguously placed; her act of pacing back and forth is far from creating a sense of a solid grounding on the earth or of moving into the next life. The religious authority and surety of the ancient Egyptians as shown in their sculpture is subverted by May's repetitive, bounded walking back and forth along the same trajectory, acting out her own entrapment on the stage.

Debilitated movement

As May precariously shuffles along the strip of light she also carries out a highly stylised, performative act of walking: measuring out the set number of paces, her feet carefully follow a prescribed straight line. This combination of debility with precision has suggestions of walking a tightrope: the failed figure made to perform a balancing act. May's way of walking suggests the limitations of puppets, which represent the human, but are not embodied creatures, with the flesh, musculature, joints and sinews that give live creatures flexibility. The figure seems to be controlled from outside as if she were a puppet, as she "wheels" at the point of return. The lengths of pacing

are interrupted with the stage directions for a pause, for example, "M … halts, facing front at R" (Beckett, 1986, p.399). The alternation of walking and standing stock-still, as the only two possible states, reinforces the grotesque puppet-like effect. In his German rehearsals for these stationary points, when the figure seems to be isolated in past memories, Beckett gave the direction, "Quite still. No movements with the head, and the eyes open, fixed" (Asmus, 1977). In the second movement of the play, as the disembodied Voice delivers a monologue, the actor was directed to "move her lips twice… as though she were murmuring something to herself … Each time at the end of the lip-movements she drops her head and closes her eyes for a moment". The lip movements were to last for the same amount of time, about 22-24 seconds (Asmus, 1977). The precision of this lip-synching gesture, which is repeated twice, is part of the contesting of identity, problematizing the Voice as potentially internal memory, present by its ghostly absence.

This emphasis on the difficulty of walking which reveals an automaton-like aspect to the human condition, suggests a comparison with Bruce Nauman's *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)* (1968), a video art work which as its title makes explicit, owes some influence to Beckett, specifically his novel *Watt* (1953) (Connor, 2000). Both the art work and the play consist exclusively of one figure and problematize the act of walking; although the figures and their environments look very different, their actions question the nature of motility and embodiment. They both show walking to be a mechanical balancing act, in Nauman's own words:

> *Slow Angle Walk* has to do with a description by Beckett of travelling to someone's house. The body movements are like exercises – bending, rotating, raising one leg, going on and on. It's a tedious, complicated process to gain even a yard (Nauman in Reginio, Houston-Jones & Weiss, 2017, p.65).

As May is caught up in the cycle of retracing her steps, the visual stage language evokes the sense of what the process of living does to the human figure in terms of body memory. Recalling how Beckett drew her attention to the sound of visitors' footsteps during a museum visit when he was writing this play, Cohn states that the working title of, "*Footfalls/It All* … hints at an equivalence between the anxious steps and ubiquitous pain, as though suffering had to be audible" (Cohn, 2005, pp.334-5). In the premiere at the Royal Court in May 1976 Beckett had sandpaper put on Billie Whitelaw's shoes to heighten the sound of each distinct footfall (Knowlson, 1996, p.624).

An emotional charge is registered on the body, which survives as a flickering signal that life is still present. However, the sense of running out of energy is revealed in the decreasing strength of the light on the strip, and the increasingly faint sound of the chimes, which mark each of the four

movements. The figure exhibits a lessening of energy as the movements unfold. The actor Rosemary Pountney writes that in discussion with Beckett in Paris in 1980 he "pointed out that on her last walk along the strip of light, her energy runs out after three paces and she has to wait there until enough vitality returns to drag herself to the end of the light" (Pountney in Murray, 2009, p.74). However, the figure's subtle diminution in energy is suddenly brought to a halt in the fourth movement, as the figure is no longer on stage. The repetition of the walking which created the dramatic action has disappeared without explanation, as the faintly lit strip is all that remains on stage for its 10 seconds duration. In her discussion about cyclic and linear structuring, Pountney argues for a tension between the two: despite May's vanishing, "one is left with an overriding impression of repetition" (Pountney, 1998, p.68). The figure has been disappeared, leaving an unanswered question by its absence; there is a feeling that the four movements could start up again in a repeated sequence.

Shaping the posture

The figure in graduated dim lighting, increasingly hunched over with arms locked over the torso, suggests a literal 'holding oneself together', an expression of internalised emotions. This frozen posture insists upon itself without respite closing down gesture, exploring the expression of emotion through stillness and restriction. The actor Billie Whitelaw said of her work with Beckett ,"I feel that the shape my body makes is just as important as the sound that comes out of my mouth". Rather than ask Beckett about meaning, she would try to "complete the image he has in his mind's eye and in his ear" (Whitelaw cited in Kalb, 1989, pp.235-6).

The over-riding sense from this hunched over shape is of coldness, with the body contracting into itself; there is a suggestion of pacing to keep warm, huddling down to conserve energy. Beckett stressed the importance of coldness in rehearsals of the German premiere. When the actor questioned the translation change from "south door" to "north door" in the German text, Beckett replied it was to convey a bodily sense of coldness, "South Door is too warm. North Door is colder. You feel cold. The whole time, in the way you hold your body too. Everything is frost and night" (Asmus, 1977). This conveys through the visual stage language the elemental situation of being physically cold. Although the fragments of narrative given in the spoken text are unreliable, as the suggested mother and daughter relationship remains ambiguous, the hunched posture also evokes emotions of grief and regret.

An investigation of May as an emotional image of suffering can be aided by comparison with that of visual representations of Mary Magdalene, depicted in countless art works, as one of the most important figures in Christian iconography. Fionnuala Croke has compared the figure with Silvestro

dei Gherarducci's (c1339-c1399) *The Assumption of St Mary Magdalene* (1380s) which was in the National Gallery, Dublin at the time that Beckett was making repeated visits there. The saint's identifying feature of long hair covering her body is compared by Croke to the "tattered" clothing of Beckett's figure; the arms crossed over the breast gesture in both figures is also noted (Croke, 2006, p. 18). However, there are major differences between the painting which depicts Mary Magdalene floating up to heaven assisted by angels, and the painfully constrained walking of Beckett's figure, which emphasises the inability to rise above the physical and gain release.

Mary Magdalene is depicted in many art works at various stages of her life, including as the 'fallen woman', repenting for her sins. However the painting I would like to explore in connection with May is a dramatic scene which shows the saint as one of the first to arrive at Christ's sepulchre to find it empty: *Saint Mary Magdalene approaching the Sepulchre* by Gian Girolamo Savoldo (active 1508 – 1548), at the National Gallery, London. That Beckett knew and admired this painting is clear from his letter to Thomas MacGreevy of January 1937, in which he praises it and a similar version seen in the Kaiser Friedrich museum in Berlin, "Practically a repetition of the Savoldo Magdalene in London, the same lovely pearl-yellow cloak and hastening figure, only called here Venetian Woman" (Beckett in Fehsenfeld & Overbeck, 2009, p.429). Mary Magdalene's figure fills the frame of the painting, her silver cloak showing "the minutely recorded subtleties of light". Looking outwards, her face in shadow, she "seems to beckon us to follow, poised between the darkness of the tomb and the dawning of the light" (Langmuir, 1994, pp.149-50). The figure's imminent walking off in search of Christ, her magnificent covering cloak and the liminal position between life and death are reflected in the play through subversion.

An investigation of the differences between this painting and the visual stage language shows how May has been reduced by age and decay. The contrast to the saint is clear from the stage directions "dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing" (Beckett, 1986, p.399). The costume designed by Jocelyn Herbert for the 1975 premiere at the Royal Court created a much rougher, more layered look, which made a "swishing noise" as May walked. Herbert describes how she "bought a very old lace evening dress with long sleeves and a lot of lacy net curtains which I dyed different greys and shredded" (Herbert in McMullan, 2012, p.16). In the rehearsal notes for the German premiere in 1976, (published in 1977) Walter Asmus writes that, "Beckett shows a photo of Billie Whitelaw in the London production" to demonstrate her posture (Asmus, 1977). Asmus records Beckett's comments on the posture and the costume:

> She is isolated. The costume will look like a ghost costume. It is described in the
> play: 'Tattered . . . A tangle of tatters ... A faint tangle of pale grey tatters.' It is
> the costume of a ghost (Beckett in Asmus, 1977).

Herbert's shredded dress suggests a rending of Savoldo's magnificent silver cloak in the painting; it also carries connotations of a body being flayed. McTighe finds there is a suggestion that the skin itself is in tatters, the boundaries of the body ruptured, as a result of harm from the mother-daughter relationship, which has left May, "Fraying at the edges, both literally and psychologically" (McTighe, 2013, p.103).

5.3 *Waiting for Godot*

Abstract lines

When he directed *Godot* (1953) at the Berlin Schiller-Theater in 1975 Beckett created a very detailed set of stage directions in his production notebooks "to give shape to the confusion" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, P.xi). Cohn has characterised these stage directions:

> This is not only traditional blocking, but concern with who faces where at every
> moment of time, with each actor's moment-by-moment victory over stillness,
> with the total stage pattern, with the counterpoint of word and gesture, with
> visual echoes, symmetries, and oppositions (Cohn, 1980, p.258)

McMullan has drawn attention to how, "Beckett's prompt-script" from *Godot's* 1953 premiere already revealed "stage directions for a formalized style of acting such as the "separation of speech and movement" (McMullan in Pilling 1994, p.197). As discussed above under *Footfalls*, in the mid-1970s Beckett explored the possibilities of expressing walking as a repetitive activity which problematized representation and increased the level of abstraction. In his production notebooks Beckett lays down exact details for movement, including diagrams, based on chords (in mathematics, a chord is a line joining two points), arcs and semi-circles. The 'Approach by stages' along linear pathways and the 'Little turns' which are circular create "recurrent patterns [that] are a major structural device of Beckett's *Godot*" (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.99). Movement is interspersed with 'waiting points' (Wartestellen) (ibid., p.155) and 'inspection places' when the figures are brought to a sudden standstill and perform an act of looking. (ibid., p.97). This patterning of movement and stillness by repetition highlights the tension between representation and abstraction, thus showing the failed figure. As Lawrence Harvey records Beckett as saying, "The

great task of the artist is to express being and he sees being as a collection of meaningless 'movements' … His vision of man is of *inadequacy*" (Harvey in Knowlson & Knowlson, 2006, p.134).

There are twelve instances where Beckett introduced a 'waiting point', where the figures freeze and there is silence; the first one is the revised opening of Act One, which produces a "still, waiting tableau" creating "the atmosphere of 'waiting' which is a main subject as well as a fundamental characteristic of the play". Beckett changed the opening so that Vladimir is also on stage, standing near the tree, instead of just Estragon struggling with his boot. The start of Act Two was also changed so that Estragon is on stage whilst Vladimir sings the 'dog song' (Knowlson in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.xiii). These visual changes stress the indeterminacy of the world they inhabit: there is no clear beginning and there will be no end, they are caught on the stage with no possibility of moving away from it.

The feeling of entrapment on the stage is emphasised by what Beckett labelled as 'Inspection place': these are four "clockwise circuits around the perimeter of the stage exploring the physical possibilities confronting Vladimir and Estragon" (McMillan & Fehsenfeld 1988, p.97-8). Beckett provides four diagrams for the precise linear directions they each take to move around the boundaries of the stage (ibid., p.98). These diagrams show a resemblance to the diagrams for the "active line" and the "medial line" as given in Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* written for his Bauhaus students. Klee contrasts, "An active line, limited in its movement by fixed points" with, "A medial line which is both: point progression and planar effect". The former is open-ended, whereas the latter creates a completed shape (Klee, 1953, p.18). In Beckett's diagrams, the second inspection point movement very nearly creates a planar shape using the medial line, after the first attempt has failed. On the third attempt, the line fails to achieve the completion of the planar by a larger margin, and the fourth diagram is an active line, showing Vladimir's failure to complete an inspection. This failure to create a completed shape underlines the failure to find resolution, as the repeated exercise falls apart.

Beckett was familiar with Klee's work, having seen many of his paintings during his German trip in 1936/7; for example, he sought out Klee's work in the Moritzburg Museum in Halle, where he had to sign a special visitors' book to access the modern art collection, which had been classified as 'Entartete Kunst' ('Degenerate Art') by the Nazi regime (Dow Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, p. 439). Beckett's use of movement for patterning and fragmentation emphasises the tension between representation and abstraction. This has affinities with Klee's paintings, such as *Red Waistcoat* (1938), in which the movement of the line determines structure, creating enigmatic shapes, playing with the concept of abstract signs as carriers of meaning. Despite the title, the painting is resistant to

narrative, with fragments of shapes that could be interpreted as human figures, but also emphasise that they consist of a series of curves, dots and lines. Merleau-Ponty has written that art reveals how perception works: lines do not exist in nature, the "contour of the apple" and "the border between field and meadow" are "very imperiously demanded by the things, but they themselves are not things". Klee's practice "is simply a matter of freeing the line, of revivifying its constituting power" so that it "develops a way of extending itself actively into that space which subtends the spatiality of a thing" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.372). The mixture of figurative and abstraction in art elucidates Beckett's use of abstract lines: Vladimir and Estragon's movements punctuated with inertness as they freeze on stage signal that nothing can be completed.

Vladimir and Estragon

Movement and gesture function to show the isolation of the individual and the fractured nature of relationships. Beckett's initial thinking behind the 'approach by stages' motif, which details how Vladimir and Estragon move towards and away from each other, was that of caged animals, "Gen. effect of moves esp. V's though apparently motivated that of those in a cage". Although he rejected the idea, Beckett had thought of making this more explicit, "Faint shadow of bars on stage floor" (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.115). Beckett characterised the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon through their movement, as they come together and separate as if on a "rubber band" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.xxii). Their running into the wings and back into centre stage, as they panic at losing each other shows Beckett's metaphorical rubber band reaching its full extent and then contracting back. This tension of dependency and antagonism in the relationship between the two as they move towards and away from one another brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's comment on how we are always caught in an "ambiguous position" between self and others:

> we can never know complete rest. We are continually obliged to work on our differences, to explain things we have said that have not been properly understood, to reveal what is hidden within us and to perceive other people (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp.87-8).

Kenner notes the "symmetrical structure" of the play, in terms of the couples, the two acts, and the shape of the dialogue (Kenner, 1973, p.35). The opposing natures of Vladimir and Estragon are developed visually through the 'theme of the body' concept. Estragon's default position seated on the rock, with its association of sleepiness and withdrawal anchors him to the ground in contrast to Vladimir's more active standing by the tree (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.139).

In the lullaby scene for example Estragon sleeps on the stone, retreating into an unthinking solidity through stillness and silence; the stage directions read, *(He resumes his foetal posture, his head between his knees)* (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.63). The image of the seated figure on the rock can be compared with sculptures by Ernst Barlach (1870-1938), the German Expressionist who was banned by the Nazi regime. During his 1936/7 trip Beckett ordered Barlach's *Zeichnungen* (Drawings) from a Hamburg bookshop (Nixon, 2010, p.249). In Munich towards the end of his trip Beckett tried to get hold of a copy of Barlach's autobiography, but the publisher thought it was too dangerous for Beckett to take over the border (ibid., p.271).

Estragon asleep on the rock presents an image which has affinities with Barlach's *The Sleeping Drifters* (1912), in which the figures are solidly present in their simplified shapes but enigmatic in sleep in a way which questions representation. Estragon's withdrawal into himself as he sleeps embodies the tension between presence and absence, the blurring of the distinction between subject and object; sleep mirrors death, creating a liminal sense. Esslin has written that Beckett's drama shows "the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain and the borderline between dream and waking is ever shifting" (Esslin, 1961, p.69). The lullaby scene is one of a series of fragmented performative segments which impose a rhythm of rising and falling emotions, as anger and irritation lapse back into feelings of despondency. In this scene Vladimir joins Estragon on his rock, puts his arm around him and rocks him to sleep; this shows the relationship at its closest. Estragon's repose is violently broken when he leaps up with a start from a nightmare of falling. The brief sleep on the rock is one of a sequence of "E's sleeps" consisting of drowsing, sleeping, dreaming and then this one nightmare, which Beckett lists in his *Theatrical Notebook* (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.311).

Godot alternates action with stasis, as Vladimir and Estragon regain and then lose impetus, as if running out of energy and belief in what they are enacting. The lullaby scene for example comes between Vladimir fitting the boots onto Estragon's feet and the rapid three-hat trick they perform. The repertoire of scenes they play out in quick succession, the figures' debilitated movement, and the expressive gestures have a resemblance to puppetry. In his own production in the 1990s Walter Asmus, who was the Associate Director for Beckett's 1975 *Godot*, used this "'score' established by Beckett" to maintain an abstract quality. Bradby states, "There was little attempt to create the illusion of reality on stage … the emphasis was on the choreography of the actors' movements and gestures" (Bradby, 2001, pp.186-7). One example Bradby gives is when Vladimir and Estragon comment on the tree: first they look at each other and then look "towards the opposite sides of the stage", then "towards the tree so that they were seen in profile, momentarily fixed in expectation".

Bradby states that "the perfect synchronicity of their gestures gave the impression of puppets … it made them seem as if they were being manipulated by some outside force which they could not control" (Bradby, 2001, p.187).

Caught in the repetitive cycle

Estragon's "Off we go again" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.45) in Act One as the Boy with the message from Godot enters, suggests they are caught in a recurring, unresolvable pattern, in which the intervention of the Boy has occurred already. The unsettling indeterminacy of the play in which assured presence in time and space is undermined is emphasised by the Boy being played by the same actor in both acts, but denying in Act Two having been there before. Esslin has emphasised this liminal aspect, "It is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem on time, evanescence and the mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity" (Esslin, 1961, pp.60-1)

An understanding of Christian imagery from visual art helps to analyse this cyclical patterning and specifically to gain an insight into the Boy's function. I argue that we can interpret this as a subversion of images from paintings of the Nativity; one painting in particular which Beckett admired was *The Nativity, at Night*, by Geertgen tot Sint Jans (1455/65-1485/95. Having seen the painting at the National Gallery, London in February 1935, Beckett wrote to MacGreevy in May 1936, "I keep seeing … the round backs of the sheep of Geertgen". This suggests an intense scrutiny of this small painting, which Beckett categorised as an early example of the spotlight genre (or *chiaroscuro*) (Beckett in Dow Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, p.253; p.338). Appearing towards the end of both acts, the Boy can be seen as a composite of the angel, who announced Christ's birth to the shepherds, and also as one of the shepherds watching the flocks. The first time the Boy appears he claims to "mind the goats" whilst his brother "minds the sheep" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p. 47). Whilst paintings such as tot Sint Jans's show the Christian message of light and salvation for humanity through such heavenly messengers, Beckett's figure shows the failure of divine intervention. The Boy brings only a message of continual deferral to Vladimir and Estragon, as he functions as an unreliable emissary from the dis-embodied Godot.

Beckett accentuated the artificiality of the Boy's movement in his Berlin production, which increased the abstract and liminal nature of this conflation of the angel and the shepherd. Elinor Fuchs argues that the form of *Godot* subverts the medieval Mystery play format which allegorises the journey of Everyman. She places this development in terms of nineteenth and early twentieth century dramatists' interest in exploiting what she terms the 'mysterium' form in which character and

narrative meaning were downplayed in favour of an "abstract teleological patterning". According to Fuchs, Beckett differs from other mysterium playwrights in that instead of emphasising "the unfolding of the pattern", *Godot* shows "its failure to unfold" (Fuchs, 1996, pp.44-9). Whilst Fuchs investigates this in relation to the overall arc of the narrative, I explore the detailed visual stage language, the patterns on stage which play with a teleological concept whilst denying the resolution of a purposeful design which stands outside human-kind.

Instead of running from the stage in response to the seeming threat from Vladimir, as in the original text, in Beckett's Berlin production in both Act One and Act Two the Boy *"exits backwards calmly"* (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.48) and *"exits calmly backwards"* (ibid., p.83) as the moon rises. The non-naturalistic movement of walking backwards along the pathway on which he entered, combined with the synchronised rising of the moon create a sense of both the reversal of time and also of time speeding up. Beckett makes use of chords (lines linking two points) and arcs in the movement. The spatial relationship created by the Boy's exit and the moon's rising is accentuated by the moon's arc, stopping above the point where the Boy had stood, connecting with his linear exit, to suggest part of an uncompleted circle. The Boy and the moon's relationship in time and space, in terms of the unresolved circle, is one example of the circle motif used by Beckett throughout the play (ibid., p.143).

The 'heap' scene: cross and circles

The 'heap' scene in Act Two shows how Beckett as director created an abstract patterning effect from the style of the four actors falling down, and the patterning of their bodies as they lie on the ground. In rehearsals at the Schiller-Theater he stressed that the movement of falling-over in the 'heap' scene must be done "artificially, with beauty, like ballet. Otherwise everything becomes only an imitation, an imitation of reality". Beckett demonstrated how Lucky's two falls in the play should be executed in four clear moves "he falls to his knees, stretches his arms above his head, and then out before him as he finally slides to the ground" (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.140). In the 'heap' scene Pozzo copies these moves in his own fall, which happens in rapid succession after Lucky's fall (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.161). The failure of the body, as the collapse is seen in mechanistic, framed movements, mirrors the fractured mind: as the figures question consciousness of their own existence, so their bodies are subject to repeated physical failure. In his discussions about movement at the rehearsals Beckett emphasised that Lucky should fall "very cleanly" and that the play itself should be seen as a "game" and "must be done very exactly" (Beckett in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.140). The falls in the 'heap' scene are part of Beckett's shaping of the visual stage language rather than simply clowning pratfalls. Falling down and lying on

the ground form elements of his 'themes of the body', working with the opposing lifting-up of another's body to create images which are central to the play.

McMillan & Fehsenfeld in their analysis of Beckett's production notebooks drew attention to the "controlling images of circle and cross" in the play (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.121). Beckett's diagram for the 'heap' scene for example illustrates how the fallen figures form a cross shape (ibid., p.118). Lucky and Pozzo lie face down, as they fall, with Lucky as the horizontal and Pozzo on top of him as the vertical beam; the reference to the Cross suggesting suffering. Vladimir and Estragon fall backwards so that they gaze upwards as they lie, on either side of the lower part of the cross shape, in a subversion of Christian iconography which shows mourning figures at the foot of the Cross. The carefully constructed image shows the four figures on the ground as literally fallen men, but it also evokes the allegorical Christian sense of 'fallen man'. When the figures rise up, in reverse order to how they fell, it is Pozzo who takes on the role of Christ, held up between Vladimir and Estragon, "(*They* [*go to him and*] *get him up again*. POZZO *sags between them, his arms around their necks*)" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.77). This mirrors the previous raising-up of Lucky in Act One (see later in this section). The image suggests Christ between the two thieves, as Cohn states "both tableaux recalling the many paintings of a crucified Christ between two thieves" (Cohn, 1980, p.260). The spoken text has several Biblical references to this aspect of the Crucifixion; for example the comment early in Act One that, "One of the thieves was saved. (*Pause*). It's a reasonable percentage" (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.11).

Knowlson has suggested that Beckett's production of the 'heap' scene in Berlin "recalls" Pieter Bruegel's (c1525-1569) painting, the *Land of Cockaigne* (1567) which Beckett had seen on his visit to Munich in 1937 (Knowlson, 1996, p.609). The painting depicts three men, representatives of the three estates (church, army and peasantry); presumably having gorged on food they lie on the ground, possibly an allegory by the painter about greed and sloth. In contrast Beckett's figures are prone on the ground due to debility and lack of food: this subverts the painting, whose title refers to the fabled land of plenty. The figures in the painting depict a rough cross shape, but perhaps more obvious is the shape of the circle, the disposition of their bodies as they lie like spokes in a wheel, the elevated circular table which towers above them and the rows of circular pies.

This circular shaping with lines suggesting spokes of a wheel can be seen in Beckett's use of chords and circles in the prelude to the 'heap' scene. As they prevaricate about whether they should help the fallen Pozzo and Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon approach them by stages, moving up and then retreating back down a line from the stone to the bodies on the ground. They then break out of this chord sequence of movement, which was along a radial spoke alignment, moving in two semi-circles

around the prone bodies, first upstage and then downstage, back to the stone (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, pp.70-3). The circle shape signals being trapped within a repeated cycle; it also suggests the figure zero, and hence the concept of Nothing. However, the artificiality of this shaping of movement suggests failure, as the half circles fall short of creating the perfect circle.

Lucky as composite image

Apart from the torrent of words in his 'Think' parody sermon the figure of Lucky is rendered through visual stage language: although clearly a human being, he is demonstrated on stage as if he were a fairground animal or a beast of burden, controlled by Pozzo through the rope and whip. Lucky transgresses the human/animal divide in a grotesque way: he is presented as if he were a biological composite, which problematizes what it means to be human. Lucky provides a spectacle of the subservient body: as Pozzo puts on a show for Vladimir and Estragon in Act One all three stand and gaze at him as if he were an object. The rope is a dominant image of their relationship: it is signalled very strongly from the entrance in Act One, when, "LUCKY is the first to appear, followed by the rope which is long enough to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before POZZO appears" (Beckett in McMillian & Knowlson, 1993, p.21). In her analysis of *Godot*, McMullan focuses on corporeal and intercorporeal suffering; the maltreatment of others can be interpreted within historical frameworks such as the Holocaust. Such interpretations highlight the "internalized and imposed subjection" of the master/servant relationship in the play (McMullan, 2010, p.36).As the so-called "carrier" Lucky is over-burdened by the bag, stool, picnic basket and coat. In his *Theatrical Notebook* Beckett emphasises that the image is of a debilitated figure bowed down under the weight of his loads that are somehow part of him, "L never a moment free of load except 1. To dance 2. To Think and 3. When fallen" (Beckett in McMillian & Knowlson, 1993, p.286). In a list entitled "L's moves" Beckett lays out the exact nature of his movement forwards and the way he puts down each of his impediments and then picks them up again. In a composite of enfeebled age and the sense of backing a horse into a resting place, Beckett instructed the actor to walk backwards rather than to turn naturalistically on stage, "Trouble with L always backing never seen from behind" (ibid., p.286).

A comparison can be made with the image of the rope around Lucky's neck and Pozzo's whip, which recall instruments of torture in Christian iconography. An example of such a painting which Beckett would have seen during his visit to the Alte Pinakothek in Munich in March 1937 is Matthias Grünewald's *The Mocking of Christ*, (1503-5); according to his German diary this artist's paintings were of "particular interest" (Nixon, 2010, p.268). The rope in this painting is foregrounded, as the passive figure of Christ, blindfolded and bound by the rope, seemingly awaits the blows from the torturer. In the painting the rope and whip are combined in one image, as the knotted section of the

rope is used to whip Christ into action. Lucky too can be seen to embody the archetypal scapegoat: subjected to brutality the body is either goaded into action or frozen into passivity.

There are other comparisons to be made with the representation of different stages of Christ's Passion. The spectacle of Lucky's silent suffering as he struggles with his loads has affinities with the image of Christ carrying the Cross, the instrument of his own sacrifice. When Lucky is lifted up by Vladimir and Estragon after falling to the ground there is, as noted previously, a suggestion of him as Christ between the two thieves. However, this is conflated with images which show Christ being taken down off the Cross, and subverted, as these show Christ's body being tenderly and carefully treated. This iconography is covered in many paintings such as Peter Paul Rubens's (1577-1640) *Descent from the Cross* (1614) in Antwerp Cathedral. In the play such references are undercut by bathos, as Vladimir and Estragon let go of Lucky so that he falls to the ground:

> POZZO: Raise him up!
>
> (VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON hoist LUCKY *to his feet, support him an instant, then let him go* [*and move away from him*]. *He falls* [*as before*].) (Beckett in McMillan & Knowlson, 1993, p.41).

This visual image combines the idea of Lucky as both Christ and the sad white-faced circus clown Pierrot, thus reflecting the subtitle of the play, "A Tragicomedy in Two Acts". The sad clown and the rejected Christ have been compared to each other in art, as the artist identifies with the humiliated outcast, whose work is misunderstood and mocked. In his *Self-Portrait as Clown* (1921) Max Beckmann presents this double image of himself: the clown elements consist of his neck ruff and trumpet, whilst in an image borrowed from medieval paintings, Beckmann presents his arm and hand in Christ's gesture to show his wounds. Beckett was familiar with Beckmann's work, for example in 1937 he visited the private gallery of the modern art dealer Gunther Francke in Munich to view "several paintings by Max Beckmann" (Nixon, 2010, p.269). Lucky could be seen to stand for Beckett's own failure as an artist: as composite image of Christ and the clown, his 'Think' mock sermon failing to communicate, Lucky is the failing artist, whose message renders obvious the failure implicit in attempting to express.

5.4 *Quad*

Mathematical patterning

In *Quad* (1982) Beckett creates a piece which relies wholly on the continual movement of four silent figures, who are known simply by the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4, based on the sequence in which they

enter the square. The four hooded figures, whose faces are obscured, are completely enrobed in gowns; they do not express any form of gender, age or ethnicity, although two male and two female actors were used in the original production (Brater, 1987, p.109). This abstract visual work was originally conceived for television, (Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Stuttgart, 1981), but it has subsequently been staged in the theatre. The complexity of the movement made *Quad* a difficult piece to rehearse and Beckett initially thought of abandoning it (Knowlson, 1996, p.673).

The Faber text specifies how, "The original scenario (*Quad I*) was followed in the Stuttgart production by a variation (*Quad II*)"; this had slower movement, no percussion and the blue, white, yellow and red costumes were replaced by all in white (Beckett, 1986, p.453-4). Beckett commented that the second iteration "took place 'ten thousand years later'" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1996, p.674). This is an example of what Connor called Beckett's use of repeats to show "entropic decline" and also of his argument that repetition problematizes the sense of a first time or a conclusion (Connor, 1988, p.121). Beckett commented, "Quad 3 they would be scarcely moving. And the old robes falling off them" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2016, p.562).

The piece is composed of the bodies' movement, as they weave an interlocking set of geometrical movements along sections of a quadrangle, crossing from the four corners but shying away from the centre where they just avoid colliding. There is no spoken text and no narrative conveyed through mime either; it is an abstract choreographed piece created by the intricacies of movement. This is comparable in some ways to Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* (1922), a work which relies on "simplicity and clarity" of movement in accord with the Bauhaus aesthetic. The performance piece was choreographed to create "floor patterns of great clarity which perfectly harmonised with the shapes of the costumes and the movements of the dancers" (Lahusen, 1986, p.69).

Pountney sees similarities between *Quad* and a much earlier unpublished fragment of 1963 ' J M Mime' in which two players on a marked out square have their movements plotted out in a series of geometrical "solutions" and "errors" (Pountney, 1998, pp.11-2). This confirms Beckett's long term interest in movement for mathematical patterning. The figures do not interact but instead complete their 'journeys' as automata, along fixed path-ways, as if they were individual atoms being forced along an experimental trajectory. The repetition of precise movement together with the figures' clothing, which masks their bodies completely, sets up a grotesque image which dehumanises the figures. Although they appear purposeful, especially in the more energetic *Quad 1*, the rapid movement in precise, complex shapes, within the grid of the square, comes with repetition to suggest non-meaning. This bounded, repeated movement has suggestions of imprisonment: the title suggests quadrangle with its overtones of a prison yard. There is also the homonym with the

punning suggestion of 'quod'. This is both a slang word for gaol and also suggests the phrase *quod erat demonstrandum* (QED) meaning "which was to be proved" a phrase used in geometry (Collins on-line, 2018). The arithmetical exactitude of movement around and across the square quickly dispels any idea of representing a dramatic locus such as a market square: it becomes purely a geometric shape.

The work consists solely of instructions and diagrams which provide precise details of how the figures should produce the lines of movement. A table provides the route for each individual figure to follow, laid out in four "courses":

Course 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA

Course 2: BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB

Course 3: CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC

Course 4: DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD

(Beckett, 1986, p.451)

The sequencing of the individual figures' entry is done mathematically: first each figure enters alone then the other three enter in stages, and depart in turn, according to four "series":

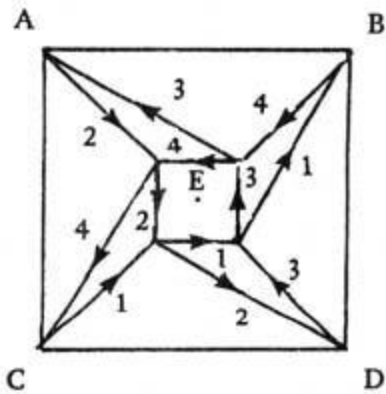1st series: 1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 42

2nd series: 2, 21, 214, 2143, 143, 43

3rd series: 3, 32, 321, 3214, 214, 14

4th series: 4, 43, 432, 4321, 321, 21

(ibid., p.451)

In addition, a diagram shows how the figures move along the periphery of the square and diagonally across it, but always make a deviation to the left to avoid the dead-centre.

(ibid., p.453)

The four figures move along the bounds of the square, disappearing into the off-stage darkness in turn, each taking a different corner as their exit point. They each continually re-enter according to the 'series' laid down by Beckett: the work illustrates the impossibility of cessation, once the mechanism is set going. One figure is always left on stage; the number of figures fluctuates in a strict sequence from one to four. The form is strictly quadrangular: the four-cornered square with the four figures carrying out their movements in quadruples, create an extremely determined structure. However, there is a tension set up between this mathematical exactitude and the indeterminacy of the hooded figures; although each figure replicates the same moves, they show no reactions and seem not to perceive one another. The iron logic of mathematics seems to deny the possibility of free will; this heightens the inexorable repetition which precludes any resolution and emphasises the abstract nature of the figures.

Geometric melancholia

The looped repetition of the figures who continue in their hopeless pursuit shows the power of unreason, paradoxically using the epitome of rational thought, mathematics and geometry. Beckett makes use of geometry by having his figures' movements create shapes which are failed polygons. A polygon is a two-dimensional figure, bounded by straight lines, such as a triangle. The figures' deviation from the centre inserts a curve which destroys the straight lines of what would be perfect triangles within the square. In creating *Quad* from the conjunction of figures and geometry, Beckett shows his awareness of the tradition of visual art, which used the principles of mathematics to create an underlying structure. A key example is the 'Golden Section', a mathematical tool for achieving harmonious proportion (Acton, 2009, p.4). Beckett undermines the concept of ideal perfection which is found in art and is intrinsic to geometry; the figures' repeated inability to create a perfect triangle conveys a sense of human fallibility. This insistent revelation of hubris can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's critique of the idea of "sovereign knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty,

2004, p.71), in favour of the argument that "reason must acknowledge that its world is also unfinished and should not pretend to have overcome that which it has managed simply to conceal" (ibid.p.73).

The figures are caught within the cage of the limits of human reason, as they are impelled to take their part again in a demonstration of failure: the quadrangle is a locus of sadness. Mark Nixon, linking Beckett with the literary tradition of melancholy in Romanticism, has connected his comments on art during the German trip with a "sympathy" with "quiet melancholy [that] was closely connected with his growing emphasis on the unsaid, the implied" (Nixon, 2007, p.72). Knowlson has stated that the little attention that has been given to Beckett's interest in Dürer's engraving has mainly been in the context of the literary tradition of melancholia (Knowlson in Croke, 2006, p.87). However, I propose that resemblances and affinities can be seen with Albrecht Dürer's highly symbolic yet enigmatic copper engraving *Melancholia I* (1514), which depicts mathematical objects, such as the polyhedron and the magic square of numbers.

Beckett admired Dürer and sought out his art during his German trip of 1936/7, at a time when he was immersed in visual art and struggling with the difficulty of using words as a medium of expression. At this time he was thinking of writing a *Journal of a Melancholic*, which however never materialised (Nixon, 2011, p.121). It is illuminating that Beckett again raised his distrust of words decades later whilst in rehearsals for *Quad*, emphasising "the difficulty that he now had in writing down any words without having the intense feeling that they would inevitably be lies" (Knowlson 1996, p.672). In Dürer's famous engraving, the polyhedron at the centre-left and the magic square of numbers at the upper-right, remain mysterious but have been interpreted as expressive of consciousness, creativity and melancholia. A polyhedron is composed of polygons, which taken together create a solid three-dimensional figure. The four courses of movement in *Quad* that map out failed polygonal shapes and the four series which sequence the entrances have affinities with these mathematical objects in the engraving. Dürer's so-called "melancholic polyhedron" in *Melancholia I,* an abstract yet solid shape, placed just off-centre in the engraving, is a visual fragment which has been re-used by other artists. For example, the German artist Anselm Kiefer uses it in his artwork *Der Rhein (Melancolia)* (1982-2013); it is interpreted as expressing a feeling of loss (Soriano, 2014). Such visual examples suggesting that melancholy can be expressed through the abstraction of geometry provide insight into the abstract in Beckett's visual stage language.

Avoiding the centre

The intricacy of the interweaving movement of the four figures creates a tension between the failed human figure and the geometrical foundation which entraps them. The moving figures create a comic impression at first, as their movement suggests inevitable collisions. However, the piece becomes darker as the manic movement is repeated and they continually shy away from the centre of the quadrangle. This fear of the centre is embodied in the left-ward swerve; in his original diagram Beckett labelled the centre as 'E', and noted that, "E supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation" (Beckett, 1986, p.453). The figures flinching away from the centre of the stage embody Derrida's idea of decentring, in which the idea of a "centered structure" was false, being founded on:

> a reassuring certitude" by which "anxiety can be mastered for anxiety is
> invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being
> caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset
> (Derrida, 1978, p.279).

The figures' compulsion leftwards is significant for Beckett, as he associated it with the direction that Dante and Virgil take in Canto XVIII of the *Inferno* when they visit the damned, forced to follow the left path. Beckett specifically explained the left-ward movement in another of his works, *Company* (1980), as relating to this Canto. Dante remained one of Beckett's favourite writers throughout his life: the same copy of the *Divina Commedia*, which he had as a student of Italian in his youth, was by his bedside at the end of his life (Knowlson, 1996, pp.52-3). A comparison with art can elucidate the figures making this left-ward swerve from the centre.

A visual representation of this movement leftwards around a central point of suffering can be seen in Sandro Botticelli's manuscript illustration of Canto XVIII. When Beckett visited the Berlin art galleries during his trip in 1936/7 he admired the work of Botticelli (Nixon, 2010, p.259); it is therefore highly likely that he saw Botticelli's prints and drawings, which were considered to be a major part of Berlin's collection. This illustration by an artist Beckett admired, of a poet whose work he revered, suggests an underlying importance of both the left-ward movement and the technique of decentring in *Quad*. Beckett subverts Botticelli's image, creating a fragment, in which the centre is an abstract idea on an empty stage. Whilst for Dante the world is built on the central authority of God and theological dogma, Beckett shows an empty nothingness, to which the figures gravitate and around which they circle repeatedly. In the four figures Beckett has conflated those who are damned with those who watch from the track, seemingly in a place of safety. The colours of the individual costumes in *Quad 1* which stand out against the empty stage are replaced by a monotone uniformity

in *Quad 2*. This can be compared to the Botticelli illustration in which Dante and Virgil are dressed in bright coloured robes, in contrast to the grey monotone colours of the undifferentiated mass of the damned. The second part provides no resolution, as the grey figures, subject to a process of entropy, compulsively follow the tracks laid-down.

The "deviation" is the acknowledged kink in the linear movement, working to knock the figures out of the straight lines. The almost-collisions which are narrowly avoided are repeated throughout the work; when all four figures are on stage the sequenced swerving movements create a flowing circle, which is aesthetically pleasing for the brief time it exists. The movement of the figures was designed mathematically, to shape the precision needed for the choreography to show each time an almost-collision: the swerving movement means that the figures are never stationary, but always in motion. There is a tension between this highly skilled movement, which one can admire as a visual illustration of cleverness, and the stupidity of not learning, as the repetition suggests lack of foresight and the failure of human reason.

In conclusion, my analysis of these four plays demonstrates how Beckett uses movement, gesture and stillness to show the failed figure attempting to fit itself into a quasi-geometric system. Repeated abstract patterning of movement reveals the limitations placed upon the figures. However, the tight restriction on movement paradoxically means that what is shown has expressivity and the capacity to reveal emotion.

Chapter Six

Light/dark and the monotone spectrum

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate more fully Beckett's use of light and dark, and the monotone range of black, white and grey to find a visual form to express failure. This discussion will provide further evidence of how Beckett uses lighting to suggest the binaries of presence/absence and life/death, creating zones of light within the mass of the darkness on stage. The visual stage language employs a precise and complex range of stage lighting, from total darkness to piercing bright spotlights, with different intensities of lighting which interrupt the simple binaries of light/dark. I explore how this creates a liminal abstract space, with the in-between grey tones suggesting failure and confusion. The failed figures which inhabit this space are shown in a range of black, white and grey; caught between the binary of organic/inorganic they generate a sense of the grotesque.

I investigate these matters in the following plays: *Play, Krapp's Last Tape*, *That Time* and *Ohio Impromptu*.

6.1 Play

Vast darkness

In *Play* (1963) a seemingly random oscillation between a probing bright light and an almost annihilating darkness conveys the philosophical problem of the being/non-being binary:

> It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable … where we have, at one and the same time, darkness and light, we have also the inexplicable (Beckett in Knowlson, 1972, p.11).

The ontological questioning of what existence is for lies at the heart of Beckett's aesthetic of failure: he creates a visual image of nothingness by using the abstraction of darkness, with the fragmented faces in their urns responding to the intermittent stimulus of the passing light. The sense of inhabiting a vast darkness means that the void is here a dominating presence, "The best background is that which best suggests empty unlit space" (Beckett in Harmon, 1988, p.145). As Cohn has written of the figures in urns, "their containers … are a metaphoric shelter from the darkness of non-being. The light is where they are" (Cohn, 1973, p.214).

The lighting instructions precisely delineate a monochrome spectrum, which uses a combination of blackout, weak and murky lights and the strong spotlight. At the beginning there is "almost complete darkness. Urns just discernible", followed by, "Faint spots simultaneously on three faces", as the low muttering from all three figures is heard. This is followed by the first "Blackout" before the, "Strong spots simultaneously on three faces" as the voices reach "normal strength"; the second "Blackout", like the first of five seconds' duration, leads to the strong spot on each face in turn (Beckett, 1986, pp.307-8). The interrogating spotlight, whose sequencing takes up the majority of the duration of the play, is a complex visual image of provocation; it "should be a pencil (finger) of light snapping from face to face" (Beckett in Harmon, 1998, p.145).

The beam of light in the darkness is a visual device which is sharply juxtaposed with the fragmentary and incoherent language which it compels the figures to utter forth. George Devine who directed the English premiere at the National Theatre in London (then based at the Old Vic Theatre) compared it to a "dental drill" (Devine in Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, p.113). This image conveys the linkage between the eyes and the mouth, as the light which hits the retina forces the mouth to open, continuing the repeated loop of a violation of the body and mind. In quoting from Devine's directorial notes Knowlson shows how he embraced the problematizing of language which is part of the play "words not as conveying thought or ideas but as dramatic ammunition – cf. light … words have no significance or meaning whatever – just "things" that come out of their mouths" (Knowlson in Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, p.114). The fragmented heads tell individual fragments of stories which offer a link between the three, in terms of sexual passion; the spotlight can be seen as an external image which conveys their internal compulsion to memory and speech. In one sense the figures inhabit a purgatory between heaven and hell, condemned to their memories, in Kenner's words "trapped in a condemnation to repeat, repeat, versions of what happened elsewhere, long ago, not to their credit" (Kenner,1973, p.153).However, the figures, designated as W1, W2 and M, are de-personalised: what predominates is the image of the abstract figures in a liminal space.

Interrogating spotlight

Beckett makes clear in the stage directions concerning the rapidly swivelling spotlight that there is a relationship between it and the three figures, with the spot functioning as a "unique inquisitor", present on stage as an active force (Beckett, 1986, p.318). Billie Whitelaw, who was one of the three actors in the UK premiere, said that the play was a four-hander, "The light is probably the most important member of this quartet … I called the light the 'cow-poke'" (Whitelaw, 1995, p.80). This conveys the brutal physicality of the impact of the bright light as it hits the retinas of the eyes of each head in sequence. As the heads are unable to turn away to protect themselves because they

are held vice-like in the urns, they are forced to confess. It is the spotlight, seemingly an inanimate object, which makes the figures visible; although light itself is the means by which sight is enabled, it closes down their gaze by blinding them, whilst forcing them to open their mouths. Merleau-Ponty has described the seeing subject as being also the seen object, "Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the seer does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by means of the gaze" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.354). The spotlight which assaults the seers' gaze becomes a grotesque fusion of object/subject, reversing the relationship of agency.

In a letter of September 1963, after having been involved with the global premiere of the play in Ulm in June, Beckett pointed out the necessity of having just one swivelling spot-light:

> The light should have a probing quality, like an accusing finger levelled at them one after another. This is obtained by a single pivoting spot and <u>not</u>, as in Ulm, by three fixed independent spots, one for each face, switching on and off as required (Beckett in Craig et al, 2014, p. 574).

The one blinding beam of light has different potential meanings as interrogator/torturer/judge, without being limited to those concepts.

After Ulm, Beckett's involvement in rehearsals in 1963/4 for the English and the French premieres meant that he was able to implement this concept. Gontarski details how in November 1963 Beckett delayed the English publication of *Play* by his British and American publishers (Faber & Faber and Grove Press) until a process of practically trying it out in rehearsals had been completed (Gontarski, 2018b, pp.163-4). The refined stage directions based on rehearsals are therefore in the Faber & Faber 1964 text, "The source of light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims" (Beckett, 1986, p.318).

Another example of how Beckett developed his visual stage language through the production process is his modification of the spotlight in the 'Repeat', which he worked on in rehearsals in Paris. Beckett had first conceived of the 'Repeat' as being "rigorously identical" to the first iteration, but in a letter to George Devine, the director of the English premiere, he specified his changes based on working on the French production "less and perhaps slower light" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2014, p.594). This would entail a change in the relationship between the spotlight and the figures, a weakening of the force which:

> in a less confident movement of spot from one face to another and less immediate reaction of the voices … The inquirer (light) begins to emerge as no less a victim of his inquiry than they (ibid., pp. 594-5).

This depiction of the failing of the spotlight as it moves from stronger to weaker is part of Beckett's use of repetition with variation to convey a sense of entropy. The difference between the two iterations follows the Beckettian trajectory of a process of failing which never reaches completion.

Chiaroscuro

The precise visual stage language of light and dark which Beckett employed follows principles of art used by the spotlight or *chiaroscuro* painters. These painters developed techniques for contrasting the depiction of sources of light with surrounding darkness, and the effect of the attenuation of that light, as it is swallowed up by the dark. *Chiaroscuro* artists used such techniques to present human figures, often in the framework of Christian iconography, highlighting for their dramatic purposes, the groupings and parts of the body which were revealing of the narrative. Beckett was made aware through such paintings of the possibilities offered by the way in which a figure was lit and the handling of the surrounding scene in terms of light and different shades of darkness. Beckett engaged critically with the development of the *chiaroscuro* genre, writing comments in the gallery catalogues he acquired and in his personal copy of *An Introduction to Dutch Art* (1929) by R.H. Wilenski. This academic study included works by artists who Beckett admired, such as Gerrit van Honthorst (1592–1656) and Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610); Beckett called the latter's paintings "exquisite" (cited in Haynes & Knowlson, 2003, pp.79-80).

The Beckett scholar Angela Moorjani has drawn connections between the light and dark effects of *Play* and the spotlight genre, focusing on Adam Elsheimer's *The Flight into Egypt* (1609), which Beckett saw in Germany in 1937 and which he earlier made notes on whilst reading Wilenski's book (Moorjani in Ben-Zvi & Moorjani, 2008, p.131). Using Wilenski's analysis of the painting as revealing the vastness of the universe, and more recent research linking Elsheimer's depiction of the sky with the contemporaneous invention of the telescope, Moorjani writes that, "Beckett's admiration for the Elsheimer painting may well have to do in part with the forlornness of the figures in the limitless dark only intermittently pierced by points of light". (ibid., pp.131-2). The "three faces" in the painting which "are partially illuminated by a torch in Joseph's left hand" (ibid.,p.132) are compared with the spotlights on the three heads in the urns and the placing of the urns in the darkness is compared to the vast space of night depicted in the painting (ibid., p.134). Moorjani finds that:

> the fade-ins and dissolves of Beckett's stage sets in and out of darkness suggest
> beyond their literal theatrical sense, outer and inner space, stretching from the
> boundlessness of cosmic space and time to an inner endlessness of mind and in
> *Play* … implying the mythic passage from one world to the next (ibid., p.134)

Beckett's interest in this painter and in this particular scene is evident. Knowlson comments on how Elsheimer "was strikingly original in his treatment of light" and notes that Beckett saw this painting "in the Alte Pinakotek in Munich in 1937" (Knowlson in Haynes & Knowlson, 2003, p.80). In his listings from the German diaries, Nixon notes that whilst in Berlin, over 16-17 December 1936, Beckett, "Admires a night landscape by Adam Elsheimer in loan exhibition of drawings from the Louvre" and on 18 December "inspects the Elsheimer night landscape again" (Nixon, 2010, pp.256-7). However, a focus on the differences between the painting and the lighting in *Play,* suggest that Beckett was subverting the concepts of light and dark which Renaissance painters were concerned to illustrate. The Elsheimer painting shows a calm landscape, lit by the soft light of the moon, its reflection in the water and the multitude of stars of the Milky Way. However, Beckett has just two registers of light, which shine on the figures in the dark void: either the torturing fierce light or the entropic, confused shadowy light. In *Play* there is no landscape or situated place, the urns are positioned in the liminal space, created out of light and dark to show humankind's position in an alien universe. There is a sense of harmony with nature in the Elsheimer painting, projected by the visual motifs of Joseph's lamp and the shepherds' fire, human sources of light which combine with the celestial ones. In contrast the figures in urns in *Play* have no agency to create light, only suffering the violent light or the dim indifference of being passed over.

Instead of a comforting narrative in the work to create the illusion of humanity's salvation, the interplay between light and dark simply makes material the abstract concepts of something/nothing. The concept of nothingness is expressed through minimalism which foregrounds the fragmented figure only through light, as the spotlight's illumination of one urn at a time brings that head out of the darkness. McMullan has written of the "ghost-like figures" of the late plays who "are exiled between presence and absence, the present and the past, the mortal boundaries of a life and what may lie beyond" (McMullan, 2010, pp.105-6). This sense of liminality is conveyed through the way in which each figure is inextricably bound by the agency of the spotlight, which reveals and conceals them, its erratic, fast-paced swivelling creating an abstract patterning effect out of light.

Images of mortality

The brutally fragmented and immobilised figures in urns are examples of grotesque fusion figures which violate the boundaries between different ontological orders, "Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns" (Beckett, 1986, p. 307). The lack of any expressivity on the faces, which are clamped in a forward-looking position, increases the inhuman aspect, as does their uniform nature: Beckett stressed that the three "grey discs" of their faces in the grey urns should not be differentiated one from another (Beckett in Harmon, 1998, p. 145). Their lack of awareness of

each other is emphasised; the striking visual image of the three urns in a row, touching each other, whilst the heads cannot turn, illustrates their isolation. George Devine's notes for the 1964 Old Vic production stipulated that the actors should not rehearse together initially, so that they could get used to not taking their cue from each other (Gontarski, 1997, p.92).

The two components of the fusion figure, flesh of the head and clay of the urn, are designed to merge into one another, an image which references the Biblical sense of humanity being moulded out of clay. Both the urn and head are encrusted with a thick, roughly textured layer, which gives a tactile sense of organic matter decaying, but confuses the animate with the inanimate. The figures are in a state of disintegration, but are poised between the organic and inorganic, between life and death, in a liminal space. Jocelyn Herbert described how for the 1964 London production they created "make-up out of oatmeal mixed with water and a little glue" for the faces and then "added grey and white pancake", so that "They looked like old stone and the surface of their skin appeared to flake off during the performance. The urns were textured so that the actors seemed to be continuous with them" (Herbert in Courtney, 1993, p. 98). Billie Whitelaw commented that, "*It looked as though we were disintegrating in front of the audience"* [sic] (Whitelaw, 1995, p.80). The suggestion of eroded statues, such as medieval funerary sculpture, links to the aesthetic of revealing the failed body as subject to time, debilitated but enduring.

Angela Moorjani has drawn comparisons between this play and concepts of the Ancient Egyptian afterlife, in particular the idea of being judged and the light/dark dichotomy (Moorjani in Ben-Zvi & Moorjani, 2008, p.128). Moorjani links the urn/head image to Ancient Egyptian canopic jars, funerary receptacles which held the organs of the body, the lids of which were fashioned into heads (Moorjani in Ben-Zvi & Moorjani, 2008, pp.128-9). The idea of the light of judgement in a liminal place, suspended between being and non-being, has affinities with the play, but unlike the smoothness of the canopic jars which hold the mummified remains within, the urn/face composite shows both elements to be equally ravaged by time and materially degraded. Beckett's failed figure emphasises the fragility of the human body, which as an organic object decays becoming inorganic through a process of destruction.

A comparison Beckett drew between the paintings of Jack B Yeats and those of Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) in terms of this organic/inorganic dichotomy is revealing. Beckett praised what he termed "a sense of the ultimate inorganism of everything" in Yeats's painting, comparing this to what he saw in the paintings of Watteau, who he said "stressed it with busts & urns, his people are mineral in the end" (Beckett in Dow Fehsenfeld & More Overbeck, 2009, p.540). Carville investigates Beckett's interest in Watteau in the context of the painter being admired by Symbolist poets such as

Baudelaire for his evocation of melancholy and because his paintings "whilst suggesting narrative meaning, also frustrate it" (Carville, 2018, p.128). Carville sees Beckett's comparison of Watteau and JB Yeats as based on the way they "return the viewer immediately to the physical", revealing the material world, "its brutal, unforgiving, atomization which in turn leads to the viewer's apprehension of their own petrified quality" (ibid. pp.138-9). Beckett highlights the presence of death and decay in the paintings of Watteau, despite the fact that they are not overtly to do with mortality. In paintings such as *Fetes Venitiennes (1718-9*) Watteau contrasts the vitality of the colourful throng with the grey, mineral oversized urn and statuary which are positioned above them. Beckett's reading of the garden urns and busts in Watteau's seemingly carefree paintings of young people at play as symbols of mortality sheds light on the concept of the failed figure as being poised between life and death. In his visual stage language for *Play* Beckett shows the process of returning to mineral dust, as he conflates the organic with the inorganic, in his image of fragmentation and disintegration.

6.2 *Krapp's Last Tape*

Zones of light in the dark

In *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) Beckett experiments with polarities of light/dark and black/white to problematize liminal states between presence/absence and life/death. This is a major thematic thread running through the spoken text as well as the visual stage language; it conveys the failed figure caught in a flawed universe. On page 43 of the *Theatrical Notebook* for his 1969 Schiller-Theater production, Beckett gave a list of 27 instances when either the spoken text or the *mise-en-scène* referenced the binaries of light/dark and white/black. However, he entitled this list 'Mani' which refers to the founder of the third century Christian doctrine of Manichaeism, which preached a conflation of such polarities "in the beginning there were two independent principles described as Good and Evil or Light and Darkness". When evil sought to take over good, both became mingled. The world is a fusion of spirit and matter and man is "torn between the two" (Pine-Coffin, 1961, p.13). St Augustine, the champion of orthodox Christianity, who wrote against this rival sect, was an early favourite of Beckett's: in the late 1920s Beckett had "immersed himself deeply in the *Confessions* of St Augustine" (Knowlson, 1996, p.109).

Beckett uses the technical possibilities of stage lighting to create a liminal space between life and death using the light/dark polarity. The physically wrecked Krapp embodies a fall from grace: a decline from youth, as archived in the taped voices of his earlier selves, to an enfeebled old age. Krapp either sits at his desk in the pool of strong light, or walks laboriously back and forth into the

zone of darkness to fetch back into the "zone of light" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1976) the objects that encompass his own memories. In a letter of January 1960 to Alan Schneider, Beckett stressed that complete darkness should be attempted, "All backstage as black as possible, he can disappear through black drapes for his drink and dictionary" (Beckett in Harmon, 1988, p.60). In his own productions in Paris and Berlin in the 1970s the effect created was of Krapp being swallowed up by the darkness when he moved outside the lighted area; Beckett was to associate obliquely the darkness with death (Knowlson, 1976).

Light reveals presence to the sight and allows the present moment to be bodied forth, whilst darkness can be conceptualised as the absence of light, the closing down of vision and consciousness. Krapp's attempts to control his life, with the ledger and tapes, take place in the zone of light. However, it is the uncontrollable darkness, itself an undeniable presence which encompasses most of the stage space, that enables the zone of light to exist. This tension between light and darkness questions the primacy of light. The darkness is not simply destruction and death, but also represents both the past, in the form of memories, and also crucially the future, which is unnerving and unknowable. In this play Beckett shows the past-present-future continuum, with Krapp haunted by his past disembodied selves and by his future, whilst appearing as a ghost-like figure, a spectre at his own parodic birthday celebration. Krapp's unstable identity in this liminal time and place recalls Derrida's description of the "logic of the specter" in which the "specter is … a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance" (Derrida, 2002, p.117).

One aspect of Krapp's haunting is shown by a gesture which he makes towards the backstage, as he turns away from the zone of light to interrogate the opposing darkness. Beckett called this gesture the 'Hain moment' and introduced it into his own productions, from the Schiller-Theater production onwards. The *Theatrical Notebook* for this production includes two iterations of this moment: at line 58 and at line 256 near the end of the play, which is the longest in duration. Hain 1 at line 58 describes it *"turns to the tape-recorder, makes to switch on, arrests gesture, turns slowly to look over his shoulder into the darkness backstage left, long look, then slowly back front"* (Beckett in Knowlson, 1992, p.4). Beckett took the term 'Hain' which refers to a figure symbolising Death as a blessed release, from the German poem *Death and the Maiden* by Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) (Knowlson, 1992, p.20). Beckett explained to Martin Held, the actor playing Krapp, at the rehearsal in Berlin "Old Nick's there. Death is standing beside [behind] him and unconsciously he's looking for it" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1992, p.xvi). The looking backwards into the darkness is however just one part of this visual image: as Krapp's hand is suspended over the tape machine, with his head turned, his body creates a connection between the machine in the zone of light and the surrounding

darkness. The polarities of being/non-being are mixed: death is in the zone of light as well as in the darkness, as the machine and tapes are his dead selves which persist through technology.

The act of listening to the disembodied voices and recording himself again implies that these traces will outlive his physical body. In a film about his philosophy, Derrida discussed his anxiety about recording his life and his acute awareness of his own mortality, which was heightened by the act of filming "these images will most likely live longer than I … Death is here. We are filming someone who we know will die before the archive" (Derrida in Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2005, p.46). The idea that the tape recorder and tapes will persist after Krapp is gone, is suggested by a lighting change that Beckett made for the Schiller-Theater and in subsequent productions. Instead of complete darkness at the end the tape machine had "a 'magic eye', a small 'control lamp' on the front which continued to burn at the end of the play" (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.259). This image of a small light in expansive darkness problematizes the presence/absence binaries, as the light signals that the recorded past outlives individual human beings.

Beckett continued to explore the possibilities of lighting to produce effects of liminality in later productions. In his Schiller-Theater production Beckett introduced the idea of a cubby hole as a distinct space which Krapp goes into three times. Beckett accentuated the distinct nature of the space by stipulating that the light inside it should be white, and that there should be a black curtain covering the entrance to it (Knowlson, 1992, p.252). A second zone of intermittent light is therefore created, in addition to the primary zone with the strong white light from the lamp hanging over the light oak table. Krapp therefore moves between two zones of light, through an area of darkness, as a fragmented being. The restricted space he inhabits, moving along a trajectory between the two zones, reflects his inner division: as an embodiment of failure he walks back and forth through the darkness. Beckett suggested a further refinement for his San Quentin Theatre Workshop production in 1977, asking for the curtain to be "set in motion" on Krapp's entrance and exits from the cubby hole and specifying that, "Ideally curtain will be faintly stirring throughout the play, helped perhaps by ventilator fan" (Cluchey & Haerdter in Knowlson, 1980, p.126). This concept would have created an insubstantial, flickering affect, caused by both the moving curtain and the shadows created by the waves of light leaking out from the cubby hole. The mingling of the light and dark creates an uncertainty and anxiety, which is not resolved: the final image of the light on the tape recorder only serves to problematize the boundaries of life and death.

Krapp's decay

In his advice to the director Alan Schneider for his production in 1960, Beckett drew attention to the polarities in the lighting and colour scheme, but also to their polluted nature, "Black and white (both dirty), the whole piece being built up in one sense on this simple antithesis" (Beckett in Harmon, 1988, p.60). An organic patina of grime covers his clothing: Beckett specified in the original stage instructions that trousers and sleeveless waistcoat should be "rusty black", the "Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar" and the footwear should be a, "Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1992, p.3). With this clothing and his unshaven "white face" and "Disordered grey hair" (ibid., 1992, p.3). Krapp presents an overriding image of the decayed and decrepit body. Even before the first production of the play, Beckett had eliminated Krapp's "purple nose" (although this remains in the Faber & Faber text), thus reducing visual references to Krapp as a clown (Knowlson, 1992, p.13). McMullan reveals how Jocelyn Herbert's collaboration with Beckett on the design of Krapp's appearance for the 1958 premiere helped move the image away from the clown associations in the original stage instructions. In her revised sketches, Herbert comes closer to the "affecting image of the aging, introspective, memory obsessed Krapp" (McMullan, 2012, p.14).

Subsequent changes increased the sense of a decaying figure. Michael Haerdter who was Beckett's assistant director for the 1977 Berlin San Quentin Theatre Workshop production listed a change in the stage make-up from the white face of earlier productions to "a realistic reproduction of an old face whose life colours have been replaced with a sallow-grey", with the hands also made-up to reflect this (Haerdter in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.303). The white face of the original text of the play still retained something of the image of the clown, present in the genesis of the play. The unhealthy-looking flesh and dishevelled appearance create an image of bodily failure which suggests an almost tactile and olfactory sense of dissolution. The concentration on the decaying flesh has affinities with the image of the crucified Christ as portrayed in the work of Northern Renaissance painters such as Matthias Grünewald, for example his *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1510-15). The painter emphasized the suffering of Christ by focusing on the pock-marked, greying flesh and the contorted body. In Krapp Beckett shows the state of the aged body to illuminate the inherent fragility and transitory nature of the failed figure. The stress on Krapp's decay emphasises the nature of physical embodiment; his name itself suggests organic waste products, what is left-over from the process of being alive, thus signifying human presence whilst questioning human pretensions.

McMullan has written that, "Krapp's fragmented existence through time is not visible in a single body, but is materialized in the myriad spools that litter the stage, and the different voices of his

older and younger selves" (McMullan, 2010, p.47). Krapp is in effect defeated by these disembodied voices on the tapes: although the working title was 'Magee Monologue', (it was written for the actor Patrick Magee) (McMillan & Fehsenfeld 1988, p.242), it is only near the end that he attempts a live monologue, which comprises just 34 lines. By coming near the end this undermines theatrical expectations: the majority of the play is mime, a preamble to Krapp's attempt at being the primary speaker on stage. Lloyd has argued that objects in Beckett's theatre rather than securing the subject in its world "fail in that function, over and over again, and in failing call the subject and its certainties into question". In *Krapp's Last Tape* the "tape recorder, which may have commenced as the prosthesis of Krapp's memory, has become a thing that displaces him" (Lloyd, 2018, p.134). Near the end of the play Krapp rips out the tapes he is recording on "wrenches off reels, throws them away" and replaces them with the tapes of a former self (Beckett in Knowlson, 1992, p.9).

Organic/inorganic polarity

The inorganic objects of the tape recorder and the tape tins are sharply juxtaposed with Krapp's texture of material decay. Although the image is not a fusion figure, the machine's metal sheen and smooth contours and the greying flesh of Krapp's hands which grasp it and his unshaven face and dishevelled grey head which hovers over it, is suggestive of that grotesque relationship. Merleau-Ponty has written that:

> I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk
> round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be
> able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be
> unobservable (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp.104-5).

With the tape machine and also the ledger (discussed below), Krapp is trying to observe himself but his attempts fail as the grotesque confusion between the subject/object shows. The image of Krapp and the tape recorder suggests a failing, decomposing frame combined with a mechanical impetus towards the repetition of continuance. In his Schiller-Theater production Beckett specified the black/white polarity of the tape machine "Black cable" linking to "white lead of the recorder" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1992, p.185). This emphasises the inexorableness of the machinery which relays the voices of past selves; it contrasts starkly with the prominent hands and face, made-up in the same grey tones. Krapp's intense relationship with the machine is shown through touch as he holds it closely; Beckett commented during his 1969 production, "Tendency of a solitary person to enjoy affective relationships with objects" (Beckett in Knowlson, 1992, p.205). However, as

McTighe argues Krapp's seeking to recover his past lives through the tapes problematizes presence, it "actually reveals rupture and separation, and defies and disrupts the act of touch as a verifier of presence" (McTighe, 2013, p. 22).

Jean Martin who played Krapp in Beckett's 1970 production at the Théâtre Récamier in Paris recalled how Beckett wanted "Krapp to bend more and more towards the tape recorder as the play went on" (Martin in McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.257). This wrapping of his body round the machine signals a bodily emotional responsiveness towards the inanimate object, moving the image towards the grotesque as the boundaries of flesh/machine are challenged. The expressivity of the hands, hugging the tape-recorder towards the body contrasts with the face immobilised in the act of concentrated listening, which hovers over the machine. Pierre Chabert, who played Krapp in Beckett's 1975 Paris production at the Théâtre d'Orsay, wrote that the face becomes mask-like in the intense listening phases of the play, with some subtle reactions to the taped voices, "Imperceptibly, one modifies the mask. But for some time this mask retains its emptiness, its absence, its enigmatic quality" (Chabert in Knowlson, 1980, p.96). The almost frozen image of the mask, machine and hands conveys an inner turmoil, as the body holds within it emotions set off by the act of remembering. Walter Asmus has commented on how Beckett wanted to bring out the "flow of emotion" from his actors on stage (Asmus, 2015). Maude considers Krapp's body as a site of "embodied memory", (Maude, 2009, p.16), and it is the impact on the body of repeated memories, the body entrapped by the voices on the circular tapes, which suggests that Krapp is physically caught up in the "spool" of emotion.

In addition to the tape recorder, an implacable device of modernity, Krapp's interaction with the ledger which catalogues the tapes also visually signals a physically close relationship. In Beckett's Schiller-Theater production the ledger was "large, black and worn" (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988, p.261), suggesting a symbiosis between it and Krapp. Both have degenerated through time: the ledger is worn by Krapp's own hands, as Krapp himself is worn down through the documented tapes. It has been suggested, that the play's *mise-en-scène* "visually echoes" Rembrandt's *The Money Changer* (1627); Beckett noted in his German diaries that he saw the painting in January 1937 (Ackerley and Gontarski, 2006, p.481). Both play and painting consist of an aged man sitting at a table, lit by a single spotlight in the surrounding darkness. A massive ledger to the left in the foreground of the painting lies open, hemming in the figure that is encircled with tottering piles of bills, paper and money-bags. Krapp's ledger is prominent in the play, and as he takes the tapes out of the tins, the reels form a tottering pile, which at one point he dashes to the floor. Both the money changer and Krapp are in darkened, liminal spaces, but while one is doing his money accounts, Krapp

is taking stock of his past life. The spot-lit figure in the painting has Christian allegorical meanings to do with the short-sighted making of money in contrast to a life well spent in preparation for heaven. Krapp's review of his life takes place in the context of failure, without the possibility of such an external judgement or resolution through religious certitude. The decaying ledger can be seen as Krapp's attempt to memorialise his life; in Beckett's San Quentin production the ledger was filled with talcum powder to "cause a cloud of dust" (Cluchey & Haerdter in Knowlson, 1980, p.136) when it was handled. This impression of the ledger's physical disintegration into dust is a visual image which equates with Krapp's own physical decay. This very tactile image for failure also brings to mind the Biblical image of humans as "dust to dust" (Genesis, 3:19).

6.3 That Time

Engulfing darkness

That Time was written in a period spanning 1974-5 and first performed at the Royal Court in May 1976, directed by Donald McWhinnie; it was in a double bill with *Footfalls*, directed by Beckett. In this play Beckett suspends a mute head in darkness, using fragmentation to accentuate a tenuous and contingent embodiment as the only lighted zone is the human head, signifying a limited spark of consciousness. Beckett's use of the stage space creates an unsettling perspective as the head of the Listener is "about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre" (Beckett, 1986, p.388). The positioning of the only element visible within the topmost part of the stage frame shows the extremely fragmented figure being overwhelmed by the vast darkness below. This has parallels with *Not I* in which the image of the fragmented Mouth, placed high up at the top of the stage space is set against complete darkness; the head of the Listener in *That Time* contrasts with Mouth as the speaker. Beckett acknowledged the links between the two, reportedly telling the actor Patrick Magee that he would not allow them to be played on a double bill, because *That Time* "was too self-consciously "cut out of the same texture" as *Not I*" (Brater, 1987, p.37).

Beckett's use of a minimal and fragmented image in a dark void has affinities with Francisco Goya's (1746-1828) *The Drowning Dog* (1819–1823), one of the artist's so-called 'Black Paintings', which shows the small head of a dog, seemingly drowning, enveloped by dark ochre paint. The dog's head in Goya's painting is placed near the foot of the canvas, a decentring device which increases the sense of the weakness and fragility of the dog. In contrast the decentring of the head in the play positions it at the top of the stage space, creating an optical effect which suggests a dissipation of the head as it appears to exist un-anchored in the darkness, and about to float off beyond the frame.

Beckett problematizes the primacy of light as the darkness can be seen to be more solid, more present than the minimal image occupying the overwhelming darkness of the void.

The darkness is given added presence through the dense spoken text which emanates from three disembodied, ghost-like voices which come out of the darkness, creating a triangular aural structure around his head, "Voices A B C are his own coming to him from both sides and above" (Beckett, 1986, p.388). In contrast to the lit head, the darkness can be seen as the site of the Listener's internal consciousness, where voices repeat the web of memories. The darkness also suggests the liminal nature of time itself, as suggested in the play's title. This brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's contention that we inhabit time as much as we do space:

> The problem is how to make time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident, time at all times underlying the *notion* of time, not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp.482-3)

Twilight: liminality of grey

Beckett's setting of the lighting on the head at "twilight", which lasts for the majority of the play, creates the spectral presence of Listener, who is positioned in a liminal space between life and death. Beckett's use of the word "twilight" plays on the sense of the mingling of light and dark, as it is the period mid-point between day and night, when the darkness of night is about to conquer the light of day. The twilight lighting on the white face and hair create an insubstantial image, the Listener is almost lost in the darkness but nevertheless maintains a weak presence. The "twilight" effect is also part of Beckett's artistic strategy of expressing the inexpressible as is his use of the colour grey, which provides a means of expression whilst creating liminality and indeterminacy. If for the artist Gerhard Richter, "Grey is the epitome of non-statement" (Richter on Tate website, 2007), we can say of Beckett that "twilight" and grey tones are aesthetic choices which allow him to avoid making statements and to disable interpretation in an oblique approach.

Monochromes of black, white and greys combine with fragmentation and stillness to create an abstract staging. Pierre Chabert has commented on the almost erasure of the body which "make[s] the body come to light"; Beckett's figures always exist in a "state of lack or negativity" (Chabert, 1982). There are three occasions when the light grows stronger to then subside; the lighting becomes brighter in synchronicity with the action of the eyes opening, suggesting intermittent surges of consciousness. In the German premiere at the Berlin Schiller-Theater (October 1976) directed by Beckett, he instructed that at the end of each of the three parts, when Listener opens his eyes "the light will come on for ten seconds (later this is changed to 15 seconds), stays for 10

seconds very bright and then fades in the same space of time back to the original twilight level" (Beckett in Asmus, 1977). However, the opening of the eyes does not disturb the overriding stillness of the image; the action is not, in Merleau-Ponty's words a "gaze that gets to grips with a visible world" because Listener is intent on listening. Nevertheless the image of the face does accord with Merleau-Ponty's description of a face as "that expressive instrument" which "can carry an existence" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.409).

Decapitated head

Although positioned at the top of the stage space, the perspective Beckett sought was of an, "Old white face, long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread" (Beckett, 1986, p.388). By radically altering the field of vision we perceive the head as if seen from above and seemingly in a flattened form. The white hair spreading upwards, the immobility of the face and the shadowy image create an almost two dimensional effect. The lack of depth in the image is accentuated by the surrounding darkness which closes down any sense of a perspective, creating instead an illusion of a plane surface. However, despite this the face and hair are perceived as a human head, through a mixture of the figurative and the abstract. As Merleau-Ponty wrote, perception works by completing the fragments which the eye actually sees: on seeing one side of a cube for example the mind perceives its three dimensional depth (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp.235-6). Garner sees *That Time* as one of the plays in which Beckett experiments with depth, "rendering the third dimension of his performance images unstable" so that the Listener seems to be "floating in an expanse outside measurement" (Garner, 1994, p.74). The image of an almost abstract head, fragmented with a textural surface which emphasises a ghostly insubstantial quality, destabilizes representation. In a 1975 letter to the designer Jocelyn Herbert regarding the premiere at the Royal Court Beckett specified, "The remoteness & stillness of listening face is part of the thing & not to be touched" (Beckett in Craig et al, 2016, p.405). The head as the site of subjectivity can represent the act of perception itself; this image strikingly conveys the fragility of consciousness.

At the end of the play, as he suddenly smiles open-mouthed into the darkness it is the Listener who seems to actively gaze out into the darkness. In the context of the minimalist setting this dramatic smile breaks through *[…After 3 seconds eyes open. After 5 seconds smile, toothless for preference. Hold 5 seconds till fade out and curtain]* (Beckett, 1986, p.395). With his hair seemingly standing on end, as if through an electric shock, the jolt he transmits through this sudden action can be compared with paintings of decapitated heads, and in particular to paintings of the Medusa. The decapitated head of this monster from Greek mythology, with snakes for hair, turned to stone those who gazed upon it. One example of this representation in art is Caravaggio's *Medusa* (1597) which

Beckett would probably have seen in his repeated visits to the Uffizi gallery in Florence in 1927 (Knowlson, 1996, p.74). The image of the painting is subverted in the play: the seemingly electrified hair and open mouth of the Listener can be seen as the enfeebled version of the energised snake hair and youthful open mouth of the Medusa. The affinities between the two reside in both being images suggesting death and the immobility or stone-like quality which death brings. The image of the Listener's head acts as a *memento mori*, which suddenly strikes the spectator with the presence of mortality.

Death mask

The face with eyes closed, hair spread above, picked out by the grey-toned lighting is a liminal image which confuses the boundaries between sleep, dying and death. The white, textured face in repose suggests a death mask, the plaster cast of the face of a dead person, but the opening of the eyes creates ambiguity. The long hair brushed in a sweeping upwards motion also has associations with the flame of a candle, as the white textured strands flare up suggesting the brevity of human life. Drawing on the spoken texts which evoke memories Cohn states that both this play and *Krapp's Last Tape* "lean on the convention that one's whole lifetime wells up into consciousness at the moment of death" (Cohn, 1980, pp.9-10). The idea of lying on a bed or a death-bed was stronger in earlier drafts of the play, in which the head was "framed by a white pillow"; this was re-thought by the fifth draft when Beckett wrote "'no pillow'" (Knowlson & Pilling, 1980, p.206). The sense of being propped up by a pillow is comforting and suggestive of domestic surroundings, fixing the image precisely. This process of erasing naturalistic details increases the abstraction of the fragmented image.

Beckett's instructions that the image is "as seen from above" suggests that the spectator could be looking down on the Listener, as if he were lying in a prone position. However the placing of the head high on the stage space means that the image is physically seen from below, in what is known in art as *di sotto in su* technique. Ackerley and Gontarski suggest that Beckett used this perspectival technique in *That Time* and they also point out, although no further analysis is given, that this technique was used by Andrea Mantegna in his *Lamentation of Christ* (c1480), also known as the *Foreshortened Christ* (Ackerley & Gontarski, 2006, p.568). I argue that Beckett subverts the technique of *di sotto in su* in order to create a flattened image of a remote fragment, which lacks the three dimensional effect which was the reason for using this technique, to focus on the solidity of Christ's body.

The illusion of a head that is in a lying-down position is necessarily created by an actor standing-up, so that we can see the face full-on and not in profile. This underlying use of the primary positions of standing and lying carries a metaphorical weight embodying life and death; Christian iconography relies on the known order of the positioning of Christ's body on the vertical and horizontal axes. The subtexts of the Mantegna painting in which Christ is lying on the stone slab is that the figure has been nailed up on the Cross and subsequently will be standing upright above the open tomb, signifying the Resurrection. Mantegna's painting consists of monotone greys, suggestive of granite, unifying the body with the stone slab, the so-called stone of unction, where the process of anointing the body takes place. The physicality of the body is emphasised, as the viewer's gaze sweeps up from the feet and is channelled towards the head on the pillow. Whilst in the painting the viewer is placed at the foot of the stone bed, very near to the body and the gaze is closely focused onto Christ's corporeality, Beckett's image is distanced and ghostly in its lack of physicality. There is a sense that the viewer of the painting could touch the body of Christ; in fact the subject is actually about touch, because it is to do with the anointing of the body with oils before burial. In contrast Beckett's image is disembodied through the fragmentation, distancing and dim lighting, which closes down tactile possibilities; there is instead a sense of a residue, that something has left a faint imprint in the darkness of the void.

6.4 Ohio Impromptu

Reader and Listener

Beckett's use of a stark contrast between black/white and light/dark is evident in *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), written especially for the symposium at Ohio State University, held for Beckett's 75th birthday celebrations (Gontarski, 1982). In this play Beckett shows two figures, "As alike in appearance as possible" each with, "Long black coat. Long white hair" (Beckett, 1986, p.445). The effect is of a doubled abstract figure: white wig posed on a black, buttoned-up gown. They sit mid-stage at a, "Plain white deal table say 8' x 4'" (ibid., p.445), which is the only area of the stage which is lit. This creates an illuminated liminal space, within which the identical figures sit at the table as if frozen within the surrounding darkness. The lighting stays constant after the fade up and until the final fade out, allowing an unchanging focus on the image, which is suggestive of a personal reckoning or the summing up of a life. Gontarski compares "the conspicuous coat and hat" of the play with a preliminary version, in which the figure of Beckett himself is enjoined to put on the "shroud and cap" before his "address" at the University (Beckett in Gontarski, 1985, pp.177-8). This suggests an underlying image of the university cap and gown, with the latter becoming the shroud embodying mortality. Pountney writes that with Listener and Reader both on stage, "Beckett

introduces a visual double or doppelganger" into this play, and "confirms that they are one and the same" (Pountney, 1988, p.223).By making the two figures identical Beckett creates an image of the single fractured, failed figure. Text from Beckett's preliminary version humorously punctures the idea of being able to capture oneself:

> What am I to say, I said.
>
> Be yourself, they said, yourself.
>
> Myself, I said. What are you insinuating?
>
> Yourself before, they said.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> And after
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Not during? I said (Beckett in Gontarski, 1985, pp.177-8).

The two figures and the contrasting black/white palette and light/dark suggest binary opposites. Alan Schneider, who directed the premiere at Ohio State University, wrote to Beckett that he thought he would have approved of their rendering of his *mise-en-scène*, "Very pure. Direct. Strong image of black and white. The white table strongly lit, the two mirror-figures, blackness around" (Schneider in Harmon, 1998, p.404). Brater has written that this play "abounds in doubles and near-doubles" in the spoken text and visually, highlighting the "two fades of equal length" both being ten seconds, the two properties of hat and book, and the table being "8' by 4'" (Brater, 1987, p.132). Brater's comment that Pythagoras "identified the binary nature of the number two with that which deceives, that which is false, that which wears a mask" (ibid., p.133) is highly pertinent to the concealment and disguise of the figures in the play.

The painter Avigdor Arikha suggested that Gerard ter Borch's painting *Four Franciscan Monks* (c.1647-48) was "the origin of the staging for *Ohio Impromptu*" (Atik, 2001, p.6). Beckett had written appreciatively of this painting in a 1935 letter to Thomas MacGreevy (Croke, 2006, pp.18-9). There are resemblances, such as the positioning of the two seated figures in the play and the painting, although Beckett does not replicate the standing figure behind each of the two seated figures in the painting. However, differences between the painting and play reveal a subversion of the world of religious authority and order: the problematizing of the figure is what predominates and destabilises representation. The figures are identical with their black coats and white hair, but paradoxically they

embody binary opposites in their roles as Reader and Listener. The single, "Black wide-brimmed hat at centre of table" (Beckett, 1986, p.445) which replaces the crucifix in the painting, suggests the figures are two sides of the same conflicted entity and the alienation which the act of remembering brings. The hat placed at the centre also functions as a visual metonym, emphasising but also problematizing the nature of the head as the site of consciousness. Whilst it is placed within the bright light, the faces of the two figures are obscured; the Reader's fragmented face is partly seen in profile, whilst the Listener has, "Face hidden" (ibid., p.445). The light on the table provides the grounding for reflection, clarity and a self-probing, as the light reflects off the whiteness of the wood. However, visually the white/black figures are images of concealment, in contrast to the supposed act of revelation: the veracity of what appears to be a reading from a book is undermined by the ambivalence of the figures.

Internal world of consciousness

The constrained figures are nearly immobile, sitting at the table at the fade up and the fade out, creating a concentrated image, as if in a tableau. The space evokes a liminal place, the void of time and space, whilst also conveying a sense of the internal world of consciousness. This is implicit in the figures' identical nature and in their postures which link them in an act of communication and suggests a closed intensity between them. Knowlson has drawn the comparison between *Ohio Impromptu* and "the interior of a seventeenth-century Dutch painting", a genre which Beckett admired. Knowlson compares the figures of Reader and Listener to those from Vermeer paintings, if as he notes the colours that Vermeer uses are discounted. Knowlson specifies the figures in *The Geographer* (1669) and *The Astronomer* (1668), emphasising the comparison between the play's stillness and the "stark, almost frozen nature of their gestures" (Knowlson, 1996, p.824). The appearance of Johannes Vermeer's (1632-1675) figures, with their voluminous gowns and long hair, frozen in mid-thought, each with a hand on the table, close to an open book, show resemblances to the play. As Vermeer does in the titles of these two paintings for his figures, Beckett assigns each of his figures a label as Reader and Listener.

However, Beckett subverts the positive feeling of the paintings, which reflect the seventeenth century's rise of reason, scientific discovery and exploration. The fragmentary image in the darkness suspends Reader and Listener in a liminal space; their almost stasis is derived from a very different process to that of *The Geographer* and *The Astronomer.* Instead of looking outward into the world, Beckett's figures are caught up in the internal world of repeating past memories, trying to reach a resolution or a judgement on the emotional life of past selves.

Unlike the richly coloured Vermeer paintings, the austere monochrome *mise-en-scène* creates a minimalist image which unifies the figures and the book together into a concentrated image, which is pitted against the surrounding darkness. Beckett maximises the potential of that one stage property: the book is both a disembodied repository of subjectivity and also of potential but suspect authority. The book is prominent on the table between the two figures; the black and white colour scheme of the two figures is repeated in the book, with its white pages with black lettering, bound in black. The importance of the book is shown in a letter to Alan Schneider in which Beckett wrote that he continued to think about how to "make the book visually effective". This was in addition to what he had already stipulated that it should be of "largish format & black binding" and that "the faint thud of its being closed at the end" should be heard (Beckett in Harmon, 1998, p.403).

As the book is "open at last pages" (Beckett, 1986, p.445) one of its potential meanings is as the metaphorical 'book of life', in a similar way to how Krapp's tapes and ledgers are in one sense the physical manifestation of his life. The image of the book, its pages being slowly turned on the table, suggests a Bible placed on an altar; the form of the play itself is based on reading from the book, this is the sole performative act which structures the work. This can be compared to a reading in church, as the slow and deliberate turning of the pages could indicate scriptural revelation and the certainty of religious authority. However, the split and fragmented figures, whose faces are largely hidden, do not perform as authoritative or reliable witnesses. The seriousness of the act of going through the records has visual connotations of ceremonial discovery but the black and white, almost monk-like figures both suggest and negate the possibility of encompassing or grasping the significance of a life lived. Biblical exegesis, which would explain the purpose of life, is here stripped of the belief system that underlies it. Instead in *Ohio Impromptu*, written for his 75th birthday, to be performed in front of Beckett scholars, Beckett has created another form for failure which rejects any idea that he has a message for his audience or a summing-up of his own work and life.

Bookends: the split figure

The binary structuring of the play through the two figures meeting at the table to go through alleged past events as seemingly set down in the book, sets up expectations of an interaction between Reader and Listener. However, the visual stage language undermines the idea that they are a duo. The strict black and white colour scheme of the figures at the table, which makes the two almost identical, is complemented by the figures' positioning, as they mirror each other in the disposition of their arms and hands. The instructions state that Listener is to be "seated at table facing front towards end of long side audience right. Bowed head propped on right hand. Face hidden. Left hand on table" and Reader "seated at table in profile centre of short side audience right. Bowed head

propped on right hand. Left hand on table" (Beckett, 1986, p.445). The stage picture showing one figure's obscured face positioned face forward, and the other figure in side profile until the end, suggests a Cubist perspective of showing one figure from different viewpoints. Beckett's instructions for exactly how the two sit at the table emphasises an identity or a complementarity, as if they were two bookends on either side of the book. However, the position they each take in relation to the table, creates a triangular shape at the top right corner of the table, a decentred positioning which leaves the majority of the table as a blank, empty space. This and the overriding impression of a doubling of the same figure contests the idea of binary roles of Reader and Listener despite the formal patterning of black/white and light/dark.

The strong suggestion of the splitting of one figure into two figures can be seen as a visual way of expressing the split within the single subject. As *Ohio Impromptu* plays with ideas of the self-revelation of the writer's life a comparison with an artist's self-portrait is apt here. Lovis Corinth's (1858-1925) *Last Self Portrait* (1925), in which the doubled image of the artist, one looking outwards and one in profile can be seen as apposite. There is an ambiguity in the painting about the profile image, whether it is in a mirror or a painting on an easel. Beckett was aware of Corinth's work: there had been an exhibition at Berlin's National Gallery in 1936, during the Olympic Games, called 'Contemporary Art – from Corinth to Klee' (Knowlson, 1996, p.238). Beckett tried, to no avail, to acquire the exhibition catalogue when he visited a bookseller in Munich in March 1937 (Nixon, 2010, p.270)

The sculptural image of Reader and Listener expresses the complexities of perception and representation: although nearly identical and mirroring each other, they are nevertheless inalienably separate. The figures' hands, which are prominent throughout the play, conceal their eyes, therefore impeding acknowledgement and mutual recognition. The gesture of the hand on the brow, shading the eyes also signifies deep thought and melancholy. Resting on the forehead and on the table the hands act as an anchor for the upper body: the arms and hands create a framed triangular shape which has a sculptural sense of a figural bust. Each sits separately within their own restricted space at the table, displaying their bodies as if in disguise, concealed by their hair and clothing, their gestural action is extremely limited, conveying their inability to reach out to each other. The Listener's repeated taps on the table and the Reader's responses are only interrupted in one instance, when the Reader's physical action of turning the page is halted by the Listener, "[Starts to turn back the pages. Checked by L's left hand. Resumes relinquished page]" (Beckett, 1986, p.446). McTighe contrasts this "spontaneous action" with the predictable rhythm of the series of knocks, which create a sense of a rehearsal, within the context of an impromptu, seen in both musical and

theatrical terms. She highlights the "disjuncture … between the figures, between staged image and spoken text, and between present body and absent shade" (McTighe, 2013, pp.137-42).

When Beckett attended rehearsals for the Paris production of 1986 at the Théâtre Petit Rond-Point he further weakened the gesture of Listener's knocking on the table, instructing the actor to "take only the fingernail of the right index finger and tap it very lightly on the table" (Kalb, 1989, pp.227-8) The "knock" of the original play text was therefore attenuated, so that the weakness of the gesture rather than a forceful intervention was suggested. This radical fragmentation, focusing on one nail of one digit, is an example of Beckett's refining of his visual stage language during rehearsals to convey the failed figure's running-out of energy.

Failed encounter

The accentuation of geometrical symmetry brought about by the twinned physical action of the two figures at the end of the play problematizes any sense of a resolution through recognition. Beckett's instructions stress the abstract nature of the movement and of their frozen faces:

> *Simultaneously they lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless.*
>
> *Ten seconds.*
>
> *Fade out.* (Beckett, 1986, p.448)

Brater sees the final image as the "recognition scene" when the figures "in a sense, take off their masks", although the scene "really resolves nothing, intensifying uncertainty" (Brater,1987, pp. 136-7). The mirroring of the mask-like faces as they are seen to make eye contact for the first time paradoxically serves to suggest a lack of recognition and to show an estrangement and failure within the work itself. Their close resemblance and the exact matching actions suggest a reflection in a mirror. Merleau-Ponty writes that the mirror shows how, "I am both seeing and visible, because there is a reflexivity of the sensible; the mirror translates and reproduces that reflexivity" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.359). Merleau-Ponty draws upon the mirror as the "emblem of the painter's gaze … the specular image sketches, within things, the work of vision" (ibid.). Merleau-Ponty further writes that, "This also explains why [painters] have so often loved to draw themselves in the act of painting …adding to what *they* could see of things at that moment, what *things* could see of them" (ibid.). The repeated, abstract figure becomes thing-like through an almost erased subjectivity; this thwarts the idea of recognition by a subject, presenting instead a failed encounter.

The act of being brought to the table to divulge the truth is shown in the visual stage language to be a failure. This can be seen as a subversion of Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* (1601), his painting which shows the dramatic moment at which the resurrected Christ blesses the bread and the two disciples recognise him for the first time. Beckett would have seen this painting during his visits to London's National Gallery in the early 1930's; as we have seen Beckett was an admirer of *chiaroscuro* painting and of Caravaggio. Beckett's white table, unlike the white table-cloth in the painting which presents a feast, is bare except for the book and the hat: nothing of sustenance remains. The painting shows figures at a table, in a darkened, shadowy void; hand gesture is paramount as for example Christ's hand is outstretched towards the viewer, blessing the bread, an act which engenders recognition. In comparison Beckett's figures, who sit in the position of Christ face-on towards the audience (Listener) and St James on the right of the table (Reader) are lacking in gestures which could lead to recognition. Beckett's figures are twinned in a reductionist identification which leads to a stalemate: there is no pre-eminent figure, such as Christ, to appear and provide a resolution. Instead the abstract figures reveal only the impediment to vision and to representation.

In conclusion, my analysis of these four plays demonstrates how Beckett uses the binary of light and dark to express the most abstract concept of nothing or non-being. This tension between the representational and the almost obliteration of the figure by the darkness provokes questions without providing answers. In foregrounding how light and dark are used in Beckett's visual stage language the links with fundamental principles of art and with specific visual images from art become more evident. In order to create minimalist images in the darkness Beckett collaborated with designers and technicians in a radical and complex process which serves the purpose of a visual communication.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter I reflect on my research and how it supports my proposition that Beckett uses a visual stage language as part of an aesthetic of failure, and that the lens of visual art allows us to focus more fully on this aspect of his theatre. One of the things that drew me to his drama from the beginning was his minimalist iconic visual stage images, which challenge and provoke questions rather than providing answers. Beckett's art criticism has been important for my understanding of the aesthetic of failure, in particular his idea of the need to show the dramatist as failing to represent in any complete way. Building on the scholarship, I have endeavoured to provide fresh insights into Beckett's experimentation with the resources of the stage to find visual forms for failure.

7.1 *Mise-en-scène* into visual stage language

In this thesis I have tested the concept that there is a visual stage language in Beckett's drama, which goes beyond the norms of the *mise-en-scène* to fulfil a complex and formative role. Beckett commented on his work in the theatre in typically paradoxical terms, "In the theater, one enters into a game, with its rules, and one cannot not submit oneself to them" (Beckett in King, 2001, p.33). Beckett challenged these rules using the visual resources which the stage offered him. My research contribution is to bring together in a systematic way multiple examples of how Beckett used the full array of tools, from lighting to make-up and costume to movement, to create his visual stage language.

That Beckett's arresting and enigmatic visual stage images are evidence of a fundamental fusion of form and content can be tested by considering what would happen to *Play, Rockaby* and *Footfalls* if you removed the figures from the urns, rocking chair and strip of light. However, the complexity of the visual stage language goes beyond the initial conceit: my many case studies reveal the intricacy of the plays' visual forms through an investigation of how the different components of the *mise-en-scène* work together to convey an array of elements of the aesthetic of failure. In *Play* for example, it is the lighting, stage space and make-up, as well as the head/urn stage image which all combine together to create the visual elements such as abstraction, the grotesque and the liminal. The over-arching effect, despite the complexity of the design, is of minimalism, a term which conveys the

almost destroyed, failed figure hanging on in a liminal space. The centrality of minimalism has been highlighted in the scholarship, and by actors such as Chabert and Whitelaw, and directors such as Asmus and Schneider. The transient and fragmentary nature of the human being and their perception of the world lie at the heart of the aesthetic of failure. Merleau-Ponty's ideas have helped to elucidate this:

> Things and instants can link up with each other to form a world only through the medium of that ambiguous being known as a subjectivity, and can become present to each other only from a certain point of view and an intention (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, P.388).

7.2 Evaluating visual stage language through art

My principal use of art is for the comparative analysis process, through which I have evidenced how specific art works or principles or art can be aligned with the visual stage language. From the wide range of artists known to Beckett, the process of choosing art works to use took place over several years, as I carried out my research and grew in knowledge about art. By studying artists' work in galleries and by looking at reproductions I developed my knowledge of visual language, and was able to mine examples from artists whom Beckett was interested in, such as Munch's *Self Portrait – Between Clock and Bed*, Corinth's *Last Self Portrait* and Schlemmer's *Stairway Scene* (*Treppenszene*). Research trips in which I visited galleries to see art which Beckett had seen led to insights which helped me to develop my ideas. I too undertook my own German trips, tracking down 'degenerate art' that Beckett saw, an example being Karl Ballmer's *Kopf in Rot* which the artist took with him to Switzerland when he left Germany in 1938. By viewing an exhibition of fifty works by the artist at the Ernst Barlach Haus in Hamburg in 2017 it was possible to examine in more detail the mixture of abstraction and representation which Beckett found so significant in Ballmer's work. One of the striking aspects of seeing *Kopf in Rot* was that the colour red was a weaker shade than commonly shown in reproductions. This suggested a draining of the vitality of the passion associated with the colour red, tying in with Beckett's development of weak colours or monotones.

On a research trip to Berlin's Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) I viewed on special request the print and preparatory drawings for Sandro Botticelli's manuscript illustration of *Canto XVIII* of Dante's *Inferno* (1481). What struck me was how Botticelli's fragmentary and unfinished preparatory sketches would have appealed greatly to Beckett, as he valued the unfinished and incomplete. As someone who was used to visiting artists' studios and seeing work in progress, Beckett's interest in the process of creating art would also have been stimulated. My own

repeated viewing of figurative images in art helped me to develop the concept of subversion: seeing Savoldo's *Saint Mary Magdalene approaching the Sepulchre* at the National Gallery, in which the grey cloak dominates the painting, drew me to search through Beckett's letters, where I discovered how much he admired this painting. My experience has been that looking at such repeated images, itself a very Beckettian concept, helps to open our eyes to the visual stage language.

7.3 Recommendations for further research

More research is needed into Beckett's visual staging as a language for failure and the links with art; a cross-disciplinary study, with scholars from an art background in addition to those from performing arts could bring fresh insights into the debate. Although I set the parameters of which artists to use in my analysis at those whose work Beckett would have known, I was also drawn initially to artists working now. I explored affinities for example with work such as Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), a preserved shark in formaldehyde, the artist's contemporary version of a *memento mori*. Hirst's simple image of immobility contrasted with a dynamic tension, and the blurring of the distinction between life and death, have affinities with the trapped figure caught in a liminal space on Beckett's stage. Another example, which suggested affinities with Beckett's use of light and dark was Monica Bonvicini's *Light Me Black* (2009), an installation in which a "massive sheaf of neon lights cancels your sight … Lured by this monstrous wattage, your eyes are scorched and assaulted" (Cummings, 2016). Although fascinating research has been carried out on Beckett's influence on artists, I would recommend more research using the work of contemporary artists to investigate Beckett's visual stage language. I believe this is a crucial part of our on-going dialogue with the plays.

Notwithstanding the importance of modern and contemporary art to this debate, I believe that further research into links with the art of the Old Masters continues to be of central importance. The concept of subversion which I have proposed provides a valuable approach to considering how these art works, which were so important to Beckett artistically and emotionally, could relate to his own creative life. Although excluding the spoken text from my analysis was a discipline which enabled me to focus on the visual, further research should be undertaken into the way in which the visual and the spoken work together. The fault-lines between language and what is shown on stage are of course important aspects of Beckett's aesthetic of failure, and indeed, in our understanding of art today the spoken word can pertain as much to art as the visual.

This thesis does not conclude that the theatre is the wrong place for Beckett's work: the term visual stage language offers due weight to the fact that it is within the framed stage space with its array of

theatrical tools that he did his visual creative work. However, it remains an intriguing proposition that performing the plays in an art gallery setting could be of interest: clearly, environment changes expectations, and this could reveal new insights into Beckett's theatre. New ways of performing the plays in galleries could result, for example creating specific spaces through the use of light and dark effects, something of great importance to Beckett's visual stage language. In addition, such a production could be curated along with chosen art works that reflect on the play, shown in a separate space as a contextual aid. This would be a practical iteration of my methodology of using examples from visual art to shed new light on the drama.

The implications of linking Beckett and art lead to a much wider intellectual terrain that considers the exciting possibilities offered by the breaking down of barriers between the different performing art forms and visual art. Aspects of performance are central to much contemporary art, which blurs the boundaries between art and drama; the extent to which this is also true for Beckett's work, especially his shorter plays, is something which needs to be investigated further. Towards the end of my research process, I was excited to come across Beckett's work *Film* (1966) in the permanent exhibition at the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris (at the Pompidou Centre); it was on show in the same room as installation and video works by Bruce Nauman. Although my research does not cover Beckett's work for film and television, with the exception of *Quad*[5], which has been performed on stage, the fact that both works are in the collection of one of the major global modern art institutions is proof that Beckett makes use of visual language to a high artistic level.

One of my initial recommendations was that the Beckett Estate should be encouraged to allow the re-publication of the *Theatrical Notebooks* which had suffered from a restricted availability due to their being out-of-print and thus commanding highly inflated prices (Gontarski, 2006/7, pp.9-10). As the notebooks show Beckett refining and extending the visual staging of his plays, this likely has hindered an appreciation of the visual stage language both in dramaturgical practice as it relates to new productions and also within the teaching and research fields. The fact that Beckett himself paid for the publication of these *Theatrical Notebooks*, (ibid. p.9) gives a strong indication of their importance. It was pleasing to me that Faber & Faber are re-publishing them: the *Theatrical Notebooks* for *Godot* and *Endgame* came out in August 2019 and *Krapp's Last Tape* and the *Shorter Plays* are due in summer 2020 (Faber & Faber website, 2020) However, the apparent decision not to re-publish the *Production Notebook* for *Happy Days* is regrettable as it provides important material on changes Beckett made, based on his own experience of working on the play in the theatre.

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[5] Although not on display at the time of my visit, the Musée national d'art moderne website lists *Quad I* & *II* as being in their collection (28/11/2018)

In conclusion, in moving the perspective away from the spoken texts I sought to reveal that Beckett created a visual body of work which can be compared with that of a visual artist. I hope that my research will help in promoting the necessary debate into the visual experimentation of the plays, bringing to light Beckett the artist in the theatre.

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Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany

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Atelier de Cézanne, Aix-en-Provence, France

Bauhaus Archives, Berlin, Germany

Bauhaus Foundation, Dessau, Germany

Bauhaus Museum, Weimar, Germany

Berggreun Museum, Berlin, Germany

Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, Germany

Bode-Museum, Berlin, Germany

Ernst Barlach Atelierhaus, Güstrow, Germany

Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg, Germany

Frick Collection, New York City, USA

Courtauld Gallery, London, England

Galerie Belvedere, Wien, Austria

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, Germany

Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany

Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, Germany

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany

Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany

Historisches Museum, Bamburg, Germany

Kenwood House, London, England

Kunsthalle Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany

Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany

Kunsthalle Wien, Wien, Austria

Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria

Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, Germany

Kunsthaus Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany

Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland

Künstlerhaus Ulm, Ulm, Germany

Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

K20, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern Switzerland

Kunstmuseum, Bonn, Germany

Kunstmuseum Moritzburg, Halle-Saale, Germany

Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Berlin, Germany

Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Köln, Germany

Kenwood House, London, England

Kolumba Kunstmuseum, Köln, Germany

Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, Germany

Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Wein, Austria

LehmbruckMuseum, Duisburg, Germany

LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz, Linz, Austria

Leopold Museum, Wein, Austria

Liebermann-Villa, Wannsee, Berlin, Germany

MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg, Germany

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, USA

Musée de Granet, Aix-en-Provence, France

Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble, France

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, Lyon, France

Musée National d'art Modern, Paris,France

Museum Berggruen, Berlin, Germany

Museum Brandhorst, München, Germany

Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, Germany

Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany

Museum für Franken Staatliches, Würzburg, Germany

Museum Hessen, Kassel, Germany

Museum im Kulturspeicher, Würzburg, Germany

Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany

Museum Ludwig, Köln, Germany

Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (MUMOK), Wien, Austria

Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York City, USA

Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany

Museum Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, Germany

Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

National Gallery, London, England

National Portrait Gallery, London, England

Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany

Neues Museum Nürnberg, Nürnberg, Germany

Neue Pinakothek, München, Germany

Niedersachsisches Landesmuseum Hannover, Hannover, Germany

Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg, Germany

Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen, Germany

Pergamonmuseum, Berlin, Germany

Pinakothek der Moderne, München, Germany

Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam, Germany

Sprengel Museum Hannover, Hannover, Germany

Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany

Staatliches Museum, Schwerin, Germany

Städel Kunstmuseum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, Germany

Tate Britain, London, England

Tate Modern, London, England

Tiroler Landesmuseen, Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, Austria

Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, Germany

Wallace Collection, London, England

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, USA

Würzburg Residenz, Würzburg, Germany

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland

Appendices

Timeline

The purpose of this timeline is to provide a reference tool for the reader, in terms of Beckett's life-long engagement with visual art and his friendships with artists and art experts. It also highlights key theatre productions with which he was involved and milestones in his life. However, it does not attempt to be a comprehensive summary or to act as a biographical survey.

1906   Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Foxrock near Dublin. In his youth he has picture of a Dürer's *Praying Hands* on his bedroom wall; his interest in the artist's work can be seen in the German diaries (1936/7). Hands feature prominently in his visual stage language in plays such as *Come and Go* and *Footfalls.*

1923   Enrols for an Arts degree at Trinity College, Dublin, studying literature and languages. During this time develops a passion for painting and is a regular visitor to the National Gallery in Dublin.

1927   April – August: stays in Florence, visiting art galleries and churches most days; makes repeated visits to the Uffizi gallery. Also visits Venice.

1928   First visit to Germany. Visits Kassel (in September and December) and stays with his uncle, "Boss" Sinclair, who is a modern art dealer; Beckett is introduced to the vibrant Weimar Republic art scene during his stay. He spends Christmas with the Sinclair family in 1929, 1930 and 1931.

1928   November: attends École Normale Supérieure, Paris, as an exchange lecturer. Beckett meets Thomas MacGreevy (1893-1967) who becomes a close friend and mentor. MacGreevy is well connected with art and literary circles in Paris and introduces Beckett to his friends, including James Joyce. Beckett corresponds with MacGreevy until the latter's death; their letters include many discussions on art. MacGreevy became an art critic and later the Director of the National Gallery of Ireland (1950-1963). In Paris Beckett visits major galleries such as the Louvre; he also visits smaller art galleries which are displaying art from the Weimar Republic artists, for example those associated with the *Die Brücke* German Expressionist group (for example Ernst Ludwig Kirchner) and the *Bauhaus Group* (for example Paul Klee and Oscar Schlemmer).

1929   Publication of his first essay on aesthetics: *Dante … Bruno. Vico..Joyce*

1930   October: becomes a lecturer in French at Trinity College, Dublin for two years.

1930   November: Beckett meets, through Thomas MacGreevy, the painter Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957). The friendship lasts until the artist's death; whenever Beckett is in Dublin he visits Yeats's studio.

1931   February: Beckett co-wrote and performed in a French parody of Corneille's play *Le Cid* called *Le Kid* at the Peacock theatre in Dublin.

1932   January: Beckett resigns his lecturer post at Trinity College and moves to Paris to become a full-time writer.

1933   June: Beckett's father dies of a heart-attack, which has a profound effect on him.

1934   Beckett moves to London, where he undergoes psychoanalysis. He applies to become an assistant curator at the National Gallery in London, using Jack B. Yeats as one of his referees. He is a regular visitor to all the major galleries in London (National Gallery, Victoria and Albert, Tate Gallery, Dulwich Picture Gallery, the Wallace Collection and Hampton Court). At the Tate he sees Cézanne's *Montagne Sainte Victoire* (1905/6) and writes to MacGreevy about the alienation he feels the painter achieves and the impact on his own aesthetic position.

1935   February: attends the Arlington Gallery, London where there is an exhibition of paintings by Estella Solomons, Mary Duncan and Louise Jacobs. This is one example of Beckett's active interest in contemporary art.

1936/7   September: begins seven months' tour of Germany. His letters to MacGreevy and the diaries he kept during this trip show him seeking out visual art, artists, collectors and art experts. Modern art is banned by the Nazi regime as so-called 'degenerate art', although in places the ban is not yet implemented; often Beckett has to get permission to view it or seek out private collections. During his stay he makes a study of German art, being at pains to acquire books which are being censored. These include books by the banned artist Franz Marc's *Theory of art*; the sacked Jewish director of the Moritzburg Gallery, Max Sauerlandt's *Die Kunst der letzten 30 jahre* (*The art of the last 30 years*); and Max Deri's *Neue Malerie* (*New Painting*). A brief summary below gives details of his itinerary, artworks seen, and meetings with artists and others in the art world:

- 2 September – 3 December: in **Hamburg** he makes many visits to the Kunsthalle where he admires the Dutch and Italian Masters and the modern art which is still on display (including Franz Marc, Emil Nolde, Oskar Kokoschka, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff). During his visit to the city he makes contact with modern art buyers who let him view their private collections. Meets many artists including Eduard Bargheer (he visits his studio) and Karl Ballmer whose painting *Kopf in Rot* he admires and analyses in terms of his aesthetic.

- December: in **Hannover** he visits the Provinzialmuseum, where he admires the Late Gothic wood sculptures of Tilman Riemenschneider. When in **Braunschweig** (5 December) he admires the Dom (cathedral) and the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum where he praises the Renaissance artist Giorgione's *Self-portrait.*

- 11 December – 22 January 1937: **Berlin**. Makes many visits to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Nationalgalerie and Deutsches Museum and admires the Italian, Flemish and Dutch collections. An Adam Elsheimer painting of a night landscape captures his eye, as well as portraits by Albrecht Dürer and Botticelli paintings. At Kronprinzenpalais views modern work by artists including Kokoschka, Munch, Kirchner, van Gogh and Schmidt-Rottlff. Visits the Neues Museum and is impressed with their Egyptian collection, Islamic and Indian art. In January meets Axel Kaun in Berlin; Beckett will later write to him about his distrust of language and how he wants to find a new form of expression.

- 23 January 1937: visits the Moritzburg Gallery in **Halle**, where the Nazis had created what they called a 'Schreckenskammer des Entarteten' (Chamber of Horrors of Degenerate Art) from the modern art collection. Many of these works were transferred to the infamous 'Entartete Kunst' exhibition in Munich (July 1937); subsequently these works were sold abroad or destroyed. Beckett admired paintings by artists such as Klee, Marc, Kirchner, Kandinsky, Feiniger and Munch.

- 24-27 January: visits art galleries in **Weimar, Erfurt and Leipzig.** In the Anger Museum in Erfurt modern art was still on display; he saw works by Kirchner, Kokoschka, Feininger, Kandinsky, Nolde, Dix and Barlach.

- 29 January – 19 February 1937: **Dresden**. Visits the Alte Akademie, Neue Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, the Albertinum and the Zwinger Courtyard. On 31 January he sees Kasper David Friedrich's *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes* (*Two men in contemplation of the moon*) at the Alte Akademie: Beckett later states that this painting inspired *Waiting for Godot.* At the Gemäldegalerie he admires paintings by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Dürer. 2 February: Beckett views the private collection of Will Grohmann, the former director of the Zwinger gallery who was dismissed by the Nazis in 1933 due to being Jewish and because of his promotion of modern artists such as Otto Dix, Paul Klee, Ernest Ludwig Kirchner, Wassily Kandinsky and Oskar Schlemmer. During his stay Beckett continues to meet with Grohmann to discuss modern artists. Grohmann was to become a major art critic and historian, publishing extensively on modern art after the World War II. Beckett also visits the art collector Ida Bienert, who has an extensive collection of modern art, including works by Cézanne, Marc, Munch and Kokoschka.

- 19 February 1937: travels to **Bamberg** via **Freiberg**, where he takes time to visit the cathedral with its thirteenth century *Golden Gate* porch containing statues of the saints. In Bamberg, Beckett makes numerous visits to the cathedral and is impressed by the ancient stone statues, worn down by age and the elements. He visits the Neue Residenz art gallery where he is impressed with paintings by Peter Breughel the Younger.

- 24 February 1937: **Würzburg**. Beckett visits the Residenz where he is impressed by the huge ceiling fresco *Allegory of the Planets and Continents* (1750-1753) by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo; Beckett would reference this fresco in *Endgame*. In the Fränkisches Leopold Museum he once again comments on how he likes the wood sculptures of Tilman Riemenscheider.

- 27 February 1937: **Nürnberg**. Visits the Germanische Museum's medieval art and the Sebalduskirche, where he admires the stone sculptures by Adam Kraft.

- 3 March 1937: **Regensburg**. Admires the cathedral and the city's churches.

- 5 March – 2 April 1937: **Munich.** Beckett makes many visits to the Alte Pinakothek and studies their Italian, Dutch and Flemish, Spanish and German collections. Dürer and Grünewald's paintings are of particular

interest to him. He buys art books, for example Georg Dehio's *Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst* (*History of German Art*). On 16 March visits Deutsches Museum and views German nineteenth century art and also paintings by Cézanne, van Gogh and Monet. On 17 March Beckett meets Otto Griebel, an artist who had been arrested and termed a 'degenerate artist' by the Gestapo. In Munich he tries unsuccessfully to acquire from the publisher a book of Barlach's drawings which has been banned. On 31 March he visits a private collection of paintings at the Graphisches Kabinett which include modern artists such as Heckel, Marc, Müller and Beckmann. On 2 April 1937 his German trip ends as he flies to London.

1937   October: moves to Paris permanently. He meets the Dutch painter Bram van Velde and his brother Geer. Bram will be a life-long friend and Beckett will consistently support him financially, helping to arrange exhibitions of his work and publicising his art through writing articles about it. This art criticism can be considered as helping him to develop his own aesthetic of failure. December: has a short affair, which leads to a longer friendship with Peggy Guggenheim a major art collector and exhibitor; he encourages her to concentrate on modern art. He becomes friends with the artist Alberto Giacometti, a friendship that lasts until Giacometti's death in 1966, and makes the acquaintance of the artist Marcel Duchamp, with whom he plays chess. Other artists he meets and comes to know include Wassily Kandinsky, Francis Picabia and Otto Freundlich. He attempts, but does not finish a play called *Human Wishes* based on the life of Samuel Johnson.

1939-1945   World War II

1940   Beckett and his partner, Suzanne, join the exodus from Paris after the Nazis invade. They make their way to Arcachon where they are neighbours with Marcel Duchamp and the Dada artist and writer Jean Crotti. Beckett spends a lot of his time playing chess with these two artists.

1941   Beckett and Suzanne return to Nazi-occupied Paris. He makes contact with Jeannine Picabia, daughter of the painter Francis Picabia, who is the leader of the Resistance cell 'Gloria SMH'. Beckett joins the cell until it is betrayed and he is forced to flee Paris and go on the run.

1942	In exile in Roussillon in the south of France until 1944. Here he meets the Jewish French/Polish artist Henri Hayden, who will become a close friend until the artist's death. Beckett will write introductions to Hayden's work and help set-up and attend art exhibitions of his work. Beckett joins another Resistance cell. He writes the novel *Watt* during his exile.
1943	Works on a farm near Roussillon.
1944	Returns to Paris after Liberation.
1945	For his work in the Resistance, Beckett is awarded the Croix de Guerre. He joins the Irish Red Cross as a volunteer in Normandy.
1946	*Cahiers d'Art* publishes Beckett's 'La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde le Pantalon'
1947	Friendship with the art historian Georges Duthuit who is the editor of the art and literature periodical *Transition*, for which Beckett does translation work and also writes his own articles. Beckett's 'Duthuit Dialogues' published in this journal, ostensibly on three modern artists, can be considered an essay on his own aesthetic position. Duthuit's wife Marguerite is the daughter of the artist Henri Matisse, whose art work is used in the journal. Beckett completes his first play called *Eleutheria;* this play is not published or performed during his life-time.
1948- 49	Beckett writes of *Waiting for Godot* in French. During this very creative period he completes the novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, all in French: these titles will become known as *The Trilogy*.
1950	Beckett meets the publisher Jérôme Lindon and signs a contract with his company Les Éditions de Minuit for his work in French.
1951	Has a property built in Ussy-sur-Marne, which will become his writing refuge.
1952	November: *Waiting for Godot* begins rehearsals in Paris
1953	His first performed play *Waiting for Godot* is given its premiere at Théâtre de Babylone in Paris. Through his American publisher Barney Rosset, Beckett meets the abstract expressionist artist Joan Mitchell in Paris; their friendship lasts until Beckett's death. He attends art exhibitions by Mitchell and makes visits to her studio; her partner was the Canadian artist Jean Riopelle.

1954	Beckett attempts a first draft of *Endgame* in French
1955	*Waiting for Godot* receives its first performance in English at the Arts Theatre in London.
1956	Beckett starts a friendship with the Jewish Romanian artist Avigdor Arikha, which lasts until Beckett's death. As with his friendships with other artists, Beckett helps Arikha to set up exhibitions of his work, writing introductory pieces for the catalogues and supporting the family financially.
1957	January: the radio play *All that Fall* broadcast by BBC Third programme. April: premiere of *Endgame* (in French) and *Act without Words I* at Royal Court, London
1958	January: *Act without Words II* has its first performance at the ICA in London. May: Beckett travels to Berne in Switzerland to attend a retrospective of Bram van Velde at the Kunsthalle. He also views their extensive collection of paintings by Paul Klee. October: premiere of *Krapp's Last Tape* takes place at Royal Court Theatre, London
1959	July: Beckett is given an honorary D. Litt. from Trinity College, Dublin.
1960	August: begins a first draft of *Happy Days*
1961	Alberto Giacometti and Beckett work together to design the tree for a revival of *Waiting for Godot* at the Odéon Theâtre de France in Paris. September: first performance of *Happy Days* is given at the Cherry Lane Theatre, New York City.
1962	May: attends a private view of Henri Hayden's work at Galerie Suillerot and in the same month visits two Joan Mitchell exhibitions in Paris (Galerie Jacques Dubourg and Galerie Lawrence)
1963	June: Beckett attends rehearsals for *Play*, which has its premiere at Ulmer Theater, Ulm-Donau, Germany. During rehearsals for *Play* in London he meets Billie Whitelaw, who will become one of his favoured actors.
1964	July: in New York, visits the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum. Makes *Film,* a motion picture with Buster Keaton
1965	October: Beckett directs Pierre Chabert in Robert Pinget's *L'Hypothèse* at Musée d'Art Moderne, as part of the Biennale de Paris.

1966   January: *Come and Go* has it premiere at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt in Berlin. February: Beckett directs *Come and Go* at Odéon Theatre de France, Paris. Beckett goes twice to the exhibition at the Royal Academy in London of the post-impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947). Max Ernst illustrates an edition of Beckett's short prose piece *From an Abandoned Work.* Beckett had first met Ernst through his friendship with Peggy Guggenheim in 1937.

1967   September: Beckett directs *Endgame* at Schiller-Theater Werkstatt in Berlin

1968   May: Beckett attends Henri Hayden art exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. November: attends Bram van Velde's exhibition at the Galerie Knoedler in Paris

1969   Visits the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in-between rehearsals for his own production at the Schiller-Theater of *Krapp's Last Tape;* he saw the James Whistler exhibition and revisited the collection of paintings by Watteau at the Charlottenburg Palace. October: Beckett is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1970   April: directs *Krapp's Last Tape* at Théâtre Récamier, Paris

1971   September: Beckett directs *Happy Days* at Schiller-Theater Werkstatt in Berlin

1972   June: Beckett urges the theatre designer Jocelyn Herbert to see his friend Sergio de Castro's art exhibition at the Wildenstein Gallery in London. Beckett regularly attended de Castro's exhibitions and visited him in his studio in Paris. The two friends are buried close to each other in the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris, according to de Castro's wishes. September: *Not I* premiered at the Lincoln Centre Theatre, New York City

1973   January: Beckett takes rehearsals for *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape* which open at the Royal Court in London. April: donates part of his collection of publications and pictures to the Beckett collection at Reading University.

1974   Beckett collaborates with the American Abstract Expressionist and Neo-Dada artist Jasper Johns on an edition of an artist book containing Beckett's prose fragments *Foirades/Fizzles*

1975   August: Beckett receives a gift of a small sculpture from Vadim Sidur, a Russian sculptor; he places it on the windowsill outside his study.

1976	May: *That Time* and *Footfalls* have their premieres at Royal Court Theatre, London: Beckett is the director of *Footfalls*. October: Beckett directs *That Time* and *Footfalls* at Schiller-Theater Werkstatt in Berlin.
1977	September: takes rehearsals for San Quentin Drama Workshop production of *Krapp's Last Tape* at Akademie der Künste, Berlin
1978	Beckett is introduced to the painter Louis le Brocquy and his artist wife Anne Madden, who would become friends. In 1979 Beckett would visit le Brocquy's exhibition at Galerie Jeanne Bucher in Paris. Le Brocquy would design the tree for Walter Asmus' production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1991. April: directs *Footfalls* and *Not I* at Théâtre d'Orsay, Paris.
1979	June: Beckett directs *Happy Days* at the Royal Court, London.
1980	May: Beckett directs *Endgame* with the San Quentin Drama Workshop at Riverside Studios, London. *A Piece of Monologue* is given its first performance at the Annex at La Mama, ETC in New York City.
1981	April: *Rockaby* receives its first performance at the Centre for Theater Research in Buffalo, New York. May: *Ohio Impromptu* premiered at Ohio State University. June: Beckett directs *Quad* for Süddeutcher Rundfunk, Stuttgart.
1982	July: *Catastrophe* first performed at the Avignon Festival in France.
1983	June: first stage performance of *What Where* at the Harold Clurman Theatre, New York City
1984	February: Beckett attends rehearsals for San Quentin Drama Workshop's *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Walter Asmus, at Riverside Studios, London.
1985	Beckett agrees to the publishing of his *Theatrical Notebooks.*
1986	Beckett refuses to give Barney Rosset and John Calder permission to publish his first written play *Eleutheria* (1947).
1988	Publication of artist book with Beckett's last prose work, *Stirrings Still*, with illustrations by the artist Louis le Brocquy.
1989	Beckett dies in Paris on 22 December and is buried in Cimetière de Montparnasse.

Sources used:

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