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**Speech-Gesture Complexes and Directions for the Stage in Beckett
and Joyce**

By

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Introduction

The audience for a 1984 production of *Endgame*, directed by Joanne Akalaitis, received this message from the author, as part of their programme for the evening:

Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me [...] The American Repertory Theatre production which dismisses my directions is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this.¹

This served as restitution for Grove Press, who then withdrew the legal injunction they had threatened against the theatre. The A.R.T., having set the play in a New York subway, after a nuclear holocaust, dismantled the stage directions on the grounds that 'strict adherence to each parenthesis of the published text [...] robs collaborating artists of their interpretive freedom' (Kalb, 79). This hostility between the contrary intentions of practitioners, publishers and the estate's lawyers is a phenomenon peculiar to Beckett, and has continued in his absence. In 1994, Deborah Warner's production of *Footfalls* at the Garrick, in which May roamed around the stage and over the dress circle, rather than pacing up and down a confined strip, was quickly terminated by the Beckett estate, who told the director she would 'never do Beckett again'.² At the core of these disputes are the stage directions, which in their two-plane function, as fictional representations and directives for performance, encompass tussles between 'interpretive freedoms', directorial authority and the relationship between the text and its physical incarnation. Whereas directors such as Akalaitis and Warner dismiss the directions to make space for

¹ Quoted in Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 79.

² Reading Archive MS 4137, *The Observer*, December 17, 1994.

their own vision, critics often encourage a form of reading in which stage directions, misunderstood as solely the province of the director, are ancillary to the dialogue. Sites of contestation such as these arise from conflicts of professional interest, but also inadequate apprehensions of a language which is both representational and directive. As well as tone and manner of delivery, documentary scene setting and lighting, textual directions determine postures, facial movements and gesture, all of which, however slight, serve to complicate the tone, timing and intentions of dialogue by working with or against what is uttered. At the same time, they prescribe tangible incarnations which pass these restive bodies before the eyes of an audience. Directions are not only to be read, but seen; if not seen, then imagined as incarnate.

It has been noted of Beckett that: 'the direction is always written into his texts in the most literal way [...] the word is never conceived outside the framework of the accompanying gesture'.³ Yet the peculiar coercive authority of his directions lies partly in the correspondence between Beckett's own experience as a director and his activity as a writer. Directing his own plays became a form of public re-reading, where he would allow variations suggested by stage management to enter compositional intent. By refracting various theatrical traditions through Beckett, the first chapter will consider the complexities between directions and dialogue as correspondences between compositional and directorial intent. Previously unexamined influences will be traced in production techniques and the kinds of static theatre he admired; the blind beggars in Synge, choreographic repetitiveness in Yeats, who once asked his actors to rehearse in barrels; bodily localisation and affective musculature in the productions of Meyerhold; Maeterlinck's marionette dramas, which replaced mimetic with symbolic bodies.

³ Pierre Chabert, 'Beckett as Director', *Gambit*, 7:28 (1976), 52.

The second chapter will analyse ‘Circe’ in terms of its diversions from theatrical conventions, and in relation to the drama, particularly *Hamlet*, which informs the wider structure of *Ulysses*. Having twice been rejected by the Abbey theatre, the chapter is to some extent Joyce’s response to Yeatsian Revivalist theatre: ‘Circe’ borrows speech-gesture patterns from these plays, especially with regard to notions of ritual and magic, in order to create its own kind of counter-Revivalist drama, with alternative takes on national history. The mingling of private and communal historicism and the ways in which the ritualised body in ‘Circe’ preserves an ancient corporeality is related to certain theoretical practices in Yeats: his view of theatre as occurring ‘on the stage and in the mind’⁴, which also has direct bearing on Beckett’s plays, is refracted throughout ‘Circe’ in the complexities of relation between the psychic and the somatic: as hallucinations are summoned through ritual acts, bodily impulses are seen germinating from psychic intentions, whilst mental activity takes its ‘structural rhythm’ from physiological tendencies, or the rhythms of the ritualised body.

Parallels will be drawn between the Yeatsian view of bodily recall as a phenomenon of cultural memory, and the linguist Marcel Jousse’s theory of the gestural origins of language. These forms of corporeal memory underlie the comic stage language of ‘Circe’, where vocal functions are transformed by Joyce so that speech and gesture become interchangeable: stage directions, liberated from the function of referring to an actual stage, mime the impossibility of incarnating physical referents, and foreground the

⁴ W.B. Yeats, Preface for *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (London: Bullen, 1911), p.x.

activity of reading directions which dissolve boundaries between the imaginary and the incarnate.

Chapter Two will consider the directions in 'Circe' as cross-pollinations of stage language and interior languages of private feeling. Interior monologues, which until this chapter had remained unspoken and unseen, are transformed into physical signals and public spectacle by the stage directions. Private routines of mind are turned in 'Circe' into theatrical gestures, and stage directions become motifs for the thousand complexities in the minds of the characters. This passage from the private to the public will be related to the differences in compositional intent between fiction written for the reader and theatre as a public spectacle, and how this foregrounds a shift in relations between body and voice.

Corporeal Gesture and Disembodied Voice in Beckett's Plays

The Symbolic and the Grotesque

Beckett's theatre is inhabited by reluctant and scarcely mobile bodies, moribunds preserved as in suspended animation by the stage directions and prevented from ever resting at last. The dual function of directions, which prescribe specifics of stage management and, on the page, call to the eye of the mind, preserves the bodies both in their natural movements and as formal articulations, in which gestures stand for attitudes of mind. This twofold division becomes symbiotic in the actor's body: in his material presence, gestures are uniquely his own; yet his limbs are instruments of a distant will, that of the stage directions. The Beckettian body, in its infirmity and unhappiness, is at once a natural and a formal body 'frozen by its function as an artificial object'.⁵ Hindered by their own gravity, Vladimir and Estragon, '[grotesquely rigid ...remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.]'⁶ F in *Ghost Trio* over and again '[relapses into opening pose, bowed over cassette]' (410). Barely perceptible gestures emerge from immobility, taking their course against the stillness of uninhabited space, only to return to it soon after:

[Eyes open, hands unclasp, return to mound. Pause. She clasps hands to breast again, closes eyes, lips move again in inaudible addendum, say five seconds. Low.] (Happy Days, 138)

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 28.

⁶ Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber, 1986), 20.

Stasis is a symptom of physical affliction, where minute gestures are all a character can muster. While '[*Embedded up to above her waist*]' (138), Winnie is still able to clasp her hands and pray, just before brushing her teeth; the routines with her hands are her hope, they keep her distracted, enable her to relish her talk. When Beckett saw the actor Michael Dolan in 1924, playing a modern Job in T.C. Murray's *Autumn Fire*, he remarked how much the hand movements had come into representing a kind of redemption when, 'as a man who was maimed and stricken', he had 'all these tragic occurrences falling upon him.'⁷ Manual gestures are the reserve of the stricken: Winnie's lips do not move inaudibly in prayer in the second act because she cannot gesture towards it. Hope disappears along with the use of her hands.

The stilled gesture of Krapp's cupped hand both makes a show of his near deafness, and intensifies his immobility as he strains to catch himself as he was. This freezes him into a formal tableau. He listens, grotesquely rigid, to a voice coming from a body no longer his own. As he bends motionless over the machine, the Krapp who is just before his end can scarcely hear himself as he talks of his young body lying, without moving, across the woman in the upper lake. Recurring economies of gesture are Beckett's theatrical tools. In his own production of *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Schiller-Theater (1969), Beckett instructed Martin Held to fold his arms across his body and clutch his upper-arms;⁸ quoting himself in his 1976 production of *Footfalls*, he instructed Billie Whitelaw to reproduce this gesture.

⁷ Bill Cunningham on Telefis Eireann radio programme, quoted in James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (London: John Calder, 1979), 282.

⁸ Donald McMillan and Martha Fehesenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* (London: John Calder, 1988), 261.

Producers don't seem to have any sense of form in movement [...] 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 recognise them from before.⁹

Krapp hugs himself: his body seeks a warmth which is also symbolic, in that he exists only for himself, having 'nothing to talk to but his dying self, and nothing to talk to him but his dead one.'¹⁰ This is echoed by May in *Footfalls*: Beckett stipulated her feeling 'cold the whole time' in the way she 'holds [her] body. Everything is frost and night'; but her posture also suggests 'that May is there exclusively for herself.'¹¹

The directions give precise formal arrangements for stricken bodies, which are also the natural bodies of the actors. Two-plane mediations between the fictional and physical are accented by forcing the actors to share the painful conditions of their characters. In *Play*, the fatigue involved in kneeling with '[*the neck held fast in the urn's mouth*]' (307) is worsened by the unblinking glare of the spotlight. Playing Mouth, the actress in *Not I* is strapped rigidly into a chair high above the stage.¹² Billie Whitelaw described *Not I* as 'unlearnable':¹³ the play is partly a reflection on the process of learning to speak, or not learning the meaning of the pronoun 'I', yet the actress' mind, as rigidly restrained as her body, is consumed by the extreme concentration the role requires. The disembodiment of the actress and the insistence on rapid delivery, heighten the textuality of the theatrical

⁹ To Charles Marowitz, *Encore*, March-April 1962, 44.

¹⁰ Beckett to Alan Schneider, 1960, in Maurice Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 59.

¹¹ Walter D. Asmus, 'Rehearsal Notes for the German Premiere of Beckett's *That Time* and *Footfalls*' in S.E. Gontarski (ed.), *On Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 338.

¹² For a discussion of the physical trials in acting Mouth, see William B. Worthen, 'Beckett's Actor', *Modern Drama* Vol. 26 (1983), pp. 415-424.

¹³ Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw . . . Who He?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 142.

act; Mouth's representational absence also belongs to the actress telling the tale of 'she', refusing to relinquish the third person. In Alvin Epstein's 1984 production of *Endgame* at the Samuel Beckett Theatre, New York, Peter Evans' Clov mimed this duplicity of textual form and physical movement by means of the '[*Stiff, staggering walk*]' (92) prescribed in the textual directions. Clov suffers from an actual sickness which keeps him from sitting, and staggers as if his legs are unable to keep up with his head and his will. With knees bent and legs apart, Evans shuffled in a formal manner that conveyed pain without resembling any particular kind of limp. Jonathan Kalb described it as 'like a danced abstraction of cripplehood', both formal and natural, appearing to perform both for the audience and as part of his interaction with Hamm.¹⁴ Stage directions, which manifest formal and natural bodies, contain and are contained by the actors' unhappy postures, precisely determined by Beckett, to the last gasp.

The state of being, or remaining, on stage is a formal incarnation. Directions in the text, collapsing the natural and artificial nature of theatre, force Beckett's invalids to endure these cruelties, signaling formal patterns of movement and acting as goads for the suffering actor: playing Lucky, the actor cannot but feel the tug of the rope. Neither narrative voice nor diegetic perspective, stage directions serve to mediate between textual and scenic fictions. They are at once representational and directive, intended for the solitary reader, and practitioners putting the play in its physical form. This complex of illocutionary forces contained in textual directions demands 'a mental activity which is far more precise and more socially co-ordinated than the reading of other fictional texts.'¹⁵ This is particularly the case when the play-script directions are considered in the light of Beckett's own directorial practice.

¹⁴ Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 42.

¹⁵ Jeanette Laillou Savona, 'Didascalía as Speech Act', *Modern Drama* Vol. 25 (1982), pp.25-35.

The infirm natural body is directed as a series of static abstractions, where patterns of gesture exist in correspondence with the patterns the gesture evokes in the mind. In Beckett's theatre, '[*grotesquely rigid*]' bodies mime physical affliction, but also transcend their imitativeness as gestures become symbols of affliction: Clov's 'danced abstraction of cripplehood' is the physical correlative of an internal condition, as are the folded arms of May and Krapp. The Beckettian body is a distant relation of the bodies of Symbolist theatre, where gestures, rather than serve as direct imitation, symbolised deeps of mind, and mime was like overheard thought, beginning and ending before words have formed themselves. Maurice Maeterlinck, the originator of a tradition of Symbolist theatre which stretches through Yeats and Irish Revivalism, and culminates in Beckett, imagined material presence as a projection of subliminal forms. This became the theatrical norm in the 1890s: the actor's physical imitativeness was viewed as inhibiting formalised patterns of gesture from evoking 'profounds of mind' (*Ohio Impromptu*, 448); to maintain an abstract quality in which gestures are liberated from natural imitative bonds, the Symbolists sought to replace the natural actor with the purely formal non-living body of a marionette.

Vladimir and Estragon, '[*arms sagging, head sunk, sagging at the knees*]', which Peter Evans turned into Clov's stiff walk, anticipate the rigid bow of F's head in *Ghost Trio* and the 'stiff, slow puppet-like'¹⁶ gestures in *Come and Go*. These directions, which articulate barely perceptible movements as puppet-like abstractions, partly originate in marionette theatre. Maeterlinck wrote plays for marionettes from the conviction that the actor's physical presence, held captive by its own weight, detracts from the abstract

¹⁶ Beckett to Schneider, 1981, in Harmon, 417.

quality in the gestures. The view of his English apologist, Arthur Symons, that ‘two people should be able to sit quietly in a room, without ever leaving their chairs, and to hold our attention’¹⁷ fundamentally changed the way Yeats would imagine theatrical bodies; in the light of Symbolist abstraction, stiff, slow and puppet-like, an opening stage direction for *At the Hawk’s Well* states that movements should ‘[suggest a marionette]’.¹⁸

Symons spoke of Maeterlinck’s drama as a ‘theatre of artificial beings, who are at once more ghostly and more mechanical than the living actors whom we are accustomed to see’,¹⁹ who ‘move like quiet ghosts across the stage, mysterious to us and not less mysterious to one another’ (*Plays, Acting and Music*, 77) talking ‘in a toneless language’, where ‘no actor makes a gesture which has not been regulated for him’ (68). The ‘ghostly and mechanical’ gestures, scarcely emerging from stasis, and the ‘toneless’ delivery, trace lines which intersect in Beckett.

Symons thought ‘Maeterlinck should be acted in this solemn way, in a kind of convention’. He described the acting in a London production of ‘Interior’ as ‘not sufficiently monotonous, with that fine monotony which is part of the secret of Maeterlinck [...] these busy actors occupied themselves in making points, instead of submitting passively [...] to the betrayal of these emotions in a few, reticent, and almost unwilling words’ (81). Symons preferred the productions of Maeterlinck by Edward Gordon Craig, a director for the whom the physical ebullience of actors was a source of dismay: ‘In the modern theatre, owing to the use of the bodies of men and women *as*

¹⁷ Arthur Symons, *Plays, Acting and Music* (London: Constable, 1909), 171.

¹⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Collected Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1953), 210.

¹⁹ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Constable, 1899), 153.

their material, all which is presented there is of an accidental nature', in which he includes 'the actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sounds of his voice' (82). Craig held that 'art can admit of no accidents', preferring acting to consist for the main part of the 'symbolical gesture' of marionettes: 'The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure - the Über-marionette'.²⁰ These 'inanimate figures' anticipate the strict determination in Beckett's directions, which, in their meticulous regulation of physical monotony, allow for no accidents. The marionette articulates the modern body as a site of contradiction between unconscious vitality and mechanical selfhood by foregrounding the latter: bodies are not peculiar to themselves, but exist as impersonal beings. This perception is central to Beckett, although the Beckettian body is not animated by a mind or spirit coming down into an automaton; this would suppose that the body itself is without an inside and without a self. His stage directions conserve the doubleness of the formal and natural: between the psychic and physiological there take place exchanges which stand in the way of defining gesture complexes as either psychic or somatic.

While discussing the minimal gestural responses he had in mind for F in *Ghost Trio*, Beckett referred the actor Ronald Pickup to Heinrich von Kleist's essay 'About the Marionette Theatre'.²¹ His fondness for this essay, from which he found an articulation of the kind of slow, deliberate and graceful movement, emerging from and then returning to stasis, the notion of being guided as F glides through his predetermined footsteps, dates back much further; Kleist's marionettes were invoked in rehearsals for *Happy Days* in

²⁰ J. Michael Walton (ed.), *Craig on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1983), 84.

²¹ See Knowlson and Pilling (1979), 279.

1971,²² and, although there is no documented record, may have helped him imagine Lucky's 'danced abstraction of cripplehood.'

Kleist's essay of 1810, a translation of which appears in Gordon Craig's *The Marionette* (1918), predates the ideas of a theatrical movement which sought to supplant actors with marionettes, or to alter the style of acting so that actors aspire to the condition of marionettes. This for the purposes of a particular kind of theatre, one in which the outer stillness suggests a quality borne within the character but which cannot come to light, the figure on stage going through the motions of life without a living body. The Beckettian actor is weighed down by his natural body's grotesqueness and pratfalls, yet the balletic arrangement even of clownish routines, the regulated and solemn motions of his theatre have a kinship with the marionette theatre, one which Beckett brought to light as a practitioner.

Kleist accentuates the mobility and ease with which marionettes move: 'they have the advantage of being anti-gravitational. They are not hindered with the inertness of matter, [...] because the lifting power is greater than that which keeps them down.'²³ Imagining Lucky as a grotesque puppet, too burdened with his own flesh to achieve the graceful and formal mobility of Kleist's puppets, adds suggestiveness to the rope which ties him to Pozzo. Kleist remarks in his essay that 'the dancer who wished to perfect his art could learn many things from [puppets]' (101); Lucky is hailed not only as a thinker but a dancer, and Pozzo, the 'actor', hopes by pulling the rope to edify and amuse his audience. '[*Lucky dances. He stops.*]' Then, he '[*executes the same movements, stops*]' (39).

²² James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 584.

²³ Heinrich Von Kleist, 'About the Marionette Theatre', trans. Cherna Murray, *Life and Letters Today* Vol. 16, No. 8 (1937), 103.

Beckett's stage direction is merely: '[*Lucky dances*]' (39), there are no further indications of movement, the kind of imprecision which led him to the view that Godot was undisciplined in terms of its stage form. Although Beckett taped Lucky's speech for Jack MacGowran to teach him the rhythms, there is no word about the dance. Jean Martin in the 1953 production at the Théâtre de Babylone describes the physical effects without once mentioning the dance (McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 76); neither does Roger Blin, who directed that original production, make mention of this, nor J.Pat Miller, whom Beckett declared as 'the best Lucky I have ever seen.' The lack of content in the stage directions and the absence of notations in the Schiller-Theatre production notebooks forces us to go to the play-text to find a physical image of the form the dance might take: Pozzo tells his audience that it is called: 'The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net' (39).

Toby Silverman Zinman provides a useful survey of the dance from the earliest productions onwards and concludes: 'In all but one version I have seen of Lucky's dance, the actor begins by lifting one foot, bending his knee at a right angle to his other leg, and raising his arms.'²⁴ This posture is sometimes repeated twice more, when in Act Two, Vladimir suggests, after they have done their exercises, that they 'do the tree' as a pastime, following which, we are told, '[*Vladimir does the tree, staggering about on one leg*]' (62). The staggering is partly an imitation of Lucky's loss of balance after raising his leg, and in performance, would resemble Lucky's dance.

²⁴ Toby Silverman Zinman, 'Lucky's Dance in *Waiting for Godot*', *Modern Drama* Vol. 38 (1995), 313.

Alan Schneider discussed using the position called ‘the tree’ as being what Beckett had in mind: ‘Sam once even drew a little diagram to show me exactly what he meant.’²⁵

Beckett also sketched a diagram for Peter Hall in 1955, ‘*Let’s do the tree. Sketch herewith*’ (Harmon, 4) representing a man with his knee at a right angle to his other leg. It is initially unclear how this posture might be related to its description as ‘the Net’; a connection may exist with a passage in the Kleist essay, if ‘net’ is understood in a proverbial context. ‘To dance in a net’ is an English proverb which means ‘to proceed under observation while supposing oneself unobserved’. It is cited in *English Proverbs* in both 1659 and in 1670: ‘Think not you are undetected. You dance in a nett, and you think no body sees you.’ Kleist’s marionettes are graceful precisely because they lack self-consciousness: they are unaware that they are being watched. To demonstrate the rigid awkwardness caused by self-consciousness, one of the narrators in Kleist recounts a story in which a boy loses the free play of his gestures, a result of becoming self-conscious; the posture the boy adopts is similar to Lucky’s dance as manifest in productions, and Beckett’s image of ‘the Tree’:

I bathed about three years ago, with a young man who at that time possessed extraordinary charm. He might have been about sixteen, and only indistinctly could one see the first traces of vanity [...] We had recently seen in Paris ‘The youth drawing a thorn from his foot’. A copy of this statue is well known and is present in most German collections. A glance he cast in a large mirror, while putting his foot on a stool to try it, reminded him of this statue. He smiled and told me of the discovery he had made. I had had the same idea but, either to test the strength of his charm, or to damp his vanity a little, I laughed, and replied

²⁵ Alan Schneider, ‘Working with Beckett,’ in *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 245.

that he saw ghosts. He blushed, and lifted his foot again to prove it, but the experiment failed, as could have been foreseen. Confused, he lifted his foot three, four, perhaps even ten times. In vain, he was unable to produce the same movement again. On the contrary, his movements now had such a comical element that I could hardly refrain from laughing. From that day, so to speak from that moment, an inconceivable change occurred in the young man. He began to stand before the mirror for days, and lost one charm after another. *An invisible and inconceivable power had come like an iron net about the free play of his gestures*, and after one year there was not a trace of his charm which before had delighted the eyes of his companions. (104) (my emphasis)

Lucky's dance is a mime which might convey a sense of lost artistic skill and a kind of grotesque self-consciousness which sends spasms through his limbs. His sense of being observed is closely related to the implicit intention that he dances to impress his master, so that he will remain in his service. His dance is his thinking overheard, and when he starts to think, aloud, the self-consciousness of the mock-scholarly clauses sends spasmodic ripples through a syntax without a centre of gravity. Unlike Kleist's supple marionettes, where 'every movement [has] a centre of gravity' (101), part of 'the structure of a body which has [...] no consciousness' (105), Lucky is incapacitated by the superabundant consciousness that he is being watched and judged. That he carries excess weight is an inversion of Kleist's marionettes, who are 'anti'gravitational', whose movements are such because 'the lifting power is greater than that which keeps them down.'

The dance is symbolic of the net which has come about the play of Lucky's gestures. It mimes both his resourcefulness and incapacity. But it is conceived from a sense of the grotesque: that is to say, despite its abstraction, the dance should proceed from Lucky's infirm physical condition. In this sense it is reminiscent of the grotesque strand of marionette theatre, bringing to mind certain figures in the plays of Michael de Ghelderode: for instance, in *The School for Clowns* (1936) there is a mime at the beginning of Act 1 Scene 7 where the 'master of buffoons': '[*improvises the strange figures of a tipsy puppet*], and when the music ends, the dancer [*remains as though suspended on wires*].'²⁶

The grotesque, a genre of low comedy which has manifestations in the fairground booth, French cabaret and English music-hall, is a kind of low comedy which subordinates psychology to artifice, miming a stylised incompetence. Meyerhold remarked that 'the grotesque helps the actor to portray the real as symbolic and to replace caricature with exaggerated parody'.²⁷ This was the spirit in which Beckett imagined *Godot*: in January 1953, four days after its opening, he wrote to Roger Blin admonishing him for a textual deviation:

One thing which annoys me is Estragon's trousers. I naturally asked Suzanne if they fell completely. She told me that they were held up half way. They must not, absolutely must not ... The spirit of the play, to the extent that it has any, is

²⁶ Michel de Ghelderode, *Théâtre* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952), 306-7, quoted in Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automaton, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 108.

²⁷ Quoted in Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1979; repr. 1995), 129.

that nothing is more grotesque than the tragic and that must be expressed until the end, and especially at the end.²⁸

The description of Lucky's dance as 'The Net', which leads to a mime of the 'iron net' in Kleist, reveal assumptions that dialogue was conceived without envisaging stage movement to be misplaced. Beckett's more explicit later use of the Kleistian marionette, in his role as director, reiterates this earlier compositional indebtedness. The stage direction, in collaboration with the dialogue, preserves the puppet-like dance in its abstract integrity: it becomes a symbol of Lucky's oppressed sense of always being watched. Yet Lucky's bodily presence contains a dualism which the Symbolist marionette lacks: that is to say, its abstraction proceeds from, rather than displacing, the disorders of an atrophied living body. Materiality and abstraction combine in staged bodies, and directions merge formal symbols of a consciousness deeper than speech, with the grotesqueness of an infirm natural body.

²⁸ The French transcript of this letter appears in the introduction to *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: Endgame* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1993), xiv.

Didascalía and Directors

The staged contradiction of bodies as symbolic and grotesque becomes clearer if the textual directions are considered in the light of Beckett's activity as a director. In 1975, he accepted an invitation by the Schiller-Theater to direct *Godot*; the extensive notebook or *Regiebuch* he kept assiduously during this production is testament to his view that the play was 'a mess',²⁹ perhaps because he remembered not being entirely at home in the theatre. During Roger Blin's first production in 1953, interpretation was cautiously let into the room, although Blin worked out the presentation of physical infirmities from the text: 'For the characters, I took as springboard their physical defects, real or implied':³⁰ Vladimir's constant need to urinate, Estragon's drowsiness, Pozzo's heart trouble, Lucky's palsy. Blin would walk critically with Latour and Raimbourg until each had a stride determined by his malady: Estragon's aching feet and Vladimir's prostate trouble. Years later, as an experienced practitioner, Beckett perhaps thought the interpretative content of *Godot*'s stage directions too high, and not regulated enough: '[*Lucky dances*]', where no further indication is given, is a case in point. The play contains several stage directions which defy scenic realisation, for instance: 'Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other . . . [*He searches for the contrary of saved*] . . . damned' (14). It cannot be conveyed to an audience that Vladimir searches for a 'contrary'; the decasyllabic stage direction is impossible to perform and contains a joke reserved exclusively for the reader, although Beckett kept in practical jokes even as a practitioner: the door '[*imperceptibly ajar*]' (408) in *Ghost Trio*.

²⁹ To Walter Asmus, quoted in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 87.

³⁰ *Le Nouvel Observateur* (September 26, 1981), quoted in Ruby Cohn, *From Desire to Godot* (London: University of California Press, 1987), 23.

Beckett began directing his own plays for the stage in the middle years of the 1960s, having until then assisted or advised other more experienced directors, such as Roger Blin, Jean-Marie Serreau, George Devine, Anthony Page, Donald McWhinnie.

Experience in the theatre re-shaped his dramatic imagination, and served to increase the abstract coercive force in the stage directions. The possibility of interpretation in the early plays is substantial. In the late plays, where dialogue is subsumed by stage directions, there are few artistic choices left to the director without dissolving the play's abstract integrity:

I see *Come & Go* very formal. Strictly identical attitudes & movements. The getting up, going, return, sitting, whispered confidence, shocked reaction (sole colour), finger to lips, etc. the same for all 3. Absent one not wholly invisible. Same toneless voices save for 'Oh!'s. Stiff, slow, puppet-like. (Harmon, 417)

In the increased formality of the later plays, Beckett moved further away from representations of natural bodies, towards the kind of bodily abstraction, 'stiff, slow, puppet-like', set forward by Kleist. As the 'formal' becomes purer and more precisely regulated, little scope is left the director. Alan Schneider describes his work on *Play* in terms of the detailed and deferential realisation of its stage directions:

I picked the actors . . . I decided on the curve and shape and size and texture and location of the urns in question. I worked out the aesthetics and mechanics (fascinating and difficult) of that omnipresent light beam, which in essence became not only the categorical imperative but the seeing eye of the author.³¹

³¹ Quoted in 'Working with Beckett', *Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. Edouard Morot-Sir and Howard Harper (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 274-5.

Schneider was often criticised for his unquestioning adherence to the smallest details of Beckett's 'seeing eye', on the grounds that the imperialism of the playwright's vision allows the director none. This is a common view amongst practitioners and performance theorists, who read stage directions not as didascalia but as dispensable textual flotsam, relegating them to a position secondary to the dialogue. That the 'dramatist elects himself as director, stage manager, lighting operator and tea lady'³² by sending interminable directives to the practitioners, who in the end are responsible for bringing the play to its intended state as a performance, demonstrates a lack of trust that they can do their jobs:

any director worth a directorial chair will tend to take the author's direction [...] not as directive but as so much pseudo-narrative information that can be used or discarded according to need. What remains is precisely the fictional doing or the dialogue. (46)

Patrice Pavis similarly argues that the 'mise-en-scène is not obliged to follow stage directions. Stage directions concerning the circumstances of utterances are not 'a formal command to produce the text in such a manner, or even an indispensable shift from text to performance.'³³ The model of performance constrains the dramatic text in its articulations, and the primary allegiance of the text is to the physical conditions of performance, to the actor's body. That the material presence of an actor whose stature, vocal qualities and physical idiosyncracies are peculiar to a performance which is

³² Keir Elam, 'Much Ado About Doing Things With Words (and Other Means): Some Problems in the Pragmatics of Theatre and Drama', in Michael Issacharoff and Robin Jones (eds), *Performing Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 45.

³³ Patrice Pavis, 'From Text to Performance' in Michael Issacharoff and Robin Jones (ed.), *Performing Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 89.

necessarily unrepeatable, since the precise internal relations established in one performance will differ, however subtly, in the next, is a fact of theatrical discourse, and the text is partly conditioned by an absent performative realisation to which it points.

In the absence of narratorial guides, providing external description and ‘world-creating’ propositions, the dramatic world has to be specified from within by means of references made to it by the very individuals who constitute it.³⁴

This is to say that corporeality and kinesic indicators are inscribed within the dialogue, to the exclusion of extra-diegetic ‘narratorial guides’ set apart from the dialogue; thus, Polonius’s ‘Take this from these if this be otherwise’ contains both linguistic and gestural deixis, ‘rendering quite redundant stage directions added by modern editors like Wilson’ (148). This is true, but is based on a particular historical convention and does not account for drama from the nineteenth century onwards in which ‘external description’ features heavily. Elizabethan dramatists and copyists were careless about the precise placing of stage directions.³⁵ Apart from denoting speech, the text often played a pseudo-iconic descriptive role in figuring the dramatic scene. This device which classical rhetoricians termed *topographia*, functions according to a purely metaphorical similarity between the verbal representation and the scene described. Modern editions of Shakespeare contain many more asides than are found in Folios and Quarto, as often as not a legacy from the eighteenth century editors who maimed and deformed where they undertook to cure; when an editor adds an ‘[*aside*]’ he often implies that the speaker would not have dared

³⁴ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1980; repr. 1997), 173.

³⁵ See E.A.J.Honigman, ‘Re-enter the Stage Direction: Shakespeare and Some Contemporaries’, *Shakespeare Survey* 29 (1976), 118.

to utter the same words openly; he passes judgement on the relationship of two or more dramatic characters, for instance:

But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son -

Ham. [*Aside*] A little more than kin, and less than kind.

King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Ham. Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun. (Act I, Sc. II)³⁶

Traditionally printed as an '[*Aside*]' (since Theobald), Hamlet's first speech expresses the riddling impudence that is characteristic of all his exchanges with Claudius before Act 5. But an aside implies that Hamlet mutters to himself without caring whether others catch his words. To label it an aside is to deprive the line of a nervy edge which allows itself to be over-heard, an activity central to the play.

Speech act philosophers perceive closer analogues between the scriptural form and its physical incarnation. John Searle argues that the text of a play:

will for the most part consist of a series of serious directions to the actors as to how they are to pretend to make assertions and to perform other actions [...] the author of the play is not in general pretending to make assertions, he is giving directions as to how to enact a pretense which the actors then follow.³⁷

Searle's argument makes no explicit reference to stage directions; as a linguistic philosopher his attention is directed to the illocutionary uptake between speakers, and the

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 183.

³⁷ John Searle, 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', *New Literary History* 6 (1975), 319-32.

conditions created by the speaker's intentions which finally determine the semantic nature of utterance, its illocutionary force:

It seems to me that the illocutionary force of the text of a play is like the illocutionary force of a recipe for baking a cake. It is a set of instructions for how to do something, namely, how to perform the play.³⁸

Here the play text is described as not only intended for performance, but containing the precise 'set of instructions' for performance. But accent, tempo, rhythm in printed dialogue are not indicated unequivocally in this way: printed speech does not provide the exact timing required for the delivery of a line. The term 'set of instructions' more aptly describes the rhetoric of directions for the stage.

The notion of the illocutionary force of language, originated by J.L. Austin, ties down speech acts to the particular circumstances in which they are made. Linguistic exchanges are always based in the occasion of their utterance, but this occasion is not only a linguistic condition: non-verbal contexts, gestures, however slight, the overall kinesic continuum in which speech always occurs, determine and can serve to complicate illocutionary forces by working with or against what is uttered. Stage directions, far from being mere scaffolding which enables the writer to structure his dialogue for the practitioner to dismantle and bring it to its full scenic realisation, are in this sense illocutionary acts. They bring out the fictional status of the characters, indicate tone of voice, spatio-temporal placings, gesture, all of which govern the strategies of each speech and to a large extent determine its illocutionary force. The intentions in a speech-act can

³⁸ John Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), 70.

to an extent be determined by tone, cadence and emphasis; in writing these cannot be fully notated, but stage directions may provide the conditions in which they occur. The key to Hilda's character in Ibsen's *The Master Builder* is in her incessant changes of tone: these are indicated in stage directions which follow the inscrutable modulations in her attitude to Solness:

[In a lower voice, seriously] [...]

[Lively again] [...]

[Turns quickly towards him and has once more the sparkling expression of gladness in her eye] [...]

*[Again a little sulky, retreats from him].*³⁹

Austin calls the listener's recognition of illocutionary intentions the 'securing of uptake'.⁴⁰ Comedy is full of the infelicities caused by the non-securing of uptake, otherwise known as talking at cross-purposes. The listener's task is to attribute to the utterance its correct illocutionary force, its status *as*, for instance, a question, assertion, command. The illocutionary mode of the utterances, through indicators such as tone and kinesics contained in stage directions, should enable the actor to interpret correctly the intentions involved, to distinguish, say, a serious from an ironical command. In this sense, the dramatic speakers are also dramatic listeners, and much like the reader of the play are required to create in their minds the status of the linguistic-fictional utterance.

In Beckett, characters struggle to secure a *physical* uptake. Failing to recognise the intentions in stage directions which indicate their most minute gestures, characters reveal

³⁹ Henrik Ibsen, *The Master Builder*, trans. William Archer, (London: Heinemann, 1893), 60.

⁴⁰ John L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford: OUP, 1962), 117.

their ignorance as to their illocutionary conditions. In *Endgame*, the only mobile character, Clov, finds difficulty in linking the mechanics of movement with the purpose of moving. There is a problem in coordinating intention with action, manifest as he takes the ladder to look through the windows. The intentions in the stage directions are not the characters', and they often display their inability to carry out their own: 'Let's go [*They do not move*]' (88). One of Beckett's most persistent theatrical axioms was the separation of movement and speech: this gives the impression of a strange detachment with which his people regard the things their hands and feet do. There is a hiatus between the intentions of the mind and the body, because the body is inhabited by stage directions at odds with the will. Hugh Kenner's remark on Watt's walk, that it is 'less something he does than something we can observe his body doing',⁴¹ aptly accounts for this dislocation in Beckett's stage figures.

For Richard Schechner, the historical survival of texts for performance lies in the absence of stage directions, which constrain interpretation for later generations of audience:

The act of playwriting is a translation of [...] internal scening into dialogue and stage directions. The stage directions are vestiges and /or amplifications of the internal scening. The whole scening process is, in my view, a scaffold that is best dismantled entirely once the play takes shape as dialogue. This was the Classical and Elizabethan convention; I think the survival of many of those plays is due to the fact that later generations have been spared stage directions and character descriptions [...] Generally it is not possible to do the play in the author's vision anyway. Either that vision is unknown, as with most pre-modern

⁴¹ Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (London : John Calder, 1961), 84.

writers [...] or the conventions and architecture of the theatre make it impossible.⁴²

This view disallows the possibility that the 'internal scening' in stage directions may have an artistic point if translated on to stage. Schechner's charge could be directed against the kind of documentary fussiness found in Naturalist drama, where scene setting can appear merely circumstantial, and therefore dispensable. Yet Ibsenite drama such as *The Master Builder* and *Ghosts* contains within its naturalist detail vital symbols for that which is latent and unconfessed. Hilda and Solness discover in them a life outside that which the domestic interiors represent; their gestures both hide and reveal the invisible circumstances between them. Domestic arrangements in *Ghosts*, for instance '[*the lamp burning on the table, the darkness outside*]' and '[*the faint glow from the conflagration*]' are formalised stage pictures symbolising patterns of mind, collapsing distinctions between internal and external 'scening'. This documentary fussiness is inseparable from the dialogue. In Joyce's *Exiles*, which belongs to the Ibsenite tradition, the attention to clocks and furniture in the extended directions bury intelligible matter in scenic detail. Other details such as the '[*floor of stained planking*]'⁴³ are not superfluous: the faded elegance of Richard Rowan's drawing room is related to the banality of his passion. Joyce learned from Ibsen this technique for surveying the details of theatrical naturalism with an ironic eye, observing behind an arrangement of furniture and other scrupulous minutae psychic realities, images of paralysis and claustrophobia. These extended stage directions 'parade an ironic obsession with what the characters see in order to express what they ignore'.⁴⁴

⁴² Richard Schechner, 'Drama, Script, Theatre and Performance' in *The Drama Review*, 17: 3 (1973), 13.

⁴³ James Joyce, *Exiles* (London: Cape, 1918 ; repr. 1952), 15.

Directions which indicate posture cannot be done away with either. The actor indicates his relations to the rest of the stage using deictic gesture, the means by which the presence and the spatial orientations of the body are established. Deictic functions in language, the primary means whereby language gears itself to the speaker and receiver (through personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’), to time and place of action (through the adverbs ‘here’ and ‘now’, as well as to the supposed physical environment at large and the objects that fill it (through demonstratives like ‘this’ and ‘that’) take on a physical character in theatre which is separate from, though related to, its linguistic counterpart. Julia Kristeva has observed that the etymological root of ‘deixis’ is a gestural concept, meaning ‘pointing’, which was adapted by Greek grammarians in order to classify verbal indices.⁴⁵ In this way the situations in which utterance takes place are contained by the force of deictic gesture, a corporal attitude. It is through gestures that people on stage most clearly adopt attitudes towards one another and to their environment.

In *Exiles*, physical contact is adumbrated throughout by an intricate deictic pattern of hand gestures. To dismantle these directions, even to switch the order in which they occur, would involve distorting the psychic forces and tensions between the characters. Robert, sketched as Richard’s opposite, whose gestures like his speech are frequently ‘[*sudden*]’ and ‘[*fervent*]’, who acts ‘[*With enthusiasm*]’ (86), is first seen coming towards Bertha ‘[*with outstretched hand which she takes*]’ (30). His gestures of sentiment have a warmth which has abandoned Richard’s: ‘[*He kisses her with passion, holding her head between his hands.*]’ Richard only ever ‘[*Joins his [own] hands earnestly*]’: he only really trusts himself and his convictions, and hand-play becomes a symbol of fallen trust: ‘BERTHA [*Taking his hands.*] [...] RICHARD [*He withdraws his hands slowly*]’ (86).

⁴⁴ Hugh Kenner, *Dublin’s Joyce* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), 78.

⁴⁵ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1980; repr; 1997), 70.

Much of the hidden struggles take their momentum from the inability to deduce the intentions of the other person: ‘*[Gazes into her eyes and then lets her hand fall.] I cannot read in your heart either*’ (103). Richard’s most tender gesture comes at the end, although the illocutionary force in the dialogue points to a more inwardly turned movement: ‘*[Releases his hand and, taking her head between his hands, bends it back and gazes long into her eyes.] I have a deep, deep wound of doubt in my soul*’ (162).

This ‘certain reserve’ is both a vocal quality, where dialogue takes much of its illocutionary force from what is left unsaid, and a physical condition: gestures in the play, especially Richard Rowan’s, whose character is conceived from the fact of his total self-mastery, are minute and are carried with a certain ‘*[repressed energy]*’ (24). His gestures are cold and self-possessed, and he does not give away what he knows and feels about a situation, as for instance here, a scene at which point Richard knows that Robert’s concern for his marriage is feigned:

ROBERT

Not only for your sake. Also for the sake of - your present partner in life.

RICHARD

I see.

[He crushes his cigarette softly on the ashtray and then leans forward, rubbing his hands slowly.] (52)

When Richard finds the chance to reveal to Bertha his opinion of his friend, his speech for a moment is declamatory and direct, but his gestures are curiously repressed:

RICHARD

My great friend! A patriot too! A thief - nothing else! [*He halts, thrusting his hands in his pockets.*] (71)

Emotional paralysis is embodied in static gesture, and the pattern of hesitations, silences and evasions is translated into the physical reserve of the characters. Joyce's concern with the inward nature of Richard's victory over jealousy would be in stark contrast to any surface kinesics a director may wish to add. Richard's restraint implies an unseen struggle: '*[She turns away and walks over to the little table on the right. Richard restrains a sudden gesture. A short pause]*'. In *Exiles*, insecurities are given away only in the small gestures of characters whose dramatic function is to hold back rather than reveal.

This desire to dramatise an incorporeal abstraction, Richard's metaphysical struggle, the 'deep, deep wound of doubt' in his soul, is perhaps a little remote for the stage, and makes the staged bodies stiffly obtuse. Joyce's notes at the end of the play can hardly be taken as guides towards the practicalities of stage management:

Bertha's state [...] is like that of Jesus in the garden of olives [...] Through these experiences she will suffuse her own reborn temperament with the wonder of her soul at its own solitude and at her beauty, formed and dissolving itself eternally amid the clouds of mortality. (164)

Joyce explained why *Exiles* was not acted in Paris in 1921, because Crommelynck's *Le Cocu Magnifique*:

took the wind out of the sails of *Exiles*. The jealousy motive is the same in kind in both cases. The only difference is that in my play the people act with a certain reserve, whereas in Crommelynck's play the hero, to mention only one person, acts like a madman.⁴⁶

Joyce hints at how these variant accounts of jealousy depend on radically different notions of corporeality. *Exiles*, which wears its seriousness on its sleeve, relies on the static reserve of the characters; *Le Cocu* is a hyperkinetic farce, closer to Beckett in its principles of disintegration between body and mind.

The dialogue of *Le Cocu* indicates much of the stage business, and stage directions provide illocutionary details about the staging of characters' movements. Tones of voice and gesture are wrought together in the stage directions, so that adverbs which normally indicate vocal tone include in their register physical activity. In this play, where dramatic intensity is in surface kinesics and physical exchanges are treated as misreadings, directions which are used by the practitioner as gestural signals are taken in by the reader as character insights; both receptions are true to the compositional intentions of a play in which invisible movements of suffering and lingering dissolution inside a character are translated into physical form.

The central figure, Bruno, tests his jealousy by forcing Stella, his wife, to sleep with all the men in the village, so that he can catch her imaginary lover. This mania, which springs from Bruno's perverse notion that in order not to doubt his wife's fidelity any

⁴⁶ Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses' and Other Writing* (Oxford: OUP 1972), 350, in William Empson, 'Magnificent Cuckolds', in *The Strengths of Shakespeare's Shrew* ed. John Haffenden (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 157.

longer, he must be certain of her infidelity, is played as farce. Stella often speaks ‘[*Simply*]’ but this also refers to a bodily presence which is imagined as lithely and naively unself-conscious. Her almost universal attractiveness to the morbid love of other men is an aspect of the simple sense she has of herself as artfully concealing nothing, and the confidence that she is directly and singularly beloved. Her husband Bruno begins the play in a state of extreme unsteady vigour, enervated by his violent physical love; he makes his entrance by jumping ‘[*over the window sill*]’ into the room. His intoxication is manifest in the way he eyes his wife and encourages others to do so. At first this is done without awareness of social tone, so caught up is Bruno with the fleshly vision of his wife that he asks others to join in his admiration:

BRUNO: Isn’t she the most graceful and the lightest on her feet? [...] When she stands up, she can touch the floor with her fingertips without bending her knees.⁴⁷

Bruno’s closest companion is Estrugo; his function as passive recipient renders him absurdly inarticulate, such that his gestural language is as empty and useless as his speech: ‘[ESTRUGO . . . *His gestures seem to be a springboard for his words. When he is unable to say something, his gestures remain suspended for a long time*]’ (20). Estrugo’s aphasia is partly a physical condition; he cannot tell his master that he is wrong headed, because he cannot secure uptake in good time:

⁴⁷ Ferdinand Crommelynck, *The Magnificent Cuckold*, trans. Marnix Gijsen (New York: James H. Heineman, 1966), 23.

BRUNO

Ah, ah, question. Yes, answer simply; faithful or unfaithful; yes or no. The question is asked. Why?

[ESTRUGO *doesn't have time to answer. Suspended gestures.* BRUNO *answers for him.*] (33)

Bruno allows his demented reason to confirm his poisonous imaginings because his auditor is always silent or incapable of speech. He crushes himself, the goad is within him, and his physique catches the morbidity of his suspicions: '[*Bruno has changed a lot since the departure of Petrus. His hair is ruffled, his eyes shifty, his colour bilious*] (37).

As Bruno loses physical possession of his wife, so he loses his self-possession:

BRUNO: Every gesture, every word of Stella, every beat of her heart, her silence and her immobility, whether she's awake or sleeping, all that pertains to her in time and space, is a reason for my anxiety. (61)

This literal rendering of physical possession is what underpins Bruno's jealousy: that he cannot accept her physical separateness leads him to a severance between his instincts and his body; the mania of his suspicions takes possession of his body. From the beginning he is characterised by a lack of restraint, as when he demands that Petrus admire his wife's breast: '[*Feverishly he opens the bodice of the young woman*]'(31). The final, darkly farcical scene is the culmination of Bruno's inability to apprehend gestural deictics. His hermeneutic skill is based throughout the play on assuming Stella will not publicly demonstrate affection to her imaginary lover, and that she may feign affection

with others in order to keep him hidden. Unlike Richard, who rarely lets physical impulse get the better of him, who is constantly seen ‘*[Recovering himself]*’ (21), and speaks with ‘*[With sudden self control]*’ (28), there are few instances where Bruno ‘*[pulls himself together]*’ (40); this absence of physical equilibrium leads him to misreadings of the gestures of those who surround him:

STELLA and the YOUNG man from *Oostkerke* remain quiet. Not a gesture, not a look. Two statues

BRUNO

[...]

Your silence and your discretion give you away. This immobility means as much as an embrace. (55)

The actor indicates his relations to the rest of the stage using deictic gesture, the means by which the presence and spatial orientations of the body are established. If the adverb ‘*[Simply]*’ encapsulates Stella’s stage presence, then so does ‘*[Coldly]*’ (26) for Richard. Bruno is observed consistently failing to secure the illocutionary uptake in the stage directions. Having reduced the role of the other characters to players on the stage of his own trauma, Bruno, usually seen arranging the scene as he will so that he can (mis)read it in a particular way, is a director who dismantles the deictic patterns in directions which would correct his error. This so that he can stage a private vision of infidelity.

It is difficult to read Crommelynck's *Le Cocu* without bearing in mind Meyerhold's great Biomechanical production in 1922, at the Actors' Theatre, Moscow, described as a rendition of the 'physiological suffering caused by jealousy'.⁴⁸ Manifest in 'Biomechanics', a training method for his actors, it was Meyerhold's conviction that relationships on stage are 'determined by gestures, poses, glances and silences', that 'words alone cannot say everything', that 'there must be a *pattern of movement* on the stage', that 'in the new theatre, speech and plasticity are each subordinated to their own separate rhythms and the two do not necessarily coincide'.⁴⁹ These strictures echo Beckett's most consistent law in his role as director: the precise alternations of stillness of motion, where gesture and speech rarely fall together.

Many of the calisthenic stage actions in *Le Cocu* were in the stage directions:

Crommelynck himself wanted his actors to be capable of standing the physical trial of the play. It was a production built on surface rhythms. The text of the play unfolds by turning Bruno's internal dialogue into a dramatic and physical dialogue, through secondary characters, who appear as an expression of the protagonist's various facets. Meyerhold's actors were choreographed in order to appear as extensions, limbs of the same collective actor. The Biomechanical law of balance between actor and character was ideally suited to the image in the play of a physical deterioration which mocks Bruno's insane conviction: Erast Garin, in an account of the first performance at the Actors' Theatre, commented: 'Bruno stood before the audience, pale face motionless [...] at the same time this Bruno was being ridiculed by the actor performing acrobatic stunts at the most impassioned moments of his speeches, belching and comically rolling his eyes whilst

⁴⁸ P. Marcov, in *Vremnik Russkogo Teatral'Nogo Obscestva*, I (Moscow, 1924), 257, quoted in 'Crommelynck and Meyerhold: Two Geniuses Meet on the Stage', *Modern Drama* 39 (1996), 447.

⁴⁹ Edward Braun (ed. and trans.), *Meyerhold on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1969), 59.

enduring the most dramatic anguish.’⁵⁰ Bruno’s player adopted the grotesque overtones of Crommelynck’s stage directions, which require both naturalist sympathy and low mocking; the description is in tune with Meyerhold’s view of the grotesque as ‘enabling the real to become symbolic, and replacing caricature with exaggerated parody’. A mind corroded by jealousy is embodied in absurdly over-played gestural patterns, formalised routines of incapacity. Beckett re-invented these grotesque abstractions of the actor’s body from his character, communicating a severance between physical mechanics and naturalism, issuing signals for ‘mind and world [to] come asunder in irreparable dissociation’.⁵¹

In *Le Cocu*, the ‘physiology of jealousy’ precedes its psychology; Meyerhold would instruct his players to begin with external physical techniques and from there work inward toward psychological centres. He would demand of the actor a ‘physical competence’, consisting of a true eye, a sense of balance, and the ability to sense at any given moment the location of his centre of gravity.’ Meyerhold’s acting method was partly based on reflexology: ‘The nature of an actor must essentially tend to respond to the stimulation of the reflexes [...] To respond to one’s reflexes means to render in movement, feeling and speech a task imposed from the outside.’⁵² It became a premise in his theatre that an emotional reaction was the consequence, and not the cause, of a physical reaction, itself triggered by a physical stimulus. Exercises were developed in gesture and movement, which were then broken down into physical stimulus, physical reaction, and emotion, a cycle of three invariable stages which were labeled:

⁵⁰ Quoted in Edward Braun, *Meyerhold: A Revolution in Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1979; repr. 1995), 182-3.

⁵¹ Beckett on Sean O’Casey, ‘The Essential and the Incidental’, in *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983), 82.

⁵² Nina Gourfinkel, trans., in Vsévolod Meyerhold’s *Le Théâtre théâtral* (Paris, 1963), 185.

1. INTENTION 2. REALISATION 3. REACTION: *The intention* is the intellectual assimilation of a task prescribed externally by the dramatist, the director, or the initiative of the performer. *The realisation* is the cycle of volitional, mimetic and vocal reflexes. *The reaction* is the attenuation of the volitional reflex as it is realised mimetically and vocally in preparation for the reception of a new intention.⁵³

These studies would train the actor's sense of balance – between himself and his part; motion reflexes – allowing instant response to external goads, and gravity – a sense of being lifted or pulled down. This serves to distance the actor's body from his role, and signals formal correlatives for aspects of mind similar to the gestures of the marionette in their instant mechanical response. Biomechanics were aptly accommodated to *Le Cocu*, which reverses the Ibsenite pattern so that emotion is often the outcome not the cause of physical activity. Joyce puts himself closer to Ibsen in *Exiles* by staging bodies which conceal hidden eddies of desire: buried emotion precedes its physical manifestation, and is given away only occasionally in unconscious slips of manual gesture. The notes for *Exiles* designate broad shades of feeling for which no physical correlative is found in the play itself: Yeats' critique of Ibsen's *Ghosts* could more justly be levelled against Joyce:

Why did they not speak out with louder voices or move with freer gestures?

What was it that weighed upon their souls perpetually? Certainly, they were all in prison, and yet there was no prison.⁵⁴

⁵³ Braun (1969), 127.

⁵⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 168.

This 'prison' is perhaps the allegorical idea assigned to each figure, which half comes to light in the notes, rather than the stage directions: it failed next to *Le Cocu*, a play in which centres of gravity take physical form, and grotesque routines formalise the mind's inner workings. Bruno's prison is his self-created trauma, but it is manifested in his own body, which is also the actor's. Meyerhold's system of physical stimulus and response served to integrate monologue and mime, while maintaining nearly absolute separation between voice and physical action: this technique set precedents for Beckett's disembodiments.

Ghost Trio is divided into three parts: 'I Pre-action, II Action, III Re-action' and there are vestiges of similarity with Meyerhold's directorial method: the play is divided into the three stages by which an actor assimilates and then enacts his given physical task. Except that in Beckett's play, the effect should be of weightlessness, raising the question as to whether the audience can trust its perceptions of physical movement. When Beckett quoted Kleist for *Ghost Trio*, the effect he intended was one of incorporeality. The actor should move 'bowed through space with no visible propulsion.'⁵⁵ F, who is immediately responsive to the woman's directions, is partly an image of the actor responding to external command. The total detachment of physical indicators from dialogue serves to emphasise the physical conditions to which the character responds. Like the knock in *Ohio Impromptu*, the goad in *Act Without Words*, the bell in *Happy Days*, or light in *Play*, the woman's voice is the technical impetus that stimulates instant response. These external goads represent acts of directing which are written into the text.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Knowlson and Pilling, (1979), 283.

Beckett's refusal to discuss the inner upheavals and confusions of his characters, allowing them to come to light through the correct posture, has its kinship with Meyerhold's Biomechanics, where particular muscle movements create corresponding mental states, so that the actor works from external considerations inwards. In his production of Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, Meyerhold imagined the central character as a 'dead mannequin' with 'mechanical gestures':

there is such an emptiness behind this character - physical and spiritual. It's as though he is made of paper - not a man but a shadow. He is not physical, very non-material. He talks with a remote, deadly voice; his speech is full of pauses, long pauses. Don't think that there is something hidden in those pauses.⁵⁶

This distraction away from what lies behind appearance (gestures, pauses) draws attention from psychological motivation to the gestures themselves. This was a principle of Beckett's directing: by shutting out the possibility of getting behind those gestures to something hidden, the duplicitous nature of the actor's body is preserved. This vice-like restraint paradoxically opens out interpretations whilst neither confirming nor denying any one of them: a gesture may have a nouminous symbolic quality or it may be the reflex response of a natural body; the marionette gestures of F, which could also be described as 'non-material', could be the movements of an internal psychic trauma, or a mysterious liminal afterlife which allows no escape from the traumas of the living. F could be either 'man' or 'shadow'.

⁵⁶ Meyerhold's Notes to *The Government Inspector (Revizor)*, in Christopher de Hann (ed.) '*Revizor: Nikolai Gogol/ Vsevolod Meyerhold*', *Theater* 28:2 (1998), 68.

Those who worked with Beckett have documented his rehearsals as sequences of dictated behaviours: as in *Biomechanics*, these behaviours would help the actor articulate physical signals as prior to speech. Walter Asmus describes the performance by Hildegard Schmahl in the German premiere of *Tritte (Footfalls)* as initially hampered by her search for realistic intentions that could put her where she is. Beckett continued to stress to her the importance of physicalisation: ‘The position of the body will help you to find the right voice’. May’s posture during her pacing was central to Beckett’s conception of the character, and it is also connected with May’s voice: ‘When you walk, you slump together; when you speak you straighten up a bit.’⁵⁷

In Asmus’s words, once Schmahl gave up the attempt to ‘produce the images from the inside’, all the ‘more or less unconscious movements of the body, especially of the head’ that inevitably accompanied her psychological intentions disappeared. She was able to hold her body stiffly, avoiding all uncalculated movement, and the new tautness in turn affected her articulation. Once she had made the primary ground for her performance physical not psychic, Beckett remarked to Schmahl: ‘You have found the trick’ (339).

As the actor refines his or her physical comportment, the resulting specificity of form will generate corresponding states in him and the spectators. The fact of the performer standing before us *is* the psychological circumstance; trapped inside the stage directions, their physical predicament is equivalent to their ontological condition. ‘If the play is full of repetitions, then it is because of these lifelong stretches of walking. That is the centre of the play; everything else is secondary’ (338). In rehearsals for a production of Maeterlinck’s *Sister Beatrice*, Meyerhold disciplined his actors’ movements by the simple

⁵⁷ Walter D. Asmus, ‘Rehearsal Notes for the German Premiere of Beckett’s *That Time* and *Footfalls*’ in S.E. Gontarski (ed.), *On Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 338.

expedient of confining them to a strip of stage in front of the proscenium arch no more than two metres in depth: an anticipation of May in *Footfalls*, who in paces precisely timed, will never have done rehearsing her story, '[width one metre, a little off centre audience right]' (399).

In his role as his own director, Beckett developed techniques similar to those of Biomechanics as his stage directions became active performatives. His experience as a practitioner complicated text-performance relations within stage directions, which were often cut or altered; the tone and timing of speech-gesture complexes became central both to textual and performative directions. Even texts already published were altered, as Beckett allowed performative intent to influence composition. His work as director was a form of re-reading, in which he allowed variations suggested by practicalities of stage management to enter the text. Reading the work of others is an act of criticism; reading one's own work, even in public, is listening to oneself articulating and perhaps re-writing the work. Beckett would often review the residues of physical presence that lie on a page. For instance, lighting changes were made for each of his three productions of *Footfalls*, which were never incorporated directly into any English text. He introduced 'Dim spot on face during halts at R [Right] and L [left]' so that May's face would be visible during her monologues, and a vertical ray of light which seemed to be coming through a door barely ajar, this to counterpoint the horizontal beam on the floor along which May paces.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ S.E. Gontarski, 'Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theatre', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 22: 1 (1999).

‘It’s things like tone and timing that can’t be dealt with outside the theatre.’⁵⁹ An insistence on completing a play-text only after ‘some rehearsals’ or a ‘certain number of rehearsals’ would become central to Beckett’s compositional strategy from *Krapp* onward: ‘I should prefer the text not to appear in any form before production and not in book form until I have seen some rehearsals in London. I can’t be definitive without actual work done in the theatre.’⁶⁰ In *Happy Days*, substantial cuts and alterations of physical movement were made in the first act, once Beckett experienced the play in concrete space. The minutiae of these alterations reiterates the significance of small gestures; for instance, the precise patterns of eye movement:

Cues for Willie

‘ . . . be mine’	Eyes up
‘ . . . smile today’	“ down
‘ . . . in yr. hole’	“ up
‘ . . . after it you know’	“ down ⁶¹

‘I am relying on [...] speech - gesture complexes, eyes, switching on and off of smile, etc. to do the work.’⁶² The coordination of these complexes are at the centre of Beckett’s directorial endeavour: they refer to the ‘[organised] economy of these two orders of resources, body and speech’ (Harmon, 95). There are times when Winnie cannot move, and times when she cannot speak: her problem, which is also a directorial problem, is

⁵⁹ Letter to Alan Schneider, 25 July 1961, Harmon, 89.

⁶⁰ Letter to Grove Press about *Happy Days* on 18 May 1961, quoted in S.E. Gontarski, ‘Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett’s Theatre’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 22:1 (1999).

⁶¹ James Knowlson (ed.), *Happy Days: The Production Notebook of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber, 1985), 115.

⁶² Letter to Alan Schneider, 1961, Harmon, 95.

how to eke out each day by organising her resources. In the second act, Winnie can no longer rummage in her bag, shake out her handkerchief or polish her spectacles. These ample gestures are replaced by intricate facial patterns: ‘[*Smile off*]’, ‘[*smile broader*]’, ‘[*she squints down*]’, ‘[*distends cheeks*]’ (160-61). Her pared down speech-gesture complexes increase her despair and the audience misses the gleaming opulent flesh in the first act, yet her instinct for making do with very little allows her to go on. Patterns of eye movement counterpoint vocal silences, especially as physical presence becomes more disembodied, and concentration is focused on tiny gestures. Against a background of vocal monotony, Beckett’s directions would organise the two orders of body and speech by re-calculating their textual alternations.

By the late 1950s, with *Krapp’s Last Tape*, physical theatre had become Beckett’s playground. Initially intended as staged monologue, the mime sequences were added quite late in the play’s development. Re-readings of Beckett’s drafts reveal that Krapp grew out of an abandoned prose piece: ‘It is almost certain that Beckett abandoned the novel *From an Abandoned Work* in favour of the play, retaining its best features and thereby creating, through the retrospective medium of the tape recorder.’⁶³ In the first draft of *Krapp*, no mention is made of his comic appearance, ‘*trousers too short for him*’ or the routines with the keys and bananas (Gontarski, (1985), 55). In Typescript 3, Krapp no longer ‘feels’ in his pockets for the keys; he ‘fumbles’ for them. As deictic gestures began to shape not only *Krapp*’s relation to his desk, to backstage, but his relation to himself: the banana is almost an autoerotic fetish and signals Krapp’s desire for the life of the senses. His inability to regulate his consumptive habits points to a truth which the younger

⁶³ Michael Robinson, *The Long Sonata of the Dead* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), 212.

Krapp, for whom spirit is the ultimate incarnation, will not admit: the inability of the mind to abstract and control the body.

As physical comedy became a formal necessity, Beckett realised that composition of stage directions could not be divorced from performance. He is already sounding like a director in 1958, writing to Barney Rosset after the Royal Court *Krapp*:

During rehearsal we found various pieces of business not indicated in the script and which now see to me indispensable. If you ever publish the work in book form I should like to incorporate them in the text. A possible solution in the meantime would be for me to see Alan again (hardly feasible) or to write to him at length on the subject and prepare for him a set of more explicit stage directions.⁶⁴

Practical considerations brought new patterns of movement:

What helps for the cue is for Krapp to have a very special gesture for switching on and off which it has to be abrupt may be prepared by a change of posture (straightening a little out of his crouch, for example), the same each time.⁶⁵

Although this gesture ‘helps for the cue’, it also turns Krapp’s gesture into something more sudden and alert, as he straightens ‘out of his crouch’. He becomes more conscious,

⁶⁴ Letter to Barney Rosset on 20 November 1958, in S.E. Gontarski, ‘Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett’s Theatre’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 22:1 (1999).

⁶⁵ Beckett to Schneider, 1960, in Harmon, 59.

suggesting an increased sensitivity to his painful thoughts. These new performative directions were used to dramatise, by the very act of loosening a formal grip on the body, the process of staging the more mechanical body in the play-text. Permutations within stage directions across various performances brought significant changes to the way Krapp is perceived, so that his body appears as emotive as it is abstract. Initially a clownish figure, whose rituals of incapacity with the keys and bananas keep the tone at a remove from his sentimental recall, Beckett's cuts and alterations for the BBC2 production, directed by Donald McWhinnie with Patrick Magee as Krapp, tone down the pantomime routines, and increase his naturalism. The opening mime is modified, Krapp no longer fumbles with the keys; directions are added which increase Krapp's mobility, so that he appears more vigorous: Beckett adds that Krapp '*[bangs drawer shut]*'; he picks up the banana skin and '*[throws it away into darkness backstage left]*';⁶⁶ the table is bare which necessitates a trip to the recess to bring in the tape recorder and tins. These altered physical patterns make Krapp less clownishly abstract. Conducting his rite of self-communing with an active certainty, he thinks he knows what he will find, and need only go through the motions; there is a solace in this: despite Krapp's aloneness, he can still summon the vigour to get on and live with himself. His relation to himself shifts in the act of re-direction, as his body becomes a screen for his sentiments; this colludes with the disembodied grotesque found in the first edition.

Beckett added a pause, to which he noted 'long enough to look at [tape recorder] as if to say: 'What's keeping you?''⁶⁷ The machine becomes an old and reliable friend, as well as Krapp's own mechanised voice. Krapp's last words 'Lie down across her' are followed

⁶⁶ Reading Archive MS 3071, annotations by Beckett on Grove Press, 1960 edition, used by Beckett for BBC2 production with Magee, dir. McWhinnie, 29 Nov 1972, 10.

⁶⁷ Reading Archive MS 1479, annotations in copy of *Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 15. Associated with Albert Finney revival of play.

after a '[*Long pause*]' with the stage direction '[*He suddenly bends over the machine*]' (223). This gesture of companionship, where his body remembers an intimate moment, is two-fold: it restores to Krapp his mortal remains just as he is left corpse-like hugging a hulk of machinery. Pauses in *Krapp's Last Tape* often betray the dislocation between his past and present self; in the interval which separates the phrases, filling their interstices, there are silences many years old, the recorded silences on tape. His life is a retrospective anticipation of his final moments: 'on the morning after the play Krapp was surely *dead*. '[Beckett] has always insisted on the fact that Krapp is debris. Some sort of an old man with hardly any age at all and just before his end'.⁶⁸ Preparing Martin Held for the part of *Krapp*, Beckett explained: 'Old Nick's there. Death is standing behind him and unconsciously he's looking for it'.⁶⁹ Beckett requested Held to glance over his shoulder, as though aware something was behind him. Despite his all-encompassing aloneness, Krapp feels as though he's being watched: Death is waiting for him in the wings. This gesture became standard in other productions: in the manuscript revised for Magee, Beckett noted '[*switches on action interrupted by first look backstage, into darkness*]' (13), and again on page 27, '[*action interrupted by second look into darkness*]'. In a letter to Alan Schneider, where Beckett explains: 'Krapp has nothing to talk to but his dying self and nothing to talk to him but his dead one',⁷⁰ he sketches a diagram of Krapp's new route backstage for his drinks and dictionary, where he must go around the front of the table before going back: this 'has the great advantage of lengthening the walk (to compensate immobility)'. This pattern of footsteps is laid down before Krapp begins the gesture of looking over his shoulder, and generates an ambiguity which is also a principle of Beckett's directions for the stage: Krapp either senses 'Death' behind him, or traces of

⁶⁸ McMillan and Fehesenfeld, 261.

⁶⁹ 'Martin Held talks to Ronald Hayman', *The Times* (Saturday Review), 25 April 1970.

⁷⁰ Beckett to Schneider, 1960, in Harmon, 59.

his own body, an echo of footsteps, the shadow of himself. That is to say, these combined gestures leave interpretation open to either supernatural intervention, 'Old Nick's there', or the mind resurrecting its own traumas: 'unconsciously he's looking for it.'

Krapp's lengthened walk 'compensate[s] immobility': it has formal economy whilst carrying its mimetic function. When he looks over his shoulder, inner trauma comes to light, but the gesture resembles, in the distance from which Krapp grasps for his own body, the abstract mechanised bodies of Kleist's marionettes and Meyerhold's Biomechanics. The balance between mimesis and symbolism in Beckett's staged bodies is revealed in the patterns of compositional change to which the stage directions were subjected as they became active performatives: Beckett's enterprise as a director lay in the organisation of economies of speech and gesture, leaving the body both natural and formal, emotive and abstract.

The Disembodied Voice

The mechanical reproduction of Krapp's voice dislocates his voice from his body.⁷¹

Although Krapp exists only for himself, the dessicated wreck on stage is separated from his own voice by the medium of the tape recorder; his closest companion, himself, is as distant as death is near. A principle which continues throughout Beckett's stage and screen directions is the separation of speech from movement: bodily gesture, which exhibits the body and locates onstage action in space is set against the remoteness of the speaking voice: the 'here and now' of the dramatic context, related to the actor's body, counterpoints the 'there and then' of voice. Krapp stands before us, but he is lost in a wilderness of mirrors, he is not all there. Beckett's performative directions, which complicate relations between the two orders of body and voice, represent reassessments of contradictions between body and soul which preoccupy his work from his earliest separately published work, *Whoroscope*, a poem which gathered together his voluminous reading of Descartes. In the Cartesian tradition, the reflective attitude simultaneously purifies the common notions of body and soul by defining the body as the sum of its parts with no interior, and the soul as being wholly present to itself without distance. This is the transparency of an object with no secret recesses – the body as marionette, and the transparency of a subject which is nothing but what it thinks it is – the self-conscious emotive body. These distinctions are not so clear and distinct for Beckett, for whom the dualism of body and soul is always at bottom inexplicable. In his theatrical figures, processes such as sight and motility are for the character as though they were third personal: Krapp's awareness of his own body, the way a severance is enacted between

⁷¹ See Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1988), 128, for a discussion on the tension between 'live' utterance and mechanically reproduced utterance.

the intentions of his mind and body, is not reflective in the Cartesian sense. The Cartesian unity between the body conceived through its natural use, and the body conceived abstractly as an idea, comes asunder from *Krapp* onwards, until total dissociation between body and voice in the ghost plays.

Beckett's ghosts may or may not be memory traces of absent bodies or mysterious liminal afterlives; his staged bodies are preserved in a 'formal emptiness'⁷² which neither confirms nor denies either views, yet allows both. This is peculiar to a form of stage management founded on the separation of speech and gesture, which makes characters appear disembodied, or immaterial. As in *Biomechanics*, physical signals precede vocalisation: the stage directions inhabit the body before the actor can speak. This separation generates a distance between the actor's reflective attitude towards his own body, and dislocates interiority as a state present to itself without distance. These stage entities occupy a liminal zone between symbolism and mimesis; the body is neither a transparently abstract mechanism, nor an organism which moves along the lines of its own psychological motivation.

May in *Footfalls* 'must hear the feet however faint they fall' (401) in order to convince herself she exists: the pacing attests to her physical presence, and this is set against the impalpability of her voice, which is 'not there'. The mother's tales revolve around the absence of the daughter; with cumulative emphasis, timed to the back and forth pacing, mother and daughter echo 'not there' (403) to the daughter's claim of absence at the evening service. Gesture usually materialises the dramatic subject by asserting their identity with an actual body in an actual space; here the severance between body and

⁷² Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (London : John Calder, 1961), 141.

voice is total, to the extent that it is not possible to determine whether the mother's voice is heard within May's field of memory, or if May's body is conjured by the mother's voice. Although we see a strip of board, illuminated by a single beam, in a theatre, V claims that M is 'in the old home' (402). The two voices are brought as near to each other as possible: both 'monotone. Without colour, very distant'; 'One must sense the similarities of both narratives. Not so much from the text as from the style, from the way the text is spoken.';⁷³ May should move her lips twice during the mother's text, murmuring to herself that 'she has not been out since girlhood' to the mother's reluctance to use the word 'born''(341). This formal displacement supports a dramatic context in which the mother is dead and May does not properly exist: two ghosts talking to one another.

The dualism between body and mind remains unclarified in these later plays; the increased stringency of the directions opens out possible psychosomatic or supernatural contexts without confirming them. Beckett developed this technique of physical duplicity and disembodiment from key influences in the drama of Yeats and Synge.

Separations between speech and gesture occur as early as *Endgame*, which inherits a technique of disembodiment as a symptom of blindness: as he cannot locate voices in perceptible bodies, Hamm's mind must place things in an imperceptible space, so that he can maintain his relation to them. Behind Beckett's sightless figures lie the tale-telling of the Douls in Synge's *Well of the Saints*, and Yeats' blind and lame beggars in *The Cat and the Moon*. Speech-gesture dislocations in Beckett owe a great deal to the Irish Modernist theatre, which trained its actors in the marionette method, and in their stage

⁷³ Asmus, 338.

directions allowed speech to arise from a background of immobility. Yeats remarked that it was ‘a day of triumph when the first act of [*Well of the Saints*] held its audience, though the two chief characters sat side by side under a stone cross from start to finish.’⁷⁴ Synge’s *Well of the Saints* is about the mind’s inner workings as it is abstracted from the body; the speech of the Douls becomes dissociated from their bodies through their blindness, so that it assumes a ghostly insubstantiality and they become disembodied in the very moment in which they become visible.

In Synge’s play, husband and wife, both blind, wait by a ‘[*Roadside with big stones*]’ for the saint to come and cure their blindness. A passage in John 9:4 concerning the miracle of Jesus curing the blind man - ‘I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work’ - is alluded to by proto-Hamm in ‘*Avant Fin de Partie*’: ‘allez, dépêche-toi, the night-cometh etc.’⁷⁵ Like Martin and Mary Doul, he In *Rough for Theatre I*, A is blind and B confined to wheelchair. Reminiscent of Hamm and Clov, as B provides A with eyes, while A pushes the wheelchair, there are yet stronger echoes of Yeats’ *The Cat and the Moon*. Similarly, in the unpublished play *The Gloaming* (at Reading University), the chance meeting of A and C suggests Yeats’ play, in which two beggars, the blind carrying the lame, arrive at the magical St. Coleman’s Well, to have their sight and mobility restored. In Beckett’s abandoned mime of 1963, ‘J.M. Mime’, one of the stage images was of a father carrying his son along various paths of rectangle, getting entangled in the rectangle.

In *Endgame*, much of the effect comes from the distinction between perceptible bodies and blind Hamm’s imagined worlds. Sitting in the centre, but unable to content himself

⁷⁴ W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 238.

⁷⁵ Reading Archive MS 1227/7/16/2, titled ‘*Avant Fin de Partie*’, 12.

that he is really there, Hamm feels the need to confirm the limiting circumference of the room, and relishes the solidity of the wall. His blindness allows a tension between his deictic location (here) and actual proxemic locations (Clov's position in relation to Hamm); the physical comedy arises from Hamm's misperceptions as to his actual location. Like Hamm, the Douls in *Well of the Saints* perceive themselves by talking and taking relish in the flow of their peculiar syntax. They imagine that the world accords with the disembodied voices which inhabit it: despite their knockabout earthiness, their sense of pitch and tone is acute: 'Perhaps no Irish countryman had ever that exact rhythm in his voice [...] it makes the people of his imagination a little disembodied'.⁷⁶

Martin complains to Mary Doul of 'the clack you do be making, for you've a queer cracked voice', while admiring wistfully Molly's 'sweet beautiful voice you'd never tire to be hearing' (60):

[*Speaking pensively*] It should be a fine soft, rounded woman, I'm thinking, would have a voice the like of that. (60)

The Douls fantasise that they both ravish the eyes which fall on them, and much of their banter while they are still blind consists in flattering their misperceived physical grace.

After the saint has given him sight, Martin:

⁷⁶ Preface by Yeats (1905), John Millington Synge, *The Well of the Saints* (1903-8), in *Complete Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 53. 84

[sees Molly Byrne on Mary's Doul seat, and his voice changes completely] Oh, it was no lie they told me, Mary Doul. Oh, glory to God and the seven saints I didn't die and not see you at all. [...] The blessing of God on this day, and them that brought me the saint, for its grand hair you have [*she lowers her head, a little confused*], and soft skin, and eyes would make the saints, if they were dark awhile and seeing again, fall down out of the sky. (69)

The bewilderment which ensues is a result of the dislocation of voice from body: 'It's Molly's voice you have . . .', 'MOLLY: Why wouldn't I have my own voice? Do you think I'm a ghost?' (70)

Beckett once remarked that Synge was his greatest influence. His fondness for *Well of the Saints* is well-established:

I wouldn't suggest that G.B.S. is not a great playwright, whatever that is when it's at home. What I would do is give the whole unupsettable apple-cart for a sup of the Hawk's Well, or the Saints, or a whiff of Juno, to go no further.⁷⁷

The grotesque comedy which arises from physical infirmity in Synge laid the path for Beckett, as when the Douls, having gained their sight, recognise their ugliness:

⁷⁷ James Knowlson, *Samuel Beckett: An Exhibition* (London: Turret Books, 1971), 23.

Your hair, and your big eyes, is it? . . . I'm telling you there isn't a wisp on any grey mare on the ridge of the world isn't finer than the dirty twist on your head. There isn't two eyes in any starving sow, isn't finer than the eyes you were calling blue like the sea. (73)

While they remain blind, their voices do not inhabit bodies visible to them, and the grotesque issues from their disembodiment. Beckett extends this effect in the radio play *All That Fall*, which required diegetic evocations of bodies. As he remarked, it 'depends on the whole thing's *coming out of the dark*.'⁷⁸ The audience cannot see Mrs Rooney, who in turn cannot be seen by her blind husband Dan, and feels herself to be not quite present to other people. Like May in *Footfalls*, her pacing verifies her bodily presence: 'What have I done to deserve all this, what, what? [*Dragging feet*]'. The other characters frequently fail to secure uptake and follow through what she has just said; she is spiritualised from those around her, the aloneness in her dialogue appears as though '[*to herself*]': 'Don't mind me. Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known' (183). Voices cannot be seen emerging from perceptible bodies, and the grotesque comedy lies in the physical efforts enacted in sound and dialogue, which are disembodied in their absence from our eyes, as when Mr Slocum tries to assist Mrs Rooney into his car:

[*Efforts of Mrs Rooney*] No . . . I'll never do it . . . You'll have to get me down Mr Slocum, and help me from the rear.

[*Giggles*] Oh glory! . . . Up! Up! . . . Ah! . . . I'm in! [*Panting of Mr Slocum*].
(190)

⁷⁸ Letter to Barney Rosset, 27 August 1957, quoted in Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Samuel Beckett's Media Plays', *Modern Drama* 28 (1985), 23.

Beckett took from Synge the very Irish notion of farce as a way of approaching physical unhappiness. The speech-gesture dislocations in Synge proceed from infirm conditions, that is to say, they are motivated by a natural cause. Synge's naturalist view of the body as burden is combined in Beckett with the Maeterlinckian notion of the body as symbol. For instance, the play *The Blind Ones*, with its desperate yearning for system, in which the blind characters sit drawn up in neat rows, twelve in all, six of each sex, facing each other, has its kinship with the mathematical symbols in later Beckett:

*[Most of them sit waiting with their elbows on their knees and their faces between their hands; and all seem to have lost the habit of useless gesture, and no longer turn their heads at the stifled and restless noises of the island.]*⁷⁹

Their gestures are 'useless' because they cannot be used as deictic indicators: time and place is blindly abstract:

THE OLDEST BLIND MAN: Does anyone know where we are? (171)

SECOND BLIND MAN: Have we been here long?

THE OLDEST BLIND WOMAN : It seems to me that I have been here centuries.' (193)

Gestural play is focussed on their hands:

⁷⁹ Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Blind Ones*, trans. Laurence Tadema (London: Allen & Unwin, 1895), 120.

SECOND BLIND MAN: I think I am next to you. [*They grope about them with their hands.*]’ (174)

THE OLDEST BLIND MAN: We have never seen each other. We question each other, and we answer each other; we live together, we are always together, but we know not what we are . . . It is all very well to touch each other with both hands; eyes know more than hands. (202)

In *Rough for Theatre I*, the third sequence is begun when B asks A to tuck in his rug; A moves toward the voice and B takes his hand. As A’s hands encounter B’s face, he remarks: ‘Is that your face? B: I confess it is. [Pause] What else could it be? [*A’s fingers stray, stay*] That? My wen’ (232). The remote symbolic quality of the gestures in Maeterlinck are mingled with Synge’s treatment of the grotesque.

Maeterlinck’s blind ones sense the nearness of death in the sound of the ‘dead leaves’; the dog finally directs their attention to the immobile priest. There are echoes of this in *All That Fall*, where blind Mr. Rooney confuses ‘the rotting leaves’ for a ‘dead dog’(194). The opening stage direction draws a familiar Maeterlinckian posture: the old man, ‘seated [...] motionless’:⁸⁰

[A very old priest [...] His head and the upper part of his body, slightly thrown back and mortally still, leaning against the bole of an oak tree, huge and cavernous. His face is fearfully pale and of an inalterable waxen lividity [...]]

⁸⁰ Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*, trans. Alfred Sutro (London: George Allen, 1897), 105.

His eyes, dumb and fixed, no longer gaze at the visible side of eternity [...] His hands, extremely lean, are rigidly clasped on his lap.] (157)

Immobility here signifies death, but the detailed physical account, '[*hands clasped rigidly*]' suggests an active presence. The priest still exerts his influence among the blind figures who await him; much of their anxiety is in half-knowing the priest is imperceptibly dead. If existence 'est percipi' (*Film*, 323), then so is non-existence.

In the theatre of Biomechanics, and of Synge, the body is both that of the actor and the character; in marionette theatre, the mimetic body becomes a symbolic body; the figures in late Beckett occupy a liminal zone between theatrical mimesis and symbolism. In what have come to be known as the 'ghost' plays, among them *Footfalls*, *Not I*, *Come and Go*, separations are enacted not only between voice and body, but also between the body of the actor and the body of the character. The figures in these plays exist ambiguously 'between sleep and waking [...] alike on the stage and in the mind, between man and phantom'.⁸¹

Beckett made no attempt to clarify the unspoken mysteries in these plays, but did leave detailed stage directions, as author and director: he suggested to Rose Hill (who played mother's voice) for the premiere at the Royal Court, London, 1976 to play it 'like one ghost speaking to another.'⁸² That May paces in order to confirm her corporeal presence perhaps supports Freud's notion that 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not

⁸¹ W.B. Yeats, Preface for *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (London: Bullen, 1911), x.

⁸² Quoted in Rosemary Poutney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-76* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), 60.

merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface.’⁸³ May is reliving an unspoken trauma: from her obsessional pacing, her mind can be understood as in some sense hysterical. Freud again may illuminate: ‘Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences’ (*Standard Edition*, II, 7). Phil Baker has observed that:

The art that hysteria particularly resembles is drama, because the feature that distinguishes hysteria is the conversion of psychic material into bodily actions or symptoms.⁸⁴

Hysteria somatises or dramatises the psyche by (re-)enacting it, converting it into dramatic form from which issue ‘hieroglyphed bodies’ (Baker, 164). The dead, according to Freud’s theory of melancholia, not only haunt the subject but possess and become it (*Standard Edition*, XIV, 249). The formal patterns in which May and the mother seem to speak with the same voice are possibly a form of identification for the ego with its abandoned object. Abraham and Torok argue that instead of the dead being ‘introjected’ in symbolic form, as legitimate memories, for example, they are rather ‘incorporated into the body by the more physically oral phantasy that incorporation implies’ (Baker, 154).

Freud’s ghosts do not know they are dead: ‘His father was alive once more and was talking to him in his usual way, but (the remarkable thing was that) he had really died, only he did not know it.’⁸⁵ Lacan writes that ghosts arise from ‘the gap left by the omission of a significant rite’ (Baker, 171): there is a sense in which May’s ritual is an attempt to fill this gap. Her passage up and down the North transept of the Church (‘his

⁸³ ‘The Id and the Ego’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-7), vol. XIX, 26.

⁸⁴ Phil Baker, *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 164.

⁸⁵ *Standard Edition*, vol. V, 430.

poor arm') is reflected in the candelabrum: 'how its flames, their light . . . like moon through passing rack.' In many Roman Catholic churches, the bank of candles lit continually by those at prayer is found in the North transept. These lit candles are prayers for the dead.

Keir Elam perceives the negated bodily fragment in *Not I* as evoking an 'eschatological experience of afterlife torment'.⁸⁶ In an essay which draws analogies with Beckett's first and last love, Dante, Elam argues for the possibility of a dramatic eschatology where the world on stage is not the world of the audience. In Canto XXXII of the *Inferno*, there is a bodiless head, of whom Dante demands his identity. The sinner replies: 'Pluck out all my hair, I will not tell you who I am' The head belongs to 'Bocca', which means 'Mouth'. Like the traitor Bocca, Mouth in *Not I* is perhaps doomed to an endless concealment of her identity through logorrhoeic speech. Her damnation is in her narration, which can be understood as a refusal to admit any personal guilt and responsibility. Alternatively, her refusal of identification with the narrative present and narrated past, speaking her life as though lived by another, is a symptom of psychic atrophy, of the kind where hystericals are unconscious of certain of their bodily phenomena:

Physiology tends to establish that there is thus being accomplished in the human organism an immense number of conscious facts which, for the ego, are as if they belonged to other people.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Keir Elam, 'Dead-heads: damnation and narration in the 'dramaticules', in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 145.

⁸⁷ Pierre Janet, *The Mental State of Hystericals*, trans. Careline Rellin Corson (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), 187.

These are possible contexts, only ever implied by the stage entities themselves, or the experience of their staging. Billie Whitelaw remarked on playing Mouth: ‘The very first time I did it, I went to pieces, I felt I had no body; I could not relate to where I was’.⁸⁸ The avoidance of deictic references point to an afterlife outside time or place, or to a psychic imbalance: they also point to the actress’ body and the self-abnegation necessary to play the part. The ‘godforsaken hole’, the mouth itself, shows forth a fractured existence in an attempt to deny its own pronominal, bodily and ontological bond with that existence. The more Mouth defends her non – subjectivity, the more she betrays her reluctant self-awareness as stage subject-object, from narrating the discovery of her act of narrating, ‘sudden urge . . . to tell’(380), to the discovery of the spectators’ eyes, ‘ . . . till she saw the stare she was getting’ (381).

These enacted physical separations, between the body of the actor and that of the character, thematise the fractured ontologies within the fiction, so that they remain unspoken mysteries. In Beckett’s notes for what became his last dramatic production, *What Where* for TV Süddeutscher Ruunfunk in Stuttgart, he describes the playing as a ‘field of memory’, whilst the separate, remembering consciousness, the ‘voice of BAM’, is called a voice ‘from beyond the grave’.⁸⁹ Stage ghosts usually either involve a supernatural intervention, as in *Hamlet*, or can occupy the space of living memory, for example, Alvin in Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. In *What Where*, and, it can be argued, many other late plays, they are closer to a Yeatsian vision of the afterlife, where ‘the human spirit is destined to dream back through its life’;⁹⁰ this is related to Dante’s vision of purgatory,

⁸⁸ James Knowlson, ‘Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio, and Television: Extracts from an Unscripted Interview with Billie Whitelaw’, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 3 (1978), 86.

⁸⁹ Quoted in S.E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume IV: The Shorter Plays* (London: Faber, 1999), 415.

⁹⁰ Quoted from *A Vision*, in F.A.C. Wilson, *W.B. Yeats and Tradition* (London: Methuen, 1968), 148.

where Belacqua, the name adopted for the hero of Beckett's early fiction, can dream over, at his ease, a whole life spent dreaming.

If life contains an unresolved emotional knot, the spirit is forced to stay at that point until the knot is untied. In *Words upon the Window Pane*, Dr. Trench remarks: 'Some spirits are earth bound - they think they are still living' and go over and over some action of their past lives as the living go over a painful thought. Yeats' theatre of limbo inhabits the 'land of the unborn', giving the impression of a waiting place between modes of being, the nebulous region between the living and the dead. It is not only the shortness of Beckett's later drama which suggests its liminality: hidden bodies, truncated faces, the choreographic repetitiveness in half-light create a semi- corporeal indefiniteness which suggests the crepuscular space on stage may not be entirely of this world. In *Ghost Trio*, the 'slow faltering walk' 'makes no sound';⁹¹ Beckett also specified that the 'exits and entrances' in *Come and Go* should be 'slow, without sound of feet' (211). Previously the sound of feet were what grounded a figure in the physical world, for instance, May, or Mrs. Rooney; here, that there is no sound suggests they figures are not of the physical world. The effort in imagining this is implied in the *Ghost Trio*'s stage direction '[*Door imperceptibly ajar*]'(408); something is there but it is imperceptible, or in the case of the figures, we perceive something that is not there. It could be the case that Flo, Vi and Ru are already gone;⁹² in this sense, the ritualistic and circular acts of whispering become the purgatorial punishment to which they have been condemned. As in Yeats, being 'gone' is not a simple absence, but a terrible present-ness, taking the form of an eternal and agonising instant.

⁹¹ Reading Archive MS 1519/1.

⁹² See Elam in Pilling (1994), 147.

The women's ritual gesture of the clasped hands mimes a kind of communal prayer for the other woman. As a symbol, the pattern made by the intertwining hands, the figure on the right holding the left hands of each of the others, the one on the left holding both right hands, the one in the centre holding a right and a left, suggests a figure of eight turned on its side: the image of infinity.⁹³ Enoch Brater has noticed that May's pacing, wheel and turn, from right to left, then left to right, from above, is also an 'elongated variation of the figure of eight turned on its side.'⁹⁴ These restless souls, trapped in their physical predicament, are consigned to eternal repetition, like the lovers in Yeats' *The Dreaming of the Bones*, compelled to live and relive their unhappy existence, or the spirit of Swift in *Words Upon the Window Pane* and the mother in *Purgatory*, condemned to tread the same circular path. Trapped on the horizontal beam which she paces, May will never have done. Yeats' stage management of his purgatorial ghosts foreshadows Beckett's manipulation of light:

The 'perception' may be considered as a circle or space of light encircling each man, and it is the Husk. The dead past thrown off by the living present.⁹⁵

This is not so firm a metaphysical statement: in his plays, Yeats does not exclude the possibility that the past is more living than the present. In this sense, the 'light encircling each man' is the spotlight in *Play*, the players' urns, their husks, the light a perception, but not theirs, of their present-ness. The beam transfigures the actors' bodies into a state of static lifelessness. Yeats had 'once asked a dramatic company to let me rehearse them

⁹³ Lois More Overbeck, 'Getting On', in Katherine Burkman (ed.), *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Toronto: AUP, 1987), 25.

⁹⁴ 'A Footnote to Footfalls: Footsteps of Infinity in Beckett's Narrow Space', Enoch Brater, *Comparative Drama*, 12 (1978), 37.

⁹⁵ W.B. Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 332.

in barrels that they might forget gesture' (*Explorations*, 82); in doing so, the player loses his or her sense of being embodied. Beckett brought Yeats' rehearsal practice into the life of his plays: this strictness is turned into an unrelenting decisiveness in Beckett's directions, and becomes an aspect of the play's irreversible and absolute determination. The barrels echo the ashcans in *Endgame*, Winnie's mound, the urns in *Play*, serving as concrete stage symbols for a state of changelessness. The original lighting was changed in *Happy Days* so that 'Strong sunlight' became 'blazing light'⁹⁶; as in *Play*, the light falls as though conscious that it both perceives and torments. Beckett told Billie Whitelaw that Winnie's 'strength is through her unawareness.'⁹⁷ The possibility of endlessness is kept from Winnie, or rather she hides the fact behind her daily rituals. In *Play*, there is no possibility of distraction from the unflinching spotlight. Physically separated, remote and inscrutable to one another, their mud caked faces suggest burial, and the persistence of consciousness beyond embodiment. The light as a 'unique inquisitor' (318) implies an endless agony of perceivedness. For these figures, death is not the end, and there is no peace or forgetting; the *da capo* brings out the indefinite approximating towards endlessness. Repetition is their punishment.

Directorial and compositional lines of vision had merged by *Play* into a single beam - the 'unique inquisitor' – falling on bodies which have ceased their natural function. The barrels adapted by Yeats to dislocate speech and gesture in rehearsal, the aspect of having to repeat oneself as an actor as it is rehearsed, are transformed into stage symbols which evoke an unnamed reality. In Beckett, the process of staging the play becomes a correlative for the ontological condition of the characters; by removing all possible

⁹⁶ S.E.Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 210.

⁹⁷ *The Beckett Circle II* (Summer, 1979), 4.

signals of Cartesian unity, the total dissociation of the natural living body from its formal function leaves this condition partially inexplicable in psycho-somatic terms. This severance preserves a formal emptiness in which staged bodies can be imagined as memory traces or voices 'from the beyond the grave'. Beckett cross-fertilised mimetic elements in Synge's blind beggars, who assume ghostly insubstantiality as perceptible bodies are dislocated, with the Maeterlinckian and Yeatsian symbolic body. The dead priest in *The Blind Ones*, '[seated ... motionless ... his face ... of an inalterable waxen lividity]' (157), and the Old Man motionless by the dry well in *At The Hawk's Well* are transmuted into Krapp; his immobility is a symptom of decrepitude at the same time as serving a formal function which requires a static tableau broken by patterned movement and physical refrains. Stage directions determine Krapp's posture as he shuffles off stage, as a collusion of the infirm and the formal: in the ghost plays, movement becomes far more formalised as gesture is severed from imitative bonds of motive and action, bringing these staged bodies closer to Maeterlinck, where '[movements appear grave, slow, apart, and as though spiritualised by the distance, and the light]'. This distance between body and self is re-iterated in the thematisation of rehearsals which Beckett learnt from Yeats: repetition becomes endlessness and directorial vision, an agony of perceivedness.

The situation in *Play* calls to mind Sartre's *Huis Clos (No Exit)*, which Beckett would have seen soon after his postwar return to Paris.⁹⁸ Bodily perceptions post-*Play* partly represent re-workings of existentialist concerns. Sartre spoke of the play's inception:

⁹⁸ See Ruby Cohn, *From Desire to Godot* (London: University of California Press, 1987), 144.

How can one put three characters together without an exit, and keep them there on the stage to the end of the play, as though eternally? That's when the idea came to me to put them in hell and make each one of them the torturer of the other two.⁹⁹

Both plays are versions of the adultery melodrama, literal takes on the eternal triangle; the characters in *No Exit* are explicitly in hell, with no possibility of release. The central torment is in not being able to shut out the perception that they no longer exist: their bodies are husks containing ever-receding memories of earthly embodiment. Nothing is left of them on earth, and they are to spend an eternity taunting each other with this fact: 'All you own is here', 'you can't prevent your *being there*.'¹⁰⁰ Their stage is a place where 'all sigh, I was, I was' (*Rough for Radio II*, 248).

Denied eyelids so they cannot blink, without the respite of private solace, they are always aware of where they are, yet absent in the various mirrored reflections in the room, and cannot perceive themselves as the others see them:

I feel so queer. [*She pats herself.*] Don't you ever get taken that way? When I can't see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn't help much.' (19)

Their bodily self-consciousness is trapped in the gaze of the other, from which there are no angles of immunity: 'Come here, Estelle. Look at me. I want to feel someone looking

⁹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Un Théâtre de situations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 237-38, trans. in Ruby Cohn, *From Desire to Godot* (London: University of California Press, 1987), 37.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, (New York: Vintage, 1989), 21.

at me while they're talking about me on earth' (8). To convince themselves of their physical reality, their connection with earthly activity, they rely on each other for verification: like *The Blind Ones*, or the Douls in *Well of the Saints*, they grope with their hands:

Estelle: My poor darling! Look at me. Please look. Touch me. Touch me. [*She takes his hand and puts it on her neck.*] There! Keep your hand there.' (34)

The figures are inseparable in this sense: unable to take their eyes off each other, they cannot see themselves with their own eyes. This estranges voices from bodies: Garcin speaks in a '[*in a far away voice*]', a vocal immateriality bringing to mind May's remoteness of tone. There is a transition from first person existence to an abstraction of that existence, which lives on a former experience, or rather on the memory of physical experience. Once they are caught in the eddies of power play, their punishment is made clear to them:

[*Inez has come up and is standing behind Estelle, but without touching her. During the dialogue that follows she speaks almost in her ear. But Estelle keeps her eyes on Garcin, who observes her without speaking, and she addresses her answers to him, as if it were he who is questioning her.*] (31)

Bodies simultaneously see and are seen, yet they are deprived of the ability to recognise themselves in what they see. To see is to have at a distance: 'vision is not a certain mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means given me for being absent from myself'.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston:Northwestern University Press), 165.

Yet their selves, as bodily indices, are third personal memories of a previous existence, so they cannot be absent from themselves in this way, and consequently can never come back to themselves.

If the characters are trapped in their predicament, the audience is trapped in a certain way of looking at them; these complicit forms of perception stress the irreversibility of the fictional situation, and both depend on stage directions which tell actors and audience how to look. This staring vision is essential to the piece. Having only one another for company, the figures in *No Exit* learn that hell is being caught, like a mote in a sunbeam, in the other's gaze.

This notion takes various forms throughout Beckett's plays: with each visual composition comes a particular way of perceiving that is central to the play. Whereas Kleist's marionettes retain their grace through a complete absence of this sense, Lucky's lack of grace is a symbol of the incapacitating sense of being watched. The stage lights slowly fade on a motionless Krapp, '*staring before him*' (223) as the tape runs on in silence, until the only light is 'that of the 'eye' of tape recorder',¹⁰² an image reminiscent of the supernatural red eye gleaming from the queen's tower in Maeterlinck's *Death of Tintagiles*. The camera in *Ghost Trio*, 'once set for shot, does not explore, simply looks. It stops and stares.'¹⁰³ In the ghost plays, the gaze is strictly directed in a manner which preserves an interpretive openness; Sartre's vision is made vague: 'esse est percipi', yet the severance of voice from body leaves an uncertainty as to whether what we see occurs in bodily reality or 'profounds of mind' (*Ohio Impromptu*, 448). To violate these

¹⁰² Reading Archive MS 3071, annotations by Beckett on Grove Press, 1960 edition, used by Beckett for BBC2 production with Magee, dir. McWhinnie, 29 Nov 1972, 28.

¹⁰³ Reading Archive MS 1519/2, Beckett's annotations on holograph manuscript, 3.

intentional indeterminacies, as did the American Repertory Theatre's *Endgame* and Deborah Warner's *Footfalls*, is to distort the situation and falsify the delicate process of exchange between actors and audience. Akalaitis remarked in her defence that 'everything on stage is in a specific place', but her visual composition, in its specificity, actually closes off interpretation by misdirecting the gaze of the viewer.

These angles of perception direct the audience's gaze in a process peculiar to each play, and depend on adequate apprehension of the contradictions within the stage directions. Beckett's directions for the stage reveal affiliations to theatrical traditions directly engaged with the contradictions between vocalised text and physical performance. The staging of mechanical bodies in Symbolist theatre merges with Biomechanical deictics as a way of severing speech from gesture and the imitative bonds of the actor; the grotesque and infirm bodies in Synge are made to inhabit a Yeatsian liminal province 'between sleep and waking [...] alike on the stage and in the mind, between man and phantom';¹⁰⁴ in the dramatisation of speech-gesture dislocation through the stage directions in the ghost plays, existentialist ontology is pitched against Cartesian unity. In the process of directing his own plays, Beckett re-organised these influences by preventing either the formal or natural elements of staged bodies from assuming a privileged originating force.

¹⁰⁴ W.B. Yeats, Preface for *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (London: Bullen, 1911), p.x..

Joyce's Stage Directed Bodies: Ritual and Rhythmic Gestures in 'Circe'

Stage Directions/Narrative Voice

The uncertainty as to whether what we see on Beckett's stage occurs in bodily reality or 'profounds of mind' is preserved by the dual-plane which it occupies. Stage ghosts are accessed by a reader, who perceives their coming and going, or their stillness, alone and in a private space. Or they are perceived communally as physical incarnation. Both planes of perception depend on stage directions, which work on the private visual imagination as much as the public stage. Neither are arbitrary or independent phenomena, and both carry a strict determination. It is evident, in their illocutionary complexity and the meticulous revisions to which they were subjected, that they were intended as much to be read as 'seen', and that the later plays are explicitly concerned with the passage from one kind of perception to another.

Beckett spoke of the composition of his plays as visualising 'on your mental stage while you're writing'.¹⁰⁵ The enclosed unalterable dynamic and the notion of writing direction into the text point to a compositional intent which imagines a mental stage. This is projected onto an actual stage which frequently refers back to its inception. Richard Schechner's view that 'stage directions are vestiges and /or amplifications of the internal scening' and that 'the whole scening process is [...] a scaffold that is best dismantled

¹⁰⁵ Beckett to Jonathan Kalb, quoted in Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72.

entirely once the play takes shape as dialogue'¹⁰⁶ misses a crucial aspect if applied to Beckett's ghosts, where performance dramatises, rather than dismantles, 'internal scening'. The difficulty in imagining a 'mental stage', in the process of the play's composition, enters into its dramatic and scenic content. On stage, the incorporeal nature of Beckett's figures are like ghostly projections of the text: reading the directions, we imagine the bodies as shadowy, unclear and crepuscular because they do not literally pass before our eyes.

The mediation between prescriptions for stage management, and signals for the solitary reader, foregrounds in Beckett the reversibility of psychic and somatic complexes. Internal and external scenings are bracketted together in stage directions, collapsing distinctions between mental images and their physical incarnation. This two-plane language, which asserts physical correlatives as conditions of mind, belongs to various theatrical traditions, but also to the quasi presence and imminent visibility of speech-gesture complexes in Joyce. Formulating the specific innovations of Joyce's language, Beckett wrote in 1929 of the inadequacies of 'reading' its 'quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture'.¹⁰⁷ Louche habits of reading, the 'rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense' (26), will fail to apprehend *Finnegans Wake*, which 'is not to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to' (27). Joyce's experiments with boundaries between language and gesture, the 'tilted and effervescent' words Beckett describes, have their genesis in the stage directions of 'Circe' in *Ulysses*. The directions, if adequately received, radically transform the notion of referring to something outside the experience of reading them, whilst turning the notion of 'reading' into an effortful activity akin to stage management. 'Circe', which turns the hidden velleities of

¹⁰⁶ Richard Schechner, 'Drama, Script, Theatre and Performance' in *The Drama Review*, 17:3 (1973), 13.

¹⁰⁷ 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce', in *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983), 28.

its characters into vaudeville, should be read both as narrative and drama, looked at and listened to whilst being read. The peculiar concision of the directions project what had previously been read as interior monologue - the private consciences and complexes of Dedalus and Bloom - onto the public stage of 'Circe', transforming their lone habits of mind into theatrical gestures. Beckett's stage directions, read as a public staging of internal traumas, are descendents of Joyce's dramatic innovations.

Beckett's problem as writer-director lay in the organisation of the orders of body and speech. In 'Circe', Joyce endeavours to organise accumulated interior monologues and bodily phenomena : this is achieved by stage managing the preceding narrative. Whereas an actor's gesture refers, by analogy, to its model in the everyday world, gestures in 'Circe' refer by analogy to the world in the preceding chapters. It is by contrast with the narrative forms of the other chapters that 'Circe' acquires a hallucinatory quality, displaying the unconscious of Stephen and Bloom as pantomime. Stage directions construct a 'memory-theatre' which allows the retrospective arrangement and embodiment of the novel's characters; narrative memory is turned into a production number, and ghosts take flesh. The detail in the hallucinations comes from the collective vocabulary of earlier parts of the book: in 'Telemachus', the appearance of Stephen's mother, 'a ghostly light on her tortured face', anticipates her grand-guignol entrance, assisted by a choir of virgins, in 'Circe':

In a dream, silently, she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes.¹⁰⁸

In the first and subsequent early chapters, adverbs tend to precede the verb and the logical subject, signalling a particular quality of motion, and adding a staginess to events. In 'Telemachus', this conveys a solemn processional quality - 'silently, she had come to him' - yet the past perfect tense keeps the apparition at a safe distance, a remembered dream; in 'Circe', stage directions place the afflicted dead mother presently before Stephen's horrorstruck eyes:

[Stephen's mother, emaciated, rises stark through the floor in leper grey with a wreath of faded orange blossoms and a torn bridal veil, her face worn and noseless, green with grave mould. Her hair is scant and lank. She fixes bluecircled hollow eyesockets on Stephen and opens her toothless mouth uttering a silent word.] (539)

The 'wasted body' in 'Telemachus' is delineated in the tawdry operatics of public spectacle; the somnolent vestige visible only to Stephen is scarcely but perceptibly fleshed and clothed in 'Circe', as she '[*rises stark through the floor*]' to a choir of virgins. The language of the stage transforms the crepuscular quasi presence of a private apparition into an incarnate stage presence. As Stephen's nightmare is caught in public lines of vision, the direction is enacted before the eyes of the other 'players' as well as the

¹⁰⁸ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 10.

reader. The bodily indices of Stephen's dreamed revivescence are exposed to view: the trauma in imagining his dead mother as a still decaying natural body is materialised before an audience.

From Stephen's point of view, 'Circe' is a ritual allowing him to escape the protracted mourning of his mother, who has been taken into his mind and preserved there. His mind is condemned to a dream of its past from which he struggles to awake; Stephen does not just turn over in his mind a painful thought, or listen out for a voice from beyond the grave: he enacts to himself scenes in which his mother is corporeally proximate to him. *Ulysses* begins with Stephen alone with his mother: the physical detail of memories accessible only to Stephen - 'her glass of water from the kitchen tap when she had approached the sacrament [...] a cored apple, filled with brown sugar, roasting for her at the hob on a dark autumn evening'(10) - place her on a private stage. Although she is only a vestigial shade, she is more vivid to him as an afterlife than Mulligan's histrionic voice. His grand entrance - 'he came from the stairhead' - is enacted in public, whereas the mother 'had come' to Stephen, 'her glazing eyes [...]on [him] alone' (5). Stephen conceives of his own mind theatrically, and his torments often take the syntactic form of directions for a public space:

The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face. Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. (10)

The reader is irretrievably installed in Stephen's consciousness from the opening, and the physical world outside his perceptions remains shadowy and uncertain. The 'signature of all things' is communicated through Stephen's reading of them, and his private traumas

are made more vivid than anything his eyes see. The 'ghostly light on the tortured face' sets blueprints for the stage directions in which the mother rises from the floor. The staging of events in 'Circe' is informed by these mental involutions which are from the opening conceived somatically as theatrical refrains; the mother's routines of re-appearance within private recesses is transmuted into a public ritual of resurrection.

The routines of Stephen's mind early on are motivated by unconscious strategies of diversion from the centre of his misery. He dazzles himself with his private conjuring, in order to keep himself from dwelling on the causes of his mourning. Pacing along the beach and lost in his own rare thoughts, he is reminded, as is the reader, of the physical world by his footfalls on the grainy sand:

Reading two pages apiece of seven books every night, eh? I was young. You bowed to yourself in the mirror, stepping forward to applause earnestly, striking face. Hurray for the Goddamned idiot! Hray! No-one saw: tell no-one. Books you were going to write with letters for titles. Have you read his F? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful. O yes, W. Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand year, a mahamanvantara. Pico della Mirandola like. Ay, very like a whale. When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once...

The grainy sand had gone from under his feet. His boots trod again a damp crackling mast, razorshells, squeaking pebbles, that on the unnumbered pebbles beats, wood sieved by the shipworm, lost Armada. Unwholesome

sandflats waited to suck his treading soles, breathing upward sewage breath. He coasted them, walking warily. (40-41)

Stephen has acquired Hamlet's self-mockery, able to direct an ironic gaze at his arrogant youthful poses and misconceived ideals, scrutinising the gap between his pretensions and achievement. The 'fabulous artificer', no longer hawklike, has fallen, weltering, a lapwing. The ellipsis breaks off his deliberation before it takes flight, as he is brought down to earth by the sand under his feet. His footfalls mime his weariness at such quixotic flights, bring home the physical world and his place outside his own 'rare thoughts'. Stephen patterns his routines of mind on Hamlet's, speculating on the weariness of his worldly achievements, as though over his shoulder, so as to avoid brooding on a parental ghost. The footsteps distract his reflections at the same time as triggering a physical memory, manifesting the unspoken trauma which besets him: as he paces along the beach, his recollections - 'proudly walking ...you were going to do wonders, what? Missionary to Europe after fiery Columbanus' (42) - are interrupted by the image of the 'blue French telegram ... -- Mother dying come home father' before continuing their defiant march:

His feet marched in sudden proud rhythm over the sand furrows, along by the boulders of the south wall. He stared at them proudly, piled stone mammoth skulls. Gold light on sea, on sand, on boulders. The sun is there, the slender trees, the lemon houses. (42)

'Proudly walking', marching in 'sudden proud rhythm': Stephen's unspoken self-denial, voiced by Mulligan and his aunt, is that his mother was finally killed by his own proud

defiance, in the refusal to enact rites for the dead. His routines of evasion revolve around the absent ritual at his mother's deathbed. He dwells on Lucifer, and his 'proud lightning of the intellect'(50); in the wild air he hears the harping of his own wild nerves, before the narrative lens pans back into the third person: 'He stood suddenly, his feet beginning to sink slowly in the quaking soil. Turn back'(44). 'Circe' takes its horror from the dehiscence of Stephen's guilt at not praying for his mother: the centrality of this absent ritual lies in his secret fear that she has been improperly buried. This is manifest when Stephen is forced to attend her ritual re-incarnation in 'Circe', where she appears as a wasting body.

The ineluctable mourning for the dead mother and the footsteps along the beach, serving both to distract him from and remind him of his mother, have their analogues in the figure of May in *Footfalls*, who paces to confirm her physical presence. The formal patterns in which May and the mother seem to speak with the same voice suggest the introjection and incorporation of the mother in May's body. In Stephen's case, his efforts to avoid brooding on his mother are synchronous with a struggle to prevent his mother's ghost from reaching bodily proximity. In the sound of his feet grounding him in the physical world, in 'the conversion of psychic material into bodily actions or symptoms',¹⁰⁹ somatising the psyche by (re) enacting it (Baker, 164), *Footfalls* comes to mind. Lacan's view that ghosts arise from 'the gap left by the omission of a significant rite' is more directly applicable to Stephen than it is to May, whose trauma conceals an abstract and unexplained origin, even though her mind broods on the church candelabrum, prayers for the dead in the form of lit candles. Stephen's circumlocutions avoid the centre of his trauma, the guilt at not praying for his dying mother. He turns

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Phil Baker, *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 164.

back to another play to relieve himself of this trauma, *Hamlet*, a play in which the protagonist also turns to old stories to put his mourning into dramatic form, to keep him distracted. Turning, as he scans the shore south, Stephen imagines the ‘cold domed room of the tower’ which awaits him as Elsinore.

The complexities which never fully come to light in Hamlet’s mind, the dark matter of his memory and mourning complex, accentuate the inscrutable aspects of what innervates his theatrical self. Mr. Best in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ quotes Mallarmé’s view of Hamlet: ‘il se promène, lisant au livre de lui-même, ... reading the book of himself’ (179). Like Stephen, Hamlet is both intimate like a book and remotely on stage. The audience or reader has a privileged view of both of their innermost thoughts, yet these are often strategies devised in order to disguise the substrata of their emotions. The motivation behind the play may be as blank to Hamlet as to his audience – it is uncertain whether he grasps his own cause. It is perhaps the invasiveness of theatre as a publicly shared experience, the result of reluctantly finding himself in a revenge play, that keeps Hamlet from always revealing the thousand complexities in his mind. *Hamlet* is the Prince’s solo, and leaves the impression of a series of reflections, drawn from one mouth. This is what Mallarmé suggests by the line ‘reading the book of himself’: like Stephen, who prefers to think of himself on ‘green oval leaves’, Hamlet would often rather indulge the solitary activity of ‘reading himself’ than sharing himself publically on stage.

The mother’s apparition in ‘Circe’ inherits some of the uncertainties as to how apparent the ghost is to the characters. Hamlet’s father appears on the battlements to everyone present, but only to Hamlet in the Queen’s boudoir. The former is supposedly ‘real’ because public, the latter ‘imaginary’ because private, though according to the stage

direction the audience sees them both. In 'Telemachus', she comes to Stephen alone; the objectivity of the stage directions in 'Circe' displace this privacy, and it cannot be said that the hallucination is exclusively his: Buck Mulligan also upturns his eyes to Stephen's mother: 'she's beastly dead. The pity of it!' (539). The prescriptive nature of the directions does not allow for the difference between the reality of the ghost and the minds of the characters, between the public arena and the solitary mind. The formulation of private conditions in stage directions points to the activity of publicly re-read selves; the language in which Joyce directs his characters turns these conditions into theatre.

Stephen must exorcise his mother, and both he and Bloom must exorcise the nightmare of history: a ghost play is called for. As Breon Mitchell remarked: 'if 'Circe' was not in a novel, it could be seen as a further example of the dramatic experimentation in the 1920s'.¹¹⁰ Joyce had planned to write a play since university, and regarded his novels and stories as preparation. His conversation at this time was preoccupied with the defects of Shakespeare compared to Ibsen.¹¹¹ Yet Ibsen was too 'simple' for Joyce, even in 1907:

Life is not so simple as Ibsen represents it [...] It is a remnant of heroics [...] For me, boyhood and youth are these two beside us [indicating a drunken boy of about 20 who had brought his mother in to the trattoria] I would like to put on paper the thousand complexities in his mind. (Ellmann, 266)

'Circe', which Joyce considered the best thing he had written, is a parody of theatrical naturalism, revising the idea that you can see and hear all that occurs on stage. This is

¹¹⁰ J. Aubert and M. Jolas, *Joyce & Paris 1902 ... 1920-1940 ... 1975: Papers from the Fifth International Joyce Symposium* (Paris, Editions du C.N.R.S., 1979), 53

¹¹¹ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (Oxford: OUP, 1959; repr. 1982), 265.

achieved with stage directions which become motifs for the ‘thousand complexities’ in the minds of the players. A ‘[*concave mirror*]’ does not merely present Bloom, but the image of his self-pity, ‘[*lovelorn longlost lugubru Boolooohoom*]’ (413).

Joyce’s technique melds drama and narrative by making stage directions refer to inverse worlds of theatre and fiction. The technical language of proxemic stage codes ‘up right/left’ ‘down right/left’, derived from the perspective of the actors, and stage machinery, is adopted in ‘Circe’:

[A man in a brown macintosh springs up through a trapdoor.] (458)

[From left upper entrance with two sliding steps Henry Flower comes forward to left front centre.] (486)

Theatrical dimensions are invoked by recourse to the gestures of vaudeville:

[Bloom trickleaps to the curbstone [...] [he swerves, sidles, stepsaside, slips past and on.] (414-415)

[Virag chutes rapidly down through the chimneyflue and struts two steps to the left on gawky pink stilts.] (491)

These deployments serve to transgress the confines of the theatrical. Vocal distinctions, such as those between the mimetic voice of a character and the diegetic voice of the narrator are exploded by the deadpan voice in the stage directions which renders what is

optically absurd and forms motifs for mental complexities. In play scripts, there is usually a distinction between speech directions and narrative directions; for directions indicating gesture, the present tense indicates movement which precedes utterance, whereas the participle form signals movement made simultaneously with the utterance. These distinctions are collapsed in directions which display a language unable to deal with simultaneity; whose conventional task is to prescribe doable acts of the body, but which defies physical possibility, as when Bloom '[turns each foot simultaneously in different directions]' (439).

Joyce's innovation in 'Circe' lies in the cross-pollination of languages of the stage and interior languages of private feeling. The chapter experiments with the notion of staging a play depicting Stephen and Bloom's confrontation, aware that only with serious difficulty could the material yield itself to a physical incarnation. Yet the visual frame is there in the stage directions, and the reader is forced to place voices inside bodies. The private languages of the characters are heard in stage language which ordinarily acts as external indicator. The narrative eye, which throughout *Ulysses* never relinquishes its position as invisible onlooker, gains a new vantage point from which to survey its characters outside their skin.

An early draft of 'Circe'¹¹² was written without stage directions, as narrative focalised through an observer or auditor: 'Whistles are heard . . . a plate is heard . . . A child is heard' (Herring, 211). The past tense places the unfolding scene, like the dream Stephen has of his mother in 'Telemachus', as an event remembered and narrated. The final version translates the notion of remembrance into an activity unfolding presently before

¹¹² Herring dates early draft of 'Circe', Buffalo MS. V.A. 19, spring/summer 1920, in Phillip F. Herring, *Joyce's 'Ulysses' Notesheets in the British Museum* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1972), 199.

our eyes: '[*Whistles call and answer . . . A plate crashes . . . a child wails*]' (408-9). The directions project the bodies onto the same stage in the form of speech-gesture hallucinations which had previously inhabited reminiscences and private conflicts. That the reader should also hallucinate these figures required a rhetorical trick where voices could be seen emerging from bodies: that is, an imagined stage. Joyce's efforts are also the reader's: to privately stage manage Nighttown.

This organisation of orders of body and speech depends on the chapter's context.

Slippages between the psychic and somatic in 'Circe' are the accretions of speech-gesture complexes transfigured from the internal scenes in the preceding chapters into public fields of view. Characters take their cue from directions which are also projections of their own unconscious. These experiments with theatrical form can only be comprehended in the light of the earlier narrative; it is necessary to grasp the ways in which individual routines of mind keep Stephen and Bloom from painful animadversions, before they are exploded into spectacle. Whilst its innovations connect 'Circe' to the 'dramatic experimentation' of its time, it is nevertheless impossible to dissociate it from the wider narrative: the stage directions are often retrospective arrangements of previous sentences, mingling the past voices of interior monologues with present tense stage language.

Despite the transition from narrative to dramatic form, vestiges of previous narrative styles are found, such as the reversal of subjects and predicates. Subsidence between perceptions and narrative voice are anticipated before 'Circe'; although there is never a clear-cut distinction between diegetic and mimetic statements, in previous chapters it is possible to tell who is thinking what, according to their mode of expression. Thoughts

can be separated from narrative line, from action rendered through observation rather than through spoken language. It is more difficult to distinguish the narrative levels in 'Circe' and to say to whom exactly the hallucinations belong, yet its technique is an enlargement of previous stage settings.

'Circe's' stage is anticipated as far back as the opening scene:

Solemnly he came forward and mounted the round gunrest. He faced about and blessed gravely thrice the tower, the surrounding country and the awaking mountains. Then, catching sight of Stephen Dedalus, he bent towards him and made rapid crosses in the air, gurgling in his throat and shaking his head. (3)

Mulligan pretends to be a Black Mass celebrant, going through the motions of an Irish priest. The staginess and the mock ritual look forward to 'Circe's' Black Mass, but the nature of Mulligan's stage presence provides a significant contrast with the two protagonists. He is never permitted unspoken thoughts, and is always seen as the stage Irishman, speaking as though cued by stage directions: 'coarsely', 'sternly', 'briskly', 'gaily'. His next extended entrance, described as 'Entr'acte', occurs during the discussion of Shakespeare's stage; his last, in a costume drama of narrative manners. That he is denied an interior voice points to the uniqueness of Bloom and Stephen as dramatic characters. His mock hieratic routine contrasts with the account of Dignam's funeral service through Bloom's eyes. The physical sequence in which the priest bends down and then faces about to 'bless all the people' echoes Mulligan's sermon, but the vantage point is Bloom's, a man unaccustomed to the ritual before him, who looks over the

congregation and their 'risen hats' before realising he must 'stand up at the gospel of course' (77).

Bloom's thoughts on Dignam dominate the scene, just as Stephen's mother occupies him on the beach. During the service and burial, the panorama of motion and ritual, the movements of the congregation, the liturgical chants, the coffincart wheeled along the lane of sepulchres, contend to make themselves heard above Bloom's own perceptions of them. His thoughts are at a remove from the ritual surrounding him, as he muses on the priest praying 'all year round [...] the same thing' and the afterlife, which moves from 'you will see my ghost after death', a thought which gives Bloom 'the creeps', to 'warm beds: warm fullblooded life' (110). Bloom remembers Dignam's life in his own way, and achieves during the funeral a kind of transcendence of life over death by his strategy of withdrawal. This trait, the protection of his selfhood through withdrawal, taking possession of the odds and ends of the world and reforming them into mental images, is Bloom's secret weapon, which is turned against him in 'Circe'. His introjections maintain his equilibrium and humour, whereas Stephen's private reflections threaten to destroy him. This capacity to withdraw reverberates across the chapters leading to 'Circe', and reaches its full flourish in 'Nausicaa'; here, the technique in 'Circe' which shifts borders of mind and lets them flow into one another is established.

The gestural language passing between Gerty and Bloom - 'it was a kind of language between us' (355) - anticipates the tawdry theatricality and the staging of private fantasies in 'Circe'. Fetishistic commonplaces and 'pulp-fiction cliches [...]'¹¹³ - 'she would fain have cried to him chokingly, held out her snowy slender arms to him to come,

¹¹³ Darcy O'Brien, *The Conscience of James Joyce* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 157-158.

to feel his lips' (354) - place the scene in Gerty's language. But the chapter also shows Bloom stage managing his own fantasy. What occurs is something like a shared daydream: Bloom masturbates over a scene he constructs, but it is in the language of Gerty, whose romantic pining for a hero Bloom fills for himself, to aid his own fantasy. He imagines himself as her 'steadfast, [...] sterling man, a man of inflexible honour'(349). Impossible as it is to distinguish between what is imagined and what actually passes between them, the encounter nevertheless contains in the conjunction of two separate fantasies an element of complicity:

She leaned back far to look up where the fireworks were and she caught her knee in her hands so as not to fall back looking up and there was no one to see only him and her when she revealed all her graceful beautifully shaped legs like that, supple soft and delicately rounded, and she seemed to hear the panting of his heart, his hoarse breathing, because she knew about the passion of men like that, hot-blooded [...] (349)

Desire is based on an imagined response: Bloom imagines Gerty receiving him as her hot-blooded lover. For Bloom, to 'see her as she is' is to 'spoil all' (349): he 'Must have the stage setting, the rouge, costume, position, music.' Hence the detail in the 'nainsook knickers, the fabric that caresses the skin, better than those other pettiwidth, the green, four and eleven, on account of being white'. His fantasy is ended mid-thought: rather than make a quietly dignified exit, Gerty limps away, just as Bloom goes limp on her:

She balked with a certain quiet dignity characteristic of her but with care and very slowly because Gerty MacDowell was...

Tight boots? No. She's lame! O!

Mr Bloom watched her as she limped away. (351)

The language that passes between them is one of visual interaction, a silent language of pantomime. The encounter demonstrates Bloom's propensity to place value on imaginative reconstructions of possible relationships, and hints at the pantomime anxieties to come in 'Circe', where his guilt manifests itself not as actual but in potential affairs with other women. Bloom's mind turns on the notion of actual and imagined physical love: if the stage setting during Gerty's encounter were projected for public consumption, Gerty would be made a whore. So in nighttown she re-appears lasciviously, pawing Bloom's sleeve, obedient to his fantasy: 'I love you for doing that to me', before receiving the stage direction: '*[She slides away crookedly]*' (420). This not only remembers the scene earlier as Gerty limps away, but adds the present tense vantage of a theatrical referent: Bloom's thought in 'Nausicaa' (above) is broken by the ellipsis, Gerty's movement is not seen by the reader, Bloom responds, the narrative eye pans back and the reader is given Bloom's reflections in a past tense, as a reflection: 'Mr Bloom watched her as she limped away.' The stage direction incarnates its referent before Bloom by placing the movement presently before an audience.

Gerty mingles with the whores of nighttown: the description of her in 'Nausicaa', as 'in very truth as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see' (333), is recalled in the stage direction which introduces Kitty: '*[And a prettier, a daintier head of winsome curls was never seen on a whore's shoulders]*' (489). The difficulty in

distinguishing mimetic terms (what happens) from narrative stance (point of view) is taken to an extreme in 'Circe', which uses the objective form of drama to transport the most subjective elements: Bloom's physical memory, his bodily remembrance.

The charge that Bloom is a 'wellknown ... bigamist, bawd and cuckold' is partly brought about against him by himself; the 'SINS OF THE PAST', who in a medley of voices reprove him for his heavy breathing, the 'unspeakable messages he telephoned mentally' (503), represent minor acts of furtive sexuality upon which a burden of free-floating guilt has amassed. The accusation of having made 'improper overtures' (441) to Mrs.

Yelverton Barry, Mrs Bellingham and the Honourable Mrs Mervyn Talboys and the fantasy submission to Bella, which takes the form of a medieval ritual, the trying of the heretic, with torture, confession of guilt, and imposition of cruel penance, are self-tormenting fantasies, dramatisations of an intrapsychic power struggle whose guilt partially originates in the encounter with Gerty, attested by Bella's reference to the 'wondrous revelation' Bloom espies in 'Nausicaa': 'The scanty, daringly short skirt, riding up at the knee to show a peep of white pantalette, is a potent weapon' (506).

Routines of mind metamorphose into public ritual. The boundaries between the various women in 'Circe' evaporate into images of a mind guilt-ridden with its habits of introjection and appropriation: 'Is me her was you dreamed before? Was then she him you us since knew? Am all them and the same now we?'. Bloom's trait of protecting his selfhood through withdrawal into fantasy is turned against him. He is literally turned inside out, as inner traits become gestural realities and items in a public ritual. Rather than hide his social impotence as he does in previous chapters, by turning away or surveying his fingernails, he is made to play himself as though it were no longer possible to disguise his nervousness, joining '[*his hands with hangdog mien*]' (443),

‘[*apologetic toes turned in*]’ (439). Similarly, Bloom’s magnanimity, which has previously remained a private relishing, is transformed into spectacle, as he is seen:

[Shaking hands with a blind stripling ... Placing arms round shoulder of an old couple ... He wheels twins in a perambulator ... He performs juggler’s tricks, draws ... hankerchiefs from his mouth ... He consoles a widow ... He dances the Highland fling with grotesque antics ... He kisses the bedsores of a palsied veteran ... He gives his coat to a beggar.] (459)

Bloom is too much the free-thinker to have instinctive tastes for ritual behaviour: when he finds himself in situations of communal practice, his mind slips into its own routines of commemoration, removing him from the scene, as it does at Dignam’s funeral.

Bloom’s acts of goodness are found in the littleness of diurnal routines, rather than grand ceremonious gestures: ‘[*shaking hands ... placing arms round shoulders*]’, consoling, kissing: these are Bloom’s grand gestures.

Diurnal routines of mind are transformed into enacted ritual: the unfolding spectacle mimes the passage of perception from interior monologue to theatre. This is articulated in theatrical directions, which by their appearance on the page, foreground an activity central to the novel as a whole: the speculating upon Stephen and Bloom ‘reading the book of [themselves]’.

Stage directions collapse distinctions between the language of interior feeling and spectacle, rendering previous unconscious strategies of repression ineffective as they are publically disseminated. Events occur in a liminal zone, 'on the stage and in the mind'.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ W.B. Yeats, Preface for *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (London: Bullen, 1911), p.x.

Circe, Yeats and Ritual Theatre

The ritualistic means by which Bloom's ordinary behaviour is transformed into specialised sequences, the way in which gestures reveal previously hidden motives, unfolding as an array of unsteady compromises among levels of intent, the overdetermined nature of unfolding events, and their liminal character, on the threshold of past and future conditions, place 'Circe' in ironic relation to the kind of Revivalist theatre described by Yeats as 'between sleep and waking . . . alike on the stage and in the mind, between man and phantom' (*Preface*, x).

As Hugh Kenner has noted:

no book concerned with the Dublin of 1904 – the year the Abbey opened – would be complete without a play: a play, moreover, sufficiently outrageous to exceed the offence Revival dramaturgy had offered.¹¹⁵

The inaugural play of the Irish Revival theatre, *The Countess Cathleen*, served to rankle bourgeois Dublin and played under police protection in 1899; Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* received condemnation for its traductions of Irish womanhood, and for passing off as Irish what was Greek legend; *The Playboy of the Western World* was famously received with rioting. 'Circe', which places prostitutes on the same stage as bishops and cardinals, goes several steps further. Joyce's translations of Hauptmann's *Before Dawn* and *Michael Kramer*, for the Abbey, were rejected by Yeats in 1904; William Archer did not much care for Joyce's 'form of realism' (Ellmann, 402) in *Exiles*, and the Abbey

¹¹⁵ Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980; repr. 1987), 118.

again turned it down in 1915, Yeats not recommending the play ‘to the Irish Theatre because [...] it is too far from the folk drama’ (Ellmann, 401). ‘Circe’ was Joyce’s response, outdoing Revivalist scandals while parodying those theatrical conventions which claim Celtic rites as the only kind of ‘folk drama’.

As counter-Revivalist drama, ‘Circe’ adopts the Yeatsian technique of shifting borders, and evocation by symbols, whilst lampooning the Celtic mysticisms which inform their operation. The transfiguration in ‘Circe’ of the private into the collective unconscious is initiated by ritual gestures and a kind of image magic, which gains control of an object by internalising its image. According to the Linati schemata, the chapter’s ‘Art’ is ‘Magic’: ritual and magic techniques not only provide ‘Circe’ with its overall structure, but also inform small-scale gestures by which characters summon the items of their unconscious. The interfusion of private memory and communal historicism owe a debt to Yeats’ practical theories on magic and its applications in theatre:

the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create a single mind, a single energy; the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory [...] this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.¹¹⁶

It is not always clear whether these ‘symbols’ summon private or historical memories in ‘Circe’. As soon as Bloom ‘[*assumes a mantle of cloth of gold*]’ (456) and is sanctified as sovereign, he is observed enacting ideals of his own diurnal routines, rather than grand heroic gestures. For Yeats, ritual was the means by which historical memory is preserved,

¹¹⁶ W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 28.

in the form of predetermined patterns of gesture: Yeats' ritual recollections of the heroic age are undermined by Bloom's emanation of unconscious energy, which turns heroism into a comic spectacle:

[Shaking hands with a blind stripling ... Placing arms round shoulder of an old couple ... He wheels twins in a perambulator ... He performs juggler's tricks, draws ... handkerchiefs from his mouth ... He consoles a widow ... He dances the Highland fling with grotesque antics ... He kisses the bedsores of a palsied veteran ... He gives his coat to a beggar.] (459)

Magic in 'Circe' is deflated into tricks and sleights of hand: Bloom '[performs juggler's tricks, draws ... handkerchiefs from his mouth]'; a cigarette '[appears on the table]' (522) to a drunken Stephen. Yeatsian techniques are shadowed by varying degrees of comic remembrance and ridicule. The magical transformation in *Cathleen Ni Hoolihan*, where the old crone is transformed into a young girl, has parallels with Stephen's transformation into Rudy. Yeats' 'symbolic talisman which medieval magicians made with complex colours and forms, [which patients must] ponder over daily and guard with holy secrecy' (*Essays and Introductions*, 148) becomes Bloom's 'Potato Preservative Against Plague and Pestilence'. The potato which cursed Ireland in the 1840s becomes Bloom's magic charm which protects the city. At the same time, the hero cults, messianic traditions and occult rituals, which constitute Revivalist theatre are roundly mocked. The mock-language and gesture of the parlour magician - '*disappears... elevates... vanishes*' - is consistent with Joyce's opinion of Yeatsian mystics, that 'they do not compare either for

consistency, holiness or charity with a fifth-rate saint of the Catholic Church'.¹¹⁷ That 'Circe' is structured as a Mass is testament to this view.

The enactments of ritualistic death and rebirth cycles, behind many of the transformations in 'Circe', parody not only theatrical boundaries as to what cannot be shown, but notions of communal historicism found in Revivalist theatre. For Yeats, the stage was a space on which the ceremony of nationhood could occur; the unity of a nation was 'like an audience in a theatre' and he yearned for an Irish equivalent of the Theatre of Dionysus, a national theatre in which the people would watch 'the sacred drama of [their] own history.'¹¹⁸ Pagan ritual would preserve the sacred culture of Ireland by discovering ancestral relations to Celtic Ireland through forms of bodily recall. Ritual gestures hark back to unchanged patterns of movement during Ireland's heroic age. In *On Baile's Strand*, Cuchulain's oath of fealty to the High King Conchubar is performed as a ritual in which his sword is joined in the fire with those of the lesser kings, to the inaudible murmur of chanting female voices, a symbolic rite directly borrowed from the Celtic Mysteries.¹¹⁹

To this notion of 'ancient corporeality' would be accommodated a solemn, hieratic acting style, which preserves in bodily form lost historical ideals. The acting style of the early Abbey was described in a review of its inauguration as played

¹¹⁷ Stanislaus Joyce, *The Dublin Diary*, ed. George Harris Healey (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 106-7.

¹¹⁸ Commentary on the 'Three Songs to the Same Tune', *King of the Great Clock Tower* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1934), quoted in James W. Flannery, *W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* (London: Yale University Press, 1976), 65.

¹¹⁹ W.B. Yeats, *Collected Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1953), 262-63.

‘with an art of gesture admirably disciplined and a strange delicacy of enunciation [...] in the method of ...ritual.’¹²⁰ This play included a preface by Lionel Johnson called ‘The Lord of Light’, which imitated the religious observances preceding performances in Greek theatre.¹²¹ Johnson’s poem proclaimed a new rite based on the continuity of pagan and Christian doctrines. The lavish references to light in ‘Circe’, for instance, the children’s question ‘Where’s the great light?’, partly answered by the stage direction ‘[*light all over the world*]’, are informed by these rites. In the climax to Yeats’ *The Unicorn from the Stars*, the visionary young tradesman Martin, in defiance of social and religious constraints, puts out a row of lighted church candles, saying to the priest who has come to save him:

I thought the battle was here, and that the joy was to be found here on earth, that all one had to do was to bring again the old wild earth of the stories – but no, it is not here; we shall not come to that joy, that battle, till we have put out the senses, everything that can be seen and handled, as I put out this candle. [*He puts out the candle*] We must put out the whole world as I put out this candle. [*Puts out another candle*] (*Collected Plays*, 384).

The enactment of this ritual is an attempt by Martin to abolish certain historical and religious constraints; Stephen’s response to his mother’s ghost, a similar gesture of denial, results in a smashed chandelier in a brothel, and him in a drunken heap:

¹²⁰ Quoted by Drew Fraser in ‘The Irish Allegiance of an English Laureate: John Masefield and Ireland’, *Eire-Ireland* (Spring, 1968), 27.

¹²¹ James W. Flannery, *W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* (London: Yale University Press, 1976), 243.

[He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Times livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry.] (542)

The solemnity of Yeatsian symbolic ceremonies is subverted by the unconscious energy of its participants: or in this instance, Stephen's near unconscious inebriation. Borders of mind between historical ritual and the private mind mingle and become grotesquely symbiotic, as the natural body interferes with hieratic solemnity.

'Circe' pitches grand rituals as low comedy: ceremonies of State and Empire, of trials, executions, coronations, acknowledge the Anglicisation of the collective mind with raised eyebrows. The Archbishop of Armagh '*[Pours a cruse of hairoil over Bloom's head]*' (455), part of the coronation ceremony where, after the coronation oath, the sovereign is anointed with holy oil to signify that his person is set apart and sanctified. Once Bloom is made sovereign, symbolic ceremonies follow investing him with the imperial mantle:

[Bloom assumes a mantle of cloth of gold and puts on a ruby ring. He ascends and stands on the stone of destiny. The representative peers put on at the same time their twentyeight crowns. [...]The peers do homage, one by one, approaching, genuflecting.] (456)

Bloom either hallucinates these rituals, in which case the coronation scene, in its precise enactment, inexplicably pervades the bodily indices of his own memory; or apparitions of Ireland's corporeal memory, in the form of symbolic ceremonies, summon Bloom to a role against his volition. These rites are embodied as mock-ministrations, because

Bloom's humour reigns over their authority. This develops the technique by which Bloom withdraws himself from Dignam's funeral rites in 'Lotus Eaters': sacraments in 'Circe' are filtered through and performed by a humour which can reflect upon 'warm fullblooded life' during a funeral.

Bloom's and Ireland's memory become symbiotic in their mutual summoning. Solemnity is removed from ritual observances, by staging the low comedy by which grotesque bodies keep ordinances from becoming sacraments. Borders shift between the public and private unconscious; rituals are predominantly consistent with the sense of guilt in the minds of the characters: Bloom's fear of being arrested, and his memory of shameful episodes is manifested as trials in which he is charged with being an enemy of the state, a seducer, a political turncoat, and a cuckold (433). The Recorder, charging Bloom - who wears black, a symbol of polygamy - for being a Mormon, '[*dons the black cap*]' (445), the ritual gesture of an English judge about to pronounce a death sentence.

Stephen's unconscious is formally extended to encompass the entire chapter, as ritual and as the collective conscience of the race. His first appearance in 'Circe' is as a priest presiding over the Mass around which the chapter is structured. Bloom appears in '[*a crimson velvet mantle trimmed with ermine, bearing Saint Edward's staff, the orb and sceptre with the dove, the curtana.*]' Catholic rites are remembered in their detail, yet it is as though they are recalled by a combination of Stephen's high scorn and Bloom's earthy humour. The Agnus Dei is applied to the commercial traveller; the Gospel is represented by a story about Mary Shortall who caught the pox from Jimmy Pidgeon and had a child by him. Stephen sees himself as the Prodigal son and Lynch sees the whores as the 'Three "Wise Virgins''. There is a mock blessing from '[*His Eminence, Simon Stephen*

Cardinal Dedalus], who '[invokes grace from on high with large wave gestures and proclaims with bloated pomp]' (492), then with

[*His head aslant, he blesses curtly with fore and middle fingers, imparts the Easter kiss and double shuffles off comically, swaying his hat from side to side.*]
(492)

There are mock litanies in honour of Bloom; a mock confession by the three whores; the street quarrel swells into a vision of Armageddon, and culminates in the celebration of a Black Mass on the belly of Mrs Purefoy.

Catholic rites were largely ignored by Revivalist theatre, which saw Rome as opposed to the Celtic spirit. From as early as his essay on 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages'¹²² Joyce was compelled to challenge a Revivalist consensus which displayed indifference to the early Irish church, and the false historiography in distinctions between national culture and Anglo-Irish culture.¹²³ It cannot be said of Joyce that blasphemy was the flip side of belief, yet certain Catholic rites were closer to his idea of 'folk drama'.

Joyce's singular criticism of his own hero, Ibsen, that his plays are 'a remnant of heroics' (Ellmann, 266), is at once a personal and a historical point of view. It represents Joyce getting firm with himself, overcoming the anxiety of influence which proceeds from hero-worship, and looking forward to putting 'on paper the thousand complexities' (Ellmann, 266) of the unconscious mind, conventionally hidden by documentary scene-

¹²² James Joyce, *Critical Writings* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), 176.

¹²³ See 'Joyce and the Anglo-Irish Revival: The Trieste Lectures', L.H.Platt, in *James Joyce Quarterly* 29 (Winter, 1992), 259-266.

settings in Naturalist drama. Yet the criticism of 'heroics' is also historical in the sense in which Yeatsian drama articulates the vestiges of Ireland's heroic age at the expense of a wider national history.

The mingling of pagan and Christian observances - hallucinations parallel Mass, though the rites celebrated are those of Circe - leaves the impression of ritual degenerated to the point of spectacle.

As a matter of fact it is of no importance whether Benedetto Marcello found it or made it. The rite is the post's rest. It may be an old hymn to Demeter or also illustrate *Coela enarrant gloriam Domini*. It is susceptible of notes of modes as far apart as hyperphrygian and mixolydian and of texts so divergent as priests hailhooping round David's that is Circe's or what am I saying Ceres' altar and David's tip from the stable to his chief bassoonist about the alrightness of his almightiness. (474)

The 'old hymn to Demeter', the fertility goddess, the fifth of the Homeric hymns, was intended to state the mythical foundation of the Eleusinian Mysteries; '*Coela enarrant gloriam Domini*' is the opening line of Psalm 19, which Benedetto Marcello set according to the seven modes of Greek music. Stephen argues that such rites are a formal representation of insights into the coincidence of contraries: the Mass is specifically that rite which formally represents the nature of an incarnate God. The ritual nature of the chapter is a reflection not only of Stephen's isolation and suffering but of the theme of the meeting of extremes, where artist and commercial traveller make contact. This is embodied in the summoning of rituals by the integration of two intersecting minds.

As Victor Turner argues:

[rituals] are initiated when the peaceful tenor of regular, norm-governed social life is interrupted by the breach of a rule controlling one of its salient relationships. This leads ... to a state of crisis, which, if not soon sealed off, may split the community into contending factions and coalitions. To prevent this, redressive means are taken by those who consider themselves or are considered the most legitimate or authoritative representatives of the relevant community. Redress usually involves ritualised action, whether legal, religious, or military ... The first is reconciliation of the conflicting parties following judicial, ritual or military processes; the second, the consensual recognition of irremediable breach, usually followed by the spatial separation of the parties ... interrupt the flow of social life and force a group to take cognizance of its own behaviour in relation to its own values.¹²⁴

Turner demonstrates the liminal, transitional nature of rituals which strive to reconcile potential breaches within a community. The brothel chapter occurs in a liminal state: Stephen is at the furthest remove from the image of himself as an unshackled artist, Bloom is far from home and his role as husband and father. He is on the threshold of Mrs Cohen's; the brothel represents the extreme of pure sexual license through which he passes before assuming again his paternal role:

¹²⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York:PAJ Publications, 1992), 92.

What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not itself. God, the sun,
 Shakespeare, a commercial traveller, having traversed itself in reality, becomes
 that self. (475)

The combined reflection of Stephen and Bloom as Shakespeare recalls the account of Shakespeare in the library as a soul divided between prudent businessman, lover and artist. Stephen foresees the necessity of being not just an 'unremmiting intellect' but a man, to act and be acted upon. In the mirror, Bloom becomes Stephen's counterpart.

The reader often cannot tell whose consciousness is being turned to ritual, due to the fact that Stephen and Bloom hallucinate things they could not have known about. Cissy Caffrey appears as a reminiscence of Bloom from 'Nausicaa', while he is offstage; when Stephen's mother appears, she reminds her son that there are 'More women than men in the world', a repetition of an idea which occurred to Bloom in 'Hades' (102). This is an aspect of the way in which Stephen's visions refract variously into Bloom's, by inclinations not previously observed. They participate in rituals which mix collective pagan and Christian histories, but also the substrata of their own dispositions.

The question as to whom the hallucinations occur, and who summons them, works on a dual-plane: either they are brought forth by rituals of collective race memory, or the private unconscious hallucinates the rituals. Neither the 'nightmare of history' nor the lone mind dreaming are privileged with originating force. The liminal zone of 'Circe', a twilight world between sleeping and waking, allows stage ghosts both a public and private function: like Beckett's ghosts, they are either supernatural interventions summoned by the rituals, or projections of profounds of mind to which the rituals

accommodate themselves. The sources of the various rituals and magic remain obscure to the players: the stage directions display Stephen and Bloom summoning each other's hallucinations. Bloom makes his entrance just after Stephen demonstrates his view of gesture as a 'universal language':

[Stephen thrusts his ashplant on him and slowly holds out his hands, his head going back till both hands are a span from his breast, down turned in planes intersecting, the fingers about to part, the left being higher.] (412)

In an instant, '*[On the farther side under the railway bridge Bloom appears]*', as though summoned by Stephen's mysterious intersecting palms. Later, tracing the lines on Stephen's palms as 'lines of fate' (524), Zoe's prediction: 'You'll meet with a ...' is interrupted by Bloom, who '*[detaches her fingers and offers his palm.]*' Hand gestures and parlour magic literally summon the other figure, acting as symbols for the idea that 'dreams go by contraries' (532) in the coincidence of Bloom and Stephen's meeting. Thoughts on 'metempsychosis' which occupy Bloom - 'the transmigration of souls [...] That we live after death. Our souls'(62) - become consanguinous with Stephen's brooding on elective fatherhood: 'Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?'(199) The dual dreams of the artist and the commercial traveller finally intersect and culminate in the transformation of Stephen into Rudy.

'Circe' passes as though it had never been, neither Bloom nor Stephen will allude to anything that happened or seemed to happen, as though it was no more than an immense bad dream: but it is a shared dream. At the end of 'Circe', Bloom calls Stephen a

'somnambulist' (564), yet the reader is informed in 'Ithaca' that 'from somnambulism' Bloom was not 'totally immune' (645), and that 'once, sleeping, his body had risen, crouched and crawled in the direction of a heatless fire and, having attained its destination, there, curled, unheated in night attire had lain, sleeping.' This is the posture in which Stephen ends up in 'Circe', before he turns into Bloom's son: '[*He stretches out his arms, sighs again and curls his body.*]' (564)

Stephen, foetally-positioned, opens his eyes and sees Bloom bending over him; he thinks he sees the deathly vampire of his morning's meditations, the panther of Haines' nightmare. Imagining himself at the moment of his death, Stephen consoles himself not with Christian prayer but by murmuring Yeats' evocation of redeemed time: the lines he sang to his dying mother:

Who ... drive ... Fergus now

And pierce ... wood's woven shade ... (564)

Taken from *The Countess Cathleen*, it is sung by the countess to comfort herself, for having sold her soul that her people might have food. It is Stephen's aesthetic counterpart to prayer: his own sacrament which substitutes the absent Catholic rite. He repeats the rite as he thinks his own death is imminent; in his place Bloom's dead son appears, Stephen's ashplant metamorphosing into Rudy's [*slim ivory cane*]' (565).

Bloom and Stephen are observed summoning each other in hand gestures which serve as symbols for intersecting lines of fate. As counter-Revivalist drama, 'Circe' stages small intimate gestures as rituals which summon the collective consciousness of two minds.

Ritual, deprived of its Yeatsian earnestness, degenerates into vaudeville. Borders between historical and private memory shift imperceptibly; ritual enactments, as preservations of ancient corporeality, fade before the comic staging of grotesque bodies, whose unconscious routines of mind and motor activity turn ritual into a form of personal as well as historical body recall. Established ritual gestures, melded with the unconscious gestures of the participants, turn the commemoration of ancestral corporeality into the revivescence of past states in the mind of an individual.

‘In the beginning was the rhythmic gesture’

Ritual language in ‘Circe’ always points to the bodily indices which form the substrata of its remembrance. Traumas are manifested in bodily action, although it is unclear whether these disturbances are primarily psychic or somatic: in the summoning of these traumas through ritual acts, impulses of the living body are seen germinating from psychic intentions, whilst mental activity takes its ‘structural rhythm’ from physiological tendencies, or the rhythms of the ritualised body.

Ritual involves acts of the body coinciding with speech, and it is often an encounter with the body which initiates the hallucinations, for instance, Stephen’s down turned palms, ‘[*in planes intersecting*]’ (412). In this movement he sets out to illustrate the loaf and jug of bread and wine in Omar, using a manual language of pre-lingual gesture. Analogues between manual and oral expression abound in ‘Circe’; Stephen tries to find in their structure and in their manner of rendering objects a similarity that might return language to its ‘first entelechy’:

So that gesture, not music, not odours, would be a universal language, the gift of tongues rendering visible not the lay sense but the first entelechy, the structural rhythm. (412)

Stephen’s conjunctions of ‘gesture’, ‘the gift of tongues’, ‘structural rhythm’ and the illustrative gesture with his hands suggest relations to linguistic theories, particularly those of Marcel Jousse, current while Joyce was writing *Ulysses*, on the origins of language in gesture.

Joyce's interest in Jousse was documented by his friends:

At that time the Abbé Jousse was lecturing in Paris. He was a noted propounder of a theory that Joyce gave adherence to, that language had its origin in gesture – ‘In the beginning was the rhythmic gesture’ Joyce often said [...] Around the lecturer was a group of girls, who addressed him as ‘Rabbi Jesus’. The words spoken – one of the parables, I think – were, I gathered in Aramaic, and what was shown was the word was shaped by the gesture. Joyce was full of the subject [...] ¹²⁵

‘In the beginning was the rhythmic gesture’ is a direct quote from Jousse.¹²⁶ Stephen Heath mentions sketchily the influence of Jousse on *Finnegans Wake*, especially in terms of the loss of clarity in alphabetical writing and speech which preoccupied both men. But Stephen's language from *Stephen Hero* onwards suggests an earlier acquaintance with Jousse; in ‘Circe’, the rhythmical character of ritual gestures and motor activity, which includes in Jousse's definition facial expressions and ‘laryngo-buccal gestures’, reveal Joyce's engagement with speech-gesture hieroglyphs before *Finnegans Wake*.

Jousse believed that the way the body speaks is intimately related not only to psychic states but vocalised speech, and that the continued use of, for instance, manual gestures, preserves ancient links to pre-lingual man. The ‘progress of civilisation is due to the

¹²⁵ Padraic and Mary Colum, *Our Friend James Joyce*, (New York, Doubleday: 1958), 130-1, quoted in Stephen Heath, ‘Ambiviolences: Notes for reading Joyce’, in Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (ed.), *Post-Structuralist Joyce* (Cambridge, CUP: 1984), 55.

¹²⁶ Marcel Jousse, *The Oral Style* trans. Edgard Sienaert and Richard Whitaker, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1925; repr. 1990), 57.

reciprocal action of hand on mind and mind on hand'.¹²⁷ This has analogues with Yeats' idea of the preservation of ancient bodily habits through ritual. Jousse's theory is founded on mimetic learning patterns and the notions that all psychic states are incarnated in motor elements, and that psycho-physiological states are more easily revived the more its gestural elements are carried with them. The preservation of ritual hand movements provides a line back to long lost ancestries; this is cognate with the Yeatsian view of bodily recall as a phenomenon of cultural memory, although Jousse's theory also encompasses recollections of past states in the mind of an individual. Both these forms of corporeal memory are found in 'Circe'.

It is this infinitude of past gestures, lying under the threshold of consciousness and setting each other off, that makes possible [revivication] of past states and the totality of their multiple connections.¹²⁸

The revival of past perceptions is initiated by the action or gesture in which they originate. Repetitions of gestural patterns are also revivescences; sense memory is a kind of 'gestural revivescence',¹²⁹ and as the person imitates earlier gestures, he re-enacts them. This explains why a dramatic scene being narrated by a first hand witness is acted out, or rather re-enacted, in the telling. This phenomenon is accentuated in the transition from narrative voice to stage directions. In the chapters before 'Circe', the narrative eye pans back from an interior monologue, in order to describe physical phenomena, and events are told in the past tense; whereas the stage directions manifest present tense collusions of speech and gesture. This foregrounds the ways in which present tense

¹²⁷ Levy-Bruhl, in Jousse, 92.

¹²⁸ Ribot, *La vie inconsciente et les mouvements* (Paris : F. Alcan, 1914), in Jousse, 14.

¹²⁹ Pierre Janet, *Traité de psychologie*, (Paris : F. Alcan, 1923) 923-925.

gestures act as forms of bodily remembrance, instigating revivals of past conditions of mind; this activity is parallel to the re-arranging of the novel's textual memory: previously narrated speech-gesture complexes are projected into the spectacle as though they unfold before our eyes.

Memories of past sensation are triggered in the characters by present tense gestures in 'Circe's' directions. Some reach even further back than 'Telemachus': when Lynch '[slaps Kitty's behind twice]', the sound it makes, like a 'pandy bat', summons childhood scenes at Clongowes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

[Twice loudly a pandybat cracks, the coffin of the pianola flies open, the bald tittle round jack-in-the-box head of Father Dolan springs up.]

FATHER DOLAN

Any boy want flogging? (523)

Bloom is reminded of his 'love's young dream' to be a 'shoefitter in Mansfield's', 'the darling joys of sweet buttonhooking', when '[stifflegged, aging, [he] bends over [Bella's] hoof and with gentle fingers draws out and in her laces]' (497). In 'Circe', where sentences are revivescences of earlier sentences, this form of gestural recall bears witness to a narrative presence re-enacting the preceding events, so that they are shown rather than told. Virag, an image of Bloom's perverse and bawdy side, appearing on '[gawky pink stilts]' (481), recalls Bloom 'stepping hastily down the stairs with a flurried stork's legs' (63) in 'Calypso'. Davy Byrne, who 'smiledyawnednodded all in one - 'iiiiichaaaaaach!' (168) - in 'Lestrygonians', is seen again '[yawning]

iiiiiiiiiaaaaaach!’ in ‘Circe’. The yawn mimics its earlier textual form, which itself harks back to a pre-lingual symbol.

Jousse’s theories on rhythmic gesture and Beckett’s remarks on the ‘hieroglyphs’ of *Work in Progress*, where ‘the root of any word whatsoever can be traced back to some pre-lingual symbol’ (*Disjecta*, 24), are closely related to other contemporary views on gesture and language: Richard Paget, who cites Jousse’s *Human Speech: Archives de Philosophie*, argues that ‘gestures previously made by hand were unconsciously copied by movements or positions of the mouth, tongue or lips’, in a ‘specialised pantomime of the tongue and lips’.¹³⁰ For instance, the word ‘hither’ corresponds to the equivalent hand gesture:

extended hand, palm up, drawn inwards towards the face and at the same time fingers bent inwards towards the palm. This is imitated with the tongue protruding, withdrawing and bending up its tip as it re-enters the mouth and falls to rest. (Paget, 138)

Joyce does something more advanced than Paget’s straightforward mimesis implies; Stephen’s gesture of down turned palms, ‘[*in planes intersecting*]’ (412), is an example of the way symbolism perplexes mimetic functions. Yet the parallels between various physical processes in art, the rhythms of reading, the body and speech, set forward a cross-bred language as a flow of energy between linguistic representation and the dumbshow it mimes. Past voice becomes present tense mime; gestures hark back to their previous vocalisation. Stage directions are not determined, as they are in Beckett, by the

¹³⁰ Richard Paget, *Human Speech* (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1930), 132.

practicalities of stage management: they are signals for a reader to imagine vocalisation and gesture as reciprocally homonymous.

Vocal mimes of physical scenes occur in the chapters leading to ‘Circe’, for instance, in the meticulous and neat transition of syllables in the signature walk of the tiptoeing librarian in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’: ‘swiftly rectly creaking rectly rectly’ (202), coming ‘a sinkapace forward on neatsleather creaking and a step backward a sinkapace on the solemn floor’, then ‘twicreakingly [...]he corantoed off’ (176). This technique is intensified in ‘Circe’, where language mimes the impossibility of incarnating physical referents. Vocal functions are transformed by Joyce so that speech and gesture are interchangeable. Directions for physical gestures are rhetorically evoked: the laboured enunciation of a stage direction mimics the difficulty in reproducing the gesture itself:

[Stephen with hat and ashplant frogsplits in middle highkicks with skykicking mouth shut hand clasp part under thigh, with clang tinkle boomhammer tallyho hornblower blue green yellow flashes Toft’s cumbersome turns with hobbyhorse riders from gilded snakes dangled, bowels fandango leaping spurn soil foot and fall again.] (538)

Bodily movement is concomitant with acoustics in these directions, as Joyce plays with the relationship between the appearance of the letters and compound words, their distinct audibility, and the scene which they direct. ‘Circe’, whose ‘Organ’ is ‘locomotor apparatus’, presents a catalogue of choreographed routines, where metrics and phonetics are co-ordinated with physical motions: Private Carr and Private Compton, swaggersticks

‘[tight in their oxters, [...] march unsteadily rightaboutface and burst together from their mouths a volleyed fart.]’ The climax is reached in a dance where ‘[all weave a pattern on the floor, weaving, unweaving, curtseying, twisting, simply swirling]’, the arabesque of assonance sketching the pattern they make on the floor.

Derek Attridge condemns unexamined concepts of art as imitation, attacking Jakobson’s views on sound-symbolism as a creation of sequences of sound which imitate sounds or other qualities in the non-linguistic world:

The achievement of referential intensity [...] is not a matter of the specific ‘mimeticism’ of the phonemes in relation to their referent, as sound-symbolism suggests [...] these aspects depend less on specific configurations of phonetic sequence than the meaning of the passage.¹³¹

The complexities of Joyce’s mimetic language cannot be interpreted solely as sound-symbolism: the medium stands between the reader and the direct experience itself, but also between the characters, hence the hallucinations. Concentrating on ‘Sirens’, Attridge would need to shift his terms with ‘Circe’, where the reader enters into the dramatic world ‘iconically’, where relations between referent (imaginary stage) and activity of referring (stage directions) are carried out by language which, with its physical and oral textures, plays with the absurdity in prescribing physical movement on stage: the ‘tilted and effervescent’ stage directions in ‘Circe’, their phonetic patterns, mime the slapstick comedy of a language unable to retrieve the phenomena of cultural memory

¹³¹ Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988), 153.

through gesture. Mime exists before vocalisation, yet gestural directions are built from the preceding narrative voice.

The interchangeability of voice and gesture, in the conjunction of stage codes and narrative insight, generates not only a language which mimes its origins in gesture, but also staged gestures which 'speak' at points of vocal failure. Psychic and physical dysfunction is shown to be reciprocal; stage directions break down motor impulses, which in turn contract fields of consciousness. No longer able to hide from his secret torments as he is pushed on stage, Bloom is always giving himself away. Until 4PM, he goes through routines of engrossing motion, blocking off from his thoughts the novel's principle theme and keeping himself distracted: in 'Hades', as Boylan is sighted by the others, Bloom instantly 'reviewed the nails of his left hand' (200). Elsewhere, his hands search his pockets in a dumbshow of misdirection: 'I am looking for that. Yes, that'. Bloom speaks with his hands, evidencing the view of Jousse that 'not only is the hand [through its gestures] as easily recognisable as a face, it also reveals its secrets more openly and unconsciously; people can control their body; the hand escapes control' (Jousse, 35). Bloom's gestures of distraction with his hands reveal that he has a secret, rather than its content: they distract rather than transmit his mental disposition. Put on the spot, he enacts the physical equivalent of an embarrassed change of subject: he not only talks with his hands but is seen thinking with them. In 'Sirens', bored Bloom tambourines gently with 'I am just reflecting fingers' (268), his hands as attentive as those which 'fingerponder nightly each his variorum edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*' (208).

The English language allows little independence to the organs of the body: most verbs of conscious behaviour require a grammatical subject implying an undivided self of which the organ is a mere satellite. (Attridge, 160)

In the sentence ‘he wears a ring’, we deduce the role of finger: there is an easy transition from the subject to the verb. *Ulysses* frequently fails to conform to these syntactic norms, where individual organs command their own intentional verbs: ‘His hand accepted the moist tender gland and slid it into a side-pocket’ (59). Eyes and lips listen, speech pauses on lips, moist lips titter. This allows individual organs ‘their own energies and proclivities’ (Attridge, 163), but also makes them speak as if independently of the body.

The ataxia of the chapter’s organ is manifested in lacks of coordination which are physical, psychological and textual. In the stage directions, localised ataxia in individual body parts are rendered as phenomena distinct from the subject’s conscious sensation of accomplished movement. Bloom’s legs go through though the motions of slapstick with a will of their own, as he ‘*trickleaps onto the curbstone [...] darts forward suddenly [...] blunders stifflegged.*’ The will of the stage directions disguise Bloom’s own defects of will. ‘Locomotor ataxia’, or the breakdown of motor control, initiates parallels between psychic and physical breakdown. Bloom’s painful reminiscences, the suicide of his father, his son’s death, his wife’s infidelity, his daughter’s sexual maturation, which culminate in self-accusation and punishment and religious apostasies, also transform his motor apparatus. The directions offer gestural representations of inner compulsions, as Bloom loses his ability to be suddenly detached from his traumas. Pierre Janet, in accounting for the muscular anaesthesia and ‘the ataxia of hystericals’

(suffering from reminiscences), describes voluntary movement as ‘undecided and ill directed’¹³² due to the phenomena of unconscious gestures:

the ego has no consciousness of [the moving body part], but without affirming that the phenomena is not conscious in itself and on its own account [...] there is thus being accomplished in the human organism an immense number of conscious facts which, for the ego, are as if they belonged to other people.

(Janet, 187)

Bloom’s kinaesthetic images of his own erotic improprieties turn into the material for the hallucination of Virag, which in terms of role changing, becomes Bloom, ‘*[profuse yellow spawn foaming over his bony epileptic lips]*’, jerking ‘*[his hips in the cynical spasm]*’, (490) ‘*[his multitudinous plumage moulting]*’, walking ‘*[in two ungainly stilthops]*’. Visual imagination not only replaces tactile sensation, but is embodied in a third personal body, whose motor impulses are physical correlatives for Bloom’s aguishaken reminiscences. Janet’s principle of unconscious ataxic gestures, in which the ego, without awareness of the individual body part, perceives movement as though it belonged to another person, is transformed into the hallucination of Virag. Narrative and personal memory - Bloom ‘stepping hastily down the stairs with a flurried stork’s legs’ (63) in ‘Calypso’ - is revived and projected into an incarnation of Bloom’s perversions, as Virag appears on ‘*[gawky pink stilts]*’ (481). ‘Circe’s’ directions stage the unconscious power of the corporeal self as *disjecta membra*; individual body parts speak as though independent of the body, and ataxia is shown to be a localised phenomenon, as individual body parts are rendered distinct from the subject’s conscious sensation of movement.

¹³² Pierre Janet, *The Mental State of Hystericals*, trans. Careline Rellin Corson (New York: G.P. Putnam: 1901), 159.

'Circe' contains a variety of contradictory energies which are synthesised in the stage directions. Small private gestures generate communal rituals as a direct contrast to the falsely historicising folk rituals of Revivalism. The body is staged as at once a natural and cultural phenomenon: unconscious disjecta membra 'speak' repressed memories, which are both personal and historical, and this creates the comic condition for the communing of conscious gesture. Gestural fields operate as symptoms of private and cultural fields; the directions offer a diagnosis of these symptoms as belonging both to Bloom and Ireland. The application of Yeatsian theories of ancient bodily remembrance, Jousse's discovery of corporeal recall as a private occurrence, and Janet's views on ataxia as a localised phenomenon of individual body parts, assist in the apprehension of how the comic is unified with the epic in 'Circe': Bloom's body is 'heroic' in the ways in which it embodies and preserves ancestral forms of national ritual, yet these ritual gestures, transmuted from the earlier narrative, act as symbols for the comic energies of Bloom's diurnal routines of mind.

Conclusion

Stage directions in Joyce and Beckett carry a significance which is equivalent to the dialogue. Speech-gesture complexes and the overlapping of the psychic and physiological cannot be grasped unless the activity of reference - to an actual stage in Beckett's plays, to an imaginary one in 'Circe' - is fully taken into account. The concomitance of directions and dialogue reveal the mutual subsistence of psychic motives and bodily actions: impulses in the natural body are seen germinating from mental acts, and vice versa.

The passage of perception from the psychic to the physical, and from internal to external scening, is enacted in the stage directions. This flow of energy is related to their two-plane function: they are both to be read and staged. In 'Circe', although the stage is imaginary, lone monologues of the mind become manifest as spectacle and private traumas become external scenes: the reader is forced to re-visualise what had previously remained unseen and place inner compulsions in elaborately stage managed gestural patterns. The directions conserve the doubleness of ritualised and natural bodies: exchanges between the psychic and physical maintain gesture complexes as either ancient patterns of national ancestry or localised manifestations of motor ataxia.

In Beckett, the organisation of resources of speech and gesture sustains a delicate ambiguity which preserves gestures as natural movements and symbols for attitudes of mind. This reciprocity of mind and body thematises the operations of a language which can be taken in by the solitary reader, or perceived communally in actual physical space. The dual function of directions, which prescribe specifics of stage management and, on

the page, call to the eye of the mind, shows forth bodies which simultaneously mime physical affliction, and provide correlatives for internal traumas. Gestures occupy a liminal space between symbolism and mimesis; they are neither transparently abstract mechanisms, nor do they move according to psychological motivation. A stage management founded on the severance of speech from gesture preserves a formal emptiness in which staged bodies can be imagined as memory traces or voices 'from beyond the grave', internal or external phenomena.

The mental stage in the process of composition becomes in Beckett an aspect of its scenic content, in the way in which mental patterns are re-visualised as staged gestures in 'Circe'. The liminal zone 'between sleep and waking [...] alike on the stage and in the mind, between man and phantom'¹³³ is also in Joyce and Beckett the space suspended between acts of reading and staged enactments.

¹³³ W.B. Yeats, Preface for *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (London: Bullen, 1911), p.x.

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