University of Reading

Beckett: Art, Music and the Creative Process

PhD

English Literature & Film Theatre and Television

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Abstract

This thesis looks at Samuel Beckett's creative process beginning with an analysis of how the visual arts (in particular Kandinsky and Abstract Expressionism) influenced *Watt*, which he began writing as a means of staying sane during WWII, and ending with an investigation of the colour blue in *Company* (which was finished in 1980) in relation to paintings by Beckett's acquaintance, Geneviève Asse. Three radio plays and two teleplays which Beckett wrote during this period are also examined to evaluate how contemporary (Morton Feldman and Marcel Mihalovici) and Romantic (Beethoven and Schubert) music instruct Beckett's creative process, specifically his structural techniques and narrative voice. With reference to Beckett's early drafts from his manuscripts held in the Beckett Collection at the University of Reading, his correspondences, and early critical essays, this research asks how music, art, and media inform Beckett's aesthetic decisions and shape his work. Specifically, it asks how Beckett's use of art and music can create new perspectives on his struggle to express the sense of longing and tension between hope and despair. By choosing texts that span forty years, Beckett's stylistic shifts are analysed in relation to the cultural context, particularly the technological advancements and artistic movements, during which they occur. As an author who recycles numerous motifs – greatcoats, slippers, the sea, cylindrical enclosures – one can identify how Beckett's methodological experimentation affects his creative process, particularly his use of language. This thesis finds new examples to claim that the drastic changes that took place in the visual and musical worlds, such as the move from abstraction to minimalism, and tonality to atonality, influenced Beckett and, in turn, were influenced by him. Its focus on Beckett's creative process contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship, extending the discussion on Beckett and his personal and intellectual involvement with the surrounding artistic milieu.

Declaration of original authorship

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Lucy Jeffery

To my parents

in memoriam Jill Symmons
whose 'lid eye bid bye bye' too soon

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To my friends and family both near and far, whose companionship, laughter, and discussions I hold very dear, thank you for putting up with me (and Beckett). I look forward to our next misadventure; you are all never far from my thoughts.

On a more personal level, I would like to thank Liza for her friendship; a true Athos. Peter and Elizabeth Stead, thank you for always welcoming me with open arms. Lastly, my largest debt of gratitude is owed to my parents, whom I cannot thank enough for their inestimable generosity of spirit and love throughout. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and dedicate these first failings to you both.

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List of Illustrations

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List of Abbreviations and Notes on the Text

Works by Beckett

CDW *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)

Godot	*Waiting for Godot*
Krapp	*Krapp's Last Tape*
ATF	*All That Fall*
E	*Embers*
Rough I	*Rough for Radio I*
Rough II	*Rough for Radio II*
WM	*Words and Music*
Ca	*Cascando*
TT	*That Time*
GT	*Ghost Trio*
APOM	*A Piece of Monologue*
NT	*Nacht und Träume*
btc	*…but the clouds…*

CIWS *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)

Co	*Company*
ISIS	*Ill Seen Ill Said*
WH	*Worstward Ho*
Heard I	*Heard in the Dark I*
Heard II	*Heard in the Dark II*

CSP *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995)

Capital	*The Capital of Ruins*
Text	*Texts for Nothing*
Lost Ones	*The Lost Ones*
IDI	*Imagination Dead Imagine*
P	'Ping'
L	*Lessness*

CP *Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Seán Lawlor and John Pilling (London: Faber and Faber, 2012)

Dis *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 2001)

Dream *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. by Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012)

HII *How It Is*, ed. by Edouard Magesa O'Reilly (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)

MPTK *More Pricks Than Kicks*, ed. by Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2010)

The Trilogy *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1958)

W *Watt*, ed. by C. J. Ackerley (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)

Letters I *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume I, 1929-1940*, ed. by Martha Fehsenfeld, George Craig, Lois More Overbeck, Daniel Gunn (Cambridge: CUP, 2009)

Letters II	*The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume II, 1941-1946*, ed. by Martha Fehsenfeld, George Craig, Lois More Overbeck, Daniel Gunn (Cambridge: CUP, 2011)
Letters III	*The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume III, 1957-1965*, ed. by Martha Fehsenfeld, George Craig, Lois More Overbeck, Daniel Gunn (Cambridge: CUP, 2014)
Letters IV	*The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume IV, 1966-1989*, ed. by Martha Fehsenfeld, George Craig, Lois More Overbeck, Daniel Gunn (Cambridge: CUP, 2016)

Other Works

Journals

JML	*Journal of Modern Literature*
JOBS	*Journal of Beckett Studies*
MFS	*Modern Fiction Studies*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
SBTA	*Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*

Library Archives

HRC Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin
UoR Beckett Collection, University of Reading
TCD Trinity College Dublin Library, Department of Manuscripts

Notes on the text

Translations from the French are my own unless stated otherwise.
All biblical references are taken from the Authorised King James Version.
To denote erasure by Beckett in original manuscript citations, ~~strikethrough script~~ is used.
MHRA referencing style is used, except for when referencing texts by Beckett where the work and page number is cited in brackets immediately after the quotation.

Introduction

> The only true criticism is comparative . . . because any work in a field is itself imbricated within other fields . . . There is no work that doesn't have its beginning or end in other art forms . . . All work is inserted in a system of relays.[1]

Modernism's concern with the fluidity and interchangeability of artistic media can be seen in the works of Oskar Kokoschka (a painter who wrote an opera libretto), Ezra Pound (a poet who composed music), and Arnold Schoenberg (a composer who painted). These three polymaths influenced a wave of thought where the artist's self-consciousness over his or her medium informed their creative process by encouraging experimental enjambment between the arts. For Samuel Beckett, the use of music and visual art emerged out of a dissatisfaction with language and was, broadly speaking, intended to extend the possibilities of the written word. As James Knowlson explains:

> Beckett was, as his friend Barbara Bray once picturesquely put it to me, like a swan, sailing serenely along, spotting and picking up morsels from different parts of the lake, then pre-digesting them, before making them unequivocally his own.[2]

This doctoral thesis asks how Beckett's use of the visual arts and music affects his creative method and output, making it 'unequivocally his own'. By looking at work that uses different media, this research contributes to existing work that looks at Beckett's creative use of music and the visual arts in his fiction and plays for radio and television. In line with the aims of interdisciplinary research within Beckett studies (which will be specified in the subsequent section), this thesis asks how thinking of Beckett's work from musicological and art historical perspectives changes our reception and interpretation of his work. In its attempt to glean a better understanding of Beckett as an artist, rather than solely as an author, it examines Beckett's creative process to evaluate how he uses music and the visual arts in his works. It then discusses the effect the arts have on his use of language. Beckett's oft-mentioned struggle to express, paralleled by the inability of his narrators to tell their story, is interpreted through the presence of musical and painterly techniques in Beckett's aesthetic. Out of this paradigm, the precarious balance between hope and despair, longing and disappointment

[1] Gilles Deleuze, 'Le creveau, c'est l'écran' trans. by Marie Therese Guirgis (first publ. in *Cahiers du cinema*, 380 (February 1986), 25-32) in *Digital Thoughts* < http://www.diagonalthoughts.com/?p=2252 > [accessed 21 February 2017]
[2] James Knowlson, 'Looking Back – But Leaping Forward', *SBTA*, 11 (2001), 31-36 (p. 32).

arise. To address this central tension in Beckett's work, the thesis asks what impact his use of particular media has on his creative process.

The remainder of this introduction is split into four stages. Firstly, it engages with the emergent research questions and situates this study within the field of Beckett studies. Secondly, it gives an overview of Beckett's use of television and radio. Thirdly, it provides the reader with a contextual backdrop to Beckett's interest in art and music. And lastly, a chapter outline explores the methodology used in each section and maps out the course of the thesis as a whole. The thesis is constructed to ensure dialogue within each specific medium and between the arts more generally. Hence, it begins by exploring the effect of visual abstraction in *Watt*, followed by an analysis of music's place in the radio plays. In order to identify the changes in Beckett's implementation of music, this is coupled with an examination of how Beethoven and Schubert shape two late teleplays, and finally, by asking how the colour blue influences our reading of the mid-late short prose, the discussion revisits the impact of the visual arts on Beckett's creative process.

Research question and contribution to Beckett studies

This thesis falls into intersecting fields of research within Beckett studies, specifically Beckett and the arts. It builds on Mary Bryden and Catherine Laws' work on Beckett and music, but as well as analysing the effect music has on the mood of the piece or its subject(s), this research examines how Beckett's use of music aids and complicates his attempt to express the ineffable, and looks at how it informs the structural composition of the piece. Beckett's interest in the visual arts, explored by James Knowlson (with reference to the Dutch and Flemish school and Caravaggio in relation to pieces for theatre and television), Lois Oppenheim (Beckett's art criticism and influence on Pop Art), and Mark Nixon (Beckett's early interest in painting and sculpture, particularly German Expressionism) is re-examined from different perspectives.[3] It focuses on how a description of a character's direct encounter with a painting in a novel can make the reader reflect on his/her own experience of reading a novel in terms of the artist's struggle to express. Hence, in the art sections of this thesis, Beckett's

[3] Kindly note that Conor Carville's *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts* (CUP: Cambridge, 2018) was published after the completion of this thesis.

prose is viewed in light of the ideas behind Abstract Expressionism and the work of painter Geneviève Asse. With reference to the latter, colour theory is used to unpack the use of blue both as a thematic and structural factor of and behind the text. In its consideration of Beckett's use of a range of genres, this thesis speaks to work by Everett Frost (radio) and Jonathan Bignell (television). Whereas Frost and Bignell both tend to examine how the technical aspects of radio and television inform Beckett's process and have an impact on the actors in the recording studio or on set, and also evaluate how Beckett's experimentation with these media was received, this research asks how Beckett's use of music within such media facilitates an increasingly wordless style of narration. Overall, this research asks in what ways art and music work with and against language in selected examples from Beckett's oeuvre to produce new compositional structures and offer new perspectives on familiar Beckettian themes such as hope and despair, longing and lack. Within this interdisciplinary line of enquiry Beckett's particular use of Modernist and Romanticist ideologies are looked at in association with his aforementioned concerns with the experience of tension between binaries. As explained later in this introduction, due to the enormity of this debate, Beckett's romantic and modern tendencies are only touched upon in relation to specific instances where his use of art and music inform the sensibility of the work in ways that bring either tradition to mind.

As a methodological starting point, the work of Gilles Deleuze (already evident in the prefatory quote to this introduction) is used to open the discussion of Beckett's attempt to express through art, music and media. The thesis then uses different critical frameworks in each chapter, which will be clearly identified in the 'Chapter Outline' section to this introduction. Such frameworks include specific musicological and art historical sources which are woven into literary and philosophical debates concerning Beckett's work.

In its musical analysis, this research problematises Mary Bryden's belief that 'Beckett concurs with [Walter] Pater in regarding the art of music as being "unique" in inhabiting a zone of abstraction and immateriality'.[4] To do this, Bryden's discreet allusion to the connection between art and music

[4] Mary Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p. 42.

is stressed when looking at the connection between aural and visual in the radio and television plays. Bryden's suggestion that Beckett, like Pater, believes that '*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*', however, is challenged as we see Beckett reconcile German Romantic music with a more Modernist fragmented vision.[5] Whilst Beckett does strive to create a language that can reach the immediacy of music, this thesis looks at how he conveys music's fragmenting and unyielding tendencies, rather than its holistic beauty.[6] Hence, this research adds to Catherine Laws' important 2013 study *Headaches Among the Overtones: Music in Beckett/Beckett in Music* by asking how Beckett's use of medium facilitates the interaction between image and music, memory and reality. A similar debate between seeing Beckett as a Romanticist or Modernist surfaces in the visual arts chapters.

In its exploration of Beckett and the visual arts, this thesis does not try to confine Beckett's interests or style to a movement or period in art history. It thereby rejects Daniel Albright's belief that Beckett's 'instincts were surrealist'.[7] As Beckett stated in his 1929 essay 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce':

> Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon hole, or modify the dimensions on that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping. (Dis: 19)

Furthermore, unlike David Lloyd, whose 2016 study *Beckett's Thing: Painting and Theatre* is concerned with the aesthetic tastes and approaches of the artists Beckett was fond of (such as Jack B. Yeats, Bram van Velde, and Avigdor Arikha); here, Beckett's use of art *in* his creative works, rather than the enjoyment *of* art in his private life is closely examined.[8] In order to assess the visual aspect of Beckett's creative process, this research takes as its springboard Lois Oppenheim's observation

[5] Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione' in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Mineola; New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 90 (*italics* in original).
[6] Whilst Beckett was drawn to a time-based art, he acknowledged the unavoidability of sequentiality early on: 'At best, all that is realised in Time, whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively by a series of partial annexations and never integrally and at once.' (Proust: 7)
[7] Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p. 9.
[8] Lloyd begins by stating that the principal aims of *Beckett's Thing* are 'to pursue as far as possible, drawing on Beckett's relatively spare comments about the painters whose work he admired and even promoted, what it was that he saw in them that detained his attention and defined his own approach to the visual presentation of his work.' David Lloyd, *Beckett's Thing: Painting and Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 6-7.

that, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Beckett sees art as something that 'does not reproduce the visible, but makes visibility be.'[9]

Overall, Beckett's oeuvre is seen as a series of questions about the creative process, rather than a cache of answers to the insufficiency of language. As such, Beckett's considered mode of representation is a primary concern. Beckett said of Joyce's work that 'form *is* content, content *is* form', adding that it is 'to be looked at and listened to' because his writing 'is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*' (Dis: 27). In his own work, Beckett revealed the mechanism behind a literature that works on visual and aural levels to expose his struggle with language as his primary means of expression.

An artist who dares to fail

In a 1937 letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett famously remarked:

> And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it […] To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. Or is literature alone to remain behind in the old lazy ways that have been so long ago abandoned by music and painting? (Dis: 171-2)

To ensure literature did not 'remain behind' the other arts, Beckett made use of a variety of aesthetic forms and media. His integration of art and music into his works, however, did not absolve the contention that what he was trying to express lies behind the mode of representation. Beckett shows us that all the arts are preoccupied with their own self-conscious representational nature. For instance, Beckett uses the same metaphor when he describes Bram van Velde's paintings as

> An endless unveiling, veil behind veil, plane after plane of imperfect transparencies, light and space themselves veils, an unveiling towards the unveilable, the nothing, the thing again. (Dis: 136)[10]

[9] Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (USA: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 140. Furthermore, Oppenheim's assertion that Beckett argued for an art that is valued for representing nothing but its own representational insufficiency, will be explored with regard to his inclusion of aural and visual techniques.

[10] This metaphor is perhaps derived from Beckett's reading of Schopenhauer whose interest in early Indian thought is evident in his description of the Veil of Maya. In the 'Clare Street' notebook (UoR MS5003, 17r-18r) made in August 1936, Beckett changed Schopenhauer's 'veil of Maya' into the 'membrane of hope' ('Hoffnungsschleier') which must be torn apart because the eyes can only cope with such weak light for a short time.' See: Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 170.

In line with his appreciation of van Velde's attempt to undo and subtract, Beckett's writing follows a trajectory towards the 'core of the eddy' (Proust: 48) which entails a ceaseless *via negativa*. This working towards undoing, or inherent deconstruction is evident in Beckett's early comments concerning his creative process and complex understanding of abstraction, a concept that requires further consideration. In his German Diaries (26 November 1936), Beckett describes Karl Ballmer's *Kopf in Rot* (1930-1) as a 'metaphysical concrete' that depicts a transcendental truth that moves beyond appearance to express the essence of objects.[11] Hence, in Beckett's use of the word, abstraction is a form of expression that encapsulates the sense of becoming whilst purging any anthropomorphism, as Beckett expressed to Thomas MacGreevy in his letters about Cézanne's paintings. Later, in a letter to Georges Duthuit, 3 February 1931, Beckett describes the indeterminacy of the sky and tree on the set of *Godot* as being 'sordidly abstract as nature is' (Letters II: 218), and not comparable to a Wagnerian merging of man and nature (which Beckett found irksome by this time). This thesis understands abstraction to be a methodological struggle that attempts to overcome the problem of expression which evolves out of the awareness of the role of perception in sensory experience. Abstraction, however, is not a solution to this problem, but remains slippery in its refusal to be accounted for through language. What is abstract, therefore, is that which remains outside of language and indeterminate in its form. Through its sense of indeterminacy, Beckett's abstract work creates a sense of tension between representation and the thing itself as his language pivots between its physicality and ephemerality.

Unlike James Joyce, whom Beckett described to Israel Shenker as working with 'omnipotence', Beckett said he worked with 'impotence'.[12] This perspective informed the construction and outlook of Beckett's most successful works that set up a series of defeats, retractions

[11] Beckett in Nixon, *German Diaries*, p. 156.

[12] Beckett said: 'The kind of work I do is one which I am not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. His tendency is toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance.' Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters; A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling *Waiting for Godot*', *New York Times* (5 May 1956), section 2, p. 3. This tone of uncertainty was not only expressed by Beckett, his comment may have been influenced by Paul Valéry's statement in *The Course in Poetics: First Lesson* (1938), that: 'the fact is that disorder is the consideration of the mind's fertility: it contains the mind's promise, since its fertility depends on the unexpected rather than the expected, depends rather on what we do not know, and because we do not know it, than what we know.' This association with Valéry is not unlikely as *La soirée avec Monsieur Teste* (1896) and his novels from the 1930s had a palpable influence on Beckett. Valéry in Brewster Ghiselin ed., *The Creative Process: A Symposium* (New York; Toronto: Mentor Books, 1952), p. 106.

and diminishments. As Daniel Albright states: 'If it is true that art can do little or nothing, then to provide little or nothing is a form of facing the truth.'[13] Hence, in his conviction that 'to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail' because 'that failure is his world' (Dis: 145), Beckett succeeds. This success is, in part, due to Beckett's transformation of literature through his incorporation of music and art.[14] It is important to state that by permeating his writing with music and images, Beckett was not seeking to create a Wagnerian total artwork that is complete in its own terms, but to enhance its ambiguity and problematise its status as literature, or, to put it more positively, to enhance the possibilities of literature by exploring the problems of language.[15] To do this, Beckett incorporated the experimental strategies and structures that musicians and artists were using to push the boundaries of literature, theatre, television, radio, and film. The focus of this thesis is how these influences, previously outlined by Gilles Deleuze, shaped Beckett's creative process.

In his influential essay 'L'Epuisé' ('The Exhausted'), published in 1992, Deleuze divides Beckett's work chronologically into three categories: *language I* (early novels up to and including *Watt*), *language II* (later novels, particularly *The Unnamable*, theatrical works and radio pieces), and *language III* (born in *How It Is*, passes through theatre texts such as *Happy Days*, *Act Without Words I & II*, and *Catastrophe*, and 'finds the secret of its assemblage in television').[16] Deleuze argues that *language I* consists of phrases that point to the meaningless order in which things generally happen (e.g. Molloy's sucking stones, the biscuits in *Murphy*, and Watt's attempt at naming furniture). *Language II* eschews signification in favour of storytelling for its own sake as seen in the dialoghorrhea of *Not I*, or the inexorable, obstinate silences of *The Unnamable*. Lastly, *language III* consists of visual and aural refrains as well as spaces that unblock the impasses and aporias found in *language I* and *II*. As Deleuze explains: 'It remains in relationship with language, but rises up or becomes taut in its holes, its gaps, or its silences. Now it operates through silence, now it makes use

[13] Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 2.
[14] For a study that explores Beckett's interest in art, music and genre, see: *Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*, ed. by Lois Oppenheim (New York; London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999).
[15] Beckett said to Georges Duthuit in the early 1950s: 'C'est du wagnérisme. Moi je ne crois pas à la collaboration des artes' in Rémi Labrusse, 'Beckett et la peinture', *Critique*, 46.519-520 (August/September 1990), 670-680 (p. 676). Roman Haubenstock-Ramati's musical mobiles and George Crumb's visual scores contribute to the broader field of intermediality; an area which exemplifies Beckett's influence.
[16] Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', trans. by Anthony Uhlmann, *Substance*, 24.3, Issue 78 (1995), 3-28 (p. 10)

of a recorded voice that presents it, and still further, it forces speech to become image, movement, song, poem.'[17] As this thesis seeks to evaluate Beckett's work in terms of his use of the visual arts and music, Deleuze's *language III* is a useful concept to keep in mind due to its direct relevance to Beckett's creative process. In his preface to *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993), Deleuze refers to Beckett's 1937 letter to Axel Kaun, stating:

> There is also a painting and a music characteristic of writing like the effects of colours and sonorities that rise up above words. It is through words, between words, that one sees and hears. Beckett spoke of "drilling holes" in language in order to see or hear "what was lurking behind." One must say of every writer: he is a seer, a hearer, "ill seen ill said," she is a colourist, a musician.[18]

This thesis looks at the 'painting and music' that Deleuze suggests are 'characteristic' of Beckett's writing in order to uncover exactly how Beckett's authorial style, which must still depend on language, operates.

Each chapter looks at the narrator's simultaneous need and struggle to tell his story through either an artistic or a musical perspective.[19] The thesis uses Beckett's interest in the arts to unpack the reasons behind his decision to use musical or painterly forms. As its starting point it takes the long-standing notion that in Beckett's creative process there is a push and pull binary that forges a tension between efficacy and failure. As early as 1964, David Hesla wrote that the shape of Beckett's art is dialectic:

> A synthesis of the positive and negative, the comic and the "pathetic," the yes and the no […] Optimism and pessimism, hope and despair, comedy and tragedy are counterbalanced by one another: none of them is allowed to become an Absolute.[20]

In 1977, Vivian Mercier picked up on Hesla's point to suggest that Beckett's work is a balance between two poles: 'There is always, I believe, a dialectic at work in the minds of the greatest writers: perhaps their greatness consists precisely in the power to hold two equal and opposite ideas in the mind at once.'[21] This thesis asks how Beckett's use of the visual arts and music affect the tension

[17] Ibid., p. 12.
[18] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), preface.
[19] When talking to Georges Duthuit, Beckett described how his creative process entailed 'The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express together with the obligation to express.' (Dis: 139)
[20] David Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 216.
[21] Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: OUP, 1979), pp. 10-11.

such polarisation causes, and how the medium he uses gives shape to this tension. Theatre is absented from this consideration because Beckett's specific and complex use of the visual and aural in this live medium would require a different framework to explore the effect theatre had on his creative process. How Beckett reimagined the inescapably visual and aural nature of theatre, as well as his collaboration with scenographers, directors, and actors, and influence on performance art would all need to be investigated as the use of music and art is implicitly wrapped up in these elements of theatre. Beckett's use of music in the radio and television plays, however, is more direct, which allows for a more focussed discussion on music's structural and performative role. The focus on the visual arts in the prose demonstrates how Beckett's visual mind translates into a literary medium in order to offer a clear understanding of the impact the visual had on Beckett's creative methods. By beginning with *Watt* and ending with *Company*, Beckett's early and late prose frames the discussion, thereby illustrating the specific ways in which Beckett's use of language changed as a result of his engagement with art. The central music chapters explore how music sets and upsets the shape of the piece. By taking a broadly chronological exploration of Beckett's output, the development of his creative process can be charted. In order to identify both the parallels and differences throughout Beckett's oeuvre, this research uses varied methodological approaches. As well as using existing Beckett scholarship, this analysis works from art historical and musicological sources, close textual analysis, and archival research. Use of contemporaneous innovators as diverse as Arnold Schoenberg and Agnes Martin, for instance, offer new perspectives and contexts through which to view Beckett's work. Whilst some texts contain both artistic and musical influences, art and music are explored separately to offer a more thorough reading of how they each inform Beckett's creative process. This approach also provides scope for a consideration of the formal significance of art and music within the context and media in which they occur.

Beckett as a Romantic Modern

As an author whose writing possesses both Modernist and Romantic characteristics, Beckett's work resists classification. On the one hand, Beckett's decision to live in Paris, close association with James

Joyce, involvement with *transition* magazine, and tireless pursuit to reinvent the forms of literary expression seem to qualify him as an exemplary Modernist. On the other hand, his reluctance to sign up to a particular movement, creative singlemindedness and personal introversion suggest a resistance to the milieu to which, outwardly at least, he seemed to belong. Beckett's interests, which range from St. Augustine to Anton Webern, evidence a broader scholarly and aesthetic pool of influences. As well as his fondness for Proust and Rimbaud, and friendship with Duchamp (they played chess together), Romantic writers, composers, and thinkers such as Keats, Goethe, Beethoven, Schubert, and Kant are all evident behind the surface of Beckett's texts. From Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon's 2007 issue of *SBTA* entitled 'Beckett and Romanticism' to Steven Connor's *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (2014), criticism demonstrates that Beckett can be read both alongside the Romantics and the Moderns.[22] In this thesis, Beckett's use of Beethoven, Schubert, and the colour blue are explored in relation to the Romantic notion of longing, with a caveat of inevitable failure. When Romanticism is mentioned, it refers to the aesthetic tropes of this tradition through a Beckettian lens that consists of an admixture of nineteenth and twentieth-century ideas and characteristics. This perspective is neatly surmised by Van Hulle and Nixon in the introduction to their aforementioned volume:

> No matter how tongue-in-cheek Beckett's references to Romanticism sometimes are, they keep recurring with a remarkable persistence throughout his work. The "blue flower", one of the key symbols of Romantic yearning for unreachable horizons, is already present in Beckett's personal piece, his first published story 'Assumption'. Later on, the *Blaue Blume* appears as the "blue bloom" in 'A Wet Night', alluding to Leopold Bloom's activities in the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses*.[23]

As this excerpt alludes to both the key figures of German Romanticism (Novalis) and Modernism (Joyce), it is clear that Beckett's work contains elements of both literary styles, creating an ironic ('tongue-in-cheek') Romanticism, or a sensitive Modernism.

[22] Other notable contributions include Lloyd Bishop's chapter: 'The Fullness of Chaos: Beckett's Trilogy' in *Romantic Irony in French Literature from Diderot to Beckett* (Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 1989); Elizabeth Barry, '"Take into the air my quiet breath": Samuel Beckett and English Romanticism', *JOBS*, 10.1-2 (2001), 207-221; Paul Davies' chapter: 'Fancy and Imagination in the Rotunda (*All Strange Away*) in *The Ideal Real: Beckett's Fiction and Imagination* (London; Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994); and Shane Weller's essay: 'Beckett and Late Modernism' in Dirk Van Hulle, *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (CUP: Cambridge, 2015).

[23] Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon in '"All Sturm and no Drang" Beckett and Romanticism: Beckett at Reading 2006', *SBTA*, 18 (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007), Introduction.

New forms of failing: radio and television

It has often been commented that Beckett 'writes with a specific medium in mind', but relatively little attention has been devoted to the effect Beckett's use of different media has on his creative process.[24] This thesis sees Beckett's use of media as a self-reflexive comment on the medium itself, just as his novels are often, though certainly not exclusively, commenting on the problems of language.[25] Hence, it extends Albright's discussion of Beckett's attention to medium by asking *how* Beckett's work is 'a calling-into-question of the medium in which the work appears.'[26] To do this, it follows on from Ulrika Maude's reading of Beckett's use of technology, but whereas Maude discusses how 'new technologies change the way in which we see, hear, and more generally perceive the world', Beckett's interest in failure, and its extension into his use of different media, is investigated.[27] Beckett's notion of art as inherently uncertain finds its way into his use of different genres. Thus television and radio become mediums of ambiguity and instability, often going against the very nature of the technology itself. For instance, by creating visual impressions through radio, he challenges radio's implicit blindness, and by reducing the subjects of his teleplays to grey blurs, he casts a shadow of uncertainty over the corporeality of actors on a set. Jonathan Bignell has illustrated how 'vision and sound […] work together to determine the reality of the space and the source of the music, but also deprive the viewer of this security of meaning.'[28] This implies that Beckett subverts television's status as a reliably realistic means of representation. Bignell goes on to suggest that the music in *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* draws the viewer's attention to the 'emotional tone' of these plays, but Beckett's orchestration 'fragments this emotional level into the constituent visual and aural components that would usually express it in a unified and structured way'.[29] With his use of music as a motif, voice and structuring device, Beckett's experimentation with new recording technologies facilitates the

[24] Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Samuel Beckett's Media Plays' in *Modernism in European Drama: Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello, Beckett*, ed. by Frederick J. Marker and Christopher Innes (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 241-259 (p. 242). Recent research that looks at Beckett's use of television and radio include Jonathan Bignell's *Beckett on Screen: The Television Plays* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), and *Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio: A Reassessment*, ed. by David Addyman, Matthew Feldman and Erik Tonning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[25] The titles of Beckett's work alone (*Play*, *Film*, and the 'Roughs' for radio and theatre) are evidence of his preoccupation with genre.
[26] Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p. 5.
[27] Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 8.
[28] Bignell, *Beckett on Screen*, p. 49.
[29] Ibid.

increasing agency of music in these works. It is this interaction between sound, image and medium, which constitutes the focus of the chapters on radio and television.

Beckett began writing for radio during the summer of 1956, completing *All That Fall* in the September of that year. Each play reveals a curiosity to find out how writing for radio affects his subject's attempts to tell their story. As Mrs Rooney says, 'I sometimes find my way of speaking very … bizarre.' (ATF: 173) Indeed, Beckett's use of radio saw music's gradual replacement of this 'bizarre' language as the 'voice' through which to create auditory impressions. Though initially 'very doubtful of [his] ability to work in this medium', Beckett made attempts 'to write *for* the radio medium, rather than simply exploit the medium's technical possibilities' (Letters III: 181), as he said to his American publisher, Barney Rosset on 23 November 1958. This resulted in a body of work that is as much about the technology of recording, and its implications on the body speaking and the body listening, as it is about broadcasting itself. Everett Frost explores this genre conscious element of Beckett's works and explains that 'prior to Beckett no radio drama had used the unseen medium's unique ability to represent music itself, or words themselves.'[30] To do this, Beckett and his collaborative composers write parts that aim to represent their creative process and grapple with the specific medium they are using. When looking at Beckett's radio plays from this perspective, his compositional approach as well as his interest in the unsayable quality of music begin to surface. Through Beckett's writing, radio becomes a Schopenhauerian medium that realises 'the elemental force lies in the sound.'[31] This point is stressed by Beckett's director Donald McWhinnie who comments: 'the sound complex of radio works on the emotions in the same way as music; and from its total meaning it, too, exists in time, not space, it has its own rhythmic and melodic patterns, its melodic shape.'[32] As chapter two illustrates, more than any other medium, radio was suited to Beckett's desire to work with music and collaborate with composers in order to stretch the limits of expression and probe the limitations of language.

[30] *All That Fall and other plays for radio and screen* ed. by Everett Frost (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. xi.
[31] Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 28.
[32] Donald McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 39.

After his involvement in *Film* in 1964, Beckett's interest in television began in earnest on his fifty-ninth birthday, 13 April 1965, when he began constructing his first teleplay, *Eh Joe*.[33] This enthusiasm for the then new medium resulted in *Ghost Trio*, *...but the clouds…*, *Quadrat I* and *II*, and *Nacht und Träume*. These plays all challenge television's reputation for being the most accessible and mainstream broadcasting medium. Jonathan Bignell examines how Beckett's work fits into, contradicts and expands the televisual tradition. Bignell describes Beckett's 'theatrical television form' as 'an allusion to a past that did not exist in any simple way as a contrast to the television present at the time his television plays were made.'[34] He suggests that Beckett's slower camera movement and longer shots give these works an old-fashioned sensibility. This opinion is shared by Graley Herren, who sees television as the 'perfect medium for wrestling with memory, because like memory it is an illusion where absence is an irrefutable and unbridgeable given.'[35] Bignell also points to a 'modernist aesthetic' that can be traced in the teleplays, 'where the reduction of verbal and spatial textures, and concentration on geometrical forms and music, represent experiments in medium-specificity.'[36] Like his work for radio, Beckett's teleplays are constantly aware of how their medium shapes their narrative style. Whereas Bignell's materialist reading examines the technical production of the teleplays and Herren sees television as part of Beckett's 'debate on memory and to the artistic tradition of elegy', this research looks at the auditory structure of these plays.[37] It opens out Beckett's concentrated geometrical forms and musical excerpts to understand how the teleplays expose the impossibility of communicating with the past, or imbuing the absent with presence by reanimating the dead. Chapter three investigates how Beckett's decision to work with television not only speaks to his interest in visual allusions and his longstanding interest in chiaroscuro techniques, but also

[33] Beckett's work on set in Greenwich Village with Alan Schneider and Buster Keaton for *Film* in 1964, means that he was experimenting with camera equipment in the years leading up to *Eh Joe*. This interest in film is also evident in Beckett's enthusiasm for Hollywood comedy, French surrealist and German Expressionist cinema, application to Sergei Eisenstein in 1936 to study at the Moscow State School of Cinematography, and reading of Rudolf Arnheim's books on film. For an overview of Beckett's interest in the theoretical and practical aspects of film see: Anthony Paraskeva, *Samuel Beckett and Cinema* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 1-37.
[34] Jonathan Bignell in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, p. 174.
[35] Graley Herren, *Samuel Beckett's Plays on Film and Television* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 4.
[36] Bignell in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, p. 166.
[37] Herren, *Beckett's Plays on Film and Television*, p. 22.

reveals an increasingly dominant auditory structure that orchestrates the narrative movement and atmosphere of the play.

Early influences on an 'inoffensive nutcase' (Dis: 120)

Beckett's involvement in the art world is evident from his application to work at London's National Gallery in 1933, his learned interest in the Dutch and Flemish School, and in his friendship with numerous twentieth-century artists.[38] As a result of this lifelong investment in the visual arts, the image played an important part in Beckett's creative imagination and critical perspicuity throughout his life. According to Avigdor Arikha, in his later years Beckett often 'sat gazing at a painting, print or drawing a long while without uttering a word. He would simply gaze, marvel, nod, and sigh.'[39] Both Beckett's memory and attention to detail enabled him to recycle images from the museum of paintings he stored in his mind and use them either directly or obliquely in his works. Billie Whitelaw's appearance as May in *Footfalls*, for example, is considered to be a reimagining of Don Silvestro dei Gheraducci's *The Assumption of St. Mary Magdalene* (c. 1380), which Beckett would have seen in Dublin's National Gallery.[40] Ernst Barlach's *Der Fries der Lauschenden* (1930-35) also seems a likely influence for May. Beckett spoke about Barlach in his 'German Diaries' and owned Carl Dietrich Carls' book on the sculptor from the 'Zeichner des Volkes' series, which contained 85 illustrations, including one of the woman who possibly influenced May's sculptural form.[41]

[38] Some of these friends included Peggy Guggenheim, Jack B. Yeats, Bram and Geer van Velde, Avigdor Arikha, and Henri Hayden. Beckett even collaborated with Alberto Giacometti, Joan Mitchell, and Geneviève Asse. He also gave permission for the composition of artist's books comprising his texts to Jasper Johns, Max Ernst, Louis Le Brocquy, and Robert Ryman, to name but a few. Beckett satirically and affectionately calls the art lover an 'inoffensive nutcase who runs, like others to the cinema, to the galleries, the museum, and even to churches' (Dis: 120).

[39] Avigdor Arikha in *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett*, ed. by James and Elizabeth Knowlson (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 145.

[40] *Samuel Beckett: a passion for paintings*, ed. by Fionnuala Croke (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2006), p. 19.

[41] See: Carl Dietrich Carls, *Ernst Barlach* (Berlin: Rembrant-Verlag, 1958), p. 121. Nixon testifies Beckett's purchase of this book and adds that 'Barlach's figures strikingly recall Beckett's characters in his late stage and television plays' in *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 141. It is well known that Caspar David Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819) and Jack B. Yeats' *Two Travellers* (1942) both inspired *Godot*. Beckett's fondness for Edvard Munch's *Mädchen auf der Brücke* (1901) that he saw when he visited the private art collection of Heinrich C. Hudtwalcker with Rosa Schapire on 22 November 1936 may also have influenced the appearance of the three women in *Come and Go*. See: Nixon, 'Chronology of Beckett's Journey to Germany 1937-1397 (based on the German Diaries)', *JOBS*, 19.2 (2010), 245-272 (p. 253).

Figure 1. Ernst Barlach, *Fries der Lauschenden: Der Gläubige, Der Blinde, Die Tänzerin, Der Empfindsame, Der Wanderer, Die Träumende, Die Pilgerin, Der Begnadete, Die Erwartende*, 1935.

Figure 2. John Haynes, *May – Billie Whitelaw, Footfalls*, 1976.[42]

Early on in his career Beckett also wrote essays on painters.[43] These include 'MacGreevy on Yeats' (1945), 'La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon' (1946), 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit' (1949), 'Hommage à Jack B. Yeats' (1954), and 'Henri Hayden, homme-peintre' (1955). Beckett's critical voice is not declaratory or assured, as Lois Oppenheim states; in these essays he wrote 'to reiterate the idea that good art, legitimate art, was irrelevant to critical commentary.'[44] This statement supports Beckett's claim that the paintings by Geer and Bram van Velde:

[42] John Haynes, 'Samuel Beckett Plays' < http://johnhaynesphotography.com/samuel_beckett_plays11.html > [accessed 7 April 2017]
[43] Nixon opens his chapter entitled 'Talking Pictures: Beckett and the Visual Arts' by declaring: 'Any reader glancing at the German diaries could be forgiven for thinking that they were written by an art critic, and not a creative writer.' Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 133.
[44] Oppenheim in Croke, *Beckett: a passion for paintings*, p. 77.

> not being sausages, are neither good nor bad. All we can say about them is that they translate, to a greater or lesser degree, absurd and mysterious thrusts toward the image, that they are more or less equivalent to obscure inner tensions. (Dis: 123)[45]

From this assertion, it is clear that Beckett's art criticism is not about slotting artworks into an objectifying frame of reference pertaining to a universal standard of judgement. Instead, Beckett's criticism strove to explore the 'obscure inner tensions' caused by the painting in question and to engage in the real substratum of art: the unveiling of feeling, not thought, the pre-cognitive or instinctual, rather than the reflective or analytical. In his criticism, the fleshy vitality of the work, troubling as it may be, is not removed by a neat or conclusive answer; it is exposed and stretched by further questions. Beckett emphasises the importance of conserving rather than resolving the forces aroused by art and his critical prose style resists classification as strongly as the paintings it addresses. Beckett's assessment is not qualitative for Beckett believed that good art directly faces the impossibility of true representation and is thereby impervious to critical evaluation by means of perceived virtue of its intent. The better the work is, the more resistant it is to critical commentary. As the painting becomes an enigma – 'an impediment of the object, an impediment of the eye' – ambiguity is key.[46] This position was shared by abstract artists, such as Joan Mitchell and Sam Francis, whose work Beckett very much appreciated.[47] As chapter one argues, the pervasiveness of uncertainty regarding the analysis of an abstract painting forms the central tension in Beckett's creative engagement with the visual arts.

As well as being well connected in the art world, Beckett came from a musical family and became friends with celebrated musicians and composers. His cousins Walter and John Beckett were both composers, his wife, Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, was a classically trained pianist, and his nephew, Edward Beckett, is a professional flautist. Beckett himself was a keen listener and amateur

[45] Translation in ibid. Beckett expressed his fondness for van Velde in a letter to Marthe Arnaud and van Velde on 25 March 1952, where he confessed, 'if there had to be for me a soul-mate, I make bold to say that it would be his soul and no other. […] Bram is my great familiar. In work and in the impossibility of working. That's how it will always be.' (Letters II: 305)

[46] In 'Peintres de l'Empêchement' Beckett writes: 'Il y a toujours eu ces deux sortes d'artiste, ces deux sortes d'empêchement, l'empêchement-objet et l'empêchement-œil.' (Dis: 136)

[47] Beckett wanted Mitchell to illustrate both *Embers* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*, but both projects were never fully realised. For Beckett's translation of Georges Duthuit's essay on Sam Francis see: John Pilling, '"B" and "D" Revisited: A "Dialogue" of a different kind', *JOBS*, 20.2 (2011), 197-212.

pianist who enjoyed playing sonatas by Hayden, Mozart and Schubert.[48] This musicality finds its way into Beckett's works. As Walter Beckett said:

> I feel that Sam, with his musical knowledge […] conceived and wrote his works in a rhythmical fashion as if they were music. Words to him were notes. They had to be clear to the ear and at the same time create a word picture. The sound was to be carried through from one word to the next in the same way that an accomplished singer carries the sound, on the breath, through from one note to the next.[49]

This observation is supported by Beckett in his letter to Alan Schneider dated 29 December 1957, where he says of *Endgame* that it is 'a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible'.[50] Perhaps it was in his working relationship with actor Billie Whitelaw that Beckett could most effectively realise his rhythmically structured creative process. When describing working on *Footfalls* at the Royal Court in 1976, Whitelaw said that she felt as though she was 'working with a musician' as '[t]he movements started to feel like dance.'[51] She added that acting as May was like performing a piece that 'worked almost like a trio – sound of voice, scrape of footsteps, the brushed drum-beat.'[52] This musical form can be seen in Beckett's collaboration with composers when writing two of his radio plays, as well as his rigorous musical notes when structuring his teleplays.

Chapter outline and methodology

Whilst Beckett's 'German Diaries' (1936-37) are evidence of his fondness for abstract art, particularly German Expressionism, the painterly technique of his early prose anticipates the ideas and practices of the Abstract Expressionist painters of the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, in his essay on Proust, Beckett suggests that the artist must seek within himself to find the essence of his art: 'The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent.' (Proust: 65) This is akin to the Abstract Expressionist's belief that good art is a self-reflexive exploration. As Meyer Schapiro states: 'The painting symbolises an individual who realises freedom and deep engagement

[48] For more detail on Beckett's musical friendships and tastes, see: James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) and Bryden, *Beckett and Music*.
[49] Walter Beckett in Deborah F. Weagel, *Words and Music: Camus, Beckett, Cage, Gould* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 58.
[50] Samuel Beckett, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, ed. by Maurice Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 24.
[51] Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw … Who He?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 144. In *Godot* Pozzo offers to have Lucky dance, sing, or think. Prioritising the pre-cognitive and pre-linguistic instinctive movement of dance, Estragon requests he 'dance first' to which Pozzo responds: 'By all means, nothing simpler. It's the natural order.' (Godot: 39)
[52] Ibid.

of the self within his work.'[53] Chapter one, therefore, uses Abstract Expressionist thought alongside examples of earlier abstract art familiar to Beckett in order to unravel the 'blooming buzzing confusion' of Erskine's painting in *Watt*.[54] The similarities between Abstract Expressionism and French Symbolism, in their shared tension between intention and integrity as well as a deepening interest in the psyche, reinforce the relevance of viewing *Watt* through this artistic lens. In the autumn of 1888, Paul Gauguin advised fellow painter Emile Schuffenecker: 'Do not paint too much after nature. Art is an abstraction.'[55] By departing from verisimilitude, loosening the connections between lines, forms and colours, and creating a transcendent emotiveness, Abstraction emancipated itself from the restricting rigors of artistic realism. This style is closest to that found in Erskine's painting and it is from this perspective that this painting, the novel at large, and Beckett's creative process during this time, are viewed. Whilst Erskine's painting has been discussed as part of an analysis of *Watt* as a comic novel (Ruby Cohn), an exploration of the absurdity of language (Rubin Rabinovitz), and as emblematic of the text's own decentring (Lois Oppenheim), there remains no criticism that interprets the novel from the perspective of Watt's engagement with Erskine's painting. This chapter sees Watt's experience in front of Erskine's painting as key to understanding the novel at large which functions as a playful move away from realism towards non-representational forms of expression. Martin Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are evoked for their shared belief in perception as occurring via the body; something applicable to Watt's experience with art. Both philosophers claim that the individual's experience rests upon a body that opens into a world that includes it and other human bodies. Due to his notion of Dasein, Heidegger's position is more worldly than that of Merleau-Ponty. Heiedegger is less attached to the subjectivism that necessarily remains a part of the individual's bodily orientation towards the world and the subjectivisim that is part of Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body. Hence, Watt's experience with Erskine's painting is considered in light of Heidegger's

[53] Meyer Schapiro, 'The liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art' in *The New York School: Abstract Expressionism in the 40s and 50s*, ed. by Maurice Tuchman (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), p. 21.
[54] This reference to William James is also found in Neary's farewell speech to Murphy: '"The face," said Neary, "or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion. I think of Miss Dwyer."' (Murphy: 6)
[55] Paul Gauguin in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. by Herschel B. Chipp with contributions by Peter Selz and Joshua C. Taylor. (Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1968), p. 60. It is interesting to note that the white bird at the feet of the wizened old woman on the left of Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From. What Are We. Where Are We Going* (1987) speaks to Beckett's vulture from his poem 'The Vulture' (probably written in early 1935). Both represent the futility of words and difficulty of expressing through language and image.

broken hammer metaphor and Merleau-Ponty's comments on sensory experience. Through its engagement with these philosophers, the chapter shows how Watt's inability to find a satisfying response to the painting and the frustration that the image's abstraction aggravates in him echo Beckett's own struggle with language.

Chapter two looks at Beckett's use of music in three radio plays: *Embers*, *Words and Music*, and *Cascando*. In these medium-conscious works, music comments on and challenges the ability to tell or finish a story. This reading compares the discordant musical structure of these radio plays with that of G. W. Leibniz's *Monadology*. To arrive at Beckett's deconstructed Monadology, Katrin Wehling-Giorgi's suggestion that Beckett 'departs from the Leibnizian idea of a "pre-established harmony"' to enable the 'disintegration of the (speaking) subject' is used as a starting point.[56] In its use of Leibniz, this chapter follows on from research carried out by Erik Tonning in order to expose the failures of expression and narrative disorder in Beckett's mid-career writings.[57] Leibniz's Monadology is used to understand the function of music in the radio plays, but, instead of adhering to Leibniz's belief in the unity of substances and coherency of shape, the thesis understands Beckett's use of music as a strictly disunified version of Leibniz's Monadology. To ascertain the formal shape music creates, it takes Voltaire's rhetorical gibe (somewhat) seriously: 'Can you really believe that a drop of urine is an infinity of monads, and that each of these has ideas, however obscure, of the universe as a whole?'[58] In his use of radio and music, this chapter suggests that Beckett appropriates Leibniz's Monadology as he carves out a space for the inexpressible.

Beckett called *Embers* a text that 'repose sur une ambiguïté' as it drifts amidst its protagonist's confusion between imagination and memory.[59] Inexpressibility seems to be a problem for both Henry, as narrator, and Beckett, as author. The play reinforces Beckett's comment in his essay 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin' (1938): 'The time is not perhaps altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art

[56] Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, '"Splendid Little Pictures": Leibnizian Terminology in the Works of Samuel Beckett and Carlo Emilio Gadda', *SBTA*, 22 (2010), 341-354 (p. 346).
[57] See: Erik Tonning, *Samuel Beckett's Abstract Drama: Works for Stage and Screen 1962-1985* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).
[58] Voltaire in Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz on the Reality of Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 13.
[59] Beckett in an interview with P. L. Mignon in Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1976), p. 83.

has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear, and does not make clear.' (Dis: 94) This lack of clarity is most evident in the scene between Addie and the Music Master as it parallels Henry's inability to 'utter or eff it' (W: 53), whatever 'it' is. During Addie's piano lesson, music does not, as Kevin Branigan suggests, provide an optimistic solution, but it perpetuates the inability to express.[60] This reading of *Embers* contrasts with the general critical standpoint that began with Vivian Mercier's comment that *Embers* 'allows little scope for music.'[61] Rather, it sees *Embers* as a play driven by the rhythmic ebb and flow of the sea, which acts as a musical leitmotif that directs the thoughts and actions of its protagonist.

Words and Music was written by Beckett and composed by Morton Feldman, making it Beckett's first truly collaborative work. The radio play explores the difficulty language and music share in storytelling, but in its closing seconds it hints at the restorative effects of music. *Words and Music* marks Beckett's decisive move towards an increasingly musical lexicon as it dramatizes the frustrations behind the creative process. Beckett manages, in Al Alvarez's words, 'to make a work of art out of the struggle of making a work of art.'[62] By analysing Feldman's score, the interaction between Words and Music as well as the process of collaboration offers new insights into Beckett's approach to writing, particularly his adoption of compositional methods.

Cascando is Beckett's last radio play. It is another collaborative work, this time with the composer Marcel Mihalovici. Whilst numerous critics such as Kevin Branigan and Ulrika Maude have mentioned the relevance of music in *Cascando*, not many have considered the role it performs. Unlike *Words and Music*, where harmonious cooperation is sometimes possible, in *Cascando* Voice and Music are forever in tension. The play seems to be channelling Schopenhauer's belief that when words are incorporated into music 'they must of course occupy only an entirely subordinate position, and adapt themselves completely to it.'[63] As a supposedly dominant Opener struggles to impose order,

[60] See: Kevin Branigan, *Radio Beckett: Musicality in the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).
[61] Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett*, p. 116.
[62] Al Alvarez, *Beckett*, 2nd edn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 128.
[63] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Metaphysics of Music' in *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, 3 vols (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1996), II, 448.

Voice cannot finish his story, and Music seems to veer off course; *Cascando* is read as a masterpiece of failure because of its exposure of the shortcomings of word and note.

Chapter three focuses on *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* to evaluate the extent to which Beckett's use of German Romantic music influenced his creative process. It explores how the tension between yearning and indifference is expressed through Beckett's use and remodelling of Beethoven and Schubert's scores. With reference to Beckett's notebooks, this chapter illustrates that in these teleplays music becomes the main storyteller as, for the viewer it seems to propel the movements and thoughts of his personae. By using musicological analysis, Beckett's omission of certain musical phrases and subtle alterations to the scores are considered as vital clues to understanding music's role in these works. In line with Catherine Laws' research, this analysis works against the understanding that Beckett's use of music is reconciliatory or consolatory. It adds to Laws' research in its consideration of how the interplay between auditory and visual marks a new stage in Beckett's creative process. In its discussion of the interaction between sound and image in the teleplays, Adorno and Deleuze (philosophers whose proximity in this sentence may seem incongruous) are referred to in relation to their understanding of negative dialectic and negation, respectively. Both philosophers respond to Hegel's views on negation and contradiction. Adorno argues against Hegel's future-orientated teleology in favour of a retrospective trajectory where we move backwards into the future whilst the debris of history collects at our feet (an idea encapsulated in Walter Benjamin's angel of history). Deleuze rejects Hegel's view of negativity as the proper form of production and sees negation as resistance to the capitalist drive to production. Moreover, Deleuze does not see desire as a response to a lack, but as something that produces the real, thereby containing a positive force. Whilst this thesis does not follow Deleuze's suggestion that art emerges from a positive constructivism that positions the artist as someone who creates new ways of being and perceiving, it does adhere to his comments on the non-teleological trajectory of events and argument that a single substance is expressed in a multiplicity of ways.[64] In the analysis of the teleplays, different aspects of

[64] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1994), pp. 35-49; 269.

Adorno and Deleuze's arguments are used in order to avoid philosophical contradiction. Deleuze is referred to in relation to his comments on Beckett's formal experimentation with language and almost inherent intermediality and Adorno's comments are used to explore Beckett's employment of music as something that acknowledges lack before giving voice to memory and longing.

The final chapter takes up Raymond Federman's invocation to create 'a new critical vocabulary, one perhaps not invented yet' and uses paintings by the late twentieth-century artist, Geneviève Asse (who Beckett met and worked with), to comment on the effects the colour blue creates in the later short prose.[65] This new critical vocabulary *sees* Beckett's short prose as exhibits of his painterly process that use colour in ways akin to Asse's minimalist techniques. Lois Oppenheim endorses this realignment of focus from word to image when she claims that 'writing for Beckett is a way of seeing.'[66] Chapter four extends Oppenheim's suggestion to explore how the visual and transcendent qualities of Beckett's post-*Trilogy* short prose are so closely connected to his interest in and use of the colour blue. Whilst Beckett's monochrome environs are often alluded to throughout Beckett criticism, no study has looked at the significance of blue in Beckett's writings.[67] Earlier artistic styles such as minimalism (Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*), readymades and Pop Art (Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word*) and German Expressionism (Jessica Prinz, 'Resonant Images: Beckett and German Expressionism' in *Beckett and the Arts*) have been looked at in relation to Beckett's work, but focus has been aimed at the sympathetic approaches between these movements and Beckett's aesthetic ideology, as expressed in his essays and letters. This research focuses on the painterly style of four of Beckett's works written between 1965 and 1980: *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 'Ping', *Lessness*, and *Company*. It asks to what extent Beckett permits the Romantic weight and spirituality that the colour blue is charged with, to surface. As this shares themes with the previous chapter, parallels between Beckett's use of music and art begin to surface. Archival research is also

[65] Raymond Federman, 'The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way – Samuel Beckett's Fiction Since *Comment c'est*', *L'Esprit créateur*, 11 (Fall 1971), 21-43 (p. 27).
[66] Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 46.
[67] Tine Koch sees Beckett's works, in light of Novalis' blue flower motif, as 'a sustained attempt to pursue a certain desirable, yet inaccessible goal', but does not note his use of blue. Instead, Koch aligns Beckett's unending pursuit with the same sense of longing shared by German Romantics such as Schlegel. See: Koch, 'Searching for the Blue Flower: Friedrich Schlegel's and Samuel Beckett's "Unending Pursuits" of "Infinite Fulfilment"', *JOBS*, 19.2 (2010), 228-244 (p. 229).

used to explain how Beckett's use of colour was intended to create the setting and tone of his texts in much the same way as Beckett used Beethoven and Schubert's scores to create a structure and mood for his teleplays. This chapter also applies perspectives from art history as well as twentieth-century philosophy to close textual analysis in order to unpick the significance of the colour blue. Most importantly, by comparing Beckett's work to that of Geneviève Asse, the discussion addresses James Knowlson's comment that 'Art […] has become incorporated into the text so it almost *is* the text'.[68] These comparisons unearth the relevance behind Beckett's sustained interest in Romanticism, memory, and spiritual curiosity. Henri Bergson and St. Augustine are invoked to explore how past images mingle with present perception and what shape these memories take as they trigger the tension between *Sehnsucht* and denial. Bergson's comments on pure memory, as that which registers the past in the form of image-remembrance, and Augustine's belief that memory is intimately connected with perception and emotion are used to understand the connection between the colour blue and a subject's memory.[69] By contrasting Beckett's interest in the visual in his mid-to-late prose with his earlier prose, this discussion uncovers how his use of colour connects his early and late styles. For instance, blue has quasi-spiritual significance in its representation of the sky in 'Assumption' and *Company*, written in 1929 and 1979, respectively. Moreover, Beckett's tramping around galleries in the 1930s is recalled in *That Time*, which was written forty years later. In this play, voice C reminisces about the time 'when you went out of the rain always winter then always raining that time in the Portrait Gallery in off the street out of the cold' (TT: 388). This connects the paintings Beckett saw in the 1930s with his writing towards the end of his life, and, like his allusions to Schopenhauer, German Romanticism or paintings he remembered, shape his writing in new and fascinating ways each time a different genre is used.

[68] Knowlson and Bernd Kempker, 'The blue celeste of poesy', *Radio feature on Beckett and Painting*. Broadcast 29 May 2001, SWR2 (UoR JEK C/5/25).
[69] For Beckett, memory is bound up in a self-contradictory tension between humankind's striving to remember yesterday whilst yearning for what tomorrow will bring: 'There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday.' (Proust: 2)

Lastly, the conclusion reflects on how the main research questions of this thesis have been addressed. It also encapsulates how the diverse critical voices employed in each chapter enable the reader to unpick Beckett's unique way of working with sound and vision.

Watt's 'wild and unintelligible' painting

> No possible set of notes can explain our paintings. Their explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker.[70]

Introduction

Beckett wrote *Watt* between 1941 and 1945 after escaping from the Gestapo and finding refuge in Roussillon in the south of France, but the manuscript was not published until 1953, the same year as *The Unnamable* and *Godot* were published and first performed.[71] The novel's prolixity and peculiarity mirrors Europe's crisis at the time by presenting the reader with the fundamental human conditions of fallibility and error. For example, because Watt cannot understand how Mr Knott 'was never heard to complain of his food though he did not always eat it' (W: 74), he considers at least twelve reasons why, but then 'put them out of his mind, and forgot them' (W: 75) in an act of dispensing with logic and rationality. Thus Mr Knott's eating habits remain a mystery and the sense of mystery itself (the inexplicability of even the most mundane events) occupies the centre of *Watt*. Situations are not merely accepted, but they seem to be rigorously misunderstood, as was the situation in Germany when Beckett was visiting his Aunt Cissie and Uncle, the Jewish art dealer, William 'Boss' Sinclair, between 1936 and 1937.[72] Beckett's experiences in Germany and France in the build-up to and during WWII cast a shadow over the novel. The reduction of sex to mathematical permutation (Mrs Gorman and Watt make love according to strictly timed routines), disgust with nursing babies, eating other animals, and bodily functions, episodes of physical and mental torture, massacres and deaths all suggest that something is rotten at the core of society.[73] By his own

[70] Adolf Gottlieb, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman wrote this statement in response to the remarks by art critic Edward Alden Jewell on their paintings in the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors exhibition held at the Wildenstein Gallery in New York, June 1943. The statement was published in Jewell's column in the *New York Times*, 13 June 1943. See: Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, p. 545.

[71] For an outline of Beckett's situation when writing *Watt* see: Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 319-340; and Lawrence Harvey, '*Watt*.' in *Anthem Studies in Theatre and Performance: On Beckett*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (London: Anthem Press, 2012), pp. 72-3. Harvey suggests: 'Something of the experience of the refugee tramping wearily along the roads of France, doing manual labour in the service of others in order to survive, living with a heightened sense of exile in the uncertainty and relative solitude that prevailed under such conditions in wartime France finds its way into *Watt*.' Ibid., p. 73.

[72] Two of Boss Sinclair's written comments on art may have influenced Beckett. Whilst Beckett had a less idealised notion of painting than his uncle and saw the falsity within representation as well as the clarity it can sometimes afford, Sinclair's comment that 'the painter is he who lifts the tangled throbbing veil' certainly coincides with Beckett's creative aim. Furthermore, Sinclair question: 'Has anyone imagined that words are finalities, or thought that Literature was anything else but the doors or windows of a palace in which something unspeakable lurks?' is echoed in Beckett's letter to the German critic Axel Kaun. W. A. Sinclair, 'Painting', *The Irish Review (Dublin)*, 2.16 (June 1912), 180-185 (pp. 185, 184).

[73] Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p. 99. Beckett describes Watt and Mrs Gorman's lovemaking as 'kissing, resting, kissing again and resting again, *until it was time for Mrs Gorman to resume her circuit*.' (W: 122, emphasis mine). Even Watt and Mrs Gorman's intimacy is

admission, Beckett wrote *Watt* 'to get away from war and occupation', yet despite this, social and political tensions loom large.[74] For John Pilling, *Watt*'s importance resides in the socio-political backdrop Beckett was writing out of:

> Against the background of an epoch given over to irrational barbarism posing as the saviour of civilization, *Watt*'s mobilisation of ridiculously "rational", and hence utterly deranged, strategies, looks almost perfectly emblematic. Though there is no trace of the global conflict in *Watt*, it reads very much as if it could only have emerged from a world gone mad.[75]

As Pilling suggests, *Watt*'s 'ridiculously rational' or absurd style, is the result of the context within which Beckett was writing.[76] The novel's 'initial absence of meaning' (W: 66), no doubt due to the positivist thought of the time, forms part of its comic attack on Cartesian rationalism. *Watt* abounds in logical parody as it ridicules the rational approach through its firm resistance to conclusiveness. This allows it to raise fundamental questions about the nature of the novel, and experiment with what it can jettison while still remaining a novel. As a result, decay and incompletion form the heart of *Watt*, to such an extent that the pursuit of meaning and order unveil further meaningless and disorder.

Watt, like other war novels, explores the power of language to circumvent logic and entrap its reader, and exposes the inevitability of death and destruction.[77] It charts the shift from pre-war apathy towards an anguished self-awareness. As such, it is a challenging novel that requires its reader to navigate his or her way through obscure scenarios and otherworldly language. This rendered the novel 'too wild and unintelligible' (Letters II: 16) for Herbert Read who considered *Watt* for post-war publication.[78] Now one can see this unintelligibility as a comment on the war years immediately preceding its publication. Within the novel's empty spaces (such as Knott's absence and Erskine's silence) there is an overpowering sense of looking over one's shoulder in uncertainty. Watt himself

dictated by a cyclical structure that coincides with the form of Erskine's painting and the novel at large, for 'Mrs Gorman called every Thursday, except when she was indisposed.' (W: 199)

[74] Beckett in John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 59.

[75] John Pilling, 'Beckett's English Fiction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by Pilling (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 17-39 (p. 36).

[76] In *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin states that Beckett's absurdism is in his 'polyphonic' presentation of his understanding of the human condition. The piebald nature of *Watt* must be interpreted (though not oversimplified in a quest for meaning) 'like the different themes in a symphony, which gain meaning by their simultaneous interaction.' Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 45-6.

[77] For a reading of *Watt* as a war novel see: Anna Teekell, 'Beckett in Purgatory: "Unspeakable" *Watt* and the Second World War', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 62.3 (September 2016), 247-270.

[78] In 1946, the year after Read made this assessment, *Watt* was 'refused by a score of London publishers' (Beckett to Barney Rosset, 1 September 1953; Letters II: 397), namely Chatto & Windus, Methuen, and Secker & Warburg. It was eventually published by Maurice Girodias of Olympia Press on 31 August 1953 only to be banned in Ireland on 15 October 1954.

suffers from a sense of timelessness that comes with the uncertainty as to one's existence one day after the next. This is reflected in the circularity of the novel, which is parodied in Erskine's painting and in the repetitiveness of sentences that describe a character's mannerisms or behaviour. Watt's frustration, and the reader's, comes about both from the tediousness of these Gertrude Stein-like passages and in the cracks that appear in them.[79] The largest crack can be seen in the circle of Erskine's painting. As a fragmented loop, this image is metonymical of the shape of the novel and becomes a recurring motif in Beckett's oeuvre.[80]

At the heart of *Watt* there is a contradiction between movement and stasis and it is this conflict that both drives and hinders Watt's (and the reader's) understanding of what is happening. John Fletcher described *Watt* as 'a sort of extended doodle in words.'[81] This chapter sets out to understand the 'doodles' that make *Watt* such a brilliantly messy work of art. The most revealing 'doodle' this work focuses on is Erskine's circle and point painting. The chapter looks at how Erskine's painting affects Watt's conscious thinking mind as well as his more deep-rooted behavioural patterns. It sees Erskine's painting as a synecdoche for the form of the novel and suggests that this artwork is a visualisation of the difficulty Beckett has with language. The discussion hopes to explain how the painting does not resolve, but visually represents the following dynamic between the word and the image outlined by Bram van Velde on 11 August 1972:

> Words are nothing. They're just noises. You have to distrust them deeply. When I approach a canvas, I encounter silence. This mechanical world is asphyxiating us. Painting is life. Life is not in the visible. The canvas allows me to make the invisible visible.[82]

[79] Beckett himself commented: 'the logographs of Gertrude Stein are nearer [than Joyce's latest work] to what I have in mind. At least the texture of language has become porous.' (Dis: 172)

[80] See the discussion of *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* in chapter three for a more detailed exploration of Beckett's fragmented loop caused by musical repetition, cut-up technique and retrograde. The mixed choir song in *Watt* is another example of how intentions for wholeness are thwarted by discord. For instance, the bass voice has to sing a note that lasts over three bars. This is too long for one breath to sustain, illustrated by the insertion of 'Jesus!' (W: 28) before the song reaches its conclusion. This humorous cuss upsets the four-part harmony, thereby fragmenting the circularity of a piece that would otherwise sound reminiscent of a Gregorian chant. Helen Bailey claims that 'The systematic and sequential description of the choir, as well as its various hearers and non-hearers, is also surprisingly comforting – perhaps because it creates a sense of routine, ritual and control in the midst of the uncontrollable.' Bailey also believes it conceivable that 'in the turmoil of Beckett's flight from Paris, he 'sought comfort in his writing […] about a choir of angels, with its connotations of unfazed security, protection and "sweet, consoling chant".' Helen Bailey, '"More nearly pure spirit': music and spirituality in the works of Samuel Beckett' (PhD Thesis, University of Reading; 2014) p. 198.

[81] Fletcher, *Novels of Beckett*, p. 87.

[82] Bram van Velde in Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, trans. by Tracy Cooke and others (Champaign; London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), p. 89. In 'Painters of Impediment' Beckett writes that 'what painting has been freed from is the illusion that there exists more than one object of representation, perhaps even from the illusion that one object allows itself to be represented.' (Dis: 136) This supports the slippery indefiniteness of Erskine's painting.

To explain this discomfort with language, Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic philosophy is applied alongside a deconstructionist reading of Erskine's painting.[83]

Erskine's painting, however, is not the only artwork to be found in *Watt*; three other paintings are mentioned. Sam (the narrator) uses Hieronymus Bosch's *Christ Mocked (The Crowning with Thorns)* (c.1510) to describe Watt's appearance in the asylum. In the waiting room of the train station Watt looks at 'a large coloured print of the horse Joss, standing in profile in a field.' (W: 204) And in the addenda, the second, more realist picture in Erskine's room depicts a naked man seated at the piano painted in the style of Jan Davidzoon de Heem. The following analysis of Erskine's painting includes a discussion of these paintings as well as an examination of the circular form of the novel, to which these other paintings contribute. It suggests that Erskine's painting is a meta-comment on the novel which houses it. The very incompleteness of the painting as well as its illogical arrangement (the point rests outside an open-ended circle) mirrors the unfinished addenda of the novel, the irrational form of its sentences, and order of its chapters. A summary of the novel and the existing criticism precedes this discussion.

The novel itself is centred on a neurotic man who works for his master in a grand house, before moving on to an unspecified place and preoccupation.[84] Despite its simplicity, the plot of the novel, like its hero, is obscure. It is narrated by Sam (a meta-play on Samuel Beckett), who is an inmate Watt meets at the asylum and tells his story to.[85] Watt takes the train to Mr Knott's house where he has found employment as a servant. His duties are rudimentary, but his existence is perplexing. Reason is replaced by vagueness and questioning so that as we enter Watt's mind, rational thinking is supplanted by what Hugh Kenner calls 'a cascade of deliquescent hypotheses.'[86] Throughout the novel, the reader senses Beckett's conflict between relishing arcane language (evident in words such as 'conglutination', 'exiguity', and 'ataraxy'; W: 122, 172, 180) and his belief that

[83] As they shared the same intellectual climate of inter and post-war Paris, it is widely acknowledged that Beckett and Merleau-Ponty were familiar with each other's works. They almost certainly would have known about each other through either Georges Duthuit, Jean Beaufret, or Alberto Giacometti. Ulrika Maude traces these connections in *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 5.

[84] For two clear outlines of the novel, its genesis and the meaning of 'Watt', see: Ruby Cohn, *Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 109; and C. J. Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 28.

[85] A surface-level layer of metatextuality is created in Beckett's decision to name his narrator after himself. This is a clear example of a pun that plays on its own complexity: a technique Beckett often uses in *Watt*.

[86] Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 59.

literature often perpetuates 'the waste [of] words' (E: 264). Using language turns into a tedious game of 'Trying names on things . . . almost as a woman hats.' (W: 68) Watt stays in Knott's employment for an indeterminate amount of time, where he meets Arsene and Erskine, amongst other characters. He then leaves (to be replaced by Arthur) and makes another train journey to an unknown destination, asking at the ticket-window, where he puts down his bags 'once more', for a ticket 'To the end of the line' (W: 212). Sometime during this period – the exact timeframe is unknown – he is institutionalised and meets Sam (just like when Murphy met Mr Endon), to whom he tells his story. At the end of the book there is an addenda of thirty-seven unnumbered items that, according to the footnote, contains 'precious and illuminating material' and should be 'carefully studied' for 'only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation.' (W: 215) As Ruby Cohn explains, these extraneous items are 'erratic and macaronic' and serve to 'emphasise Watt's vulnerability – and his failure.'[87] This failure is not only attributable to Watt the character, but, as the intentional structural and contextual erratum show, to the novel at large.

Watt's 'coming to', 'being at' and 'going from / Knott's habitat' (W: 218)

Watt's structure is circular as it begins and ends with Watt at a train station in the summer. This circularity, however, is illogical for the chronological order of Watt's tale would require the reader to read the novel in the following order: I, II, III B, IV, III A.[88] As Barbara Reich Gluck observes, by distorting the chronology so that Knott is at the centre of the book, Beckett tells the reader that 'this is a novel about Knotting, that all anyone can ever speak of is nothing, and that all language and life are merely illusions covering the reality of nothingness.'[89] This daring experimentation with form is perhaps the one common denominator that builds the foundations of the novel's experimental style. The microcosm mirrors the macrocosm and the various events, people and objects circulate within a closed system. No rational order is produced within this whirlpool of meaninglessness; when Watt

[87] Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 113.
[88] 'Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story.' (W: 186) Although there are four parts to the novel, Beckett's notebook shows that *Watt* was constructed, like *Ghost Trio* (discussed later), with a triadic structure in mind: 'The Coming', 'The Being', and 'The Going'. This three-part structure supports claims to see *Watt* as a quest narrative as well as the suggestion that there is an allusion to the Holy Trinity in Knott (the Father), Watt (the Son), and Sam (the Holy Ghost).
[89] Barbara Reich Gluck, *Beckett and Joyce: Friendship and Fiction* (New Jersey; London: Associated University Presses, 1979), p. 94.

seeks answers he finds more questions. Beckett toys with logic and reason and in so doing toys with the reader's sense of what is reasonable, even feasible. The need to know is the thing that drives Watt and the novel at large; however, the reader must come to terms with the fact that 'the difficulty and indeed impossibility of knowing' are its conclusion.[90] Within *Watt* the reader is faced with long speeches, lists of objections and their solutions, informational tables, poems, permutations of words, songs, croaking frogs, dashes, question marks, hypotheses, abyssal parentheses, obsessively repeating phrases, hilariously absurd passages, digressions, and descriptions of paintings. Hence, a 'comedy of exhaustive enumeration' (Proust: 71) runs through the novel's incessant patterning.[91] As we search for a recognisable pattern, our endeavour to find a correlating form is thwarted by the plethora of anomalies that suffuse the text. Indeed, by mocking rationalism's fondness for series and formulae, *Watt* could be read as a pastiche of rational systems where the recurring glitches become the salient moments of the text. The result is a 'comedy of the logical impasse' that causes both laughter and frustration.[92]

Watt's character: 'a milder, more inoffensive creature does not exist' (W: 14)

Despite being bombarded with information about Watt's strange appearance (bulbous red nose, thinning reddish hair, protruding ears, fluted cheeks), attire (green greatcoat, yellow bowler hat, ill-fitting boots), mannerisms (he picks his nose and smokes cigars), predilections (milk, the wind, and venerable Saxon words), and mental condition (he has been close to suicide), there are obvious omissions to create an aura of ambiguity; for example, the reader never discovers Watt's first name.[93] Watt remains a walking 'What?' As we never discover any of his motives, he becomes a living incarnation of the desire to know. His journey to Knott's house is a quest to find the knowledge that will satisfy him and bring him tranquillity. This attempt to find certainty in reality, however, ends in

[90] Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 352.
[91] Within the repetitive passages, language hiccups like a malfunctioning computer program. Amanda Dennis suggests that: 'The bizarre automation of language in *Watt,* its repetitions and glitches, give us the image of a machine on the point of collapse.' Amanda M. Dennis, 'Glitches in Logic in Beckett's *Watt*: Toward a Sensory Poetics', *JML*, 38.2 (Winter 2015), 103-116 (p. 113).
[92] J. M. Coetzee, 'The Manuscript Revisions of Beckett's *Watt*', *JML*, 2.4 (1972), 472-480 (p. 480).
[93] Watt's odd manner of walking was the inspiration behind Bruce Nauman's 60-minute video art entitled *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)*, (1968). See: Bruce Nauman and Christa-Maria Hayes, 'Nauman..Beckett…Beckett.Nauman: The Necessity of Working in an Interdisciplinary Way', *CIRCA*, 104 (Summer 2003), 47-50.

disillusionment and bafflement, for Watt is a suprarational man in an irrational world, which means that his quest for understanding turns into one of negation. With a tendency to seek meaning ('what'), he hopes for 'semantic succour' (W: 68) and explanation. Knott's irrational establishment, however, does not permit any rational conclusions. Instead, when Watt enters Knott's house, he is confronted by the knottiness of his own thinking process and the unsettling reality of *le néant* ('(k)not') of his new quarters. Only at the end of his stay does Watt finally learn 'to accept that nothing had happened, that a nothing had happened, learned to bear it and even, in a shy way, to like it.' (W: 66) Watt's acceptance, however, is hard won and his path to 'liking' this nothingness is not always positive.

A 'way of advancing' (W: 23) through *Watt*

Critical commentary has focused on five main elements of *Watt*: madness, existentialism, rationalism, self-obsession, and chaos.[94] Significantly fewer critics have commented on Beckett's use of the visual image. Nicholas Allen suggests that for Beckett a painting is 'a means by which to refigure established relations between seer and seen', but exactly what these relations of 'silent meaning' are and how they 'reflect on the transparent absurdity of our own projections onto the field of art' is unclear.[95] For Enoch Brater, Erskine's painting – the 'anxious object' – in Knott's house 'serves as an emblem for the work as a whole'.[96] John Wall expands upon Brater's point adding that the picture 'functions as a *mise en abyme* reflecting not only the "logic of disintegration" that afflicts Watt so greatly, but also the general topography of the novel.'[97] Taking Wall's point further, if the meaning of Erskine's painting is the meaning of its form, this piece of art manages to bring form and content together. As such, Erskine's painting mirrors Watt's search for himself during his stay in Mr. Knott's house.

[94] See: Alvarez, *Beckett*, pp. 42, 45; Martin Esslin, 'Introduction' in *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Esslin (New Dehli: Prentice-Hall of India, 1980), 1-15 (p. 9); Jacqueline Hoefer, '*Watt*' in Esslin, *Collection of Critical Essays*, 62-76 (p. 63); Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick; New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), pp. 68, 79; Gottfried Büttner, *Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt*, trans. by Joseph P. Dolan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 124; David Hesla in H. Porter Abbott, *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1973), p. 61; John Chalker, 'The Satiric Shape of *Watt*' in *Beckett the Shape Changer*, ed. by Katharine Worth (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 29; and John C. Di Pierro, *Structures in Beckett's Watt* (York, South Carolina: French Literature Publications Company, 1981), p. 100.

[95] Nicholas Allen, 'Beckett's Dublin' in Croke, *Beckett: a passion for paintings*, 44-52 (p. 45).

[96] Enoch Brater, *Why Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 43. Harold Rosenberg spoke of artworks as 'anxious objects' if they make the viewer question their status as 'art' or not. Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) is a perfect example of what Rosenberg would call an 'anxious object'. The difficulty here is to discover *why* or even *if* this is an artwork. Consequently, this art often contributes to the viewer's confusion over whether it is one thing or another thing entirely. The anxiety and tension this uncertainty and ambiguity cause make the viewer question the very manner in which he or she perceives. It makes us question our perception as a means of interpreting what we see. In his 1969 essay *Art After Philosophy*, Joseph Kosuth (an artist influenced by Beckett) explains how Conceptual art emerged out of this line of thought in Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, ed. by Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 13-32.

[97] John Wall, 'A Study of the Imagination in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*', *New Literary History*, 3.3 (Summer 2002), 533-558 (pp. 550-1).

Watt's analysis of the painting could therefore be seen as an exploration of himself. Accordingly, Eric Levy sees the painting as an exploration of Watt's mind. Levy posits: 'Watt seeks the meaning of a picture whose meaning in turn […] is his own search for an explanation, his own quest for a context in which he can find himself.'[98] Hannah Copeland also sees synonymy between Erskine's painting and Watt as she remarks: 'this painting represents for Watt the sorrowful human predicament.'[99] When reading *Watt*, the reader's inability to rationalise the events of the text is alarmingly similar to Watt's failure to provide a clear explanation of Erskine's painting. J. E. Dearlove remarks on the similarity of experience when she says 'we too try to piece together fragmented incidents into some meaningful whole.'[100] This analysis investigates Watt's and the reader's response to Erskine's painting and asks *how* it works as an emblem for the work at large. In the pages that follow the motives and techniques behind such apparent lack of structure are investigated. The discussion claims that Erskine's painting is the quilting point of Beckett's discourse: 'the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively.'[101] Erskine's painting, therefore, is seen as both the reason for and result of the novel's absurdity. It is to the ideology behind this image this chapter shall now turn.

Erskine's painting

Erskine's painting is elusive and enigmatic not only because of its abstractness and resistance to description, but also because it is kept under lock and key. Beckett plays with the notion of inaccessibility by stating that Erskine's room is 'always locked' (W: 105), adding that Erskine keeps the keys in his pocket, away from Watt and consequently away from the reader. For Watt, who 'could pick simple locks, but […] could not pick obscure locks', the idea of counterfeiting a key to pick this lock comes to mind, but he 'could not counterfeit obscure keys' (W: 106). Sam later informs us that Watt couldn't obtain possession of Erskine's key 'even for a moment', thus making it impossible for

[98] Eric Levy, *Beckett and the Voice of Species: A Study of the Prose Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p. 33.
[99] Hannah Copeland, *Art and the Artist in the Works of Samuel Beckett* (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1975), p. 64.
[100] J. E. Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 46.
[101] Jacques Lacan in Arthur Rose, 'Beckett: a Quilting Point?' in *Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Arka Chattopadhyay and James Martell (London: Roman Books, 2013), 84-100 (p. 84).

Watt to break into Erskine's room. This metaphor of not being able to access the unknown because the tools one has are inadequate can be applied to Watt's difficulty with language and his inability to describe Erskine's painting; the enigma behind the locked door. The strength of Erskine's painting is that, in Merleau-Ponty's words: 'Precisely because it dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to, the work of art teaches us to see and ultimately gives us something to think about'.[102] Moreover, *Watt*'s 'obscure locks' (W: 105) leave a discontented feeling for the reader as Beckett does not fill the gap between the known and unknown; we are made to 'dwell in a world we do not have the key to'. As we try to pick the lock to access the heart of the novel, we are, like Watt when he tries to conceive of a way to unlock Erskine's door in order to access the painting, left with 'disagreeable and confused chatter' (Dis: 119), somewhere far from the centre of coherent discourse.[103] This exclusion from understanding causes Watt (and the reader) to feel frustrated at their bewilderment that seems to aggregate the longer Watt spends at Knott's establishment. The endless array of alternatives and the multitude of differing explanations lead, as J. E. Dearlove suggests, 'back to Beckettian ambiguity and doubt.'[104] The circularity of the narrative (mirrored by that of the painting) encourages this sense of involution which, instead of facilitating direction and linearity, refuels Watt's uncertainty.[105] It is, therefore, by being armed with these uncertainties that we must break into 'all the comings and all the goings' (W: 114) of *Watt*.

Though we never discover how, eventually 'Watt did get into the room' and, apart from a broken bell, he finds that the 'only other object of note in Erskine's room was a picture, hanging on the wall, from a nail' (W: 109). Unlike the other paintings in the novel, Erskine's painting is abstract.

[102] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. by Gralen A. Johnson, trans. by Michael B. Smith (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 46-121 (p. 114).
[103] In 'La Peinture des van Velde' Beckett writes: 'on se livre franchement à un bavardage désagréable et confus' (Dis : 119). David and Cecile Shapiro describe a similar feeling of being locked outside of understanding in relation to viewing an Abstract Expressionist work: 'The new painting dispensed with recognisable images from the known world. Its surfaces were often rough, unfinished, even sloppy, with uneven textures and dripping paint. Violent, brutal, impoverished, slapdash, it demanded attention yet offered no clue to the nature of the response expected. It had force, energy, mystery, yet its explosions seemed inchoate outpourings of expression to which viewers were provided no key.' David and Cecile Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 1.
[104] Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos*, p. 8.
[105] Beckett's alinearity can also be found in his use of music where logical continuity is dissolved to allow for the naturally more disordered and illogical nature of experience. This is discussed in detail in the following two chapters. Also see Catherine Laws' discussion of Beckett's musical model in 'The Double Image of Music in Beckett's Early Fiction', *SBTA*, 9 (2000), 295-308.

Figure 3. *Illustration of Erskine's circle and point painting in* Watt.

Watt describes this picture as follows:

> A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground, of this picture. Was it receding? Watt had that impression. In the eastern background appeared a point, or dot. The circumference was black. The point was blue, but blue! The rest was white.

In this almost three-dimensional painting, the circle occupies a no-man's-land space between foreground and background. When Watt asks if it is receding, the circle seems far off as if ungraspable. The 'broken' circle mirrors this uncertainty and that of the text which also narrates a mid-point in Watt's life, broken-off from his past or future. The painting's most remarkable feature is its blue point.[106] Watt's surprise at the colour blue ('but blue!') is significant as it both tempts Watt's desire for meaning and denies reductive signification. Blue is enigmatic and elusive as it stands out, but for no singular reason. Instead of providing meaning it entrances Watt (and therefore the reader) only to intensify our desire for understanding. Rothko believed that a painting is an intentional '*tableau vivant* of human incommunicability' as it represents solitude and silence.[107] In a similar vein, Erskine's painting exposes the agonising indescribability of art as it is (paradoxically) blatantly self-effacing. This description acknowledges the painting's, and the novel's, dual nature. The painting's lines and colours, though they appear to have been created instinctively, evoke symbolic meanings that take on an independent existence. Its form-centred nature creates arbitrary aesthetic pleasure and its directness encourages Watt's personal participation. Much like the works of the abstract painters and some members of *Der Blaue Reiter*, Erskine's painting focuses on the vitality and fleshiness of

[106] See chapter four for an in-depth discussion of Beckett's use of blue in his later short prose.
[107] Mark Rothko and Miguel López-Remiro, *Writings on Art* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 59.

colour and line.[108] Bram van Velde spoke of the importance of the line when he called it a 'force, borrowing its power from the energy of the draftsman', as seen in the painting below.[109]

Figure 4. Bram van Velde, *Souvenir Duthuit,* 1975.

Tension between line and point give Erskine's painting energy and stir Watt's aesthetic emotions. This approach and style is commonly found in the artists Beckett admired and whose paintings he went to see during his artistic pilgrimage in Germany. Such artists include Wassily Kandinsky, Kurt Schwitters, Paul Klee, Franz Marc and Emil Nolde. For these artists immediacy and impact was beginning to replace history and intellectualism. The same is true of Erskine's painting, and therefore any attempt Watt makes at trying to rationalise or contextualise the artwork is doomed to fail. In *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936), Alfred H. Barr remarks that these artists had 'grown bored with painting facts' and so they turned 'by a common and powerful impulse' to explore the technical features of art: the lines, forms and colours which constitute the work itself.[110] Following Barr's

[108] 'The Blue Rider' group lasted from 1911 to 1914. Its members included Kandinsky, Franz Marc and August Macke, amongst other Russian emigrants and German artists. Whilst the artists differed in their style, they shared the same aesthetic objective: to express spiritual truths through art, especially in their use of the colour blue.

[109] Bram van Velde in Hans K. Roethel, *The Blue Rider* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 22.

[110] Alfred H. Barr in Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 149. These thoughts had been brewing for some time as in his public lecture in 1885, James McNeill Whistler claimed that the 'unattached writer' has 'widened the gulf between the people and the painter', bringing about 'the most complete misunderstanding as to the aim of the picture'. Whistler, *Mr Whistler's Ten O'Clock* (first publ. in Chatto and Windus, 1888) in 'The Correspondence of James McNeil Whistler' < http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/miscellany/tenoclock/ > [accessed 16 July 2017]

understanding of abstract art, Erskine's painting is not about fact or anything to do with representation; instead, it is wholly concerned with the shared experience, what Merleau-Ponty calls 'lived perspective', between artist and viewer.[111] Watt's experience with the painting is blighted by his stubborn desire to know the meaning behind it despite the impossibility of ever reaching complete understanding. Accordingly, throughout the novel Beckett asks us to consider: 'what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning? And to what did it tend?' (W: 62) These are pertinent questions for a consideration of Erskine's painting. The painting's 'indifference to meaning' is mirrored in Watt who, as Vincent J. Murphy suggests, 'does not want so much to know, but rather to accommodate himself to the discomfort of not knowing.'[112] Indeed, it is Watt's 'impression' (W: 109) of Erskine's painting that is described, not his understanding of it. Watt can only offer his intuition of the painting and this troubles his rationalistic mind greatly. In his 'German Diaries', Beckett suggested that an element of ambiguity is important and one's engagement with art had to admit elements of uncertainty rather than attempt to simplify complexities. He asked: 'how can one see anything "simple & whole"?'[113] Watt's encounter with Erskine's painting opens out this chasm between the pursuit of and indifference to meaning. Watt reluctantly admits defeat as he is '*forced* […] to the conclusion' (W: 111, emphasis mine) that the picture was part and parcel of Knott's implausible establishment. This admittance seems to irk Watt who then goes on to consider the picture as 'one of a series' that comes and goes in Knott's house, thereby forcing Erskine's painting into a mathematical sequence so as to categorise and pin it down. As this painting represents art's drive 'in vain towards figurelessness' (Letters II: 104), it causes Watt to hesitate when trying to settle on a specific line of perspective or focal centre for the painting. Rather than providing Watt with an image to identify himself against, this painting makes him query what he sees. It asks questions rather than provides statements through a blunt rebuttal of representation, in favour of flux. As Beckett wrote to

[111] Interestingly, in a telephone interview with James Knowlson on 23 February 1992, Morris Sinclair used similar rhetoric to Merleau-Ponty when he stressed that 'paintings were never a paragraph in art histories for Beckett. They were *lived experience*' (emphasis mine). Knowslon, 'Beckett and Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Art', *SBTA*, 21 (2009), 27-44 (p. 28). Suzanne Langer's perspectives would offer an interesting parallel reading of *Watt* as she argues for the life, vitality and livingness of a painting conveyed through abstract forms that are 'freed from their common uses' to be reemployed as symbols 'expressive of human feeling'. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 51.
[112] Vincent J. Murphy, '*La Peinture de l'empêchement*. Samuel Beckett's *Watt*', *Criticism*, 18.4 (Fall 1976), 353-366 (p. 362).
[113] Beckett, 26 March 1937, in Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 145.

Duthuit on 3 January 1951: 'Does there exist, can there exist, or not, a painting that is poor, undisguisedly useless, incapable of any image whatever, a painting whose necessity does not seek to justify itself?' (Letters II: 218) Unintelligibility, it seems, is at the heart of *Watt*, and Erskine's painting makes Watt confront it head on. What is important is not Watt's forced conclusion, but his interaction with the painting and the feelings it evokes.[114] Such thoughts lead towards a consideration of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological writings.

Erskine's painting from Merleau-Ponty's perspective

For Merleau-Ponty a painting and its phenomenological description are intrinsically intertwined. In both, meaning is called into existence by the body's own activity in the world. In three essays – 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945), 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' (1952), and 'Eye and Mind' (1961) – Merleau-Ponty developed his thoughts on perception. These essays claim that the consciousness of body-subjects is incarnate in the world and the act of painting or interpreting a painting is the act of bringing what it is concerned with into being. Looking at the painting returns the viewer to a pre-linguistic silent realm. Perception, then, is our ordinary pre-reflexive, bodily participation in the world because of a painting's closeness to the palpable life of things. This immediacy is lost in the sort of modern science and philosophy Watt adopts in his attempt to rationalise experience through language.[115] Instead of being shackled by logic and reason, Merleau-Ponty's descriptive philosophy of perception is based on our kinaesthetic, pre-scientific, lived-body experience and cognition of the world. It unifies our affective, motor and sensory capacities. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty sees philosophy as art itself: 'not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but like art, the act of bringing truth into being.'[116] The same rationale can be applied to Watt's engagement with Erskine's painting. More specifically, Watt shares a similar experience when looking at Erskine's painting to that which Merleau-Ponty describes a viewer has

[114] As Lois Oppenheim has observed, 'Merleau-Ponty's nontheic, or thoughtless, opening of painting *within* the world's visibility […] is an actualization of "mute meanings" (Merleau-Ponty), of the "Silence à l'oeil du hurlement" (Beckett) that concretises the ubiquity of Being.' Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 114. Hence, as a pre-rational representation of the world as seen, the painting can successfully represent the failure to express.

[115] Rubin Rabinovitz outlines the discoveries that helped to collapse the fundamental tenets of positivism from Einstein's relativity of time to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and Gödel's First Incompleteness Theorem. See: Rubin Rabinovitz, *Innovation in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 12.

[116] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (New York; London: Routledge, 1962), p. xxiii.

when looking at Cézanne's pictures in 'Cézanne's Doubt'.[117] In both Erskine's painting and Cézanne's work there is an 'impression of an emerging order' as the object is 'in the act of appearing, organising itself before our eyes.'[118] Erskine's painting, like Cézanne's landscapes cannot be reduced into language.[119] It remains, as Beckett states, 'by definition unapproachably alien'; an 'unintelligible arrangement of atoms' (Letters I: 223). Additionally, Watt's reaction to Erskine's painting supports what Merleau-Ponty describes (in Heideggerian fashion) as the viewer's being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty states: 'I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once.'[120] When Watt cries as he looks at Erskine's painting, his physical reaction reminds the reader of Merleau-Ponty's comment in 'Eye and Mind' that 'The visible world and the world of [one's] motor projects are both total parts of the same Being.'[121] According to Merleau-Ponty's theories, Watt's physical reaction is symptomatic of his deep engagement with the painting. This is even more meaningful when we consider Watt's myopia. Lastly, in 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', Merleau-Ponty pits language against painting when he states that 'language speaks, and the voices of painting are the voices of silence.'[122] Interestingly, it is only after deep contemplation of Erskine's painting that Watt arrests his (il)logical permutations mid-stream and stands looking at the painting in silence. Moreover, Watt's reaction is immediate and not premeditated, it is not a measured response that has been filtered through convention or tradition because, as Sam explains, 'Watt knew nothing about painting' (W: 110). This coincides with the intention of Abstract Expressionist work to be 'objects of contemplation' that are 'set out to persuade the viewer to look into himself' and thereby 'affect the

[117] Beckett expresses similar confusion between the relation of subject and object when describing Cézanne's *Montagne Sainte-Victoire* (1905-6) in a letter to MacGreevy (8 September 1934) when he saw the painting at the Tate Gallery: 'Cézanne seems to have been the first to see landscape & state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever' (Letters I: 222). Watt's engagement with Erskine's painting questions this incommensurability between canvas and viewer. For a discussion of Beckett's Cézanne letters see: Georgina Nugent-Folan, 'Personal Apperception: Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein, and Paul Cézanne's *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire*', *SBTA*, 27.1 (2015), 87-101.

[118] Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, 59-76 (p. 65). Whether this order comes from the painting itself or is imposed upon it by Watt's obsessive rationalising mind will be debated later in this chapter.

[119] Susan Schurman explains Watt's finding himself 'in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance' (W: 67) as language being 'no longer applicable to a thing, but is a self-sufficient system subservient to the imagination.' Schurman, *The Solipsistic Novels of Samuel Beckett* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1987), p. 54.

[120] Merleau-Ponty, 'The Film and the New Psychology' in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by H & P Dreyfus (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 48-59 (p. 50).

[121] Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, 121-151 (p. 124).

[122] Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' ibid., p. 117. This is reminiscent of van Velde's comments, mentioned earlier.

way people think and feel'.[123] Equally, Erskine's painting's abstractness confronts the viewer; it has a life of its own that cannot be explained away. It possesses an abstract, abyssal quality akin to Kandinsky's *Free Curve to the Point – Accompanying Sound of Geometric Curves* (1925).

Figure 5. Wassily Kandinsky, *Free Curve to the Point – Accompanying Sound of Geometric Curves*, 1925.

Erik Tonning has already talked about the similarities between Beckett and Kandinsky. Tonning argues that whilst Beckett lost interest when Kandinsky began to lyricise and geometrically balance the tensions and clashes in his paintings, he found in the early Kandinsky 'a similar attempt to confront the viewer with a field of pre-conceptual associations which might partly elide habitual

[123] Frank Whitford, *Understanding Abstract Art* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1987), p. 123.

modes of perception.'[124] Here, Erskine's painting and Kandinsky's *Free Curve to the Point* share a sense of unresolved dynamism and movement. They both explore the anxiety caused through the deconstruction of the world as one sees it (represented in the broken circle) and a sense of balance that could at any moment be irretrievably lost (represented by the drifting point outside of the circle). The similarity of themes shared between these two paintings is not mere coincidence. Beckett spoke of Kandinsky's style in his 1969 interview with John Gruen:

> I think perhaps I have freed myself from certain formal concepts. Perhaps, like the composer Schoenberg or the painter Kandinsky, *I have turned toward an abstract language*. Unlike them, however, *I have tried not to concretise the abstraction* – not to give it yet another formal context.[125]

Throughout *Watt*, and in the case of Erskine's painting in particular, this free 'abstract language' is evident and one could argue that Beckett's decision not to put an image of the painting into the novel *à la* Sterne, despite numerous meticulous illustrations in his notebook, is a deliberate avoidance of concretisation.[126] Chris Ackerley describes Erskine's painting as an echo of Kandinsky's *Point and line to Surface* (1926) invoked in *Murphy* as: 'a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line.' (Murphy: 66)[127] Without concretising the abstraction, Watt's attempt to describe this simultaneous separation and connection between point and line makes his mind spin into an endless chain of possible permutations. Watt is unable to exhaust the image's ineffable richness despite his determined and profligate attempts at stabilising it through signification. This inability to encapsulate the painting's meaning is, as Roland Barthes puts it, because 'all images are polysemous' carrying 'a "floating chain" of signifiers in tow.'[128] There remains a *je ne sais quoi* quality behind the image's surface and consequently, no one word or expression will suffice. Thus Watt becomes increasingly dissatisfied with language and, as Nathan Scott remarks, resorts to an

[124] Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 66. For further discussion on Beckett's familiarity with and use of Kandinsky see: Tim Lawrence, 'Samuel Beckett's Critical Abstractions: Kandinsky, Duthuit and Visual Form', *SBTA*, 27.1 (2015), 57-71.
[125] Beckett in John Gruen, *Vogue* (December 1969), p. 210 (emphasis mine). This resistance to concretisation is also evident in Beckett's use of Beethoven in *Ghost Trio*, discussed in chapter three. In a strikingly similar comment to Beckett's, Beethoven said of his *Pastoral* Symphony that it was 'more expression of feeling than painting'. Beethoven in Lawrence Kramer, 'The Shape of Post-Classical Music', *Critical Inquiry*, 6.1 (Autumn 1979), 144-152 (p. 151).
[126] David Hayman sees Beckett's graphic accompaniment and marginalia in the manuscripts as a sort of release and even 'a *source* of creative energy.' In reference to Beckett's doodles for Erskine's painting, Hayman believes that some 'were in fact designed to illuminate the text, perhaps as acts of desperation on the part of a stymied author, perhaps in response to a comic impulse.' David Hayman, 'Beckett's *Watt* – the graphic accompaniment: Marginalia in the manuscripts', *Word & Image*, 13.2 (1997), 172-182 (pp. 182, 177).
[127] Ackerley, *Annotated Watt*, p. 124.
[128] Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 32.

almost pointillist manner of angrily deploying words 'like pellets of colour on a Seurat canvas'.[129] Watt describes the painting as:

> a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively. . . (W: 110)

This passage exposes Watt's frantic tendency to search for meaning within a 'molecular soup' of forms that rise out of and fall back into one another.[130] His search is unsuccessful not because the painting has no meaning, but because the tools Watt is using to unlock meaning (language and logic) are the wrong implements. Watt's absurd logic features as a broken tool, whose functionality is unable to meet the demands asked of it. Rationalism, for Watt, is not theoretical but practical as it manifests itself in his way of walking and talking. Its practicality, however, is problematic and is therefore similar to Heidegger's broken hammer metaphor when he is concerned with '"*dealings*" *in* the world and *with* entities within-the-world.'[131] In Heidegger's discussion of *presence-at-hand*, a broken hammer, that could further damage anything in its proximity, is an example of a useless set of equipment that needs to be repaired or replaced. In Watt's case, his broken hammer that is present-at-hand is his broken logic. This affects (and problematizes) his communication, way of walking, and aesthetic experience. Watt's being, therefore, can be seen as a constant battle with experiencing 'a certain un-readiness-to-hand.'[132] His un-readiness is due to his logic (hammer) being damaged, having elements missing, and being a hindrance to pursuing an endeavour (understanding the painting). Heidegger terms these three shortcomings as conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy. He describes the effect of these flaws in a way which brings Watt, when he stands in front of Erskine's painting, to mind: 'The helpless way in which we stand before it is a deficient mode of

[129] Nathan A. Scott, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1969), p. 73.
[130] Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 79.
[131] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 95. Beckett's knowledge of Heidegger is difficult to estimate. Whilst he moved amongst scholars and artists engaged with the philosopher's writings, like Jean Beaufret and Brian Coffey, it not known whether they discussed Heidegger at the Ecole Normale or Parisian cafés. In 'La peinture des van Velde' Beckett mentions Heidegger when he comments that, according to Karl Ballmer, 'les écrits de Herr Heidegger faisaient cruellement souffrir.' (Dis: 118)
[132] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 103.

concern, and as such it uncovers the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of something ready-to-hand.'[133] As a result of Watt's 'broken hammer' logic, in his 'dealings with the world of [his] concern' (i.e. his attempt to describe Erskine's painting) his supra-rationalism '"stands in the way" of [his] concern.'[134] When Watt applies his logic to Erskine's painting, he is generally more conscious of the process of his analysis than the painting. Watt's tools only become phenomenologically transparent (i.e. he is only unaware of how he is logically interacting with something) when he cries in front of Erskine's painting. In this brief moment, art allows Watt to experience a subjectless, objectless world. As Heidegger explains with his hammer and nails metaphor, as the carpenter is hammering the nail into the workbench he becomes absorbed in his activity so that he has no awareness of himself as a subject over and against his world of objects.[135] There is only the experience of an ongoing event which, for Watt, is his primordial experience with Erskine's painting. This ties in with Merleau-Ponty's belief that meaning is achieved through a *sensory experience* with rather than cognitive assessment of the painting. Watt's prioritisation of the mind over the body and refusal to see both as intimately linked leads to Beckett's parody of Cartesian dualism, illustrated in Watt's desire to understand the world around him through language rather than interaction.[136] Like the incomplete circle with its centre 'receding' into 'the eastern background', Watt's sentences drift off course as they desperately attempt to exhaust every eventuality of the relation between 'circle and centre' (W: 110). There is no magnetic pull to bring Watt's meandering thoughts into focus. This frenzied outpour of configurations is an example of Watt's schizoid tendencies as he uses Cartesian methodology to exhaust every logical possibility of explaining the 'circle and its centre'.[137] The dual sense of fragmentation and incompletion represented in the splintered structure of this passage mirrors the

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] This can be compared with Beckett's writing on the irreparable breakdown of subject and object in painting from 'Peintres de l'Empêchement'. See: Rupert Wood's chapter 'An endgame of aesthetics: Beckett as essayist' in Pilling, *Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, pp. 1-16.
[136] See the humorous passage on pages 173-4 of *Watt*.
[137] G. C. Bernard sees *Watt* as an expression of the subjective experiences of schizophrenia. More broadly, Lea Sinoimeri, Shane Weller, and Elizabeth Barry read Beckett's plays, language, and trilogy as schizophrenic in style and/or content, respectively. See: C. G. Bernard, *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach* (New York: Dodd, 1970); Lea Sinoimeri, '"Close your eyes and listen to it": schizophrenia and ventriloquism in Beckett's Plays', *Miranda*, 4 (2011) in *Miranda Revues* < https://miranda.revues.org/1924 > [accessed 14 February 2017]; Shane Weller, '"Some Experience of the Schizoid Voice": Samuel Beckett and the Language of Derangement', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45.1 (2009), 32-50; Elizabeth Barry, 'All in My Head: Beckett, Schizophrenia and the Self', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 37.2 (June 2016), 183-192. Lastly, for an analysis on the schizoid voice in *Watt* see: Chris Ackerley, 'The Uncertainty of Self: Samuel Beckett and the Location of the Voice', *SBTA*, 14 (2004), 39-51 (p. 42).

anguish Watt feels at the disconnection of the point and circle. Eventually Watt stubbornly accepts Erskine's painting as an artwork that opens out into questions rather than one that closes into solutions. When Watt does not seek meaning, but allows himself to be overcome with the emotional integrity behind the image, he gets closer to understanding the truth the painting is trying to convey and experiences a euphoric sense of relief. Like Merleau-Ponty, Adolph Gottlieb believed that instead of asking what a painting means, a viewer should ask if the image conveys any emotional truth. It is this perspective Watt takes when he connects with the painting by shedding a tear.[138] Though Watt cannot interpret the painting, his emotional reaction suggests that the meaning has burrowed its way under his skin. Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, meaning cannot be objectively identified: 'The painting does not so much *express* the meaning as the meaning impregnates the painting.'[139] Thus Watt's physical reaction and inability to succinctly outline the painting's meaning, validate the artwork as an abstract painting of high order. In *The New Decade* (1955), Gottlieb justified this point by explaining that visual images 'do not have to conform to either verbal thinking or optical facts.'[140] Erskine's painting violently resists verbal unpacking as Watt's attempt to understand it turns into a flawed *reductio ad absurdum*, as explained through Heidegger's hammer and nail metaphor.[141] The incompletion of the painting (Watt is left with a dissatisfying part-circle that triggers his urge as viewer to partake in the completion of the image) and its resistance to verbal signification contribute to Watt's frustration with language.[142] Here, Watt shares similarities with Beckett who admired van Velde's paintings for their attempt to express the struggle of artistic communication.[143] Beckett commented that van Velde's paintings concern us with 'the acute and increasing anxiety of the

[138] These tears testify Watt's lived experience of Erskine's painting for, as Merleau-Ponty writes: 'To perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body.' Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception. And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James Edie (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 42.

[139] Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 92.

[140] Adolph Gottlieb, 'The New Decade' in Tuchman, *The New York School*, p. 71. When writing on Gottlieb's paintings Barnett Newman, acknowledging Gottlieb's beliefs, wrote: 'It is gratuitous to put into a sentence the stirring thing that takes place in these pictures.' And, according to the sculptor Seymour Lipton: 'It is false to use literary means to convey the sense of reality, the mysteriousness, the transcendent, which alone is the realm of the artist.' Newman and Lipton in Ann Gibson, 'Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language' in Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, pp. 195, 196.

[141] When describing Knott's appearance and 'little ways of phrasing the little days' to Sam, Watt speaks of being 'tired of adding, tired of subtracting and from the same old things the same old things.' (W: 184)

[142] Dante's words from Canto VII of *The Inferno* ('parole non ci appulcro'; W: 223), quoted in the final part of the addenda, suggest Watt's/Beckett's giving up with language.

[143] Merleau-Ponty shares this aesthetics of failure when he writes that 'language speaks peremptorily when it gives up trying to express the thing itself.' Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 81.

relation itself' that is shadowed by a sense of 'invalidity' and 'inadequacy'.[144] As they appear as if in suspense, they convey an unfinished quality that increases the viewer's unease. If we apply Beckett's assessment of van Velde's art to Erskine's painting, the incompleteness of the circle forms a point of entry for the viewer to enter. This aperture invites Watt to engage in a felt, pre-cognitive response with the painting.[145]

Now experiencing the painting from the inside of an incomplete circle, Erskine's painting becomes a visual parallel for Watt's endlessly circling but unresolved mind that we enter when reading *Watt*. The painting appears as an eye whose pupil has drifted off course, and whose vision is therefore abstracted.[146] When Watt engages with the painting he is behind 'eyelids caked with frozen tears' (Text 6: 125) and must search within himself for the essence of this art. Like the artist, Watt is 'drawn in to the core of the eddy' as he shrinks from 'the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena' (Proust: 48).[147] As an eye, or 'I', the painting mirrors the disintegration of Watt's mind into solipsism. In a narcissistic fashion, Watt's keen interest in Erskine's painting is an attempt to understand himself, but as a result, he loses sight of what is in front of him. This self-orientated focus is physically represented in Watt's walk:

> Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north . . . (W: 23)

This 'funambulistic stagger' (W: 24) that both impresses and puzzles onlookers like Lady McCann is one of the earliest episodes in the novel that exposes Watt's peculiarity and foreshadows the absurdity that follows. Watt's movements seem as though he is trying to unravel himself out of a circular structure by walking in a reverse coil-like manner. This deeply irrational way of walking

[144] Samuel Beckett, Georges Duthuit and Jacques Putman, *Bram van Velde*, trans. by Olive Classe and Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 10.
[145] On the other hand, Barbara Reich Gluck suggests that the break in the circumference of the circle signifies the 'irremediable disjunction between meaning and means, between knowledge and man's ability to learn.' This is certainly true, but, in light of Watt's pre-cognitive experience with the painting, Gluck's comment misses the point; knowledge and meaning have no place in a lived experience between painting and viewer. Gluck, *Beckett and Joyce*, pp. 94-5.
[146] Blue eyes appear throughout Beckett's oeuvre. See the discussion of *IDI* and 'Ping' in chapter four.
[147] Hannah Copeland asks how Beckett's creativity is an instrument of self-perception. Copeland states: 'The creating artist's self-awareness aware of itself gnaws inward to the core of the work, uncovering what has so long lain hidden beneath layers of fictional convention – the creative act itself.' Copeland, *Art and the Artist in Beckett*, p. 18.

seems to be based on Watt's failure to grasp what walking is and his attempt to escape from his position of unknowing. Watt's confused walk is the result of an excessively meditated idea of walking as a concept, thereby losing the instinctive flow of movement. The notion of 'left-right, left-right' is a binary relationship that finds no place in Watt's circling mind. His movement, therefore, as a physical manifestation of his mind, provides little efficiency or direction. This simultaneous circling and desire to escape the circle is akin to Erskine's painting of a circle with a way out, or breech, at the bottom. Watt's experience when walking is a perpetuation of what he knows and to step outside of this home-spun rationality is to step into the unknown: a risk Watt is unwilling to take. This walk now appears as a physical manifestation of a trauma Watt has suffered and recasts *Watt* as a novel written against the backdrop of Nazi occupation, as mentioned earlier. Watt's reluctance to move in an un-premeditated manner is suggestive of his obsessive need to double-check and strategically control every aspect of his thought and movement. Thus Watt's urge to control each situation could be seen as a response to the tension and sense of high alert that spread throughout France during WWII, when Beckett was working on the novel. This, however, is by no means an explanation to the questions *Watt* poses for ambiguity remains central to Beckett's use of the visual in his creative process.

This back to front and inside out movement is also similar to Watt's inverted way of speaking (to which thinking backward corresponds). As Gottfried Büttner states, 'Bodily movement is equivalent here to *moving about mentally*'.[148] When Watt and Sam stroll around the garden in the asylum Sam explains: 'As Watt walked, so now he talked, back to front.' (W: 140) Sam then offers the following example of Watt's manner of speaking:

> Day of most, night of part, Knott with now. Now till up, little seen so oh, little heard so oh. Night till morning from. Heard I this, saw I this then what. Thing quiet, dim. Ears, eyes, failing now also. Hush in, mist in, moved I so. (W: 140)[149]

[148] Büttner, *Beckett's Novel Watt*, p. 93.
[149] In *The Annotated Watt* Ackerley tells us that on a 'presumably discarded page of an early translation', Beckett noted: 'Most of day, part of night, now with Knott / Up till now, oh so little seen, oh so little heard / From morning till night / What then, this I saw, this I heard / Dim, quiet thing / Also now ears, eyes, failing / In hush, in mist, so I moved'. Ackerley, *Annotated Watt*, p. 153.

Like his walk, Watt's elements of speech are all present, but appear in disarray. Watt's failing sight and hearing in this extract relate back to 'The incident of the Galls' where Watt says that the piano tuning event seemed: 'ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten' (W: 61), suggestive of the title of Beckett's 1981 short story: *Ill Seen Ill Said.* The failure of ears and eyes and Watt's 'hush in, mist in, moved I so' mark Beckett's decision to turn inward. According to Leslie Hill, reality, like language, 'becomes a closed system, capable of endless permutations'.[150] Thus unintelligibility (to reuse Herbert Read's word) perpetuates as language and reality disintegrate into madness. Later, when Watt speaks, he inverts the letters in the word with the words in the sentence with the sentences in the passage, as follows:

> Dis yb dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap. Skin, skin, skin. Od su did ned taw? On. Taw ot klat tonk? On. Tonk ot klat taw? On. Tonk takool taw? On. taw ta kool tonk? Nilb, mun, mud. Tin fo trap, yad la. Nem owt, dis yb dis. (W: 143-4)[151]

Watt is aware of his back to front way of speaking and apologises to his dumbfounded narrator and reader for his almost indecipherable glossolalia by saying 'Beg nodrap […] nodrap, pardon geb' (W: 144). The structure of these sentences forms a tight circuit, concealing the meaning inside and augmenting Watt's struggle to express. His anxiety stems from his determination to probe the deepest ravines of his mind in order to source the core of language. This mirrors the effect Erskine's painting has on Watt as it secures its meaning behind its surface structure. An understanding of Watt's irrational way of speaking also reinforces the importance of a pre-cognitive, felt rather than thought, interaction with the painting.

Sam points out the unknowable gap between the painting and Watt's description of it, stating: 'By what means the illusion of movement in space, and it almost seemed in time, was given, *Watt could not say*.' (W: 109, emphasis mine) Perhaps Watt's inability to 'say' how the painting achieved its 'illusion of movement in space' is because of its abstractness, wherein 'the objective correlative (the actual event or object) to the emotion has been omitted.'[152] More specifically, it is the use of

[150] Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 30.
[151] Ackerley offers the following as a 'translation' of Beckett's Zaum-like passage: 'Side by side, two men. All day, part of [the] night, all day. Dumb, numb, blind. [Did] Knott look at Watt? No. [Did] Watt look at Knott? No. [Did] Watt talk to Knott? No. [Did] Knott talk to Watt? No. When then did [we] do? Nix, nix, nix. Part of [the] night, all day. Two men, side by side.' Ackerley, *Annotated Watt*, p. 157.
[152] Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, p. 3.

language to 'say' what the painting means that is prohibited. As Watt 'tried and tried to formulate this delicious haw!' he realised that, akin to his inability to name Mr Knott's pot, 'any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail.' (W: 53)[153] Not only do Watt's attempts to concretise and disambiguate the uncertainties and conflicts of the painting result in the failure to even describe it, but an attempt to 'rationalise' something as abstract as Erskine's painting distances Watt from a sensory engagement with the work. Only when Watt is too exhausted to use language and therefore too tired to think, does he physically 'experience' the painting. This supports Beckett's belief that aesthetic commentary should be hinged upon 'un métier qui insinue plus qu'il n'affirme [a subject that insinuates more than it states]' (Dis: 130). This implies that Watt would be better off experiencing rather than defining, as the artwork defies being pocketed into reductive statements. As Barthes explains: 'The denoted word never refers to an essence for it is always caught up in a contingent utterance, a continuous syntagm (of that verbal discourse).'[154] As he attempts to rationalise Erskine's painting, Watt gets caught up with his 'boundless' (W: 110) 'verbal discourse', but realising that this approach offers no further enlightenment, he moves from a cognitive engagement with the artwork to a sensual, instinctive one:

> Watt's eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks unchecked, in a steady flow, refreshing him greatly. (W: 110)

Watt's tears mark his exhaustion at the interminable (and flawed) looped program he finds himself trapped in. By this point, Watt is tired and frustrated with a language that, as Ernst Cassirer warns, 'harbours the curse of mediacy, and is bound to conceal what it seeks to reveal'.[155] When Watt turns to the 'so important matter of Mr Knott's physical appearance' (W: 181), he finds it impossible to give Sam a clear description of Knott because his language functions rhythmically, not semantically. After reading that Watt has 'unfortunately little or nothing to say', the reader is bombarded with Watt's verbosity on the matter in a passage reminiscent of his meandering description of Erskine's

[153] A similar inability to 'eff' the ineffable is seen in the Music Master's frustration with Addie in *Embers*, discussed in the following chapter.
[154] Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 48.
[155] Ernst Cassirer in John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 25.

painting. Over the course of three pages, Watt's frantically sporadic listing consists of every possible physical attribute:

> For one day Mr Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middlesized, yellow and ginger, and the next small, fat, pale and fair, and the next, middlesized, flushed, thin and ginger, and the next tall, yellow, dark and study, and the next . . . (W: 181)

As Watt's sentences go round and round, no new ground is covered. The text spins like a frantic carousel, mimicking Watt's rotation of Erskine's painting when he takes it off the wall. Despite Watt's loquaciousness, the information he gives is minimal. The point he labours is that there is no point in what he is saying; his words are only meaningful as part of a sequence that leads him to despair with and then denounce language.[156] At this point, when Watt cries, he experiences seeing as an extension of his relation with his body; there is reflexivity between Watt's cognitive and corporal agencies. There is no Cartesian split between mind and body as both function as receptors and interpreters of the sensations conveyed through aesthetics. In Clive Bell's words, during this cry of fear and freedom, Watt experiences the feeling of being for one moment 'shut off from human interests; [his] anticipations and memories are arrested; lifted above the stream of life.'[157] In light of Bell's comments, Erskine's painting has therapeutic qualities for Watt. His breakdown is an acknowledgement of defeat and his tears suggest that the painting has unlocked his rationalist anguish. The painting manages to transport Watt from his world of banal routine to one of aesthetic exaltation. With reference to Bell's argument in *The Aesthetic Hypothesis* (1914), this is because the significant form of the circle and point's lines and colours are combined in a particular way so that these forms and their relations with each other can stir Watt's aesthetic emotions.[158] This instinctual, bodily reaction coincides with Merleau-Ponty's 'inarticulate cry' and is transferred from the artist to Watt, who experiences the anguish and release of emotion that harbours a disconcertingly unknown (perhaps uncanny) aspect and 'refresh[es] greatly' (W: 110).[159] These tears are a pre-linguistic

[156] For an explanation of Beckett's pattern of repetitions see: Ackerley, *Annotated Watt*, pp.181-4.
[157] Clive Bell, 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis' in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 113-116 (p. 115).
[158] See: ibid., pp. 113, 115.
[159] Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 142.

utterance, a primordial cry at the point of simultaneous connection and disconnection between the viewer and painting. Though Watt's tears germinate from feelings of connection and oneness with the painting, they are shortly followed by confusion and angst at his inability to articulate this experience. In this brief moment these tears become 'the voice of light', allowing Watt connection and insight; a glimpse at the far side of the horizon.[160] Watt's experience brings him as close as he can be to the omniscience required to experience the painting, as object, in its fullest sense. The side that is hidden, due to Watt's singular human vantage point, becomes accessible in Watt's transcendent perspective ('Was it receding?'), which allows him to see the painting in an 'illusion of movement in space, and it almost seemed in time'" (W: 109).[161]

During this intimate moment of sensory perception, Watt is, as Jacqueline Hoefer remarks, 'preoccupied with sights, smells, sounds […] as a man who believed that through the senses comes the only kind of experience which he can know.'[162] Watt is entranced, his body becomes plexus, his sensory-receptors open and his eyes become tendrils searching for the knowledge the painting withholds. When Watt engages with his senses, he makes himself vulnerable so that the painting can affect him more profoundly. This grants him deeper engagement and therefore deeper understanding. Merleau-Ponty explains that the split between the individual and his context, experience given and experience received when interpreting an artwork creates 'a sort of dehiscence that opens [one's] body in two'.[163] For Merleau-Ponty, this is because: 'between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that […] things pass into us as well as we into the things.'[164] With meaning contingent with pre-cognitive

[160] Ibid. David Michael Levin's comments on perception correlate with Watt's experience: 'What happens when we stare intensely at something? Instead of clear and distinct perception, blurring and confusion; instead of fulfilment, the eyes lose their sight, veiled in tears; instead of stability and fixation at the far end of the gaze, we find a chaos of shifting, jerking forms as the object of focus violently tears itself away from the hold of the gaze.' Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), p. 69.

[161] Horizon here refers to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theories. Merleau-Ponty, whose theories are derived from Husserl's, argues that one's point of view of the world is determined by the senses, which are all spatial. In other words, the perspective from which everything is experienced comes from the body. Merleau-Ponty writes 'my body is constantly perceived' yet 'it remains marginal to all my perceptions'. Watt's body, then, is his permanent structure of perspective that both facilitates and hinders his ability to experience what he sees; his *lived perspective*. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Smith, p. 90.

[162] Jacqueline Hoefer, '*Watt*' in Esslin, *Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 70.

[163] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. by Claude Lefort, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 105-130 (p. 123). This is very different to the Cartesian split between mind and body that Beckett mocks in 'Whoroscope', *Murphy*, and *Watt*. Moreover, Beckett's use of 'dehiscence' in *Dream* is discussed in chapter three. Beckett could not have been influenced by Merleau-Ponty, however, as this fragmentary text was published posthumously in 1961, nearly thirty years after Beckett abandoned writing *Dream*.

[164] Merleau-Ponty in Lefort, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, p. 123.

perception, for a brief moment there is a transferral of ineluctable information, which has a profound effect on Watt. We are told that when Watt holds the painting with the breech below, 'these thoughts […] please Watt' (W: 111). In this act of taking the painting 'from its hook' and holding it 'before his eyes', then rotating it 'at arm's length, upside down, and on its right side, and on its left side' (W: 110), Watt interacts physically with the artwork. The work no longer 'exists in itself like a thing,' it now 'reaches its viewer and invites him to take up the gesture which created it'.[165] Watt now sees Erskine's painting through what Merleau-Ponty calls *lived perspective*. It is an 'object in the act of appearing, organising itself before [Watt's] eyes', so that Watt's experience is *with* the painting, not *in relation to* it.[166] This act of engagement, however, is not conclusive, it is followed by Watt's confusion. As he moves the circle and point around the points of the compass, Watt's shifting perspectives parallel his uncertainty regarding the relation between the circle and point, if there is a relation at all. For Merleau-Ponty, Watt's stupefaction is because 'painting scrambles all our categories, spreading out before us its oneiric universe of carnal essences, actualised remembrances, mute meanings.'[167] Watt's emotional reaction and inability to speak of the painting's meaning supports Merleau-Ponty's assertion that a work of art can cause a resurgence of 'actualised remembrances' and '*mute* meanings'. It is also clear from Watt's condition of being desperately 'in search of' (W: 110) meaning that Erskine's painting has 'scrambled' his intensely rational thought process. Watt must admit that 'the picture was part and parcel of Mr Knott's establishment' (W: 111), thereby testifying to its ungraspable absurdity for, as Watt soon discovers, Knott's house is a hub of nescience.[168] As Watt rotates the painting in his hands he finds that there are no 'hot spots' (as de Kooning would say) because there is no Golden Section, or governing structure conveyed through light or gesture, to create order.[169] As a result, like the nomadic point and circle, the eye also roams

[165] Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 88.
[166] Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', ibid., p. 65.
[167] Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', ibid., p. 130. When interpreting Beckett's understanding of art through that of Merleau-Ponty, Lois Oppenheim explains that 'vision makes painting the carnal enactment of the primordial spatiotemporal functioning of the world'. Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 111.
[168] The scene with the Galls piano tuners represents Watt's difficulty in accepting that 'nothing had happened' (W: 62). It represents Watt's upsetting reaction to this sort of anti-experience that he will become accustomed to in the Knott household. Richard Begam describes this non-experience as 'a consciousness that something has happened together with a complete ignorance of what that something is.' Begam, *Beckett and the End of Modernity*, p. 75.
[169] For a brief explanation of de Kooning's distaste for this didacticism in painting see: Rosalind Krauss, *Willem de Kooning Nonstop: Cherchez la femme* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 6, 14.

the canvas without focus or direction (mirrored in the novel's alinearity). When Watt links vision with movement he realises that his interaction with the painting is not an exteriorisation of it for he does not see it as a detached object. To allude to Merleau-Ponty, Watt does not 'see it according to its exterior envelope' but 'live[s] it from the inside [and is] immersed in it', for when he takes Erskine's painting off the wall and rotates it in his hands, it becomes a world that circles around him, not merely a painting in front of him.[170] Beckett demonstrates a similar aesthetic ideology when he comments in *Three Dialogues* that his gaze 'wonders within' the painting 'as in the holes of being' (Dis: 138), for one sees according to or with a painting to glean an experience not a datum.[171] As Watt quickly learns, however, a full experience *with* or *in* Erskine's painting is problematic. The relation between what we see and what we know is complicated by a superimposed order that we cannot comprehend. The viewer is confronted with an image that embodies not just an idea, but a whole way of seeing. Meaning is not found in what this painting 'says' but in what it is. This fundamental concept is shared by Merleau-Ponty and the abstract artists. The abstraction these artists create is a result of their confrontation with the abyss of meaning and the angst that trying to communicate this aporia creates. For van Velde, for example, painting is an attempt 'to get closer to nothingness, to the void.'[172] Similarly, Erskine's painting is an expression of the void beyond language.[173] When Watt confronts Erskine's painting he sees the artist's struggle and encounters his own anxieties which are transferred onto the reader. As Kandinsky commented, form 'reflects the spirit of the individual artist' as it 'bears the stamp of his *personality*.'[174] When Beckett places meaning in form, he uses the same rationale used by the abstract artists to convey that ineffable sensation between the desire to express and the inevitable failure in doing so.

[170] Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 126. In this essay Merleau-Ponty attaches vision to movement in the same way that Watt does when he picks up and rotates Erskine's painting so that the visible world and the world of Watt's motor projects 'are both total parts of the same Being.' Ibid., p. 124.
[171] To further justify Beckett's intellectual crossovers with Heidegger, in his essay *The Age of the World Picture*, the philosopher explicitly defines an artwork as something that 'becomes an object of experience [*Erlebens*] and consequently is considered to be an expression of human life.' Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 57.
[172] Bram van Velde in Juliet, *Conversations with Beckett and van Velde*, p. 41. Works like *Void* (1989) by Anish Kapoor and *How it is* (2009) by Mirosław Bałka explore Beckett's notion of the ineffability of an artistic experience.
[173] In 'La Peinture des van Velde' Beckett describes a painting as 'La chose immobile dans le vide [immobile thing in the void]' (Dis: 126)
[174] Kandinsky in Roethel, *The Blue Rider*, p. 65.

For Beckett the task of art is to contemplate, not solve, problems. He claimed that art is 'the sun, moon and stars of the mind, the whole mind.' (Dis: 94) With this astronomical lexis, Beckett chimes with Merleau-Ponty who describes how the artist paints to create the image of 'figures emanating from the constellations.'[175] Watt picks up on this astral terminology to acknowledge the importance of ambiguity at the end of inconclusive digressions: 'It is by the nadir that we come […] and it is by the nadir that we go, whatever that means.' (W: 111) For Beckett, Merleau-Ponty and Watt, art comes from the unknown and indescribable realm of the imagination. The yearning for unity with the cosmos could be seen both as an attempt to overcome artistic alienation and as a yearning for unity with the painting. Erskine's painting, which looks like a moon drifting out of orbit and away from its planet ('sail[ing] steadfast in its white skies'), provides Watt with a womb-like aperture to enter into the world of the painting from 'its patient breech for ever below'. Whilst the form of this broken circle allows Watt to enter the painting, its incompleteness also creates a sense of tension that prolongs Watt's irksome meditations. This parallels Beckett's insertion of visual concepts into his text and leads to a deconstructionist reading of the novel.

The 'breach for ever below' (W: 111)

The circle and point is an image of brokenness and fragmentation, reflective of true-to-life complexity. Early in the novel Sam speaks of Watt's bewilderment when he comments that 'sometimes Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now.' (W: 23)[176] It is from this point of unknowing that Watt's time in Knott's house begins. The incomplete lists and unsolvable series are examples of the appearance of this gap of uncertainty in Watt's day to day existence. The gap in the circumference of the circle holds considerable significance for Watt's interpretation of the painting and the formal shape of the novel. Anthony Uhlmann comments: 'The hermeneutic circle draws us into a process of interpretation, but the process cannot be completed because a gap occurs.'[177] This gap or 'nadir' (W:

[175] Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, p. 129.
[176] For Eric Levy, the central idea in Beckett's prose is that human experience is 'an experience of Nothing' for the only reality it knows is 'the inability to interpret its own structure.' Levy, *Beckett and the Voice of Species*, p. 4.
[177] Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), p. 59.

111) is, according to Uhlmann, 'a failure to completely relate or connect elements, a failure to lead us to an intended meaning.'[178] This connective failure is seen in Watt's struggle to comprehend each situation in which he finds himself, especially his encounter with Erskine's painting.

Watt's attempts to understand 'what the artist had intended to represent' (W: 110) add to the elements of chance and unpredictability already existing in the painting. In acceptance (or at least acknowledgement) of the painting's deconstructed form, Watt's final suggestion is not that the centre is in search of its centrality, but that it searches for an image of itself 'in boundless space, in endless time'. As he searches for this eternal image, Watt does not conclude his thoughts, but adds another possible interpretation. Indeed, there can be no conclusion because the painting does not permit an objectifying perspective as the circle and point seem animated. Watt wonders 'if they had sighted each other' or if 'harried by some force of merely mechanical mutual attraction' they are 'blindly flying'. Erskine's painting is, therefore, an explicit visualisation of the deconstruction that is subliminally at play within the novel as a whole. The point or *eccentric centre* of the artwork (much to Watt's dismay, the point is not central in the painting) simultaneously makes-up and threatens to deconstruct the painting.[179] This construct acts as a metaphor for the novel's destabilising qualities. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Watt becomes disorientated and disillusioned by his experience of viewing the painting and after trying to understand the happenings in Knott's house, ends up in a mental asylum. As deconstructionism, by its very nature, is always already at work within the novel, its symptoms can be seen in Watt's odd mannerisms, such as his inverted ways of walking and talking. Hence, this circle and point is an image representing the central unravelling of Watt's life and narrative. Consequently, *Watt* and Watt proceed by entropic involution. This relates to Beckett's creative process which, as Hannah Copeland states, 'concentrates meaning through contraction' as it

[178] Ibid.

[179] Derrida explains that the 'eccentric centre' is the place where deconstruction takes place within the work. For Derrida, deconstructivism is 'already at work', it is not at the centre, but 'in an eccentric centre, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct.' Derrida stresses that deconstructivism does not supervene afterwards or from the outside. He argues that 'it is always already at work in the work' and justifies this comment by saying that 'the destructive force of Deconstruction is always already contained within the very architecture of the work.' Jacques Derrida, *Memories: for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 153.

attempts to get below the surface by removing each veil of obscurity.[180] As it parallels the text's lack of direction and sense of incompletion, Watt's struggle to fill the gap, or *horror vacui*, and complete the circle is evidenced throughout the novel. The broken circle mirrors the irrationality of life, and Watt's difficulty in sealing the gap is suggestive of his difficulty in sealing the communicative gap. For Steven Connor, repetition (evident in Watt's description of the painting) can be read as 'an attempt to close the gap between word and thing, even though it is repetition which insistently opens that gap.'[181] Watt's gap, like the breech in Erskine's painting, becomes an abyss that swallows meaning as his repetition is carried beyond the limit of comprehension. Repetition enacts the arbitrariness and emptiness of language as it imitates Watt's floundering attempt to use words effectively. As Connor explains, repetition is language which has 'lost its substance,' because it has been 'made redundant by its very nature in being the mere shadow of previous utterance.'[182] As Watt goes on in each of his descriptions, the reader's grasp of the concept is effaced because the distinction between the signifier and signified has collapsed into obscurity.[183] Hence, as in the late teleplays (discussed in chapter three), due to its use of repetition, the narrative loop is fragmented as it carries its deconstructive catalyst with it. For John J. Mood, *Watt* is Beckett's 'most devastating depiction of the cul-de-sac of modern Western rationalistic philosophy.'[184] As we have seen, nowhere is this devastating irrationality more evident than when Watt attempts to rationalise an abstract painting by using language. As Beckett wrote in 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce', reduction of artistic expression into an ill-fitting phrase is unhelpful: 'the danger is in the neatness of identifications' for such 'neatness' can reduce comparative analysis to 'a carefully folded ham sandwich' (Dis: 19) where language's decompartmentalization comes at the expense of artistic ambiguity.

The opposition between circle and point creates a tension that cannot be overcome by Watt's determination to create a unanimous, anthropocentric circle and centre. Watt's attempts at making

[180] Copeland, *Art and the Artist in Beckett*, p. 43. Beckett also refers to the need to get behind the veil of language in his 1937 letter to Axel Kaun, as shown in the introduction to this thesis.
[181] Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 37.
[182] Ibid.
[183] See, for example, Watt's description of 'the poor old lousy old earth' (W: 38).
[184] John J. Mood, '"The Personal System": Samuel Beckett's *Watt*', *PMLA*, 86.2 (March 1971), 255-265 (p. 255).

the circle and point whole ('he wondered if they would eventually pause and converse, and perhaps even mingle'; W: 110) are unsuccessful; the circle remains incomplete and Watt's tensions remain unresolved. The dynamic of the painting is one of simultaneous opposition and harmony between point and circle. This instigates Watt's endless analysis that unveils the anguish followed by a moment of relief (the effect of which is recognisable in Watt's tears) intrinsic to all indeterminate, or deconstructionist, works of art. With no clearer idea of the meaning of the painting by the end of what Sam describes as Watt's 'Prolonged and irksome meditations' (W: 111), it seems that Watt's use of language to stabilise and signify Erskine's painting is blighted by what Jacques Derrida calls 'deferral'.[185] In this dimensionless painting the breech and separateness of the circle and point prevent an holistic effect and point to an altogether more disjointed, dysfunctional and disunited world view. This coincides with Beckett's belief that whilst the arts should interact, the artist should not strive to create a *Gesamkunstwerk*. Instead, Beckett's concerns seem to have been with the tension between the arts at the point of their interaction, rather than in the attempt to create a work that elided any complexities whatsoever. Thus *Watt* is a novel that explores language's shortcomings when it is used to explore a painting.

Disconcertingly, the most reliable information about Erskine's painting is that the position and relation between the circle and point is uncertain. After suggesting that the circle and centre are, in some way, 'in search of each other', Watt proposes that the painting could be 'a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively' (W: 110). With this negation, the circle and point seem to drift out of relation with one another, just as the Frog Song Watt hears when lying in a ditch represents a study in atonal discord.[186] The circle and point are personified as 'blindly flying' leaving Watt wondering 'if they had sighted each other' at all. Uncertainty over the interaction between the circle and point is made clear in the description of them 'harried by some force of merely

[185] For Derrida, deferral means that the meaning of a text can never be fixed as it is always subject to the context it is in, which is always changing. Words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean, but we attempt to define them by appealing to additional words, from which they differ. A breech (much like that in Erskine's painting) is formed by this infinite referral where what is intended to be conveyed is never reached. Derrida called this symptom of deferral 'arche-writing'. This problem is explored when Watt tries to describe Mr Knott's appearance. Here, meaning is forever deferred through an endless chain of signifiers. This postponement is continuous and indefinite as the signified can never be achieved. Accordingly, the meaning of Erskine's painting is never captured by Watt's attempt to pin it down. For a further discussion of Beckett and Derrida see: Aska Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 27-55.

[186] See: Susan Field Senneff, 'Song and Music in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*', *MFS*, 40.2 (Summer 1964), 137-150.

mechanical mutual attraction, *or* the playthings of chance' (W: 110, emphasis mine).[187] The unyielding and self-cancelling permutations undermine Watt's desire for fact and fixity. Erskine's painting is a representation of Watt's world, conducted, according to Francis Doherty, within 'asymmetrical symmetries.'[188] Watt goes on to wonder

> if they would eventually pause and converse, and perhaps even mingle or keep steadfast in their ways, like ships in the night, prior to the invention of wireless telegraphy […] they might even collide.

As it sails 'steadfast in its white skies' (W: 111), Erskine's painting becomes a metaphor for Watt's loneliness as he is lost in the sea of his own thoughts. The nautical lexis in Watt's description of Erskine's painting and his inability to explain its meaning relates to the rhythms of the sea in *Embers* as a marker of music's (and in Watt's case art's) ineffability.[189] Watt, like the point, that lost 'speck in the void' (Endgame: 109), does not partake in a journey from ignorance to enlightenment. Instead, Watt enters and leaves the novel at his lowest point. This is, after all, a story of (Poor Johnny) Watt who works as a servant and spends time in an asylum; Watt has no great expectations to fulfil and finds only a brief moment of company with Sam. Mirroring the circular form of the painting, Watt ends where he begins: at a train station in the summer with two bags containing his worldly possessions. Watt's predicament is twinned with *Watt*'s form. The reader's final impression of Watt is Sam's description of him after he 'drew him, through the hole' (W: 139) of the garden fence as 'Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square' (W: 136).

[187] Here, certainty is marginalised in favour of randomness. This is similar to Watt's experience with Erskine's painting as it is an 'impression' he is left with, not a fact. It also shares similarities with Watt's understanding of Knott's physical appearance, where mathematical rigour is reduced to approximation.
[188] Francis Doherty, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 40.
[189] Interestingly, 'wireless telegraphy' foreshadows Beckett's use of radio. See chapter two for a discussion of music's role in *Embers*.

Figure 6. Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ Mocked (The Crowning with Thorns)*, c. 1510.

This painting not only evokes pathos for Watt by comparing him with Bosch's image of Christ's earnest, almost resigned gaze, but also links with Erskine's painting and the form of the novel. The crown of thorns that are 'in [Christ's] scalp' (W: 136) echoes the barbed wire fence lining the garden that Watt grazes the circumference of his head on as he goes to see Sam. Its circular form with a breech where Christ's head is positioned also represents the circle in Erskine's painting. Overall, the

thorny crown mirrors the sporadic yet coil-like form of the novel and is a metaphor for Watt's endless suffering. The painting of 'the horse Joss' (W: 204) that Watt sees when sat in the 'faintly lit' waiting room that is 'empty of furniture' (W: 202) at the end of the novel, also evokes feelings of pity towards Watt.[190] Watt's posture embodies this helpless existence as 'drooped sigmoidal in its midst', his gravity correlates with his *via dolorosa*. There seems to be no escape from Watt's 'empty heart' and 'dark mind' that, like the image of Joss, stumble 'through barren lands' (W: 219). Joss 'seemed hardly able to stand. Let alone run' as she contemplated the sparse, sere grass 'without appetite' with her 'head sunk' (W: 205) as if consumed by melancholy. Adding to the sadness of this solitary, lifeless horse, 'the light was […] approaching night, or impending storm, or both'. Like Joss, when Watt looks at this painting he is in a waiting-room 'of scant light, of no light' (W: 204), alone, and irked with fatigue. Like an old horse being led from its stable to rest, at this low ebb, Watt departs from Sam's narrative. This deflating exit is a nod to the sense of failure and departure Watt has become accustomed to during his stay at Mr Knott's. Beckett sums up Watt's pitiable condition in what he cites in his 'Whoroscope' notebook (UoR MS3000) as the 'Last words of Aristotle': 'Faede hunc mundum intravi, anxius vixi, perturbatus egredigor, causa causarum misère mei' (W: 222), translated as 'in filth I entered this world, anxious I lived, troubled I go out of it, on account of these causes have mercy on me'.[191]

The 'Second picture in Erskine's room' (W: 219)

Erskine's second painting, which appears in the addenda, is the last picture in the novel, and it is the most detailed and naturalistic. It is an allegory of the lowly artist himself, who is described as 'representing gentleman seated at piano, full length, receding profile right, naked save for stave-paper resting on lap.' (W: 219) Despite the nakedness of the artist, his identity is indiscernible. Beckett undermines the realist tradition with a painting finished so that it 'would have done credit to Heem' (W: 219) in its 'significant detail', particularly 'in treatment of toenails, of remarkable luxuriance and

[190] This is similar to the photograph of the ass in *Malone Dies*.
[191] See: Ackerley, *Annotated Watt*, p. 215.

caked with what seemed to be dirt' (W: 220).[192] Beckett comically satirises how the artist (Mr O'Connery) paints the nitty-gritty details of the body, but provides little reason for doing so. Mr O'Connery's attention to detail is further mocked as Beckett writes that the right nipple 'from which sprang a long red solitary hair, was in a state of manifest tumescence, a charming touch.' The orgasmic implications behind the pianist's state of 'manifest tumescence', 'eyes tight closed' and 'lips parted' is then explained as a 'pretty […] synthesis' of 'anguish, concentration, strain, transport and self-abandon' (W: 219-220), which reminds the reader of Watt's 'endocrinal Bandusia' (W: 122) with Mrs Gorman. This is followed by a suggestion that music and musician simultaneously reach a climax as an 'extraordinary effect [is] produced on musical nature by faint cacophony of remote harmonics stealing over dying accord.' (W: 220) When the reader/viewer discovers that this climax is encapsulated in a C major chord, he/she smiles at Beckett's knowing anti-climax. The simplicity, perhaps even the banality of this chord suggests that despite the creator's valiant efforts, there is little artistry to show. This overblown, tragi-comic style gives a bitter and lasting impression of the artist's failure. In so doing, it gestures towards the failure of the creative process and, as the text splinters into a series of notes, this image encapsulates the failure of language and even the novel itself. His futility and vulnerability as he sits 'in disgusting condition', 'positively filthy', are qualities Beckett recycles for subsequent protagonists who share this sense of failure. Indeed, his advancing years, worries, nervousness, slaver frothing from his pale face and pathetic beard all seem familiar in light of Molloy or Hamm.

Conclusion: Watt and 'das fruchtbare Bathos der Erfahrung' (W: 222)?

Watt is over 200 pages of diverting, hesitant, repetitive sentences that mark a withdrawal from linearity. It is a 'labour of composition' where Watt, perhaps like Beckett, feels 'uncertainty as to how to proceed' (W: 133). The extraneous material of the addenda, or whatnot (WattKnott), is a

[192] In 'La Peinture des van Velde' Beckett sees the realist style as naïve: 'Le "réaliste", suant devant sa cascade et pestant contre les nuages, n'a pas cessé de nous enchanter. Mais qu'il ne vienne plus nous emmerder avec ses histoires d'objectivité et des choses que personne n'a jamais vues, ses cascades sont assurément les plus énormes. [The "realist", sweating before his waterfall and cursing the clouds, still enchants us. But we would prefer him not to bother us with his talk of objectivity and the observation of things. Of all the things nobody has ever seen, his cascades are certainly the most enormous.]' (Dis: 126)

combination of music, prose, verse, and Latin and German quotations. Each sentence qualifies the one preceding it in an obsessional series of juddering movements. Al Alvarez describes *Watt*'s style as being 'like a squirrel running around his treadmill: an enormous expenditure of prose in order to say more or less nothing and go more or less nowhere'.[193] It is this convulsive getting nowhere that makes up the entire novel and is what Watt contends with when he attempts to understand Erskine's painting. In *Dream*, Beckett wrote that the reality of the individual 'is an incoherent reality and must be expressed incoherently.' (Dream: 101) The unintelligibility resulting from this can be seen in Watt's way of speaking and his difficulty with naming things. Beckett exposes this bankruptcy of rationality through Watt's irresolute digressions over Erskine's painting, for as he remarked in 'Les Deux Besoins', 'Car aux enthymèmes de l'art ce sont les conclusions qui manquent et non pas les prémisses [Because in the enthymemes of art conclusions fail, not premises].' (Dis: 57) This supports Alvarez's claim that Watt is like a squirrel endlessly running after a conclusion that constantly eludes him.

Ultimately, Watt cannot fathom the world he is in. Everything, including his own body, seems irrevocably connected to his mind and surroundings. Watt's mind is like the contents of Knott's bubbling pot of stew where 'foods of various kinds,' 'too numerous to mention' were 'well mixed together in the famous pot and boiled for four hours, until the consistence of a mess, or poss, was obtained' (W: 72). The amalgamation of ideas and sensations is upsetting for Watt as his predisposition towards reason is tested by the richness of his experience. For Beckett, it was the irrationalism and schizophrenic aftermath of a world at war that threw logic off course. Beckett's anxieties over his ability to represent existence and communicate it to others are closely related to Sam's difficulties in relaying Watt's stories and struggle with communication in general. To return to the idea of war from the beginning of this chapter, in his 1926 review of Herbert Read's war memoir *In Retreat* (1925) for the *Criterion*, Richard Aldington writes of the 'torturing sense of something incommunicable' in the experience of war.[194] Bonikowski Wyatt explains that there are

[193] Alvarez, *Beckett*, p. 43.
[194] Richard Aldington, 'Review of Herbert Read's *In Retreat*', *Criterion*, 4.2 (April 1926), 363-367 (p. 363).

social and traumatic aspects to this incommunicability that include disruptive symptoms. For Watt these problems include disturbed memories, easily overwhelmed sensory experiences, and an unbridgeable gap between himself and those around him. Wyatt adds that there is 'a silence within the experience of war' that 'cannot be spoken of or represented either to oneself or others.'[195] In this way, *Watt* ties in closely with Absurdist theatre and the war novel, as its main concern is humankind's reaction to a world without meaning. Watt himself is a puppet controlled and menaced by invisible outside forces. The hopeless situations he finds himself in force him to repeat meaningless actions. Moreover, the novel parodies realism with its inconclusive plot, and its content filled with word play and nonsense.[196] John Pilling's notions of derangement and a world that has gone mad, mentioned earlier in this chapter, make us aware of the importance of the context in which Beckett was writing. Ironically, Beckett said that *Watt* was written in 'dribs and drabs' as a way to 'stay sane' during the war.[197] With its protagonist and narrator residing in the same mental asylum, and the bilious pages of projectile prose, it seems that it was too late for 'staying sane'. Beckett's experience at Saint Lô, 'The Capital of Ruins' (as he describes it in his reportage), had given him such an unforgettable 'conception of humanity in ruins' (Capital: 278) that sanity was out of the question in a world where liberation by the Allies with one bomb dropped per second came at a higher cost than German occupation. This inverted logic that became synonymous with war is reflected in Watt's irrationality. Watt's bodily dysfunctions, most noticeably his peculiar manner of walking, as well as his anxiety that springs from his sense of uncertainty, could be attributed to shell shock. His disrupted mind and inability to order and make sense of experience could also be attributed to the horrors of war. Watt's outsider status is also suggestive of his marked difference to ordinary civilians. As Jay Winter writes in *Remembering War*, 'their illnesses were so odd, so frightening, that their presence was always a problem.'[198] To the civilians sitting on the park bench who first see Watt, he certainly is baffling, and to Lady McCann

[195] Bonikowski Wyatt, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post World War I British Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 3.
[196] Erskine's second painting could be interpreted as an attempt to mock realism.
[197] Beckett in Harvey, *Beckett: Poet and Critic*, p. 222.
[198] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between History and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 59.

who throws a stone at him, he is, and to the reader remains, problematic. This is not to suggest that Watt is essentially a symptom of war induced trauma in the same way as one reads the shell-shocked Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*.[199] Watt's encounter with Erskine's painting complicates this reductive reading as the therapeutic immediate impact of art contests with the anxiety inducing intellectual contemplation that follows.

Not only Watt's language, but also his daily tasks as Knott's servant suggest that he is a cog trained to carry out monotonous actions in a modern bureaucratic society. Suzi Gablik's understanding of Modernist art ties in with Watt's humdrum existence. Gablik explains:

> A person whose whole life is spent performing a few repetitive tasks becomes mechanized in mind; hardly ever breaking through the surface of his routine, he finds little opportunity to exert his understanding, judgement, or imagination. The critical faculties grow dull and perception is blunted, hardened by a crippling sameness. This sort of collective trance, with its automatic and reflex responses usually remains constant: the conformist mind does not change, or grow with experience unless something happens to disrupt it.[200]

Erskine's painting is what 'disrupts' Watt's 'conformist mind'. It awakens his perception to challenge his habits and norms. It produces a counter-consciousness that breaks Watt's automatism and mechanical mode of life. Erskine's painting opposes this all-consuming 'collective trance', and as a difficult and disturbing piece of art 'acts as a countertendency to this levelling process – precisely because it disrupts our habits of thought and strains our understanding.'[201] The painting does this by estranging itself from its viewer. It produces a counter-consciousness that breaks Watt's routine and disrupts his 'mechanised mind'. Thanks to the irregularity of the painting and everything else in Knott's house, Watt has to shed his restricting greatcoat of logic and reason.

Watt's problem is that he cannot rid himself of the desire to know and speak with absolute certainty, despite the fact that this is impossible. In other words, despite having a 'morbid dread of sphinxes' (W: 220), Watt perpetually yearns to know the truth and answer the riddle of the Sphinx.

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[199] Mary Bryden invokes Deleuze and Guattari's discernment in *L'Anit-Oedipe* (1972) that the Beckettian character is 'sans identité fixe, toujours decentre. *Conclu* des états par lesquels il passe ['without fixed identity, always off-centre. Concluded from the states of past being]' to suggest that Beckett's writing and his subjects cannot be reduced to a simple split between self and other. Bryden adds that there is an unnameable, central obstacle (such as the void at the centre of Erskine's painting or the mid-point in *Quad*) which causes the subject in question to shuffle around the object, with a series of either physical or semantic missteps. See: Bryden, 'The Schizoid Space: Beckett, Deleuze, and "L'Epuise"', *SBTA*, 5 (1996), 85-94 (pp. 88, 90).

[200] Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), pp. 36-7.

[201] Ibid., p. 37.

In this metaphor, for Watt, Erskine's painting is both the sphinx and riddle he tries to solve and understand. What Watt and the reader realise is that we share an incapability to communicate our aesthetic experiences. It therefore forces us to relinquish knowledge in favour of experience. The novel, like Erskine's painting, is indeed, 'wild and unintelligible' (Letters II: 16), as Herbert Read first described it when he rejected its publication, but this is its strength. As we can see with his difficulty in naming Knott's pot, language is the chief obfuscator in his moil. As Watt attempts to comprehend his own reality through analysing his interaction with the objects he sees around him, he traps himself in a language game that does not clarify, but distorts reality. Watt finds himself locked in the Sphinx's riddle. As Derrida states: 'The more we attempt to know the self by constructing models of it, the more we "adulterate" it, turn it into what it is not, something alien and "other": "In affecting oneself with another presence [a supplement], one *alters* oneself."'[202] As Watt tries to explain Erskine's painting, his emotional interaction ceases which causes his appreciation of it to wane. Watt's physical quirks are symptomatic of the rationalist method he uses to find a logical formula behind our human condition. Erskine's painting is an obstacle he encounters that forms one of the variables within this algebraic equation. When Watt abandons all, he gains an aesthetic experience that opens out the windows of the self to the world around him. In line with Watt's encounter, the aesthetic impression Beckett creates grows out of experience rather than knowledge. As both Beckett and the Abstract Expressionists believed, art is more effective (and affective) if it leaves an impression on our nerves, rather than our minds.[203] Like the painters of the 1960s, Beckett's writing becomes 'only the conduit' and his pen becomes the tool that 'transmit[s] emotion' onto the surface of the page.[204]

Just as Watt's head was full of 'voices, singing, crying, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear' (W: 22), Beckett wrote to MacGreevy on 26 May 1938 that 'A terrible wireless has started next door. They turn it on when they get up, keep it on till they go out, & turn it on again when they

[202] Derrida in Begam, *Beckett and the End of Modernity*, p. 68.
[203] Beckett told the actor Jessica Tandy that he hoped *Not I* would 'work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect.' Beckett in Enoch Brater, 'The "I" in Beckett's *Not I*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 20.3 (July 1974), 189-200 (p. 200).
[204] Here David and Cecile Shapiro are referring to the American Abstract Expressionists. See: Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, p. 2.

come in. One morning it waked me at 7 am. I must put up with it.' (Letters I: 626) At this point it would be surprising to think that Beckett would write several plays for radio, but as the following chapter illustrates, radio became an integral part of Beckett's attempt to transmit emotion.

Radio waves of 'encircling gloo-oom' (ATF: 184)

> I was driven onward by the need for *brevity, precision, definition and clarity*. I had the sense that I was now saying it *better*, more *clearly*, more *unambiguously*, more *personally*.[205]

Introduction

After Beckett's post-*Trilogy* writer's block, radio 'captured his imagination' and opened a new creative outlet.[206] His experimentation with the medium produced no less than seven radio plays, mostly commissioned by the BBC Third Programme in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[207] These plays formulated a new circuit of communication between voice, sound, music, silence and radio system. Radio enabled Beckett to dramatize disembodied voices and open up 'the possibilities for eavesdropping on the human consciousness'.[208] He saw radio as an ideal medium for presenting the intensely private world of a character because it is concerned 'not with plot or script, but with sounds'.[209] As Al Alvarez states:

> For a writer who continually created characters haunted by voices radio was a natural medium. In a sense, everything Beckett wrote was devoted to the task of catching the precise speed and cadence of the voices in his head.[210]

In these radio plays, however, it is not just voices, but also sounds and musical phrases that Beckett captures.

Whilst most criticism concerning the radio plays tends to be divided between musical (Catherine Laws), technological (Ulrika Maude) and narratological (Tom Vandevelde) approaches, this chapter explores how the technical and narratological elements are effected by the musical.[211] More specifically, it looks at Beckett's use of music in *Embers*, *Words and Music* and *Cascando* and reconsiders his decision to use radio as his medium. This chronological approach illustrates how

[205] Arnold Schoenberg in *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923*, ed. by Bryan R. Simms (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 7.
[206] Donald McWhinnie, 21 February 1957, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 431.
[207] This includes *That Old Tune* (1960), an adaptation from Robert Pinget's original *La Manivelle*. Given the Third's outsider-academic status, Clas Zilliacus found that: 'Radio now was to be given an opportunity to try to satisfy the few, or, to put it in terms preferred by the BBC, to satisfy the desires of shifting minorities: the Third was not to be an enclave for a rigidly defined audience but a service to which anyone was welcome if and when he wanted to broaden his mind through serious learning.' Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 16.
[208] Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-76* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1988), p. 6.
[209] Beckett in a letter to Nancy Cunard, 5 July 1956, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 428.
[210] Alvarez, *Beckett*, p. 119.
[211] A notable exception is Everett Frost's essay entitled 'Fundamental Sounds: Recording Beckett's Radio Plays', *Theatre Journal*, 43.3 (1991), 361-376. Like Frost's article, this chapter hopes to tie the various strands of Beckett's methodology together and ask how music responds to radio's practical and theoretical aspects as well as to Beckett's concern with storytelling.

music's narrative role shifts in relation to language's storytelling role. It complements the previous chapter's investigation of how the visual arts can pose problems for language in terms of the inexplicability of artistic experience by looking at how music also complicates the formulation of feelings and memories into language. Whereas the previous chapter made use of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to explain the sensory experience of art, as practiced by the Abstract Expressionists, in an early novel; this chapter employs musicological readings of the various musical excerpts in three radio plays. It also uses G. W. Leibniz's Monadology, which Beckett first encountered in the 1930s through Wilhelm Windelband's *A History of Philosophy*, to unpick how music is both offering comfort and posing challenges to the plays' subjects as well as complicating the act of narration through the medium of radio.[212] Leibniz's writings on how memories surface in one's mind is used in relation to *Embers*, and his Monadology is used to analyse the interaction between language and music in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*.[213] Furthermore, a Leibnizian framework is applied to better understand how language and music interact as separate entities occupying the same space, and what the broader implications for Beckett's often self-conscious acts of storytelling are. The chapter argues that the interaction between language and sound is similar to that between monads, as described here by Nicholas Rescher: 'No casual relations can arise among monad; at best they can *accord* with one another in their states. This protocasual reciprocal accord extends throughout the universe and links all of its monads in one vast framework of mutual interrelation.'[214] As will be discussed, in Beckett's radio plays this 'accord' is questioned and appears strained.

Studies comparing Beckett's work to Leibniz's philosophy have already been carried out by Naoya Mori, Garin Dowd, Erik Tonning, and Anthony Uhlmann.[215] Leibniz has not, however, been

[212] Beckett copied extracts into his 'Philosophy Notes' notebook. One such note includes the following remark: 'Leibniz to Locke / *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu, nisi ipse intellectus*.' ('Nothing is in the intellect that will not first have been in the senses, except the intellect itself.') in *Samuel Beckett's Library*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 168. Nixon also tells us that Beckett, impressed by Ballmer's paintings, invoked Leibniz when he considered the artist's work as 'metaphysical and concrete rather than abstract' (26 November 1936). After seeing these paintings, Beckett then visited the Leibnizhaus in Hannover on 5 December 1936. Nixon, 'Chronology of Beckett's Journey to Germany 1936-1937 (based on the German Diaries)', pp. 254, 255.

[213] The final chapter looks at the way in which memories surface in Beckett's later prose through Bergson and Augustine's writings.

[214] Nicholas Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 55.

[215] See: Naoya Mori, 'Beckett's Windows and the Windowless Self', *SBTA*, 14 (2004), 357-370; Garin Dowd, *Abstract Machines: Samuel Beckett and Philosophy After Deleuze and Guattari* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007); Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, 2007; Anthony Uhlmann, 'Deleuze, Leibniz, Proust, and Beckett: thinking in literature' in *Beckett's Proust/Deleuze's Proust*, ed. by Mary Bryden and Margaret Topping (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 73-86.

considered alongside Beckett's radio plays. It must be stated that Beckett did not comply with all of Leibniz's ideas. His reading of the late seventeenth-century philosopher was somewhat tempered by his twentieth-century perspective. For instance, in a letter to MacGreevy on 6 December 1933, Beckett described Leibniz as 'a great cod, but full of splendid little pictures.' (Letters I: 172) Like Bertrand Russell, Beckett interpreted the Monadology as 'a kind of fantastic fairy tale, coherent perhaps, but wholly arbitrary.'[216] In his radio plays, specifically *Cascando*, it seems as though Beckett re-appropriated the work to coincide with his understanding of the self as fragmentary and inchoate. Before discussing Beckett's reasons for using radio and music in these plays, a brief outline of Leibniz's Monadology is necessary to set the stage.

Leibniz argued that the world consists of an infinite number of monads. Monads are partless, unextended entities. Some are endowed with thought and consciousness; others found the phenomenality of the corporeal world. Each indivisible, self-sufficient monad is windowless and cannot be influenced by anything outside themselves; all ideas are therefore innate. They are all governed by a pre-established harmony. For Leibniz, the totality of contingent things cannot sufficiently explain themselves and therefore God, as the only being beyond this totality, explains them. Only God can grasp complete concepts and see at once the whole demonstration of the Monadology. God is a necessary being, the explanation of the universe, and the infinite intelligence. It is because of God's perfectness that we live, according to Leibniz, in a world that is the best of all possible worlds.[217] Beckett's Monadology, however, operates without an omniscient, omnipresent God. Leibniz's analogy of two clocks, borrowed (though this is not acknowledged by Leibniz) from Arnold Geulincx explains the apparent inter-relatedness of things. In this theory Leibniz proposes that every monad is like a clock, behaving independently of other monads. Nevertheless, every monad is synchronized with one another by God, according to his vast conception of the perfect universe. It is this harmonious synchronisation that the radio plays upset with the aid of music and sound.

[216] Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Russell House, England: Spokesman, 1900), p. xiii.
[217] Leibniz states: 'It has been very well said that he (God) is like a centre who is everywhere but whose circumference is nowhere, since everything is present to him immediately, without being removed from this centre.' G. W. Leibniz, *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Lady Mary de Selincourt Morris (London: Everyman, 1968), p. 28.

Leibniz's Monadology, when lacking an objective, orchestrating exterior body provides us with a philosophical parallel to Beckett's radio plays. In these plays, the sense of synchrony, memory and alinearity, created by the presence of music and sound effects, gives an impression of disorder as the narration becomes piecemeal and fragmented. This is similar to the world of monads where order and cause and effect have become replaced by disorder and randomness to create a disorientating image of the world around us. *Embers* is discussed to explore how Beckett's use of sound is evidence of his musicality and growing use of music as a structural tool. The encounter between a child and her music teacher is also an instructive scene when considering Beckett's struggle with language, in comparison to the relative directness of music. *Words and Music* and *Cascando* have been chosen because of their direct use of music and to see how the act of collaboration shapes Beckett's creative process. Whilst music features in *All That Fall* and *That Old Tune*, neither play deals with how music has an impact on either the use of language or the act of narration and therefore fall outside of a Leibnizian analysis of these plays.

Radio became Beckett's experimental workshop for testing the limits of his abandonment of language. He also experimented with the musicalisation of language and prioritisation of music as a means through which to paint auditory impressions. Tim Crook explains that radio was thought of as 'auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension'.[218] Whilst in *Embers* this 'psychological dimension' is reached through Beckett's use of sound effects, in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, Beckett's collaborators Morton Feldman and Marcel Mihalovici, create auditory scenes out of complex tonal and rhythmical structures.[219] Due to a recurrence of audio effects and musical phrases, Beckett's radio world is akin to Leibniz's world of 'weak perceptions' in which 'nothing stands out distinctively, we are stunned; as when one turns around and around in the same direction, a dizziness comes on, which makes him swoon and makes

[218] Tim Crook, *Radio Drama. Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 8.

[219] This approach of turning noise into musical gestures and patterns mirrors the techniques behind *musique concrète*, pioneered by Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaffer, who influenced the BBC Radiophonic Workshop through the Club d'Essai and the *Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète* which was based at RTF in Paris and picked up on by McWhinnie and composer-producer Douglas Cleverdon at the BBC. McWhinnie describes *musique concrete* as 'sheer sound, or patterns of sound, manufactured by technical processes. Its basis is an unlimited supply of magnetic tape, a recording machine, a razor blade with which to cut the tape at precise points, and something which will join the pieces together again in whatever sequence is required.' McWhinnie, *Art of Radio*, p. 85. Henry and Schaffer's compositional methods are explained in the following chapter on Beckett's teleplays.

him able to distinguish nothing.'[220] As this chapter demonstrates, this 'dizziness' manifests in the sea that Henry tries to structure, in Feldman's permutations and Mihalovici's disarray. Hence, as the narrative voice weakens at the burgeoning of the music, this 'dizziness' aggregates.

Radio allowed Beckett to distance and destabilise himself as author, opening an imaginary space for his listener to enter into. Through radio Beckett effaces the subject by contravening the linear, prosaic conventions of storytelling.[221] Like the atonal composers, Beckett adopted a style that 'treats dissonances like consonances and renounces a tonal centre.'[222] His metafictional works exist in an echo chamber or 'trap' where 'all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes'.[223] Out of this emptiness the listener hears unaffiliated voices in the dark, becoming aware of the artificiality of these voices and the construction that underpins them.[224] Hence, Beckett's self-reflective radio plays are concerned with radio as medium and content.[225] For Steven Connor, this meta-narration is the most important feature of Beckett's radio plays: 'it can also be thought of as a kind of work *on* radio, a working through the grounds of possibility for radio and what radio itself makes possible.'[226] This consciousness of radio's auditory functionality is driven by Beckett's use of music as a (de)structuring device. Beckett's physical removal of characters created pieces for voices that are 'precisely scored and as abstract as musical compositions'.[227] Hence, music usurps language by being present both as a character itself and as a way of constructing a character.[228] In this dynamic, Kevin Branigan sees language as obfuscator and music as clarifier. He proposes that the musicality of Beckett's radio plays 'may succeed in expressing a reality which language alone cannot convey.'[229]

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[220] G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and The Monadology*, trans. by George R. Montgomery (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 50.
[221] Beckett spoke of abandoning prosaic linearity when explaining how Gide's *Paludes* treats action 'symphonically' instead of 'methodically' in 1931. As Rachel Dobbins Burrows writes in her notebook: 'Understanding Bergson (*symphonie* not *mélodie*; treatment of depth not of surface).' See: Brigitte Le Juez, *Beckett Before Beckett*, trans. by Ros Schwartz (London: Souvenir Press, 2008), pp. 43-4.
[222] Schoenberg in Simms, *Atonal Music of Schoenberg*, p. 15. Beckett's form mirrors that used by atonal composers. In 1920 Béla Bartók described the genesis of this musical model as the moment when 'composers first attempted to use the twelve tones both vertically and horizontally in any configuration whatever, not deployed according to an established scale system in which some tones are always accorded greater or lesser weight.' Ibid. Beckett's fondness for Bartók is well known and the percussive score to *Quad* shares many resonances with the Hungarian composer's sound world.
[223] Yury Tynyanov in Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 91fn.
[224] As Beckett told Barney Rosset in a letter dated 27 August 1957: 'to "act" is to kill it […] the whole thing's *coming out of the dark*.' (Letters III: 63)
[225] See: Julie Campbell, 'Beckett and the BBC Third Programme', *SBTA*, 25.1 (2013), 109-122.
[226] Steven Connor in *Broadcasting Modernism*, ed. by Michael Coyle, Debra Rae Cohen and Jane Alison Lewty (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), p. 279.
[227] Ibid.
[228] As Anna McMullan states: 'characters are evoked almost entirely in sonic terms'. McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (New York; Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 76. This point will be revisited in relation to *Cascando*.
[229] Branigan, *Radio Beckett*, p. 136.

In *Embers*, however, the reality music both expresses and extenuates is the struggle to express and the impossibility of finding a way of ending a narrative.[230] In *Words and Music* and *Cascando* this difficulty is extended to the problems of collaboration.[231] Music occupies a double space in its narrative role as it reinstates the move towards an ending, all the while exposing the impossibility (perhaps due to lack of motivation or fear) of ever reaching the end point. The remainder of this chapter looks at Beckett's use of music as storyteller. This coincides with the monadological approach underpinning this chapter because as each element (voice, music, sound effects) is housed within an impartial, intangible medium such as radio, any sense of authorial control or oversight is sidestepped. Within this un-orchestrated Monadology of intertwining and conflicting soundwaves, Beckett exposes the effects sound has on language. Specifically, the chapter asks whether music is a source of pleasure or pain and reconsiders what this means for Beckett's subjects and listeners.

Music in *Embers*: 'I shouldn't be hearing that!' (E: 260)

> Listen to *Embers*. Radioembers. This is Embers. Music of Embers. Embers of music.[232]

Embers was first broadcast on the BBC Third on 24 June 1959, directed by Donald McWhinnie and starring Jack MacGowran (Henry), Kathleen Michael (Ada), Kathleen Helme (Addie), Patrick Magee (Music/Riding Master), and Cicely Hoye (pianist). It was described by Beckett as 'a rather ragged text'.[233] Like its protagonist, *Embers* is, to quote Ruby Cohn, 'obsessive and enigmatic'.[234] Continuing this parallel between character and text, Cohn adds: 'Henry conflates past and present, fact and fiction. He enlivens ghosts, he punctures memories with older memories, and he struggles with a composition.'[235] *Embers* is centred around Henry's attempt to tell a story about an elderly man called Bolton who, in great distress, calls for Holloway, his doctor. The play includes memories of

[230] Within this need to reach a conclusion there is also a fear of ending. Beckett expresses this fear in 'Rough for Radio I' in a passage that alludes to *Godot*: 'they're ending . . . ENDING . . . this morning . . . what? . . . no! . . . no question! . . . ENDING I tell you . . . nothing what? . . . to be done? . . .' (Rough I: 270)
[231] The notion of Beckett as a stubbornly solitary creator (in the Romantic sense of the word) does not take into account Beckett's collaboration with scenographers, cameramen, directors, and actors in theatre, film and television. See: Anna McMullan, 'Samuel Beckett's Scenographic Collaboration with Jocelyn Herbert', *Degrés*, 149-150 (2012), 1-17.
[232] Hélène Cixous, *Zero's Neighbour: Sam Beckett*, trans. by Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 54.
[233] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 446.
[234] Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 245.
[235] Ibid.

Henry's wife Ada, and Addie, their daughter. It is also concerned with episodes from everyday life, such as the price of margarine and Addie's middle-class pursuits that include horse-riding and piano lessons. All the while, Henry's struggle (allegorised in the relentless sounds of the sea) is intensified by the play's insinuations of suicide. Though the listener cannot be sure, it is assumed that Henry's father committed suicide by drowning himself, though his body was never found. This adds a sinister tone to the all-consuming tidal sounds that Henry cannot quieten.

The most prominent readings of *Embers* are by Hersh Zeifman, Paul Lawley, and Marjorie Perloff. Zeifman reads Henry's plight as a quest for salvation with his dead father (Christ the Saviour), who he is trying to reach.[236] Lawley interprets the play as a presentation of 'the tenacious but futile struggle of a consciousness for survival and towards identity amidst both outer and inner flux'.[237] Perloff, who focuses on the play's rhythmical structure, discusses how this 'autobiographical drama of filial guilt' is constructed.[238] She explains that 'the verbal, imagistic, and acoustic symbiosis of the two 'plots' is worked out with musical precision.'[239] The common theme of all three interpretations is the sense of being lost and in search of something, the nature of which is uncertain.[240] Henry's journey towards understanding, however, is taken off course by the sounds of the sea. Considering Perloff's assertion that 'the dominant voice is not Henry's but the voice of the sea', this analysis sees the scene between Addie and the Music Master as the pivotal moment where language fails as the narrative medium and is replaced by sound.[241]

Sonic structures and the sea

In *All That Fall* and *Embers*, Beckett constructs a play based on the principles of rhythm, rather than dramatic curve or Aristotelian poetics. Not phrased by rural sounds or a train, but hooves and the sea,

[236] Hersh Zeifman, 'Religious Imagery in the Plays of Samuel Beckett' in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 85-94 (p. 90).
[237] Paul Lawley, '*Embers*: An Interpretation' in *The Beckett Studies Reader*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 94-120 (p. 117).
[238] Marjorie Perloff, 'The Silence that is not Silence: Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett's *Embers*' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, 247-68 (p. 261).
[239] Ibid.
[240] Josephine Jacobsen and William Mueller call this 'The Quest'. Jacobsen and Mueller, *The Testament of Samuel Becket: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 135-53.
[241] Perloff, 'The Silence that is not Silence' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, p. 252. David Tucker's assertion that in Beckett's voice and Geulincx's ultrarationalist philosophy 'the persistence of failure and a kind of doomed quest [the object of which is singularly intangible]' is seen clearly in light of the play's musical form. Tucker, *Beckett and Geulincx*, pp. 7-8. This would provide an interesting reading of *Embers*, as seen in Everett Frost's discussion in: Frost, '"The Sound is Enough": Beckett's Radio Plays' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 251-268.

Embers is a piece for radio that has been musically structured.[242] Though the only music heard or referred to in these plays is Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* (*All That Fall*) and Chopin's *Waltz in Ab major, No. 5* (*Embers*), musicality is abundant in its orchestration of time and space. The form of *Embers*, like the scale Addie practices, however, is meandering and inchoate. Each cluster of phrases lacks a real centre and is fragmented by sound effects such as hooves, stones, the sea, Henry's unsettling laugh, and Addie's cry.[243] With a form that cannot 'accommodate the mess', but spins uncontrollably into retrograde, *Embers* mirrors the polytonal style of twentieth-century composition where, upon rejecting motivic repetition and development, 'one [is] suddenly confronted by the void.'[244] Musically mapped, but semantically displaced, Henry is lost between words and music as he tries desperately to finish his story. Grand Romantic themes that take an idea or expression from its inception to its culmination, similar to the motifs that Chopin developed in his piano concertos, are lost in Henry's monad-like mind that moves without direction and is splinted by troubling memories and conflicting noises.

Originally entitled 'Ebb' in a typescript, *Embers* is irrevocably linked to the sea.[245] Sounds and images continually shift between the sea and shingle, light and shadow, but never settle due to their disjointedness and incompletion. In this ineluctable rhythm Henry despairs at the continuous pulsation of the sea which he tries to control. Like Croak in *Words and Music* and Opener in *Cascando*, Henry appears as a conductor, lifting his baton as if to pre-empt the sea's emergence at the beginning of the play:

> On. [*Sea. Voice louder.*] On! [*He moves on. Boots on shingle. As he goes.*] Stop. [*Boots on shingle. As he goes, louder.*] Stop! [*he halts. Sea a little louder.*] Down. [*Sea. Voice louder.*] Down! [*Slither of shingle as he sits. Sea, still faint, audible*

[242] With Henry's boots on the shingle, the ebb and flow of the sea, and the sound of hooves, *Embers* is like a musical score. As Katarzyna Ojrzynska suggests, the plot resembles 'the act of composing or rehearsing a musical work for a radiophonic trio'. Ojrzynska, 'Music and Metamusic in Beckett's Early Plays for Radio' in *Beckett and Musicality*, ed. by Sara Jane Bailes and Nicholas Till (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 47-63 (p. 55).

[243] See: Pilling, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 98. Barbara Bray (drama script editor and producer) observed that 'after the second or third readings people began to get intrigued and get an ear for it. It's like new music: listen to it a few times and you begin to get the hang of it.' Bray in 'Obituary of Barbara Bray', *Times* (6 March 2010), 96. The 'new music' Bray alludes to coincides with Beckett's use of contemporary scores that deliberately flout expectations and intuitions that common musical structures prompt.

[244] Beckett in Tom Driver, 'Beckett by the Madeleine', *Columbia University Forum*, 4.3 (Summer 1961), 21-24 (pp. 22-3); Schoenberg in Simms, *Atonal Music of Schoenberg*, p. 9. This is also similar to the abstract form of Erskine's painting, discussed in the previous chapter.

[245] Rosemary Pountney tells us that Beckett considered almost a dozen titles, including 'The Water's Edge'. Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows*, p. 108. By entitling the piece *Ebb*, but not mentioning 'flow', Beckett's earlier title alludes to the incoherency of Henry's thoughts, the incompleteness of his story and that of the play itself. Direct and oblique images of a figure setting out from the shore in a boat and drifting without destination also occur in *The End*, *The Trilogy*, *How It Is*, and *Cascando*. In *The End* when 'gliding on the waters' (The End: 98) without oars, the protagonist remembers his father in a passage which brings both *Embers* and *Company* (discussed in chapter four) to mind (see The End: 98-99). Like Rimbaud's 'Le Bateau Ivre', which Beckett translated in 1932, an urge for self-abandonment pulls at an urge to cling on. As we find in Henry's confused Bolton and Holloway story, this is set against a precarious backdrop of grief, guilt and uncertainty.

throughout what follows whenever pause indicated.] (E: 253)

At first Henry, who is trying to control the movement of his own body also seems to be trying to temper the sound we are hearing when he says 'On', 'Down', and tells himself (and us): 'That sound you hear is the sea'. As he shuffles towards the water's edge, Henry also seems to be urging himself to move when he repeats 'On.' His difficulty in moving, evident in his desperation, pauses and need to sit down, however, parallels his loss of control of the sounds in his head.[246] As if adding instrumentation to the piece, Henry excitedly invokes 'Hooves!' to add colour and rhythm to the monotonous sea, voice, and other orchestral effects such as the '*slither of shingle*'. Trained to 'mark time', these clippety-clopping (or tick-tocking) hooves act as a metronome foreshadowing the domineering presence such musical sound effects will have. They are the first of many sonic tirades Henry must face for the hooves that initially beat staccato crotchet notes in 4/4 time, double into quavers, then semi-quavers and frenziedly speed up beyond Henry's ability to cope.[247] This sends him spiralling out of control, urgently calling for a train to 'mark time' (E: 253) and restore order.[248] At the height of his conducting prowess, with triumphant exaltation, Henry shouts 'Listen to it!' Then, overcome with emotion at his musical invocation for his father to come 'back from the dead, to be with [him]', Henry, afflicted by synesthetic confusion, says: 'Listen to the light now, you always loved the light'.[249] This epiphanic light, however, is soon dimmed. Though 'not long past noon', Henry describes 'all the shore in shadow and the sea out as far as the island'.[250] Accordingly, Henry's role as conductor is short-lived as uncontrollable sounds hijack his attempts at structuring these noises that come from inside his mind. Similar to *Watt*, Beckett takes an anti-Cartesian stance as Henry does

[246] This hints at the steady reduction of movement experienced by Beckett's radio personae from Mrs Rooney to Opener. Moreover, the sound of Henry's boots on shingle foreshadows Croak's shuffling slippers in *Words and Music*. Croak's movements, however, are restricted to the room where he resides, reinforcing the increasing sense of confinement Beckett's subjects face. Beckett also uses the sound of shuffling feet as a rhythmical marker in *Footfalls*, and mentions felt shoes in *That Time* and carpet slippers in *Eh Joe*. This 2/2 movement echoes the 'lub, *dub*' iambic pattern of the heart as a down and up beat is established, possibly equating movement with feeling where both dwindle. For a discussion of stasis in Beckett's work see: Lois Oppenheim, 'Re-Visiting Stasis in the Work of Samuel Beckett', *SBTA*, 21 (2009), 117-130.

[247] As discussed subsequently, Henry's invocation of sound effects like Hooves, may also be intended as a way to 'drown out' the dragging sound of the sea. This may inadvertently cause a kind of sonic apocalypse like the tempest at the end of *All That Fall*.

[248] The train uses a 2/4 beat that stresses the off-beats to create a syncopated rhythm. This adds to the sense of displacement, rather than creating order.

[249] At the opening of the play, there is a great deal of synesthetic confusion which is not only reflective of Henry's distracted mind, but also makes the listener conscious of their senses. Like *Godot*, where the audience is made aware of their presence in a theatre, in *Embers* the listener is made aware of the strange duality of artificiality and reality at play in such a medium-conscious work. Beckett's association of musical reception with synaesthesia dates back to *Eleutheria* (written in French in 1947) where he writes 'Music! I see it from here.' (Eleutheria: 134)

[250] Even in Henry's unfinished story, the 'Vega in the Lyre' is 'very green' and in the 'bitter cold' of winter would be a poorly seen glimmer rather than the ebullient blue beacon associated with this summer star (E: 255).

not move from obscurity to clarity (knowledge), but dwells on memories of his father. Similar to *Watt*, Beckett takes an anti-Cartesian stance as Henry does not move from obscurity (uncertainty) to clarity (knowledge), but dwells on memories of his father. Read in light of Leibniz, Henry is an isolated monad who interacts with the sonic components of the play, but never understands his place in relation to the sounds around him or structure of the play as a whole. Leibniz stated that the Cartesians had 'fallen into a serious error' by 'treat[ing] as non-existent those perceptions of which we are not conscious' and believing that souls are mortal.[251] *Embers* consists of Henry's 'perceptions of which we are not conscious' as Beckett uses radio and sound to aggregate his (and our) sense of intangibleness and uncertainty. From the beginning, Beckett uses music and sound effects structurally to dismantle the overall construction of the play and prevent Henry from being in control of his memories. Sounds make Henry and his listener 'progress' into greater uncertainty, with no hope of departing from the grey world of shadowy recollections they inhabit. Due to his inability to express himself, understand his situation, or relieve himself of his inner turmoil and mental anguish, Henry remains bewildered by and susceptible to the tempting pull of the sea. Exactly how the musical and narrative strands within this play interact and have an impact upon Henry, will be discussed below.

Henry begins by reflecting on the last time he went to the seaside with his father. Soon the sea becomes a menacing, irrepressible sound that Henry 'once went to Switzerland to get away from the cursed thing', but to his dismay, it 'never stopped all the time [he] was there' (E: 254). This sinister and uncontrollable leitmotif turns into an irrepressible drone; a thinly veiled metaphor for Henry's troubled psychosis. Henry's narration of a partially conceived story of Bolton and Holloway and disruptive memories of Ada and Addie are strained attempts of escaping the pressured sound (radio)waves. From the very first sea swell, the listener is reminded of *Molloy* who goes to the sea to escape from his mother and the social world:

> There are people the sea doesn't suit, who prefer the mountains or the plain. Personally I feel no worse there than anywhere else. Much of my life has ebbed away before this shivering expanse, to the sound of the waves in storm and calm, and the claws of the surf. Before, no, more than before, one with, spread on the sand,

[251] Leibniz, *Metaphysics & Monadology*, p. 49.

> or in a cave. (Molloy: 68)

Henry is one of those people for whom 'the sea doesn't suit'. The dissonance the sea creates between anthropomorphised sounds and Henry's narration is intensified as its 'claws of the surf' pull Henry into its unbidden depths as he screams: 'Lips and claws! [*Pause.*] Get away from it!' (E: 258). Louise Cleveland sees the sea of *Embers* as:

> A perfect auditory correlative for Beckett's perceived universe – neither random nor totally patterned, but a distressing approach to pattern that gives one the suggestion of a rhythm without the certainty of a beat, a shifting, lapsing, furtive like, dreadful sound.[252]

The sea persistently breaks up continuity of thought as it fills the pauses, pushing silence outside the air time of the radio play. The sea's tortuousness lies in its irrepressibility as both Henry and Beckett's main struggle is to express the nothingness that lies behind the surface noise.[253] Like the off-putting hiss of white noise that comes between the listener and the play, the sea adds a layer of impermeability between Henry and his story.

The sea imitates twentieth-century music's amorphous, shape-shifting form that is always unsettling and redefining itself. As well as employing *aufgehoben* (suspended) and *schwebend* (wavering) techniques, Beckett also wrote with a colouristic use of imagery and rhythm. Beckett's use of the comma in particular, echoes Debussy's impressionistic use of patterns in compositions such as *La Mer* (1905), where harmonies contain few root progressions in order to create the drifting sense of the tide.[254] Henry's sea mirrors Beckett's use of the comma as both give a sense of cause and effect, but deny the listener a clear impression of either side of this binary.[255] His work becomes a moving body of ambivalence, a tide of simultaneous offering and retraction. Its use is diverse and its effect varied, as seen in the following example:

> Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone to be with me, anyone, a stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, years of that, and then, now, for someone who . . . (E: 255)

[252] Louise Cleveland, 'Trials in the Soundscape: The Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett', *Modern Drama*, 11.3 (Fall 1968), 267-282 (p. 277).
[253] Beckett's use of pauses in relation to Beethoven is discussed in the *Ghost Trio* section of the following chapter.
[254] Schoenberg claims that Debussy's harmonies that eschewed 'constructive meaning' in favour of a 'colouristic purpose of expressing moods and pictures' to produce an 'emotional comprehensibility' dethroned tonality. Schoenberg in Simms, *Atonal Music of Schoenberg*, p. 13. The implicit link between *la mer* and *la mère* would unearth an interesting analysis of the sea and an absent maternal figure in *Embers*.
[255] Paul Auster comments that Beckett was known as 'the master of the comma.' Auster, *Collected Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 346.

Like the strength of each wave, the length of the pause of each comma varies from a raspy breath (as seen in 'anyone, a stranger, to talk to') to a more natural inhalation ('stories, years and years of stories, till …'). This makes Henry's speech simultaneously rhythmical and unpredictable. Like the sea – the ultimate marker of infinite time – Henry's stories 'always went on for ever,' for he 'never finished anything' (E: 254). And like Beckett's use of the comma and the rocking chair in *Murphy*, *Film* and *Rockaby*, the sea swings between the poles of existence, dangling at different points between order and disorder, real and imagined, light and dark.[256] For Henry, who is lost at sea, its sounds have a disconcerting effect. The text and Henry are framed by the sea, which is audible whenever a pause is indicated in the text. For Eric Prince the sea is 'the acoustic glue that holds the entire hallucinatory assemblage together.'[257] The sea, however, does not hold Henry's strands of thoughts together, but merges one thought into the next to create a confusing mêlée that Henry cannot orchestrate. With 228 pauses, the sea becomes an overbearing presence that suffuses Henry's beleaguered mind and therefore the entire play.

Henry is confused by the sea's indefinite edifices of sound that contribute to the incommensurability of signified and signifier. As Steven Connor claims: 'for Henry the sea seems to be the sound of indeterminacy itself, corroding and decaying the clarity of signals: hence his desire for definite sounds that stand clear of their background.'[258] Desperate for structure and a sense of time, Henry tries to mark out the sea's drifting tides for a second time. On this occasion, he throws stones to punctuate the directionless soundscape. Lost and frustrated he '*wildly*' exhorts:

> Thuds, I want thuds! Like this! [*He fumbles in the shingle, catches up two big stones and starts dashing them together.*] Stone! [*Clash.*] Stone! [*Clash. 'Stone!' and clash amplified, cut off. Pause. He throws one stone away. Sound of its fall.*] That's life! [*He throws the other stone away. Sound of its fall.*] Not this . . . [*Pause.*] . . . sucking! (E: 260-1)

Henry feels vulnerable to the sea's unstoppable rhythms that threaten to extinguish his last dying ember in the same way as it drowned his father. As the sound of the sea gets louder, not even Henry's

[256] Beckett captures this oscillation between binaries in his pendulum image, discussed in the following chapter.
[257] Eric Prince, 'Rekindling *Embers*', *Assaph: Studies in Theatre*, 24.17-18 (2003), 263-280 (p. 271).
[258] Steven Connor in Coyle, Cohen and Lewty, *Broadcasting Modernism*, p. 80.

habit of walking about 'with the gramophone' (E: 261), or Ada's reassurance ('It's only on the surface, you know. Underneath all is as quiet as the grave. Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound') can drown out the sea's persistent beckoning. Unsurprisingly, using sound effects to get away from the sounds of the sea in his mind results in greater cacophony. The evanescence of sound resists Henry's imposed order because 'although sounds have a physical origin, they themselves are transitory and ephemeral' and exist in Henry's mind as agents of recollection.[259]

Waves of musical memory

The sea fuels Henry's grief as it symbolises the death of his father. He begs for it to stop ('"Please! PLEASE!"'), but eventually shouts: 'No good. [*Pause.*] Can't do it. [*Pause.*] Listen to it! [*Pause.*] Father!' (E: 256)[260] During the scene when his father takes his final 'dip' in the sea and drowns, the listener hears snippets of an altercation between Henry and his father where his father shouts 'A washout, that's all you are, a washout!' Henry responds by slamming the door twice, repeating the word 'washout' and shouting: 'Slam life shut like that!' This scene, as it resurfaces in Henry's mind as an elderly man, conveys his sense of guilt, as relayed in the following dialogue with Ada:

> Henry: "I was trying to be with my father"
> Ada: "You wore him out living and now you're wearing him out dead." (E: 262)

Henry's grief remains raw, even manifesting in his obsessive preoccupation with the sea which may or may not physically be there. As Ada, perhaps another voice Henry calls from the past (the lack of sound-effect for her footsteps, direction that she makes '*No sound as she sits*' (E: 257), and Kathleen Michael's eerily displaced voice suggests this) says: 'You shouldn't be hearing it, there must be something wrong with your brain' (E: 260). For Henry (perhaps undergoing psychotherapy with Holloway), grief, his father, and the sea all intertwine into one indecipherable noise. Only by telling stories and recalling family memories can Henry distract himself from his sorrow. These memories and stories, however, are encapsulated in the musical motif of the sea which simultaneously distracts

[259] Ulrika Maude in Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett in Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 186.
[260] Here, the first 'it' refers to Henry's suicidal thoughts whilst the second 'it' refers to the sea, suggesting that Henry has conflated these two entities in his mind, making the sounds of the sea even more foreboding.

Henry from his present state and reminds him of the death of his father. The sound of the sea works both as an agent of recall and of distraction for it triggers Henry's memories and prevents him from his act of storytelling. In *A Composer's World* (1952), Paul Hindemith asserts that music's meaningfulness is its ability to 'instigate us to supply memories out of our mental storage rooms.'[261] Hindemith believes that dreams, memories and musical reactions are all made from the same fabric and states that these subconscious acts are emotionally significant only if we have once had 'real feelings of the memory of which is revived by the musical impression.'[262] In light of Hindemith's suggestion, Henry's stories must be suffused by the 'real feelings' of his memories that have been 'revived by the musical impression' of the sea.

In *Proust,* Beckett established his idea of memory as something present and destabilising: 'There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us.' (Proust: 2) This makes Henry's grief, guilt and urge to drown himself symptomatic of this deformation of memory. To quote from *Proust* again: 'life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals.' (Proust: 19) As Henry creates an endless chain of unhappy memories, Clas Zilliacus observes that he is 'threatened with an impasse where time can no longer be structured because the vacuity of tomorrow will be exactly like that of today.'[263] Like Vladimir and Estragon, continuing his existence seems futile, were it not for his urge to finish a story that he scrapes together out of shards of memories. As we listen to these fragments of time past, *Embers* exposes Henry's voluntary and involuntary memories.[264] Memory replaces the nothingness of Henry's present and, as such, 'should be viewed as complementary to living, and not conceived of as compensatory', as Kathryn White observes.[265] As what surrounds Henry is fabrication and what he

[261] Paul Hindemith in Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 62. For an essay contrasting Beckett and Hindemith's views see: J. E. Dearlove, 'Composing in the Face of Chaos: Paul Hindemith and Samuel Beckett', *Mosaic*, 15.3 (1982), 43-53.

[262] Ibid. Peter Kivy, quoting Charles Darwin, also connects music and memory: '"Music has a wonderful power […] of recalling in a vague and indefinite manner, those strong emotions which were felt during long-past ages, when, as is probable, our early progenitors courted each other by the aid of vocal tones." The emotions in music, then, are to be explained by a sort of primeval memory in man which is awakened by music through its connection with primitive courtship behaviour.' Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 218.

[263] Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 84.

[264] The difference between voluntary and involuntary memories was a key concern for Proust and, in turn, for Beckett. As Manus Charleton explains: 'It is as though the lived reality had been frozen in time such that, on the first touch of a thaw, everything about that reality begins to melt back. Ordinary voluntary memories, in contrast, are pale shadows of these involuntary ones. They are "snapshots" which have been "made arid by intellect" whereas involuntary memories are fertile with immediate feelings and sensations.' Manus Charleton, 'Music of Time in *Remembrance of Things Past*', *Irish Pages*, 6.1 Ireland in Crisis (2011), p. 102.

[265] Kathryn White, *Beckett and Decay* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 65.

recalls resurfaces with each repetition of the sea, his life becomes pregnant with regret and remorse. His thoughts shift from trying to drown out the sounds of the sea to following the sea's siren-like call and wanting to row out to be with his father.[266] Thus his will becomes subjected to the endless motion of the sea which times his movements, and prompts then interrupts his thoughts. As a persistent leitmotif, the sea strips Henry of his autonomy and agency. This marks the moment when music as a structural device starts to shape not only the direction of the radio play, but by doing so, informs Henry's movements and associative memories.

Music Master's language

Henry's depressed state leads to the meek yet humorous recollections of Ada's concerns over the 'Price of margarine fifty years ago' in comparison to the 'Price of blueband now' (E: 256), and Henry's description of putting on jaegers:

> What happened was this, I put them on and then I took them off again and then I put them on again and then I took them off again and then I took them on again and then I – (E: 257)

This *Watt*-like pattern of repetition, reminiscent of the scene where Mr Knott puts his shoes on and takes them off, is akin to a musical counterpoint that has lost its linearity. A '*Smart blow of cylindrical ruler on piano case*' (E: 258) ends this scene of anecdotal quips. In the scene that follows, Henry's daughter Addie and her Music Master play out Henry's condition, which, as Ada notices, results in him being 'silent today' (E: 259). Beginning with Addie's terribly played '*Unsteadily, ascending and descending*' (E: 258) A♭ major scale, music provokes rhythmical discontinuity, discord, repetition and inconclusiveness. Then, with an incoherence that accompanies any attempt to explain music, the Music Master reprimands Addie for playing the wrong note at the fifth bar of Chopin's waltz. As the Music Master '*Beats two bars of waltz time with ruler on piano case*' (E: 258), music imposes strict order. Even without this stern discipline, the Music Master's expectation for Addie to play Chopin's fiendishly difficult piece is punitive enough. In a distorted Laurel and Hardy scene, little Addie,

[266] In 'For Future Reference' (1930), music – thinly veiled in 'Borodine', a homophone for the nineteenth-century Russian composer Borodin – also sinisterly entices the persona of the poem: 'My cherished chemist friend / Borodine / lured me aloofly / down from the cornice / into the basement' (CP: 28).

through music, 'tearfully' elicits the climactic point of the play where the commanding Music Master '*violently*' shouts 'Qua!', thumps the correct note on the piano (F not E) and exclaims 'Fa!' When Addie makes the same mistake again, the Music Master '*frenziedly*' yells 'Eff! Eff!', hammers the note and shouts 'Eff!' (E: 259) again. Conative of the profanity 'Fuck', the Music Master's previously sarcastic invocation of 'Santa Cecilia' (E: 258) is swept aside in favour of something more direct.[267] The humour here is prompted by 'Eff' sounding like E (the incorrect note) *and* F (the note the Music Master wants Addie to play). The predominance of the letter 'e' in 'eff' and the proximity of E and F on the piano (they are only a semitone apart and therefore sound inharmonious if played simultaneously) exaggerates the confused humour and frustration of the Music Master's language.[268] In her music lesson, Addie knows what she must do, but she cannot figure out how she must do it. The missing element is outside the limits of reason and elides encoding in language.[269] Hence, the Music Master cannot explain how to play F not E, but can only state this fact. In *Murphy*, Beckett describes Celia's problems in understanding Murphy's spattering of words as 'difficult music heard for the first time' (Murphy: 27); an epithet that can equally be attributed to Henry and the Music Master's struggle with language. This supposition that music can be spoken of, or in the Music Master's case, explained, is unlikely. In *Music and the Ineffable* (orig. 1931; trans. 2003), Vladimir Jankélévitch stated: 'No, music was not invented to be talked about' because '[t]here will be things to be said (or sung) about the ineffable until the end of time.'[270] *Embers* echoes Jankélévitch's point that music's ineffability is what underwrites endless talk. Music's ineffability and the non-physicality of radio creates a temporal and spatial gap that, like the centre of Erskine's painting, the emptiness of the teleplays' familiar chambers, and the inhospitable cylindrical enclosures of the short prose,

[267] Beckett also uses 'eff' to insinuate 'fuck' in *Dream* when he muses: 'No effing smoking in the effing Folterzimmer' (Dream: 71).
[268] Similarly, when Henry first attempts to tell his Bolton-Holloway story, he struggles to get the setting right: 'Before the fire with all the shutters . . . no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the . . . no, standing, standing there' (E: 254) These panicky revisions emphasise the difficulty Henry finds in telling his story and are coupled with Addie's difficulty in beginning her Chopin Waltz, which she also gets wrong then repeats.
[269] According to Vladimir Jankélévich, 'Listening gives us a glimpse of ineffable . . . Listening transgresses the limits of intellectual speculation, poetic as the latter might be. Since, when words are no longer worth saying, what can one do, except sing?' Vladimir Jankélévich, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. by Carolyn Abbate (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 119. Beckett's interest in the ineffable also coincides with his reading of Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* which refers to the scorn of 'concrete expression' in favour of the 'magic of the ineffable' alongside the esemplastic powers of the imagination. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: OUP, 1951), p. 15. In *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Keats flirts with the ineffable when he writes: 'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter.' John Keats in *English Romantic Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. by Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1996), p. 218. This coincides with Beckett's interest in Romanticism, discussed in chapter four.
[270] Ibid., p. 72.

cannot be filled. Music therefore becomes metonymical of the central void that remains inaccessible, no matter what permutation is used to access meaning. Like the midpoint in *Quad*, this space cannot be experienced, it remains outside of language and resists visual or musical representation to cause the sense of tension that drives and stultifies Beckett's work.

The Music Master's music-language relationship is a one-sided affair: music elicits talk, but talk has nothing to give in return. Consequently, the Music Master discovers that 'one does not approach the ineffable except in stammering'.[271] In acknowledgement of the problem in trying to talk about the indescribable qualities of music, which tends to result in inaccurate chatter, the Music Master is unable to explain Addie's mistake when playing the Chopin waltz. What the Music Master experiences and the listener realises is not that music has a transcendent meaning that cannot be grasped or frozen in language, but that music itself keeps its meaning concealed. To reinforce music's deliberately ungraspable essence, Addie cannot get past the fifth bar of Chopin's waltz. Considering its opening – eight bars of an introductory trill – this simple passage should be easy to play.

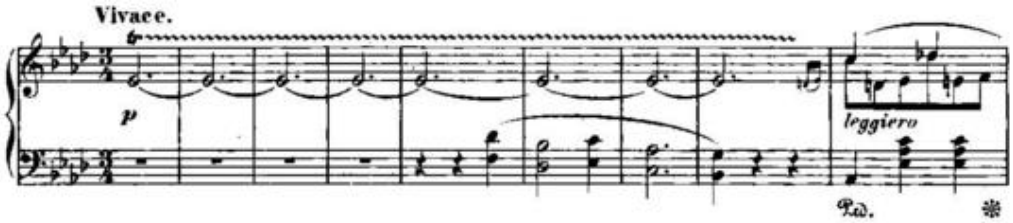


Figure 7. Frédéric Chopin, *Waltz in A flat major, Op. 42*, bars 1-9.

Addie's simple mistakes position the reconciliatory effects of music out of reach. From 'eff' to 'F', music becomes a marker of failure, and a realisation of the ineffable 'eff' (the note that Addie fails to play). This scene is directly linked to Watt's aesthetic experience in front of Erskine's painting where 'any attempt to utter or eff it [the unutterable reason for things] is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail' (W: 53). It follows that, as a musical motif, the sea is elusive and impenetrable as neither Henry, nor us as listeners, can decipher what lies behind it's veil of obscurity. In Beckett's structural and context based manipulation of music, the explanatory gap lies not in music itself, but in our ability to transmit and understand it. As Adorno suggests:

[271] Jankélévich in Michael Gallope, and others, 'Vladimir Jankélévich's Philosophy of Music', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65.1 (Spring 2012), 215-256 (p. 224).

> Sphinx-like it fools the listener by constantly promising meanings, and even providing them intermittently – meanings that for music, however, are in the truest sense means to the death of meaning.[272]

Henry's confused distance from his immediate, remembered and fictionalised experiences prevents his direct engagement with them. As a result, Henry is constantly fooled by his own tendency to flit between rational and irrational poles of existence. In his movement between real and surreal worlds, Henry loses any sense of meaning as his narration becomes incomprehensible and diffuse.

Drowning out the narrative voice

As *Embers* comes full circle, Henry's cacophonous final monologue echoes the musicality of his opening monologue:

> Not yet! You needn't speak. Just listen. Not even. Be with me. [*Pause.*] Ada! [*Pause. Louder.*] Ada! [*Pause.*] Christ! [*Pause.*] Hooves! [*Pause. Louder.*] Hooves! [*Pause.*] Christ! [*Long pause.*] Left soon afterwards, passed you on the road, didn't see her, looking out to . . . . [*Pause.*] Can't have been looking out to *sea.* [*Pause.*] (E: 263)

This is much more disjointed and erratic than the opening, suggesting that Henry has completely lost control of the sounds inside his head. As if always heard on the off-beat, there is no natural intonation or rhythmical order to this opening fragment of his final monologue. With '*sea*' italicised, its impact as a disturbing agent of recollection is stressed. As Henry's Bolton/Holloway story reaches its conclusion, the sounds of the sea become more frequent and threaten to snuff-out his life's dying ember, represented by 'the glim shaking in your old fist' (E: 264). As Henry tells this story centred around Holloway offering a grief stricken and aged Bolton (possibly a composite of Henry's father and Henry) an 'anaesthetic' (E: 263), the use of chiaroscuro ('Black, white, black, white, maddening thing'; E: 264) echoes the Manichean polarity of light and darkness in *Krapp's Last Tape*.[273] Through their storytelling, both Henry and Krapp desperately try to recall their past as a way of both escaping

[272] Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music, Selected with Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Richard Leppert*, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 140.

[273] As Bolton appears to be both Henry and his father, *Embers* becomes a story that falls somewhere between memory and fiction or storytelling. In reference to *Krapp*, James Knowlson has observed, 'Beckett's notebook [for *Krapp*] identifies the five emblems of light as the "mild zephyr", the "cooling wind", the "bright light", the "quickening fire" and the "clear water"; and the five emblems of dark as the "mist", the "heat", the "Sirocco", the "darkness" and the "vapour".' Knowslon, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, iii: Krapp's Last Tape* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 137. Beckett uses a similar, though subtler, method when using colour to outline the setting and mood in *Company*, discussed in chapter four. This painterly use of light can be seen throughout Beckett's oeuvre. It also seems to have been of interest to Beckett as a reader, for early comments on Dostoevsky, Stendhal, and Rembrandt's use of light are recorded by Rachel Burrows in her notes from his 1931 lectures at TCD. See: Le Juez, *Beckett Before Beckett*, p. 39.

their present, but whereas Krapp can play pre-recordings of himself 'When there was a chance of happiness' (Krapp: 223), Henry is afforded no such relief from his present despair as his story seems equally distressing. Narration, whilst sought after as a source of relief, seems to augment Henry's troubles. When Henry's final pleading '"Please!" [*Pause.*] "Please!" [*Pause.*]' is left unresolved, Beckett intensifies the familiar motif of '*Boots on shingle*' and '*Sea a little louder*' to suggest that the sea has saturated Henry's mind, pulling him nearer to the water's edge. Despite Henry's final words: 'Not a sound' (E: 264) (an echo of Ada's earlier words), the sea resurges. As He and She say in 'Rough for Radio I', sounds go on 'without cease' (Rough I: 267). Henry is, as Zilliacus puts it, simply condemned to play out these scenarios *ad infinitum* for 'there is no way out'.[274] No matter how many times Henry tries to escape the ubiquitous sound that incessantly plagues his mind, the sea will always sound '*a little louder*' (E: 253; 264). By imbuing the auditory with such command and presence, Beckett gives sound a greater physical presence than the characters in the play. Henry, no longer a conductor, does not try to define the drone of the sea, but following his father before him, he lets it wash over him. Music, like the sea, is closely bound by time, but often sounds timeless as it drifts between past and present: 'Music, like the prow of a ship cleaving the water, is always at the fulcrum of past and future.'[275] With its pauses and reiterations (father, light, sea), Henry's language mirrors the pattern of the sea as it is self-consciously time bound, but also timeless. Henry's futile plight to 'Go on now with [his] stories' (E: 262) reflects the ceaseless motion of the sea, implying that he has surrendered himself to an existence of endless circularity. As he stands '*at water's edge*' (E: 264), Henry's existence is a pause between the shifting thresholds of land and sea, present and past. This image is seen in Beckett's early poem 'Dieppe', written in French then English around 1937:

> again the last ebb
> the dead shingle
> the turning then the steps
> towards the lights of old (CP: 99)

[274] Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 95.
[275] Here, Jed Rasula describes T. S. Eliot and Viktor Zuckerkandl's idea of melody in terms of its linear continuum in Rasula, 'Endless Melody', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 55.1 (Spring 2013), 36-52 (p. 41).

Similar to 'Dieppe' the 'last ebb' sounds 'again' to suggest an endlessness that recalls the sound of 'dead shingle'. As a result of this relentless striving, the 'lights of old' remain in the distance for the persona of the poem and Henry alike. This leaves what Hélène Cixous describes as a 'phantom pain' of never being able to reach the end.[276] As a consequence of this residual pain, Henry's existence becomes an interminable dragging on and on, an ever-ending which causes a nihilating undoing of each day by each day. Henry, as his mind is largely closed off to his present, merges past (father drowning) with future (possibility of Henry drowning). This anticipates the nostalgic anguish expressed by Croak and Opener and in its ricocheting motion between past and present looks to Leibniz's commentary on memory which states:

> We have in our minds all those forms for all periods of time because the mind at every moment expresses all its future thoughts and already thinks confusedly of all that of which it will ever think distinctly. Nothing can be taught us of which we have not already in our minds the idea.[277]

The sea reinforces, even encourages the old lights of this Leibnizian preconceived idea, and its omnipresence extenuates Henry's suffering.

Conclusion

This discussion began with a quote from Cixous that pointed to the inherent musicality of *Embers*. In her study, Cixous calls Beckett a 'sweeper' who dusts words away from his texts.[278] In *Embers*, music and silence (a component of music), allow Beckett to 'sweep' his text and begin the process of replacing the word with the note. This sweeping, however, is not as smooth as Cixous' comment suggests, for sound and narrative often compete and collide to create a confusing and, for Henry, an upsetting cacophony. What *Embers* does show is the demise of word-based storytelling where narrative is married to a clear, authorial intention (or Dominant Monad, to borrow Leibnizian terminology). For instance, throughout *Embers* there are complicating sounds at play both inside and outside of the word. Whilst, on the whole, 'That sound you hear *is* the sea' (E: 253, emphasis mine),

[276] Cixous, *Zero's Neighbour*, p. 14.
[277] Leibniz, *Metaphysics & Monadology*, p. 32.
[278] Ibid., p. 61. For a discussion of Cixous' understanding of Beckett as a 'décharner' (literally, one who strips away flesh), see: Mary Bryden, '"Stuck in a Stagger": Beckett and Cixous', *SBTA*, 22 (2010), 275-287 (p. 282).

Beckett plays with sounds to imbue words with added sonic significance. For example, the sibilance in the sentence above emulates the sound of the sea, approximating sound with the thing itself. In this case, the sound is the sea which, due to its clandestine affectiveness, is potentially threatening. When listening to *Embers* we must 'remEmber' that within the word there is often a note that complicates a straightforward 'reading' of the play, just as within Henry's experience there is an ember of memory that resurfaces from the sounds of the sea. *Embers* demonstrates that sound is a tool employed by Beckett to distort and threaten the straightforward didacticism of the word and undermine the efficacy of language. The following discussion of *Words and Music* will evaluate this relationship between language and sound as the two arts are forced to come together. It investigates the text-music tandem for, as we move on four years in Beckett's oeuvre, music is no longer a feature or recurring motif; but a very real part, not 'of', but 'in', the play.

Words and Music 'or some other trouble' (WM: 290)

'No sound, a begging of the mind, to her, to appear, to me' (btc: 420)

Words and Music, a collaborative radio play for voice(s) and orchestra, was written towards the end of 1961 and first broadcast on the BBC Third on 13 November, the following year. The music to the original recording was composed and conducted by John Beckett, but this score was quickly withdrawn.[279] This discussion uses The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays (BFRP) Evergreen Review recording initiated by Martha Fehsenfeld, produced by Everett Frost and Faith Wilding, and directed by Frost. The music to this production was composed by Morton Feldman.[280]

Words and Music has three characters: Words (David Warrilow), also called Joe, Music (the Bowery Ensemble conducted by Nils Vigeland) also called Bob, and Croak (Alvin Epstein) who is an old castellan living in a tower and commanding Joe and Bob. Croak's commanding position is evident when Words refers to him humbly as 'My Lord' (WM: 287). Marjorie Perloff describes the dynamic between these characters in Shakespearean terms: 'Croak is usually considered a variant on

[279] Humphrey Searle also composed a score for Katharine Worth's production of the second English language recording of the play in 1973.
[280] There is also an Ensemble Recherche 1987 recording with Omar Ebrahim as Croak and Stephen Lind as Words.

the Master with Two Servants motif, as a Medieval Lord directing two minstrels, or as a Prospero figure with Words as his Caliban and Music as his Ariel.'[281] Throughout the play, Croak invokes Words and Music, who he calls 'My comforts' (WM: 288), to perform for him. In his invitations for Words and Music to speak or sound separately and together, Croak partakes in the process of artistic creation.[282] Croak hopes for therapeutic and redeeming effects from this artistic journey as he seeks solace and entertainment in the sounds created by Words and Music. Croak's groans and interruptions, however, are more suggestive of distress than contentment about his situation. This discomfort is exaggerated when Words speaks of Croak's past with Lily, a girl with 'black disordered hair' (WM: 292) and slightly pinched lips. Drawing upon Beckett's precedent in *Krapp,* one could infer that Lily is Croak's lost love whose image he is trying to recall with Words and Music. In Beckett's abandonment of plot, however, this context-dependent path quickly leads to a dead end. Contrary to the detail found in Beckett's earlier work, in *Words and Music* Beckett provides little information about the possible reason(s) for Croak's misery. What matters is how the story is told, not what it is about. What distinguishes Beckett's work in the 1960s from that which came before is his increasing use of music as an agent for storytelling, or, more precisely, for questioning the methods of traditional word-based storytelling. Whilst Words and Music are employed as Croak's consolatory pawns, Croak's suffering does not easily subside. Only at the very end where Croak drops his club after hearing Words and Music perform together, does he seem to benefit from his two companions.[283] This analysis considers how Music's role as a character, rather than auditory effect, changes the dynamic of the radio play by supplanting Words as the leading narrative voice. Beckett himself told Katharine Worth that 'music always wins'.[284] To a certain extent, by the end of this radio play, this rings true, but not without considerable repercussions.

The personification of Words (Joe) and Music (Bob) makes *Words and Music* a dramatization of Beckett's concern with the limits of language and experimentation with the possibilities of music.

[281] Marjorie Perloff, 'The Beckett/Feldman Radio Collaboration: *Words and Music* as Hörspiel', *The Beckett Circle*, 26.2 (Fall 2003), pp. 207-211 in 'Marjorie Perloff: Modern and Postmodern Poetry and Poetics' < http://marjorieperloff.com/essays/beckett-feldman/ > [accessed 15 December 2015].
[282] See: Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 95.
[283] As discussed later, Croak may not benefit at all for the sound of his fallen club may symbolise his exhaustion rather than his relief.
[284] Beckett in Katherine Worth, 'Words for Music Perhaps' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, 9-20 (p. 16).

As a character, Feldman's score for the part of Music is equally as important as Beckett's text for Words and Croak. The play itself begins in a more musical than dramatic fashion as the initial sound of a '*small orchestra softly tuning up*' (WM: 287) recategorizes this radio play as a recording from a recital.[285] As the play goes on, Words and Music are required by Croak to provide meanings for three universal concepts: love, age and the face. Out of this contest to express these grand themes, two arias of age and the face emerge. The rest of the play constitutes the discord between Words and Music as they are forced to coalesce. This study first explores the nature of collaboration then illustrates instances where Music and Words perform separately and together. It also considers how Beckett's use of Feldman's typically fragmentary music affects the ability of the listener to form a clear imaginary impression of the scene/image.

Early in the play, the relationship between Words and Music fluctuates between dominance, subservience, indifference and togetherness. To see their exchange as either positive or negative is to polarise two uncertain and mulishly unclassifiable qualities. Jonathan Kalb claims that music is confined to a function in a manner 'very similar to that of a filmic signature score' because it is answerable to narrative: a reactor rather than an instigator.[286] When considering the leading role Music takes in both opening the play and providing suggestions for Words to follow during the age and face arias, however, Music must be viewed as at least an equal. Catherine Laws takes the opposite stance to Kalb and sees music as 'the prime mover', but to see Music as a commanding leader is to suggest too coherent an order.[287] As Daniel Albright surmises: 'Beckett occasionally indulged in slight sentimentalisation of music […] but at other times he knew that music is just as fallen as any other art.'[288] The central tenet of *Words and Music*, it seems, is the rub not the reconciliation between Words and Music. For Beckett, the play is an illustration of the impossibility to express, not a smug self-congratulatory collaboration between himself and Feldman. It is no coincidence that both artists believed in failure; in *The Anxiety of Art* (1965) Feldman wrote that 'For art to succeed, its creator

[285] In 'Text 3' (1931) Beckett refers to an orchestra tuning up: 'just for to give the la' (CP: 38).
[286] Jonathan Kalb, 'The Mediated Quixote: The Radio and Television Plays, and Film' in Pilling, *Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, 124-144 (p. 132).
[287] Catherine Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones: Music in Beckett/Beckett in Music* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2013), p. 327.
[288] Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p. 148.

must fail.'[289] As this quote shows, for Feldman, failure can produce success. In Beckett's hands, however, this simple binary is questioned, leading us to revisit Beckett's uncharacteristically decisive comment that music wins. Indeed, Music does not get the last word as the play ends with Words sighing (with pleasure or pain) both in response to Music's final statement and as an attempt to communicate pure feeling. For Beckett, failure constitutes both the content of the play and the creative process leading to its construction. In this sense, *Words and Music* is a deconstructionist piece that aims to expose the traces of failure that constitutes it. Both Beckett and Feldman's aesthetic approach complicates the notion of a clear artistic order, inverting a Leibnizian view of a hierarchically structured process and development. Leibniz writes that

> God alone is the ultimate unity or the original simple substance, of which all created or derivative monads are the products, and arise, so to speak, through the continual outflashings (fulgurations) of the divinity from moment to moment, limited by the receptivity of the creature to whom limitation is an essential.[290]

For Beckett, this is the role of the author, as creator. His insistence on the importance of art being an acknowledgement of, even a striving towards, failure, however, inverts this maxim. The omniscience Leibniz grants the creator is not granted to Beckett's storytellers, nor does it belong to Beckett as author.[291]

Collaboration between Beckett and Feldman, Words and Music

Beckett's approach towards Feldman's score was unusually laissez-faire. Even though Beckett placed unique dramatic burdens on Feldman, he trusted the composer's artistic direction implicitly.[292] Feldman spoke of his kinship with Beckett saying, 'I spent one afternoon with Beckett; it will be with me forever. Not his work; not his commitment; not his marvellous face, but his attitude.'[293] Their

[289] Feldman in *The Music of Morton Feldman* ed. by Thomas DeLio (New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Company, 1996), p. 209.
[290] Leibniz, *Metaphysics & Monadology*, pp. 44-5.
[291] Leibniz states: 'everybody responds to all that happens in the universe, so that he who saw all could read in each one what is happening everywhere, and even what has happened and what will happen.' Ibid., p. 57. The subject's struggle to achieve this knowledge and command constitutes the anxiety at the centre of Beckett's radio plays.
[292] Whereas John Beckett withdrew his score, Feldman's appreciation for and connection with Beckett continued to grow. After composing the score for *Words and Music*, Feldman wrote a longer composition entitled *For Samuel Beckett* (1987). This was to be Feldman's last work as he died the same year, never having the chance to compose the score for *Cascando*, as the pair had planned.
[293] Morton Feldman, Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, 'Soundpieces interview, 17 August 1980' in *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987*, ed. by Chris Villars (Oxford: Hyphen Press, 2006), 87-94 (p. 94). Feldman told Everett Frost: 'he's a word man, a fantastic word man. And I always felt that I was a note man. And I think that's what brought me to him. The kind of shared longing that he has, this saturated, unending longing.' Frost, 'The Note Man and the Word Man: Morton Feldman on Composing the Music for Samuel Beckett's Radio Play *Words and Music* in *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, 47-55 (p. 51).

collaborative success, therefore, stemmed from their mutual respect rather than a close working relationship.

This meeting took place in Berlin in 1976, where they initially bonded over their shared hatred for opera.[294] This distaste of dramatic opposites that seek resolution, as found in opera, is evident in the relationship between Words and Music. Here, there is no simple opposition or harmonisation, but a more nuanced, even fractious interplay betwixt the arts is clearly at work. In this collaboration both Beckett and Feldman made unusual artistic decisions: Beckett let go of the reins and Feldman composed by using his grid precompositional approach where the score is premeasured with nine spatially equal bars in each system that function like lines in a play.[295] Whilst the grid is characteristic of Feldman's late style, for *Words and Music* he moves away from his usual practices by using repetition and time signature changes so that whilst the score resists development through Feldman's juxtaposing blocks of score, recognisable patterns are revisited and reimagined in different contexts. Moreover, Feldman based much of his composition on the rhythm and pacing of the lines which he read aloud with Everett Frost. This was certainly an unusual practice for the composer. Feldman even spoke to Frost about the struggle he experienced composing for *Words and Music*:

> You couldn't just go looking for a style, because all you're going to do is your memory's going to go into this composer, into that composer; and it'll just be a cliché ridden score. It's very difficult; Beckett is very difficult.[296]

Feldman, a composer whose main concern was to allow sounds to speak for themselves, seems a strange choice for Beckett as his text requires a composer to write music in response to Croak's three main themes. Feldman's sustained attempt to challenge the belief that music's main function is to directly evoke emotions, however, correlates with Beckett's intention to expose the struggle to express. The fact that Feldman's score never quite reaches the warmth and sentimentality it journeys

[294] This mutual distaste for opera resulted in Feldman and Beckett's 1977 anti-opera *neither*. It must be noted, however, that Beckett was particularly fond of the Mozart and da Ponte opera *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786). He saw Karl Böhm conduct *Figaro* in Dresden and said to MacGreevy on 16 February 1937, it was 'the first opera that I was sorry to have over.' Beckett in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 253. His fondness for Cherubino's aria from Act 1 and canzone from Act 2 is evident in the 'Whoroscope' notebook (UoR MS3000) wherein Beckett neatly copied out these sections from the score.

[295] Feldman's grid system was preceded by George Antheil, an earlier American composer. In 1936 Antheil wrote to Nicolas Slonimsky about 'filling out of a certain time canvas with musical abstractions and sound material composed and contrasted against one another with the thought of time values rather than tonal values.' Antheil added that he 'used time as Picasso might have used the blank spaces of his canvas' and 'did not hesitate, for instance, to repeat one measure one hundred times.' Antheil in Linda Whitesitt, *Life and Music of George Antheil, 1900-1959* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1983), pp. 105-6.

[296] Frost, 'The Note Man on the Word Man' in 'Morton Feldman Texts' < http://www.cnvill.net/mfefrost.htm > [accessed 27 March 2015]

towards suits Beckett's attempt to express his failed efforts at achieving artistic harmonisation between words and music. Beckett's words and Feldman's notes contain traces of inexpressible thought, whose realisation remains out of reach. Difficulty, therefore, is at the core of both Feldman and Beckett's collaboration and forms the kernel of the play itself.

Feldman's score consists of 33 interrelating fragments to be played by a piccolo, flute, vibraphone, piano, violin and cello. In the rising and falling notes of the score it is difficult to decipher any specific major or minor scale pattern. The length of each of the 33 fragments ranges from three minutes to a few seconds, adding to the unpredictability of the piece. Most significantly, musical disharmony is heard in the out-of-sync relationship between the instruments when playing their rising and falling lines. Feldman creates this disjointedness by intertwining differing rhythms and pitches. This faltering, staggered line creates what Catherine Laws describes as 'an ambiguity of leadership'.[297] Feldman himself referred to his varying pitch and unequal rhythms as a sort of crippled symmetry. This unevenness is evident in statement 10.

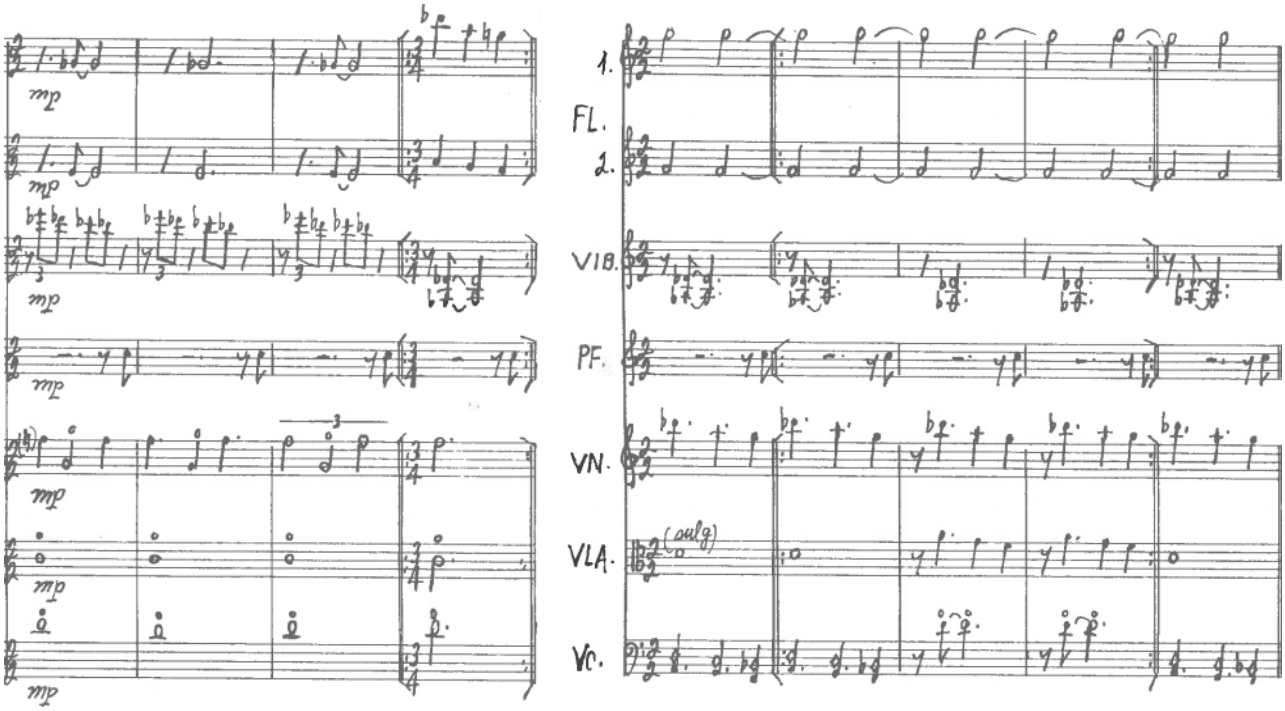


Figure 8. Morton Feldman, *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, statement 10.

[297] Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 338.

Here, Feldman uses a rising and falling pattern of minor sevenths (F5 to G4) in 2/2 time followed by a descending three note pattern (B♭ to A to G) to cause fraction and disrupt regularity. By subtly undermining the hierarchy between 'almost-but-never-quite unison' musical lines; their stable roles of leader and follower are unhinged so that Words and Music have an even slimmer chance of fitting together than if Music's backdrop was stable and predictable.[298]

'They are not together? / No.' (Rough I: 268)

When attempting to evoke the first 'Theme tonight . . . love' (WM: 288), Words and Music's aims at cohesion are unstructured and unsuccessful. They act as rivals bound together in their mutual attempt to appease Croak. As a result, their first attempt at achieving coherency is a complete failure. After a brief greeting, Croak repeatedly tells Joe and Bob (his 'comforts') to 'Be friends!' (WM: 287), encouraging their potential synonymy, but also highlighting their existing discord. Words expresses his reluctance to collaborate when he says to Music: 'How much longer cooped up here in the dark? [*With loathing*.] With you!' (WM: 287). Beckett then undermines Words by suggesting that his meaning and delivery is obtuse and uninteresting. For example, Words defines love broadly and blandly as 'a movement of the mind pursuing or fleeing real or imagined pleasure or pain' (WM: 288). This prosaic, indefinite series of words exposes language's arbitrariness and conflicting rather than clarifying characteristics. As a possible definition for just about anything, Beckett underlines Words' imprecision when Words slips up by replacing love with 'sloth' (WM: 288) and then confusing both with 'soul' (WM: 289). What is missing from this definition and the language throughout the play is what Beckett suggests has fled: 'feeling'. In Words' definition, pleasure or pain is 'pursued' and 'fleeing', not captured and feeling. This artistically unrepresentational entity remains the unattainable goal Words and Music aspire to reach.[299] From the outset, words are proven to be ill-fitting rhetorical devices that can latch onto any context. This vagueness points to the

[298] Ibid., p. 339.

[299] Feldman stresses this sense of the musical root continuously shifting so that it remains forever out of reach when he describes his creative process: 'It was word painting. It's not Wagnerian in terms of the layering of the word into the structure and body of the music. It's more distant. It's going along. I wanted its presence and its remoteness, its unattainableness. An unattainableness and yet a marvellous presence which is music. This mystery that music has for so many people.' Feldman in Frost, 'The Note Man on the Word Man' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 54.

inaccuracy of language, something Beckett had grappled with to the point of absurdity in *Watt* and is an obstacle he continues to face here. Additionally, Beckett describes Words' repetitive and ineffective speech as '*Orotund*' (WM: 288) as it is delivered in an increasingly overenunciated and forced tone of voice. Croak also dismisses Words with his '*Rending sigh*' and '*Anguished*' interruption: 'Oh!' When it is Music's turn to express the first theme, Croak makes his preference for Music clear as he '*Groans*' and shouts 'Alas!' (WM: 289) when Words picks up from where Music has left off. In an attempt to stop Music from overshadowing him during the '*soft music worthy of forgoing, great expression*' (WM: 288), Words says 'No! Please!' throughout Music's retort. In these few bars (statement 8) Feldman manages to create a depth of emotion greater than Words can cope with, let alone create, substantiating the musicological argument that '*music articulates forms which language cannot set forth*.'[300] In a childish retaliation against Words' interruption, Music becomes louder '*drowning Words' protestations*' (WM: 288). Music, who is asked to convey the same statement, first plays a discordant series of disconnected chords marked '*fortissimo*', therefore unsuited to the soft profundity of love Croak desires. Statement 9, therefore, goes directly against Beckett's instructions '*As before*' and '*all expression gone*'.[301]

[300] Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 233.

[301] In his score, Feldman often takes liberties with Beckett's direction. Feldman deemed comments like '*warm suggestion*' (WM: 291) utterly unhelpful as a means with which to approach composition. As Feldman said: 'If I would use [Beckett's] terminology, that he would use in asking for music, I never could have written it, because I don't know what that terminology means […] If he says he wants something sentimental, I have no idea what that means.' Feldman in Frost, 'The Note Man on the Word Man' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 52. Music, in particular, rejects the structure and tone specified by Croak, Joe and ultimately by Beckett. Feldman interprets '*warmly sentimental*' with an ironic smile that coincides with (perhaps even influences) Beckett's modification of the warmth found in Beethoven and Schubert's pieces in his teleplays.

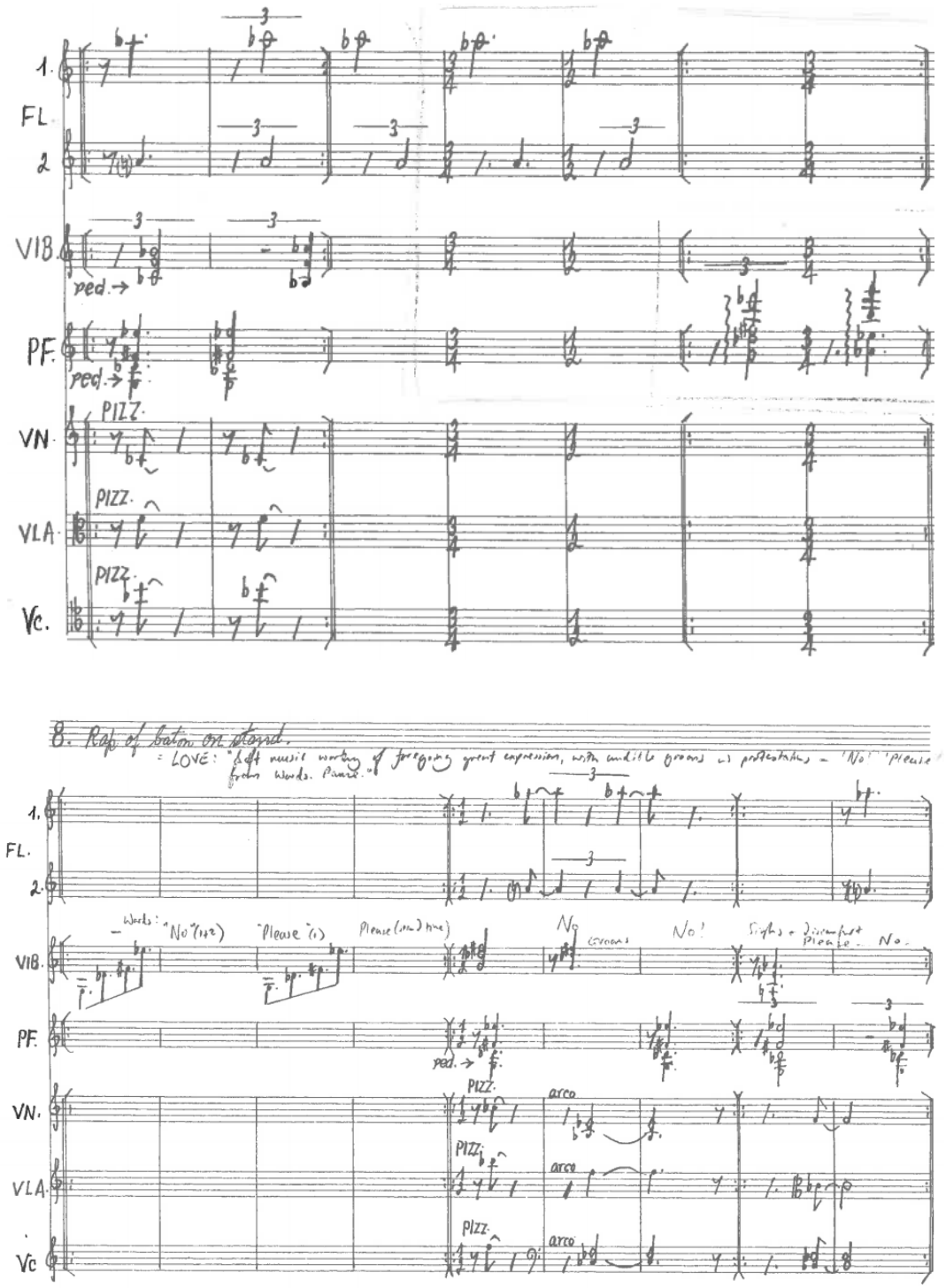


Figure 9. Morton Feldman, *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, statement 8.

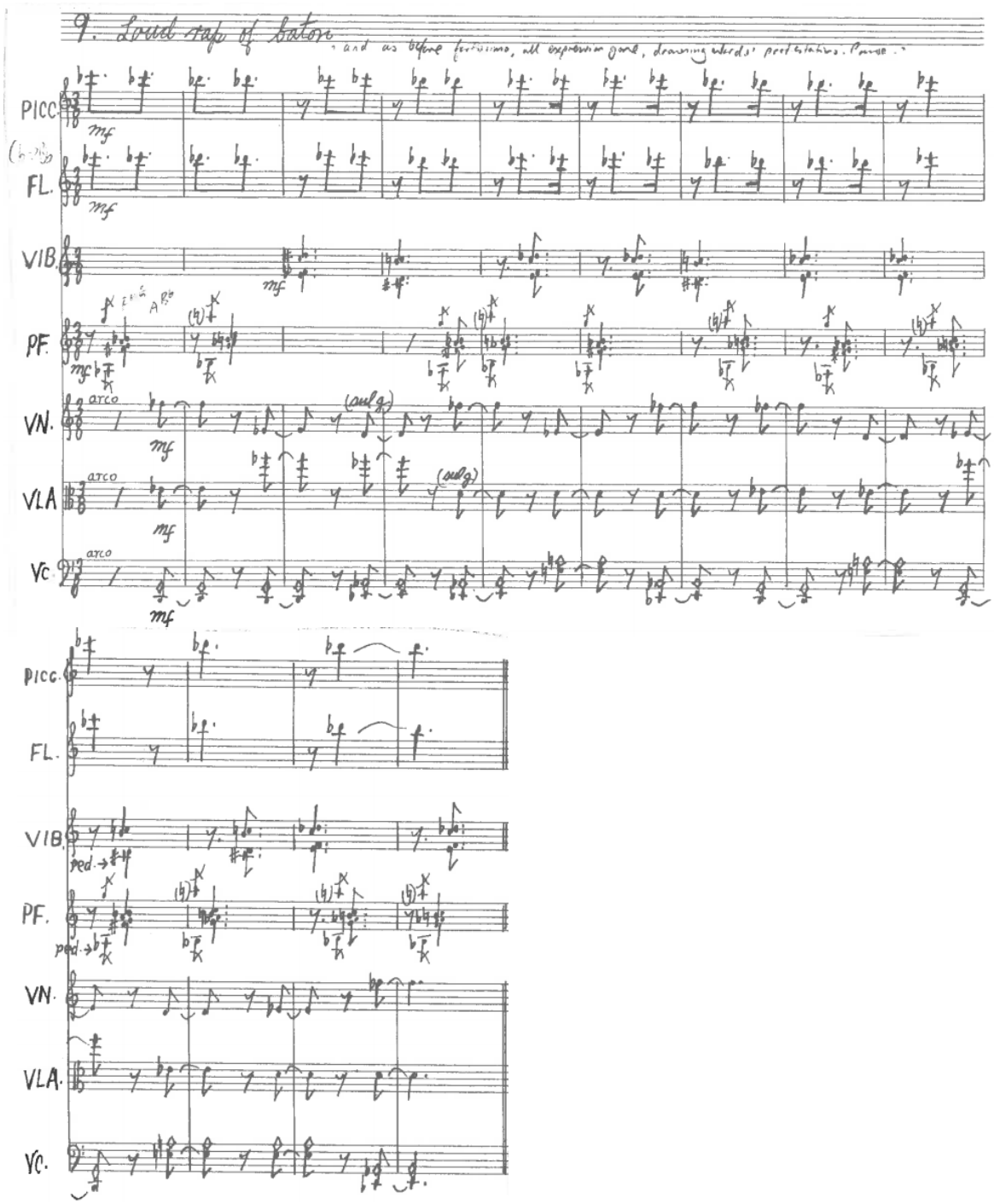


Figure 10. Morton Feldman, *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, statement 9.

By using dyads of minor seconds above and below central dyadic clusters of F# to G, and A to B♭ on piano, Feldman creates a dissonant texture. This discord is emphasised by the grace notes that fall outside the range of the main cluster. On top of this, shrill melodic minor second dyads are coupled in a two-pitch, four-note melody on flute and piccolo (C♭, C♭ and B♭, B♭). This is repeated (*mf*) with rhythmic variations for around thirty seconds to add a sense of frustration and anxiety. Due to their

strained tone, the listener feels Music and Words' unsuccessful effort to give voice to an idea as abstract as love. Croak's '[*Anguished*] Oh!' and sudden '*Violent thump of club*', midway through Words' attempt to describe the manner of love's 'movement of the mind' (WM: 288), is a distempered avowal to this crippling inability to express. There is not, as Stephen Benson argues, 'an umbilical link between music and the spoken word.'[302] As the play continues, Words becomes increasingly hesitant and fragmentary, as seen in his 'age' speech (WM: 289). Music, also experiencing doubt over its own ability to express, becomes reticent and does not respond promptly. Croak has to violently thump his club and imploringly beg for Music to begin so that together Words and Music can create an auditory impression of longing in order to satisfy Croak as companions in solitude.[303] This reluctance is clearest when Croak must shout 'Together dogs!' (WM: 290) What ensues is a scene where Music plays a note or scale for Words to follow and sing to. The result is unsatisfactory, inaccurate and interrupted by thumps, pauses and shouts.

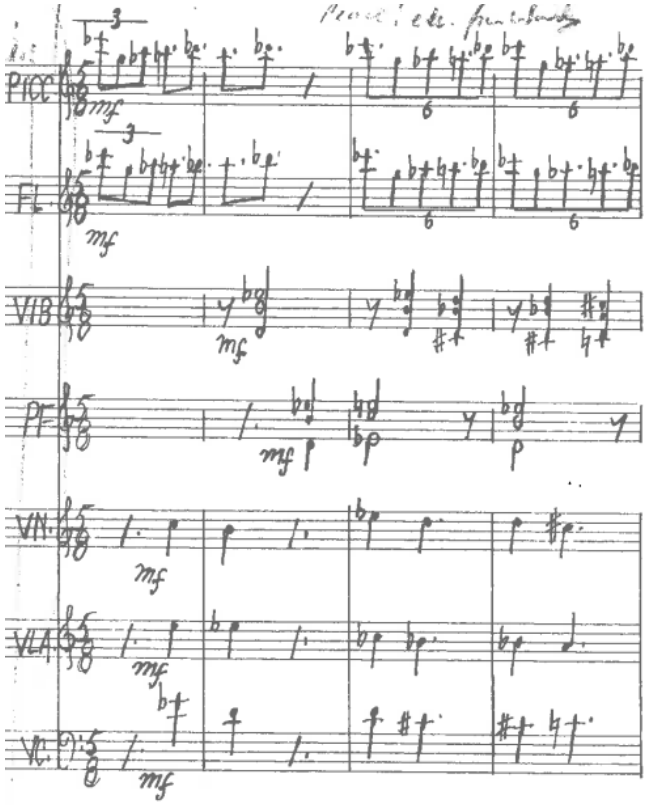
Fragmentation of the image

In order to portray Lily's face, Music starts proceedings with a '*Rap of baton and warmly sentimental*' evocation that lasts '*about one minute*' (WM: 291). In a '*Cold*' tone, reminiscent of the opening scene, Words interrupts Music by imposing his own suggestion that the face's eyes are 'dimmed,' its 'piercing beauty' no longer to be seen. This contestation between Music and Words continues with Words '*Interrupting, violently*' before supplanting Music with a detailed visual description that comes to him 'in that clarity of silver' (WM: 292). Croak '*Groans*' as Words reminds him of Lily by describing her 'brows knitted in a groove suggesting pain' and how her eyes are 'of course closed', implying that she is dead. This image categorises *Words and Music* as another work concerned with mourning and the desperate attempts of the bereaved to connect with the woman he has lost. Croak's repetition of 'The face' six times adds to the emotional weight that this face holds. As Words' description becomes more intimate when he outlines 'the great white rise and fall of [her] breasts',

[302] Stephen Benson, 'Beckett, Feldman, Joe and Bob: Speaking of Music in *Words and Music*' in *Word and Music Studies: Essays on Music and the Spoken Word and on Surveying the Field*, ed. by Suzanne M. Lodato and David Francis Urrovis (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2005), 165-181 (p. 168).

[303] Here, the listener is reminded of *…but the clouds…* where M1, crouched in his dark sanctum, begs a deceased woman to appear.

Croak's despairing groans become more frequent until he shouts 'Lily!' (WM: 292) with a tone of desperation and longing.[304] It is not until Music cuts Words off with an orgasmic '*Irrepressible burst of spreading and subsiding music*', however, that Croak can only '*Faint*[ly]' thump his club and Words feels 'ravished away' (WM: 292). The agitated mood conveyed in this statement (29) is achieved by the doubling of flute and piccolo and use of chromaticism (all pitches are played except F and F#), similar to statement 9 which attempts to convey the concept of love.



[304] Similarly, Krapp describes his 'dark young beauty' as being 'all white and starch' and having an 'incomparable bosom' (Krapp: 219). Both Krapp's lost love and Croak's Lily are associated with sexual desire. Before the lily flower became associated with Christian ideals of chastity to be rooted in the Virgin Mary; for the ancient Greeks, the lily signified eroticism (the long pistil of the flower resembling a phallus and the pollen symbolising fertility).

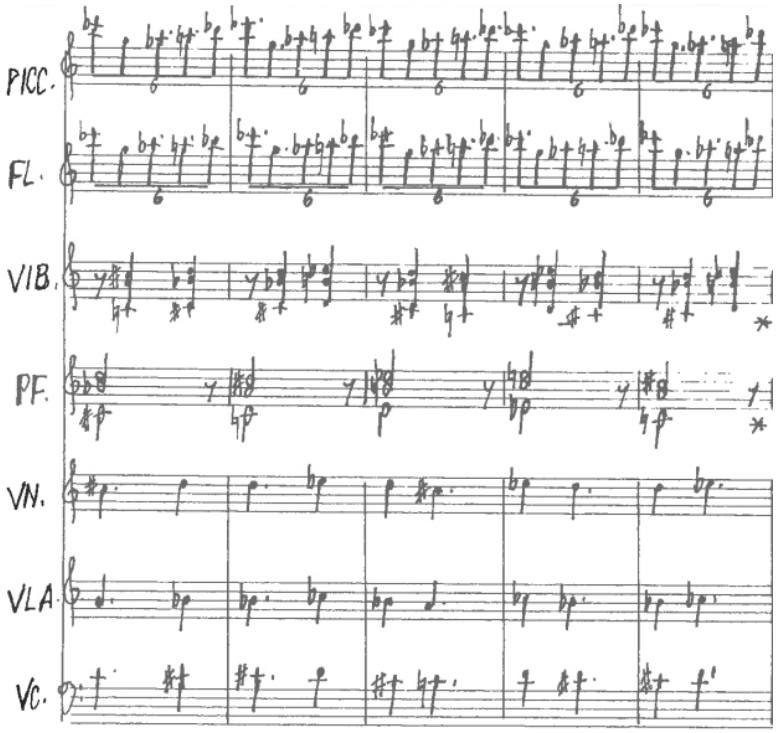


Figure 11. Morton Feldman, *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, statement 29.

These fragmentations compliment Words' description of a cubist face that belies unification. It is not unusual for Feldman to create such a visual soundscape, for his association with the Abstract Expressionist painters of the 1950s and 1960s has been well documented.[305] As Feldman said: 'The new painting made me desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed before.'[306] Moreover, Feldman's use of a 5/8 time signature as well as numerous groupings of five reflects both the fraught dialogue and fragmentation of Lily's face which Words describes as having a shard-like 'pinched' nose and 'gleam of tooth' shining from the lips (WM: 292). As Words describes the face as an 'old starlight / On the earth again' (WM: 291), he associates it not only with Croak's lost love, but also with Myra in the Whale. Drawing upon *Embers*, Lily is depicted as the rarely visible blue-tinted star, often called 'Myra the Wonderful' positioned in the centre of the constellation 'Cetus the Whale'.[307] With her pursed lips, and the reference to Myra

[305] For discussions on Feldman's interest in Abstract Expressionism see: *Music of Feldman*; *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Seán Kissane (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2011). Catherine Laws also mentions Rothko and Philip Guston in her analysis of *neither* in 'Morton Feldman's *Neither*' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, pp. 57-86.
[306] Morton Feldman in Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music: A Guide to the Understanding of Twentieth Century Music* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1963), p. 633.
[307] Beckett's interest in astronomy is documented in his 'Dream' and 'Whoroscope' notebooks as well as through Molloy's voice when he says 'Yes, I once took an interest in astronomy. I don't deny it.' (Molloy: 39) See: Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, pp. 206-10.

– a rarely seen, but beautiful star – Lily is pictorialized as lack itself as 'on this particular night' she is 'shining *coldly* down' (WM: 292, emphasis mine). She is the silent, rarely seen subject hidden in the depths of Croak's mind. As a voiceless spectre drifting along the air-waves, Lily haunts Croak and the listener with her ghostly silence. The music at this point is an agitated flute solo, played over Words' '*vain protestations*'. To create a sense of uneasiness, Feldman's score indicates a repeated five-note semitonal ascending scale for flute and piccolo; both ephemeral and shrill instruments Feldman uses to create a sense of anguish. Guy Debrock explains that 'music is not telling a story,' nor expressing a sentiment, but as a gesture it begs us and commands us to 'react in some way.'[308] Words follows this with an increasingly detailed description of Lily's face, which seems to become more lifelike as Words adds detail to his description: 'a little colour comes back into the cheeks and eyes' (WM: 293). Throughout Words' fragmented speech, Croak becomes more and more distressed at the nearness of Lily. It is as if he is pained by this imagined apparition due to the knowledge that she will always be a figment of his fading memory.

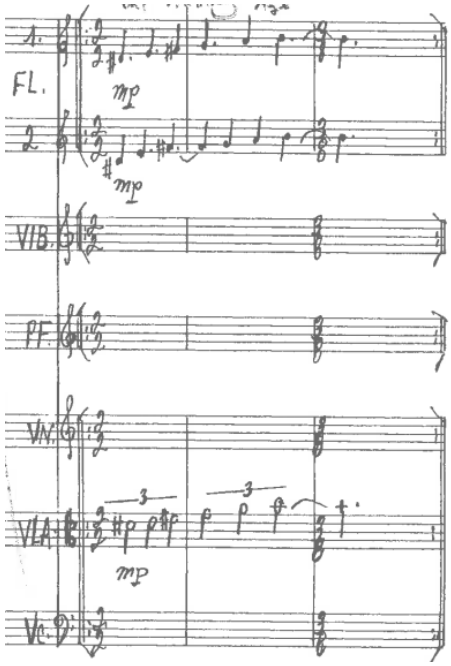
'. . . there's more . . . they're together . . . TOGETHER . . .' (Rough I: 271)

Words and Music first work together when Words recites a fourteen-line poem accompanied '*very softly*' (WM: 291) by Music for their aria. When entwined, Words and Music create a romanticised image of an old man 'Huddled o'er the ingle' (WM: 291). Using antiquated language and music suggestive of an older, more melodic tradition, both the form and content of the performance evoke age. The use of out-modish words like 'ingle' mirror the old-fashioned lexicon of an old man with greater specificity than what Music can achieve alone. Both the descriptive accoutrements of language and the direct impression of feeling created by Music momentarily come together to give an understanding of 'age'. Musically, this age aria is echoed in the final face aria (statements 25 and 30 onwards), during which symmetry is reached. Overall, the rise and fall first played by the flutes (statement 20) then vibraphone and piano (statement 22) creates a sense of offering and retraction. This mirrors the imaginary presence, but physical absence of the face.

[308] Guy Debrock, 'The Word Man and the Note Man: Morton Feldman and Beckett's Virtual Music' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, 67-82 (p. 80).

In this section, Words and Music come together more seamlessly than when they attempted to express their previous 'age' theme. After Music's '*Discreet suggestion[s] for following*' then '*More confident suggestion for following*', Words tries to sing gently and is eventually accompanied by Music who is also heard '*very softly*' (WM: 293). The following excerpts illustrate the passages where Music and Words as they are heard together for the second time.

> Then down a little way
> Through the trash
> Towards where
> All dark no begging
> No giving no words
> No sense no need
> Through the scum
> Down a little way
> To whence one glimpse
> Of that wellhead. (WM: 293-4)



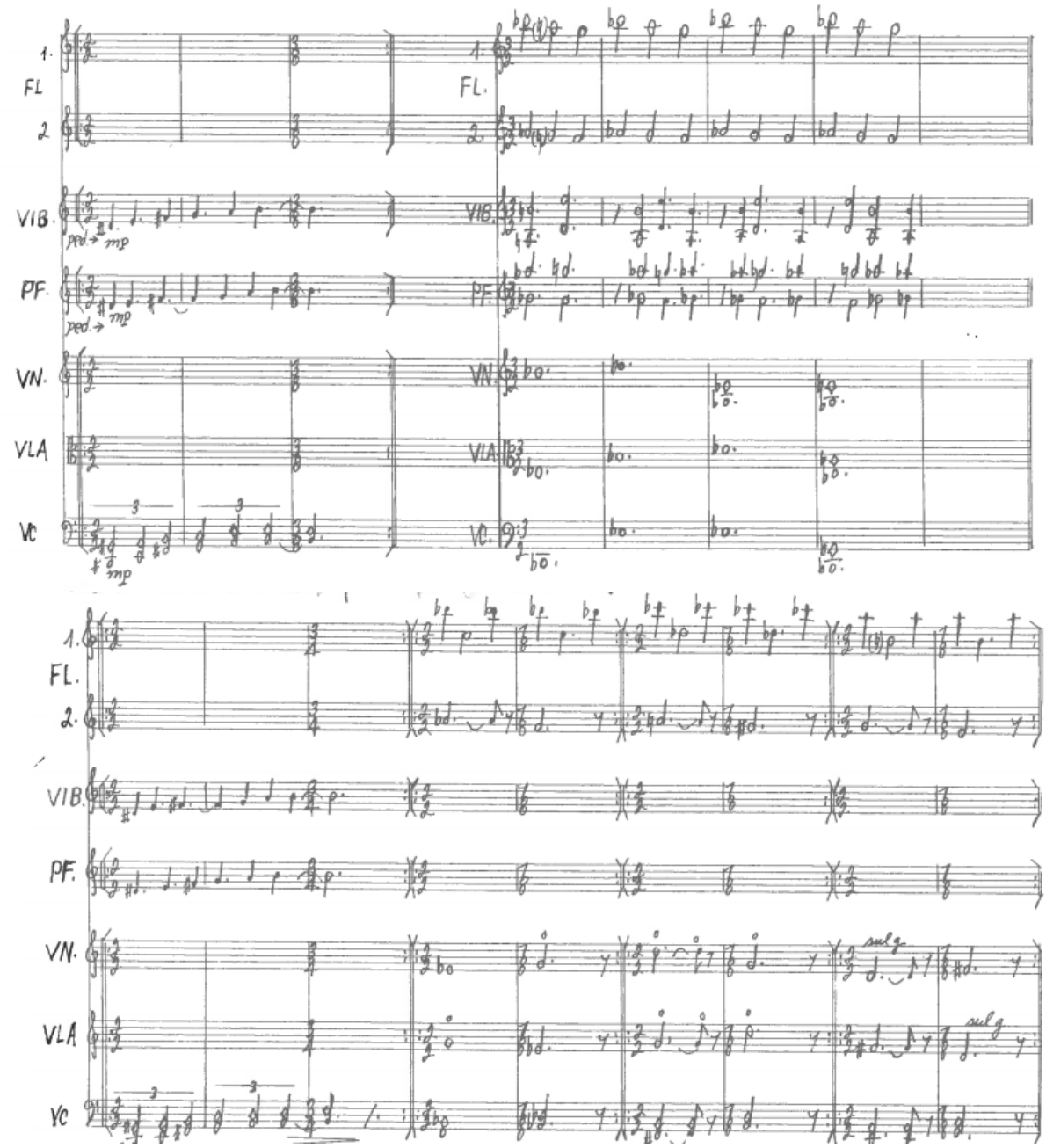


Figure 12. Morton Feldman, *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, statements 30-34.

No longer competing, but working together to arrive at the effortless state of 'no begging/No giving no words', Words and Music leave Croak '*Shocked*' (WM: 294) by their effulgent 'wellhead' of musical and poetic enjambment that is heard in the dark 'through the trash'. The music consists of allusions to statements 10 and 11 with its prominent descending three note theme (statement 32) and familiar use of rising and falling sevenths (statement 33). This familiarity as well as chromatic scalic patterns combines tonal with atonal structures. It is as if Feldman himself is trying to reconcile Words and Music by producing sounds evocative of the pursuit of coherence and structure. In response to this quasi-melodic theme, Croak drops his club before shuffling away, pausing in exhaustion and

hope that Music will console him fully. Finally, after some '*halts*' (WM: 294), Croak walks into obscurity and silence, perhaps to join a loved one, but more likely, he leaves only to return and repeat the whole process again.[309] From beginning to end, Croak's role steadily turns from autocratic dictator to passive listener. When Words and Music play together they overpower Croak, who, like Henry before him, surrenders himself to the sounds he hears, rather than trying to orchestrate them. At last, Croak is in some way comforted as he is no longer the orchestrator of his narrative and can therefore immerse himself in his purposefully crafted diversion from reality. Through the twinned effort of Music and Words, the creative process becomes self-perpetuating. For a moment, Beckett has managed to undermine the hierarchical order of narrative as the story progresses without its teller. Whilst this can be seen in a positive light as a moment of liberation where subjects are free from autocratic rulers, on the other hand, the story becomes inchoate, directionless and fragments itself as Music and Words split apart. This is perhaps a parallel for the ups and downs of collaboration, as well as a veiled comment on political instability, alluded to in the previous chapter with regards to *Watt*. As Adorno writes in his essay on *Endgame*, Beckett's characters inhabit 'the pre-established harmony of despair'.[310] In this oblique reference to Leibniz, Adorno connects Beckett's post-war worlds as cultures rebuilt on top of the shaky ground of rubble and dustbins, or in this case through the 'trash' and 'scum' (WM: 293).[311]

Musicalisation of language

Words and Music creates synonymy between language and sound not only though collaborative harmonisation, but also through Beckett's musicalisation of the word. Beckett often goes beyond the remit of onomatopoeia in his texts. Words merge into notes through their inherent musicality (like Krapp's pronunciation of 'Spoool!'; Krapp: 216) and phrasal patterning. The elongation of assonantal sounds in 'sloth,' 'love,' and 'soul' exaggerate the inherent sonority of language.[312] This word

[309] As the following chapter will discuss, the fact that there is no ultimate exhaustion in Beckett is precisely what is exhausting: 'always winter then endless winter year after year as if it couldn't end the old year never end like time could go no further' (TT: 393).
[310] Theodor Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', trans. by Michael Jones, *New German Critique*, 26 (Spring-Summer 1982), 119-150 (p. 141).
[311] In the same essay, Adorno suggests that 'Beckett's trashcans are the emblem of a culture rebuilt after Auschwitz.' Ibid., p. 143.
[312] Catharina Wulf comments that 'the predominant emphasis on vowels throughout Beckett's writings have a very rhythmic and melodious effect.' Wulf, *The Imperative of Narration: Beckett, Bernhard, Schopenhauer, Lacan* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997), p. 2.

becoming note, as well as the space Beckett allows for a musical counterpart, enabled Beckett to build his content out of a musical structure. When first reading *Words and Music*, Feldman said: 'I couldn't read it without the music.'[313] Due to the radio's magnification of the texture and timing of the voice, rather than prioritisation of a sentence's place in the narrative, Beckett's language becomes less dependent on linguistic framework and more dependent on instrumental textures. Beckett begins to draw on pitch, tone, rhythm, and texture, stressing the importance of auditory patterning rather than linguistic didacticism.

A process of trial and error unfolds as the listener follows Music and Words' attempt to connect the themes of love, age and the face to Croak's personal associations with them. As the limberness of music draws attention to the sterility of words, verbal expression is rendered pliable and transformed through its dialogue with music. In an attempt to achieve closer proximity towards Music, Words' speeches become more complex in their musical makeup. The symmetrical sentence structure that re-circles, but offers no further enlightenment or intriguing twist, follows a simple musical scale in its stylistic arc: 'Sloth is of all the passions the most powerful passion and indeed, no passion is more powerful than the passion of sloth.' (WM: 287) Beckett's use of repetition in the place of tonic notes and placement of a comma at the mid-point of the phrase, follows the pattern of a simple ascending and descending scale. In response to the lack of depth and meaning found in Words' statements, his musicality becomes complex by adopting more contemporary rather than Classical tropes. By varying the shape and contour of his sentences, Words replaces linearity with expressivity to give language a musical form with greater movement and dynamism. Meaning is in the sound itself, there is no space for anything else:

> Age is . . . age is when . . . old age I mean . . . if that is what my Lord means . . . is when . . . if you're a . . . man . . . were a man . . . huddled . . . nodding . . . the ingle . . . waiting (WM: 290)

As it inherits a monosyllabic/staccato musical style, Words' dialogue becomes less unified, but more direct. Slipping off the beat onto the off-beat, Words' form and meaning work together to dislodge

[313] Feldman in Frost, 'The Note Man on the Word Man', Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 51.

and unsettle the listener who also sits 'huddled' in a nook 'waiting' for something to happen. Language is sparser and sharper, like a note piercing the silence, the image of the word cuts through the surrounding greyness of the elliptical pause. Within this economical and purposeful soundscape; the more musical Beckett's style, the more vivid the impression created in the listener's mind. Thus as the musicality of the text increases, the image it creates comes into sharper focus. It is, therefore, music *in* Words, not Music *and* Words, that creates the clearest imaginary soundscape. Hence, it is Lily's cubist face that is the most memorable impression for both Croak and the listener. This image, however, is as mysterious as it is memorable. Whilst Words' impressionistic and indeed musical qualities are evident, the efficacy of language leave much to be desired. As a result of the futility of language in relation to music, Beckett, toe to toe with Schopenhauer in his belief in the mastery of music, dispenses with words. Accordingly, the play ends with Feldman's score and Words' non-verbal exhalation. As the conclusion to this section goes on to explain, this is not to suggest that Feldman's final bars are triumphant or in any way conclusive. Just as in *neither*, Feldman's score stops abruptly to augment the listener's incomprehension and hint at Croak's endless longing.

Conclusion: Words 'in danger, as Mauthner has shown, of being no longer needed' (Rough II: 276)

Croak's sad departure is followed by a brief exchange between Words and Music. Without Croak's intent on waging the effectiveness of Words and Music or forcing collaboration, Words is free to acknowledge Music's greater mastery of expression and does so when he implores Music to play 'Again […] Again!' (WM: 294). It seems that Music now has centre-stage and is seen as the sole provider of compassion. As Susanne Langer states:

> The real power of music lies in the fact that it can be "true" to the life of feeling in the way that language cannot […] Music is revealing, where words are obscuring, because it can have not only a content, but a transient play of contents. It can articulate feelings without becoming wedded to them.[314]

[314] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, pp. 243-4. Langer, in line with Wagner's comments on orchestral language, adds: 'Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.' Ibid., p. 235.

By the end of the play, Music's warmth and increasing harmonic consonance comfort Words and the listener, despite Feldman's characteristically stubborn avoidance of true harmonic progression.

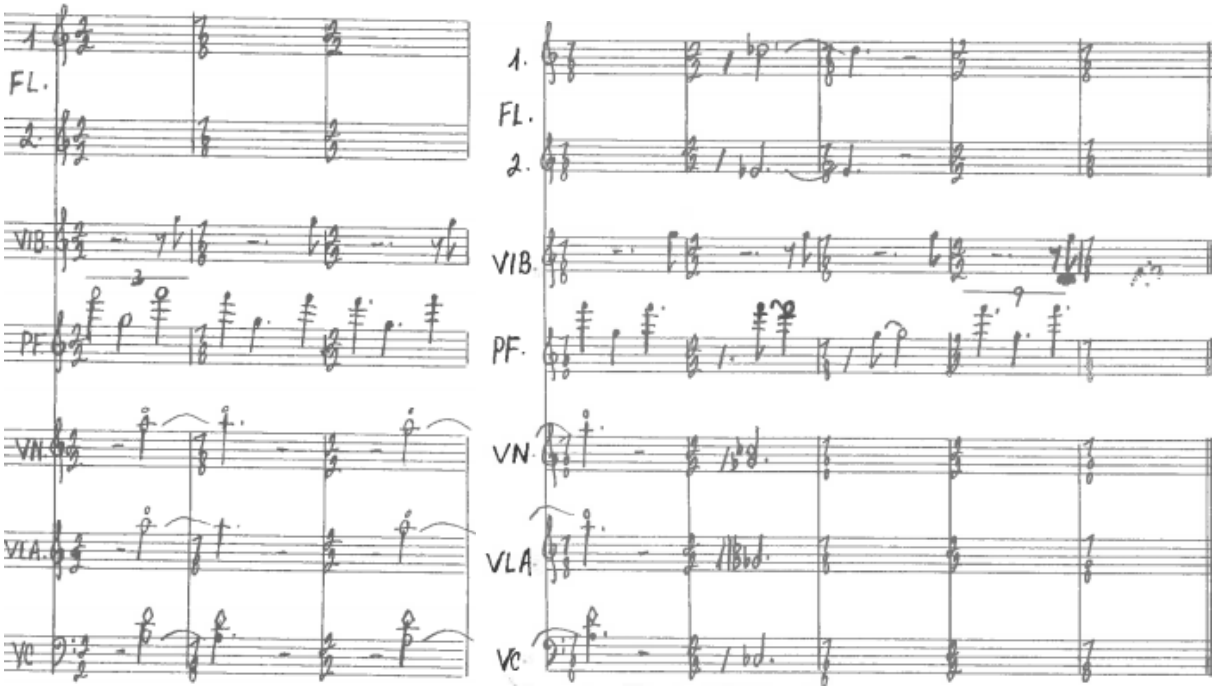


Figure 13. Morton Feldman, *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music*, statement 36.

Feldman's entire score dwells on an oscillating minor seventh. Towards the end of the play, however, this minor seventh is softened by his use of major harmonies and quick modulation through two additional transpositions of the existing melody. Although this melodic phrase can hardly be considered, in conventional means, as a hummable tune; Feldman's music attempts to 'meet Beckett half-way in the sentiment' by adopting an uncharacteristically expressive character in order to cooperate with Words.[315] In Langer's terms, it articulates feelings but does not become wedded to them. When satisfied with Music's emphatic phrase, Words writes himself out of the play as he breaths a '*Deep sigh*' (WM: 294) of gratitude, exhaustion and relinquishment. Words' departure marks Beckett's parting with language as he gives Feldman the final 'word'. This prioritisation of music over text is reinforced by Beckett who reportedly said to Adorno that *Words and Music* ends unequivocally 'with the victory of the music.'[316] This so called 'victory', however, is far from triumphant as Music seems to merely fail better than Words.

[315] Feldman in Frost, 'The Note Man and the Word Man' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 53.
[316] Adorno in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 114.

In his remarks to Everett Frost, Feldman describes Beckett as 'involved with the subject that haunts most of us.'[317] As Words and Music reveal, in their attempts to define their three subjects, the underlying theme is communication itself. As the play ends with a human sigh and Croak's slippers shuffling away into the distance, Beckett, as wordsmith, admits defeat. L. A. C. Dobrez describes the core of Beckett's world as 'a residue that is left when all that is inessential is removed, a presence so minimal as to be nothing at all yet inescapably *there*, in philosophical terms, a being-nothing.'[318] Like Croak, we are inclined to call for Words and Music, our one time 'comforts', again and again. This call is answered in *Cascando*, a sparser, almost imageless play, where the 'residue' of Beckett's storytelling voice is even fainter and resistant of resolution.

Cascando: 'no more words' (Ca: 298)

I'll try and tell myself another story, to try and calm myself. ('The Calmative': 61)

Written a month after *Words and Music*, *Cascando* is another musico-literary collaboration, this time between Beckett and Marcel Mihalovici. It was drafted by Beckett in the December of 1961, but due to Mihalovici's involvement in writing the score for an *opera buffa* entitled *Les Jumeaux*, it was not completed and broadcast on Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF) until 13 October 1963.[319] This joint enterprise emerged primarily out of friendship and mutual respect. During the late 1950s the Becketts (author Sam and his wife, pianist Suzanne) befriended the Mihalovicis (composer Marcel and his wife, pianist Monique). Of Beckett, Mihalovici said that he is 'a remarkable musician' who 'possesses an astonishing musical intuition' that influenced his composition.[320] Beckett, in a characteristically more moderate manner, said of Mihalovici: 'some of his work is very fine'.[321] Out of this shared appreciation *Cascando* was written.

[317] Feldman in Frost, 'The Note Man and the Word Man' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 50.
[318] L. A. C. Dobrez, *The Existential and its Exits: Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on the Works of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 63.
[319] It was first broadcast in English (Beckett's translation) on the BBC Third on 6 October 1964. This recording was produced and directed by Donald McWhinnie with Denys Hawthorne as Opener and Patrick Magee as Voice. It is the BBC recording this discussion uses.
[320] Marcel Mihalovici, 'My Collaboration with Samuel Beckett' in *Beckett at Sixty*, ed. by John Calder (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), 20-22 (p. 20).
[321] Beckett in a letter to MacGreevy dated 10 April 1959 in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 468. Beckett's interest in Mihalovici's work is evident in his notes where he writes a brief biography as well as a list of his compositions. UoR JEK A/5/7 (*Cascando*).

In a letter to Clas Zilliacus dated 12 March 1974, Mihalovici wrote: 'The idea for *Cascando* comes from Beckett himself, but the initiative to write a radiophonic piece with my friend was mine.'[322] This idea is concerned with a familiar Beckettian theme: the search to put an end to language, yet all the while tell a story. With three characters: Opener, Voice, and Music; *Cascando* presents a fragmented mind that, due to its very incoherency, represents the impasse of attempting to tell a story whilst searching to end all stories. Whilst Voice attempts to create an image of a man (Woburn) lost at sea and finish his story, Music interrupts and fragments Voice's narrative. Opener, like Croak in *Words and Music*, attempts to combine Voice and Music to create a more harmonious, rounded story. Within this dynamic, *Cascando* explores the fear of telling a story in the wrong way and ending it in the wrong place. As expected, despite the three characters speaking in unison 'as though they had linked their arms' (Ca: 303), *Cascando* lacks closure, allegorised by Woburn who drifts out to sea. Rosemary Pountney states that in *Cascando* a 'compulsion to tell stories is present, combined with a longing for freedom'.[323] As these tensions are certainly present throughout the play; how this compulsion manifests itself and the effect it has on Beckett's creative process will be the focus of this discussion.

Beckett described *Cascando* as 'an unimportant work' that shows 'what passes for [his] mind and what passes for its work.'[324] Despite Beckett's disregard for this work, *Cascando* is a key text for understanding his relationship with music and radio technologies, and what Anna McMullan calls the evocation of characters in 'sonic terms'.[325] What these 'sonic terms' are and how they affect the narrative of the play help to understand Beckett's attitude towards the creative process. Considering the weight behind what these 'sonic terms' impose, Vivian Mercier's reading of *Cascando* as an 'invisible opera' falls short of explaining the musical and imaginary complexity of the piece.[326] Mary Bryden, on the other hand, alerts sensitive listeners to the 'multiple auditory layers' at play between

[322] Mihalovici, 'My Collaboration with Beckett' in Calder, *Beckett at Sixty*, p. 20.
[323] Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows*, p. 64.
[324] Beckett in ibid., p. 120.
[325] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, p. 76.
[326] Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett*, p. 183.

the words and music as well as between Beckett and his collaborator.[327] Such multiplicity creates an auditory palimpsest of fragmentary and conflicting exchanges that defy linearity and consolidation. Thus in creating auditory impressions, Mihalovici's composition is equally as important as Beckett's text.[328] Any analysis of the 'sonic terms' of this text must, therefore, include an analysis of Mihalovici's composition.

Mihalovici's score is for flute, clarinets, piano, celesta, harp, percussion (two musicians play the cymbal, tam-tam, gong, wood block, tambourine, triangle, three Chinese blocks, xylophone, marimba), first and second violin, alto, and cello. From this percussion-heavy instrumentalisation, it is clear that Mihalovici was not interested in conveying grand ideas through complex melodies, but, like Feldman, had a keen ear for the sound world each instrument evoked when played separately and in unison. When combined with Beckett's text, this entire sound world finds its parallel in Leibniz's Monadology.

Cascando's Monadology

Voice, Music and Opener are analogous to Leibniz's simile in which the perception of a physical object is likened to the distant roar of the surf. They are disparate particles intended, but finding it impossible, to create a single wave of sound. As Benson Mates explains: 'the rushing, roaring noise, according to [Leibniz], is a confused composite of innumerable small noises produced by the individual waves.'[329] As each (radio)wave is transmitted by a 'confused composite' of Voice, Music and Opener, the listener hears a torrent of 'innumerable small noises' for each individual wave of sound.[330] Opener seems to occupy (at least initially) this God-like position, as he attempts to order Voice and Music by 'opening' and 'closing' them. Bertrand Russell explains that in Leibniz, 'only one original miracle was required to start all the clocks'.[331] Here, Opener provides that kick-start

[327] Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 28.
[328] Everett Frost acknowledges the importance of Music's role when he relays how it 'augments, follows, and counterpoints Voice's monologue with a "monologue" (in musical form) of its own. It restates (or, at the end, anticipates and sets the pattern for) Voice in another, more abstract, language, but it does not have a name and does not take up a part in the dialogue'. Frost, 'Fundamental Sounds', p. 371. The fact that Music does not feature in the 'text' alludes to music's ungraspable, ineffable quality that haunted Henry in *Embers*. This does not imply, however, that Music merely 'provides a musical narrative that echoes that of Voice', as suggested by Tom Vandevelde in '"I OPEN" Narration in Samuel Beckett's *Cascando'*, *SBTA*, 25.1 (2013), 253-265 (p. 261).
[329] Benson Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 41.
[330] This relates to Henry's struggle to drown out this roar and his attempts to produce and control specific sounds, such as hooves and thuds.
[331] Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Leibniz with an Introduction by John G. Slater* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 137.

which propels Voice and Music for the rest of the play.[332] A formulaic pattern, however, does not ensue. Though the relationship between Voice, Music and Opener is interrelated, it is not interdependent. As monads, to quote Russell again, Voice and Music have 'no real interaction, but the appearance of it results from the pre-established harmony.'[333] When Opener's autonomy is undermined, Voice and Music's chaotic interaction is unearthed. Beckett replaces Leibniz's categories for perfection (variety and orderliness), with a Modernist mood of repetitiveness and disorder. Beckett has tinkered with Leibniz's system, bringing it into the twentieth-century aesthetic: Voice lacks continuity (he cannot tell his story) and Music lacks harmony (Mihalovici's score is often discordant), and neither submit entirely to Opener's attempts to reinforce an unwavering pre-established harmony.

Like *Embers*, *Cascando* is concerned with a solitary figure trying to tell a story about a man lost at sea. Voice's tone is hurried and even more disordered than Henry's as he speaks in a '*Low, panting*' (Ca: 297) manner. Both Voice's character and way of speaking is closely related to Beckett's original title for the play: *Calando.* A musical term meaning 'diminishing in tone' (equivalent to diminuendo or decrescendo), 'calando' was changed when Beckett learned that 'calendos' was slang for camembert in French. So as not to lose the implied muteness in the original title, *Cascando* ('cascades') is suggestive of both decrescendo and rallentando.[334] True to its title, *Cascando* is a story that has lost its sense of shape and ebbs out of existence. Beginning in 'the month of May . . . *for me* [Opener]', *Cascando* seems to take place at different times, depending on who is speaking. For instance, contrary to Opener's Chaucerian springtime genesis, Voice's first words are in search of an ending: '– story . . . if you could finish it . . .' Such disarray is augmented by Beckett's insertion of Mihalovici's score which splices any continuity in Voice's narrative and usurps Opener's direction. Furthermore, the name Woburn – whose image Voice attempts to relay – is suggestive of a sorrow (woe) which lingers and intensifies leaving behind a burnt-out ember (burn). Thus despite beginning

[332] In an Occasionalist vein, Leibniz adds: 'Thus God alone constitutes the relation or communication between substances. It is through him that the phenomena of the one meet and accord with the phenomena of the others, so that there may be a reality in our perceptions.' Leibniz, *Metaphysics & Monadology*, p. 39.
[333] Ibid.
[334] See: Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 574.

in the month of May, *Cascando* is an ashen, timeworn attempt to tell a woeful story. Following on from Henry's irritated pleading to Ada in *Embers* to: 'Drive on, drive on! Why do people always stop in the middle of what they are saying?' (E: 262), Voice says to himself: '…finish this one…it's the right one…then rest' (Ca: 297). The struggle for both Henry and Voice in these radio plays is telling their Bolton/Woburn story. Music, contrary to what is expected, mirrors Beckett's inverted Monadology as it does not alleviate this burden, but acts as a catalyst that propels their frenzied interaction. Whilst Opener may seem to occupy the position of the Dominant Monad by setting up the 'interaction' between Voice and Music, contrary to what is expected, Music mirrors Beckett's inverted Monadology as it does not alleviate the burden of storytelling, but acts as a catalyst that propels a frenzied, rather than cooperative, exchange.

Opener's narrative weakness

Like Henry and Croak, Opener acts as a God-like Dominant Monad as he tries to orchestrate each subject in his restless mind. His position as the central sensorium for which Voice and Music stand in the role of subordinate organs is overturned as Voice and Music disregard him to become entirely independent and self-sufficient monads.[335] This is made clear when Opener confesses:

> What do I open? / They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head. / They don't see me, they don't see what I do, they don't see what I do, they don't see what I / have, and they say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head. / I don't protest any more, I don't say any more, / There is nothing in my head. / I don't answer any more. / I open and close. (Ca: 299-300)

Here, Voice and Music, who were once held within Opener's mind, break the chains that shackled them to their pre-established harmony.[336] Opener's defeatist speech is followed by Woburn's descent. In his next monologue, Voice describes Woburn as a Pim-like figure, face down in the mud. Rather than looking up to face the Heavens, Woburn's 'head [is] sunk' 'in the sand' and, despite trying to get up 'on his feet', his 'huge bulk' is 'jammed down' as he falls 'knee-deep' into the sea (Ca: 299). Voice despairs at his inability to convey a clear impression of Woburn:

[335] Beckett wrote in his 'Philosophical Notes' that 'Each monad is, with reference to the rest, perfectly independent' in *Beckett/Philosophy*, ed. by Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani (Germany: ibidem Press, 2015), p. 194.
[336] Later in the play, Opener is left feeling utterly deflated. In words similar to the Unnamable's he says: 'I'm afraid to open / But I must open. / So I open.' (Ca: 302)

> – Lights . . . of the land . . . the sky . . . he need only . . . lift his head . . . his eyes . . .
> he'd see them . . . shine on him . . . but no . . . he –
> [*Silence.*] (Ca: 300)

In his repeated attempt to lift himself out of the mud, Woburn's story can be seen in light of the myth of Sisyphus. In Beckett's retelling of the myth, Woburn is made to bear a 'ton weight' (Ca: 299) which prevents him from seeing the beacons of hope shining above him. Woburn's story never reaches its summit because Music, as the inestimable weight, prevents Voice from finishing his story.

Music and Voice: characters in competition

Before being cut off for the first time by Opener, Voice begins *in medias res* by telling us that he has managed to finish 'thousands' of stories, but struggles to introduce this 'different' story about Woburn; a character in the 'same old coat' somewhere 'right the sea', 'left the hill' (Ca: 297). Voice states that an immeasurable amount of time has passed ('five years later . . . ten . . . I don't know') with 'a few misfortunes', before 'earth darkening'. At this early stage, when Opener interrupts Voice, his words obediently cease before Opener authoritatively says 'I close'. After Music's 22 bar interlude, Opener, in a sterner voice repeats 'And I close'. Music, however, emits a final high-pitched G mid-triplet on the flute, after Opener has finished speaking.

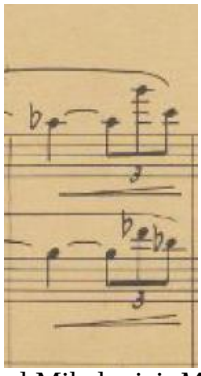


Figure 14. Marcel Mihalovici, *Musical Score for Cascando*, bar 22.

Music's act of rebellion undermines the pre-established order, set out by Opener, and adds a note of uncertainty over what is to come. Music does not, as Ruby Cohn suggests it does, function 'like background music'.[337] Music is not a supporting prop; as a character it is unpredictable and autonomous.

[337] Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 272. Kevin Branigan also disagrees with Cohn by saying that music is 'not intended as accompaniment for Voice's text. Neither is it programmatic music.' Branigan, *Radio Beckett*, p. 219.

In each of the eight sections where Voice and Music are heard together, Voice struggles, signified by the caesuras, aposiopesis, and anaphoric repetition of 'come on' (Ca: 298), to tell Woburn's story. This story maps out Woburn's fall, 'face in the mud', attempt to get up, and dragging 'out to sea' (Ca: 302), leaving the listener with the image of Woburn clinging on 'in the dark'. Voice's desperation is mirrored in Woburn's, whose plight Voice tries to relate. Each time Voice nears his conclusion however, Music distends and fragments his story, forcing Woburn and Voice back into their hellish quagmire. This happens a total of eight times, a symbol connoting infinity.[338]

As he delves deep into the base of his memory, described in Platonic terms as 'a cave' (Ca: 298), Voice hopes for enlightenment and resolution, but Woburn's tale is a tragic one and Voice must describe another unhappy scene: 'no more trees . . . no more bank'. In this fragment, Voice describes Woburn's return home to Ireland (implied in the word 'boreen') after a considerable absence. With 'not a soul', Voice, saddened for Woburn, stops. After a brief silence, Music echoes this entropic feeling and adds a sinister series of harsh jabbing sounds created by the strings. As Voice is about to finish his story, at bar 53 Music disrupts his hard-earned continuity with an eerie sextuplet of high pitched notes played on the célestia, followed by a pair of two off-beat quavers played by the strings.

[338] Lois Overbeck alludes to another instance of Beckett's interest in infinity, explaining: 'In a 1981 unpublished typescript, tentatively entitled "The Way", the infinity sign recurs, first as a figure eight then placed horizontally.' Overbeck, '"Getting On": Ritual as Façon in Beckett's Plays' in *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Katherine H. Burkman (London; Toronto: Associated University Press, 1987), 21-27 (p. 25).

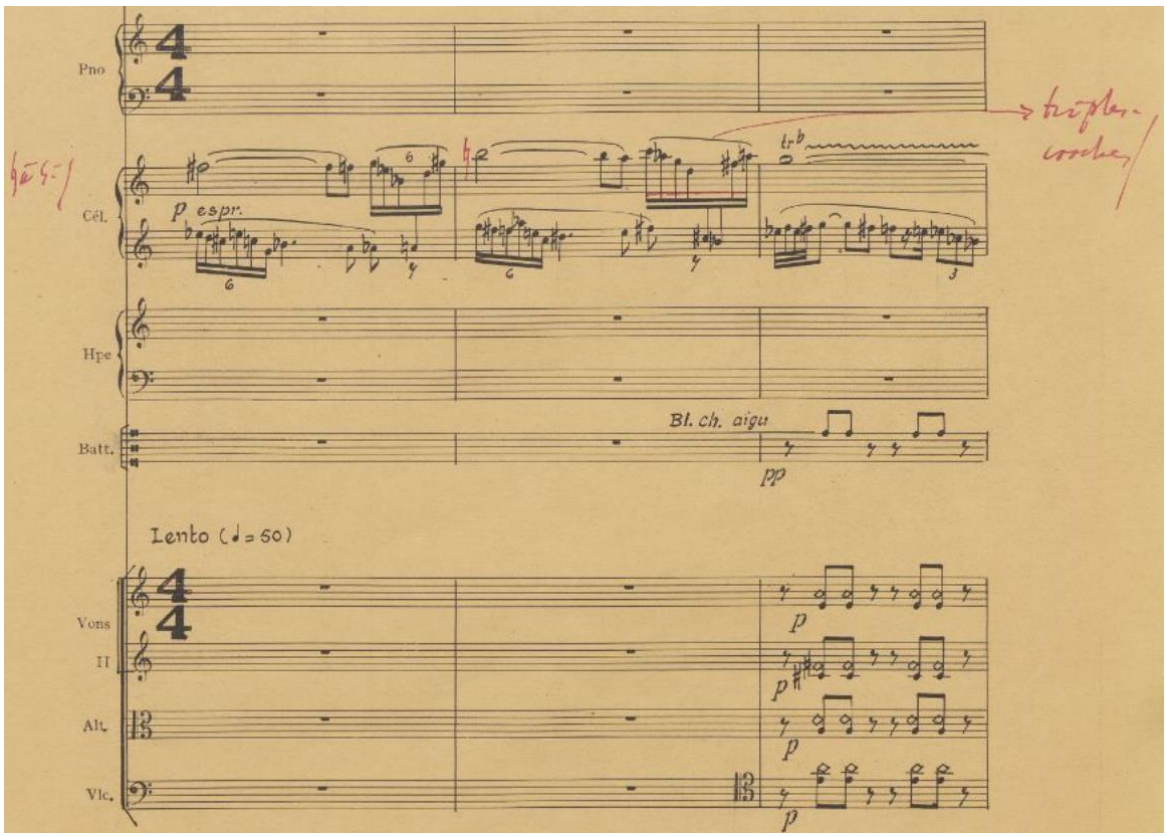
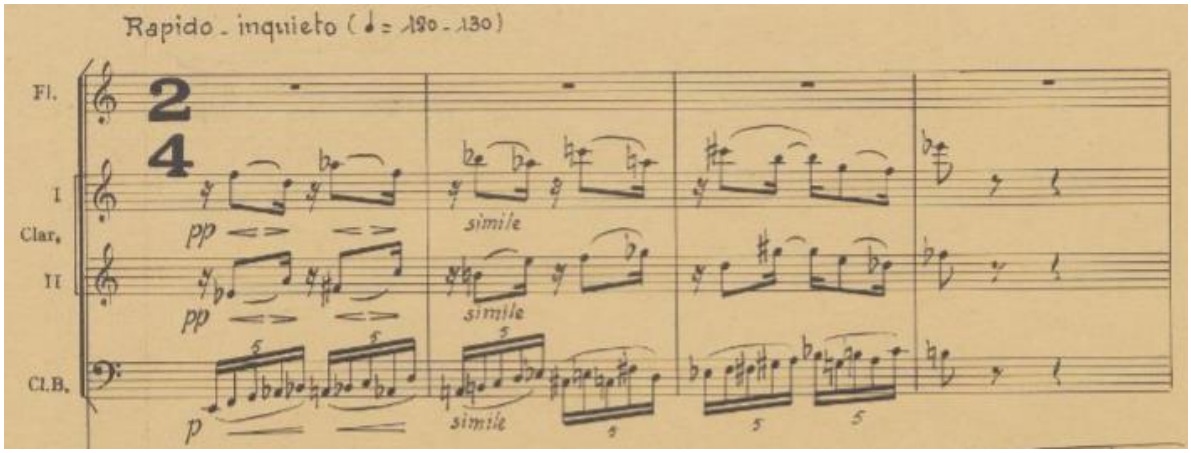


Figure 15. Marcel Mihalovici, *Musical Score for Cascando*, bars 53-55.

As Music progresses, woodblocks are added, strings are plucked instead of bowed and a bass clarinet warbles, becoming even more sinister and discordant. When Voice and Music then play together, Music's part, just like Voice's staccato-like speech, sounds as if pieces of the score are missing for the phrases don't connect and each section is frantically repeated.



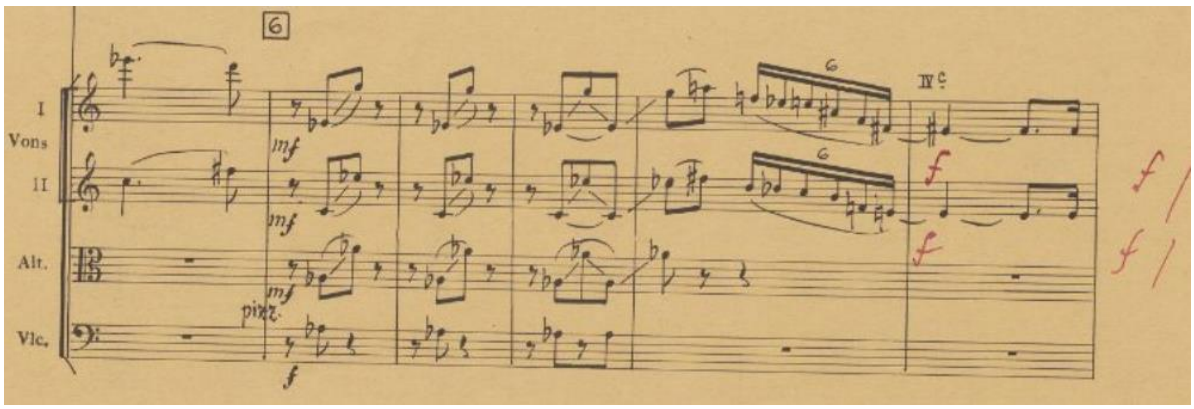


Figure 16. Marcel Mihalovici, *Musical Score for Cascando*, bars 65-74.

In the extracts above, a series of scalic quintuplets on the bass clarinet provide the backdrop for the off-beat quaver and semiquaver pairings and foreshadow discordant glissandoing violins; all hinting at a manic, scrambling mind. As Voice's incomplete story has to sit on top of this unstable ground, the listener is filled with even less hope that Woburn's story will be formed, let alone reach its conclusion. The twinned effort of Voice and Music, therefore, is never as detailed or coherent as their separate monologues. As a result, fond memories of time spent in the Irish countryside are splintered and prevented from surfacing, as seen in their ellipses and rests. Opener declares he is 'afraid to open' (Ca: 302) and fails to orchestrate Voice and Music. Without a steadying Opener to conduct Music and Voice, this daemonic operatic-duo are disruptive rather than conciliatory. They inhabit a Leibnizian world of monads whose all-seeing, all-knowing Dominant Monad (Opener) has, like Woburn, been drowned out. When Voice and Music are heard together, their points do not connect, or 'agree' as Zilliacus puts it.[339] Their sporadic structure creates a cacophony of incoherency in which any particularisation is rendered indecipherable. Perhaps *Cascando* does not, as Ruby Cohn believes, close 'on harmony between Voice and Music'.[340] Instead, when Voice and Music play together we are plunged into radiospace where a multitude of sound waves freely flow, collide and split apart. As seen in the following excerpt, the sonic terms of this play are disproportioned and unevenly weighted to produce discordance and disarray.

[339] Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 136.
[340] Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 273.

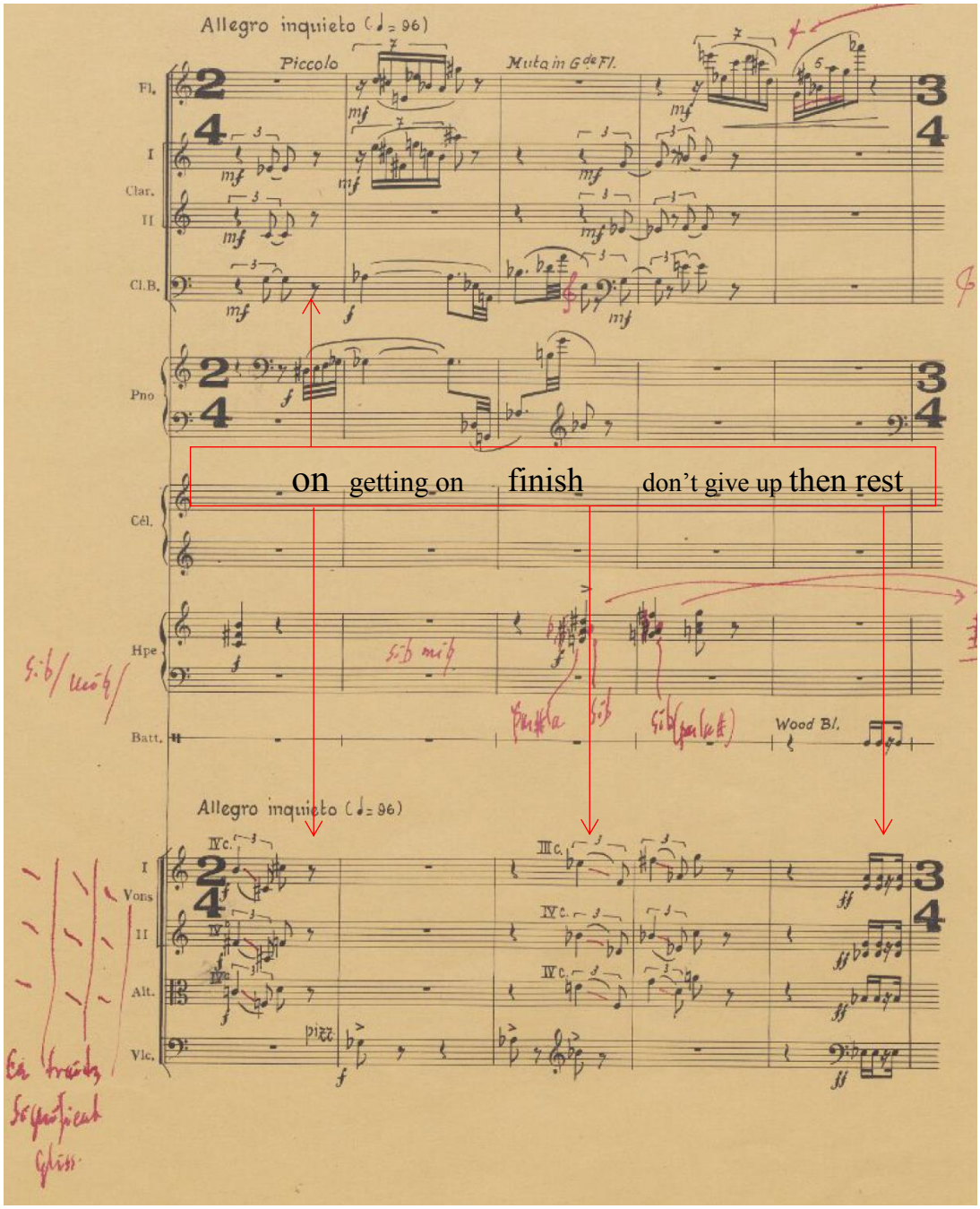


Figure 17. Marcel Mihalovici, *Musical Score for Cascando*, bars 25-29.

From this diagram it is evident that Voice and Music are at odds. *Cascando* exposes the furore of the fragment against the comparatively old-fashioned, tonal and melodious styles. When Voice says 'on', Music is slow to start, but when Voice says 'finish', Music mocks Voice with a glissando (as shown by the arrows in the diagram above).[341] Voice must constantly appease Music, but this compromise comes to no avail as when Voice says 'rest', Music plays three semi-quavers marked *ff*. This represents the chaos and organicism of the creative process, which, particularly in the twentieth-

[341] Please note that the size of the text corresponds with the stress of the word as spoken.

century, resisted wholeness and completion. As a result of this multiform structure, we feel a sense of dismay at our lack of immediate comprehension. Both radio and we, as listeners or openers, are in a continual state of flux. As Anna McMullan says, Beckett uses *Cascando* 'as an experimental laboratory for composition' as he tests the possibilities of language and music.[342] The results of these lab tests suggest that contrary to a Schopenhaurean belief in the quasi-spiritual supremacy of music that can be seen at the end of *Words and Music*, what predominates here is the self-conscious difficulty in presenting the ideas and characters of a story. *Cascando*'s expression of this difficulty mirrors the techniques used by atonal composers rather than the elaborate themes expressed in German Romantic symphonic pieces. From *Words and Music* to *Cascando*, one can sense a shift in Beckett's creative process from musical gratification towards an expression of the tension behind composition, narration and ending.

Beckett's atonal Monadology

Towards the end of the play, Opener, Voice and Music operate as individual monads circling in disarray.[343] This creates the text's layered effect for each monad is: 'a centre or point which, though itself simple, is the locus of an infinity of angles formed by the lines which intersect at it'.[344] From Leibiniz's definition of a monad, *Cascando*'s cubist, anti-figurative style could equally be seen as similar to atonal composition.[345] Beckett follows the ethos behind Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique to express his own despair at the condition of storytelling. When Schoenberg decided to abandon tonality and communicate his principles of Expressionism (captured in the prefatory quote to this chapter), he aimed to demonstrate that music had to continually evolve. For this continuous flux to be effective in representing the despair of Europe in the build up to two consecutive world wars, each note of the chromatic scale was used to accomplish the simultaneous movement of differing melodies. Within this angular and purposely disorientating framework, dissonances were

[342] Here, McMullan is also speaking of 'Rough for Radio I'. McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, p. 77.
[343] Benson Mates explains: 'Although each monad 'mirrors' all the others, there is no casual interaction among them – "they have no windows."' Mates, *Philosophy of Leibniz*, pp. 39-40.
[344] Leibniz in Rescher, *Philosophy of Leibniz*, p. 90.
[345] Daniel Albright states that 'the purpose of the twentieth-century composer seems to be to *think*, to provide transcendental philosophy with fretful and opaque analogues in sound.' Albright, *Modernism and Music*, p. 5.

emancipated from having to be resolved and turned into consonances. Accordingly, by the end of the play Voice speaks in a mode akin to Schoenberg's highly structured system of tonal relationships:

> – this time . . . it's the right one . . . finish . . . no more stories . . . sleep . . . we're there . . . nearly . . . just a few more . . . don't let go . . . Woburn . . . he clings on . . . come on . . . come on – (Ca: 304)

To demonstrate Voice's atonality, exactly twelve pitches are played with equal importance and 'no tone is repeated […] until the other eleven have been used in proper order, so that no tone is emphasised or made to sound like a tonic.'[346] This structure shares similarities to Leibniz's Monadology if the pre-established harmony (tonal system) is removed. Leibniz explained that 'monads alone do not make up a continuum, since, in and of themselves, they lack all connection, and each monad is, as it were, a world apart.'[347] Following this dictum, Beckett offers no coherency or conclusion for Voice's story and *Cascando* itself is cut off mid-stream with an inconclusive invocation to continue: 'come on –' (Ca: 304) as its final words. Furthermore, *Cascando*'s ambiguity is created out of the conflict between the different elements within the play. Voice's ability to tell one understandable story is undermined by the multiple narratives at work at the same time. According to Everett Frost, four narratives are interwoven in the play: 'the melodic and thematic development of the music, and the three verbal narratives: Opener's insistences; Voice's objective; and the Woburn story Voice tells to achieve it.'[348] Whenever these narratives draw together, as Opener seems to be encouraging towards the end of the play, each becomes unfathomable and disparate. Thus as one finds when reading *The Trilogy*, *Cascando* works toward what Maurice Blanchot called 'perpetual unworkableness'.[349] Consequently, *Cascando* is without a fixed shape; its amorphousness simultaneously negates and affirms its being as Voice and Music work against each other in order to convey their struggle to express.

Final failings: ending out of reach

[346] Jean Ferris, *Music: The Art of Listening*, 6th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), p. 310.
[347] Leibniz, 'From the Letters to Des Bosses (1712-16)' in *G. W. Leibniz Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indeanopolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 197-206 (p. 206)
[348] Frost, '"The Sound is Enough": Beckett's Radio Plays', p. 260.
[349] Maurice Blanchot, 'Where Now? Who Now?' in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince (London: Longman, 2000), 93-98 (p. 97).

As this exploration of Beckett's collaborative radio plays has shown, in terms of Beckett's writing, the month between *Cascando* and *Words and Music* marks a great stylistic shift. Whereas *Words and Music* deals with the limits of language and music, *Cascando* deals with the shortcomings of the creative process itself.[350] In the earlier play Words begs for Music to play its consolatory melodies 'Again!' (WM: 294). After some '*Imploring*' Words is satisfied, even comforted, by music, as shown by his '*Deep sigh*' of relief that ends the play. In *Cascando*, however, echoes of the Unnamable's struggle to go on can be heard in the stammering cacophony of Voice and Music who are heard splitting apart in the final lines of the play:

> – this time . . . it's the right one . . . finish . . . no more stories . . . sleep . . . we're there . . . nearly . . .
> ……..
> just a few more . . . don't let go . . . Woburn . . . he clings on . . . come on . . . come on -
> ……..
> [*Silence*]
> CURTAIN (Ca: 304)

The battle between word and note is ongoing and, as a result, neither can finish their story or convey an image of Woburn. Due to the conflict between Voice and Music, storytelling is sacrificed and Woburn is an indistinguishable subject lost to the silence that surrounds him. Like Croak in *Words and Music*, Opener is pushed to the margins of the text. Here Opener '*Fervently*' shouts 'Good!' (Ca: 301) before Voice and Music begin their final tirade. By contrast, Croak drops his club and dejectedly shuffles off stage. Music then serenades Words suggesting that the rivalry has subsided as Music becomes the sole comforter. In *Cascando*, however, the affray between Voice and Music persists; there is no gratifying sigh, only a confused loop of unfinished sounds that leave an incomplete story in their wake. As they have reached the point of incoherency, Voice and Music simply judder to a halt. Like Music in *Words and Music* and as Mihalovici intended, Music is a character who overshadows Opener and finally deserts Voice who desperately utters 'come on . . . come on' alone.[351]

[350] In his review of *Cascando* William Kraft stated: 'The character Woburn is trying to reach a destination – "the island" – which might be either the completion of the story or, more likely, of the process of creation, for which *Cascando* might be seen as an analogy.' William Kraft, *Beckett and Music: A Composer's View* (UoR MS784488-1001, p. 8).

[351] Mihalovici remarked: 'For *Cascando* . . . it was not a matter of a musical commentary on the text but of creating, by musical means, a third character, so to speak, who sometimes intervenes alone, sometimes along with the narrator, without however merely being the accompaniment for him.' Mihalovici in Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett*, p. 153.

This time the imploring words are left unanswered. Music cuts itself short and leaves Voice to struggle alone, as seen in the ellipsis followed by the true or real silence (as The Unnamable would put it) that extinguishes further words.[352] This struggle is made worse by the fact that Voice is continually trying to rid himself of anecdotal content and strive towards the fundamental quality of Music. As Zilliacus explains, the more Voice imitates Music, the more it 'moves away from the figurative and is actualised as *soi*.'[353] This must not be confused, however, with greater synthesis or harmonisation for when Voice and Music are heard together, their points do not connect. Their atonal structure creates a cacophony of incoherency in which any particularisation is rendered indecipherable. Despite Opener's brief authoritativeness when he asserts 'I open both' (Ca: 301), *Cascando* does not end neatly or conclusively. Voice declares 'all false'; Woburn is 'elsewhere' (Ca: 302), 'lights gone' (Ca: 303), sucked out by the sea 'heading nowhere' (Ca: 302); and Music disconcertingly trills off into the ether. Even when Voice says: 'I've got him' (Ca: 301), he sounds strained and uncertain, conative of desperation rather than resolution. Beckett's purposefully inconclusive ending bespeaks the play's monadic-rhizoid nature. The following passage from Leibniz visualises Beckett's multiplicity, evident in his musical approach to storytelling:

> The variety is infinite. It is almost like the confused murmuring which is heard by those who approach the shore of a sea. It comes from the continual beatings of innumerable waves. If now, out of many perceptions which do not all fit together to make one, no particular one perception surpasses the others, and if they make impressions about equally strong or equally capable of holding the attention of the soul, they can be perceived only confusedly.[354]

By the end of the play, Opener has lost control over the sounds in his head and becomes subsumed by the rising swell of Voice and Music. The listener shares Opener's despair and confusion amidst *Cascando*'s chaotic tumult of radio waves as Voice, Music and Opener create an awkward enjambment of word and note in their ambiguous soundscape. As a result, Woburn can only be perceived 'confusedly'.

[352] This musical act of offering and retraction is a pattern that recurs in Beckett's teleplays *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*, discussed subsequently.
[353] Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p. 136.
[354] Leibniz, *Metaphysics & Monadology*, p. 41.

Lastly, the competition between Voice and Music ends in a mutual recognition of the other's failings. As Erik Tonning explains in his Leibnizian reading of Beckett's late theatre, the continuous 'discovery of new refractions' of each monad (here, Music and Voice) gives rise to two kinds of experience:

> The first is the frustration […] of an endless, and endlessly fruitless, search for "company" of any kind. The second is the ever-expanding sense, evoked by these frustrations, of porousness and uncertainty of the "self", since there is no way of defining its limits vis-à-vis the All.[355]

Ultimately, what Beckett gives his listeners is an accumulation of paradoxes within Voice and Music's fragmented sounds. Fundamentally, music does not absolve the tensions of the ineffable, but augments the problem of expression by having either a fragmentary or diffuse effect. This is not to say that Music is omnipotent for, though the text becomes increasingly terse and minimal, the word does not disappear. Even with Music as such a strong 'voice', the word remains.[356] Where words and music do battle, neither win but both re-emerge as fragments of their original selves: both are made to realise, confront and struggle with their limitations. Unlike the end of *Words and Music*, neither act in a consolatory or emancipatory fashion as they both struggle on. This gives the listener, in Leibnizian terms, the impossible role of playing God as we must harmonise the parts in order to make sense of the whole. If God is the true, immediate object of our knowledge, in *Cascando*, we (as the ones who make sense of the disparate waves of transmission) are the immediate object of our knowledge. What we listen to, in a helplessly solipsistic fashion, is our own struggle to comprehend our own story and view it with objective omniscience. This is suggested by Opener who says: 'They say it's in his head' (Ca: 299). Moreover, when Opener says 'And I close' (Ca: 297) the 'I' is not only related to the self, but also acts as an attempt to create a windowless world, encouraging the listener to close their own eyes and delve deeper into their subconscious memories. This uncomfortable realisation is brought about by Beckett's considered use of music. What we hear as

[355] Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 222.
[356] James Eliopulos states: 'Beckett's use of language is designed to devalue language as vehicle for conceptual thought, his continued use of language must, paradoxically, be regarded as an attempt to communicate the incommunicable.' Eliopulos, *Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 9.

we sit in the comfort of our echo(ing) chambers is the song of ourselves.[357] *We* become the meaning of the incomplete story and must reconcile this dissatisfying anti-climax internally as the universal soundscape becomes a disarming skullscape.

Conclusion

Beckett's radio plays use language at the point where language as we know it is no longer possible. Beckett then inserts music to open out the communicative functions he deems language incapable of. As this chapter has illustrated, contrary to Schopenhauer's idealisation of music, that, due to Beckett's fondness for the philosopher, numerous critics sign-up to, music is not always capable of saying the ineffable; often, it adds to the confusion Beckett's subjects are trying to escape from. Both Beckett's musicalized language and music itself find difficulty in moving towards the conclusion of a story and muddy, rather than clarify, the soundscape. As a result, Leibniz's utopia is eventually inverted. In these works, Beckett demonstrates that music either expresses itself as part of his 'syntax of weakness' (*Embers*), exposes the impossibility of transparent communication through language (*Words and Music*), or manifests into a disruptive force (*Cascando*).[358] The endless fluctuation of progressive and regressive word-flow within repetitive structures (seen in Henry's revisions of his story, Words' redoing of his poem, and Voice's repetition of the fragments of his story) suggests that the process of telling a story is never-ending. In order to appreciate the central contradiction that belies music as a means of communication – that the greatest abstraction yields the greatest truth – Beckett's text emulates music's isomorphism. His move towards a compositional style, therefore, is accompanied by a negation of referentiality which causes the obfuscation of semantics and breaks down the rule of cause and effect. The plays mirror the makeup of Leibniz's Monadology wherein 'Every portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fish. But every branch of a plant, every member of an animal, and every drop of the fluids within it, is also

[357] Radio is the ideal medium to present the intensely private world of a character. Steven Matthews argues that the radio medium confers 'a kind of co-creativity between audience and artist, one in which listening in to oneself, listening in to the tones of one's language, are uniquely engaged.' Matthews in Addyman, Feldman and Tonning, *Beckett and BBC Radio: A Reassessment*, 249-269 (p. 256).

[358] In a conversation of 1962, Beckett told Lawrence Harvey of how he hoped to develop a 'syntax of weakness'. See Pilling in Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p. 77.

such a garden or such a pond.'[359] Whereas Leibniz claims that this is the reason for 'nothing uncultivated, or sterile or dead in the universe, no chaos, no confusion, save in appearance', in Beckett's worlds, this assemblage and the clashes between image, word and note are the reasons for the disarray and confusion experienced by his listeners both inside and outside of the radio.[360] It is an environment in which 'all bodies are in a state of perpetual flux like rivers, and the parts are continually entering in or passing out'.[361] Radio makes Beckett's subjects become less like living characters in a definite environment and more like abstractions in a formless void, self-contained in their own voices and auditory recollections.

Beckett uses music (his 'compact gems of pattern and structure') and words (his 'pure tones in abstract arrangements') to create what Jean-Jacques Mayoux aptly describes as 'an exploded form to reflect an exploded world.'[362] From this musically crafted discord there can be no unity or linearity. As we move from Beckett's radio plays to his plays for television, we enter into an even more sonically directed world of extreme loneliness. The auditory explosion experienced in *Cascando* becomes an implosion as his persona are subjected to claustrophobic, moribund confinement. As we edge forward only three years, we enter into a post-apocalyptic world of chilling emptiness and see the solitary figure as easy prey, subjected to the whims of Beckett's music-based creative vulture.[363]

[359] Leibniz, *Metaphysics & Monadology*, pp. 58-9.
[360] Ibid., p. 59.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Ian Scott-Kilbert (Essex: Longman Group, 1974), p. 43.
[363] See: 'The Vulture'(CP: 5).

Watching Beethoven and Schubert

> Content and technique are both identical and nonidentical […] because a work of art acquires its life in the tension between inner and outer; because it is a work of art only if its manifest appearance points to something beyond itself […] Inner experience and outer form are created by a reciprocal process of interaction.[364]

Introduction

Between 1966 (*Eh Joe*) and 1981 (*Quad*) Beckett wrote for television.[365] His teleplays range from depictions of isolated figures sitting in or walking around a bare room to four differently coloured cloaked bodies hastily moving in sequence to a Bartók-like composition. This chapter focuses on *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* to evaluate the impact Beckett's direct use and modification of classical music has on the viewer's perception of the physical appearance of the subjects within their environment.[366] Whilst *Eh Joe* and *Quad* tell us a considerable amount about Beckett's use of television and attitude towards language, his separation of the visual and aural in these plays detracts from an analysis of the part music plays in Beckett's dealings with language. The absence of music in *Eh Joe* exempts this play from the present study and in *Quad*, the interaction of the visual, verbal, and musical is not as multi-layered as it is in *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*. Even though *…but the clouds…* belongs to the same broadcast as *Ghost Trio* and explores the extent to which memory can stimulate the creative act, it is not discussed here because of its use of poetry, rather than of music, to explore the creative process.[367] Despite their diversity, each teleplay begs the questions: how do the inner and outer worlds interrelate and what effect does the aural have on the visual? An analysis of *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* enables us to evaluate the effect Beckett's use of Beethoven and Schubert as structuring devices has on the shape and tone of each play as well as its subjects,

[364] Theodor Adorno, 'Music and Technique' in *Sound Figures*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 197-8.
[365] Beckett's progression from radio to television coincides with the public's shift from listening to radio to watching television. As Donald McWhinnie states, 'thousands of radio sets have been switched off permanently in the past few years' as radio broadcasting became superseded by television. McWhinnie, *Art of Radio*, p. 11. During this time Beckett also wrote some of his best-known works for theatre (*Come and Go*, *Not I*, *Footfalls*) and short prose pieces such as *Fizzles* and *Company*.
[366] With its interplay between perceiver and perceived and move towards self-perception, as well as the depiction of a subject who goes through her ritualistic routine and waits for someone who does not arrive, Mark Nixon has suggested that Beckett's abandoned 'Film Vidéo-Cassette project' from 1972 (in 'FRAGMENTS PROSE DEBUT 68'; UoR MS2928) anticipates the later teleplays. See: Nixon, 'Samuel Beckett: Video Artist' in *Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies: new Critical Essays*, ed. by Peter Fifeld and David Addyman (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 177-190 (p. 179).
[367] A version with music by Martin Pearlman was produced at the 92nd Street in New York for the Beckett centennial in 2006.

namely Figure and Dreamer. The chapter asks how Beckett's adaptation of Beethoven and Schubert's scores undoes the consoling Romanticism found in these pieces.

The style of these teleplays marks not only a move away from what Martin Esslin called 'a well-made play' (something Beckett never strictly adhered to in any medium), but also a new departure from Beckett's own aesthetic.[368] Whilst we may be in the 'familiar chamber' (GT: 408) with the same dressing gown clad figures, the construction of this Beckettian set is new. For the first time Beckett uses music as the structural driving force so that the image becomes the manifestation of the play's mood or idea. Without a narrator, the camera, following music's mark, tells the story which, due to the repetitiveness of the musical sequencing, offers little trajectory or movement. With these factors in mind, this analysis revisits well-established readings by Enoch Brater and Sidney Homan who interpret these works as empathic texts that use music to reach pathos or connect their persona with their lost companions.[369] It also revisits readings by Mary Bryden and Catherine Laws whose musical acumen unpicks music's importance and affective capabilities.[370] Laws claims that music 'corresponds to the broader interrogation between the body, the imagination, and selfhood'.[371] She argues that whilst music's presence conjures memories and desires for Figure and Dreamer, this is not a positive experience. This chapter extends Laws' reading of music as a device that is far from comforting or conciliatory by exploring its role in relation to the visual image on screen. Whilst Beckett's attitude towards music in light of his interest in Schopenhauer has been extensively researched and is alluded to in any discussion of Beckett's musicality, this chapter does not focus heavily on this aspect of Beckett and music.[372] Though Beckett was clearly aware of Schopenhauer's belief that music directly connects the listener to one's emotions without the intermediation of

[368] According to Esslin, a carefully constructed play should 'present characters that are well-observed and convincingly motivated […] entertain by the ding-dong of witty and logically built-up dialogue […] have a beginning, a middle, and a neatly tied-up ending.' Martin Esslin, *Absurd Drama* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), Introduction.

[369] Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theatre* (Oxford: OUP, 1990); Sidney Homan, *Filming Beckett's Television Plays* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1992).

[370] Bryden, *Beckett and Music*; Bryden, 'Beckett's Apertures and Overtures' in Bailes and Till, *Beckett and Musicality*, 187-199; Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones.*

[371] Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 121.

[372] For criticism that comments on how Schopenhauer's ideas may have appealed to Beckett's own sensibilities, see: John Pilling, '*Proust* and Schopenhauer: Music and Shadows' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, 174-178; Eric Prieto, 'Samuel Beckett, Music, and the Heart of Things' in *Listening In: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 155-253; Franz Micahel Maier, 'The Idea of Melodic Connection in Samuel Beckett', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 61.2 (2008), 373-410; and Everett Frost, '"The Sound is Enough": Beckett's Radio Plays' in Gontarski, *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, 251-268.

thought, this does not help us to understand how Beckett used music in terms of its structural potential, relation to his use of different media, or attitude towards language. Instead, this chapter makes use of Deleuze's observations in 'The Exhausted' (as outlined in the introduction) to interrogate how Beckett's use of music and medium-based directorial decisions have an impact both on the story on screen and storytelling process behind the camera. Before looking at *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*, therefore, Beckett's reasons for using television are considered in relation to the increasing predominance of music in his creative process. Not only does a consideration of Beckett's use of television enable us to understand his decision to experiment with new media, but it contributes to the overarching discussion of how his use of visual and auditory elements contribute to the changing shape of his creative voice.

Why television?

As a pioneer of new mediums, Beckett was interested in television's technological capabilities, particularly in how the camera as narrator can remove, as far as possible, the authorial voice. Television allowed Beckett to make Figure and Dreamer respond to a musical structure, which, as his notebooks illustrate, was planned first.[373] In keeping with his belief in the ambiguity of expression, Beckett casts a permanent grey shadow over the image, and, in *Nacht und Träume*, replaces language with music. With television, Beckett could create unspoken dramas and bring the unsettling silence of their subjects into the foreground.[374] In *Echographies of Television*, Derrida claims that television makes words 'loosen their grip, separates them, or even opens them up completely' permitting Beckett 'to overcome the inferiority of words.'[375] By removing a text-based narrative, Beckett's teleplays present the viewer with an unmediated presentation of how an image is constructed to constitute a figure in a room. For Jonathan Bignell, the intimacy of television encourages the audience

[373] Anna McMullan has already explained that Beckett's work 'exploits television as a medium for composition, rather than as narrative drama, continual "flow" of information, or as a window onto the "real".' McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, p. 88.
[374] As Marshall McLuhan states: 'Television completes the cycle of the human sensorium. With the omnipresent ear and the moving eye, we have abolished writing'. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage, Co-ordinated by Jerome Agel* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1996), p. 125.
[375] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 173. Derrida adds that in *Nacht und Träume*, 'The sonorous image, the music, takes over from the visual image, and opens onto the void or the silence of the final end'. Ibid., p. 172.

'to decode the play's dramatic form and to relate its concerns to their own experience and ideas.'[376] As viewers, we are drawn into television's immediacy through the unwavering eye of the camera lens. As music and image direct the action and depict the scene, Beckett's creative process becomes less dependent on, though not exactly free from, the written word.[377] For Everett Frost, television is 'more adapted to close-ups, equipped for scrutinising the individual face with what Beckett called its "savage eye".'[378] This 'savage eye' homes in on a pitiable individual who seems torn between hope and despondency. Without words, these subjects are passive and language is stripped of its agency. In *Ghost Trio*, even Voice's words seem perfunctory, for despite their instructiveness, it is uncertain as to whether Figure can hear Voice. At the opening she says: 'Forgive my stating the obvious' (GT: 408), making language seem like an unnecessary accoutrement to the aural and visual aspects of the play. Out of this almost defeatist struggle to express, music acts as a catalyst, directing the image and movement of the play.[379] This chapter will now look at *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* in turn to examine the effect music has on Beckett's creative process, the depiction of his subjects and the overall mood of each dramatic piece.

Ghost Trio

Ghost Trio was first broadcast on 17 April 1977 for the BBC2 'Lively Arts Series' under the collective title *Shades*, which also included *Not I* and *...but the clouds...*.[380] It was directed by Donald McWhinnie (assisted by Beckett) and starred Ronald Pickup (Figure), Billie Whitelaw (Voice), and Rupert Herder (boy). Beckett refused to be interviewed for the programme, so his works were preceded by a conversation between critic Martin Esslin and presenter Melvyn Bragg. Allusions to experimental literature, theatre and art were made, signalled by shots of paintings by Henri Hayden, Edvard Munch and Francis Bacon, and sculpture by Alberto Giacometti.[381] Consequently, *Ghost Trio*

[376] Bignell, *Beckett on Screen*, p. 196.
[377] Voice's controlling directions and the words of Schubert's lied are evidence of the presence of language, however impoverished the text may seem.
[378] Frost, *All That Fall and other plays for radio and screen*, p. xv.
[379] In *Proust* Beckett writes that 'Music is the catalytic element in the work of Proust. It asserts to his unbelief of the permanence of personality and the reality of art.' (Proust: 71)
[380] *Ghost Trio* was also recorded for Süddeutscher Rundfunk (SDR) in Stuttgart with Klaus Herm and Irmgard Föst, directed by Beckett. It was broadcast on 1 November 1977 and recorded in May of the same year.
[381] For a discussion on Beckett and Giacometti see: Matti Megged, *Dialogue in the Void: Beckett and Giacometti* (Santa Fe: Lumen Books, 1985).

formed part of an artistic discussion about how best to present the human psyche. Many early critics such as James Knowlson and Enoch Brater focus on the image as both an iconographic and a minimalist depiction of the twentieth-century human condition. More recently, Michael Maier and Catherine Laws have brought our attention to *Ghost Trio*'s music-based structure wherein Beckett's use of Beethoven links Figure with the woman he yearns for. Whereas Maier and Laws suggest that music offers a moment of hopeful connection, this analysis looks at how the interrelation between the music and visual causes the viewer to see Figure as a suffering subject. It shows that music permeates both the visual and the auditory, at once abstracting and saturating the body of Figure and Beckett's text. It does not 'complete the picture' or resolve the incongruence between the visual and auditory, but ruptures the surface of the text and decentres its narrative.[382]

Beckett told Ruby Cohn that he wanted to create 'a calm scene which revealed an inner storm as the camera approached.'[383] As the camera zooms in on Figure, the 'sole sign of life' (GT: 409), the extracts taken from the second movement of Beethoven's *Geistertrio, Op. 70 No. 1* (published in 1809) create a strong sense of expectation and anguish. In each act we see Figure hunched over his cassette listening to truncated excerpts of *Geistertro*, perhaps a musical motif of Figure's longing for 'her'.[384] At this point it is important to state that the conditions of Figure's environment and the supposition that he hears the same music as the viewer remains uncertain. Beckett's use of music and indefinite image contribute to this pervasive sense of ambiguity.

Set and structure: visual and aural patterning

The beginning of the BBC version of *Ghost Trio* is in the style of a radio broadcast that we need to tune into, and acknowledges the presence of the listener/viewer, including us in the broadcast. A female Voice opens the play with the words: 'Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly' (GT: 408), which she repeats. The voice-over presents images to the viewer and by

[382] This aesthetic brings Bacon's paintings to mind. For an essay comparing Beckett and Bacon see: Jane Hale, 'Framing the Unframable: Samuel Beckett and Francis Bacon', *SBTA*, 2 (1993), 95-102.
[383] Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 339.
[384] We may be inclined to interpret Figure's waiting as a sign of yearning because of the recurrence of this theme in *...but the clouds…*: 'Then crouching there, in my little sanctum, in the dark, where none could see me, I began to beg, of her, to appear, to me. Such had long been my use and wont. No sound, a begging of the mind, to her, to appear, to me. Deep down into the dead of night, until I wearied, and ceased. Or of course until –' (btc: 420).

reassuring us that what we see is actually there, questions the assumption that the image presented on the television screen is reliable or if it is a figment of Figure's (or even someone else's) imagination.[385] Whilst Voice's words emphasise her imagelessness, her description of the sound of her voice as 'faint' supplies the listener with musical dynamics. From the outset, our attention is drawn to the play's auditory nature. Voice's cold, distant tone also heightens the sense of Figure's isolation and makes his chamber seem less like a sanctuary than that of *Film* (1964) or *Eh Joe* (1965), for example.[386]

In Act 1, Voice tells the audience to 'Look' (GT: 408), and proceeds to outline the parameters of the set and label the contents of the room. Her labelling is necessary because the indistinctness of the image does not provide a clear impression of Figure or his surroundings. This visually indistinct scene contrasts with Voice's clarity. At this point, Voice asserts: 'Dust [*Pause.*] Having seen that specimen of floor you have seen it all. Wall.' From this statement, reminiscent of Genesis 3:19 ('for you are dust, and to dust you shall return'), the viewer is asked to consider Figure in relation to something immaterial and lifeless. When Voice tells us to 'Look again', two images of the floor and wall fill the screen with two off-white rectangles (the first horizontal and the second vertical) surrounded by blackness. When we are shown the door, window and pallet in a '*Cut to close-up*' measuring '*0.70 x 2 m.*' (GT: 408-9), these images reflect the minimalism and repetitive structure of the piece. Due their indecipherability and minimalism, the opening shots are suggestive of Ad Reinhardt's monochrome paintings (*Abstract Painting No. 5* (1962), for example), Rothko's black and grey paintings from 1969-1970, or Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1913).[387] These monochromatic pieces relate to the sense of vacancy that Beckett is exploring throughout the play in his silencing of musical sections, Figure's expressionlessness, and in the overall greyness. Whilst this indeterminateness may be confusing, even becoming irritating, it also adds to the viewer's

[385] This alludes to Beckett's experimentation with Berkeley's maxim *esse est percipi* in *Film*.
[386] Figure's restlessness also suggests that he is lacking something. His movement to the window and door implies that he would like to leave his chamber, but is seemingly unable to. A similar sense of entrapment is explored in the discussion of *IDI* and 'Ping' in the following chapter.
[387] In *The Observer*, 17 April 1977, *Ghost Trio* was described as 'a sort of minimal oblong of existence shot like a slowed up German Expressionist movie.' As the camera moves towards a speck of dust, Beckett's note that the camera 'should not explore, simply look' but 'stops and stares' as a 'staring vision essential to the piece' comes to mind. Beckett's voyeuristic eye and use of *mise en abyme* makes these pieces for television seem more like video art than television drama. See: Michael Maier, '*Geistertrio*: Beethoven's Music in Samuel Beckett's *Ghost Trio* (Part 1)', *SBTA*, 11 (2001), 267-278 (p. 277 n2; UoR MS1519/1/3).

inquisitiveness and need for clarity and focus. This indistinctness correlates with the tone of uncertainty throughout the play. For Beckett, like Reinhardt, 'More is less' and 'Less is more'.[388] As Esslin states, 'We go to a picture gallery expecting to see images, we don't expect the Mona Lisa to start telling us her story. Beckett's dramatic works – for stage and television – are more like pictures in a gallery than verbal tennis matches like the traditional three-act play.'[389] Far from the to-and-fro of a tennis match, *Ghost Trio* contains no simple binary dialogic. For instance, when Voice shows each segment in isolation and then together, directing our gaze by another 'Look again' (GT: 409), she deconstructs the scene and then reconstructs it to create a new pattern. This disassembling of the whole, then rebuilding in a new order is the same process Beckett employs in his use of Beethoven's score. This suggests that, as instruments of his creative process, music and Voice are used to enable structurally similar effects thereby doubling the expressive impact. Figure, meanwhile is a darkly clad old man who sits hunched over a cassette and slowly shuffles around his room (see below). Ronald Pickup's stiff movement gives Figure both a ghostly and sculptural appearance.[390] This complements Beethoven's strong, yet drifting composition, connecting Figure (visual) with the music he listens to (aural). Figure also mirrors the auditory in his actions: a power dynamic that is reinforced throughout the play as the music played becomes more frequent. Hence, Graley Herren's belief that 'F recognises V's pattern, seizes control over it, and reshapes it to suit his own preferences' does not take into account the extent to which Figure lacks autonomy and Voice or music dominate.[391] As this chapter goes on to demonstrate, this dynamic is often one sided as the music tends to prompt the visual.

[388] Ad Reinhardt uses this familiar adage in 'Twelve Rules for a New Academy' in 1953. See: *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, 2nd edn, ed. by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley, LA; London: University of California Press, 2012), 113-117 (p. 115). This creative approach provides the viewer with questions rather than one-dimensional answers. Albright describes this section of the teleplay as 'a game with superimposed rectangles' that bring Mondrian's grids to mind and Ulrika Maude comments that in the SDR production, Figure 'is at first indistinguishable from the objects in the room, and appears himself to form but yet another rectangle.' Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p. 136; Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*, p. 119. Joseph Kosuth has already cited the connection between Reinhardt and Beckett: 'One pauses and considers Beckett's comments in *Texts for Nothing*: "It's the end what gives the meaning" being locked in continuous play with Ad Reinhardt's well-known statement: "In art, the end is always the beginning."' Kosuth, '"Recognisable Differences": Andresen and Kierkegaard,' in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 1-7 (p. 4)

[389] Martin Esslin, 'Who's Afraid of Samuel Beckett?' in *The Critical Response to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Cathleen Culotta Andonian (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 403-414 (p. 412).

[390] When he is hunched over the cassette, Figure appears eerily gargoyle-like. Mark Nixon also alludes to Figure's sculptural presence: 'When Male Figure in *Ghost Trio* lifts his head to look at the camera, his face evokes a chiselled stone sculpture, which is further stressed by the sculptural elements inherent in the pose of the figure, the structural composition of the scene and the use of the colour grey.' Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 148. These sculptural poses occur throughout Beckett's work. When Sapo sat down with Big Lambert in *Malone Dies*, he 'laid his hand on the table and his head on his hand, thinking he was alone. Between his head and his hand he slipped the other hand and sat there *marble still*.' (Malone Dies: 212, emphasis mine) Additionally, in *What Where* (1983), the heads in darkness appear stony, resembling classical busts.

[391] Graley Herren, 'Ghost Duet, or Krapp's First Videotape', *SBTA*, 11 (2001), 159-166 (p. 164).

Whereas these two components are often separated when it comes to the interior of the room, there are moments (creaking door, sound of rainfall) when image and sound come together, but at these moments, this coalescence of what we see and hear offers no further clarity.

Figure 18. Figure from the opening of *Ghost Trio*.

Ghost Trio is constructed, like Beethoven's sonata, in a tripartite (trio) structure with three communicative modes circling around a central (but elusive) motif. The pre-action sets the scene with Figure, the action shows Figure's movements in response to thinking that he hears 'her', and the re-action repeats part two, but from different perspectives – there are three camera positions: A (general view), B (medium shot), and C (near shot) – and using different musical fragments. Beckett's selection and positioning of music is carefully timed to link Figure's present condition to his past. Music is heard when the camera is focussed on Figure, usually with the door in sight. This implies that music connects Figure with something or someone beyond the chamber, thereby beyond his present situation. For instance, music is first heard in Act 1 after Voice says 'Door', and the camera cuts to '*close-up of whole door*' (GT: 408). It is then heard when Figure is '*seated on a stool, bowed forward, face hidden, clutching with both hands a small cassette*' (GT: 409). When in this position, Figure seems to seek music as a way of escaping his present, possibly to numb the pain of his loneliness, but instead, for the listener/viewer it serves to trigger his longing for a woman that never

comes. In Act 2 Beckett reinforces this link between music and Figure's desires when he 'think[s] he hears her' (GT: 410) immediately after listening to *Geistertrio*. At this moment Figure flinches and remains in a sculptural pose with his left hand raised in mid-air, back straight and head up. He then gets up and moves towards the door where he stands '*crouched*' with a '*fleeting face*' and '*tense pose*' representing his anguish. When Voice says 'No one', Figure returns to his cassette. This is repeated until Figure opens the door that leads into a dark, empty corridor. When Voice repeats 'No one', Figure's head droops (a sign of disappointment), suggesting that whilst he may be secure in his chamber, he may not be content in his isolation. When Figure wanders around the room, from door to window to pallet to door, music is only heard as he '*goes to stool, takes up cassette, sits, settles into opening pose, bowed over cassette*' (GT: 411). Figure then thinks he hears her again, checks the door to find that nobody is there, then listens once more '*bowed over cassette*'. Throughout the entirety of Act 2 music seems to spark hope in Figure, but offers no gratification.

Act 3 begins with music, and the now familiar image of Figure listening intently to the cassette. As silence fills the grey space, the camera pans around the room, following Figure as he first holds the door open, stands awhile before holding the window open, then moves to the mirror which first reflects nothing then shows his face with eyes closed then eyes open. As the camera moves to focus on specific items from the room, it mirrors the form of Act 1. This time there are close-ups of the pillow, '*mirror reflecting nothing*' and '*close-up of F's face in mirror*' (GT: 413). The pillow, generally associated with warmth and comfort, appears grey, tattered and unwelcoming; and the mirror, when it reflects nothing, is represented as a '*Small rectangle (same dimensions as cassette) against larger rectangle of wall*', associating the cassette with Figure's identity. When Figure's face is reflected, it occupies the entire screen. His right hand is underneath his right eye, but does not touch his face, emphasising his ghostliness. An exaggerated blink conveys his sense of disbelief at his existence, but his expression is complacent, almost accepting of his present condition. His head then drops and hair fills the entire screen resembling a tangle of brushstrokes or mesh of Pollock-like drips. The scene then switches to show Figure resuming his '*opening pose*' (GT: 413) with the music

playing. This is filmed from point C, the most central point in the room. Music then stops as the hooded boy dressed in rain-soaked oilskins (reminiscent of the boy Clov speaks of at the end of *Endgame*) knocks on the door, which Figure then answers. As we hear the door creaking open, the confluence of the auditory and visual gives the viewer an appearance of sound. Act 3 contains denaturalised sounds that inform what we see and how we experience Figure's surroundings. The way in which we hear this sound, however, is disorientating as we are given no sense of perspective: we do not follow Figure's experience as the volume remains the same even if the camera moves from a long shot to a close up, making the possibility that Figure is not hearing anything seem likely. When the door slowly closes after Boy has shaken his head and '*vanishes in dark at end of corridor*', Figure sits hunched over '*with growing music*' (GT: 414), creating an intensifying mood of yearning, emerging from the cassette. The music itself is fraught and unresolved as Beethoven's chromatic descending scales forecast Figure's dejection. His loneliness is worsened by Voice's steady diminution of agency so that by Act 3 she disappears.[392] Music, however, never relinquishes its grasp on Figure, whose responses flit between hope (motions towards the door) and lamentation (return to the cassette).

From this outline, one can see that music is not merely inserted for greater emotional impact or in a Schopenhauerian fashion, to say what language cannot, but is part of the play's structure. Whilst musicologists like Peter Kivy prioritise the emotional impact of music, in *Ghost Trio* Beckett also uses music for its ability to aid the formal construction of his piece.[393] Anna McMullan points out that Beethoven's score is a structural device that 'infus[es] the geometry of the stage image with affectivity.'[394] Indeed, as music becomes the prime mover in *Ghost Trio*, it takes its place at pole position in Beckett's storytelling process.

[392] As Colin Gardner argues, in reference to the third act of *Ghost Trio*, 'As if spurred on by the music rather than by Voice (in other words, an affectively based intentionality ruled by the Imaginary rather than the symbolic), "F" again goes to the door, listens and opens it.' Colin Gardner, *Beckett and the Televisual Event: Peephole Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 130.

[393] Kivy declares: 'Let me say straightway that the emotions aroused by music, in my view, are neither anaemic emotions nor quasi-emotions, […] they are full-blooded, down and dirty emotions. They require no apologies.' Kivy, *Fine Art of Repetition*, p. 104.

[394] Anna McMullan, 'Versions of Embodiment/Visions of the Body in Beckett's *...but the clouds...*', *SBTA*, 6 (1997), 353-364 (p. 360). Albright also states: 'Especially in his later works, Beckett adapted his plots from musical structures; indeed the strangely evacuated, incidentless textures of the plots often reflect the circularity, the unprogressiveness of certain musical structures.' Albright, 'Beckett as Marsayas' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, 25-49 (p. 45).

Characterisation of 'The Ghost'

Of Beethoven's two Opus 70 piano trios, Beckett chose the first entitled *Geistertrio* in D major.[395] In an early manuscript (UoR MS1519/2), Beckett picks up on Beethoven's intention to write a piece related to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.[396] By using the second movement (*Largo assai ed espressivo*) in D minor, scored in 2/4 time, Beckett extracts the melancholic funeral-march style passages from Beethoven's score. Maier describes this movement as 'distinguished by its lucidity of form and overall gloominess', which chimes with Beethoven's pupil, Carl Czerny's description of the D minor trio as something that resembles an appearance from the underworld.[397] Beethoven's use of D minor evokes, to borrow Christian Schubart's 1806 description of the key, 'melancholy womanliness', where 'the spleen and humours brood'.[398] This romantically overblown description of the D minor key is oddly fitting when considering the themes of *Ghost Trio*. Beckett's careful selection of passages – with their slow crescendos and diminuendos, chromaticism, silences, and impressionistic use of tremolando – exaggerates the solemnity and eeriness running through Beethoven's second movement. The effect is a foreboding and persistent drone that seeps into our subconscious. As Knowlson explains:

> The particular bars of the largo that are chosen by Beckett – and the manuscript drafts show with what meticulous care he selected his extracts – do indeed reflect his "uncanny, oppressively deathly mood", but they also seem to me to capture a sense of tense expectation which may be regarded as one of the main links between Beethoven's dark motifs and the play which, until very late in its preparation, Beckett had entitled *Tryst*.[399]

[395] Beckett told James Knowlson that he owned the 1970 recording of Beethoven's *Geistertrio* performed by Daniel Barenboim (piano), Jacqueline du Pre (cello) and Pinchas Zukerman (violin). Unlike the more lyrical 1992 recording with Isaac Stern, Yo-Yo Ma, and Emanuel Ax, for example; Barenboim's trio offers a raw performance that exposes, rather than dilutes, the tensions throughout the piece.

[396] Evidence from Beethoven's notebook suggests that he was discussing an opera of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with the playwright Heinrich von Collin (brother of Mattheüs von Collin, who wrote *Nacht und Träume*, used by Beckett for his teleplay of the same name). Around sketches for the second movement the words 'Macbeth' and 'Ende' can be deciphered. It is possible that the 'Ghost' movement was intended for a scene with the three witches. Beckett, a great admirer of Beethoven's music, even toyed with the idea of writing a play dedicated to the deaf composer. See: André Bernold, *L'Amitié de Beckett* (Paris: Hermann, 1992), p. 53.

[397] Michael Maier, '*Geistertrio*: Beethoven's Music in Samuel Beckett's *Ghost Trio* (Part 2)', *SBTA*, 12 (2002), 313-320 (p. 313). Similarly, E. T. A. Hoffmann describes the Opus 70 Trios 'at the centre of the spirit realm thus discloed the intoxicated soul gives ear to the unfamiliar language and understands the most mysterious premonitions that have sitrred it.' Hoffmann in *Source Readings in Music History: The Romantic Era*, ed. by Oliver Strunk (Norton: New York, 1965), p. 39.

[398] Christian Schubart, *A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries*, trans. by Rita Steblin (first publ. in UMI Research Press, 1983) in *Affective Key Characteristics* < http://www.wmich.edu/mus-theo/courses/keys.html > [accessed 9 June 2015]

[399] Knowlson in *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 201.

Significantly, Beckett changed the title from *Tryst* to *Ghost Trio*, in order to move away from the clichéd notion of a secret moonlight meeting between lovers towards insatiable yearning.[400] What remains, as Knowlson points out, is the suspense caused by the 'expectation' of the beloved's return. This is an expectation which is encouraged only to be disappointed. Some aspects of the original title, however, seep into the play. For instance, tryst is a derivative of the Latin 'trista' meaning sad, and the Middle English 'trist' refers to the appointed place in hunting. This is reflective of Figure's melancholy mood and sees music as a hunter who taunts its prey with upsetting associations of his absent companion. *Tryst* also brings to mind the brooding force undulating in Beethoven's composition that Beckett carefully extrapolates.

Beckett's reimagining of Beethoven's score

Beckett's employment of Beethoven's trio is both structured and surprising, as he mirrors the pattern of this familiar music and then distorts it to heighten Figure and the viewer's sense of displacement. Just as we expect the continuation of a melody, Beckett disrupts the sequence and the music surprises us with silence or a different phrase. By continually flouting the listener's expectations, the music causes disappointment.[401] As this use of *Geistertrio* simultaneously creates and weakens the structure of the play, music becomes a deconstructionist catalyst at work behind the scenes. Twisting motifs and decomposing themes are hinged upon an unstable decentred structure, much like the 'eccentric centre' discussed in relation to Erskine's painting in chapter one. Here, music erodes and punctuates the text with dissonance as it perpetuates a three-part cycle of composition, decomposition and recomposition.[402]

[400] Graley Herren remarks that the choice of 'The Ghost' as a theme is significant because 'it implies from the start that F's anticipated tryst will not take place, at least not in the material world, because his lost love has joined the spirit world of the dead.' Herren, *Beckett's Plays on Film and Television*, p. 77.

[401] In *Zero's Neighbour,* Cixous has an interesting section pairing the predictability to be found in the music of J. S. Bach with *Not I*. See: Cixous, *Zero's Neighbour*, pp. 48-9.

[402] In a similar fashion, John Calder categorises Beethoven and Beckett's artistic progression into three stages: 'The first a continuation and extension of an existing tradition (Mozart and Joyce respectively), the second a full flowering of a new order of artistic creation, destined to become the trademark of the artist […], the last period for both is a move into philosophical introspection and resignation to death.' John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: John Calder Publications, 2001), p. 98. In *The Making of a Poem*, Stephen Spender not only describes how the highest attainment of an artist is when he/she 'finds himself realising that these instruments [words, paints, music] are inadequate to the spirit of what he is trying to say', but also writes of two types of genius that reflect how Beckett believed he differed from Joyce. Spender explains: 'one type (the Mozartian) is able to plunge the greatest depths of his own experience by the tremendous effort of a moment, the other (the Beethovenian) must dig deeper and deeper into his consciousness, layer by layer.' Spender in Ghiselin, *The Creative Process: A Symposium*, pp. 114-115.

Beckett's non-linear excerpts imbue Figure's space with a sense of disorder which creates an atmosphere of uncertainty whilst the otherworldly quality of the music creates a sense of lack that reinforces the absence of the longed for woman. Deleuze says of the Beethoven excerpts that there is 'a kind of central erosion' and 'hollowing out [of] the surface'.[403] This echoes Beckett's comments on Beethoven's music, particularly the *Seventh Symphony in A minor*, Op. 92, the 'dearest of the nine'.[404] He described this symphony to Axel Kaun as a 'path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence' (Dis: 172) and in *Dream* refers to Beethoven's pauses as 'punctuation[s] of dehiscence' (Dream: 139). For Beckett these silences are a necessary stage towards the 'Literatur des Unworts' (Dis: 54) where literature, in becoming musical, is a richer art form.[405] This is not to say, however, that Beckett's creative process became romanticised. As Figure remains alone and the music reverts backwards – thereby disrupting any move towards enlightenment or gratification – Beckett seems to be turning German Romanticism on its head. The most positive description one can give of music's role in *Ghost Trio* is that it is potentially consolatory.[406] Beckett held a similar position regarding his view of painting. On 21 October 1936, Beckett wrote in his diary that he regarded the sentimentality found in the paintings of the German Romantics 'with loathing'.[407] Caspar David Friedrich, however, remained an exception to this rule, for he saw his work as 'the only kind of romantic still tolerable, the bémolisé [the minor key]'.[408] In his use and modification of *Geistertrio*, it seems that, like Friedrich, Beethoven steps outside the general rule.

Music in flux

[403] Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 164.
[404] Beckett to MacGreevy, 19 October 1958, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 406.
[405] This is evident in the musicalisation of language found in *Words and Music*, as discussed earlier.
[406] Catherine Laws makes this point when she states that 'Beckett specifically draws on the spirit of German Romanticism that infuses the music, but does so precisely to deconstruct these ideas and put into question the possibility of simple solace or absolute redemption. The consolation offered by the music *is* evoked but only insubstantially'. Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 134. In Beckett's early fiction the Smeraldina-Rima writes in her letter to Belacqua that when in Vienna studying the pianoforte, her only consolation in his absence is her struggle to play a Beethoven sonata (Dream: 58 and 'The Smeraldina's Billet Doux' in MPTK: 155). Again, in this struggle to play Beethoven, the music evokes consolation 'insubstantially'.
[407] Nixon, 'Beckett and Romanticism in the 1930s', *SBTA*, 18 (2007), 61-77, p. 72.
[408] Beckett's entry into his 'German Diary', 14 February 1937, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 254. Interestingly, Beckett uses a musical term (bémolisé) to describe a visual artwork. This suggests that when considering Romanticism, Beckett saw art and music as sharing the same aesthetic palette. Karl Gierow, spokesman for the Nobel Prize, stressed this 'bémolisé' aspect of Beckett's writing when he said that 'the writing of Samuel Beckett rises like a miserere from all mankind, its muffled minor key sounding liberation to the oppressed and comfort to those in need.' Whilst Gierow is correct to identify the 'miserere' in Beckett's authorial voice, the notion that this 'minor key' offers consolation is, to use Beckett's words, 'overstated into the sentimental'. In his use of *Geistertrio* Beckett is careful not to indulge in overstated sentimentality. See: Karl Ragnar Gierow, 'The Nobel Prize in Literature 1969, Samuel Beckett: Award Ceremony Speech', *The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize* < http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/press.html > [accessed 19 April 2016]; Beckett's 'German Diary', 20 January 1937, in Nixon, 'Beckett and Romanticism in the 1930s', p. 72.

In the *Ghost Trio* notebook (UoR MS1519/1), Beckett takes up six pages to consider how he was going to use Beethoven's *Geistertrio*. In these pages Beckett crosses out and ticks off various sections and bar numbers, as if following a checklist. These notes suggest that the construction of *Ghost Trio* began with musical extracts and imply that Beckett gave music structural precedence over words and staging. They also illustrate that throughout the play music is always present, either in its 'unheard' or 'heard' forms. Beckett drew a table (outlined below) clearly marking the division of heard and unheard music.

	Unheard	Heard
I	131"	47"
II	42"	50"
III	0"	30"
	173"	127"
	300" = 5'	

Figure 19. *Ghost Trio* notebook (UoR MS1519/1).

As this table illustrates, whilst the amount of music played decreases, what can be heard increases, in relation to what is muted. This pattern translates into how music burgeons at the behest of Voice's silencing and Figure's suppression.[409] Moreover, music has both an imaginative agency and an eerie omnipresence. Michael Maier testifies to the predominance of music as reactor and instigator when he asserts that music 'creates the image.'[410] Maier adds:

> Not only does music react contrapuntally to the different events that impinge from the outside, but it also creates the coherence that offers the opportunity for an effective interruption.[411]

As a structural device, music forms a visual impression out of its colours and textures. Its heard and unheard extracts exaggerate the extent to which music 'interrupts and impinges' upon Figure, to paraphrase Maier. As music is never completely absent, even when it cannot be heard, music's

[409] For a discussion of the play's patterns and form, see: Herren, 'Ghost Duet, or Krapp's First Videotape', p. 161.
[410] Maier, '*Geistertrio*: Beethoven's Music in Beckett's *Ghost Trio* (Part 2)', p. 319.
[411] Ibid.

silence, like the pauses of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*, informs the structure and mood of the play.

Geistertrio is replete with harmonic contrast and tonal tension, and the extracts Beckett chose hover between the two main key areas of Beethoven's *Largo*: D minor and C major, but not the relative F major key. The music is in a state of flux, in anticipation of, but cut short from, its harmonic counterpart.[412] Figure resides in this musical no-man's-land, shrouded in 'shades of the colour grey' (GT: 408). As Catherine Laws explains, the music's 'state of harmonic and textual flux emphasises [the play's] instability'.[413] To imitate Beethoven's frequent use of permutations, Beckett uses five transformations of one theme from the second movement. By selecting extracts exclusively from the *Largo* Beckett avoids the more optimistic narrative arc of Beethoven's whole piano trio. Music does not create a linear path for Figure or the viewer to follow; instead it acts as an 'intensifying structure' that extenuates Figure's sorrow.[414] Music also acts as an agent of fragmentation as it severs the body (Figure, the subject) from its ability to communicate (Voice, who speaks, though not necessarily on behalf of Figure) and move freely outside the chamber (Boy, who comes and goes). Consequently, Figure becomes a ghostly spectre who has been stripped of his agency.[415]

Beckett's sensitivity to Beethoven's pitch and dynamics has a directing influence as it informs the movements of the camera and the mood of the play. When Voice is listing the contents of the chamber, music is first heard faintly for five seconds after she labels each object. In these five seconds, by beginning with three sustained notes played by violin and cello, followed by a mournful response on the piano, the music creates an ominous mood filled with suspense. The wraithlike passages on strings alternate with the doleful piano accompaniment, as seen below.

[412] Beckett adds to this sense of instability by always starting his extracts from the melodic answering figure to the opening motif and invariably omitting the first bar of the section he is quoting.
[413] Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 148.
[414] Maier, '*Geistertrio*: Beethoven's Music in Beckett's *Ghost Trio* (Part 2)', p. 319.
[415] In *A Piece of Monologue*, Beckett describes this 'faintly stirring' formlessness as a: 'Dark shapeless blot' that exists 'Beyond that black beyond. Ghost light. Ghost nights. Ghost rooms. Ghost graves. Ghost . . .' (APOM: 427-9).

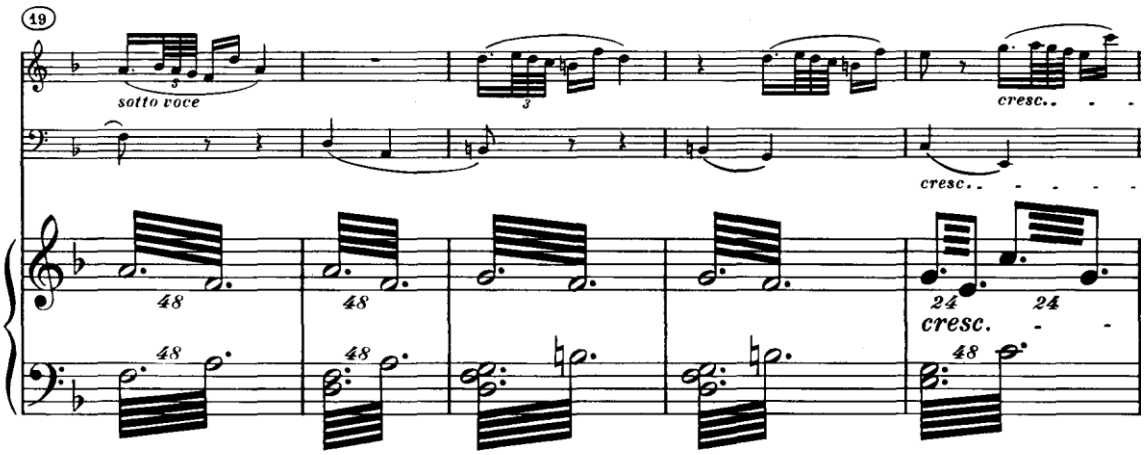


Figure 20. Beethoven, *Geistertrio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1, 2nd mvt.*, bars 19-23.

The recapitulation of the second motif of the opening subject forms Beckett's introducing theme. This haunting phrase is linked to the camera's focus on the door, which marks not only the boundaries of Figure's chamber, but also represents the threshold between hope and dejection.[416] As the phrase ends where it begins, either rhythmically or on the same note (A then D, as in the first two sections), Beethoven creates a cyclical mood. When this changes to finish on a higher note and crescendo, Beethoven builds the tension but offers no resolution. This is mirrored by the viewer's (and possibly Figure's) growing frustration that there is nobody and nothing to break the monotonous chain of events. As the only 'active' object, the cassette merely extenuates Figure's situation.

Figure's imprisonment

The cassette not only contains the musical framework that is the structural driving force behind Figure's actions, but by offering no musical resolution, it also deprives Figure of comfort as it prevents him from experiencing it as a surrogate (musical) invocation of 'her'.[417] This standpoint contradicts Katherine Weiss's argument that, in comparison to Krapp, Figure is in control of the cassette and uses it 'as a way to conjure *her* up, consequently transforming the machine into a mechanical bride.'[418] Figure, like Krapp, is entranced by the cassette as it haunts him with sounds

[416] To Figure the door appears closed for it is '*imperceptibly*' ajar (GT: 408). This makes the chamber seem more like a prison cell than refuge, as discussed later.
[417] Beckett's use of tape as a theatrical device can also be seen in *Krapp*, the gramophone of *Embers*, recorded breathing of *Breath*, and recorded voice-over of *Rockaby*.
[418] Weiss justifies 'her' absence by adding that 'because his memory of the woman remains mechanised in habit, she remains an apparition in his mind.' Katherine Weiss, 'Animating Ghosts in Samuel Beckett's *Ghost Trio* and *...but the clouds...*', *JOBS*, 18.1-2 (2009), 105-122 (p. 110). In the SDR production, Figure is given agency as the viewer sees him operate the cassette with the index finger of his right hand, but this never happens in the BBC version.

reminiscent of his past. Whereas Krapp is seen rewinding and fast-forwarding his cassette tapes, however, in response to Figure's expression and posture, the audience projects a sense of entrapment onto him and sees his existence as a musically defined limbo between past recollections and present reality. With no stage direction instructing Figure's use of the cassette, though he pours over it, he is not in control of the music emitted. Figure, therefore, is passive and helpless, at the whim of the cassette. The timing of the music even seems to fuel Figure's recollections as he 'think[s] he hears her' (GT: 410, 411) at the door. As we do not know whether Figure is responding directly to the music or associating it with the absent woman, we can only assume that his movement is a sign of boredom, restlessness, or desire to leave his chamber. Whatever the incentive, this attempt to transcend one's limiting existence exists throughout Beckett's oeuvre and, like Winnie in *Happy Days* (1961), usually results in becoming even more confined. As Geoff Hamilton explains, the promise for escape – door, light, gun – turns out to be 'more a cruel tease than an opportunity for imaginative invigoration'.[419]

In line with Hamilton's hypothesis, the viewer is inclined to interpret music as a metaphor for an existence of frustrated longing and confinement that Figure is forced to endure.[420] Here, repetition, discord and irresolution are the recurring motifs, much like the compositional style of twentieth, rather than nineteenth, century composers.[421] Accordingly, Beckett's mathematical approach when dividing Beethoven's score into segments shares similarities with the compositional techniques of the Second Viennese School, whose composers included Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg. According to Gottfried Büttner, Anton Webern, a member of this group, became Beckett's favourite modern composer.[422] With their principle of free atonality, these twelve-tone composers were able to strive 'toward a threshold value bordering on nothingness.'[423] Similarly, Beckett's use of music

[419] Geoff Hamilton, 'Annihilating All That's Made: Beckett's *Molloy* and the Pastoral Tradition', *SBTA*, 15 (2005), 325-339 (p. 327).
[420] It would be interesting to read Figure's existence in light of Max Weber's iron cage whereby 'Regularity, asceticism, and relentlessly self-interested calculation are transformed into an "iron cage", a system of behaviour to which individuals are now obliged to adapt in order to survive.' Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims for Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 184. In such conditions, Figure is what Michel Foucault would call an impoverished individual, deprived of free space, and unable to be innovative or creative.
[421] The piecemeal frames and firmly positioned camera angles also convey a nonlinear style.
[422] James and Elizabeth Knowlson, *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett*, p. 222. It is also known that Beckett was up to date with developments in music during the 1950s and was aware of composers such as Pierre Schaeffer, Edgard Varèse, Olivier Messiaen, Arvo Pärt, and Krzysztof Penderecki. See: Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 221.
[423] Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 123.

enabled him to emphasise Figure's sense of emptiness. In this sense, Beckett follows Adorno's belief that music references a lack as it resists being possessed, making it the perfect tool to create an elusive, ineffable narrative. In *Ghost Trio* this is evident in Figure's transience (he does not appear when first in front of the mirror) and lack of agency. Lack is also evident in Voice's invisibility, Boy's gesture of denial, and the fact that the woman is of 'No visible source' (GT: 408). When we do see Figure, his movements correlate with the sound of 'a fragment of life caught in a trap'.[424] As mentioned in the previous chapter, this sound world was created by Pierre Schaeffer who invented *musique concrète* after hearing a broken record repeating in a groove. Schaeffer believed that these fragments ought to be captured and allowed to speak. The result is very similar to the effect created by Figure's circular plod and Beckett's circumambulatory positioning of Beethoven's phrases:

> the sound, prisoner of the magnetic tape, repeats itself indefinitely just like itself, isolates itself from contexts, comes to disclose itself in other perspectives of perception, in order to recover this fervour of hearing, this fever of discovery.[425]

As his cumbersome movements react to the slow-paced music he hears, Figure appears imprisoned by the sounds emanating from the cassette, just as Schaeffer's sound is imprisoned by the magnetic tape it is emitted from.[426] There is no escape for Figure: as the play winds down towards stasis, it is regenerated by its musical structure which allows 'yet more cycles to occur'.[427] The perpetuation of these 'cycles' prevents Figure from recovering from his sense of loss. Figure's circling around the cassette – the source of painful memories – becomes a symptom of the trauma he suffers from. For example, at the end of Act 2, when Voice says 'He will now again think he hears her' (GT: 411), she stresses 'again' to emphasise the monotony of Figure's situation. This is reinforced musically when Voice says 'Stop' and 'Repeat' (GT: 411). The five seconds of music played at this interval approaches completion but Beckett stops it before Figure or the listener/viewer can experience

[424] Pierre Schaeffer in Albright, *Modernism and Music*, p. 188.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Ingo Berensmeyer describes Beckett's closed field of a finite number of elements contained according to set rules, as circles and endless loops of a 'continuous inclusion of the excluded'. This microstructural principle reveals 'an abyssal space or almost-void as the unmarked ground of any mark, the ground that can never be made directly accessible or visible'. By inserting extracts of *Geistertrio*, Beckett condemns the Figure to an eternal involuting loop, never resting, always searching for an end point or temporary moment of suspension out of the relentless cycle of disintegration. Ingo Berensmeyer, '"Twofold Vibration": Samuel Beckett's Laws of Form', *Poetics Today*, 25.3 (2004), 465-495 (pp. 478, 492).
[427] John L. Kundert-Gibbs, 'Continued Perception: Chaos Theory, the Camera, and Samuel Beckett's Film and Television Work' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, 365-385 (p. 378).

gratification. In response to the music stopping, Figure flinches into his expectant pose becoming a visualisation of his (and the music's) *Sehnsucht*.[428] Both Beckett's truncation of Beethoven's phrases and the empty grey chamber convey this sensation of longing and the unlikelihood of fulfilment.

When Figure sits alone with the cassette at the end of Act 2, music is played from the beginning of bar 64 (a recapitulation of bar 19, heard earlier). This time, with the *stretto* effect (a raise in tension and crescendo) coming earlier, greater expectation is felt. This is echoed by Figure as he '*sharply*' (GT: 410) lifts his head, indicating increased hope, in response to Voice who says: 'He will now again think he hears her' (GT: 411). This only results in denial as Act 3 brings more of the same, continuing the well-established pattern of promise followed by denial. As a result of this time-worn pattern, hope becomes a habit Figure sinks into. John Calder describes the condition of habit as follows:

> The nostalgia for the past has become part of our mind-set and we build our everyday existence on habit; even pain and illness can become habit […] Life becomes a succession of habits because the individual is a succession of individuals, having more or less memory of what it was like to be his or her own previous self.[429]

Like Vladimir and Estragon from twenty-five years ago, due to his repetitive actions, the audience sees Figure as 'a succession of [Beckettian] individuals' who descends into the habit of longing that becomes the meaning of his existence. Beckett defines habit as 'a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability' (Proust: 7-8). As he suffers from inescapable listlessness, Figure is afflicted by this 'dull inviolability'. Consequently, Figure's existence is, as Schopenhauer sees the struggle of mankind, 'a process of disillusionment: since this is, clearly enough, what everything that happens to us is calculated to produce'.[430] Ultimately, Figure takes one step forward and two steps back as his journey leads towards his undoing.[431]

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[428] Beckett used the word '*Sehnsucht*' in *Dream* to express that the search for love, immortality, or spiritual transcendence will always remain unfulfilled: 'not as much as the weeniest gutta of Sehnsucht between the eloquent boards of this book.' (Dream: 80). He referred to it again in his 'Sottisier' notebook (UoR MS2901) where he wrote: 'Only he who has experienced yearning knows how I suffer.' Beckett in Nixon, 'Beckett and Romanticism in the 1930s', p. 71. This word is revisited in the following chapter.

[429] Calder, *Philosophy of Beckett*, p. 65.

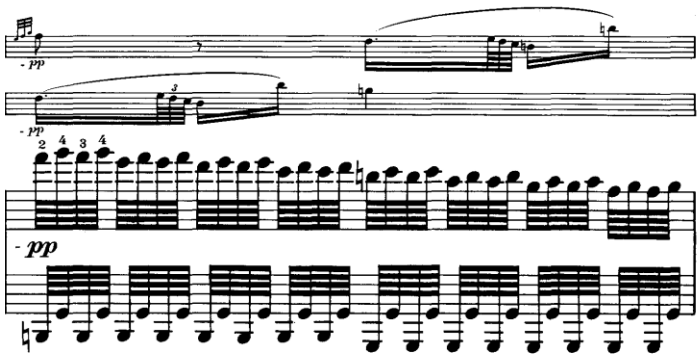
[430] Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Suffering of the World*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2004) Google Books.

[431] Eric Levy explains Beckettian mimesis as a succession that enables regression where one 'dissolve[s] toward the condition of disintegration or repudiation' because 'termination is presupposed by its very unfolding but never achieved: "finality without end".' Eric Levy, 'The Beckettian Mimesis of Time', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 80.1 (Winter 2001), 89-107 (p. 105).

Hoping for 'her' and imperceptible apertures

With excerpts exclusively from the second movement (typically female in character) of Beethoven's *Geistertrio*, Beckett links this beguiling music to Figure's lost female counterpart, but not in the positive way numerous critics have viewed it.[432] For instance, Rosemary Pountney sees music as 'an externalisation of F's yearning for "her".'[433] Catherine Laws proposes that 'the figure might be *using* the music to conjure thoughts of the woman'.[434] Similarly, Catharina Wulf sees music as 'the bridge to the absent loved one'.[435] However, Figure – whether he is able to use music or not – remains alone. The music, therefore, could also be interpreted as an expression of Figure's lack and loss. It cannot be a calling because Figure does not have the agency to control the cassette. Whilst this suggestion takes issue with Laws' belief that Figure is in control of the music he hears, it supports her argument that music reinforces ontological uncertainties of the text by seeing both Figure and *Ghost Trio* as constructed through music in Beckett's increasingly ambiguous (anti)authorial style.[436]

As well as being an *aide memoire*, music is played in connection with the chamber's points of entry and exit and determines the boundaries of Figure's chamber. At the end of Act 1, as Figure retracts '*slowly back to A via C and B*', the music becomes '*progressively fainter till at level of B it ceases to be heard*' (GT: 409), creating an auditory parameter to Figure's space. The move back to point A also follows Beethoven's chromatic descent and decrescendo to *pp* at bar 26:



[432] For a discussion of gender associations in Classical music, see: Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 9-19.
[433] Pountney adds: 'his thoughts persistently return to the *largo* and the intensity of his feeling is expressed by the music's increases in volume. In a sense "she" *is* the music. It expresses her presence in F's consciousness.' Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows*, p. 201. Whilst the woman may be a representation of Figure's yearning, she may not be his companion, but could also represent death, Figure's muse, or his will.
[434] Catherine Laws in *Beckett and Nothing: Trying to Understand Beckett*, ed. by Daniela Caselli (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 183.
[435] Catharina Wulf in Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 149.
[436] Laws states that music is 'articulating the state of shade-like "between-ness" in which other elements of the play exist'. Ibid., p. 211.

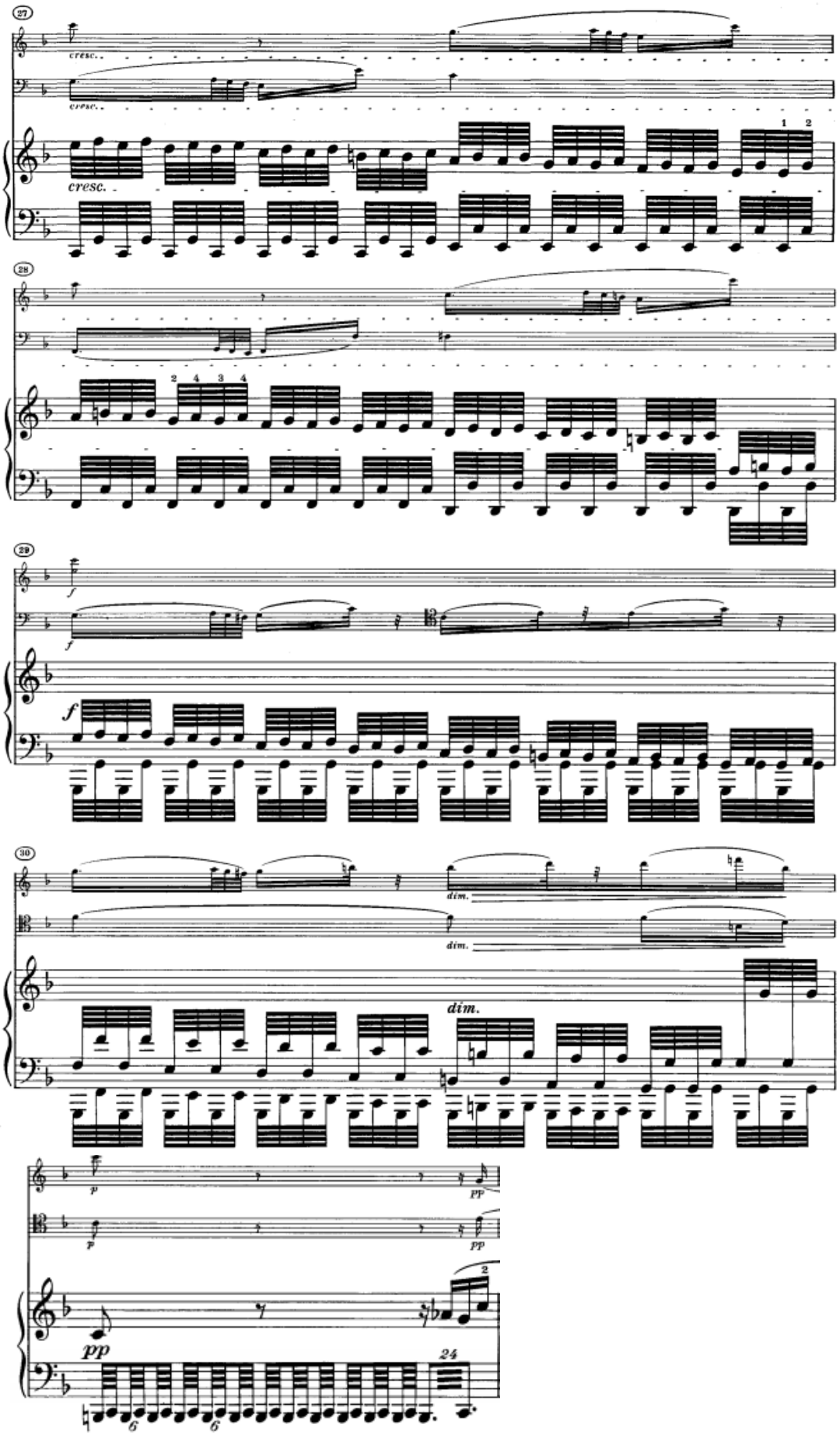


Figure 21. Beethoven, *Gesitertrio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1, 2nd mvt.*, bars 26-31.

After a crescendo where the theme enjoys a brief modulation with an F# into the key of G major (bar 28) and climax at bar 29 (marked *forte*), the piano continues its descent (which it began at bar 26) and slows down (bar 30 is marked *diminuendo*) until bar 31 where there is a quaver and semiquaver rest. This is a more peaceful passage as the rising intervals are in octaves. It also occurs immediately after Figure has disobeyed Voice, suggesting that either Figure cannot hear her, or that Voice's presence is in some way distancing Figure from his thoughts of 'her' by grounding him in his present reality, and interrupting his musical imagination.[437] In this scene, which takes place in the centre of the room, the camera focuses on Figure and the door (where the woman might appear). As the melody is first heard then unheard when the camera lingers on Figure and the door, music taunts Figure, who is pushed and pulled to and from the door, creating the central tension of the play. Equally, it marks the distance between Figure and the fringes of his room, acting as the point of tension between this push and pull of hope and disappointment. For Beckett, hope is both 'the elementary condition of life, the instinct that the human race has to thank for not dying out long ago' and something that obscures a person's understanding of their world.[438] Indeed, hope is a cruel necessity for Figure's existence; cruel because there is no fulfilment, necessary because there is nothing else to live for. Music is a key component of his hopeful yet unfulfilling existence. Citing *How It Is*, Eric Levy suggests that in Beckett's oeuvre hope is 'the source of moral suffering'.[439] In this case, *Ghost Trio* is a play entirely about hope, in Levy's sense of the word.[440] Figure's torturous, almost thankless persistence of hope is offset by its implicit sense of decline. Figure ends up hoping for what he may already sense is an unlikely outcome or utopia: the return of his companion. The viewer, meanwhile, sees Figure's trajectory as one of inevitable disappointment. Schopenhauer's comment that life 'swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom' can be applied to

[437] In Act 2, Figure disobeys Voice by going to the cassette instead of the door. His slow movement, however, suggests that he is not entirely in control of his actions, but is being drawn to the cassette, rather than approaching it by choice. See: Part III 'Death of the Word', Chapter 12 'Voices, Ghosts, Silence: Into Nothingness' in White, *Beckett and Decay*, pp. 142-153.
[438] Beckett in Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 171. This troubling notion of hope is explored further in the following chapter.
[439] 'I have suffered must have suffered morally hoped more than once despaired to match your heart bleeds you lose your heart drop by drop' (HII: 17). Eric Levy, 'The Beckettian Mimesis of Time', p. 98.
[440] This notion of hope is similar to Ernst Bloch's understanding of hope as that which is 'the opposite of security.' Ernst Bloch, 'Something's Missing' in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, ed. by Charles F. Breslin, trans. by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 1-17 (p. 16).

Figure's predicament and Beckett's fraught creative process which now seeks music take a more leading role.[441] It also reflects the dual effect Beckett's positioning of *Geistertrio* extracts has within the teleplay. The same pendulum metaphor appears in Beckett's essay on Proust:

> The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering – that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom – with its host of top-hatted and hygienic ministers, Boredom that must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils. (Proust: 16)

In *Ghost Trio* Beckett gives us the mid-point, the moment of oscillation between suffering and boredom and pivots this on a sense of hope.[442] His use of music *and* image allows him to explore the workings of ambiguity and uncertainty experienced by Figure. This tension, encapsulated by Adorno in the opening quote to this chapter, is visualised in the opening and closing of the window and door to Figure's chamber.

In Act 3, with a door and window 'imperceptibly ajar' (GT: 408), apertures lead out to an imaginary homeland in which Figure's longed-for companion exists. Mary Bryden neatly links the musical term 'overture' (from the late Latin *operatura* meaning 'opening') to the 'making-available of oneself for the reception of some external event or atmosphere'.[443] Implicit in Bryden's argument is the *possibility* for inside and outside, real and imaginary worlds to converge. Bryden adds that 'though tightly rationed by Beckett and repeatedly curtailed on stage', music 'is a site of radical possibility and unpredictability'.[444] For music to be seen in such a positive way, however, more than 'radical possibility' is required for the door to Figure's cell to open with 'her' standing at its threshold. Hence, Bryden's possibility becomes a factor of yearning rather than a move towards gratification. Moreover, the rain outside the window restricts visibility and has an enclosing effect; greatly reducing Figure's visibility and possibility of escape.[445] It is also worth noting that the window is not transparent, but translucent. And, when Figure goes to open the window in Act 2, the outside is black and the window then '*closes slowly of itself*' (GT: 410). This scene of uncertainty is enhanced by the

[441] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'The World as Will. Second Aspect' in Payne, *The World as Will and Representation*, I, 312.
[442] In a similar vein, Colin Gardner traces themes in the teleplays back to *Proust*. See: Gardner, *Beckett and the Televisual Event*, p. 182.
[443] Mary Bryden in Bailes and Till, *Beckett and Musicality*, p. 192.
[444] Ibid., p. 196.
[445] In Act 3 the image of torrential rain '*falling in dim light*' (GT: 413) fills the entire screen, suggesting that nothing promising awaits Figure.

indecipherable sound of rain or white noise (much like the sound of the sea in *Embers*) that accompanies this impression that resembles a television set that needs tuning. As a result, the sense of freedom and light suggested by the presence of a window is denied and this aperture, as well as that of the door, exaggerate the state of disorientating flux Figure finds himself in. The uncertainty created by these conflicting points of enclosure/release could even increase Figure's angst as he responds to this illusion of hope. Ultimately Figure is denied company and never leaves his chamber, but waits in hope and perhaps fear of another knock at the door.[446]

Repetition and endlessness

Ghost Trio consists of a 'perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms' (Murphy: 24) and like *Play* (1963), loops back on itself. This encircling effect is due to the fact that the structure contains a *da capo* that regresses towards 'finality without end' (Molloy: 111). This *da capo*, however, is regressive rather than progressive. In *Proust* Beckett defines *da capo* as 'a testimony to the intimate and ineffable nature of an art that is perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable' (Proust: 71).[447] This sense of ineffability and unpredictability that Beckett associates with the *da capo* is found in the irresolution of both his radio plays and *Ghost Trio*.[448] As a motif that brings a flood of earlier sensations back to life, the cassette acts as 'a commodious vicus of recirculation', bringing back memories of 'her' through musical association.[449] As the actions and music repeat themselves in all three acts to create a loop, Beckett's score more accurately charts the process of Figure's involuntary memory which contains both elation and deflation.[450] The hope and inevitable disappointment experienced by Figure coincides with Deleuze's definition of 'eternal recurrence' as

[446] Everett Frost points out that we cannot be sure that Figure is 'hoping for the awaited encounter' or if he is 'dreading it'. Frost, *All That Fall and other plays for radio and screen*, p. xvii. This suggestion will be revisited later on in this chapter.

[447] Catherine Laws locates Beckett's belief that his use of *da capo* in *Play*, *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* is 'fundamentally musical in quality' in Schopenhauer who states: 'How full of meaning and significance the language of music is we see from the repetition signs, as well as from the *Da capo* which would be intolerable in the case of works composed in the language of words. In music, however they are very appropriate and beneficial; for to comprehend it fully, we must hear it twice'. Laws adds that 'Beckett's use of this convention in later works implies a musicalizing of structure' and that 'it is the da capo structure that ultimately produces the reinforcing relationship between form and affective content'. See: Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 209.

[448] Please refer to the previous chapter for a discussion of inconclusiveness in the radio plays.

[449] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 3. Michael Moses draws directly on the connection between Joyce's wake and Beckett's ghosts when he states: 'Beckett's characters, like those in *Finnegans Wake*, multiply and recombine, only to vanish and then rematerialize.' *Michael Valdez* Moses, 'The Sadly Rejoicing Slave: *Beckett*, Joyce, and *Destructive Parody*', *MFS*, 31.4 (Winter 1985), 659-674 (p. 665).

[450] As Adorno, also drawing on Proust, states: 'All music is a recherché du temps perdu'. Adono adds that 'Beethoven's highly organised music' contains 'a multidimensional' movement that moves 'forward and backward at the same time'. This is stressed in Beckett's specific rephrasing of Beethoven's *Geistertrio* score which sees music as motion defined through sound pattern, rather than progressive linearity. Adorno in *Sound Figures of Modernity: German Music and Philosophy*, ed. by Jost Hermand and Gerhard Richter (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 48

something which 'affirms difference, affirms dissemblance and disparity, chance, multiplicity and becoming.'[451] Indeed, in *Ghost Trio*, with each repetition there is also a repudiation of what has come before for repetition contains both sameness and difference. One wonders whether Figure's repetitive acts and compulsion to return to the cassette are unconsciously triggered by his involuntary memory or if they are knowingly performed actions deployed to distract him from his present loneliness. If habit is a 'great deadener' (Godot: 84), perhaps this repetitiousness suits Figure, who is seeking music as an anaesthetic to numb him from his pain of willing. This would coincide with a Schopenhauerian belief that there is no purpose to existence other than to keep existing. For instance, in Act 3, when we see Figure bowed down over the cassette for the third time, the longest continuous excerpt of music is played (see below). Now Figure is completely alone; Voice and Boy have left and music is his only company. This recurring theme, or implicit *da capo*, not only symbolises Figure's thoughts of 'her' but also marks the point at which he is at his lowest ebb.

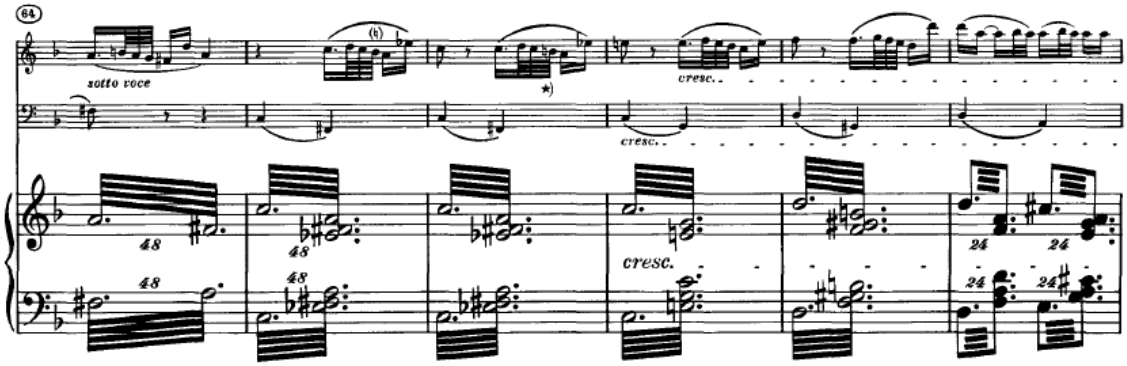


Figure 22. Beethoven, *Gesitertrio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1, 2nd mvt.*, bars 64-69.

Ghost Trio, however, does not wholly adhere to this introverted form, but contains an original complexity – that of continual deferral, eternal recurrence, or endless striving – which simultaneously structures and deconstructs its text. As a result of this complexity, *Ghost Trio* moves further away from Viconian circularity as it spirals into retrograde.[452] Accordingly, Beckett's depiction of Figure offers no finality, but replaces closure with a continuous deferral away from centrality. This deferral is seen in Beckett's resistance to a fully realised musical theme, Figure's slow movements around the periphery of his chamber, in his seated position off-centre, and in the sense of delay the viewer feels

[451] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 300.
[452] Beckett would have encountered Giambattista Vico's theories when working with Joyce on *Work in Progress*, if not earlier when a student at TCD.

at the arrival of the woman at Figure's door. Furthermore, Beckett's use of *Geistertrio* creates a diachronic pattern where there is tension between the interaction of the macro and micro levels of the play.

From the outset, the relationship between score and text is problematic as Beckett fits his text within Beethoven's structure to create an endless cycle of slightly varying repetitious acts. The outcome is an imperfect circle in which Figure's solicitation of resolution entails an ellipsis or 'simple redoubling of the route'.[453] Figure is left either '*standing irresolute*' or with his '*head bowed right down*' (GT: 412, 414) in a foetal-shaped posture, listening to fragments of music that similarly curl inward with an implicit *dal segno*. We see Figure looking like a snake-stone fossil: '*With growing music move in slowly to close-up of head bowed right down over cassette now held in arms and invisible*', a position he is to '*Hold till end of Largo*.' (GT: 414). Here, Figure's posture mirrors the circularity of the play's structure as the music from the cassette fades in and out to prompt the rise and fall of Figure's emotions.[454] Thus *Ghost Trio* is not concerned with the event, but provides the conditions for the evasion and erasure of the hoped-for event. Television, therefore, enables Beckett to both create and express the emotional impact of a subject's flawed pursuits to find company and comfort, and capture the underlying sense of longing.

Dies irae and *diminuendo*

[453] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 373. Derrida explains in 'Ellipsis' that 'the abyss of representation always remains dominated by its rhythm, indefinitely.' Ibid., p. 378.

[454] Figure's posture, which looks forward to death and backward toward his birth, could be read in light of Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* (1924), which Beckett read when undergoing treatment at the Tavistock Clinic with Wilfred Bion. Rank claims that 'phantasy in which progression toward death is identical to a regression in the womb, or where the future after death is also conceived as a return to a past before birth, is an attempt at healing the trauma of separation at birth.' Rank in Angela Moorjani, 'Beckett and Psychoanalysis' in *Palgrave Advances in Beckett Studies*, ed. by Lois Oppenheim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 172-193 (p. 173). For Beckett's attendance at the Tavistock Clinic, see: Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 171-182. For a psychoanalytical reading of *Ghost Trio*, see: Graley Herren, 'Unfamiliar Chambers: Power and Pattern in Samuel Beckett's *Ghost Trio*', *JOBS*, 8.1 (1998), 73-100

With almost nothing and no one to live for, Figure's existence reinforces the Schopenhauerian belief that life is 'a prevented dying, an ever-deferred death'.[455] This makes the music he listens to a *Dies irae* and the play as a whole, a representation of the process towards death. This process, as Kathryn White explains, is not a sudden or terminal event, but 'a process that must be endured if one is to reach that final stage of closure.'[456] Throughout the play, the viewer witnesses Figure enduring this process. Half ghost (he does not speak, and appears as a dark shadow) and half living (he responds and moves to an auditory stimulus), Figure drifts steadily around the screen as if not entirely belonging to the world of phenomena. As in the radio plays, finality is not granted because the music fuels Figure's yearning for 'her' return. To achieve this unrelenting endlessness, Beckett executes the same prevention of consolidation that one finds at the end of Beethoven's second movement. It is evident that Beethoven laboured tirelessly on his final cadence, carefully devising a result that doesn't resolve or neatly tie-up the tensions of the piece. Resolution is not reached until the finale of the *presto* (*Geistertrio*'s final movement; see below).

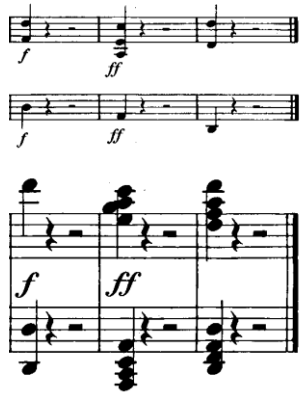


Figure 23. Beethoven, *Gesitertrio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1, 3rd mvt.*, bars 409-501.

By denying us of these conclusive final bars, *Ghost Trio* sits uncomfortably in the uncanny atmosphere which, as William Kinderman describes, invests Beethoven's *Largo* 'with its mysterious tremolos, chromatic textures, and powerful dynamic contrasts'.[457] Beckett's omission of *Geistertrio*'s first and third movement means that the play resists progression and moves, in the words of *Ill Seen*

[455] Schopenhauer in Payne, *World as Will and Representation*, I, p. 311.
[456] White, *Beckett and Decay*, p. 45.
[457] William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 134. Beckett's translation of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera's nineteenth century poem 'To Be' for the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* edited by Octavio Paz in 1958, may have influenced some of Beckett's own sentiments regarding endlessness.

Ill Said, 'well on the way to inexistence. As to zero the infinite' (ISIS: 74). By choosing his seven segments post-exposition (the earliest music Beckett uses is bar 19, the beginning of Beethoven's development), Beckett's sections are, like Figure, contextless and without linearity. Moreover, music 'creates the gaps or holes in language' that terrify Figure with the prospect of utter abandonment.[458] As the silences work in relation to music, they are a key component of Beckett's overall orchestration of the teleplay. The notion that sound emerges out of and falls back into silence is mirrored in Figure's transitory existence, where the silences represent the extent of Figure's impoverishment. Enoch Brater believes silences to be 'among the play's most resonant moments' as they parallel music's establishment of an 'overall mood of frustrated expectation'.[459] Indeed, the silence that follows the expectation of 'her' return magnifies the mood of insatiable yearning. As Figure is subjected to commands by Voice ('Now to door,' 'Now to window,' 'Now to pallet'; GT: 410-11) and his memories seem prompted by music, the moments of silence do not open out a space for quietude or relief, but reinforce his destitution. To allude to Schopenhauer, Figure is like a 'dark cloud driven by the wind over the sunny plain', whose movements are perceived as recasting shadows of torpidity and ennui, rather than as acts of positive agency.[460] Here, silence forms part of Beckett's negative dialectic. In an Adornian sense, music (of which silence is an integral component) references and responds to a lack that corresponds with an insatiable desire for affirmation and company. In an act of denial, the silence reinforces Figure's isolation and the impenetrableness of his space. It does not enable spiritual transcendence, however partial or unfulfilling this is, as seen in *Nacht und Träume*.[461]

The sense of an ending

[458] Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Beckett's Ghosts and Fluxions', *SBTA*, 5 (1996), 23-40 (pp. 34, 37). This observation hints at Blaise Pascal's remarks: 'The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.' A sense of vast emptiness is conveyed as 'The finite dissolves in the presence of the infinite and becomes pure nothingness.' Viewer and author are alone with no way out of the ennui. For Pascal the visible world is 'an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere'. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, ed. by Anthony Levi, trans. by Honor Levi (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 73, 152, 66. Pascal was considered as one of Beckett's 'old chestnuts', whose philosophy, therefore, can often be seen as an underlying influence. Beckett in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 653.

[459] Enoch Brater, *10 Ways of Thinking about Samuel Beckett: The Falsetto of Reason* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), p. 145.

[460] Schopenhauer in Payne, *World as Will and Representation*, II, p. 573.

[461] Simon Critchley argues that 'However much the protagonists in Beckett want to transcend words, in the televisual works through musicality or visuality, the achievement of this transcendence is always denied.' Simon Critchley, *Very Little – Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 153.

From bars 82 to 89, where Beethoven revisits the second theme (bars 83-87), before returning to the first theme (bars 87-89), one can hear a partial sense of finality as Figure moves back to his stool at the end of Act 3. This phrase, like the end of the teleplay, is anti-climactic as the music retracts and notation become sparser and less lyrical.

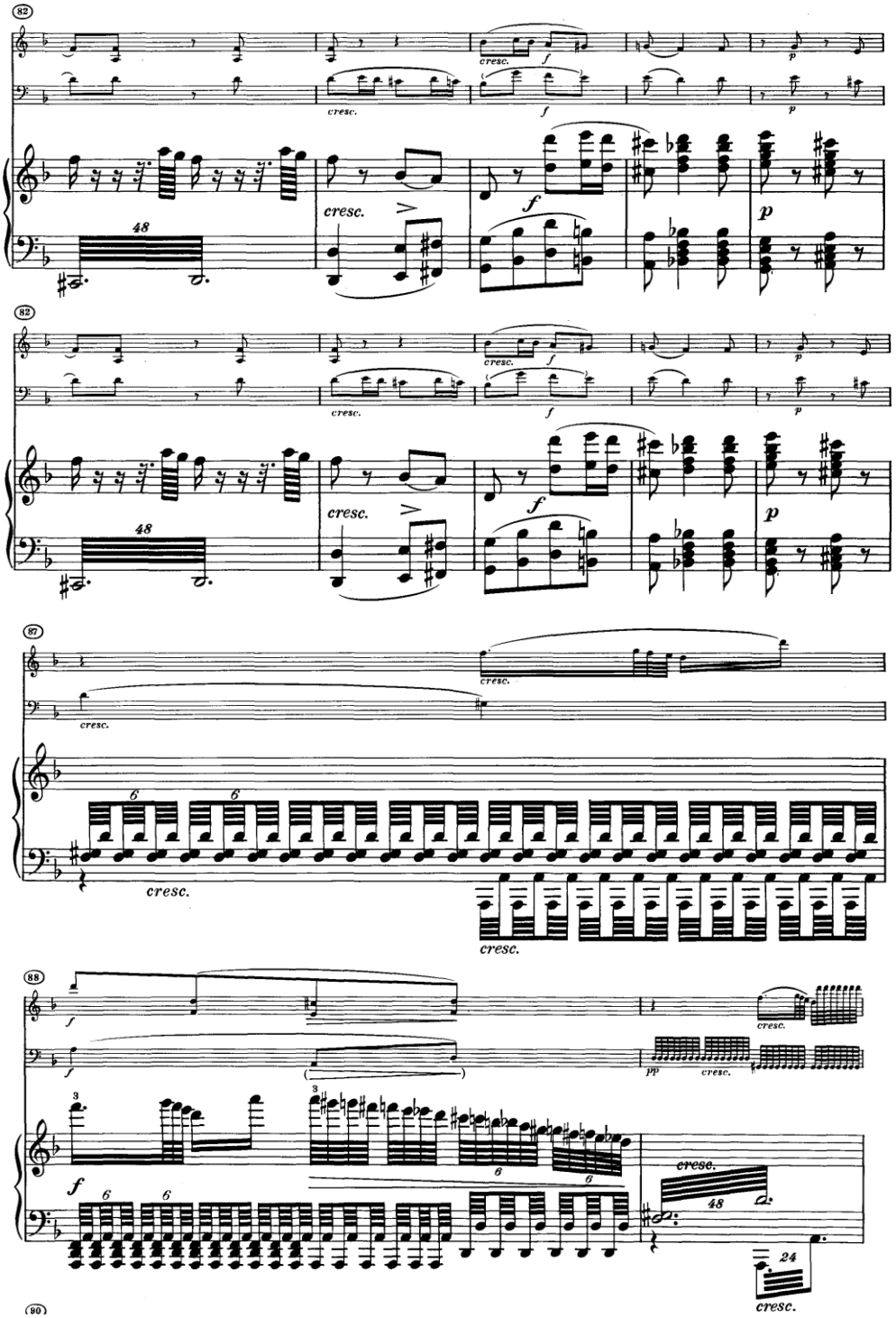


Figure 24. Beethoven, *Gesitertrio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1, 2nd mvt.*, bars 82-89.

The diminuendo and fragmentation in the music, represented in the increased number of rests that make the violin and cello quavers awkward and jolting off-beat notes, foreshadow Figure's augmenting angst. The 'growing music' (which crescendos reaching *forte* at bar 88) is visually realised in the '*close-up of head bowed right down over cassette now held in arms invisible*' (GT: 414). This semi-closing section, indicated by the rest before the final phrase, which precedes the descending chromatic scale marked decrescendo at bar 88, is followed by a coda (from bar 89 to 96) which provides a conclusion to the movement in its depreciating effect.

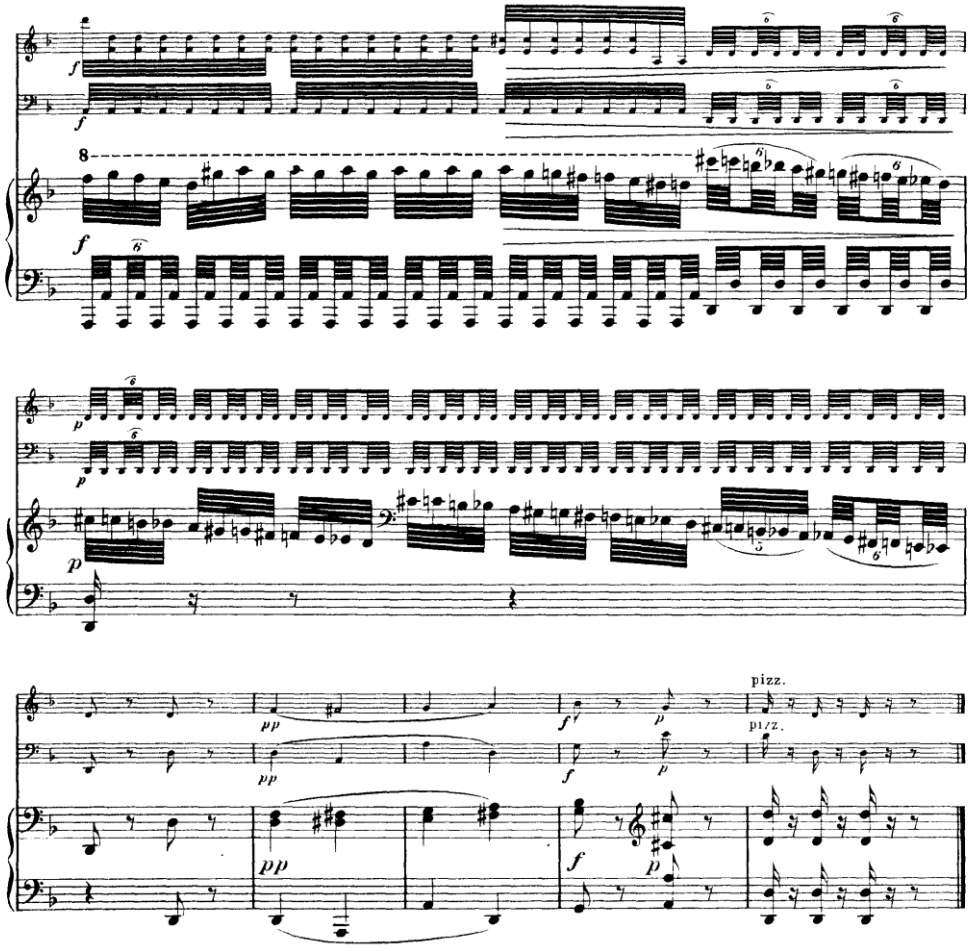


Figure 25. Beethoven, *Gesitertrio in D major, Op. 70, No. 1, 2nd mvt.*, bars 90-96.

These final bars of Beethoven's second movement are reflected in Figure's deepening depression and introversion. As the music ekes out of existence, it quietly sputters out three pizzicato notes suggestive of Figure's present, but likely shattered hope. This is echoed in Figure's raised head, as if in anticipation of the music's move into the gratifying third movement. A disappointing silence pervades, however, enacted in Figure's '*Move slowly back to A*' and the camera's final '*Fade out*'

(GT: 414), leaving the viewer with an impression of Figure as an abject, isolated subject.[462] During the filming of *Ghost Trio*, however, Beckett decided to show Figure smiling for the final image. When Figure raises his head, his face first appears sad, then he smiles meekly. Figure's wry smile becomes an unforgettable image suggestive of a half-knowing and pained acceptance of his situation. As Deleuze says of Francis Bacon's smiles, particularly that of the man in *Study for a Portrait* (1953); it is hysterical, an 'abominable smile, an abjection of a smile'.[463] This 'old xanthic laugh' (Text 2: 107) is at once ghostly and real, tense and relaxed. It is 'one of his rare wan smiles' (Lost Ones: 205) that sways, like the pendulum, between optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, it suggests a temporary relief from the tyranny of hope, but on the other, its vapidity relates to Figure's lack of agency. Like the smile at the end of *That Time* (1975), it contains a heavy dose of irony, mirroring Beckett's ironic use of Beethoven's *Largo*. The presence of the cassette is also noticeable at the end of the play. With his hands crossed over the cassette, Figure shows how he protects and still has faith in this object of technical control that promises relief from, but intensifies his longing. In this image of the tense smile and tight grasp of the cassette, the aural and the visual have become one through Figure, who embodies these unresolved tensions. In a letter sent to MacGreevy on 14 August 1937, Beckett describes J. B. Yeats' *A Storm* (1936) in a similar tone to the fraught promise conveyed through his connection between image and music in *Ghost Trio*. Beckett writes: 'One does not realise how still his pictures are till one looks at others, almost petrified, a sudden suspension of the performance, of the convention of sympathy and antipathy, meeting and parting, joy and sorrow.' (Letters I: 540) This description of Yeats' painting not only connects Beckett's early love of art to his late use of music, but also reinforces his unwavering interest in how best to simultaneously express the tension between opposites. Similarly, Knowlson's comparison of the late teleplays to Dutch and Flemish genre painting offers not only a formal parallel to Beckett's works, but provides interesting insights into the unknowability of Figure's consciousness. Both these paintings and Beckett's teleplay offer a sense

[462] Eric Levy describes Figure's seclusion in terms of the play's 'excruciating pointlessness of its own relentless continuation'. Eric Levy, 'The Beckettian Mimesis of Seeing Nothing', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 72.2 (Spring 2001), 620-632 (p. 626).
[463] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 21.

of the inwardness of the figure, but refuse direct access into their thoughts and feelings.[464] Whilst it may *seem* as though Figure is longing for a lost woman, when we view *Ghost Trio* in light of *Krapp* or *That Time* we cannot say for certain that this is what he is feeling. Like Vermeer, Beckett plays with our sense of familiarity as a well-worn depiction of everyday scenes is estranged by the sense of stillness that contains them. This depiction of a muted outward expression encourages the viewer, who finds him/herself in a dialectic of intimacy and exclusion, to read this lack as an intense depth of feeling, elevating the everyday to something more profound. The viewer, therefore, is inclined to endow Figure with an imagined inner life with an intensity that is matched only by Figure's silence.[465] What remains, as in the paintings by Jack Yeats, is a stillness of uncertainty, a Beethoven pause that stands alone in relation to what has gone before and what is to come.

Conclusion

Beckett's rhizomatic use of music can be traced back to *Dream* where: 'The music comes to pieces. The notes fly about all over the place, a cyclone of electrons' (Dream: 113). Beckett's treatment of Beethoven in *Dream* helps to explain Figure's reaction to the music he hears. In both early and late works, Beckett regards Beethoven's early compositions as incorporating

> a punctuation of dehiscence, flottements, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity bitched to hell because the units of continuity have abdicated their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons. (Dream: 139)

Figure's situation mirrors what Beckett sees as Beethoven's fractured style as he is lost in the blizzard of sound that fatigues him in its inexhaustible shuttling between hope and despair. In his letter to Axel Kaun Beckett writes of the possibility to 'feel a whisper of that final music or that silence which underlies All.' (Dis: 172) With its 'coherence gone to pieces' (Dream: 139), *Ghost Trio* never reaches

[464] In *Ghost Trio*, the cassette takes the place of the guitar or clavichord in paintings such as Vermeer's *Young Woman Playing a Guitar* (c.1970-2) or Gerrit Dou's *A Lady Playing a Clavichord* (c.1665), and the sitter is male rather than female. The universality of the familiar setting with its common decorative items, gives both these paintings and Beckett's teleplay a quotidian feel. Figure, therefore, becomes an everyman whose unspecified feelings and nondescript appearance emphasise his universality. This anonymity also threatens his autonomy and agency, as seen in his hesitant arm gestures and cautious, laboured movement.

[465] For a discussion of Beckett's engagement with genre painting, see: Connor Carville, '"Petrified in Radiance": Beckett Dutch Painting and the Art of Absorption', *SBTA*, 27.1 (2015), 73-86.

such finality. In line with his use of music on the radio, Beckett's creative process in this teleplay must also fail. Figure, in turn, is made to suffer for the music he listens to:

> consists generally in a constant succession of chords more or less disquieting, i.e. of chords exciting desire, with chords more or less quieting and satisfying; just as the life of the heart (the will) is a constant succession of greater or lesser disquietude, through desire or fear, with composure in degrees just as varied.[466]

For Schopenhauer, from the moment the melody and harmony is heard, the music arouses desires in the listener for resolution and the musical journey becomes an analogue for our journey from life to death. The journey Beckett charts in *Ghost Trio*, however, is anything but linear.[467] By constantly withholding the final chord of the piece and cutting up sections so that resolution is upset by a series of discords, Beckett extenuates the sense of *Sehnen* running through the work so that, in a cruel twist of fate, Figure's hopefulness becomes the cause of his helplessness.[468]

Nacht und Träume

Seven years on, Beckett wrote *Nacht und Träume* to test the extent to which art could be stripped of the visual and vocal, yet still be performed. In this work, Beckett strove towards greater impotence, abstraction, and minimalism to express acute loneliness. As Beckett completely empties his play of speech, this is truly a 'Literatur des Unworts' (Dis: 54).[469] He even admitted to cameraman Jim Lewis during the SDR taping of the teleplay 'that it was difficult for him to keep writing words, without having the feeling that it was a lie.'[470] This utter disbelief in the reliability of language led to Beckett's use of Schubert's lied and influence of Italian Renaissance and Dutch seventeenth-century painterly composition, making *Nacht und Träume* an important stage in the evolution of Beckett's creative process. From the opening fade up, we see an old man with grey hair seated at a table and then hear

[466] Schopenhauer, 'On the Metaphysics of Music' in Payne, *The World as Will and Representation*, II, p. 456.
[467] As Voice hints in Act 1: 'for you are dust, and to dust you shall return' (Genesis 3:19).
[468] In Act 2 of *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner explores the quasi-satisfied, quasi-frustrated dissonance awaiting final consonance in his Tristan chord. Similarly, Beckett's Belacqua-like figures exist 'in a Limbo purged of desire' (Dream: 44). Interestingly, Belacqua Shuah was said to have been a Florentine musical instrument craftsman known to Dante.
[469] From *Molloy* onwards the goal was to create a work 'to obliterate texts', 'blacken margins' and 'fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery' (Molloy: 13).
[470] Beckett in Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 98.

the last seven bars of Schubert's lied 'softly hummed' in a 'male voice' (NT: 465). As the evening light darkens, the last three bars of Schubert's lied are 'softly sung', followed by a fade down.[471]

Interpretations of *Nacht und Träume* range from seeing the play as an image of prayer (Brater and Knowlson) to a desire for reunion, or a musical suspension in the void (Laws).[472] Graley Herren argues that 'the desire for reunion, comfort and caress are central to Beckett's work, but no piece indulges these desires as openly as *Nacht und Träume*', and Ruby Cohn sees the teleplay as consisting of a flow of sound that 'enhances that feeling of entropic infinitude'.[473] This discussion expands Cohn's perspective to explain how Beckett uses music to amplify Dreamer's lamentation, what this 'entropic infinitude' is and if one can escape from it. In line with a musico-literary discourse, the remainder of this chapter asks: how does Schubert's music shape this paradigm of hope followed by despair, and how is this paradigm constructed? In answering these questions, the interaction between Beckett's visual impressions and musical narrative in his creative process is explored.

This final teleplay, originally entitled 'Nachtstück' ('Nightpiece'), was written in 1982 and broadcast the following year by the SDR. The teleplay was directed by Beckett with Helfrid Furon (as both Dreamer and Dreamt Self), Dick Morgner and Stephan Pritz. It centres on a male voice first humming and then singing the last seven bars (and quaver of the eighth bar before the end of the piece) of Franz Schubert's lied of the same name, D. 827, Op. 43, No. 2.

[471] As Beckett writes in *Still Sounds*: 'Leave it so then this stillest night till now of all quite still head in hand as shown listening trying listening for a sound or dreamt away try dreamt away where no such thing no more than ghosts make nothing to listen for no such thing as a sound.' ('Still' Sounds: 286)

[472] For readings that see Schubert's lied as comforting, see: Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p. 141; Homan, *Filming Beckett's Television Plays*, p. 114.

[473] Graley Herren, 'Splitting Images: Samuel Beckett's *Nacht und Träume*', *Modern Drama*, 43.2 (Summer 2000), 182-191 (p. 187); Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 158. Cohn's use of 'enhance' here is misleading due to its positive connotations. A more unbiased word like 'increase' would be preferable.

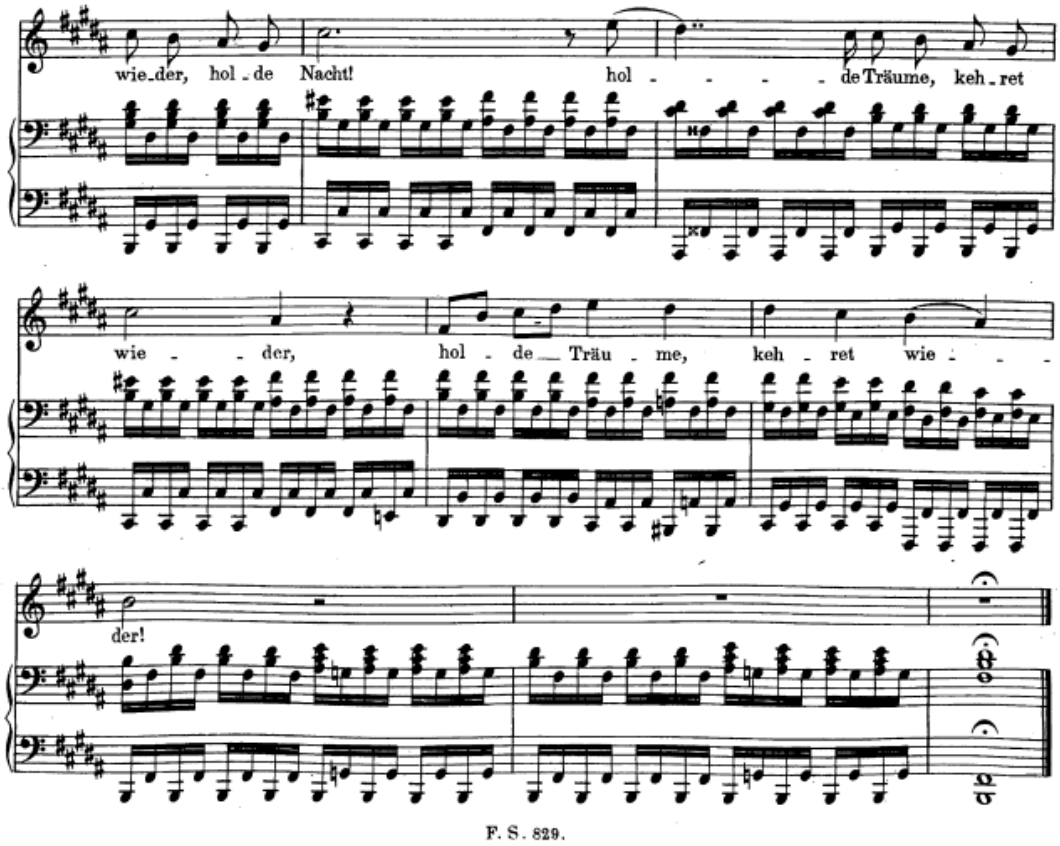


Figure 26. Schubert, *Nacht und Träume in B major, Op. 43, No. 2*, bars 22-30.

Beckett's chronological move from Beethoven to Schubert adds to the deepening solemnity and solipsism of his later teleplay for Schubert's lied is more introspective and indwelling than *Geistertrio*, which, in its three movements, retains Beethoven's spark of ingenuity. It was only in his late String Quartets (particularly his last quartet *Es muß stein!* Op. 135) that Beethoven put this grandiosity to rest. During his middle period, to which *Geistertrio* belongs, Beethoven's muscularity can still be heard.[474] By choosing Schubert, Beckett replaces Beethoven's inner strength with the younger composer's sense of inner doubt. The difference between the two composers is explained by Scott Burnham, who states: 'Music, we like to say, is about time. Whereas Beethoven can seem to enlist time in a glorious ride to the future, Schubert makes us feel its irrevocable passing. We hear the sound of memory.'[475] A similar comparison can be made between the two teleplays; whereas Figure walks and has Voice and Boy, Dreamer is practically motionless, and is completely alone.

[474] In his middle period (1803-14), Beethoven used a 'germ' motif to allow him to experiment with diverse modulation. This involved taking the initial idea and transforming it through different keys (modulation) in order to expand the harmonic realm of the piece to create a sense of development and vast spaciousness. Within this space, the music unfolds its drama, before returning (cyclic form) to its originating idea.
[475] Scott Burnham, 'Schubert and the Sound of Memory', *The Musical Quarterly*, 84.4 (Winter 2000), 661-663 (p. 663).

Although both plays use Romantic music to emphasise the loneliness of their protagonists, in *Nacht und Träume* music is even more concerned with the evocative nature of its structure and dismisses any communicative sense of dramatic narrative. Mary Bryden explains that Schubert's lied has more of 'an autonomous, mysterious presence. It is never a rapturous or transformatory source. It may even be a source of suffering or melancholia in itself ["shivering through"], for, in its associative power, it affords a means of reliving a lost moment.'[476] Set in half-light, which fades up 'on a dark empty room lit only by evening light from a window set high in back wall' (NT: 466), the setting echoes Bryden's description of Schubert's lied as it depicts a melancholy Dreamer in a 'faintly lit' (NT: 465) room.[477]

Set and structure: visual and aural patterning

When the window light goes out and the music stops, Dreamer's head droops and his Dreamt Self appears at the top right hand corner of the screen. As in *Worstward Ho*, Dreamer is a solitary figure sitting with 'eyes clenched' and 'head sunk on crippled hands' in 'dim light' (WH: 83).[478] Silently, the Dreamt Self's head is lifted by unknown hands, he is given a sip of water and his brow is wiped with a cloth. With outstretched hands the Dreamt Self holds the bodiless hand, pulls it towards him and rests his head on the hands which now rest on the table. As the Dreamt Self is cowered over in wan light, the other hand of the invisible body is placed gently on the Dreamt Self's head, as if in acknowledgement of Dreamer's sorrow and suffering. The brevity of this moment of compassion mirrors the brevity of sympathy in the entire play. As a window appears by outside light shining through it, Dreamer wakes and raises his head, as he does this, the hummed song can be heard for the second time. Just as before, when the window light goes out, the singing becomes clearer to associate music with the margins of deeper reverie and loss. The music then stops and Dreamer's head droops into his dreaming pose. Thus music holds Dreamer between his two states of being, but offers no enlightenment as it perpetuates the same pattern again and again. This time, the camera zooms in on

[476] Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 30.
[477] The light comes into the scene by gradation, as it does in Lyonel Feininger's painting entitled *Sunset*, 1930. Beckett would have been familiar with Feininger's paintings as the Sinclairs owned at least one of his works.
[478] Dreamer and his Dreamt Self could also be compared to the Reader and Listener of *Ohio Impromptu* (1980). They all share the same long white hair and dark coat. 'Impromptu' could also be a discreet reference to Schubert's impromptus for piano. M in his sanctum in *...but the clouds...* also bears similarities to Dreamer.

the Dreamt Self so that the image fills the screen and the same actions are repeated as before (head raised, sips water, brow wiped, head lowers). As the camera zooms out and the Dreamt Self disappears, Dreamer comes back into the frame. This time, however, Dreamer does not wake and the music does not begin; he stays resting and motionless. Like the character in Beckett's short story 'Still', Dreamer is left to 'Leave it so all quite still or try listening to the sounds all quite still head in hand listening for a sound' (Fizzle 7: 242). By using a brief still when Dreamer's head is down, the camera lingers on Dreamer and draws out his sadness before he 'withdraws and disappears' (NT: 465). This frustrated withdrawal becomes the predominant mood of the play as Beckett uses Schubert's lied to tease out Dreamer's desire for comfort and protection.

Between these moments of sadness, Dreamer dreams of company and consolation, and possibly for the woman whose hands we see and the Dreamt Self feels, to emerge.[479] This desire, however, is unsatisfied as Dreamer remains alone. Unlike the use of the cassette in *Ghost Trio*, 'the same old record' (ATF: 197) in *All That Fall*, or Winnie's musical-box that plays the Waltz Duet 'I love you so' from *The Merry Widow* in *Happy Days*; music is more intimately produced in *Nacht und Träume*. Schubert's lied is sung (not by Dreamer for we do not see his mouth or chest move), but by a thin, frail male voice that makes the viewer think it could possibly be Dreamer. In these moments, music is living and completely replaces the word in importance and predominance. As Catherine Laws points out: 'heard through the voice of someone within the play, the music operates more intimately, as part of a personal expressive vocabulary.'[480] Laws adds that because there is no scene or setting to develop, the music that is hummed then sung 'becom[es] part of what that individual "is" or has to "say" within the play'.[481] Whilst this interpretation adheres to Laws' belief that music becomes synonymous with Dreamer's thoughts, it sees this to be a more sinister relationship than it

[479] Whilst these hands are androgynous, Beckett intended them to be female; he told Knowlson that the hands are 'large but female'. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 600. As the SDR production is all-male, however, the hands must be masculine. Consequently, any sense of nurturing motherliness, connections with the Virgin Mary, or memories of a caring lost lover, are diminished. Furthermore, a typescript with production states that a blue cloth was used to conceal the body of the person whose arm is seen in the play (UoR MS2465). This use of blue to hide the body of the compassionate woman chimes with Beckett's association of blue with the Virgin Mary, discussed in the following chapter. It is interesting to read these motherly hands in light of John Robert Keller's comments on the disconnection between the emerging self and the mother. Keller talks of a 'nameless dread' that is a 'haunting fear of non-existence engendered either by abandonment or by usurpation of the self', but does not link this to *Nacht und Träume*. See: John Robert Keller, *Samuel Beckett and the Primacy of Love* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 25.
[480] Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 202.
[481] Ibid.

first appears because we do not know exactly where the music is coming from or if Dreamer wants to listen to it. Laws goes on to suggest that Beckett's decision to leave out the accompaniment and omit the middle part of the lied, 'simplif[ies] the musical impact' and 'minimise[s] the more disturbing elements' within the lied.[482] This, however, does not account for the effect this simpler, more ethereal music has on Dreamer. Firstly, instead of acting as a voice to call upon for comfort and empathy, music could be interpreted as an aloof spectre that reminds Dreamer of his loss and wakes him from his dreams. To allude to Ernst Bloch, Beckett does not 'let the daydreams grow really fuller, that is, clearer, less random, more familiar, more clearly understood and more mediated with the course of things.'[483] Instead, Dreamer's dreams remain removed and distant. Their position at the top right corner of the screen gives them an iconographical sense of remove and separates this unattainably transcendent existence from Dreamer who is sat at a table near the centre of the screen. Secondly, it is possible that Dreamer's solitariness is exaggerated by Schubert's vocal line which, lacking the steadying bass tremolando of the piano accompaniment, leaves the unanchored melody partial and drifting. Consequently, the music is more easily absorbed into Dreamer's subconscious and can affect him more acutely with strong feelings of longing. And thirdly, in the visualisation of his dream Dreamer's private desires are unveiled after he hears humming then singing. Taking these three points into consideration, Beckett's choice of Schubert's *Nacht und Träume* is central to understanding the presentation of ideas and emotions within this play.

Why Schubert?

When considering Beckett's use of music, one might ask: 'why Schubert; why not Schumann or Brahms?', for all of these composers elicit sympathy and express sorrow. For Beckett, however, none expressed the innermost tensions of the human psyche as well as Schubert. Indeed, Beckett had

[482] Ibid., p. 208.

[483] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), I, p. 4. In contrast to Bloch, who believed in the existence of the idea of utopia, Beckett's dream sequence deliberately denies this utopian idealism. In *Something's Missing: A Study of the Dialectic of Utopia*, Adorno challenges Bloch's belief that even if utopia is absent for us, it is potentially legible elsewhere. Similarly, in the teleplays, Beckett's hints towards the invocation of what is missing simply emphasises what Figure and Dreamer are lacking. This is reflected in the striped-back and cut-up scores and the subjects' disorientating repetitive movements. Interestingly, from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the Greek *eu-topia* ('good place) and *ou-topia* ('no place') insinuates that utopia itself necessarily does not exist. Hence, Beckett seems to be in line with Adorno's argument where 'the fulfilment of utopia consists largely only in a repetition of the continually same "today",' and the picture of utopia cannot be cast in a positive manner, nor can it be complete. Adorno, 'Something's Missing' in *Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, p. 2.

already considered using Schubert's 'Der Doppelgänger' in *Film* and according to Miron Grindea, Schubert was 'the composer who spoke most to him whom he considered a friend in suffering'.[484] Listening to the last song of *Der Winterreise* (Op. 89, D. 911), entitled 'Der Leiermann' ('The Hurdy-Gurdy Man'), it becomes clear that the suffering within Beckett's works finds its counterpart in the music of Franz Schubert.[485] As Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle tell us in *Beckett's Library*: 'The symbolic "winter journey" crops up in several of Beckett's texts, from *Textes pour rien* through to *What Where*'.[486] It can safely be said that nowhere is Schubert more prominent than in *Nacht und Träume*. In his teleplay, however, Beckett removes Schubert's Romantic hue and creates a sense of suffering that comes in response to what Adorno termed as the 'disintegration of metaphysical meaning'.[487] In other words, unlike Schubert, Beckett's *Nacht und Träume* lacks the comforting layer of unquestionable faith in spirituality. Despite his varied and numerous attempts to dispel myth and his disregard of artificial 'poetic' writing, Beckett cannot explain the fundamental nature of our Being *en-soi*. Nevertheless, at the heart of both Beckett and Schubert's work is the agonising weight of unrequited love as each piece charts the desperate (yet still hopeful) journey that veers away from company towards this inevitable sense of deepening loss. Schubert's 'Frühlingstraum' ('Dream of Spring') expresses a reverie of love and happiness which is dramatically shattered by crowing birds and bitter cold. This contrast between 'love and suffering / And world and dream', to quote from 'The Linden Tree', is remarkably similar in image, phrasing and atmosphere to Beckett's teleplay.[488] The lonely persona of 'Frühlingstraum' sings: 'I dreamt of love returned / Of a beautiful maiden' who disappears when he wakes:

> And when the cocks crowed
> My heart woke up;
> Now I sit here alone
> And think about my dream.[489]

[484] Miron Grindea, 'Beckett's Involvement in Music' in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, 183-185 (p. 183).
[485] It is hardly surprising that in his idealisation of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Franz Liszt called Schubert 'the most poetic musician that has ever lived'. Liszt in Cecil Gray, *The History of Music* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 191. Numerous parallels between Beckett and Schubert have been drawn. For example, tenor Ian Bostridge, who performed *Winterreise* for the Enniskillen International Beckett Festival in 2012, observes: 'there is something deeply Beckettian about the piece.' Ian Bostridge, *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), p. 25.
[486] Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, p. 218.
[487] Theodor Adorno in Eric Levy, *Trapped in Thought: A Study of Beckettian Mentality* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 69.
[488] For Ian Bostridge's translation of the whole poem see: Bostridge, *Schubert's Winter Journey*, p. 147.
[489] Ibid., pp. 241, 243.

Schubert's ability to riff on the absurdity of existence and anchor the doubtfulness this theme creates, both in the psyche and onto political and social circumstances, is the key to the depth and durability of his works. The image of Schubert as a composer with 'incandescent purity and intensity of vision', as John Reed puts it, ties in with Beckett's image as a writer. However, when Reed adds that Schubert's music 'speaks, with a kind of consoling sadness, of a lost world of innocence and joy', differences between these two conveyers of suffering emerge.[490] Where Schubert consoles, Beckett does not.[491]

As a result of Beckett's use of Schubert's lied, this teleplay has been dismissed as being too Romantic. For example, Martin Esslin concedes that whilst offering an 'extremely powerful' image, he finds the play 'somewhat too sentimental'.[492] Whilst Beckett's use of German Romanticism may be seen as sentimental indulgence, upon closer inspection, his selection of the last few bars of this piece, played without piano accompaniment, creates a dark, elusive sound. James Knowlson also challenges Esslin to defend this teleplay by commenting that it 'could have been sentimental, even maudlin', but '[t]he mysterious quality of the action, the beauty of the singing […] and the specificity of the repeated, almost ritualistic patterns avoid this.'[493] Dreamer's plight is not sugared by empathic understanding, instead, music perpetuates Dreamer's cycle of disappointment. This aligns Beckett's purpose with Lawrence Kramer's description of music's purpose: 'to represent the activity of a unique subject, conscious, self-conscious, and unconscious, whose experience takes shape as a series of conflicts and reconciliations between inner and outer reality'.[494] The main difference is that Beckett avoids reconciliation in favour of Dreamer's extenuated angst and lack of agency. Though he ricochets between states of being, Dreamer does not pace across the stage like May in *Footfalls*, or rock in a chair next to a window like the senile woman in *Rockaby*. Dreamer is almost motionless, he

[490] John Reed, *Schubert: The Final Years* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 269.
[491] The same sense of ungratified longing is evident in Beckett's 'Dream' notebook where he boxes two citations purporting to be from Thomas à Kempis. The first which begins '*Qui melius scit pati majorem tenebris pacem* [II. Vi; 'He who knows the secret of enduring will enjoy the greatest peace']' speaks to the endless longing that Beckett's subjects must endure. John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett's 'Dream' Notebook* (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999), p. 85.
[492] Martin Esslin, 'Towards the Zero of Language' in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, ed. by James Acheson, James and Kateryna Arthur (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), p. 46. Everett Frost also states: 'Nowhere is the presence of a serene romanticism in this supposed pessimistic ironist more palpable than in this gentle last teleplay'. Frost, *All That Fall and other plays for radio and screen*, p. xx.
[493] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 683.
[494] Lawrence Kramer, *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 201-2.

has lost his agency and is a victim of his own existence as he sits looking forlorn. To quote from 'Still' again, Dreamer is*:* 'Back in the chair at the window before the window head in hand as shown dead still listening again in vain' (Fizzle 7: 269). Dreamer's changeless situation (there is no speech, movement, or colour) simply reflects the helplessness of his condition which provides no room for reunion. The faint singing is merely a link between his empty existence and his dream for consolation, it provides Dreamer with no agency.

Beckett's reimagining of Schubert's lied

Schubert's lied expresses the phantasmagorical charm of the dream world.[495] Its otherworldly sounds haunt Beckett's teleplay and as 'a simple greeting to the falling night' it brings dreams 'to tired human kind' in a hushed adagio.[496] As tenor Mark Padmore describes it:

> [Schubert] reaches the sublime through simplicity; when he is doing least he is at his most powerful […] Twenty eight bars of unvarying, rocking semi-quavers; a heart-stopping modulation from B major to G major; and a vocal line that traces perfectly the contours of the poem. It's not so much a melody as a representation of text in another dimension.[497]

As there is no text, Schubert's lied, when it is sung not hummed, provides the only words of the play. For musicologist Susan Youens, 'The *raison d'être* of the poem is its act of withholding, the absence at its core.'[498] What Beckett withholds is gratification as what Dreamer yearns for remains out of reach. The dreams, like Figure's thoughts of 'her' approaching, remain an illusion of hope.

The solemn poem to Schubert's *Nacht und Träume* was written by Romantic Viennese poet Matthaüs Casimir von Collin (1779-1824), whose words evoke the atemporality of dreams. Composed in the year following the poet's death, Schubert used the dilatory weight of Collin's words to create a long drawn-out melodic line, requiring a soft yet full tone from the vocalist.[499] The

[495] In a fascinating interview with Petroc Trelawney for BBC Radio 3's *Music Matters* programme, Mary Bryden speaks of the connection between music and the otherworldly. Bryden states that music creates a 'sense of a presence which is almost an absence, or it's somewhere in-between. Music provides a passage to another world.' Mary Bryden on 'Cassette tape of Music Matters and Krapp's Last', *BBC Radio 3*, 9 April 2006 (UoR JEKC/2/5/3).
[496] Richard Capell, *Schubert's Songs* (London: Pan Books, 1957), p. 208.
[497] Mark Padmore in Tom Service, 'Schubert: Ferocious, Tender, Sublime' (*Guardian*, 19 March 2012) < http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/mar/19/schubert-ferocious-tender-sublime > [accessed 15 May 2015] On 1 May 2009, Padmore, accompanied by Andrew West, sang a fully staged performance of *Winterreise* with readings of Beckett's poetry in a concert entitled *One Evening*, directed by Katie Mitchell.
[498] Youens adds: 'The refusal to say where dreams come from, what they tell us, what they mean, is crucial to "Nacht und Träume," and so too is the implicit hint that dreams are music: we *listen* to them. For Schubert, this must have been an irresistible lure.' Susan Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song-Cycles* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), p. 86.
[499] Beckett's recording was of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau accompanied by Gerald Moore (1955).

evenness of stress and tempo created by the piano's evenly tempered semiquavers (marked *pianissimo*) challenges any singer to hold his breath under the 4/4 rhythm and sleepily slow tempo. The whole poem, translated here by Martin Esslin, reads as follows:

> Holy night, you do descend
> And dreams descend as well,
> Like the darkness throughout Space,
> Into men's silent, silent breast.
> They listen to them with pleasure
> And cry out, when day awakens:
> Come again, you holy night,
> Lovely dreams, oh come again.[500]

With its lexical set of darkness, silence and descent, Collin's poem moves inwards, burrowing itself deeper into the subconscious. The steadiness of this verse, particularly of the last two lines with their added pauses, shapes Dreamer's slow, monotonous existence.[501] The inclusion of the semitone 'sighing figure' in E for 'holde' ('lovely') crosses the bar-line on the first syllable of the word, and, following Collin's verse, sets the tone for the play. As Susan Youens observes:

> The combination of –h, the softest consonant of all, and the dark vowel –o makes of this rhythmic divergence an enactment of sighing, an exhalation of mingled yearning and loss. When the double-dotting [of the crotchet in D#] prolongs the syllable further, no one could mistake the fervour of the persona's desire for reunion with dreams and night.[502]

As if beseeching both Dreamer and viewer to delve inwardly, Beckett recycles the last line, 'Lovely dreams, oh come again', to stress its poignancy and immediacy. In light of Youens's analysis, Dreamer's existence mirrors Schubert's lied. Baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau explains that this lied is

> so full of a longing for purity and of devotion that only the controlled rhythm prevents [it] from spilling over into unbounded emotion. Melody and rhythm trace a line together, which, when followed by the listener, affords a sensation of inner release.[503]

What Beckett manages to do, by extracting the vocal line from the rhythmical piano accompaniment, is render this 'sensation of inner release' something altogether less enabling. As Deleuze comments:

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[500] Esslin, 'Towards the Zero of Language' in Acheson and Arthur, *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p. 45.
[501] For Richard Capell, *Nacht und Träume* requires a 'perfectly calm and steady flow of beautiful tone'. Capell, *Schubert's Songs* (London: Pan Books, 1957), p. 209. Beckett adopts a similar steadiness in his use of the camera and in his limited editing.
[502] Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder*, p. 92.
[503] Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *Schubert's Songs: A Biographical Study* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1984), p. 219.

'The monadic, melodic voice leaps outside the harmonic support, here reduced to a minimum'.[504] By never revealing the image of the woman and only playing a short segment of Schubert's lied, Beckett replaces inner release with emptiness. This emptiness, whether shown by the black screen or silence, incites tension and sense of inevitable disappointment in the viewer/listener who also longs for resolution. As the music 'whispers away into nothingness', becoming introspective, so too, in Beckett's play, does the melody line drift aimlessly through time and space without direction or focus.[505] As a result, the music is an autonomous, elusive element that drifts steadily between Dreamer's waking and sleeping states. The deliberate movement between shots of Dreamer and his Dreamt Self exaggerates the sense of time passing and draws out Dreamer's suffering. This pace follows Schubert's tempo, which he marked *langsam, sempre legato* (slow, always *legato*). Accordingly, each time the light shines on Dreamer, nothing has changed; he is in the same place and has nothing new to show. The slowness of the music and the stillness of Dreamer's body create a sense of endless torpidity as Beckett conveys a series of events chained together by boredom and suffering.

In this state, Dreamer is beyond conscious consolation, and the music is inserted as an act of haunting, not an act of healing. If as Anna McMullan states, 'Beckett's work is saturated with the cultural fragments and ghosts of twentieth century Europe', this Modernist backdrop needs to be reconciled with his use of Schubert as a nineteenth century composer.[506] McMullan goes on to suggest that, through the lens of embodiment, one can see a 'double perspective' at play.[507] She adds that 'performance can re-site the performer's body in an alternative fabric of cultural references.'[508] As Dreamer perhaps remembers himself singing Schubert's lied, his being is embedded in the German Romanticism inherent in this music, albeit in a non-corporeal sense. When Beckett removes the piano accompaniment and shortens the piece, however, he dislocates it from its potentially sentimental

[504] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 172.
[505] Ibid., p. 220.
[506] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, p. 143. McMullan subsequently thinks about how accounts of 'global or transcultural performances of Beckett is producing new versions and embodiments of Beckett's drama.' Ibid.
[507] Ibid.
[508] Ibid.

context by using typically twentieth-century acts of subtraction and fragmentation. Whilst Beckett distances Schubert from his context there is, to allude to McMullan, a 'double perspective' at work. Through the last seven bars, the listener can still hear a trace of German Romantic melody, but also feels removed from this aspect of the lied. This is visualised by the simultaneous ephemeral proximity and physical separation between Dreamer and his Dreamt Self. As a result, the warm sincerity behind Schubert's lullaby is parodied in the hazy afterglow of the Dreamt Self, allowing a familiar sense of Beckettian irony to shine through. This irony is also represented in the potentially mocking dream of Holy Communion and suggestion that the woman's hands belong to the Virgin Mary. Hence, Beckett's modification and positioning of Schubert's lied, is saturated with fragments of a more sinister twentieth-century musical landscape of repetition and irresolution.

An uncalled-for lullaby

In its adherence to the musical structure of Schubert's lied and denial of the traditional formal requirements of literature, such as plot, speech, and characterisation, *Nacht und Träume* is a visualisation of music. For example, in Schubert's accumulation of appoggiatura figures (generally associated with sighing), Beckett's teleplay adopts a crestfallen tone, expressed by Dreamer as he wakes from his pleasant dreams to find himself alone and in a dark, bare room. As an unaccompanied voice, whose origin is unknown, hums then sings to himself, Dreamer seems to be 'drawing up something that has soaked into [his] memory' without consciously intending to do so.[509] Chris Ackerley suggests that Beckett's subjects in his late teleplays are 'images that approach the condition of music'.[510] When considering *Nacht und Träume*, this observation holds true as Dreamer's presence is orchestrated through a series of stage directions that can be read as spatial dynamics. Additionally, dynamic markings can be married to Beckett's lighting directions, making *Nacht und Träume* seem like a well-crafted soundscape. The 'faintly lit' (fade up), 'evening light' (fade down), and 'minimally lit' (fade out) set can be matched by the crescendo, decrescendo, and diminuendo of Schubert's lied

[509] Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 209.
[510] Chris Ackerley, '"Ever Know What Happened?": Shades and Echoes in Samuel Beckett's Plays for Television', *JOBS*, 18.1-2 (2009), 136-164 (p. 154).

(NT: 465).[511] Moreover, the ephemerality and transcendent quality of the music is reflected by the ghostliness and religious significance of the images. Mary Bryden discusses the 'pure spirit' of Beckett's use of music when she says 'To be aware of Beckett as a composer, however, also involves being aware of the fragility, the "almost-not-thereness" of his textual music.'[512] In 1981, Beckett described to André Bertold his desire to find 'un *ombre vocale*, […] une voix qui soit une ombre. Une voix blanche [a *vocal shadow*, […] a voice which is a shadow. A white voice].'[513] Television allows Beckett to silently capture this 'almost-not-thereness' that emerges from Schubert's lied, Dreamer's form and the ambiguously dim lighting.[514]

In line with Dreamer's ephemerality and the spiritual imagery in his dream, John Pilling claims that one witnesses the journey towards 'the light of eternity only through the death of the body.'[515] When thinking of *Nacht und Träume*, the death of language must also be included in Pilling's observation because for Beckett, this was a beneficial, even 'enhancing' (to re-appropriate Cohn's wording) loss that aided his ability to present the diminution of the image/body.[516] Accordingly, music becomes the agent that aids the breakdown of the self into imperceptible fragments that become lost in the surrounding greyness. As opposed to Dreamer, who remains nebulous, music becomes clearer as humming turns to singing and is repeated with increased volume. Music aids what Beckett describes in *Film* as the 'search of non-being' (Film: 323). In his half-life state, Dreamer slips into his unconscious, and becomes a 'non-being', answerable only to music. In *neither* Beckett's words describe Dreamer's metamorphosing tendencies as he writes that we shift: 'to and fro in shadow from inner to outershadow / from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by

[511] Beckett's style of directing is often related to that of a conductor. He was frequently heard using musical terms to direct his actors. See: Sean Doran, 'Why Music Struck a Chord With Beckett', *Guardian* (31 July 2014) < http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jul/31/why-music-struck-chord-beckett > [accessed 21 February 2015] For *Happy Days* Brenda Bruce rehearsed to the ticking of the metronome because Beckett believed that it would ensure that the rhythm he desired was conveyed. Billie Whitelaw, Beckett's 'perfect actress', commented that in *Not I* she felt like a musical instrument, and in *Footfalls*, she 'felt like a moving, musical, Edvard Munch painting'. Whitelaw in Michael Billington, 'Billie Whitelaw: Beckett's "perfect actress"', *Guardian* (20 December 2014) < http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/dec/21/billie-whitelaw-samuel-beckett-perfect-actress > [accessed 7 January 2015]

[512] Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, pp. 42, 38.

[513] Bernold, *L'Amitié de Beckett*, p. 108.

[514] Bryden also notes that Beckett said to his cousin John Beckett: 'I think that the opening of Schubert's String Quartet in A minor (Deutsch 804) is more nearly pure spirit than any other music.' Beckett in Bryden, *Beckett and Music*, p. 42.

[515] Pilling, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 123.

[516] Pilling explains: 'His writing has gained solidity at the expense of limpidity, and total clarity at the expense of basic lucidity.' Ibid., p. 189.

way of neither' (neither: 258).[517] Beckett's teleplay stages this 'way of neither'. As much as it is a play about loneliness and dejection, it is a play of alienation in which a Dreamer exists in a liminal space between existence and nothingness. Alone in this in-between place, Dreamer seeks comfort and solace, but exiled from himself (he is split between two states of consciousness) and from society, he cannot be comforted by the tenderness his Dreamt Self is permitted. This is because his two states of being are, in Beckett's words, 'impenetrable'. The familiarity of the repeated music both aids the continuation of the past into the present and confirms the changelessness of his condition. Its crescendo and greater emphasis make it seem like a prompt that reminds Dreamer of his miserable condition. Furthermore, the words 'come again' add to the feeling of endlessness as night falls for the second time. Having acted as an instigator, music seems to have 'done its job' as the 'holy night' of 'lovely dreams' descends upon Dreamer and initiates comfort through the hands, cup and cloth, but soon retracts these comforts by waking him.[518] The effect is an exaggeration of Dreamer's sense of loss as he wakes. Defined by music and acting in accordance to it, Dreamer and his Dreamt Self are at its whim and become morbid manifestations of the denial of sentimentality. Furthermore, use of repetition de-familiarises Schubert's lied and its consolatory tones turn into disconcerting sounds. A soft lull morphs, like Dreamer, into a helpless projection of woes. No longer a lullaby, Schubert's lied is an estranged, sinister voice of entrapment. The subject is no longer made of words, nor does he exist in words, but is composed of a music that does not lighten or conclude. There is no space for Romantic sentimentality, for a Modernist gloom casts its shadow over the patches of light that intermittently shine behind the image of the Dreamt Self and through the window. This chiaroscuro effect emphasises the gulf between dream and reality, hope and fatigue.[519] Schubert's lied links the fading light on Dreamer with the commencement of his dream. It is on music's cue that the evening

[517] *Neither* was written in response to Morton Feldman's intention to compose something 'looking or the quintessence, something that just hovered'. Feldman and Villars, *Morton Feldman Says*, p. 75.
[518] Matthaüs Casimir von Collin trans. by Esslin, 'Towards the Zero of Language' in Acheson and Arthur, *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p. 45.
[519] James Knowlson's public lecture delivered at TCD on 7 February 1972 discusses the significance of Beckett's tonal contrast. He arrives at the conclusion that: 'it is in the very presence of these haunting and apparent opposites [light and dark], or rather their coexistence and confrontation in the mind and in the imagination, that results in confusion, in a failure to understand, let alone explain, the nature of existence.' Knowlson, *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett: Text of a Public Lecture delivered at Trinity College Dublin on February 7th, 1972* (London: Turret Books, 1972), p. 41. Knowlson's comment relates to the meaning of '*lux in tenebris*' (light in darkness) from the Gospel of John 1.5, which reads: '*et lux in tenebris lucet et tenebrae eam non conprehenderunt* [The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it]'.

light coming from the window behind Dreamer fades, so that, as Trish McTighe observes, 'music sets the emotional tone of quiet contemplation', reminiscent of both the solemn Dutch portraits and quiescent minimalism Beckett admired.[520]

Dreamer's painterly intangibility

For the entirety of the teleplay, Dreamer sits alone in darkness. Like a scene from a gothic novel, this outsider figure sits and waits expectantly for a phantom to visit him in his dreams. John Reed alludes to this moment of apparition in Schubert's piece:

> The discovery of the unconscious, the preoccupation with night, with mystery and with dreams to which it led, is here celebrated in the most Romantic song Schubert wrote. Here is the musical equivalent of the gibbous moons and moon-haunted landscapes which permeated the imagination of Samuel Palmer and Caspar Friedrich, the first deeply felt expression in music of mystery and the infinite which *heilige Nacht* conjured up in the breast of every Romantic.[521]

With the lied's call for night, ghostliness of Dreamer, and his otherworldly dream, *Nacht und Träume* is preoccupied with death.[522] Indeed, Dreamer's pale face, weariness and slow movements make him appear more spectral than human. Like Figure, the monotony of his existence suggests that there is nothing to live for, so he waits for death and, like the old man in *Worstward Ho* whose 'head [is] sunk on crippled hands' (WH: 83), looks as though he is praying.

As a repeated refrain, the 'come again' of Schubert's music could represent the call to prayer, to which Dreamer responds by drooping his head into his cupped hands.[523] This is followed by the most significant point in the play where, in the 'kinder light', a hand emerges from the 'dark beyond and above', then 'appears and rests gently' on the Dreamt Self's head (NT: 465). Beckett's description of the dimly lit room and female hands as 'kind' and 'gentle' reinforce the comfort and compassion exchanged in this scene. The female 'helping hands' provide spiritual comfort in a

[520] Trish McTighe, '"Noli me tangere": Haptic Certitude in Beckett's *Eh Joe* and *Nacht und Träume*', *Modern Drama*, 55.2 (Summer 2012), 216-229 (p. 224). Examples include portraits by Cornelis van Haarlem, Vermeer, and Rembrandt, and minimalist canvases by Geneviève Asse, discussed in the following chapter.
[521] John Reed, *The Schubert Song Companion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 339.
[522] Ernest G. Porter suggests that this teleplay contains the 'connection of peace and security with death as a psychological manifestation'. Ernest G. Porter, *Schubert's Song Technique* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1961), p. 113.
[523] On 18 December 1936, Beckett described himself in similar terms, drawing on Brueghel the Elder's *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559): 'I am the pretty young man […] [in] Bruegels Proverbs […] der durch die Finger seht. Was sehe ich durch die Finger? Mich, mit übergehenden Augen [the one that looks through his fingers. What do I see through the fingers. Myself. With crying eyes].' Beckett in Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 52. It is likely that the blue cloak at the centre of this painting would have interested Beckett, as discussed in the following chapter.

moment of tranquillity.[524] Beckett's insistence that the hands be strong and masculine, removes their femininity and makes them appear older, perhaps motherly and protective, rather than young and caressing. Conversely, as the woman's hands come from the 'dark beyond and above' (NT: 465), they appear deathly as they reach down from heaven, unattached to the woman's body (which we do not see). As they console the Dreamt Self, these decidedly female hands are both a comforting presence and an upsetting reminder of Dreamer's solitariness, as he sits devoid of human touch and compassion.[525] As James Knowlson has illustrated, when the Dreamt Self's hands softly clasp the female hands the image is reminiscent of Albrecht Dürer's 'wonderful etching of praying hands', that Beckett had hanging in his ancestral home at Cooldrinagh.[526]

Figure 27. Albrecht Dürer, *Study of Praying Hands*, c.1508.

Transcendent spirituality and the calm quietude of prayer are presented in both Dürer's painting and during Dreamer's dream. This spiritual quality, according to Adorno, can be found in music's correlating 'theological dimension' in that it says something, but what it says is at once revealed and concealed.[527] This dimension is located in music's relation to the absolute. Adorno

[524] In a letter to Reinhart Müller-Freienfels dated 5 August 1982, Beckett explains: 'I think no choice but female for the helping hands. Large but female. As more female conceivably male than male conceivably female.' (Letters IV: 588)
[525] A similar sentiment is expressed in the following mirlitonnade: 'head on hands / hold me / unclasp / hold me' (CP: 221).
[526] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 682. In his discussion of the teleplays, Erik Tonning sees the 'resulting "painterly", minimalist and abstract idiom' as inspired by 'Beckett's knowledge of the art of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer'. See: Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 166.
[527] Christopher Craig Brittain, *Adorno and Theology* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 177.

writes: 'its Idea is the divine Name which has been given shape. It is demythologised prayer, rid of efficacious magic. It is the human attempt, doomed as ever, to name the Name, not to communicate meanings.'[528] Dreamer experiences this spiritual quality of music, but because what the music 'says' cannot be extracted from the music, its spiritual aspect remains out of reach. This aural intangibility finds its visual parallel in the woman's hands that remain out of Dreamer's grasp. All the music can do is create a feeling of promise that arises from Dreamer's unmet desire. As such, music defines the unrealised, for as Stendhal stated: 'Music as an art, suffuses the soul of man with sweet regret, by giving it *a glimpse of happiness*; and a glimpse of happiness, even if it is no more than a *dream* of happiness, is almost the dawning of hope.'[529] Beckett's image of prayer visualises this musical experience of the 'sweet regret' and 'almost' dawning of hope.

With its chalice, table, and head (or skull), *Nacht und Träume* contains components reminiscent of seventeenth-century Dutch *nature mort* paintings.[530] The set has been compared to Vermeer, Rembrandt and, in his Dantean reading, Colin Gardner links the teleplay to Jan Gossaert's *The Agony in the Garden* (1510).[531] With its chiaroscuro contrast and sacramental iconography, it equally resembles a religious painting in the style of Caravaggio.[532] Enoch Brater calls this work 'a modernist version of some medieval religious painting' and James Knowlson explains that the positioning of the Dreamt Self 'calls to mind certain religious paintings where a vision often appears in a top corner of the canvas, normally the Virgin Mary, Christ ascended in his glory or a ministering angel.'[533] To support this reading of the teleplay, one could see the cup as having intimations of the

[528] Theodor Adorno, 'Music and Language: A Fragment' in Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia. Essays on Modern Music*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London; New York: Verso, 1992), 1-9 (p. 2).
[529] Stendhal (Henri Beyle) in Richard N. Coe, *Life of Rossini* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 347 (*italics* in original). John Pilling (1996) and later Nixon (2011) have shown that Beckett was interested in Stendhal in the early 1930s. Nixon comments that he 'first encountered *Le rouge et le noir* at Trinity' adding that 'Beckett returned to reading Stendhal at precisely those moments when he was struggling with his own writing.' Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 114.
[530] Ruby Cohn has observed that 'in his television plays, Beckett comes close to painting still lives in movement, so visually are the works conceived.' Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 31.
[531] See: Gardner, *Beckett and the Televisual Event*, pp. 169-82.
[532] Caravaggio's *The Calling of St Matthew* (1599-1600) is drenched in a spiritual light that shines forth from the top right of the canvas. Interestingly, this painting also has a window positioned precisely where Beckett's window is situated. Furthermore, the man Matthew is collecting tax from is depicted in a pose similar to Dreamer's. His head is also bowed down and arms resting on a table at the bottom left of the painting. Furthermore, Caravaggio's early biographer, Guido Mancini, describes the artist's use of light in terms that bring Beckett's spotlight on Dreamer to mind when he says: 'that lighting with an undivided light comes from above without reflections, as it were in a room with a single window and the walls painted black.' Guido Mancini in Clovis Whitfield, *Caravaggio's Eye* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2011), p. 217.
[533] Enoch Brater, 'Toward a Poetics of Television Technology: Beckett's *Nacht und Träume* and *Quad*', *Modern Drama*, 28.1, (Spring 1985), 48-54 (p. 49); Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 682. Knowlson also suggests that Beckett's set designs, with the 'architectural rightness' of the door, window, desk, pallet, and light is reminiscent of late Vermeer. See: Knowlson 'Beckett and Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Art', p. 37.

chalice or Holy Grail used at the Eucharist as well as the cup of sorrow that Christ begs God to take from him (Luke 22: 42), and, as Beckett told Jim Lewis, the cloth could be read as an allusion to the veil St Veronica used to wipe Christ's brow on the way to Golgotha.[534]

Figure 28. Dreamer and his Dreamt Self from *Nacht und Träume*.

To see *Nacht und Träume* in purely iconographical terms is, however, a narrow reading of a play concerned with the division between dream (prayer) and reality (abjection). By placing these iconographic signifiers exclusively in the dreamscape, Beckett provides the image of prayer, but not of transcendence. The screen is never bathed in holy light; instead, it is saturated in darkness. Beckett distils the iconography from these religious sources and distances the symbols from their mythical Christian context. Consequently, there is no vision or revelation, only a continuation of what has gone before. In this way, Beckett dispels the myth of Christian salvation as he paints an altogether less redemptive scene.

Dreamer's stillness and eerily mechanised movement foregrounds the fugaciousness of his existence. When the Dreamt Self clasps the invisible woman's hands in this prayer-like manner, the palpability of human touch is not felt but imagined, because whereas the Dreamt Self 'feels' this touch, Dreamer experiences no physical contact and his desire for tangibility remains. This distinction is important, as Beckett wrote to Jim Lewis on 6 October 1982: 'his lonely hands should have more

[534] The cloth also picks up on the bloodstained handkerchief Hamm uses in *Endgame*. Graley Herren has pointed out that Veronica, derived from the Latin phrase *vera icon*, means true image. Herren suggests that Beckett unsettles the notion of copy and original in his reading of *Nacht und Träume.* See: Herren, 'Splitting Images: Beckett's *Nacht und Träume*', p. 185.

impact.' (Letters IV: 594) Dreamer's raised head could also be interpreted, not just as a waking pose, but as it seems searching, it is also suggestive of lack and wanting. If music is a replacement for the beloved, it is a dissatisfying non-entity in comparison to the physical presence of another person. Its detached sounds merely compliment Dreamer's detached existence. As Trish McTighe writes: 'the sense that takes over in the darkness is that of touch [and] the impossibility of that touch ever occurring'.[535] If the viewer saw his floating dream sequence as his reality and his position at the table as his dream, *Nacht und Träume* could be interpreted as a sentimental teleplay of a man who is comforted as he nears death. Beckett's inversion of this, however, removes any tenderness. Haptic certitude is rejected through the play's musical construction. As music both triggers the dream and wakes the Dreamt Self, Schubert's lied extends the nothingness between these two states of consciousness. Catherine Laws suggests that Beckett's use of Schubert 'contributes significantly to the state of suspension, or in-betweenness'.[536] This liminal space, produced by the tension between dreams and reality, prevents finality and suspends Dreamer between his present state and an endpoint that is always out of reach. Consequently, Dreamer seems neither alive nor dead, his presence is merely a response to the ebb and flow of Schubert's lied. The only 'voice' belongs to music; all that remains of the self is a deathly silence. When Beckett writes in point 27 'Dream as before (7-16) in close-up and slower motion' (NT: 466), Dreamer's life appears to be dwindling away to the tune of Schubert's lied, itself an invocation to rest. Catharina Wulf describes the non-verbal relationship between Dreamer and his Dreamt Self as a representation of Beckett's act of 'Leaving the domain of language', allowing Dreamer to seek refuge 'in the silence of the imagination'.[537] As this analysis has aimed to demonstrate, in this case the absence of language *removes* agency from Dreamer. The viewer does not know if Dreamer finds refuge in his silent thoughts, but what we do know is that the solace available in his dreams is absent when he wakes.

[535] McTighe, '"Noli me tangere": Haptic Certitude in Beckett's *Eh Joe* and *Nacht und Träume*', p. 217.
[536] Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones*, p. 198.
[537] Catharina Wulf, 'At the Crossroads of Desire and Creativity: A Critical Approach of [*sic*] Samuel Beckett's Television Plays *Ghost Trio, …but the clouds…* and *Nacht und Träume*', *SBTA*, 3 (1994), 57-65 (p. 62).

The sense of an ending

By the end of the teleplay, there is no illuminating transcendence or new perspective because the structure undergoes its own self-conscious deconstruction. With no narrative to work through, Dreamer is pushed to the corners of a dimly lit screen before being faded out. Jürgen Habermas's belief that 'Nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructured form; an emancipatory effect does not follow' coincides with Dreamer's existence.[538] Dreamer does not reach a Joycean epiphany or see over Edmund Husserl's horizon, instead, the camera 'Withdraw[s] slowly to opening viewpoint' (NT: 466), as if to continue in its self-reflective loop. Music, by supplementing the bond between Dreamer and his Dreamt Self prevents the connective concretisation of the two images. As a result of being caught in the abyss between dreams and reality, Dreamer is lost somewhere between isolation and company. As the Dreamt Self gazes up at an 'invisible face' whose hand silently 'reappears' and 'disappears' (NT: 465), his connection with this ghostly presence is at best uncertain.

Dreamer is yet another Beckettian nobody who suffers from the 'tranquillity of decomposition' (Molloy: 25) in his familiar chamber.[539] Like the Unnamable, Dreamer has lost his identity; he has no voice, no 'I', and does not move. Wylie Sypher describes this Beckettian nobody as having a nothingness that 'strangely keeps its tinge of pain, doubt, solitude, despair', adding that he has 'dim recognitions, intimations that are his, though they cannot give him a secure sense of selfhood.'[540] As Dreamer and his Dreamt Self 'speak' across a gaping grey void (or 'darkness throughout Space', to quote Collin's verse), the split-selves are connected by the sense of despondency they share. Consequently, the centre of gravity no longer lies in the individual, but see-saws between the two states of being. Beckett's replacement of the word with music and image allows him to create a work where stability and narrative progression are absent and unobtainable. With a form whose centre cannot hold, Dreamer is a grey mass in a dark soundscape and the play itself is a representation of ambiguity. As the teleplay extenuates this shapelessness, music creates an aporia

[538] Jürgen Habermas in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 16.
[539] Jonathan Bignell's observation that whilst Dreamer's room 'might seem to be [a] refuge', it is also a 'lonely and empty environment into which the camera and voices can enter' reinforces the lowliness of Dreamer's situation. Bignell, *Beckett on Screen*, p. 144.
[540] Wylie Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 154.

and leads Dreamer towards an indeterminate endpoint. Like Hamm, Dreamer is 'sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever' surrounded by an 'infinite emptiness' (Endgame: 109). Perhaps Dreamer's sole purpose is to embody Schubert's belief that 'pain sharpens the understanding and strengthens the mind; whereas joy seldom troubles the former and softens the latter or makes it frivolous.'[541] For Beckett, music is the pain that sharpens and strengthens our mind as it forces us to confront our existence directly. The image on screen demonstrates that solitude lies at the heart of the human condition and it is something that neither language nor music can help us escape from. This examination of humankind's unaided move towards death is evident in Beckett's 'Sottisier' notebook where he quotes from Act 1 Scene 1 of *King Lear*: 'unburdened crawl towards death' (UoR MS2901, p. 28). Through his use of music and television, both *Nacht und Träume* and *Ghost Trio* acknowledge this unaccompanied and unembellished demise, invoking sympathy in the sensitive viewer.

Conclusion

Beckett's removal of agency from his subjects, as well as their deplorable condition of endless longing makes the viewer feel that death is a viable goal to aim towards. Al Alvarez comments that in Beckett's work the death instinct wins because 'it is as though the force of life were too fragile and uncertain to withstand the overwhelming pull towards death.'[542] This coincides with the circularity of these teleplays created by Beckett's complete abandonment of narrative linearity. As Charles Krance explains, *Nacht und Träume* directly engages with this motion of anti-linear recuperation, 'structured primarily along patterns of reiterated permutations'.[543] Krance adds that in *Ghost Trio*, the interplay between Beethoven's musical score and Beckett's television playscript 'underscores the coherent discontinuity of the music's effects'.[544] As a result, Figure and Dreamer cannot even escape from themselves and must exist as victims of neurotic repetition.[545] They sit in 'the dark the silence the solitude nothing else for the moment' (HII: 4).

[541] Reed, *Schubert: The Final Years*, p. 268.
[542] Alvarez, *Beckett*, p. 123.
[543] Charles Krance, 'Beckett Music' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts*, 51-65 (p. 55).
[544] Ibid.
[545] Erik Tonning has suggested that human desire in these plays is 'a self-referential, closed system producing projections onto an empty screen.' Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 167.

This chapter has argued that Beckett's use of music has a disabling effect on his subjects as both Figure and Dreamer respond to music they cannot control. The deconstructed musical form is, according to Lawrence Harvey, due to Beckett's determination to 'discover a "syntax of weakness"', where 'Man = weakness, surface illusions, words, accumulation/accretion from outside chaos, *le néant* [nothingness], abortive being'.[546] With Beckett's caged subjects, one 'sees the individual as having been the subject of a form of destruction and is more passive than active.' [547] In *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*, Beckett's creative process works towards its own and his subjects' unbecoming through a very musical de*composition*.

As we approach Beckett's skeletal short prose, the pendulum still swings between hope and suffering, blue skies and grey cloud. What unifies the television plays with these late texts is Beckett's interest in the German Romantic notion of *Sehnsucht*. They all convey this exacerbated, overwhelming emotion towards an unattainable and idealised object of yearning with a sense of irony and defeatism. The interchangeability between longing and loss which pivots on Beckett's weak, yet undying sense of hope, becomes the backdrop to his impressionistic use of blue in the late short prose. The final chapter also returns to the visual themes of the first chapter as it investigates how Beckett uses colour to reinvent his creative process yet again to continue in his attempt at writing prose that approaches painting in its transcendent qualities.

[546] Lawrence Harvey in James and Elizabeth Knowlson, *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett*, p. 135.
[547] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Janis Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 137.

Paint it blue: 'The vision at last' (Krapp: 220)

> Ignorance, silence, et l'azur immobile, voilà la solution de la devinette, la toute dernière solution [Ignorance, silence, and the immobile azure, that's the solution to the riddle, the absolute last solution]. (Dis: 152)

Introduction

After experimenting with a variety of media, Beckett returned to the short story form he used early in his career to try once more with language. This time, however, he incorporated the visual perspective he gained from working with theatre, film and television to create a form that places new and challenging demands on his reader. As Mark Nixon states: 'the encounter with art enabled Beckett to clarify, shape and formulate his aesthetic preoccupations, and thus to find new approaches to his writing.'[548] Unlike Joyce or Proust, this accumulation of influences did not result in embellishment, but in the restrained gaps and silences exemplified in the later prose. In these later texts, Mr Knott's busy house has been turned into a sparse room. Scenes are stripped to their foundations but still stand, words are shortened but still whole, rhythms are reduced but still resound. Time and space have been razed and rebuilt to embody a sense of infinite space. In this minimalist setting, the reader must complete the scene. This is not to say that Beckett was working directly against his earlier style, for links between the early and late prose can be identified. When she was acquainted with Beckett in the December of 1939, Peggy Guggenheim recalled that Beckett told her that he sometimes wanted 'to be back in the caul on [his] back in the dark forever' (Fingal: 22), not unlike Belacqua. Guggenheim said that Beckett described his suffering at this time as the feeling of being suffocated that comes with his 'terrible memory of life in his mother's womb.'[549] Whilst the later short prose contains passages reminiscent of Beckett's dark, muddy, static worlds, they also contain images of cloudless skies and flecks of colour. As the title to this chapter suggests in its allusion to Krapp's 'memorable night in March' (Krapp: 220), what the subsequent pages explore is Beckett's reimagining of the Romantic solitary wanderer's melancholy existence, as an expression

[548] Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 133.
[549] Peggy Guggenheim, *Confessions of an Art Addict* (London: André Deutsch, 1960), p. 50.

of irresolvable longing.[550] This chapter offers a cautiously optimistic reading of Beckett's final landscapes and discusses the effect his addition of light in darkness creates. It challenges John Pilling's suggestion that the Beckett of the 1960s 'move[s] away from the visual and towards the verbal, which is why the "images" have to cease; he becomes less concerned with *seeing* how it is and more concerned with *saying* how it is'.[551] By examining the meaning of Beckett's blue, the chapter also rejects Blanchot's comment that post-*How It Is* 'the force of seeing is no longer what is required' for one must 'Hear, simply hear.'[552] Instead, it aligns itself with Deleuze's understanding of *language III,* as explained in introduction to this thesis, which consists of images rather than names or voices.[553] It sees *Imagination Dead Imagine*, 'Ping', *Lessness* and *Company* as examples of how Beckett uses language to create an image that contains the possibility of transcendence where it marks the fateful ascent 'to the indefinite as if into a celestial state'.[554] The chapter is divided into two thematic sections: eyes and sky. Within these sections, Beckett's use of blue is examined in relation to imagination (*IDI* and 'Ping') and memory (*Lessness* and *Company*). It begins by returning to Beckett's interest in van Velde and Abstraction, as discussed in chapter one. It then looks at the trajectory of Beckett's work from the perspective of the tension between light and darkness in his prose, and finally outlines his interest in the colour blue encouraged, perhaps, by his interest in paintings by Geneviève Asse. Before commencing with van Velde, however, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Beckett's use of colour and explain the cultural and philosophical significance of blue.

From the previous chapter, it may seem as though Beckett's world is colourless, as Voice tells us: 'Colour: none. All grey. Shades of grey. [*Pause*.] The colour grey if you wish, shades of the colour grey.' (GT: 408) This, however, is starkly contrasted with Ru, Vi and Flo's dull violet, red and yellow

[550] From Beckett's admission: 'How I ADORE solitude' in his diary entry of 31 December 1936, Nixon connects the word *Schwermut* with Beckett's attraction to 'a melancholy strand of German Romanticism.' Nixon, 'Beckett and Romanticism in the 1930s', p. 68. Nixon adds that 'it was clearly not the Romantic hero that interested Beckett, but the solitary turning his back on the world, or being shorn by the world.' Ibid., p. 69.
[551] Pilling in Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p. 65.
[552] Maurice Blanchot, 'Words Must Travel Far' in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), 326-321 (p. 329).
[553] Deleuze, describing *language III*, writes: 'This something seen or heard is called Image, visual or aural, provided it is liberated from the chains it was kept in by the other two languages.' Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', trans. by Anthony Uhlmann, p. 207.
[554] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 158.

buttoned-up coats in *Come and Go* (1965). As these works show, Beckett's use of colour is unpredictable. The clearest example of his simultaneous turn towards and away from colour, can be found in 1981 with *Quad I* and *Quad II*. Whereas in the former teleplay colour is abundant as four figures move in a rhythmical sequence wearing red, blue, yellow, and white hooded cloaks; the latter is more typically Beckettian: 'no colour, all four in identical white gowns, footsteps only sound, slow tempo' (Quad II: 454). From these two examples, it is clear that we are dealing with two Becketts. On the one hand, there is a hectic, noisy, and colourful Beckett, and on the other, there is a slow, silent, dour Beckett. But in both, his aesthetic appears ambiguous, conflicted and in flux.

Beckett's 'shifts of colour' (Molloy: 10) – the familiar green greatcoat with its associations with the Emerald Isle, Hamm and Clov's '*very red face[s]*' (Endgame: 92) and Bolton's 'old red dressing-gown' (Embers: 254-5), Celia's yellow hair, and the 'blue, but blue!' (W: 109) point in Erskine's painting that transfixes Watt – pepper his works in every genre. As a symbol with its own connotations as well as wider implications, each colour has intrinsic and extrinsic value and is therefore an important consideration when it appears in Beckett's text. John Calder has suggested that Beckett's work, due to its use of colour, structural patterning, and identifiable artistic influences, is 'more painterly than literary'.[555] For instance, when Beckett describes what Molloy sees when he stumbles through the forest, he raises questions about how we see colour:

> For there reigned a kind of blue gloom, more than sufficient for my visual needs. I was astonished this gloom was not green, rather than blue, but I saw it blue and perhaps it was. The red of the sun, mingling with the green of the leaves, gave a blue result, that is how I reasoned. (Molloy: 38)

Perhaps Beckett was thinking of Kandinsky's *Blue Mountain* (1908-9) or of one of Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* paintings where a blue peak sits on top of an aspiring plateau of greens, reds and yellows. What is clear is that Beckett was acutely aware of the interplay between colours, their innate character, and their potential for transformation.[556] Beckett's 'German Diary' entry for 28 December

[555] Calder in Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 41.
[556] For a study on the relationship between colours, see: Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2013)

1936 foreshadows this association of colour with shape and atmosphere that can be found in his mid-late prose:

> Prose stanzas, keen pale colours, miniature school of Ferrara. Behind they should stand for moods; *when the mood recurs use the same colours*; reinforce the recurrence with phrase echoes. Strophe & antistrophe of fiasco, of the few moods of which the ground fiasco is capable.[557]

Mark Nixon connects these comments on colour with Dosso Dossi (c.1492-1542) who worked at the court at Ferrara and whose paintings Beckett was recalling from his visits to London's National Gallery when undergoing psychoanalysis with Wilfred Bion between 1933 and 1935. Dossi's experiments with colour and technique, apparent in *The Adoration of the Kings* (1530-42) and *Lamentation Over the Body of Christ* (1510-20) find their way into Beckett's own rhythmical use of colour. A few weeks later, Beckett expressed his admiration for Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's 'incredible line & sureness of taste & fondness of colour' (GD, 19 January 1937), demonstrating his attraction to Kirchner's German Expressionist representation of complex mental states through form and colour.[558] It becomes clear that Beckett took from artists as varied as Dossi and Kirchner, a method of using colour to create subtextual parallels and instil an underlying atmosphere. Blue, in particular, occurs fairly frequently throughout Beckett's work, becoming central in *The End*, *IDI*, 'Ping', *Lessness*, and *Company*.

Whilst the meaning of blue may seem immediately apparent, it is not simply an intriguing colour, a melancholy feeling, or a cool atmosphere; blue is a complex phenomenon that belies classification. As Carol Mavor illustrates in *Blue Mythologies: Reflections on a Colour*, blue is 'a particularly paradoxical colour'.[559] When it is associated with stockings, uniforms, birds, movies, music, Mary's cloak, or the planet Earth; blue's meanings seem infinite. Like the sea or sky, it resists being grasped making it the perfect symbol for longing and transcendence.[560] As a cultural symbol, blue, then, cannot be described as synonymous with anything in particular; even the colour itself is

[557] Beckett in Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 123 (emphasis mine).
[558] Ibid., p. 140.
[559] Carol Mavor, *Blue Mythologies: Reflections on a Colour* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 10.
[560] Beckett encapsulates this very contention in *Godot* when Estragon says: 'I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.' (Godot: 13)

indefinite as it shifts between gradations of light and dark, clarity and obscurity. As Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant state in their *Dictionary of Symbols*:

> Blue is the deepest colour; unimpeded, the gaze plumbs infinity, the colour forever escaping it. Blue is the most insubstantial of colours; it seldom occurs in the natural world except as a translucency, that is to say as an accumulation of emptiness, the void of the Heavens, of the depths of the sea, of crystal or diamond.[561]

Perhaps the one thing we can be certain about is that blue is ineffable; it cannot be classified, accounted for, or neatly pigeon-holed.[562] Even the OED alludes to blue's stubborn resistance to definition when it describes it as: 'a colour of intermediate between green and violet, as of the sky or sea on a sunny day.' This 'intermediateness' (it is neither green nor violet, but something other) makes blue the perfect colour of paradox, to refer to Carol Mavor's suggestion once again. Its ambiguity makes it both the colour of purity (as seen in Piero della Francesco's *Madonna del Parto*, c.1457) and obscenity (Andy Worhol's 1969 *Blue Movie*, for example). Not only does the meaning of blue present problems, but the significance of its symbolic use has also changed over time. The Ancient Egyptians considered blue to be the colour of truth and often used it to paint the walls of significant tombs, yet before the mining of lapis lazuli from the mines of Afghanistan (*Sar-e-Sang*, the 'Place of the Stone') and its widespread use in stained glass and religious paintings from the twelfth-century – such as *The Visitation, Life of the Virgin window* at Chartres Cathedral (c.1150) – blue often symbolised the Antichrist.[563] Indeed, indigo blue was even known as 'the devil's eye'; an association that remained in use, but whose meaning changed to suggest a sign of weeping, linking it back to Mary. Whether it is the colour of our imaginary dreamscapes, or a warning light that alerts us to danger, blue is never constant. Perhaps it is blue's shape-shifting character, its very intermediateness (as the OED puts it) that makes it so appealing for artists and authors alike. From Correggio's quadratura in his *Assumption of the Virgin* (1526-1530) situated in the cupola of Parma's Romanesque

[561] Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. by John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 102.
[562] In the earliest theories of colour by Empedocles (492-431 BC), Plato (428-347 BC), and Aristotle (384-322 BC), blue was not even identified. Kurt Badt posits that 'in the Virgin in the Basilica of San Clemente (middle of the ninth century) we have the first isolated example of a composition built around blue'. Badt in Alexander Theroux, *The Primary Colours* (London: Picador, 1995), p. 44. Blue then started to become popular in the 1300s due to its increasing appearance on the European coat of arms as well as in the clothes of the King of France. This was largely due to the cultivation of woad and improvement in dyeing techniques. Then, in the late fourteenth-century, the French poet Guillaume De Machaut wrote: 'He who would rightly judge colours and pronounce their true meaning, must place before all others beautiful blue.' De Machaut in Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of Colour* (New Jersey; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 80. Subsequently, blue's status became further elevated, eventually becoming synonymous with spirituality (Giotto's cerulean skies in Padua's Arena Chapel) and unrequited love (Werther's coat).
[563] Beckett went to see this infamous window in the moonlight with Peggy Guggenheim in 1938. See: Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 287.

cathedral, to Constable's sky paintings, to Picasso's 'blue period', and to Yves Klein's 'l'epoque bleue', the colour has inspired (and continues to inspire) artists internationally. As Goethe adduces in his *Theory of Colours* (1810): 'We love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it.'[564] Indeed, it is blue's inexplicable dimensionless quality and the sense of yearning this instils in us that Beckett's blue possesses, after all, as William Gass said, Beckett is 'a very blue man'.[565] The implications of Gass' comment and exactly how blue functions within Beckett's texts will be the focus of this chapter.

Beckett and van Velde's painterly aesthetic

In the painting below from 1970, around the time Beckett was writing the works discussed in this chapter, van Velde conveys the sentiment behind the artist's struggle to express.

[564] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. by Charles Lock Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1840), p. 311.
[565] William H. Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: NYRB, 2014), p. 9.

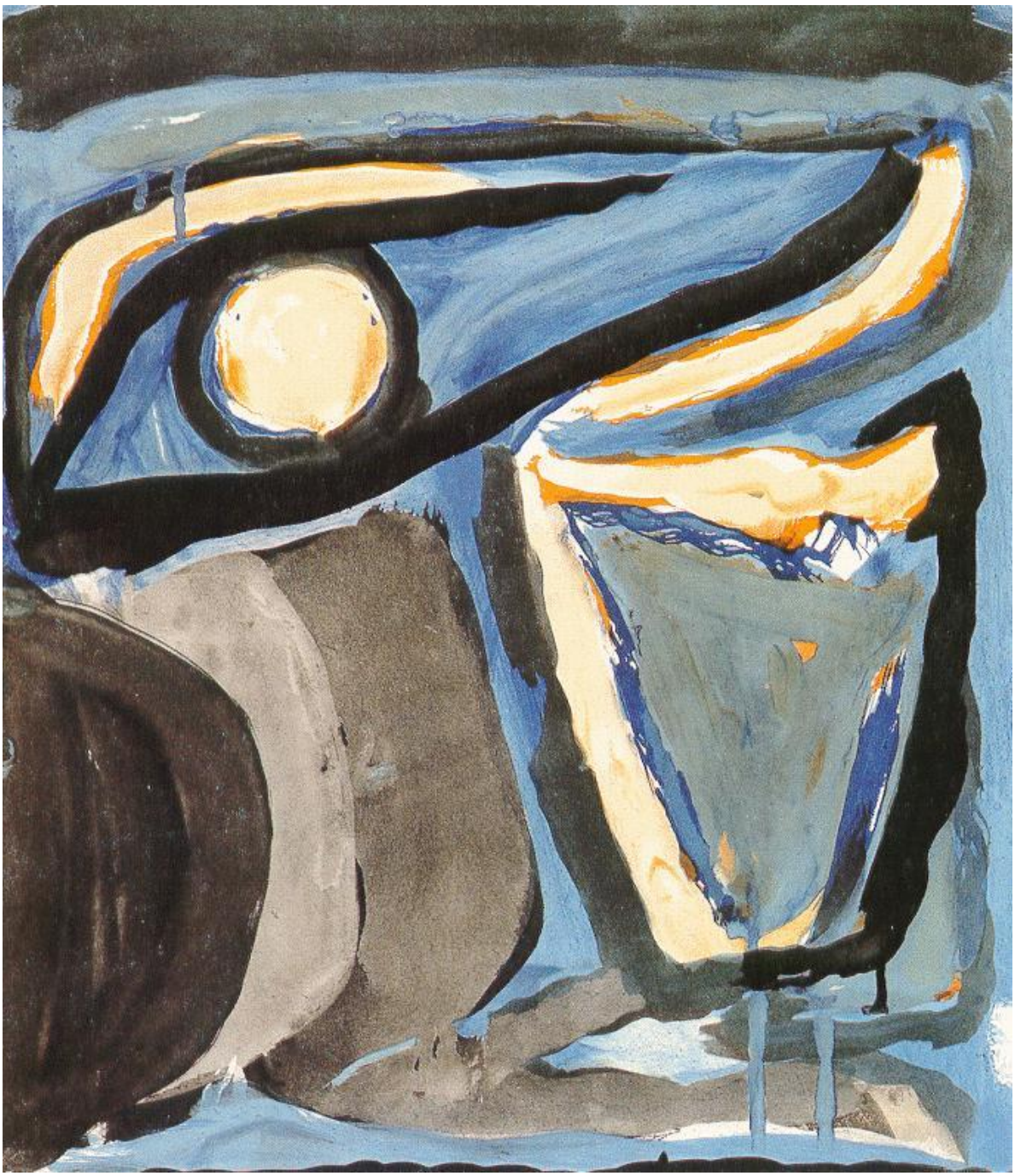

Figure 29. Bram van Velde, *Untitled*, 1970.

In this painting, although van Velde's line has become thicker, it is also weaker. The line is not as angular as in his previous paintings; its edges are softer and are often circular or flowing to create an altogether more lyrical rhythm to the piece, and to erase the subject-object relation of the work. Vivid yellow is set against this mood of perseverance and stands out against blue and black paint that drips down the canvas. These uncontrollable drips express the artist's inability to translate his intention onto the canvas with order and precision. Van Velde described the artist's canvas to Charles Juliet as

being 'really a battle' between intention and outcome.[566] This painting represents this battle and as a result, a resolution is never reached. Instead, patches of unpainted canvas poke through the thickly-set forms to give the painting a sense of being in-process. A golden circle looks out at the viewer with a thick, yet hollow, texture whilst washes of sky blue create open spaces that draws the viewer's eye in by an almost mystical power. These contrasts in texture and rhythm change the pace of the piece as the light blue spaces slow down the viewer's eye that frantically darts between the drastic colour contrasts.[567] Alongside the strong sense of form and rigour of the black and grey markings, a grey kneeling figure, shaped like a Matisse *Blue nude* cut-out, can be seen at the centre of the canvas in the posture of a praying man, like the one seen in *Worstward Ho*: 'back turned head sunk dark shade on unseen knees. Still.' (WH: 85) At once spiritual (blue) and violent (yellow), van Velde's careful balancing of colour and sense of proportion in this painting is emulated by Beckett in his own sense of equilibrium in his use of colour throughout the later short prose.[568] The influence of Picasso's primitives and Kandinsky's abstractions in this painting is clear, but here, the clarity (white) and obscurity (black) mixes with a passive grey to create a baseline of stillness. Perhaps it was this expression of the pursuit (not achievement) of harmony through discord that attracted Beckett to van Velde's art and influenced the shape of his writing.[569] Van Velde frequently commented on their connection saying in the 1940s: 'What he could express in words, I did with my paintings.'[570] During the 1960s, van Velde's painting became an experience within the viewer's own space, rather than a representation of space outside the painting. As Beckett observes in a letter to Georges Duthuit dated 9-10 March 1949: '[van Velde] is the first to repudiate relation in all these forms. It is not the relation

[566] Ibid., p. 136.
[567] Franz Meyer points out that van Velde creates the constant, restless movement of his paintings through his use of colour. In the catalogue for van Velde's 1989 exhibition Meyer states that colours are 'the true actors in the painting, and thus the vectors of its movement'. Franz Meyer in *Bram van Velde*, ed. by Claire Stoullig (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1989), p. 191. Translation from Lloyd, *Beckett's Thing*, p. 115.
[568] For a breakdown of the significance of colours see: Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), pp. 23-6. In the chapter entitled 'The Psychological Working of Colour' Kandinsky writes: 'The eye is strongly attracted by light, clear colours, and still more strongly attracted by those colours which are warm as well as clear; vermilion has the charm of flame, which has always attracted human beings. Keen lemon-yellow hurts the eye in time as a prolonged and shrill trumpet-note the ear, and the gazer turns away to seek relief in blue or green.' Ibid., p. 24.
[569] For Beckett, the formal harmony of a sentence was of utmost importance. In 1956 he told Harold Hobson: 'I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine […] "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned." That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.' Harold Hobson, 'Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year', *International Theatre Annual*, 1 (1956), 153-155 (p. 153). The discussion on *Company* will return to Augustine, specifically his meditations on memory.
[570] Bram van Velde in Paul Groot, 'Schilder Bram van Velde in Dordrecht', trans. by Charlotte Burgmans in *NRC Handelsblad*, 1979.

with this or that order of opposite that it refuses. But the state of being in relation as such, the state of being in front of.'[571] In his later short prose, Beckett, adopting what he identifies as van Velde's style, removes the objectifying distance of relations between the text and the reader. The form of these texts is non-linear, non-temporal, fragmented, unpredictable, and complicated by self-cancelling repetition. Unexpectedly, if only ironically, out of this unyielding form, warmth, hope, pastoral scenes, and most persistently, blue light, shine through. Like van Velde's line, Beckett's hard style softens to become nostalgic, even lyrical, as seen in the passages describing the Irish countryside in *Company*. With his careful attention to colour, Beckett's creative process persists to create forms and images out of doubt and failure yet again. In his comments on van Velde and Beckett, Juliet describes their lesser acknowledged uplifting characteristics:

> [Van Velde] has this amazing combination of the most incisive lucidity and a boundless innocence and naivety. In Beckett, too, I was struck by the same combination of strength, lucidity, and exceptional spiritual power existing side by side with qualities that very rarely survive in their shade: gentleness, passiveness, and vulnerability.[572]

In his less self-consciously mocking voice, Beckett's later style contains and questions this 'spiritual power' and 'gentleness'. Beckett does this by teasing out the tension between colour and monochrome through a predominantly visual creative process. As pictorialized in van Velde's canvas, Beckett does not simply saturate his texts in light; he offers moments of brightness that heighten the tension created by the contrast with darker sections of the text. The analysis that follows asks if the welcomed presence of these ambiguously hopeful images is what differentiates the late short prose from Beckett's earlier, more sinister tone.

A new process

As this thesis has already demonstrated, Beckett's interchangeable use of art and music in his creative process means that any single notion of a work as 'Beckettian' must be questioned. From *Watt* to *Company* one can see that any singularly conceived idea of a Beckett aesthetic is confounded. Even

[571] Beckett in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), p. 81.
[572] Juliet, *Conversations with Beckett and van Velde*, p. 141.

the temporal demarcations (early, mid, late Beckett) are insufficient due to his recycling of character traits, metaphors and imagery. By reading Beckett's later texts as individual pieces within a collective body of work one can see that whilst they appear terser and more minimal, there are instances which recall many of the themes Beckett was concerned with when he began writing in the 1930s. His sense of discomfort with words as his medium, for example, is an attitude that prevails throughout his work, but Beckett's way of approaching this problem, including through different media, as chapters two and three have shown, is extremely varied. These later texts in particular, differ greatly from his fatalistic depiction of the wretchedness of humanity in *The Trilogy*. They indulge (albeit moderately) in the happy past where company, homeliness and scenic beauty tentatively surface. One could argue that the presence of such bucolic motifs only reinforces the misery of the protagonists' present situation. This, however, ignores the fact that these positive moments are permitted to arise at all. Whilst the gloom and fragmentation of Beckett's later prose could be considered as a Modernist reflection of the surrounding chaos and destruction, the flashes of blue light encapsulate moments of an earlier, more blissful time reminiscent of the pastoral scenes in much Romantic poetry. To suggest that Beckett's creative process becomes darker, more desperate and less hopeful, then, is to ignore the subtle highlights beneath the surface of his text. The neo-Romanticism of Beckett's late works, as seen in his use of Yeats in *…but the clouds…*, for example, avoids straightforward linearity.[573] In his essay *Some French Caricaturists* (1857), Charles Baudelaire insists that what is modern has nothing to do with the era it was created in: 'the word modern applies to his manner, not to the period in time.'[574] In his use of Romantic symbolism Beckett channels Baudelaire's belief in an eclectic modernism that is not restrained by an arbitrary timeframe. Beckett is interested in the survival of poetry in a world of discord and emptiness; this makes his late work surprisingly ante and at times anti Modernist as it shares themes with Romanticism and works against a strictly twentieth-century

[573] From Friedrich Schlegel's understanding of great art as that which necessitates fragmentation, incomprehension, irony and continuous self-parody to S. T. Coleridge's perception of the mind as split 'not only in a positive sense so that there are magical and mysterious regions awaiting exploration, but also in a negative, destructive sense', Beckett's use of the colour blue is steeped in Romantic thought. Coleridge in Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 51. For a list of Beckett's books related to Romanticism see: Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, p. 35.

[574] Charles Baudelaire, 'Some French Cariacturists' in *Baudelaire Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. by P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), p. 210.

outlook.[575] This comforting glow of the past is felt in Beckett's use of colour. This is unlike his late teleplays, which resist comfort and resolution by remaining grey, offering no company and no relief (musical or otherwise) from an existence filled with guilt, regret and images of loss.[576] In the later prose, however, blues, yellows, and greens soften the harshness of Beckett's monochrome worlds. The addition of these colours, unlike the fragmentary insertion of Beethoven and Schubert in the teleplays, gives these harsh, angular Modernist worlds a more hopeful mood that, in moving back towards a more lyrical style, goes against an aesthetic shift that saw no place for lyric poetry after the barbarity of Auschwitz.[577]

'Hope and despair and suchlike' (Co: 29)

What this chapter aims to illustrate is best explained by referring to what it directly challenges. In *This Thing Called Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle talk about '*No sky* thinking' in relation to literature's potential to create an imaginary space. Predictably, but disappointingly, Beckett's name is trawled out to aid their explanation of this concept:

> Suffice to note here that the writings of Samuel Beckett, in particular, seem to us preoccupied with the notion of "no sky" thinking – thinking in a claustrophobically enclosed place, thinking in the dark, or thinking in which a "cloudless sky" is occluded by a "clouded pane": such kinds of thinking are evident in his novel *The Unnamable* (1953), the late prose text *Company* (1980) and the very late prose fragment "Stirrings Still" (1989) respectively.[578]

Whilst the Beckettian landscape is grey and surface-level sympathy is often lacking, to ignore the splashes of colour and 'blue sky thinking' is to provide a biased reading of a carefully balanced text. The following extract from *The End*, written in 1946, is an apt example of the precariousness of Beckett's balance between hope and dejection:

> The earth makes a sound as of sighs and the last drops fall from the emptied cloudless sky. A small boy, stretching out his hands and looking up at the blue sky,

[575] Beckett works with and against the trends of his epoch as he draws on Romanticism and carves out his own space in the Modernist canon.
[576] An exception must be made for *Quad*, where figures cloaked in white, yellow, red and blue, move in strict sequence to percussive rhythms. For an interesting discussion of the significance of these figures see: Eckart Voigts-Vichrow, '*Quad I* and Teletubbies or: "Aesthetic" Panopticism versus Reading Beckett', *SBTA*, 11 (2001), 210-218.
[577] In 1949 Adorno famously declared that 'To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric.' In line with Adorno's belief that any depiction of beauty would be artificial during a climate of despair and destruction, Modernists engineered creative styles that represented the horrors of the world they found themselves in through fragmentation, abstraction and the grotesque. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). Adorno warns that 'Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter.' Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism in Society' in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), p. 34.
[578] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *This Thing Called Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 8.

> asked his mother how such a thing was possible. Fuck off, she said. (The End: 81)

The innocence of the 'small boy' as he contemplates how the rain stops and is replaced by blue skies instils the same feelings of incredulity in the reader.[579] This childlike innocence (itself a Romantic trope) is quickly spoiled when the boy's mother cruelly dismisses his wonderment. This merciless act evokes pity in the reader who is caught up in the flux between naivety and cynicism. The tension between the child and his mother is essential and any reading that ignores either extreme – blue sky/fuck off – is marginalised. As Beckett said to Tom Driver in 1961:

> If life and death did not both present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable.[580]

This approach to the later short prose hopes to readdress the imbalanced perspectives of Beckett's use of light by investigating its liberating and restorative possibilities. Though Beckett's short fiction is often darkly comedic, deracinated, and its characters are inclined towards vegetative stasis; these worlds are not solely aporetic. There is, facing the loveless isolation of these characters, light, colour, nature and companionship.[581] However fleeting these idyllic moments are, they cannot be ignored. These lightly sketched scenes and brief bursts of blue are read as brief moments that recapture the potential of the imagination of the word and work of art to evoke it, however ill seen or ill said the sky may be in the midst of a desolate contemporary landscape.

In an interview with Bernd Kempker for German radio in 2001, James Knowlson relayed the following story to illustrate Beckett's interest in the colour blue and his architectural eye when looking at paintings:

> Beckett walked in [to Henri Hayden's studio on Boulevard Montparnasse] one day while Hayden was painting this blue, entirely blue, musical trio of three musicians playing chamber music. It's called *Le Trio,* and he said: "Wonderful, wonderful, but there's something wrong, I think Henri, with the left forearm." Hayden looked at it and when Beckett went said "You know, Sam's right, there is something wrong with

[579] Beckett connected the colour blue with his mother when he wrote to Georges Duthuit on 2 August 1948: 'I gaze into the eyes of my mother, never so blue, so stupefied, so heart-rending – the eyes of an issueless childhood, that of old age […] these are the first eyes I think I truly see, I do not need to see others; there is enough there to make one love and weep.' Beckett in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 367. Here, as in Beckett's fiction, the conflict between joy and sorrow, as well as motherly warmth and rejection (consider the hands in *Nacht und Träume*) is encapsulated through the depiction of eyes.

[580] Driver, 'Beckett by the Madeleine', p. 23.

[581] For John Calder, companionship is an 'important part of the Beckett ethic' for it 'helps to make life tolerable' by 'the sharing of misery'. Calder also states that in Beckett's works, if there is an answer to life it 'must be in *caritas*, a human willingness to share, to comfort, to be a good companion.' Calder, *Philosophy of Beckett*, pp. 55, 142.

> that forearm." And he repainted it. He [Beckett] had an impeccable sense about judgement in a painting and of form.[582]

This painterly eye is translated into the abstract settings and scenes that Beckett executes with visual precision. As in Hayden's painting, the colour blue is often present in Beckett's work and becomes an important leitmotif that relates not only to his narrative, but also to his minimalist style. Lois Oppenheim observes that:

> In this progression from the early to the late work, as reductionism enhances the visually evocative power of the text, Beckett's writing not only becomes more analogous to painting. It also brings epistemological limits of art into play that render the narrative and theatrical picture making an increasingly tangible study of plasticity. The rudimentary, organisational quality of painting becomes visible, in other words, as a phenomenon apart from the painterly picture.[583]

As Oppenheim suggests, Beckett's painterly style, particularly his use of blue in his creative process, breathes life into his texts so that they become as close as possible to being (still) life. All the while, Beckett's interest in process is evident as his writing contains strands of self-reflexive workings-out that encourage the reader to consider the artistic method as well as the intended result. For instance, Beckett refers to the image of the woman dressed in black, clutching yellow flowers outside in the afterglow at the end of 'One Evening' (1980) as a 'tableau vivant, if you will' (One Evening: 121).[584]

Beckett's 'weary hours . . . spent walking up and down in private and public collections'[585]

In his letters to MacGreevy about his reactions to the variety of paintings he saw when visiting galleries in the 1930s, two things stand out: the colour blue and the sky. In response to Nicolas Poussin's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (1657) Beckett said of this 'extraordinary' painting: 'I never saw such blue & purple, such lyrical colour.'[586]

[582] Knowlson in Kempker, 'The blue celeste of poesy' (UoR JEK C/5/24).
[583] Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 125.
[584] For research exploring Beckett and ekphrasis, see Oppenheim, 'The Agony of Perceivedness' in *Painted Word*, pp. 123-155; and Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
[585] From the *Watt* notebook 3, 90r-91r at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin in Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 161.
[586] Beckett to MacGreevy August 1932 in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 734 n.106. In accordance with Beckett's comment, Poussin wrote to A. M. de Chambrai, 7 March 1665, 'Il ne se donne point de visible sans Couleur [It cannot be seen without colour]' in *Collection de Lettres de Nicolas Poussin* (Paris: Didot, 1824), p. 347.

Figure 30. Nicolas Poussin, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 1657.

The 'lyrical' nature of Poussin's blue, as Beckett describes it, though admittedly spiritual, also has darker, more melancholic associations.[587] The blue cloak drapes like falling water over the Virgin Mary, acting as a haunting metaphor for death. The way in which Mary uses it to wipe away her tears and the manner in which the thick fabric hangs over her body speak more directly to sorrow and grief than Christ's immanent resurrection, as signified by her open left palm. As she stands apart from Saint John, Mary Magdalene, Mary of James and Joseph of Arimetha, her stance suggests that she has resigned herself to the physical loss and sacrifice of her son. Blue, at the centre of the golden triangle in this painting, casts a shadow of heavy sadness. Poussin's use of blue for Mary's cloak represents her shift from the time of the immaculate conception to Christ's crucifixion for she is no longer a 'woman cloth'd with the sun', as described in Revelation to John (12:1, 5-6). Moreover, in contrast to the hopeful blue skies of Beckett's late prose, here the sky appears dark and ominous behind the vibrant lapis lazuli of Mary's cloak. In 'Walking Out', written around the same time Beckett was writing to MacGreevy about Poussin's painting, Beckett recasts Mary's tear-soaked coat

[587] MacGreevy wrote that: 'The traces of suffering in the Face of the dead Christ, and the grief and solicitude of His Mother and disciples are all worthily stated.' MacGreevy, *Pictures in the Irish National Gallery* (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1945), p. 52.

in a more positive role: 'the larks were singing, the hedges were breaking, the sun was shining, *the sky was Mary's cloak,* the daisies were there, everything was in order' ('Walking Out': 95, emphasis mine). In this drastic re-envisioning of Mary's cloak, Beckett (with a heavy dose of irony) removes the sense of sorrow and foreboding and depicts a Heavenly blue sky that resembles the ceilings of Byzantine churches and Islamic mosques. Beckett also notes that in Antonello da Messina's *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (1476-7), 'the tiny figures of the quick in the background gossiping & making appointments' are stood 'under a paradisal sky.' (Letters I: 444)

Figure 31. Antonello Da Messina, *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, 1476-7.

Beckett's focus on the small people in the background underlines Messina's ironic depiction of martyrdom. Messina creates this irony by making his viewer confront an oversized image of a saint

who not even the people in the painting notice (one even sleeps).[588] The perfect blue sky mocks the sorrow and earnestness that is depicted in the Saint's upward-gazing eyes, as well as the courage he was known for.

Beckett's specific use of the words 'lyrical' and 'paradisal' in relation to the blue cloak and sky are directly applicable to his use of blue and sky in his late short prose. From Beckett's association of blue with goodness and sorrow (the Virgin Mary) as well as with saintliness and irony (the sky behind St. Sebastian), any analysis of this compounded colour in the later short prose must be aware of the implicit admixture of light and dark, hope and despair, that the colour itself contains. It features throughout Beckett's oeuvre as a symbol of measured hopefulness. The 'blue flower, Vega, GOD' ('Assumption': 6) of 'Assumption' turns into something mesmerising in *Watt* through Erskine's painting.[589] Blue is directly linked to the visual arts in *Murphy*: 'The vast floor area was covered all over by a linoleum of exquisite design, a dim geometry of blue, grey and brown that delighted Murphy because it called Braque to his mind' (Murphy: 40). In the early works blue is an elusive, ungraspable metaphor for the inexplicable nature of things. Beckett's characters experience the days as '[t]he long blue days' with 'all the brightness to touch and gather' (W: 32), but this blue of the day 'mean[s] nothing' because it is 'so light and free that it is as the being of nothing.' In *Malone Dies*, blue bursts forth as an unbelievable profusion of nature in Lady Pedal's song: 'Oh the jolly spring / Blue and sun and nests and flowers' (Malone: 285), and with the 'old blue eye' (E: 264) in *Embers*, it represents grief.[590] In *How It Is*, brief moments of Romantic light brighten Pim and Bom's swampy surroundings: 'Sea blue of a sudden gold and green of the earth of a sudden in the mud.' (HII: 16) There is even a proposition of romantic love between an adolescent boy and a girl in the countryside in spring: 'I look to me about sixteen and to crown all glorious weather egg-blue sky and scamper of little clouds I have my back turned to me and the girl too whom I hold who holds me by the hand the

[588] In a line of text that evokes Protagoras, in *Molloy*, Beckett writes: 'Homo mensura can't do without staffage' (Molloy: 63). Accordingly, the staffage in da Messina's painting are essential counterweights to what would otherwise be a one-dimensional representation of martyrdom, conveyed in those saintly upward-gazing eyes.

[589] As discussed in chapter one, Watt describes Erskine's painting as having a 'black circumference' and white surround, and adds that 'The point was blue, but blue!' (W: 109)

[590] The full extract from *Embers* reads: 'Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming, and the candle shaking over his head. (*Pause*.) Tears? (*Pause. Long laugh.*) Good God no! (*Pause*.) Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye' (E: 264).

arse I have' (HII: 23). Here, a mixture of companionship and sexual attraction is epitomised in the tender image of holding hands as well as the frivolousness of 'scamper of little clouds' and limpidity of the 'egg-blue sky', which suggests wholeness and fertility.[591] Even in 'Stirrings Still' the reader can find an example of Beckett's reluctantly optimistic 'cloudless sky' (SS: 107). From this survey of Beckett's use of blue, one can see that its significance is closely related to its use in connection with the 'blue sky thinking', whether ironic or sincere, that critics like Bennett and Royle are quick to dismiss. This increasing prevalence of blue sky imagery in Beckett's work can be linked to his increasing familiarity with the works of Geneviève Asse, who was known as 'blue Asse' because of her eventually exclusive use of blue. Due to their acquaintance and mutual appreciation for each other's work, Asse's possible influence on Beckett's late aesthetic experimentation needs to be carefully considered.

Figure 32. Photograph of Geneviève Asse at 'L'exposition au CNAC avec Samuel Beckett et Germain Viatte, 1970-1971'

Beckett's connection with Geneviève Asse

[591] Beckett also describes the lyricism of blue as follows: 'sometimes in this position a fine image fine I mean in movement and colour blue and white of clouds in the wind' (HII: 21).

Geneviève Asse met Beckett around 1954 at the photographer Jean-François Bauret's house at an illustrious gathering that included Kandinsky, the van Veldes, Nicolas De Staël, and Jacques Villon, amongst others. This meeting made an impact on Asse, who said: 'Beckett m'a toujours fasciné et je ne suis pas la seule. [Beckett always fascinated me and I'm not the only one.]'[592] Like Beckett, Asse's experiences as an ambulance driver who helped to evacuate survivors of Trezin concentration camp during the war had a profound impact on her creative process which moved from figurative precision towards an art of discretion and hope. For Michael Bishop, Asse's art became a 'deep, private meditation and a rigorous exploration of the subtle mystery of being's spatiality and chromatics.'[593] In 1970, when Asse's paintings were at their most abstract and soulful, Beckett became interested in her work. Two years later, Asse collaborated with Beckett by drawing a series of twelve images for Georges Visat's 1972 edition of *Abandonné*. Her high regard for Beckett never waned and in 2007, she participated in the Centre Pompidou's exposition 'Samuel Beckett', under the direction of Marianne Alphant and Nathelie Léger. This show included three drawings and *Triptique lumière*, originally painted with Beckett in mind.

Figure 33. *Triptyque lumière*, 1970-1.

The struggle for transcendence and pure luminosity conveyed by Asse's almost colourless white-grey in this triptych speaks to Beckett's struggle to express the void within his own language-based medium.[594] Like Rothko and Barnett Newman, Asse can express great innerness, position her viewer on the brink of the sublime, work with subtle abstraction, and create a sense of transcendence. Her work seems to have been influenced by Chardin's use of light and Morandi's play with flatness and

[592] Geneviève Asse in Silva Baron Supervielle, *Un été avec Geneviève Asse* (Paris: L'Echoppe, 1996), p. 68.
[593] Michael Bishop, 'The Intimacy of Silence: Geneviève Asse' in *Contemporary French and Francophone Art*, 2nd edn, ed. by Bishop and Christopher Elson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 69-87 (p. 70).
[594] For commentary on this painting see: Germain Viatte and Jean-Luc Daval, *Geneviève Asse* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes: SKIRA, 1995), p. 8.

depth.[595] Indeed, Asse was obsessed with light, blue and the creation of space within the canvas. She even referred to her work as an 'architecture of light'.[596] These themes also preoccupied Beckett both as he viewed paintings and in his approach towards writing. Like Beckett, Asse's driving force was a uniquely lyrical desperation, or 'lyrical blue' which she linked to the quiet striving for solace that can be seen in her use of blue. In this, she is stylistically most similar to Agnes Martin's middle period and late works.[597]

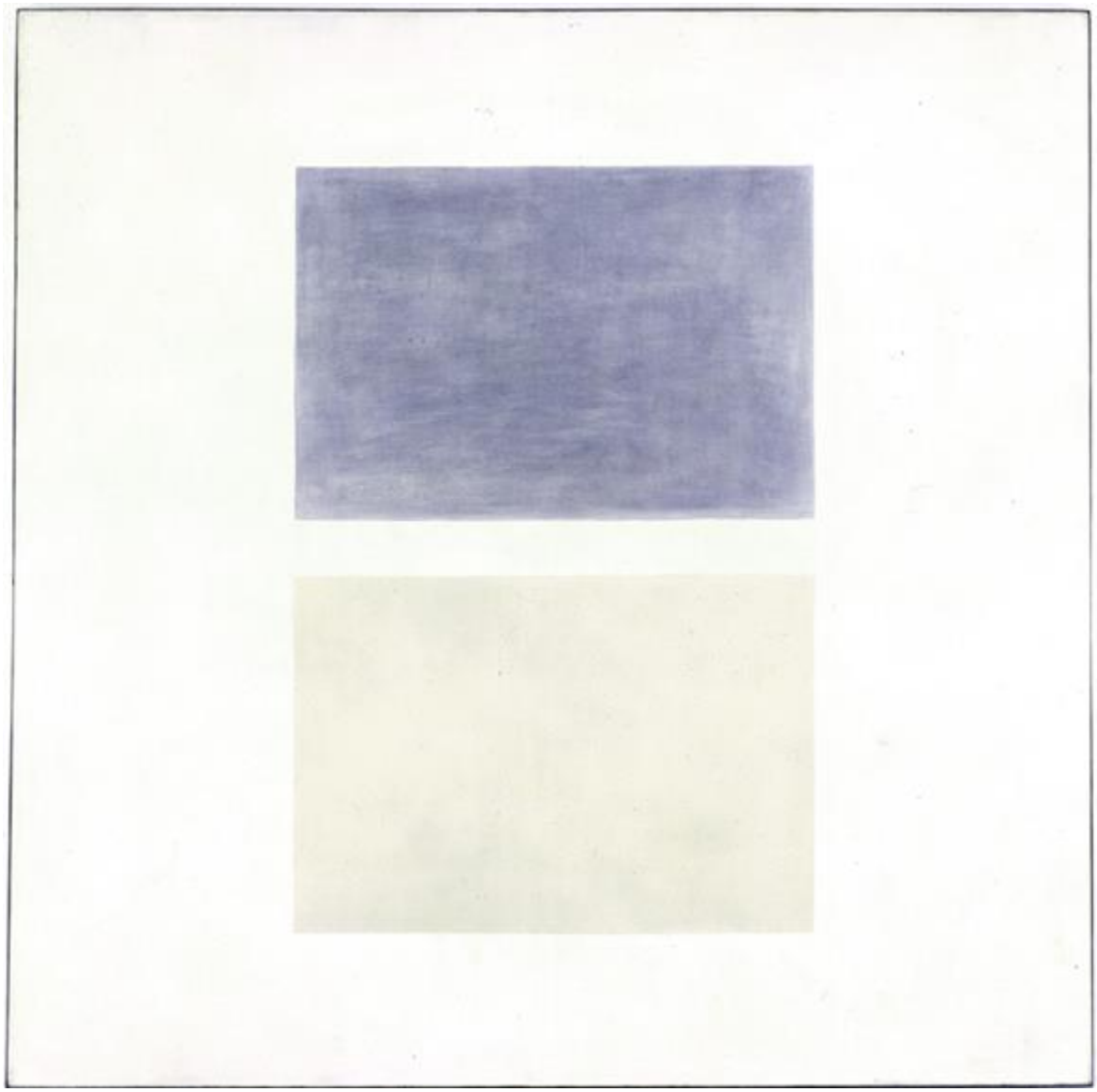

Figure 34. Agnes Martin, *This Rain*, 1960.

[595] Isabelle Ewig compares Asse's work to the sobriety, transparency, light, atmosphere of silence, and spiritual qualities of Chardin and Morandi in Christian Briend, *Geneviève Asse Peintures* (Centre Pompidou, Paris: Somogy Editions d'Art, 2013), p. 16.
[596] Asse in Bishop and Elson, *Contemporary French and Francophone Art*, p. 78.
[597] Martin's comments about her art are also reminiscent of Beckett's description of his creative process. In 'The untroubled Mind', first published in *Flash Art* 41 (June 1973), Martin wrote: 'Suffering is necessary / for freedom from suffering / first you have to find out about what you're suffering from. / My painting is about impotence / We are ineffectual'. Martin in Stiles and Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, 150-159 (p. 155).

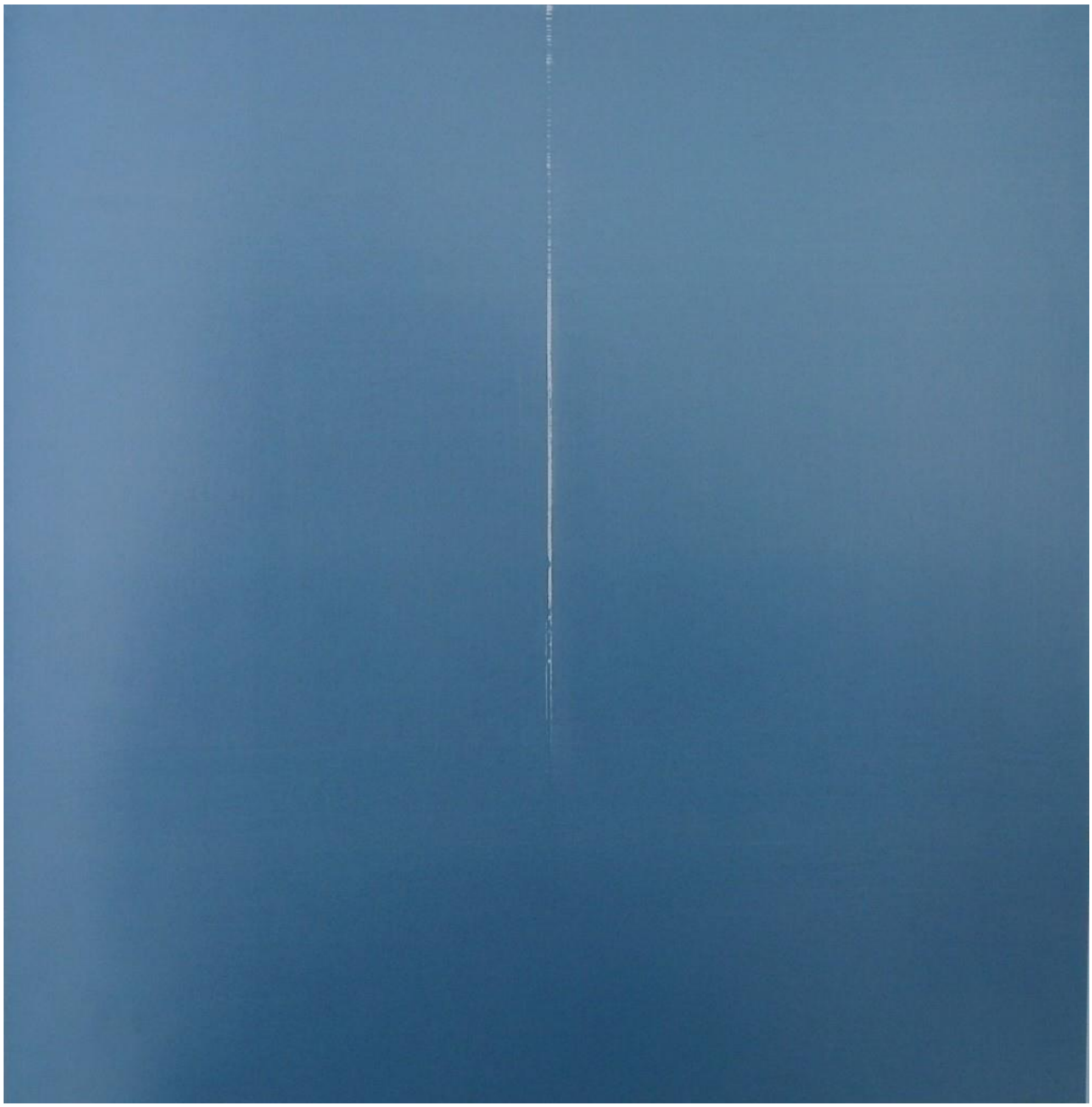

Figure 35. *Trace stellaire 7*, 2001-2008.

Like Martin, Asse's work demonstrates an affinity with blue.[598] By 1980, blue had become Asse's exclusive colour. Roland Penrose has stated that blue is Asse's colour 'of silence, of dreams and of endless space' as it conveys the sometimes troubling and at other times serene inner gaze.[599] Asse, like Beckett, sees blue as a portal for depth and hope that draws her viewer into a world of 'infinite divergence'.[600] With its capacity for inducing a meditative state, Asse's visual art is

[598] It is likely that both artists were influenced by Yves Klein, who said: 'In the real of the blue air more than anywhere else one feels the world is accessible to the most unlimited reveries. It is then that a reverie assumes true depth.' Klein also acknowledged Gaston Bachelard's influence on him, quoting the philosopher's comment that 'First there is nothing, next there is a depth of nothingness, then a profundity of blue' to suggest that blue is 'beyond dimensions'. Klein in *Colour: Documents on Contemporary Art*, ed. by David Batchelor (London; Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2008), p. 122.
[599] Roland Penrose, *Geneviève Asse* (London: Taranman, 1980), Preface.
[600] Germain Viatte in Bishop and Elson, *Contemporary French and Francophone Art*, p. 77.

transcendent and ephemeral as it moves away from concrete signification and towards something altogether less definite. Asse states: 'Avec le bleu, j'arrive à faire des transparences plus intenses. [With blue I am able to make more profound transparencies.]'[601] Asse's 1971 painting entitled *Transparence* (1971) is an example of the enlightening transience and purity of the colour blue.

Figure 36. *Transparence*, 1971.

Blue vibrates with energy as it hovers between night and day; hope and sadness. For Asse, 'Le Bleu c'est l'espace: l'essence de l'espace. Et puis la liberté: le sentiment de la liberté. [Blue is the space: the essence of the space. And freedom: the feeling of liberty.]'[602] This, in turn, links Asse's blue with

[601] Geneviève Asse in Supervielle, *Un été avec Asse*, pp. 74-5.
[602] Ibid., p. 76.

Beckett's 'cloudless sky' (SS: 107) in *Stirrings Still* and the 'palest blue against the pale sky' (Co: 15) of *Company* as it takes on a quasi-spiritual essence in their works. Asse's blue opens out an inner and outer space for the viewer to enter, as Jean Leymarie explains: 'L'espace est vraiment, selon le mot de Plotin, le grain de la lumière. La couleur bleue devient la pulsation légère de la profondeur, le règne atmosphérique de la spiritualité. [The space is really, in the words of Plotinus, the source of light. The colour blue becomes the pulsation of a profound light, an atmospheric realm of spirituality.]'[603] In his later works, Beckett absorbs the vitality and wonderment of Asse's blue to give his moribund worlds a 'radiant haze' (ISIS: 58). He marries this with the Romantic symbol of the 'little blue flower' (W: 125) derived from Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which Beckett defined as the 'Romantic ideal' (TCD 10971/1, 33v).[604] Hölderlin's 'lovely blue' is also a source of Beckett's blue as it is generally regarded as a symbol of inspiration, hope and beauty of things.[605] Hölderlin highlights the sense of longing, religiosity, and sorrow within the colour blue in his poem 'In Lovely Blue':

> In lovely blue the steeple blossoms
> With its metal roof. Around which
> Drift swallow cries, around which
> Lies most loving blue.[606]

Here, a swallow, the bird of freedom (Psalms 84:3; Proverbs 26:2), soars in the blue sky to convey a sense of liberation. Later on, a flower 'likewise lovely, blooming as it does Under the sun' links this boundless blue with the beauty of nature.[607] The 'cries' that are carried in the 'most loving blue' air, however, taint this idealistic picture with the anguish of longing. This admixture of sorrow and espérance is reminiscent of Poussin's use of blue admired by Beckett. A similar anguished blue can be felt in Asse's use of darker blues and grey, and in the divide between memories and the present in Beckett's texts. For Beckett, as well as Novalis and Hölderlin before him, blue becomes a symbol, not for that which is longed for, but for the act of longing itself. As Joseph O'Leary has observed, the

[603] Jean Leymarie in *Geneviève Asse: Peintures et Dessins*, ed. by Silvia Baron Superveille and Leymarie (Plomelin: Palatines, 2004), p. 104
[604] See: Ackerley, *Annotated Watt*, p. 142. Novalis' blue flower also appears in the poem 'Calvary by Night' (which features in *Dream*): 'till the clamour of a blue bloom / beat on the walls of the womb of / the waste of / the water' (CP: 52). These early works testify Beckett's longstanding interest in the Romantic qualities of blue.
[605] For a more detailed outline of Beckett's Hölderlin notations see: Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, p. 93.
[606] Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, trans. by Richard Sieburth (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 249.
[607] Ibid., p. 251.

feature of Beckett's literary allusions that often goes unnoticed is that they are 'steeped in romantic longing.'[608] Dirk Van Hulle extends O'Leary's argument to suggest that the blue flower 'became a symbol of Romantic *Sehnsucht* for the infinite' to such an extent that the '*Blaue Blume* became a symbol for a second-degree *Sehnsucht*, a longing for longing.'[609] In line with Hölderlin, both the pain of longing and the persistence of hope coincide with Beckett's use of blue. As an immaterial concept, blue conveys the irresistible lure of Romantic yearning which remains ultimately unattainable. Similarly, the sense of hope in Beckett's texts both feeds and denies its subject with a false promise of company. This parallels Beckett's search for a writerly form that will raise the affective capabilities of the word.

Blue eyes: 'efforts to pierce the gloom' (Fizzle 1: 225)

Beckett's use of blue to signify the imagination appears in his early poetry, as well as in the short prose from the 1960s. For example, 'Dieppe' turns towards 'les vieilles lumières' ('the lights of old'; CP: 99) and 'à elle l'acte calme' with 'les quelques haillons d'azur dans la tete' ('few fragments of blue in the head'; CP: 92) uses blue as a metaphor for artistic creation. Additionally, 'La Mouche' contains the line 'sabrant l'azur s'écrasant contre l'invisible' ('slashing the blue crashing against the unseen'; CP: 95), to juxtapose the vitality of the elements against the futility of the poet.[610] In a later poem entitled 'dread nay', which Beckett was writing in 1974, he focuses on the opening and closing of an eye within a constrained body. With its 'head fast' (CP: 203), multiple references to *The Inferno* (XXXII, 44-5 and XXXIII, 1-2), Psalm 74:20 ('the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty'), and stark contrast between 'shocked wide / with white' (CP: 204) and 'at ray / in latibule / long dark / stir of dread'; 'dread nay' depicts the simultaneous sense of fear for the outside world and desperate searching for an escape from the inner world behind in a close-up of an eye. Similar to the depiction of imagination in *IDI* and 'Ping', in this poem it is both a refuge from the horrors outside

[608] O'Leary, 'Beckett's Intertextual Power', *Journal of Irish Studies*, 18 (2003), 87-101 (p. 96).
[609] Dirk Van Hulle, '"Accursed Creator": Beckett, Romanticism, and "the Modern Prometheus"', *SBTA*, 18 (2007), 15-29 (pp. 26-7, fn. 10).
[610] Beckett's use of azure in 'à l'acte calme' and 'La Mouche' also refers to the spiritual qualities of Mallarmé's azure.

and a closed mental chamber of 'long still / long nought' (CP: 444-445). In a 'mirlitonnade' written in Ussy in 1977, imagination appears as a resilient force that cannot be extinguished:

> imagine si ceci
> un jour ceci
> un beau jour
> imagine
> si un jour
> un beau jour ceci
> si ceci
> cessait
> imagine (CP: 212)

In the prose Beckett was writing in the decade leading up to these poems, a beautiful day also hangs in the balance of an imagination that threatens to cease. What unifies each example of Beckett's expression of the imagination is his attempt to capture its presence and sense of enigmatic, transitory elusiveness through visual intimations of clarity and the colour blue.

Imagination Dead Imagine

After 'six months of erasures' and starting over at least twenty times, *IDI* was finally published in 1965, first in French then in English.[611] The rotunda that encases two white bodies positioned back-to-back was, according to Avigdor Arikha, inspired by the Val-de-Grâce church in Paris that Beckett could see from his study window.[612] This implies that from its inception, this story was crafted with an architectural awareness of space and an intense sense of the visual. From this 'plain rotunda,' with light 'that makes all so white no visible source', a ring of blue 'as in the imagination' (IDI: 182) bodies forth.

In opposition to the commonplace reading of *IDI* as being a depiction of a hellishly claustrophobic confinement, in this reading, the pale blue eyes are portals of hope and transcendence for the figures trapped in their prison-like cell. Blue is also seen as an image of how constricted the scope of imagination has become both on the part of the imaginer and that of the imagined. Some critics have read *IDI* as a defiant text that applauds the undying light of the imagination. H. Porter

[611] Beckett to Avigdor Arikha in an undated letter of March 1965 in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 532.
[612] Ibid., p. 531.

Abbott suggests that imagination is 'literally welling up out of the whiteness of the page'.[613] Brian Finney asks if imagination is 'now beginning to re-assume control, providing the anaesthetic of habitual blindness to the painful reality of things.'[614] In a more muted tone, Ruby Cohn suggests that though Beckett's new narrative tone 'diminishes the very possibility of life in an imagined voice' the pale blue eyes, though only briefly visible, 'stain the still whiteness of eternal nonbeing.'[615] This reading of *IDI* focuses on how Beckett uses blue to provide an imaginary (even spiritual, if one considers the Val-de-Grâce church) open space in an otherwise constricting, cylindrical prison. It directly challenges Laura Barge's view that 'little significance can be attached to the colours blue and white in *Imagination Dead Imagine*' as it sees blue as a signifier of imagination itself.[616]

IDI opens by ridiculing the very notion that imagination could be dead:

> No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. (IDI: 182)

A puff of air ('pah') dismisses the title's ironic suggestion that imagination may have ceased, quickly reinstating its presence ('not dead yet'). Even the title suggests that if one is imagining there being no imagination, its 'death' is impossible. Once again Beckett draws upon Descartes for this maxim. In his *Meditations* (1641) Descartes writes: '[if] none of the things which I imagine are true, nevertheless this power of imagining does not cease to be really in use, and it forms part of my thought.'[617] This belief that the imagination is an inseparable component of the self is reinforced by the Romantics.[618] In chapter XIII of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge claims that the imagination is the 'living Power and Prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the

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[613] H. Porter Abbott, 'Farewell to Incompetence: Beckett's *How It Is* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*' in Andonian, *Critical Response to Beckett*, 166-176 (p. 173).
[614] Brian Finney, 'A Reading of Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 17.2 (April 1971), 65-71 (p. 71).
[615] Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 248, 249.
[616] Laura Barge, '"Coloured Images" in the "Black Dark": Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction', *PMLA*, 92.2 (March 1977), 273-284 (p. 282).
[617] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 75. Rubin Rabinovitz draws on this maxim in his reading of the short story. Rabinovitz suggests: 'If I form a picture of my imagination dying I soon become aware of something working behind the scenes to generate this image. No matter how intent I may be on extinguishing the imaginative faculty, a perverse remnant refuses to disappear.' Rabinovitz, *Innovation in Beckett's Fiction*, p. 164.
[618] As outlined in the introduction, in recent years numerous critics have picked up on Paul Davies's belief that Beckett is 'a true Romantic' whose art is 'the overflowing of the creative imagination.' Davies, *The Ideal Real*, pp. 34, 13. Ten years later, S. E. Gontarski declared that 'A good study of the Romantic impulse in SB's writings, revealing unexpected insights into a tradition vehemently rejected but never quite denied, is currently lacking' in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 487. Then three years later, Dirk Van Hulle identified 'both aspects of the mythical Prometheus – the defiant fire/light-bringer and the creator (referred to as *Prometheus plasticator*)' in Beckett's works. See: Van Hulle, '"Accursed Creator": Beckett, Romanticism, and "the Modern Prometheus"', *SBTA*, 18 (2007), 15-29 (p. 18).

finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.'[619] Beckett's writing, in line with Coleridge's understanding of the imagination, 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate', allowing the colour blue to break into a monochrome world.[620] This blue, however, much like the protective yet suffocating cradle/cell the figures find themselves in speaks more to Coleridge's experience of Fancy where joy 'dalli[es] with distress' and hope and happiness are evoked only to 'rob [him] of [his] mirth', than to a sense of freedom often associated with Imagination.[621] Perhaps, in Coleridgean terms, it is Fancy rather than Imagination that Beckett gives us as his figures remain suspended in tension between restriction and liberation, represented by the cylindrical enclosure they inhabit.

After the initial struggle to idealise and unify the piecemeal components of the imagination, the 'effect is striking' (IDI: 181) when Beckett magnifies the eye, as if using a close up, such as those of the goldfish and parrot in *Film*. At this proximity, the 'Piercing pale blue' from the subjects' eyes suffuses the text, becoming a captivating image of hope and transcendence. When their eyes 'suddenly open wide and gaze in unblinking exposure long beyond what is humanly possible', imagination presents itself as a portal to a world 'beyond' their cylindrical confinement. The transfixing eyes give life to the dormant bodies that 'might well pass for inanimate'. These blue spheres are like the 'blue chasm' of Wordsworth's *Prelude* where 'The soul, the Imagination of the whole' is lodged.[622] When the blue light of the eyes shines in the 'Emptiness, silence, heat, whiteness' of the cylindrical enclosure, the contrast of colour suggests defiance, strength and freedom from the inhospitable refuge that fluctuates from 'white and heat to black and cold, and vice versa' (IDI: 183). Conversely, like the spotlight in *Play*, the blue eyes could belong to the reader or narrator who interrogates the scene, reinforcing the constrained state in which the bodies find themselves. Out of this harsh environment, the imagination conjures images of spring eternal: islands, waters, azure,

[619] S. T. Coleridge in Robert J. Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 12.
[620] Ibid., p. 56.
[621] S. T. Coleridge, 'Dejection: an Ode' in *The Poetical and Dramatic Works of S. T. Coleridge. With a Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1854), p. 32.
[622] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: Or, Growth of a Poet's Mind (text of 1805)*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: OUP, 1970), book XIII, lines 56; 65, p. 230.

verdure as a means of distraction from the harshness of the figures' physical situation. Azure, in particular, is suggestive of an outward-looking perspective. Such hopefulness is, however, confined in a claustrophobically enclosed cubicle where blue could also signify deoxygenation. Thus the imaginative agency of these 'Piercing pale blue' (IDI: 184) eyes is both necessary and limited because of the confinement of the two figures. Consequently, the boundlessness and immateriality of the sky that is evoked in these azure openings is equally limited. Despite the cruelty of such limitations, blue light still emanates from the subjects' eyes. As Kandinsky remarks in *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), 'the ultimate feeling [blue] creates is one of rest', adding that it is 'the typical heavenly colour.'[623] In *IDI*, the reader may see blue as the expansive gaze of a man and woman who are physically confined in a 'white speck lost in whiteness' (IDI: 185). Blue, as Kandinsky's comment implies, is the portal into an outer world; it is a pocket of hope in a forsaken world. Even when suffering from dizziness caused by the irregular strobe lighting of the ubiquitously white rotunda (3ft by 3ft), there is still hope: 'whatever its uncertainties the return sooner or later to a temporary calm seems assured' (IDI: 183). This assurance of calm marks a definite shift in Beckett's writing from the unyielding environments and situations of his earlier works. Even though his subjects inhabit a landscape that pits 'black and cold' against 'white and heat', they strive to reach this free and open inner world of blue. To do this, the subjects seek release through the self by going behind the eyelids that will shield them from the glare of the 'agitated light' (IDI: 184). As the subjects' inward-looking imagination offers relief from the harsh surroundings, we approach what Kandinsky terms 'inner need'.[624] Though Beckett may have dismissed the cosmic wholeness of Kandinsky's inner necessity, in his use of the colour blue he expresses a similar sense of wonderment.[625] For Kandinsky inner necessity is the principle of art, as it underpins the foundation of forms and harmony of colours.[626] It is the point of

[623] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 38.
[624] Ibid., p. 55. When considering Beckett's similarity to Kandinsky, one must be cautious, for while Beckett appreciated the symphonic clash of forces in Kandinsky's early canvases, he condemned the artist's lyrical fantasy and meditative geometrical purity as he felt it glossed over the all-important 'rupture of the lines of communication' (Dis: 70). On the other hand, Beckett's fondness for Kandinsky cannot be denied. In his entry into his 'German Diaries' for 15 February 1937, he writes of '3 excellent Kandinsky' and talks of going to 'look at the wonderful Kandinsky "Träumerische Improvisation"' after lunch at Chez Frau Bienert in Dresden. For a discussion of Beckett's scepticism towards Kandinsky see: Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, pp. 55-89.
[625] The discussion of Erskine's painting in chapter one evaluates Beckett's stance on Kandinsky's formal arrangements.
[626] For Kandinsky's understanding of the creation of a work of art, see the chapter entitled 'Art and Artists' in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 53-55.

contact between the form and the human soul that facilitates unlimited freedom. In *IDI*, the colour blue is this font of resilience and hope as it emerges out of the grey surroundings. The clarity of the blue eyes in Beckett's text appear as a momentary aperçu of resilience and *Sehnscht*, but unlike Kandinsky's blue, no immediate gratification is experienced. Beckett's blue still contains a sense of longing for pure harmony as it is tempered by the austere surroundings it finds itself encased in. This is because Beckett's text is concerned with the tension between, not the resolution of, physical confinement and imagined freedom.

With hope as their sole comforter, a man and woman lie perfectly mirrored in their semicircles: 'With their left hands they hold their left legs a little below the knee, with their right hands their left arms a little above the elbow.' Their sweat and the mist from their lips on the mirror placed between them emphasise their physical confinement. As the reader is told that their situation cannot be improved for there is no escape and 'nothing elsewhere' (IDI: 185), we are inclined to suppose that their physical limitations aggregate their need for imagination as an alternative to their confinement. This imaginative alleviation, however, remains, like the colour blue, intangible as we remain in the dark as to *who* (the bodies, narrator, or reader) is doing the imagining. Here, Geneviève Asse shares a similar perspective to Beckett. The artist states: 'A chaque exposition, on me pose la même question. On me dit que je suis arrivée au 'point-limite'. Pour moi il n'y a aucune limite. [At each exhibition, I am asked the same question. I am told that I arrived at the "limit-point". For me there is no limit.]'[627] For Asse and Beckett, there is no endpoint or resolution, only a continuous striving towards an unattainable goal. Blue, with its Heavenly, transcendent connotations, becomes their metaphor for this act of pursuing something unattainable. Moreover, in *IDI*, blue encapsulates a sense of hope and freedom from the harsh surroundings. In Asse's paintings blue 'n'est pas tout à fait un bleu. Il me contient. En plus, il y a l'air, l'eau, l'ardoise si je me penche vers la terre […] Les tons se sont rassemblés et donnent cette sensation d'unité : la couleur s'est équilibrée […] On peut y entrer. [It's not only blue. It contains me. It is also the air, water, slate if I lean towards the earth. The tones

[627] Asse in Morel, *Geneviève Asse: Peintures*.

merge and give the feeling of unity: the colour is balanced. Once can enter.]'[628] This sense of reaching after the unity and wholeness of a pure blue is expressed in *Cercle Fenêtre*, whose circularity brings to mind the piercing blue eyes of Beckett's subjects.[629]

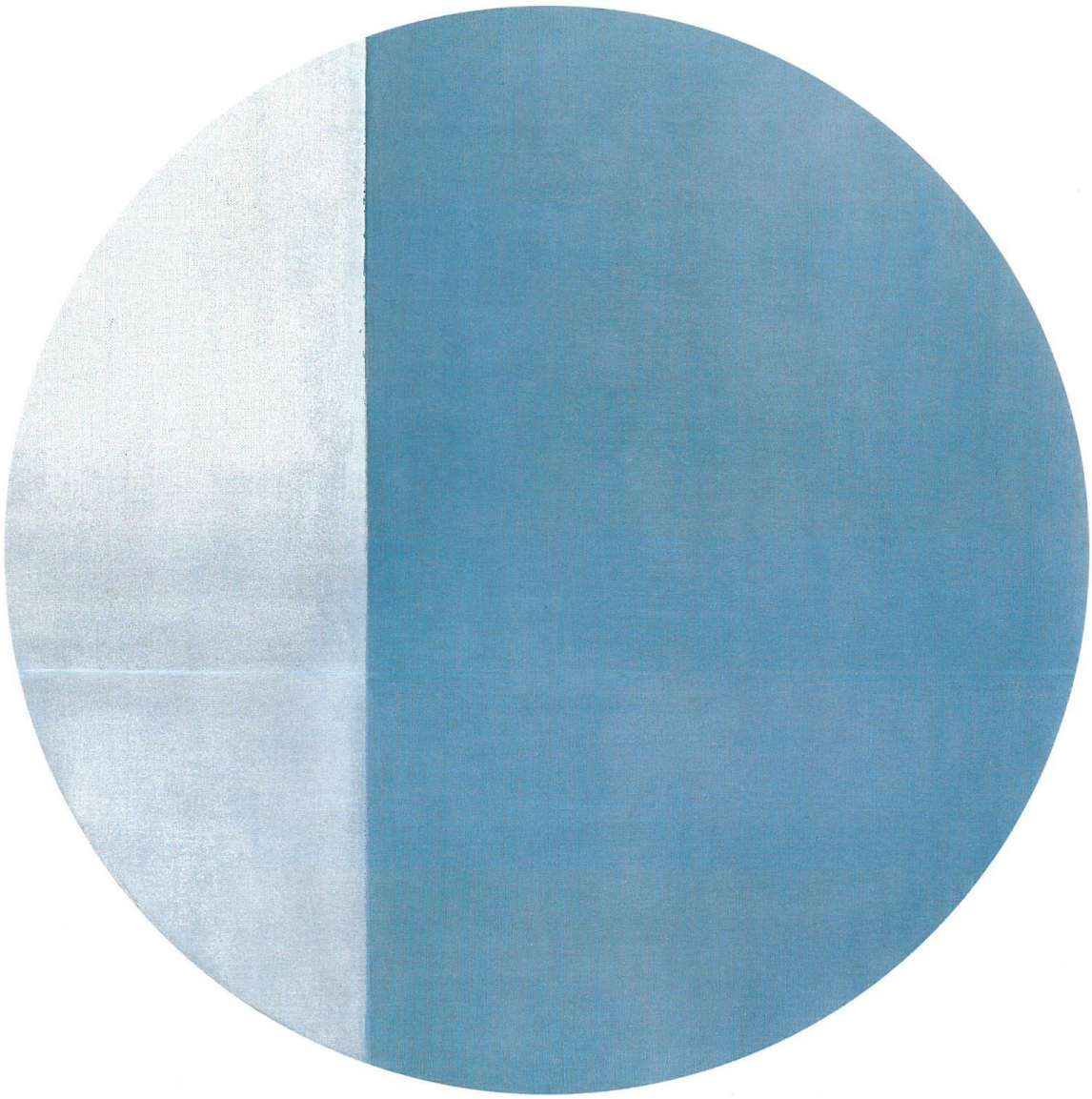

Figure 37. *Cercle Fenêtre*, 1971.

The division in this painting between the grey and blue is suggestive of the flux between the stark rotunda and the blue eyes, as well as a representation of the artist's work being incomplete or in search of itself (reminiscent of the incomplete circle in Erskine's painting). The physical containment and passivity of the two cramped bodies is both counterbalanced and enhanced by the blue eyes that signify the possibility of escapism and confirm the permanence of the subjects'

[628] Geneviève Asse in Rainer Michel Mason, Silvia Baron Supervielle and Germain Viatte, *Geneviève Asse* (Lyon: FAGE Editions, 2015), p. 65.
[629] In its connotation of wholeness ('cercle') and enclosure ('fênetre'), the title also captures the duality of limitation and limitlessness as it conjoins feelings of possibility and restriction. This also relates to the discussion of Beckett's apertures in the previous chapter.

situation. This tension is created by the off-centre division between blue (which absorbs) and silvery-grey (which reflects) in the painting above. Both Asse and Beckett use blue to offer hope with one hand, but by inserting spatial limitations (cylinder and frame), take it away with the other.

'Ping'

Published a year later in 1966, 'Ping' follows on from *IDI*. It consists of seventy extremely short, unpunctuated sentences. Key words such as 'light', 'blue', 'white', 'silence', and 'ping' ring out to create a striking picture of a mind that has been transfixed and silenced. In this text of just 934 words (many of which are frequently repeated), meaning and linearity are thwarted by an intense compression of ideas. In a room almost as claustrophobic as the text itself – 'White walls one yard by two white ceiling one square yard' (P: 193) – an old man with long white hair stands, his 'Bare white body' almost invisible against the white box he inhabits. With verbless phrases, words estrange meaning and shift emphasis so that a single understanding of the text becomes impossible. Perhaps at the height of his abstraction, in 'Ping' Beckett incorporates both visual and musical techniques. Phrases are musicalized by repetition, rhyme, assonance, and alliteration.[630] The following extract illustrates Beckett's careful phrasing where repetition and modulation are used to recycle and develop a motif:

> Given rose only just nails fallen white over. Long hair fallen white invisible over. White scars invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just. Ping image only just almost never one second light time blue and white in the wind. Head naught nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible over. Only the eyes given blue fixed front light blue almost white only colour alone uncover. (P: 195)

Whilst Beckett develops his theme (the body) through colour: 'rose', 'white' and 'blue', the rhythm in this passage is created by the repetition of 'over' and 'only', whose rounded vowel sounds give the reader an impression of overlapping themes. Into this sequence, Beckett introduces detail (or ornamentation): body parts ('hair', 'flesh', 'nose', 'ears', 'mouth' and 'eyes') and strong, surprising,

[630] For an analysis of 'Ping's' musicality, see: H. Porter Abbott, 'Samuel Beckett and the Arts of Time: Painting, Music, Narrative' in Oppenheim, *Beckett and the Arts,* pp. 17-19.

textures like 'the wind'. This seamless combination of rhythmical and impressionistic techniques is indicative of Beckett's increasingly nuanced musical and visual style.[631]

Due to 'Ping's' aesthetic originality, the form of this vignette has attracted critical attention, Georg Baselitz even provided illustrations for the 1991 edition of 'Bing'.[632] Elisabeth Segrè views the 'saturation of repetitions' as 'overwhelming,' making the reader 'increasingly frustrated'.[633] John Pilling has interpreted 'Ping' as a narrative that resembles a piece of sculpture that we 'contemplate from outside, attuning ourselves to the shape and texture of the material.'[634] Generally, it is viewed as an exploration of how we cope at the limits of isolation, silence and confinement. David Lodge sees it as a rendering of the consciousness of a confined person who is 'evidently under extreme duress, and probably at the last gasp of life', to which Segrè adds that each 'ghost of a colour' and 'fragile sign' embodies 'the brink of existence, the verge of non-existence.'[635] The colours that emerge (white, rose, black, and especially blue) and the releasing effects they have constitute the focus of this discussion.

In a white square measuring one square yard, the same size as the rotunda of *IDI*, a 'white body' with his 'legs joined like sewn' (P: 193) resides. Through this suffering and confinement, however, a blue emblem of hope shines. Again, like *IDI*, blue appears from the eyes, but this time it comes from the eyes of a solitary man. This 'almost white', 'light blue' with 'silence within' reappears throughout 'Ping'. And the 'Head haught eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front silence within' (P: 194) that stare out at the reader create an unforgettable impression. Not only is a sense of inner calm conveyed through their steadfast fixedness and 'silence within', but these blue halos of light represent memories; a 'flash of time,' 'all of old ping' (P: 195) from afar. Just as when

[631] David Lodge suggests that 'ping' might 'denote a noise emitted by some piece of apparatus' like a bell, a rifle, or a typewriter. If the sound is that of a typewriter, the process of reading 'Ping' mirrors the creative process. Similar to Feldman's score for *Words and Music* which performs the process of composition by exposing the thoughts, decisions, and revisions that are involved in the act of composition, the recurrence of the typewriter's 'ping' plots the stage of Beckett's writing and draws our attention to the stages of Beckett's creative path. This makes 'Ping' a self-reflexive work that continually reminds us of its own making. David Lodge, 'Some Ping Understood', *Encounter*, 30.2 (February 1968), 85-89 (p. 87). Enoch Brater also suggests that 'ping' is the sound of a typewriter's return. Brater, *The Drama in the Text: Beckett's Late Fiction* (Oxford; New York: OUP, 1994), p. 91. For readings of 'Ping' as the noise emitted by an ECG machine and a man-machine hybrid respectively, see: Dan O'Hara, 'What Goes "Ping" in Beckett's Ping?', *Notes and Queries*, 54.2 (June 2007), 184-186; and Alys Moody, 'A Machine for Feeling: *Ping*'s Posthuman Affect', *JOBS*, 26.1 (2017), 87-102.

[632] Oppenheim states that Baselitz's emphasis, like Beckett's, is 'clearly on the body, but its recognition is compromised by a pronounced conflict between form and abstraction.' Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 166.

[633] Elisabeth Bregman Segrè, 'Style and Structure in Beckett's "Ping": "That Something Itself"', *JML*, 6.1 (February 1977), 127-147 (p. 137).

[634] Pilling in Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p. 169.

[635] David Lodge, 'Some Ping Understood', p. 86; Segrè, 'Style and Structure in Beckett's "Ping"', p. 136.

the viewer who looks into the blue expanse of Asse's canvases is given the space to reflect on his/her sense of self, the flash of blue light facilitates an opening, accessible through the imagination. The fact that the blue light belongs to the eyes of the protagonist suggests, as Henri Bergson claims in *Creative Evolution* (orig. 1907; trans. 1911), that memory is not created or consciously recalled, but automatically inscribed within the body.[636] This means that to get to the spirit (what Bergson calls the abode of the past) through the body (the abode of the present), we need to find the point of intersection between mind and matter. In 'Ping', as in Asse's *Cercle Fenêtre*, blue functions as this boundary between present perception and subconscious recollection. When blue appears on the surface of the text or canvas, it conceals an inner world of serenity ('silence within'). As Asse says: 'Le bleu devient beaucoup plus bleu, ardoise, outremer, cobalt… Il règne sans partage. Qu'est-ce qui détermine la couleur? saura-t-on jamais…c'est un mystère. Je voyage avec le bleu, c'est ma dimension intérieure. [Blue becomes bluer, slate, ultramarine, colbat…It reigns supreme. What determines the colour? Will one ever…it's a mystery. I travel with blue, it's my inner dimension.]'[637] Both Beckett and Asse use blue to connect the present world of suffering with a transparent world of inner freedoms, or 'dimension intérieure' that is achieved through the inner gaze of the self or 'I' (eye).[638]

Although they are imprisoned in an empty enclosure, Beckett's characters are always perceiving something. Whether in his plays or prose, Beckett's subjects are also constantly perceived by a viewer or a reader, which intensifies their sense of confinement and helplessness. To counterbalance this, there is always a blue light, even if it belongs to the body watching. The presence of this blue light suggests there is no absolute void in nature, because even if one no longer knows anything of external objects, the vital imagination of the inner self never completely fades. In line with Bergson's beliefs, 'Ping's' subject has taken refuge in the consciousness that he has of himself.

[636] Beckett would have encountered Bergson through Arthur Aston Luce, his tutor at TCD from 1923 to 1927. Luce was the author of the Donellan lectures on Bergson. Beckett's own Trinity lectures in the 1930s and *Proust* were both influenced by Bergson's notions of habit and spontaneous memory, expressed in *Matter and Memory* (1896). See: Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 22.
[637] Geneviève Asse in Viatte and Daval, *Geneviève Asse*, p. 27.
[638] In *IDI*, the mirror enables this self-reflexive turn towards an inner world. Blue becomes the colour of the perceiver and perceived, forming a binary between the body looked at and the body looking, self and other, passivity and activity, immateriality and physicality.

He lives in an 'undivided present' where, as Proust suggests, the self is an essence comprised of layers of hidden memories reflecting past experiences.[639] Ping's escapism is therefore not in the physical world, but in the store of memories within his mind. His present is a continuous becoming and, symptomatic of Asse and Beckett's works in process, he never appears complete or whole. This uncomfortable incompletion is felt in the repetition of 'only just', 'almost' (P: 193), and 'only just almost never' (P: 193-4).[640] Moreover, in its focus on process, 'Ping' conveys a strong undercurrent of yearning that finds its root in Beckett's own creative struggle.

The light blue that emerges out of the wind and quiescent 'silent within' (P: 195) becomes a motif for the subject's wistfulness for times past. In this case, the pale blue light hints at a time before the severity of the white light with its connotations of a whitewashed mind. The blue light, when it shines out of Ping's bleached world is an emblem of the struggle to delay the omnipresence of the white light and quell interminable yearning with comforting thoughts of the past. This blue, however, is not as deep or piercing as it is in *IDI*, it is 'light blue almost white' (P: 193). As the text nears its end, the blue eyes have been replaced with 'eyes white fixed front' (P: 196), as if the old man, exhausted by his own up-hill struggle, is defeated by the punitive white light which finally locks his gaze into a soulless glare. As one eye has closed, Beckett describes the other eye as 'unlustrous black and white half closed long lashes imploring ping silence ping over.' In this final image, Beckett conveys a sense of desperation ('imploring') and hints at death ('last murmur'; 'ping over'). The blue and rose colours are replaced with a monochrome eyeball with its white cornea and black pupil that eclipses the blue iris, suggesting that the man now stands alone in darkness. Whilst the 'traces' and 'blurs' of 'light grey' (P: 193) may refer to the old man's memories of a time before his solitary confinement, by the end of the text, his blue eyes are forced to close. Ultimately this figure succumbs to the compression of the cylinder that contains him. He can no longer utter 'Brief murmurs' (P: 193), but suffers in silence. Thus 'Ping' is one of Beckett's most shocking texts, where an old man's blue

[639] Bergson in *The New Bergson*, ed. by John Mullarkey (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 59.
[640] Both Hugh Kenner and Fredrick N. Smith have suggested that *How It Is* is a novel that 'looks like a draft of itself' as it begins with inspiration ('sudden blazes in the head'; HII: 28) and goes through erroneous attempts, repeating 'no delete', 'it's preferable', 'something wrong there', before struggling on with no end in sight. Kenner, *Beckett: A Critical Study*, p. 190; Frederick Smith, *Beckett and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 67.

eyes simply represent his desperate longing for small moments of relief from his all-consuming suffering.

Blue skies: 'Unformulable gropings of the mind' (Co: 14)

From the Greek 'algos' (pain) and 'nostos' (home), the idea of nostalgia aptly depicts the sentiments expressed in *Lessness* and *Company*, for these two texts convey both the act of remembering and the scenes from the past with an equal measure of trepidation and familiarity. As Beckett is more concerned with the visualisation of memory, a strong sense of one's temporal existence is sacrificed. To conflate and thereby annul a distinct sense of past, present or future, Beckett's reflective texts follow St. Augustine's temporal hybridity. As Augustine states:

> neither the future nor the past exist, and therefore it is not strictly correct to say that there are three times, past, present, and future. It might be correct to say that there are three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things […] The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is exception.[641]

By taking an immediate perspective, 'the present of past things', Beckett's nostalgic turn avoids sentimentality in its exploration of the affect the past has on the present. Landscapes before their destruction and memories of innocence before experience are weighted against a present day reality of ruins and knowingness.

Lessness

Beckett's interest in Bergson's writings on memory, evident in 'Ping', is equally present in his 1969 short story *Lessness*, which uses blue as a signpost to signal how memory functions in the mind. The passages from Bergson's writing which Beckett recalled tend to have their roots in the German Romantic tradition.[642] Not only is Bergson's concept of *élan vital* – the vital force responsible for all organic evolution – Dionysian as it harks back to the Greek mysteries, but his ideas have affinities with Schopenhauer, whose influence on Beckett has been well documented. It is Bergson's inverted cone of memory, however, that is relevant to *Lessness*. The cone is like a telescope pointing up to the

[641] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 269.
[642] See: Calder, *Philosophy of Beckett*, pp. 108-9.

night's sky. It functions as a metaphor for the old woman who reclines and looks up at Venus, to bring a memory from the past down to the surface of her existence in *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Firstly, there is an unconscious focus, and then singular images come into view. A Milky Way condenses into singular, isolated stars as it passes through a cloud of interpretation. Thus interpretation requires fragmentation and a twofold movement of rotation and contraction. In this way, our manipulation of the memory cone is, like Beckett's use of language, both centrifugal and centripetal. It suggests that true memory is involuntary as it *descends* down the cone from the past to the present. Rather than consciously trying to recall the past (as in 'Ping'), in line with Bergson's memory-cone process, the figure in *Lessness* experiences memories when they subconsciously appear.[643] Read in light of Bergson's memory cone, *Lessness* differs from 'Ping' in that whereas the reader can interpret the old man's blue eyes as portals of hope in the earlier text, here, memories can be associated with the blue sky. Whilst these memories are a comforting distraction from the hellish landscape the figure inhabits, the image of the blue sky recalls Beckett's comments on the sky in Messina's *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*. The reader, therefore, must be alert to both the beauty and sarcasm conveyed in this Heavenly sky.

In *Lessness*, the protagonist, known as 'little body', appears lost and alone in 'ruins' he cannot escape from (L: 197). This small, still, naked body inhabits an *Unheimlich* 'refuge' of 'grey sand' and stands upright amidst ruins where 'ash grey sky mirrored earth mirrored sky' (L: 199). Imprisoned in a timeless, changeless 'little void', the unnamed little body suffers from 'light of reason all gone from mind'. In this barren wilderness, the little body seeks comfort in memories referred to as 'blue celeste of poetry'. As this analysis will show, blue functions as a messenger bringing the reader and potentially the subject momentary happiness by creating a refuge in the memories associated with it. The general critical standpoint, summarised here by Robert Cochran, sees *Lessness* as Beckett's 'most persistent exploration of entropy where less and less nudges down against zero.'[644]

[643] In *Proust* Beckett describes this as 'involuntary memory' (Proust: 21). This correlates with Susan Schurman's description of Beckett's artistic method wherein 'creativity stems from an inward direction, a movement toward the centre. [It] proceeds from the circumference (outer world) to the core (inner world).' Schurman, *Solipsistic Novels of Beckett*, p. 9.
[644] Robert Cochran, *Samuel Beckett: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 59.

With the profusion of Romantic sensibilities in *Lessness*, encapsulated in the line: 'Never but imagined the blue in wild imagining the blue celeste of poesy', John Pilling's suggestion that 'The splitting asunder of the true refuge is like the opening of a pod, except that it scatters ruins rather than seeds' needs to be re-examined.[645] By contrast Ruby Cohn states that *Lessness* reflects Beckett's most generalised view of reality as 'the infinite void in which, against all probability, life briefly stirs', and J. E. Dearlove finds *Lessness* enriched by brief flickers of light and laughter.[646] This analysis shares these latter, more positive interpretations of the short story. Instead of only looking at the text from the perspective of the monochrome ruins surrounding the subject; this reading of *Lessness* explores the moments of relief, marked by the insertion of blue, that, for the reader at least, bring lyricism and colour into a fragmented, grey world. *Lessness* is a text marked with blue specks of hopefulness that are akin to Wordsworth's spots of time as they inject colour into a monochrome world to create a sense of tension.[647] In the brief stirs of life that unfold, the subject resorts to memory to find company and solace, for, as Beckett said: 'All human beings have a need for space, but also to share that space with other human beings.'[648] In its illustration of the Bergsonian process of active memory, *Lessness* represents Beckett's search for a way out of the ruins of language.

Lessness consists of 120 sentences, sixty different sentences doubled, put into six groups of ten and randomly ordered. Beckett describes *Lessness* as

> Ruin, exposure, wilderness, mindlessness, past and future defined and affirmed, are the categories, formally distinguishable, through which the writing winds, first in one disorder, then in another.[649]

In this revealing sentence, Beckett encloses the key to unlocking *Lessness*; by suggesting that past and future are 'formally distinguishable' through a series of 'disorders', he alludes to the arbitrary randomness of his structure whilst implying that a continuum of time past is wound into the ruinous

[645] Pilling in Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p. 174.
[646] Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, p. 268; J. E. Dearlove, '"Last Images": Samuel Beckett's Residual Fiction', *JML*, 6.1 (February 1977), 104-126 (p. 123). Cohn acknowledges the irrefutable Romanticism of *Lessness* when she states: 'A phrase like "blue celeste poesy" expresses nostalgia for all the love and lyricism of earlier Beckett works; the archaic and ironic bareness has been earned through his mastery of language.' Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, p. 268.
[647] Bergson states that 'there is no perception which is not full of memories' in *Henri Bergson Key Writings*, ed. by Keith Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 115.
[648] Beckett in Michael Haerdter, *Materialen zu Beckett's Endspiel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968), p. 88. Translation in Sarah Gendron, '"The Death of a Dynasty" Presence in Drama and Theory: Samuel Beckett and Jacques Derrida', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 18.2 (Spring 2004), 21-39 (p. 22).
[649] Beckett in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 564.

landscape of time present. Our task, as active readers, is to unwind the text in order to uncover Beckett's creative process. Asse's paintings provide useful visual parallels to the interchangeability of light and time in the text and help to disentangle order from 'disorder' in Beckett's process. For instance, from an earlier draft of *Lessness* it is clear that Beckett used light to demarcate time as he replaces 'hour' with 'light': 'Never was but grey air / timelessness / no sound / figment / the passing ~~hour~~ light.' (UoR MS5041) This revision tells us that light signifies an idealised past which is quickly replaced by the 'grey air' of the present. It also demonstrates how light and the past are inextricably linked, thereby creating a stark dichotomy between the figure's bright past and his bleak present. In order to decipher the effect the past has on the present, one must consider Bergson's assertion that: 'Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it.'[650]

As a story which Beckett said proceeded from 'Ping', *Lessness* evokes the memories, or 'ping[s] of old' that break momentarily into an old man's consciousness like a distant 'flash of time' (P: 195). Such flashes bring fragments of a brighter world – 'blue and white in the wind' – into the grey present. Within the subject's environment, these brief flashes are, however, miniscule moments of relief from an otherwise disappointing existence of fruitless promises. In this still, silent world ('no sound no stir'; L: 197), the subject tirelessly searches for a Paradise that no longer exists. Bergson's belief that 'our life moves – contracts, expands and relaxes – in terms of circuits, and it is the whole of memory that passes over into each of these circuits but always in a specific form or state of contraction' is akin to the persona's memory of a distilled moment of an 'old love' (L: 198).[651] The encircling form of *Lessness* means that blue also appears as an element that shines briefly before disappearing as a glimmer of hope that continually eludes the subject's grasp. In its reference to Dante's 'rosa celeste', Beckett's 'blue celeste' is suggestive of an altogether cooler, distant vision. Blue, with its virginal connotations in religious iconography, mystical importance for Kandinsky, and

[650] Bergson in Pearson and Mullarkey, *Bergson Key Writings*, p. 151.
[651] Ibid., p. 23.

imaginative power for Mallarmé connects the subject's present with the base of memories in Bergson's memory cone.

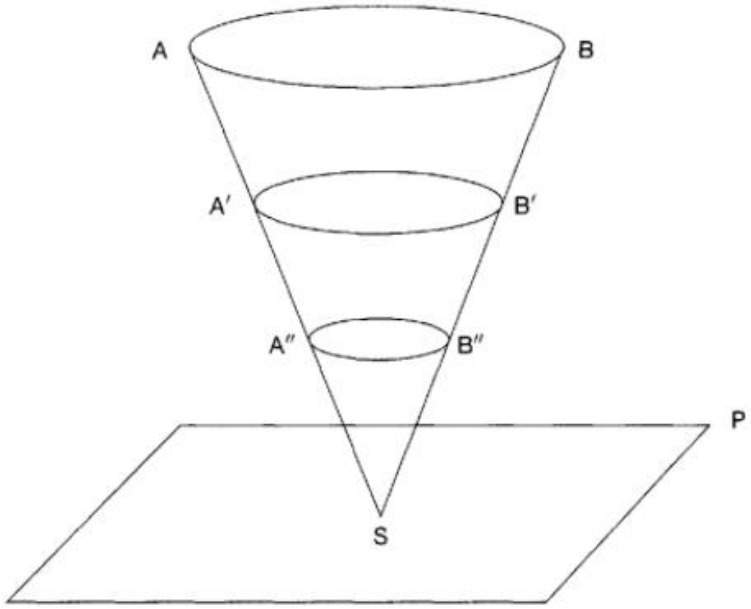

Figure 38. *Bergson's Memory Cone*.

As the above image shows, this memory cone appears inverted as point 'S' is at the plane of our present existence (i.e. where the subject exists in the present) and the base of the cone, labelled 'AB', is where memoires are stored (in the blue sky above the subject, perhaps). These are the oldest surviving memories which come forward spontaneously, in dreams, as experienced by Dreamer in *Nacht und Träume*, for example. In *Lessness*, the base of this memory cone (where the figure's deepest memories are kept), is signified by the colour blue. For the figure, reaching this blue (moving from 'S' to 'AB') involves traveling along the 'double current' which goes from the plane of our present being to the deepest recess of our memories.[652] Ricocheting up and down this cone, memories either 'crystallise into uttered words' (like the blue in Beckett's text) or evaporate into distant memories (like the grey ruins, whose structure cannot be fully formed).[653] Thus Beckett's blue is like Vega, a star with similar heavenly connotations to the 'blue celeste'.[654] It is transient, and like memory exists as a glint amidst grey matter when it appears at 'S' (our point of being) along 'P' (our plane of existence). Like the old woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the subject goes 'on his back face to the sky open again over him' (L: 199). He first sees 'the ruins the sand the endlessness' because, according to

[652] Ibid., p. 165
[653] Ibid.
[654] Beckett also alludes to Vega in *Embers*, discussed in chapter two.

Bergson, on the first rung of the memory cone one sees nothing. Soon, the figure experiences a tangible closeness of 'sheer white' (L: 197). As Bergson states, when unconsciously focusing the lenses of the telescope (or dwelling in the base of the memory cone), singular images come into view. In this moment, a Milky Way (or cloud of indistinction, found in the middle of the cone) condenses into singular stars of recollection at the base. By the twofold movement of rotation (focusing the lens) and contraction (distillation of the image from the ruins), a memory-image is created and is experienced at 'S': the figure's point of existence as we see him in the grey plane of the present. In *Lessness*, this happens when fragments of the past are placed within a maze of randomly ordered coordinates. For the little body to access memories at the base of his memory cone, he must isolate and focus on the blue shards of sky permeating through the ruins.[655] As Bergson claims: 'In our consciousness, states permeate one another, imperceptibly organise themselves into a whole, and bind the past to the present.'[656] Hence, memory exists in the synthesis of past and present: 'Practically, we perceive only the past, the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future.'[657] Like the renovating virtue of Wordsworth's 'spots of time', Beckett's looping 'over backwards' (L: 198) provides an instant of past happiness that keeps his subject holding onto the fringes of existence.[658] The subject's 'blessed days of blue' (L: 199) tint the 'grey air' (L: 197), 'grey sky', 'grey sand', as the past leaves its mark in the present. This infers that time past is a distinguishable 'figment' shored up against the ruins of time present and, through Bergson's memory cone, is redeemable. Whilst the constantly revolving *musique concrète*-like composition of *Lessness* resists perforation, shards of blue light pierce the surface of this palimpsest, allowing the subject to access fond memories and to temporarily alleviate the bleakness of his wasteland.[659] In line with Bergson, *Lessness* sees time not as a reduction of instants or mathematical points, but as something that can be visualised due to its positive reality or spatiality. The text's allusion to memories, or

[655] This action is mirrored by the reader who must disentangle the writing that, as Beckett says 'winds, first in one disorder, then in another', in order to unlock the 'blue celeste of poesy' (L: 199) from Beckett's rigorously formulaic text. Beckett in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 564.
[656] Bergson in Pearson and Mullarkey, *Bergson Key Writings*, p. 7.
[657] Ibid., p. 159. This echoes Augustine's notion of the 'present of past things' mentioned earlier. Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 269.
[658] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, book XI, line 258, p. 213.
[659] Lois Oppenheim reads *Lessness* as a cubist work in which 'a specifically geometric structure and geometric content are fused', as seen in the following excerpt: 'Four square all light sheer white blank planes all gone from mind. Never was but grey air timeless no sound figment the passing light. No sound no stir ash grey sky mirrored earth mirrored sky.' (L: 199) Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, p. 127.

'blessed days of blue' (L: 199), therefore, can alleviate the depravity of the 'scattered ruins' (L: 197) of the present. In this compassionate act Beckett's use of blue can be considered in the same light as Asse's. Both adhere to Bergson's notion that the survival of past images in recollection 'must constantly mingle with our perception of the present, and may even take its place.'[660]

Both Beckett and Asse require their readers/viewers to search for the unsayable something behind the text or canvas. J. E. Dearlove insists that it is the reader's responsibility to 'order Beckett's structures in order to glimpse the ineffable lying beyond art.'[661] Similarly, Michael Bishop describes Asse's discretion and soberness to be 'A jubilation of the inscribed transparency of the ineffableness of the experience of the real'.[662] Indeed, Asse's paintings of self-discovery resist a geometry of closed form; her line breathes its soft vulnerability in 'an aesthetics of unassuming ineffableness.'[663] To pin Bishop's comment onto an example, in *Ouverture de la nuit* (1973) Asse's blue takes on this mysterious atmosphere. Viewed in light of *Lessness*, an horizon of light breaks through the surface of this ominous blue sky like a memory that has worked its way to the surface plane of existence.

[660] Bergson in Pearson and Mullarkey, *Bergson Key Writings*, p. 141.
[661] Dearlove, '"Last Images": Samuel Beckett's Residual Fiction', p. 105.
[662] Bishop in Bishop and Elson, *Contemporary French and Francophone Art 2*, p. 85.
[663] Ibid., p. 79. Jacqueline Lichtenstein has written on the ineffability of colour itself. She states that 'The impotence of words to explain colour and the emotions that it provokes – the commonplace of all discourse on painting – betrays a more fundamental disarray in the face of this visible reality that baffles the usual procedures of language.' Lichtenstein in Batchelor, *Colour: Documents on Contemporary Art*, p. 191. The further complexities inherent in the colour blue seemed to have appealed to Asse and Beckett, who were interested in what can escape the hegemony of language, yet still communicate feeling.

Figure 39. *Ouverture de la nuit*, 1973.

With a pale haze surrounding this white shard of light, Asse gives her viewer the sense that the white light is emerging out of the blue atmosphere like a sun shining out from behind the clouds. The painting does not give the viewer the feeling that the blue surroundings are suppressing this light, but again, like the clouds, it seems as if the blue is about to part in order to let the light shine through. In this sense, the atmosphere of light in this canvas encapsulates the 'blue celeste' in *Lessness*, which offers a moment of escapism in the surfacing of a memory. Through their use of light and colour, both Beckett and Asse create intense depth that is both spatial and temporal. In this painting Michael Bishop claims there is 'simply a slow contemplative evolution of the self's relation to the world whose intrinsic logic is steeped in a "silence".'[664] It is certainly the case that this painting and *Lessness* enable the subject and reader/viewer to catch a glimpse of their past through the light that lurks behind darkness. What is always present in Asse's canvases and Beckett's texts, however, is the binary

[664] Bishop in Bishop and Elson, *Contemporary French and Francophone Art 2*, p. 72.

between these two shades of light and dark. A sinister comment on Worm and his tormentors reminds us of the overhanging sense of darkness throughout Beckett's texts: 'To see him flooded with light, then suddenly plunged back into darkness, must strike them as irresistibly funny' (Unnamable: 355).

Blue enables Beckett to facilitate an engagement between his reader and the sentiments which constitute his text. Whether it is a hand gesture, as in numerous paintings by Caravaggio, Turner's infamous red buoy, Newman's minimalist zips, or Asse's light, these eye-catching sections of the canvas permit the viewer's sensual engagement with, and even embodiment of, the work they are standing in front of. In *Lessness*, Beckett uses blue light as the viewer's point of entry and empathic connection with the narrative's persona. The closing sentence of *Lessness* conveys a sense of possibility and tranquillity that Asse's paintings also evoke in their depiction of the encroachment of light blue into the darker shades: 'Figment dawn dispeller of figments and the other called dusk.' (L: 201) This phrase both offers and retracts a sense of hope for the reader as the murky blues of dawn and dusk provide the possibility of clarity ('dawn dispeller') and the inevitability of obscurity ('dusk'). As Goethe states in his *Theory of Colours*, blue 'brings a principle of darkness with it' because its 'peculiar and almost indescribable effect on the eye' causes a 'contradiction between excitement and repose' which stimulates negation.[665] This binary is echoed by our reading of the text which quickly passes over the figment of light and into the ruins. Thus Beckett reinforces the tension between dawn and dusk, present and past, grey ruins and blue celeste. Whilst he offers a transcendent blue sky, he does not lift the subject out of his grey, purgatorial world. The changelessness of the subject's condition led Linda Ben-Zvi to consider *Lessness* as a 'devastating scullscape' of 'ruin, desolation and stasis'.[666] Whilst Ben-Zvi is right to note the text's deflating tone, as the brighter moments in the text struggle to emerge, Beckett's use of colour also emphasises the persistence of hope expressed in words like 'dream', 'calm', 'imagination', 'love', 'blessed', 'blue', and 'light'. Though these past moments are described as vanquished 'figments' of the past, their brief presence

[665] Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, pp. 210, 311. It is interesting to note that in Beckett's transcriptions from the section outlining Goethe's early artistic resolution in *Dichtung und Warheit* (TCD MS10971/1, 54v-55r), one reads of 'the tendency to turn an image, into a poem', affirming Beckett's interest in using art to stretch language's capabilities. See: Nixon, *German Diaries 1936-1937*, p. 68.
[666] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1986), pp. 119-120.

suggests that a happier existence has not quite 'all gone from mind' (L: 197). As Bergson shows, the past is a living memory, not a forgotten figment. Moreover, the poetic lyricism of these images implies that the 'blue celeste of poetry' (L: 199) survives in Beckett's creative process, despite his belief that 'At the end of [his] work there's nothing but dust […] complete disintegration. No "I", no "have", no "being".'[667]

Company

Ten years after writing *Lessness*, Beckett completed *Company*.[668] In this late work, the importance of memory is more apparent as the memories themselves are closer to home. Scenes from his childhood in Ireland are visualised with particular importance placed on setting and colour. These realistic vignettes operate within a metafictional prism, through which Beckett strove to reach the inner spirit through the natural world. In this process, he equated the internal and external worlds as he believed that 'what are called outside and inside are one and the same.'[669] Whilst Rubin Rabinovitz is correct to argue that there is a steady trajectory towards immobility and stasis and equates this to 'a descent into the inner world', this perspective does not take into account the imagined outer world experienced by Beckett's aged figures.[670] Indeed, it is irrefutable that Beckett's characters suffer a claustrophobic sense of confinement and motionlessness (examples of such existences can be found in the previous two chapters). In *Company*, however, this hapless condition is alleviated by memories of a childhood spent walking in the Irish countryside, such as those expressed as far back as *More Pricks Than Kicks*.[671] This, in turn, instils in Beckett's creative process a newfound willingness to work with words. In *Company*, Beckett even retrieves the sort of sentiment he omitted from his English translation of *Godot* thirty-six years earlier. In *En Attendant Godot*, Gogo and Didi's relief

[667] Beckett in conversation with Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters', p. 3
[668] 'The Voice/Verbatim' (UoR MS2910), written in Paris in January 1977, is considered to be a forerunner to *Company*.
[669] Beckett, 9-10 March 1949, to Georges Duthuit in Van Hulle, *New Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p. 81.
[670] Rabinovitz outlines this movement as follows: 'In Beckett's earlier novels, a descent into the inner world is often marked by a character's diminishing ability to make progress in the outer. Murphy ties himself into a chair; Watt is confined in an asylum; Moran goes from an autocycle to a bicycle; Molloy starts with a bicycle and ends with crutches; Malone is stuck in bed; Mahood lives in a jar. The movement is consistently toward a type of physical immobility that leads to freedom of movement in the inner world.' Rabinovitz, *Innovation in Beckett's Fiction*, p. 159.
[671] Anne Atik recalls that Beckett 'loved his father' and 'told us several times, lingeringly, about the long walks they took together; furze and gorse were often in his vocabulary, indelibly part of his landscape in childhood and in the work.' Atik then remembers how Beckett 'loved to shuffle his feet through [the leaves]; told us each autumn how, as a young boy, would do just that with his father.' Atik, *How it Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp. 33; 88.

at the possibility of their wait ending and immanent return home is expressed in the following excerpt: 'Ce soir on couchera peut-être chez lui, au chaud, au sec, le ventre plein, sur la paille. Ca vaut la pein qu'on attendre. Non?'[672] This dream of comfort and safety finds no place in the 1955 translation, but in line with the original French version of *Godot*, *Company* gives us a glimpse of this comfort, even if it belongs to the protagonist's distant memory. This compassionate artistic sensibility surmounts the cold, mathematical patterning of the earlier works. As Beckett said in an interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède for *Nouvelles Littéraires* on 16 February 1961: 'I am no intellectual. All I am is feeling.'[673] Indeed, *Company* evokes so much pathos in the reader through its encapsulation of distilled emotion that, as Knowlson cautions, as you read late Beckett 'you may find yourself suddenly and unaccountably moved to tears'.[674]

Company is one of Beckett's most endearing texts because, as the title suggests, Beckett 'devis[ed] it all for company.' (Co: 3) Its narrator remembers his childhood in Ireland and consciously draws on 'boyhood memories' to alleviate the pangs of loss.[675] As one of Beckett's most biographical texts, the creative process becomes one of escapism as well as struggle. Calder writes: 'Every artist is tortured by the experience of creating art, but it is also his escape from the outside world, and from worry, pain, and both company and solitude.'[676] To reinforce the importance of togetherness, the words 'company' and 'companionable' occur in the region of about fifty times. Knowlson points to the memory of 'an old man and a boy walking hand in hand across the foothills' as '[o]ne of the most moving images in Beckett's late prose'.[677] In fact, this memory of feeling protected by 'Father's shade to right and a little to the rear' (Co: 14) when walking along Ballyogan Road towards Croker's Acres is one of the most comforting moments in Beckett's entire oeuvre. Robert Cochran also declares that there is 'no work warmer than *Company*'.[678] This text, however, does not solely consist of happy

[672] Beckett, *En Attendant Godot* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1952), p. 30.
[673] Beckett in Graver and Federman, *Beckett: Critical Heritage*, p. 217.
[674] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 671. For Susan Brienza 'words themselves serve as companions.' Susan Brienza, '*Company* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*: Gropings of the Mind' in *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 217-243 (p. 222).
[675] Beckett talking about *All That Fall* in a letter to Aidan Higgins, 6 July 1956, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 428.
[676] Calder, *Philosophy of Beckett*, p. 13.
[677] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 12. A similar image is conveyed in 'The Downs': 'summer days on the downs / hand in hand / one loving / one loved / back at night / the hut' (CP: 207). This poem, possibly written around the time Beckett wrote *Company*, contains a similar nostalgic tone that combines companionship with loss.
[678] Cochran, *Beckett: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. 74.

memories. In a Heideggerian fashion, through his acts of reflection, the narrator transports himself as a 'man of the future into that "in-between" in which he belongs to being and yet, amidst beings, remains a stranger.'[679] Susan Brienza calls it a 'crescendo of despair', and John Pilling states that it 'succeeds in de-familiarising the familiar and making the strange even stranger.'[680] Regardless of their effect, memories constantly surface in this text as timeworn impressions are painted afresh in an old man's mind.

Similar to *IDI*, *Company* begins with the following isolated sentence: 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.' (Co: 3) This voice plays a complex fugue of memory and imagination that are both willed and unwilled. It is not unlike the female Voice in *Ghost Trio* as it 'tells of a past', and plumbs the depths of the old man's mind to reach his deepest memories.[681] These memories, however, are conveyed through gradations of light and colour, rather than excerpts of music. In this way, the old man in *Company* shares similarities with Augustine who, in Book X of his *Confessions* said: 'Even when I am in darkness and in silence I can, if I wish, picture colours in my memory.'[682] Typical of Beckett's earlier work, the old man's memories, like the description of the setting, are not entirely wholesome:

> A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand. You turn right and advance in silence southward along the highway. After some hundred paces you head inland and broach the long steep homeward. You make ground in silence hand in hand through the warm still summer air. It is late afternoon and after some hundred paces the sun appears above the crest of the rise. Looking up at the blue sky and then at your mother's face you break the silence asking if it is not in reality much more distant than it appears. The sky that is. The blue sky. Receiving no answer you mentally reframe your question and some hundred paces later look up at her face again and ask her if it does not appear much less distant than in reality it is. For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten. (Co: 5-6)

[679] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 72. Heidegger then refers to Hölderlin's 'To the Germans' which recalls *Embers* in its tone and imagery: 'Even if your soul soars in longing / beyond its own time, mourning / You linger on the cold shore / Among your own, and know them not.' Ibid.
[680] It has been suggested that the obsessive repetition of 'company' is more indicative of struggle than comfort. See: Brienza, *Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 228; John Pilling in Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 350.
[681] According to Susan Brienza, *Company* has a 'séance-like quality' as the narrator seems to be speaking of memories 'from beyond the grave'. Brienza, *Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 220.
[682] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 215.

This unforgettable retort reminds the reader of when the mother says 'Fuck off' (The End: 81) to the young boy in *The End*.[683] What is noticeably different, however, is that in *The End* the child is asking about the rain, but in *Company* he is amazed by 'The blue sky'. The sky's infiniteness and boy's wonderment is evidenced in Beckett's use of repetition and its presence as a minor sentence. It is as if Beckett himself has been stunned by its promising allure. Thus what *Company* gives and *The End* rejects is a shared, even reciprocated, sense of awe between the child and reader. Throughout his use of blue, Beckett is careful not to idealise its heavenly qualities.[684] Hence, the stern, 'angered' mother is still present in the old man's mind, suggestive of the bittersweet nature of memory. As Augustine explains: 'My memory also contains my feelings […] We might say that the memory is a sort of stomach of the mind, and that joy or sadness are like sweet or bitter food.'[685] To mark the bitter and sweet sides of memory, in *Company* there are two kinds of light. On the one hand there is the 'faintly luminous', grey, 'shadowy light' that exists 'without source' in the narrator's 'little void' (Co: 11). On the other hand, there is the natural light from the sun and moon. Whether an imagined light in darkness or the natural light of the 'Palest blue against the pale sky' (Co: 15), Beckett's protagonist is still soaked in light, and it is this pale blue light of the sky which inspires a sense of hope.[686]

Whilst we learn that the old man's senses are all 'dulled' (Co: 33), the narration of his memories relate his sensory reaction to light, flowers, laughter, footfalls and a held hand. As a result, memories become part of his everyday existence. They are not consciously recalled as they surface involuntarily when he is still, huddled, crawling, alone, and in the dark. This supports Augustine's belief that describing the past is not a recollection of a series of facts, but contains 'words based on our memory-pictures of those facts.'[687] The colour of the old man's 'memory-pictures' is important

[683] The mother's sentiment is encapsulated in 'Casket of Pralienen for a Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin' (1931): 'all's well with the gorgonzola cheese of human kindness' (CP: 237). Moreover, this passage works on two levels: we not only read of an old man's memory, but are also reminded of an earlier text so that memory functions intertextually and contextually.

[684] It is important to note that this is a child's view of colour which, according to Walter Benjamin, 'represents the highest artistic development of the sense of sight; it is sight at its purest, because it is isolated.' Benjamin adds that children 'elevate it to the spiritual level' so that they can 'create the interrelated totality of the world of the imagination.' Benjamin in Batchelor, *Colour: Documents on Contemporary Art*, pp. 63-4. As we see in *Company*, however, this view of colour is mediated through an old man's memory, an element of Neoplatonic aura and holistic purity is therefore lost.

[685] Ibid., p. 220.

[686] This tension between happiness and sorrow is perhaps best depicted in the story of the hedgehog where we are told the man takes pity on a hedgehog 'out in the cold and put in an old hatbox with some worms' (Co: 18), so he puts it in 'a disused hutch' and then prays for the hedgehog, only to neglect it for 'days if not weeks' (Co: 19) to find: 'The mush. The stench.'

[687] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 268.

because when these memories happened 'they left an impression on [his mind], by means of [his] sense-perception.'[688] Beckett's use of colour, specifically blue, belongs to this memory 'impression' that imprints a lasting impression on the minds of his subject and reader. For example, in its association with 'holding your mother's hand' (Co: 5), blue draws upon the nurturing, even spiritual, association with the Virgin Mary, as mentioned by Beckett when talking about Poussin's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*. In this moving scene, blue is also associated with the unforgettable 'cutting retort' (Co: 6) the mother makes, thereby complicating a purely positive interpretation and alluding to the ironic use of blue in Messina's *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*.[689] Thus whilst the blue sky signifies the freedom and innocence of youth, it also marks its swift passing and transformation into a more impatient, dismissive temperament.

Earlier drafts of *Company* in the 'Olympic' notebook (UoR MS1822) suggest that Beckett was keen to stress the comforting effects of memory as he adds the words 'light,' 'comfort,' 'rainbow light,' 'a haven,' and 'blue' to passages six and thirty-nine. In a fascinating page of notes, Beckett categorises the 'scenes from past' within the story in terms of where they happen, who or what it involves, and then carefully specifies the time of day and atmosphere through the light that would be visible:

Scenes from past
5. Cornels court Hill (sun. azure.)
7. Birth. Father. (Evening. New moon.)
8. Ballyogan Rd. (Evening. Add detail.)
11. Elvery's gate. (Noon or afternoon. Add.)
14. Bathing place. (anytime of day. Add.)
22. Mrs Coote. (afternoon. Add.)
25. Ballyogan Rd. (as 8. Same add.)
27. Welsh mountains (sunless cloudless)
31. Hedgehog. (afternoon/evening. add)
38. Last walk. Snow. Pastures. (Lit from below)
39. Summerhouse. Tryst. (rainbow light.)
47. Ashen. (trembling shade)
w. hair - 52. Black thread. (all day to sundown)
55. Shadow of second hand (sunlight rising sun.)
(woes of M2)
57. Strand. Evening. Shadow on strand.

[688] Ibid. In *Company*, the narrator asks: 'What if not sound could set his mind in motion? Sight […] Taste? The taste in his mouth? […] Touch? The thrust of the ground against his bones. […] Smell? His own? […] Some sixth sense?' (Co: 33-4)
[689] It also brings the offering and retraction of the gentle female hands in *Nacht und Träume* to mind.

60. Dark place. No time. Crouched. Sunshine
End of words – fable.

Figure 40. 'Olympic' notebook (UoR MS1822).

From this illuminating section of the notebook, one can see that Beckett's writing process began with an image of the setting which is then coloured in terms of the time of day and the mood this conveys. Any reading of *Company*, therefore, should pay particular attention to the colour Beckett uses for each scene. Beckett's most painterly technique can be seen in point 38. By thinking of the angle at which the light will enter the scene, Beckett is writing exactly as a painter paints. In this 'dark scene' that 'seems lit from below' (Co: 22), Beckett's writing adopts an impressionistic style that brings to mind Camille Pissarro's snowy French landscapes: 'Then the snowlit scene. You lie in the dark with closed eyes and see yourself there as described making ready to strike out and away across the expanse of light.' Here, Beckett's protagonist shares Augustine's ability to picture colours in memory, even when residing in darkness. This shining of light into darkness or the presence of happy memories in a lonely existence, is perhaps Beckett's greatest act of comfort and presents itself numerous times in *Company*. For both Beckett and Augustine, memories are filled with and instigate different sensory reactions. According to John Calder, Beckett says that we can 'build and store within the unconscious a secret garden that can be evoked by an association or an accidental recognition.'[690] Here, Beckett appears to be borrowing a metaphor from Augustine who states:

> I can distinguish the scent of lilies from that of violets, even though there is no scent at all in my nostrils, and simply by using my memory I recognise that I like honey better than wine and smooth things better than rough ones, although at that moment I neither taste nor touch anything.[691]

For both Augustine and Beckett, the senses summon scenes and events from memory's 'vast, immeasurable sanctuary.'[692] James Olney suggests that 'The "dim mind" of *Company* is the twentieth-century version of the Augustinian mind where all takes place, where past, present, and future exist […] held in expectation, then in recitation, finally in memory.'[693] Olney claims that

[690] Calder, *Philosophy of Beckett*, p. 67.
[691] Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 215. In *Proust*, Beckett claims that the 'involuntary memory' is 'stimulated or charmed' by the 'taste' of the lime blossom tea and madeleine biscuit which 'conjures in all the relief and *colour of its essential significance*' (Proust: 21, emphasis mine).
[692] Ibid., p. 216. Bergson also believed that images are perceived when one's 'senses are open to them, unperceived when they are closed.' Bergson in Mullarkey, *New Bergson*, p. 7.
[693] James Olney, 'Memory and the Narrative Imperative: St. Augustine and Samuel Beckett', *New Literary History*, 24.4 (Autumn 1993), 857-880 (p. 861).

Augustine's *Confessions* and *Company* are alike because they are both narratives about the act of remembering and narrating. For Beckett and Augustine, the memory and the self are indistinguishable. As Augustine wrote: 'The power of the memory is great, O Lord. It is awe-inspiring in its profound and incalculable complexity. Yet it is my mind: it is my self.'[694] In line with Augustine's writings, memory in *Company* becomes a mode of confession: an encounter of the self that facilitates the possibility of gaining perspective of one's present situation in relation to one's past experiences. Through this journey towards understanding, the process is pleasurable and painful in equal measure. The text's complexity, or, as Katharine Worth puts it, 'the mental struggles, the anxieties as well as the imagination at work, the ingenuities of the wit' render straightforward happy nostalgia a conflicting and sometimes painful experience.[695] It is worth remembering that Beckett notes that the 'scenes from past' range from 'sunlight' to 'sundown' (UoR MS1822), reminiscent of the dawn and dusk binary mentioned at the end of *Lessness*. Similar to Worth, Kateryna Arthur suggests that the writing 'constructs and simultaneously deconstructs the concept of company' as it develops a reassuring possibility of community, communication and friendship, whilst 'parodying it by presenting it as merely an aspect of narrative, a textual device or a conjuring trick invented by the writer-deviser who is himself "devised".'[696] Arthur supports her analysis by considering *Company*'s lack of closure, smoothness of form and unification of meaning as components of what Deleuze and Guattari labelled a schizophrenic text in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972). This paradoxical experience of memories as at once pleasant and disturbing is evident in Beckett's jarring description of a pastoral scene: 'Next thing you are on your way across the white pasture afrolic with lambs in spring and strewn with red placentae.' (Co: 23) This light, snowy scene is written with a heavy dose of irony and disturbing imagery, expressed by the old-fashioned use of 'afrolic' and

[694] Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 223-4.
[695] Katharine Worth in Cohn, *Beckett Canon*, p. 349.
[696] Kateryna Arthur, 'Texts for *Company*' in Acheson and Arthur, *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, 136-144 (p. 141).

Beckett's description of a field 'strewn' with bloodstained afterbirths.[697] Yet again, colour is used, like music in the teleplays, as a simultaneous offering and retraction of peacefulness.[698]

In contrast to the bloodstained fields, Beckett recycles the image of 'Palest blue against the pale sky' (Co: 15) when he describes the 'sunless cloudless brightness' of the Welsh mountains. As the old man remembers walking until nightfall, he recalls how he yearned for the pale blue light:

> You lie in the dark and are back in that light. Straining out from your nest in the gorse with your eyes across the water till they ache. You close them while you count a hundred. Then open and strain again. Again and again. Till in the end it is there. Palest blue against the pale sky.

The sense of relief and gratification suggest that this light is all the more comforting because of how difficult it is to come by. As he remembers 'Fall[ing] asleep in that sunless cloudless light' (Co: 16) before waking to the 'morning light', the old man of *Company* reminds the reader of the old man's memories in *Molloy* where 'two wayfaring strangers' walk in 'these self-same hills, that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light' (Molloy: 9). Both scenes are connected through the skyline's 'shifts of colour' (Molloy: 10), reaffirming the nostalgic and melancholy qualities symbolised in the colour blue.[699]

Beckett associates blue skies with fond memories again as he sets a sentimental scene between father and son in a 'Cloudless May day.' (Co: 25) Here, we are told how a young boy tried to imitate his beloved father: 'When he chuckled you tried to chuckle too. When his chuckle died yours too'. As in all of Beckett's nostalgic scenes, happiness is short lived. Just as the chuckle dies, the memory disappears and the old man's thoughts return to the present: 'The years have flown and there at the same place as then you sit in the bloom of adulthood bathed in rainbow light gazing before you.' The paradoxical nature of 'bloom of adulthood' and 'rainbow light', at once suggesting childhood and

[697] This image occurs at various stages in Beckett's oeuvre. In 'Walking Out', Beckett describes the grass as 'spangled with scarlet afterbirths' (Walking: 95); in *Watt* 'the poor old lousy old earth' is described as consisting of 'pastures red with uneaten sheep's placentas' (W: 38); and in 'Heard in the Dark I' the 'white pasture' is 'afrolic with lambs in spring and strewn with red placentae' (Heard I: 139).

[698] This back and forth, offering and retraction, evokes the pendulum metaphor, discussed in the previous chapter. In his unfinished early story 'The Tale of the Young Man and the Old Man' (UoR MS5002), translated by John Pilling, Beckett writes of being unbalanced, existing mid-pendulum swing: 'In this whole harmonious world it is not possible or comfortable for me to live, I mean, to get myself into balance [with it].' John Pilling, 'The Uses of Enchantment: Beckett and the Fairy Tale', *SBTA*, 21.1 (2009), 75-85 (p. 83).

[699] To stain this wholesome pastoral setting, Molloy replaces serenity with lurid scenes of slaughter: 'their skulls shattered, their thin legs crumpling, first to their knees, then over on their fleecy sides, under the pole-axe, though that is not the way they slaughter sheep, but with a knife, so that they bleed to death.' (Molloy: 29) This merciless scene is echoed in *Company*, but whereas the red blood in *Molloy* is of death, in the later text, Beckett restores some peace and order as the red placenta suggest birth.

maturity, sunshine and rain, reinforces this flux between past innocence and present reality.[700] Numerous paintings by Geneviève Asse express this central twist of clarity and obscurity, light and dark. With its 'mixture of white, blue and grey, and then at evening all the evening colours' (The End: 93), Asse's *Le Temps* (1964) is a fine example of the glow of rainbow light as her combination of fraught and lucid brushstrokes help convey the sense of conflict between colour and greyness.

Figure 41. *Le Temps*, 1964.

[700] See also the 'haze of many colours' that is associated with looking 'up at the sky, but without focussing it' in *The End* (The End: 93).

At first glance, this painting may seem like a monochrome depiction of the feeling of helplessness or ennui. Upon closer examination, however, this grey painting becomes alive with subtle colour variations and energised brushwork. It seems as though Asse has painted two impressions at the same time as a veiled light of imagination and energy vibrates behind a still expanse of grey. In his use of rainbow, pale blue and white light, that lurk behind the surface of a seemingly solemn text, Beckett creates a similar duplicity.[701] Whilst 'rainbow light' connotes rain and therefore greyness, above all, it symbolises a profusion of colour and a sense of hope emerging from darkness. What these works require is a second glance, or as Asse said to Silvia Baron Supervielle: 'Je voudrais que la spectateur qui s'arrête devant ma peinture la regarde longuement. Je voudrais qu'il y pénètre. [I would like it if the viewer who stops in front of my painting looks slowly. I would like it if they penetrate it.]'[702] This intrinsic juxtaposition that requires the viewer/reader to penetrate the canvas/text also mirrors Beckett's language which, as S. E. Gontarski says, is 'often baroque, inverted, elliptical' and, like Asse's painting, requires the reader to penetrate its elusive surface.[703] Beckett's comment in 'Peintres de l'empêchement' speaks directly to Asse's concern: 'Le frisson primaire de la peinture en prenant conscience de ses limites porte vers les confins de ces limites, le secondaire dans le sens de la profondeur, vers la chose que cache la chose. [As painting becomes more conscious of its limitations, it explores the outer confines of those limitations and then turns towards the thing hidden beneath the thing.]' (Dis: 135).

Beckett's use of light even provides his text with a synaesthetic agency: 'By the voice a faint light is shed. Dark lightens while it sounds. Deepens when it ebbs. Lightens with flow back to faint full. Is whole again when it ceases.' (Co: 11) For a man lying on his back, alone in silence ('Sole sound in the silence your footfalls'), this personified 'shadowy light' offers 'company in the dark!'

[701] This ambiguity is also evident in *Happy Days* where the text refers to Winnie floating up 'into the blue' (HD: 152), if she were not fixed in the earth. In his correspondence with Alan Schneider, Beckett describes a 'Hot blue sky (if blue can be hot which I doubt) and yellow-brown scorched earth.' Beckett in Harmon ed., *No Author Better Served*, p. 94. To convey this 'hot blue sky', Jocelyn Herbert used a yellow-orange sky which subsumed Winnie, who, lodged in a brownish mound, wore a mustard coloured dress. This echoes the fiery, glowing sky that surrounds Christ as he is being resurrected in numerous Renaissance paintings, again demonstrating Beckett's (and his collaborators') tendency to look to artistic forms as a primary mode of expression and allegory.
[702] Geneviève Asse, 'Le temps arrêté' in Superville and Leymarie, *Asse: Peintures et Dessins*, p. 16.
[703] S. E. Gontarski in Acheson and Arthur, *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p. 195.

(Co: 8). At the end of the text, this company is created through telling stories about the act of telling stories, making *Company* itself about the act of narration:

> Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.
> Alone (Co: 42)

In this passage, imagination and reality become indistinguishable through the layered self-conscious narration that exposes Beckett's own need to go on 'fabling' to stave off feelings of being utterly 'Alone'.[704] In comparison to the radio plays and the earlier short prose, *Company* comes even closer to finishing its story. As Beckett's 'words are coming to an end' there are no more memories to stave off the old man's painful misery and loneliness. By the end of the text, the old man's repetition of memories which, like the 'low sun' (Co: 39), 'shine on you through the eastern window', are replaced by 'the dark' and 'silence' (Co: 42). The sentiment that lingers, therefore, is that of the unresolved tension between the comfort and pain of memories. As the narrator states:

> Better hope deferred than none. Up to a point. Till the heart starts to sicken. Company too up to a point. Better a sick heart than none. Till it starts to break. So speaking of himself he concludes for the time being, For the time being leave it at that. (Co: 16)

Conclusion: 'Perhaps it's compassion. [*Pause.*] A kind of great compassion.' (Endgame: 129)

This chapter has shown that in his creative process Beckett moved away from his view of light as 'pitiless' and shining with 'intolerable brightness' as it emerges from knowledge and suffering (Proust: 70). In his later works, instead of light being complicit in human suffering, it becomes an enabling force. In Beckett's connection of light with a quietist aesthetic, he also departs from his synonymy of brightness and unhappiness. The warm glow of light in Beckett's late texts becomes a life force that restores his protagonists and his own narration with the ability to see and, therefore, to go on. It is a cruel twist of fate that an author whose aesthetic was so image based underwent eye

[704] Yet again we are reminded of Molloy who states: 'What I need now is stories, it took me a long time to know that, and I'm not sure of it […] In a moment I shall talk about the cows, about the sky, if I can.' (Molloy: 13)

surgery for cataracts during the timespan this chapter covers. However, perhaps both his yearning to see when his eyesight was at its worst and his successful operation which greatly improved his long-sightedness, could be related to the occurrence of cloudless blue skies in his writings from 1970 onwards. As early as August of 1936, in his 'Clare Street' notebook (UoR MS5003), Beckett wrote:

> Hope is the cataract of the spirit that cannot be pierced until it is ripe for decay. Not every cataract ripens: many a human being spends his whole life enveloped in the mist of hope. And even if the cataract can be pierced for a moment it almost always re-forms immediately; and thus it is with hope.[705]

Like Beckett's metaphor for artistic creation as a vulture feasting on carrion until 'not another crumb' (ISIS: 78) is left at the end of *Ill Seen Ill Said,* this image of hope as 'the cataract of the spirit' is a damning image of perseverance through failure, determination through uncertainty.

The sense of hope amid suffering, evident in Beckett's creative process is echoed in a passage written by Walter Savage Landor that Beckett once spontaneously recited with Anne Atik on a cold evening in 1975:

> I strove with none, for none was worth my strife:
> Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art:
> I warm'd both hands before the fire of life;
> It sinks; and I am ready to depart.[706]

Landor wrote this on his 74th birthday, after Dickens and Browning had left his celebrations. Of course, Beckett's texts are never so contentedly 'ready to depart', but the sense of simultaneously dying and being reinvigorated by the light and heat of the fire is evident in his late prose as flickers of hope struggle to rise out of the dark coals of the subject's refuge.[707]

Despite the diminution of brightness from the 'Piercing pale blue' (IDI: 184) of *IDI* to the 'pale blue' (L: 197) of *Lessness,* and the 'One pinhole' (WH: 103) of light in *Worstward Ho,* this dimming light is not as disheartening as it first appears. Whilst the setting undeniably gets darker, we are spared from utter darkness for there is always light to counterbalance the prevailing gloom. Nathan Scott acknowledges this inextinguishable light and explains that in Beckett's work, 'Man in

[705] Translation of Beckett's German as given in Tonning, *Beckett's Abstract Drama*, p. 185.
[706] Atik, *How it Was,* p. 94.
[707] As it turned out, Landor was not so 'ready to depart' himself as he lived on for another fifteen years. Accordingly, Krapp's final words hint at a sense of going on: 'Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back.' (Krapp: 223)

fact *is* possibility: the human condition and man's future is always open.'[708] Scott adds that no man is an island because to be human is 'to be a part of an infinitely intricate web of social relations with one's fellows.'[709] In the later prose, Beckett's language of endlessness is not, contrary to Brian Finney's opinion, devoid of colour, sound, emotion, and meaning itself.[710] This reduction of colour in Beckett's increasingly deracinated landscapes reinforces its presence through its sense of lack and increasing rarity. As Enoch Brater observes:

> Place a palette of greys next to any item of another colour, as Beckett does – a few leaves, a blood-stained handkerchief, a carrot, a mouth, a banana – and its weary hues come alive with an unsuspected dynamism, a "less" that has quickly turned into a bit more.[711]

This (typically of Beckett) negative way of depicting imagination and hopefulness is repeatedly employed in his use of blue. Lois Oppenheim makes a similar point when she explains that even in the absence of colour, as in Beckett's blueless skies, greenless grass, and colourless flowers, the 'darkness is made visible'.[712] Beckett's careful insertion of the colour blue allows him to form unique instances of negative optimism in his text. These moments, like the colour itself, cautiously edge away from despair and towards hope, whilst containing strands of both.

Like the narrator of 'The Calmative', the reader can also (metaphorically speaking) see 'a mass of bright flowers' as they 'fade in an exquisite cascade of paling colours' ('The Calmative': 76). At once 'bright' and 'paling', Beckett's presentation of colour mirrors his refusal to side with either side of the familiar absolutisms of light/dark, hope/despair, success/failure. In the instances where blue light brightens the grey ruins of the text, this colour brings with it its own ambiguity. The pinholes of light and celestial figments of blue in Beckett's texts are, due to their transience and contrast with the subject's monochrome surroundings, not only examples of his painterly technique, but are also evidence of his negative optimism: 'I call that the dark, perhaps it's azure' (Unnamable:

[708] Scott, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 126.
[709] Ibid.
[710] See: Brian Finney, '*Assumption* to *Lessness*: Beckett's shorter fiction' in Worth, *Beckett the Shape Changer*, 61-85 (p. 80). Affirmation of man's humanity can be found in the later works and, like the sense of an ending in these texts, it is ever present. Beckett's endless fiction shows us, as Wolfgang Iser observes, that 'we are alive because we cannot settle anything final, and this absence of finality is what drives us continually to go on being alive.' Wolfgang Iser, 'When is the end not the end? The Idea of Fiction in Beckett' in Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 257-273 (pp. 268-9).
[711] Brater, *10 Ways of Thinking about Beckett*, p. 45
[712] Oppenheim, *Painted Word*, pp. 42-43.

407).[713] Like Asse's paintings, blue facilitates a point of entry for the reader/viewer and offers – however reluctantly – the possibility of feeling. As Hamm says after speaking of a 'kind of great compassion', quoted in the subheading to this section: 'Oh you won't find it easy, you won't find it easy' (Endgame: 129).

[713] As Beckett's later short prose hover between dawn and dusk, Asse's paintings also hover 'between night and day', as Charles Juliet has said. Juliet in Bishop and Elson, *Contemporary French and Francophone Art 2*, p. 77. In Asse's *Ligne blanche intérieure* (1971), blue is imbibed with this eternal, serene mysteriousness as it marks the pigments of dawn and dusk with a faint vertical line that separates a lighter and deeper blue.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to show how Beckett's use of different genres as well as his keen interest in the visual arts and music has enabled him to 'fail better' (WH: 81) with language. In the first chapter, *Watt* demonstrates how Beckett's use of Abstract art allowed him to avoid reductive pigeon-holing 'for the satisfaction of analogymongerers' (Dis: 19) and suggests that for art to have impact it must work on the viewer's senses as something immediate and pre-cognitive. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of *lived perspective* and Heidegger's comments on the un-readiness of Watt's language to hand illustrate that Watt's engagement with Erskine's painting is non-verbal and sensory. When Watt attempts to intellectualise his physical experience (Watt cries) in front of the painting, Beckett shows us that art, when inserted into a language system, forms a layer of unintelligibility, becoming indecipherable. As he hints at in his critical essays, for Beckett, good art poses a series of unanswerable questions, it does not provide absolutisms. This core of ambiguity – like the unattainable blank centre of Erskine's painting or the inaccessible centre of *Quad* – finds its way into Beckett's language experiments. One of these experiments came in the form of his use of radio, which allowed Beckett to remove the narrative voice so that music could 'speak' and become a character. As chapter two demonstrated, through reference to Beckett's deliberately fragmentary and inconclusive Moandology, music's presence serves to question (not underpin) traditional methods of storytelling. In *Embers*, the Music Master scene shows that in its endeavour to reach the condition of music, language opens a void of ineffability. Beckett's collaboration with Feldman and Mihalovici allowed us to see Beckett's process as one indebted to musical influences and whose themes were concerned with the extent to which words and/or music can comfort or console the listener. *Words and Music* demonstrates that despite concentrated efforts, art will remain an unsatisfactory companion because of the immateriality of the note and the word. *Cascando* goes even further as it connects the inability to finish a story with the impossibility of reaching a final point in the creative process. The disparities between music and language in all three radio plays emphasise Beckett's inability to make these two aesthetic worlds cohere to form an holistic *Gestamkunstwerk* (something

Beckett did not believe in, as discussed in the introduction), thereby exposing a very real sense of fragmentation and discord. With music as a character in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, Beckett could, however, dramatize the act of listening by mirroring our position as listener in order to comment on the very idea of listening to radio. This medium-conscious aspect continued to shape Beckett's work on stage, film, and television. As the third chapter demonstrated, Beckett's creative process involves a deep consideration of how the aural and visual inform each other's communicative outcome. It referred to Deleuze's comments on *language III* to highlight how the visual ambiguity of these chambers is a reflection of the musical indeterminacy of Beckett's carefully phrased reworkings on Beethoven and Schubert's pieces. In *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*, the visual and aural not only destabilise the authority and undermine the reliability of language, but also enhance the sense of ambiguity inherent in expression. Both the radio and television plays highlight how Beckett's compositional style blurs the implicit dialogic aspect of communication in order to write with 'the effects of colours and sonorities that rise up above words.'[714] Lastly, the final chapter suggested that Beckett's repeated use of the colour blue in a selection of his short prose can be traced as far back as the early 1930s and then resurged when he became acquainted with Geneviève Asse whose painterly aesthetic may have influenced Beckett's approach to writing. Whereas the blue eyes of *IDI* and 'Ping' extenuate the tension between the promise of freedom and the sense of confinement of the figures (and perhaps the writing process itself), the blue skies of *Lessness* and *Company* are closely linked to Bergson and Augustine's writings on the subconscious act and emergent shape of memory where a brighter past competes with a gloomier present. As the analysis of *Company* showed, Beckett's authorial process becomes strikingly visual, even painterly, suggesting that his interest in and connections with the art world were having a significant influence on the way he constructed his texts. Beckett's notebook for *Ghost Trio*, where he calculates the timing and placement of Beethoven's *Geistertrio*, demonstrates a similar structural assimilation of music into his works.

[714] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, preface.

Through its identification of the changes in Beckett's process, his specific use of art, music, and mode of expression (reflected in the intermediality of his work), Beckett's self-conscious acknowledgement of the creative process has emerged as a recurring theme. Whilst this constant appears in different guises and situations, it continually surfaces from the underbelly of Beckett's aesthetic. The analysis of specific instances where Beckett used art and/or music, and the frequent cross-references between early and late work, highlights the difficulties of identifying a stable trend in his self-reflexive process. That said, in comparison to early works like *Dream* and *MPTK*, the visual arts and music seem to become more intimately interwoven into Beckett's writing, rather than alluded to on the surface of the text. Beckett moves away from exemplifying his erudition and learning towards assimilating the substratum from great artists like Rembrandt and Beethoven. By subtracting the datum and becoming 'a colourist, a musician', Beckett attempts to convey an experience.[715] In the recurrence of aporia-like apertures throughout his work – the inaccessible centre of Erskine's painting, the ineffable 'eff' of music, Dreamer's intangible dream, and the enclosures of *IDI* and 'Ping' – Beckett's work is suffused with uninhabitable spaces that render completion and comprehension out of reach. As a result, the experience of Beckett's figures in their confined enclosures is one of unending repetition where, despite inexhaustive efforts, the articulation of their experience remains ineffable. My argument that Beckett's use of music and art extenuate the tension inherent in the struggle to express will, I hope, influence subsequent engagements with Beckett and the arts so that music and painting are not seen as able to achieve what language cannot, but as components of Beckett's temporal and spatial zones of impenetrability.

Whilst this thesis has argued that Beckett's use of the visual arts and music arose out of his disenchantment with language, it does not suggest that this led to Beckett's utter disregard of words. Through its identification of Beckett's rhythmical and painterly language, it highlights how his experimentation led to the expansion, rather than exclusion, of literature into new disciplines. Beckett's continuous reinvention of his creative process resulted in an expression of his conflicted

[715] Ibid.

belief that 'every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness' and fondness for language: 'I love the word, words have been my only loves, not many' (From an Abandoned Work: 162).[716] Whether this statement is read ironically or not, words continue to appear as either the scaffolding or content of his works. In his final poem 'What is the word?' (1989), Beckett returns once again to his initial quest for the right word, all the while creating a poem that comes close to sound art due to its use of silence and repetition. Finally, it is through words, their pictorial, melodic, fragmented and abstract qualities, that Beckett opens out the ambiguity of expression to convey 'rags of life in the light' (HII: 15). In this sense, Beckett's creative process is a series of aesthetic failures that draw on different forms of representation and use various media to drive the sense of tension experienced by the reader. Hence, it is when Beckett's creative process is at its most visual and musical that we can say his 'language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused' (Dis: 171-2).

[716] Beckett in Gruen, *Vogue*, p. 210.

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JEK C/5/25: *CD entitled 'The blue celeste of poesy'*, radio feature on Beckett and painting by Bernd Kempker and James Knowlson, broadcast 29 May 2001

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MS1822: 'Olympic' notebook, containing *Company = Compagnie: May 77 – August 97*
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MS2928: 'Fragments Prose Debut 68', Green 'Oxford' notebook containing notes on 'Film-video cassette project' on pages 25-28

MS3000: 'Whoroscope' notebook
MS5002: The 'College' exercise book, inscribed 'Samuel Beckett, 48 Paulton's Square, London S.W.3.', containing German vocabulary
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JEK A/2/205 and JEK A/6/3/41: *Joan Mitchell*
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