Samuel Beckett's Radio Plays:

Soundings in Theory and Aesthetic Practice

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Lancaster University

October 2013

DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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24 October 2013

ACKKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Samuel Beckett's exploration of the art of radio in his six radio plays from 1957 onwards, from a range of aesthetic approaches and literary-theoretical viewpoints. In doing so, I aim to foreground the literary merits of the radio drama and of Beckett's distinctive aesthetic use of radio – an aspect of his work which is still relatively neglected. At the same time I move beyond internal literary study of these works to situate both them and the medium of radio itself in their wider cultural and historical contexts, particularly the Second World War.

Chapter One evokes three local contexts for the study of Beckett's radio plays: the development of radio drama at the BBC prior to 1957, early European avant-garde radio theories, particularly those of Futurism and Surrealism, and Beckett's own early fiction, which is preoccupied with themes of voice, silence and listening which radio explores further. Chapter Two examines psychoanalytic theories of trauma, and trauma studies in the humanities more generally, for what they can reveal to us about both the literary form and psychic content of the radio plays. The particular traumas mapped out in these texts are then related to that general matrix of trauma for Beckett, the Second World War. Chapter Three draws on the work of Michel Foucault, whose concepts of discipline, confinement and panopticon are applied to *Rough for Radio II*.

Chapter Four studies local instances of both silence and music in the radio drama, but also examines the way in which these two Beckettian motifs become a general programme towards minimalism that explains the overall trajectory of the six radio plays. Chapter Five seeks a way beyond the debate about whether Beckett is a modernist or postmodernist by exploring the concept of "late modernism" in relation to his radio drama.

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NOTE ON REFERENCING

This thesis follows MLA style throughout, as laid out in Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed. (New York: MLA, 2003).

INTRODUCTION

Switching On

One of the most resonant moments in all of Beckett's drama occurs in the conversation between He and She in *Rough for Radio I*. This fragment tells the story of a woman, She, who visits the male protagonist, He, and listens to Voice and Music, which are controlled by two knobs. Switching Voice and Music on and off in this way surely implies turning a radio on and off and tuning in to a programme being broadcast.

> SHE. And—[*Faint stress*]—*you* like that?
>
> HE. It is a need.
>
> SHE. A need? *That* a need?
>
> HE. It has become a need.[1]

That darkly enigmatic final sentence reverberates well beyond this dramatic fragment itself. To whom has radio—listening to it, switching it on and off—become a need? To He himself, certainly; but also, one might speculate—since this piece was written in French in 1961—to European culture more generally (at least before the full cultural impact of television), and certainly for Samuel Beckett himself in his short and intense phase of writing for radio in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A need may be energising, as it clearly was for Beckett in his brief period of radio creativity, but the term may also imply elements of compulsion, addiction and dependency. In *Rough for Radio I* He listens to Voice and Music while locked in his own enclosed melancholic mental world, similar to Voice and Music in their "confinements."[2] The wider cultural "need"

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[1] *Rough for Radio I* in Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (hereafter *CDW*) (London: Faber, 1986) 269.

[2] Beckett, *CDW* 271.

that radio engenders may also be ambivalent, in one direction leading positively to an expansion of quality culture through such organisations as the BBC or the *Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française* (ORTF), but in the other, more depressingly, to an exploitative realm of commercial broadcasting and advertising.

In order to make sense of Samuel Beckett's six radio plays, of the overall aesthetic project that they collectively constitute, I must take my cue from He in *Rough for Radio I* or from Opener who opens and closes Voice and Music in *Cascando*, because here I too "open" my thesis and "switch on" the acoustic perception demanded of any full engagement with radio, in the hope of analysing the conceptual "need" or needs articulated in and across these plays.[3]

This thesis adopts various theoretical and aesthetic approaches to the thematic issues of sonority involved in Beckett's radio plays. Although his work has been much studied, the radio drama remains relatively underexplored. I seek to remedy its merely peripheral role by foregrounding the relation between the radio plays as texts and the medium of radio itself, and also by opening up discussion from a range of theoretical frameworks and aesthetic practices around the issues of voice, sound and silence (or near-silence). Contrary to existing studies of Beckett's radio drama that tend to treat textual analysis, the medium of radio and the actual productions of the works as separate matters, or to argue in terms of disembodied voices by overlooking the materialised sound elements issuing from the radio, my thesis investigates these aural features of Beckett's radio texts and their productions, and of the medium itself, in order to explore their bearing upon such issues as Surrealism, Futurism, trauma theory, panopticism, and minimalism. The overarching questions that I ask of both Beckett's radio plays and the medium itself are how they articulate the unconscious, cope with

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[3] For an excellent account of the imaginative meanings of switching on and off in Beckett, see Steven Connor, "I Switch Off: Beckett and the Ordeals of Radio," *Broadcasting Modernism*, ed. Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewty (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2009) 274-93.

trauma, aspire to the condition of music, and ultimately consolidate a compelling

practice of what I shall term "late modernism." This thesis combines a spectrum of

theory, aesthetic debates, and psychoanalytic and sociological constructions of trauma

and panopticism; the medium of radio will be explored as a unique forum to stage the

sound experiments through which Beckett's plays reach for new horizons. These

heterogeneous theoretical approaches aim at foregrounding the literary merits of

Beckett's radio drama, which has become a less esteemed genre in his oeuvre, partly

because radio is now a less culturally privileged medium than the stage and a less

popular one than television.

      The disembodied voice is a central theme in Beckett studies, and its sonority, I

intend to argue, can only be properly justified and fully realised in the radio drama, as

opposed to in his fiction or stage plays. The focus on disembodied voices and on

sound, silence or near-silence—Beckett's obsessions throughout his oeuvre—is

intensified and materialised through the medium of radio. This study seeks to explore

the connection between disembodied voice, sound and silence on the one hand, and

the medium of radio itself on the other, in order to argue that radio drama can better

accommodate Beckett's aesthetics and also (as compared to stage drama or fiction)

that it centrally reveals the logic of his oeuvre.

1.   Literature Survey of Criticism of Beckett's Radio Plays

      Among the massive critical discourse on Beckett's literary career, work on his

radio drama is relatively underdeveloped. Only a modest number of Beckett scholars

offer critical analyses of selected radio plays, and even fewer devote their research

entirely to them. The study of these plays, unlike Beckett's work for other media, must

always foreground the performance of the aural and the role of radio technology in the production. These are some of the core issues that I will address in Chapters One and Four from a variety of theoretical frameworks. Here I intend to examine some of the central scholarly and critical contributions on Beckett's work for radio.

Clas Zilliacus's book *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett For and In Radio and Television* (1976) contains the earliest and fullest analyses of four (out of a total of six) of the radio plays written between 1956 and 1961 (it also includes archival study of manuscripts and unpublished sources). Zilliacus also offers a historical overview of BBC radio drama on the Third Programme as the context that prompted the start of Beckett's own radio career. With striking originality, he analyses the various aims and functions of silence and pauses in these plays, exploring three different modes of suspension used in Beckett's textual instructions: "pause," "long pause" and "silence." He argues that of all the radio plays the elusive *Cascando* best consolidates his analysis of Beckett's dramatic pauses as a radio feature. For, unlike the other plays (*All That Fall*, *Embers* and *Words and Music*), *Cascando* "leaves little margin for psychological interpretation," and its aesthetic intent is deeply enigmatic.[4] Although Zilliacus points out that both silences and pauses exist in the radio texts, and his intention to study both is suggested in the title of his chapter on this topic, I will suggest below that he may have confused pause with silence. In fact, he admits that he has "used the terms pause and silence without defining them relative to each other."[5] This failure explains why his attention is very largely focused on pauses, with only occasional mentions of silence, as with his

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[4] Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett For and In Radio and Television*, 51.2 (Å bo: Å bo Akademi, 1976) 162, 167.

[5] Zilliacus 162.

striking calculation of "140 pauses and 33 silences" in *All That Fall*.[6] For my part, I

aim to inquire into Beckett's aesthetics of silence in Chapter Four by concentrating on

its functionality and purposes after firmly distinguishing between pause and silence.

Unfortunately, Zilliacus excludes *Rough for Radio I* and *Rough for Radio II* from his

book, and he mentions the historical and cultural backgrounds to both Beckett's radio

writing and the medium of radio itself without adequately delving into these complex

issues, whereas I shall range in this thesis across the entire corpus of the six plays for

radio, and will also investigate some relevant aspects of their wider historical and

cultural contexts in Chapter Two.

Three decades after the publication of Zilliacus's work, Kevin Branigan's

monograph *Radio Beckett: Musicality in the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett* (2008)

emerged as the second full-length publication on these plays; it is based on a more

up-to-date debate about music and silence, and has proven helpful to my discussion in

Chapter Four. On the one hand, Branigan argues that silence is "the desired endpoint"

in these works, so as to dampen down disparate voices and sounds in the

disintegration of language. He regards the second play *Embers* as the key work

because it is here, he claims, that "a more Beckettian musicality begins to take shape

in which emphasis is placed upon dying or rarefied sounds" – a rarefication which can

extend all the way to silence.[7] On the other hand, he also suggests that "all sounds

and all silences . . . can be heard as music," and this is where, dramatically speaking,

the end of silence gives way to the beginning of music.[8] In his evocation of certain

kinds of collaborative ethnic music (Arabic singing, Indian and Indonesian gamelan

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[6] Zilliacus 165.

[7] Kevin Branigan, *Radio Beckett: Musicality in the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008) 81, 246.

[8] Branigan 68.

music) as a context for this reading of the radio drama, Branigan repeatedly insists—surprisingly enough, given a certain conventional wisdom about Beckett's nihilism—on the "optimism" offered in the radio plays: "The musicality of these plays provides grounds for optimism that communication may take place outside the realm of language," and he gives a particularly positive account of the ending of *Words and Music* in this respect.[9] One refreshing aspect of Branigan's book is his insistence that the devoted fidelity that BBC producers like Donald McWhinnie and Martin Esslin gave to Beckett's dramatic intentions betrayed what Branigan sees as the open-ended collaborativity that is built into the structure of such plays as *Cascando* and *Words and Music*, where a creative role for the musical composer is explicitly given in the text. Contrary to Branigan's emphasis on the optimistic strategy whereby Beckett utilises music for intuitive purposes, I propose that the latter's intent to approximate expression to the condition of music pitches his aesthetics towards minimalism (a term I explore further in Chapter Four). Although Branigan's book offers many fine insights, this long-winded and ill-disciplined volume can, at times, be infuriating. Moreover, in making the case for his use of "ethnic models of composition" as a relevant context, Branigan argues that this will allow "the listener or reader to gain insights which enhance and potentially bypass theory-based or literary interpretations of these works."[10] I, however, will make use of a series of theoretical concepts and frameworks—Futurist and Surrealist radio aesthetics, trauma theory, the work of Michel Foucault, minimalism and late modernism—in order to develop my own readings of Beckett's sequence of radio texts, and I shall offer a focus on the medium of radio itself that is underplayed in Branigan's book.

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[9] Branigan 131.

[10] Branigan 37.

My study of Beckett's works for radio requires concentration on actual broadcasts, and I am convinced that the investigation of radio techniques in production will reveal the underlying aesthetics of the radio drama. Donald McWhinnie, who produced Beckett's first radio play *All That Fall* for the BBC in 1957, has explored radio art as a means to probe the aesthetic intentions behind Beckett's work for the medium in his book *The Art of Radio* (1959). McWhinnie insists that radio practitioners should discover the distinctive particularities of the medium, instead of borrowing artistic techniques from other, more traditional genres. His account of producing *All That Fall* uniquely explores the acoustics of sound and voice in that text. His perceptive analysis of the unrealistic overtones of Maddy Rooney's speech, and of the rhythm of her footsteps or of the animal sounds as musical expression, will be further developed in my formulation of Beckettian music in Chapter Four.

As head of BBC radio drama between 1963 and 1977, Martin Esslin was also actively involved in Beckett's radio work, and he has consistently offered insightful critical commentaries on it. His interest in Beckett is notably revealed in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), where he regards absurdism in drama as a mode initiated by *Waiting for Godot* in 1953. However, his interest in the radio drama appears to better effect in his later book *Mediations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett, and the Media* (1980). Here, Esslin gives a historical summary of the production of the six radio plays and acknowledges that the first of them, *All That Fall* (on which he greatly supplements McWhinnie's account), "led directly to the establishment of the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop," thus contributing to "one of the most important technical advances in the art of radio" in Britain.[11] His insight into the radiogenic quality of the

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[11] Marin Esslin, *Mediations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett and the Media* (hereafter *Mediations*) (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980) 129.

medium underscores why these dramatic texts can only be done full justice on the radio. More importantly, Esslin offers an intriguing reading of the last four radio plays in an article entitled "Beckett's *Rough for Radio*," in which he argues:

> The four radio pieces revolving around voices and sounds are . . . among Beckett's most personal and revealing works. Here he deals with his own experience of the creative process both as a quest for fulfilment and release and as a form of compulsion and slavery.[12]

Fulfilment and compulsion simultaneously: this is exactly the ambivalence I was focusing on in my analysis of "It has become a need" from *Rough for Radio I*. Esslin's emphasis on Beckett's compulsive distress may partly derive from his own European background as a Hungarian-born Jew who fled the Nazis in 1938 (his original name was Julius Pereszlényi, *Pereszlényi Gyula Márton* in Hungarian). Since my second chapter deals mainly with trauma in relation to World War Two, Esslin's account of the radio plays is a useful reference point. I shall also develop his suggestion that these plays are self-reflexive meditations on Beckett's own creative process in my late modernist interpretation of them in Chapter Five.

I will also make reference in this thesis to the subsequent productions by Everett C. Frost. He directed five of these plays in "The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays" between 1986 and 1989 – only five because both the original BBC productions between 1957 and 1976 and Frost's productions exclude *Rough for Radio I*.[13] These contrasting sets of productions, with their different technical solutions to acoustic problems, will illuminate Beckett's artistic intentions because both of them involved

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[12] Martin Esslin, "Beckett's *Rough for Radio*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 6.1 (1977): 103.

[13] In the original BBC radio productions, McWhinnie produced *All That Fall* (1957), *Embers* (1959) and *Cascando* (1964), whereas Esslin produced and directed *Rough for Radio II* (1976). *Words and Music* was produced by Michael Bakewell in 1962.

repeated personal consultations with him. Moreover, Frost has offered many

perceptive critical analyses of the radio drama based on his experience of their

production. His focus on sounds and music in his detailed account of these

productions is demonstrated in such articles as "Why Sound Art Works and the

German Hörspiel" (1987), "Fundamental Sounds: Recording Samuel Beckett's Radio

Plays" (1991), "The Note Man on the Word Man: Mortan Feldman on Composing the

Music for Samuel Beckett's *Words and Music*" (1998) and "Mediatating On: Beckett,

Embers, and Radio Theory" (1999). Voice in Beckett's radio drama is understood by

Frost as an acoustic rather than a semantic element – hence his reference to German

Hörspiel and *Neues Hörspiel*, since the *Hörspiel* "does not narrate or dramatize a

series of events but passes through actions rendered by sound, text, and music in an

emotionally compelling way."[14] He argues that listeners can experience acoustic

impact without dividing their attention to focus on plot or narration, since the practice

of divorcing voice from linguistic meaning is connected to Beckett's general probing

of language. Frost's argument thus underpins my study of radiophonic sound in

Chapter One, and my subsequent linkage of its non-referential nature to the expression

of music in Chapter Four.

  Although there are overlapping emphases among these and other scholars and

critics, the exploration of Beckett's radio aesthetics is far from complete. I shall

invoke here a comment by Esslin to stress the conjoined neglect and significance of

the radio drama:

> Samuel Beckett's work for broadcasting is a highly significant part of his
>
> *oeuvre* and far less fully discussed in the mounting literature on Beckett

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[14] Everett C. Frost, "Why Sound Art Works and the German Hörspiel," *The Drama Review* 31.4 (1987): 118.

than his other output, far less readily available, also, in performance, which alone can bring out its full flavor. But beyond that, Beckett's experience with broadcasting, and above all radio, has played a significant and little-known part in his development as an artist.[15]

This neglect remains the case even today. Though compact disc technology has remedied the problem of availability, the connections between the actual medium of radio and Beckett's radio drama, and the issue of the overall artistic trajectory of his radio plays, have not yet received satisfactory treatment. Both of these are challenges I attempt to take up in this thesis. There have been illuminating individual articles and chapters on these plays since the foundational work of McWhinnie, Esslin, Frost, Zilliacus and Branigan; and I shall make reference to such analyses (by critics including Steven Connor, Marjorie Perloff, Mary Bryden, Katharine Worth, Elissa S. Guralnick and Nicholas Zubrugg) at appropriate local points in the chapters which follow.

I shall make use of a series of theoretical frameworks (radio theory, psychoanalysis, trauma studies and panopticism) and aesthetic concepts (Futurism, Surrealism, minimalism and the musical) to develop my own interrogation of Beckett's radio plays and the medium of radio. Each chapter of this thesis explores this body of work from diverse thematic and theoretical viewpoints without neglecting formal and aesthetic issues, and I have tried to suggest linkages across the chapters where appropriate. I will draw from my specific findings in each chapter to explore Beckett's general aesthetic intentions and to discover the aural distinctiveness of his radio drama. My use of divergent disciplines and theoretical frameworks constitutes, I

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[15] Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett and the Art of Radio," *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Gontarski, rev. ed. (London: Anthem, 2012) 273.

believe, a relatively novel approach to Beckett's radio drama (as we saw above,
Branigan explicitly ruled it out). Furthermore, the analysis of the specificities of radio
itself will contribute to a re-interpretation of Beckett's radio plays and give them the
aesthetic prominence and theoretical weight they eminently deserve, but have not yet
fully received. The aim of my thesis is to suggest that it is in Beckett's six radio plays
that he best consolidates his literary aesthetics of disembodied voice, sound and
silence in actual acoustic effects.

I wish to clarify here some further issues in relation to the focus of my study.
First, the broadcasting of Beckett's work has by no means been restricted to his radio
plays (his fiction, *Waiting for Godot*, *First Love* and his poems were all broadcast on
radio between 1957 and 1973); my study, however, is focused on the plays written
explicitly for radio, due to their exploration of the specificity of the medium. Second,
although the radio plays are the central texts here, I will include discussions of
Beckett's other literary work and critical prose as relevant sources to focus issues that
arise in the chapters. In the third section of Chapter One, for example, I will discuss
the central issues of sound, voice and silence in Beckett's pre-radio fiction, including
Murphy (1938), the Trilogy (1947-50, first written in French) and *Watt* (1953), as one
of the most significant anticipatory contexts for the radio drama. Indeed, the Trilogy is
such a key work in Beckett's art of the aural as well as for his general aesthetic and
thematic concerns that I will make repeated reference to it in this thesis. In Chapter
Three I shall include the theatre play *What Where* (1983) in my examination of the
issues of docility and confinement in *Rough for Radio II*, due to these works' shared
exploration of overt and systematic coercion. However, this juxtaposition of genres
will illuminate, rather than distract attention from, the central radio issues I intend to
analyse. I should note, finally, that in the case of the radio plays first written in

French—*Rough for Radio I*, *Rough for Radio II* and *Cascando*—I shall be reliant on Beckett's own translations of them into English here, and that I have taken *Rough for Radio I* to be a freestanding work in its own right rather than just the first draft for *Cascando* that Beckett himself took it to be (hence my decision to open this thesis with a scene from it).

2. Towards an Overview of Beckett's Oeuvre: The Modernism and Postmodernism Debate

As the overall frame of my thesis, I will also offer a macroscopic analysis of Beckett's work here. Scholars and critics must always at some point stand back from local analysis and seek to determine Beckett's position in wider literary movements, and this concern has taken and still takes the form of an on-going debate between advocates of modernism and postmodernism. Not only is there a "categorical rift," to borrow H. Porter Abbott's term, in specifying Beckett as either a modernist or a postmodernist, but he has also been dubbed as the last modernist or the first postmodernist, as an absurdist or an existentialist, as a nihilist or a pessimist; the list of labels seems potentially endless.[16] Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince therefore neatly sum up the challenge of any global characterisation of his literary work in the following observation: "Beckett has indeed served as both paradigmatic modernist and paradigmatic postmodernist for critics of differing views too numerous to enumerate."[17] Since both modernism and postmodernism are elusive and contested

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[16] H. Porter Abbott, "Beckett and Postmodernism," *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca [NY]: Cornell UP, 1996) 23.

[17] Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince, introduction, *Samuel Beckett*, eds. Birkett and Ince (London: Longman, 2000) 23.

terms, they can never be taken for granted as if they had some unitary, consensual meaning. We will always need to establish exactly what any particular critic means by his or her use of these literary-periodising terms in a specific discursive context. I will approach these debates by focusing on a selection of critical propositions, including some of the means scholars have employed to bridge or evade the modernist/postmodernist duality in the assessment of Beckett; given the constraints of space here, this will have to be a drastically selective treatment indeed. Certainly, no single definition of Beckett's style will be sufficient, especially when the heated debate between the two dominants of modernism and postmodernism remains unresolved, and the various schisms that branch out from both camps to formulate an uncomfortable if suggestive middle ground are not to be ignored either. Therefore, I will explore three separate strands of debate: Beckett as modernist, Beckett as postmodernist, and Beckett as a complex transitional figure. In Chapter Five I intend to add one further, and in my view crucial, term to the mix: Beckett as late modernist.

As a representative instance of the first position, we may take Martin Jay's forthright statement in his book on Theodor Adorno that Beckett is "the most uncompromisingly modernist writer of the postwar era," a view which Adorno himself certainly shared, as we can see from his intention to dedicate his magnum opus *Aesthetic Theory* to Beckett.[18] H. Porter Abbott suggests that Beckett's work reflects "the concept of an avant-garde: exceptional fidelity to the spirit of opposition," and this intransigent spirit is, in his view, the very impulse of modernism because "modernist art carries the spirit of opposition everywhere into the form as well as the content of art."[19] Irving Howe calls Beckett the "Last Modernist" because he is "A

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[18] Martin Jay, *Adorno* (London: Fontana, 1984) 17.

[19] Abbott 26.

lonely gifted survivor" who "remains to remind us of the glories modernism once brought."[20] Howe highlights Beckett's efforts to preserve Cartesian dualism and stresses his resistance to the stable categorization afforded by the dualistic aesthetic concepts of nihilism or optimism (a reading which certainly problematizes Kevin Branigan's too-easy affirmation of the optimism of the radio plays). In a lecture given in Oxford in February 1987, Hugh Kenner opened with the striking claim that "the Last Modernist is well in Paris where he lives under the name of Beckett."[21] Kenner's modernist viewpoint highlights the role of the machine and technology in Beckett's work, and argues that the Cartesian mind-body split is overcome in a union of man and machine that he terms the "Cartesian Centaur."[22] On this showing, the term modernism as attached to Beckett's work invokes the coexistence of opposites and the possibility of their eventual synthesis.

What I have offered here is a very brief overview of interpretations of Beckett's work in relation to various models of modernism. These discussions often also situate his work in a wider modernist culture. The philosophical grounds of his work are often seen as being akin to those of Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka or Martin Heidegger – all thinkers and writers who have been viewed as constituting the modernist tradition. Alan Wilde sees Beckett as focussed "primarily on continuing to work out the lessons of modernism" by juxtaposing dualistic form with paradoxical effect: "the modernists perceive, equivocally, A *and* not A – a configuration that paralyzes consciousness while ranging its perceptions of

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[20] Irving Howe, *The Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt, 1970) 33.

[21] Hugh Kenner, "Modernism and What Happened to It," *Essays in Criticism* 37 (1987): 97.

[22] See Hugh Kenner, "The Cartesian Centaur," *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs [NJ]: Prentice Hall, 1965) 52-61.

fragmentation into ordered and suspended symmetries of antithesis."[23] However, Andrew Kennedy has stressed Beckett's extraordinary economy of words and the "lessening" trajectory of his oeuvre, as well as the fact that his later works are often considered repetitions of previous ones; this mode of repetition-with-variation can be associated with poststructuralist writing.[24] For H. Porter Abbott, "the anxiety of modernism closely matches the poststructuralist absorption with the problematic relations of repetition and difference."[25] However, this is an unusual view because poststructuralism is more often associated with postmodernism, often as the theory of the latter's practice; so it is to the construal of Beckett as postmodernist that I turn now.

Critics who advocate a postmodernist framework commonly highlight the role in Beckett's literature of non-identical repetition and plurality as deconstructive modes. David Lodge suggests that "the general idea of the world resisting the compulsive attempts of the human consciousness to interpret it, of the human predicament being in some sense 'absurd,' does underlie a good deal of postmodernist writing."[26] He considers Beckett to be "the first important postmodernist writer" and terms the Trilogy "Postmodern Fiction."[27] Lodge argues that *The Unnamable* cancels itself out

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[23] Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Iconic Imagination* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1981) 12; Alan Wilde, "Modern/Modernist," *Contemporary Literature* 20.3 (1979): 370.

[24] Andrew Kennedy, "Beckett and the Modern/Postmodern Debate," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujoutd'hui* 6 (1997): 262.

[25] Abbott 28.

[26] David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1977) 225-26.

[27] Lodge 221.

when "each clause negates the preceding one."[28] Such self-erasure is discernible, for

example, in the second part of *Molloy*, where Moran opens with the sentences "It is

midnight. The rain is beating on the windows."[29] However, when he repeats them

again at the end of the novel, "It was not midnight. It was not raining," the text cancels

out his earlier statement.[30] Self-cancelling is seen to be in the service of repetition,

and critics often relate such non-identical repetition to Jacques Derrida's notion of

différance and view it as a postmodernist trait.

Lodge also points out that another important aspect of postmodern fiction is

exhaustibility. He observes that "Beckett's characters seek desperately to impose a

purely mathematical order upon experience in the absence of any metaphysical

order."[31] This is a postmodernist reaction against modernism's lingering—if also very

problematic—belief in an Absolute of some kind. A similar argument can be found in

Mária Minich Brewer's study of "postmodern narrative" in Beckett: "Narrativity, in

Beckett, is that which undermines the metaphysical oppositions of being and

non-being, presence and absence."[32] Postmodernists thus seek alternative modes of

narration to accommodate diverse pluralism, rather than remaining locked in the

system of binary opposition. Lodge urges that "Postmodernism cannot rely on the

historical memory of modernist and antimodernist writing for its background, because

it is essentially a rule-breaking kind of art" (although I would want to maintain that

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[28] Lodge 229.

[29] Samuel Beckett, *Samuel Beckett*, 4 vols., Grove Centenary ed. (New York: Grove, 2006) 2: 87.

[30] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2:170.

[31] Lodge 230-31.

[32] Mária Minich Brewer, "Samuel Beckett: Postmodern Narrative and the Nuclear Telos," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 15.1-2 (1986-87): 164.

modernism was itself a decidedly rule-breaking mode too).[33] Brewer suggests that

Beckett "seeks to articulate the notion of the postmodern as a narrative function"

when language is shattered and words turn to ashes.[34]

As a poststructuralist, Jacques Derrida considers Beckett "an author to whom I

feel very close or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; but also too close" –

to the point indeed that "I had always read him and understood him too well."[35] The

recent consensus among established Beckett critics such as Richard Begam, Steven

Connor, Leslie Hill and Thomas Trezise, to name only a few, is indeed that Beckett

belongs to the ethos of poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Steven Connor's postmodernist view is based on his observation that while

James Joyce employs maximum literary allusions in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan Wake*,

Beckett demonstrates "defeats, retreats and dwindlings" in *Worstward Ho* and

elsewhere, staging postmodern "declines."[36] Stressing Beckett's fascination with the

aesthetics of failure, or the "art of retraction," Connor argues that Beckett reacts

against omnipotent Joycean modernism and that his work is "countermanded by the

drive to resumption, repetition, and reproduction" to the point where it "disappears

into itself, endlessly recycling characters, ideas, and word-fragments."[37] I will offer

an alternative account of the Joyce-Beckett relationship, at least as it modifies itself in

the radio plays, in Chapter Five. According to Connor, then, Beckett's work offers

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[33] Lodge 245.

[34] Brewer 156.

[35] Jacques Derrida, "The Strange Institution Called Literature," *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992) 60-61. See also Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007) 2.

[36] Steven Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 70.

[37] Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature" 71.

involuted repetitions in reductive texts that are in the service of postmodernist repetition, and this trajectory of lessening is associated with the project of minimalism:

> Beckett's "minimalism," his systematic noncompliance with the labour of accumulation and display of largesse, and his embrace of the art of impotence set a considerable precedent for artists of every known denomination looking for ways of letting things be, or taught to see the excitement of such an enterprise.[38]

Richard Begam shares Connor's view and considers Beckett's Trilogy to be postmodern. However, his argument, which invokes the philosophical reaction against modernity based on a post-Nietzschean and post-Heideggerian Beckett, reveals a divergent theoretical approach.[39] If Marcel Proust and James Joyce are definitively modernist writers, Begam suggests that Beckett "himself is struggling to become a 'postmodern' writer."[40] He both reads "Beckett through the discourse of poststructuralism" and investigates "the discourse of poststructuralism through Beckett."[41] Begam argues in terms of Derridean *différance* because, in his view, "Derrida himself has persistently connected *différance* to a figure associated with Samuel Beckett, a figure called 'the unnamable.'"[42] I must agree with H. Porter Abbott's view that "the postmodernist categorizers have steadily gained the higher ground" based on the popularity of poststructuralist readings of Beckett's work –

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[38] Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature" 70.

[39] Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996).

[40] Begam 37-38.

[41] Begam 3.

[42] Begam 6.

which is not, however, to say that they are right, and I will investigate these arguments further in Chapter Five.[43]

However, these two opposing trends of modernist and postmodernist Beckett are not always so clear-cut. For example, Abbott maintains that "The deconstructive Beckett is a modernist Beckett" because "deconstructive art not only grew out of, but sustained, salient elements of a modernist frame of mind."[44] There is thus, on this reading, a complex continuity between these two opposing but inseparable frameworks. In a similar vein, John Fletcher offers an intriguingly hybrid formulation in his statement that "Beckett stands dominant today as one of modernism's great survivors, *postmodernly modern* to the last" (my emphasis).[45] Invoking Beckett's mastery of technology, even Hugh Kenner, that spirited advocate of modernism, expresses Beckett's intermediate position as "a bridge to the so-called Post Modern," because for Kenner the celebration of technology fails to sustain itself in high modernism.[46] These critics underscore the continuation of modernist features in the postmodern era, and it is then claimed that Beckett's work adheres to or at least illuminates both styles. This is perhaps why Jonathan Kalb abandons the term "postmodern" and formulates the art of "lessness" based on a return to avant-garde Duchamp-style aesthetics. Some critics also prefer to describe Beckett's late style as "minimalism," as in Enoch Brater's excellent study *Beyond Minimalism* (1987), which I will be making use of in Chapter Four.[47] Finally, Elizabeth Klaver has emphasised

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[43] Abbott 24.

[44] Abbott 25.

[45] John Fletcher, "Modernism and Samuel Beckett," *Facets of European Modernism*, ed. Janet Garton (Norwich: U of East Anglia, 1985) 216.

[46] Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 15.

[47] Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); Enoch Brater, *Beyond*

the difficulty of situating Beckett either as a modernist or a postmodernist based on the Trilogy and suggests instead that he is both. She points out that Beckett "makes it virtually impossible to identify in his work a radical, chronological rupture between modernism and postmodernism."[48]

I have, then, provided a selective literary review of major critics around the issues of modernism and postmodernism. These critical viewpoints offer a representative panorama of the divergent debates that demonstrates the intractable difficulty of positioning Beckett. Moreover, the trends that I have summarised—modernism, postmodernism or some transitional hybrid position—are mostly based on textual studies. The issue of the different modes of technological mediation of Beckett's art (stage, radio, film or television) must also be taken into account here. I shall return to this modernism/postmodernism debate in my last chapter after a detailed analysis of the radio plays from a variety of theoretical frameworks, and shall there suggest that the concept of late modernism may be the crucial theoretical and periodising breakthrough that we need, at least in relation to such plays as *All That Fall* and *Embers*.

Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater (NY: Oxford UP, 1987).

[48] Elizabeth Klaver, "Entering Beckett's Postmodern Space," *Beckett On and On*, eds. Lois Oppenheim and Marius Buning (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1996) 112.

CHAPTER ONE

Contexts for Beckett's Radio Drama

I intend in this chapter to explore three of the contexts in which we can situate Beckett's radio drama. Firstly, because it was the BBC that encouraged him to write for radio in the first place, and because the company remained extremely supportive of his efforts throughout his subsequent radio career, I will explore pre-Beckett BBC radio drama to give a sense of the field in which his own works—written from 1956 and broadcast from 1957—intervene. This will involve detailed attention to plays by Richard Hughes, Louis MacNeice, Tyrone Guthrie and Dylan Thomas in an analysis of their specific features as radio drama, and I shall also discuss the technological advances in BBC radio drama broadcasting which were motivated by Beckett's first radio production. Secondly, because the young Samuel Beckett immerses himself so thoroughly in European avant-garde culture, particularly in his French and German trips in the 1920s and 1930s, I want to investigate the European context for his radio experimentalism by conducting a brief survey of early attempts to formulate radio theory by the 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes. Finally, I will address Beckett's own pre-radio fiction which also provides an important context for his radio experiments of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Many critics have pointed out that there are unusual continuities of thematic concern—around such issues as voices, darkness, hearing, near-silence and silence—between pre-radio Beckett and the radio works themselves. So much is this the case that we might argue that it is almost the inherent logic of Beckett's own writing career, rather than an invitation from the BBC, that propels him into the radio adventure that begins with *All That Fall*. I will argue that his pre-radio fiction foregrounds unusual acts of listening or hearing, which can only be theorised in

fiction but are actually delivered in the radio drama, as in Wayne Booth's old distinction in the novel between "telling" and "showing."[49] The fiction, therefore, constitutes a kind of training for the radio work that follows.

1.   Pre-Beckett Radio Plays and Technology

As a unique genre that focuses solely on sound without the distraction of vision, radio drama has been given various nicknames by its practitioners and technicians. Donald McWhinnie, for example, terms radio drama "Sound Broadcasting" or "Sound Radio," stressing that the stage is created in our minds, not before our eyes.[50] The Irish playwright Louis MacNeice uses the nickname "stream radio," because he suggests that our aural-centred engagement is an equivalent of the internal voicing of the stream of consciousness.[51] British writer Richard Hughes dubs his plays for radio "Listening-Plays," and the English theatrical director Tyrone Guthrie calls his radio work "microphone plays," stressing the technology involved.[52] These playwrights, together with Dylan Thomas, are some of the most important early figures of British radio drama and provide a helpful context for my study of the radio features of darkness and interior monologue in Beckett's own BBC work.

Richard Hughes's *Danger*, which is generally held to be the first radio play and which was broadcast on January 15, 1924, stresses the issue of invisibility. The

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[49] Wayne C. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1983) 3.

[50] Donald McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio* (London: Faber, 1959) 12.

[51] Louis MacNeice, *Selected Plays of Louis MacNeice*, eds. Alan Heuser and Peter McDonald (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 3.

[52] Richard Hughes, *Plays* (1924; London: Chatto and Windus, 1966) 171; Tyrone Guthrie, Squirrel's Cage *and Two Other Microphone Plays* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1931).

play tells the story of a group of English visitors caught in darkness when trapped during their visit to a coal-mine in Wales. "*Lights out*" is announced at the start of the play and suggests the exposure to complete darkness for the characters in the coal-mine; it also gestures towards the symbolic nature of listening to a radio play.[53] Rosemary Horstmann points out that Hughes places "his characters in the same position as his audience" because "listeners can identify with the small group caught in the nightmare of a pit accident, underground in the dark."[54] The listeners, who cannot actually see the play, are thus themselves given a parallel experience of the absence of visibility that is endured underground by the miners and protagonists in the play. Mary repeatedly underscores the "frightfully dark" experience of the coal-mine and stresses that "utter blackness" is "like being blind."[55] Lack of visibility is both the condition of actual darkness for the characters and metaphorically points to the way listeners engage with radio; this is what prompts BBC radio technician Robert McLeish to call radio "a blind medium."[56]

Some playwrights even include a blind character in their plays (such as Blind Peter in Louis MacNeice's *The Dark Tower*, Captain Cat in *Under Milk Wood* or Dan Rooney in *All That Fall*) so as to foreground this radiogenic absence of the visual. Daniel Jones's preface to *Under Milk Wood* suggests that the role of the blind figure is "a natural bridge between eye and ear for the radio listener," since "the audience

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[53] Hughes 175.

[54] Rosemary Horstmann, *Writing for Radio* (London: A and C Black, 1988) 25.

[55] Hughes 176.

[56] Robert McLeish, *Radio Production: A Manual for Broadcasters*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Elsevier-Focus, 1999) 1.

cannot see" either.[57] Thus in Beckett's first radio play we rely entirely on the description of the protagonist Maddy Rooney to find out what goes on. Though listeners cannot see the radio play, this obviously should not be mistaken for the condition of actually being blind. McWhinnie observes that blind people are exposed to unorganised noises and other kinds of aural complexity, and that their experience is radically different from listening to an organised radio programme where sounds and voices are manipulated into a structured broadcast.   Given the role of blind characters that MacNeice, Thomas and Beckett all foreground, we might readily agree with the protagonist in *The Unnamable* that "the blind hear better."[58] "The loss of my sight was a great fillip," announces Dan Rooney in *All That Fall*, and this is true for the radio listener too.[59]

Darkness is also a significant feature in Louis MacNeice's radio play *The Dark Tower* (1946) – a parable with a journey motif. Instead of exploiting physical lack of visibility, darkness here has more metaphorical implications, suggesting ignorance of or disbelief in the myth of the tower: the protagonist Roland questions its authenticity and doubts the existence of the mythical dragon. Furthermore, the use of darkness as a symbol here invokes a conventionally poetic context; for *The Dark Tower* is inspired by Robert Browning's nightmare-poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855), a fact which speaks of MacNeice's career as poet before his involvement with radio. He retains poetic meters, blended with choral performance, in another of his radio plays *Christopher Columbus* (1942). MacNeice's style for radio drama is borrowed from poetry and thus fails to do justice to both forms, falling awkwardly

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[57] Daniel Jones, preface, *Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices*, by Dylan Thomas (London: Everyman's Lib., 1976) viii; Horstmann 25.

[58] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 366.

[59] Beckett, *CDW* 192.

between the two stools as it were. Consequently, his radio work hardly develops

genuine distinctiveness. This, as we shall see, is in sharp contrast to Beckett's pursuit

of a specifically radiogenic aesthetics in his BBC plays. MacNeice's radio drama is

constantly linked to the experience of World War Two, by which *The Dark Tower* is

inspired, and I shall suggest in Chapter Two that that vast historical trauma also

formatively shapes Beckett's radio drama. Moreover, MacNeice's play is full of

shifting scenes and ghostly voices that come to Roland either when he is alone or in

the form of a dream; the latter mode already suggests the rich aesthetic potential of

performing the unconscious on radio, a topic I will explore further in section two of

this chapter.

Beckett argued in a letter to Barney Rosset that "*All That Fall* is a specifically

radio play" and that it "depends on the whole thing's *coming out of the dark.*"[60] Has

he intentionally plunged listeners in the same condition as blind Dan Rooney in the

play, or does he have other purposes? We can invoke the three different zones of light,

half light and dark described in the novel *Murphy*, and suggest that the medium of

radio and the aesthetics of listening in Beckett's radio drama take place in the dark

zone as evoked by this novel, which is "nothing but forms becoming and crumbling

into the fragments of a new becoming . . . nothing but commotion and the pure forms

of commotion," where we are "more and more and more in the dark, in the

will-lessness, a mote in its absolute freedom."[61] This Beckettian dark zone is thus

analogous to our engagement with radio plays when imagination runs free. It is a

radicalisation of the physical darkness of Hughes's coal-mine, or of the blindness of

represented characters such as Captain Cat or Dan Rooney himself.

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[60] Qtd. in Zilliacus 3. Samuel Beckett's letter to Barney Rosset, his publisher (Grove Press), 27 August 1957.

[61] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 70.

Darkness is such a potent motif for radio drama because it links to internal reflexivity, potently triggering memory. The plays of Tyrone Guthrie are early examples of how radio convincingly delivers internal thoughts and provokes memory. Guthrie joined the BBC in 1924 and his "microphone plays," including *Squirrel's Cage* (1929), *Matrimonial News* (1930), and his best-known work *The Flowers are not for You to Pick* (1930, hereafter *The Flowers*), constitute his "experiments in 'canned' drama."[62] *The Flowers* is set in Ireland and tells the story of Edward who is drowning and whose memories return forcefully as he does so: "before his eyes float pictures . . . voices sound in his ears . . . voices . . . voices . . . his past life."[63] These mental pictures deal mostly with his unpleasant memories of giving up the flowers he picked, of the toy he rightfully exchanged with a boy, of the position of clergyman to which he aspired, and most painfully of all for him, of his love for Vanessa. The sea not only connects each episode of the protagonist's memories, but also has symbolic bearings upon Edward's past experience. The sea in this play carries a heavy emotional freight, since "scenes rise out of and sink into a rhythmic sound of splashing, moving seas" to suggest not only "the waters in which Edward is engulfed, but the beating of a heart, the tumult of fear, the immutable laws and irresistible strength of Nature compared with our puny and inconstant selves."[64] This is no longer just the sound of the waves in its own right, but rather a complex set of emotions mixed with the actual surroundings as suggested in the final drowning sequence. This, as we shall see, anticipates Beckett's own treatment of the sea in *Embers*, because its sound also mirrors Henry's turbulent emotions and is audible exclusively to him and

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[62] Guthrie 7.

[63] Guthrie 141.

[64] Guthrie 140.

the listeners. In *Embers*, too, the sea relates both literally and metaphorically to the character's mental distress and memories, though, unlike Guthrie, Beckett did not offer a production note to clarify its meaning in the text. If blindness is one of the metaphorical staples of radio drama, then the sea, as both reality and sound effect, is clearly another. Henry's father in *Embers*, the "old man, blind and foolish" who himself has been drowned, brings these two powerful fields of imagery together; and I shall have a good deal more to say about him in later chapters.[65]

Dylan Thomas also uses internalised voice as a means of articulating the subconscious in dreams in arguably the most famous of all radio plays: *Under Milk Wood* (1954). Densely populated as its subtitle "a play for voices" suggests, the play invites listeners into villagers' dreams and thoughts, dead or asleep, in Llareggub in Wales (*bugger all* spelt backwards). Martin Esslin suggests that the internal polyphonies are linked to what Thomas "hears in his mind when he thinks back on the little place where he spent his youth."[66] In the play's small Welsh village by the sea (that inevitable radio symbol again), voices emanate from neighbouring households, ghosts and dreamers exchange conversations, questions are asked and answered regardless of geographical boundaries and actual existence. Such effects are analogous to the way that radio transmits across geographical borders and suggest that radio potentially transgresses mentalities and geographies.

As with Louis MacNeice's poetic background, Thomas's radio script also has strongly marked literary features, as one would expect from a poet of Thomas's standing, with its emphasis on rhythm, alliteration or sentence patterning. Nonetheless, in the spirit of Beckett's *The Unnamable* in which "all is a question of voices,"

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[65] Beckett, *CDW* 253.

[66] Esslin, *Mediations* 178.

Thomas's play is a powerful performance for voices that exploits some of the specifically radiogenic features of the medium.[67] Earlier proposed titles for *Under Milk Wood* were *The Town Was Mad* or *The Village of the Mad*, and mental instability is implied in its vocal performance. MacNeice's comments that radio drama "appeals to the emotions rather than to the reason," are thereby carried one stage further.[68] If staging emotion is relatively free from sense-making on the radio, then aberrant vocal performances can reflect characters' minds more deeply than realistic presentation, and this is perhaps why both Thomas and Beckett find radio a stimulating medium. We are, therefore, not required to make sense of Maddy's screaming or of her dramatic train of thoughts in *All That Fall*, or of Henry's manipulation of unusual sounds in *Embers*. Such unsettling moments hardly have rational explanations or parallel visual presentations because they only reflect the interior state of the protagonists' minds. Similarly, the indeterminable situation of Fox in *Rough for Radio II* or of the protagonist He in *Rough for Radio I* (not to mention the still more obscure plays *Words and Music* or *Cascando*) intensifies the physical ambivalences of setting.

Radio can advantageously integrate inner thoughts with external voices. Stream of consciousness can be heard on the radio alongside dialogue or actual speech, and Beckett's radio work does not contain any textual instructions to segregate thought from speech. Such simultaneity erases the distinction of internal voice and external sound from the performance. The erasure of these opposing realms features prominently in *All That Fall*: we hear Maddy speaking to other characters in a real dialogue and, at the same time, her unspoken thoughts are also heard by us. Her mental formulations thus have an actual acoustic presence, confirming Flloyd

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[67] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 339.

[68] MacNeice 385.

Kennedy's suggestion that "Voice, in the act of speaking, gives body to thought."[69]
The lack of any visual dimension in radio performance allows the dialogues between
characters to bear equal weight with Maddy's internal monologues and her own
perception of ambient sounds. Internal and external voices, in other words, stand on
equal footing on radio.

Radio is an ideal medium for such ambiguous plays, and one reason for this is
its ability to stage emotions in many modes and manners. Stage performance is prone
to reduce emotional complexity when confined by the necessities of realistic
presentation. But physical reality does not interfere with a purely acoustic
performance that allows the presence of both internal and external voices. Robert
McLeish observes that "the sights and sounds of radio are created within us," and the
textual images subjectively form on stages in our minds based on what we hear.[70]
From a conventional stage-oriented viewpoint, such inner/outer ambiguity is flawed
because it fails to "present a consistent reality," but when radio is involved this
so-called flaw becomes a "major strength."[71] Radio is the ideal medium to turn such
ambiguity to its advantage, and Beckett's BBC drama exploits this fact emphatically,
as we shall see.

For experimental playwrights such as Beckett, radio was an exciting medium.
McWhinnie states in *Ariel* that "Beckett may have had no technical expertise, but he

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[69] Flloyd Kennedy, "The Challenge of Theorizing the Voice in Performance," *Modern Drama* 52.4
(2009): 410.

[70] McLeish 3.

[71] Frances Gray, "The Nature of Radio Drama," *Radio Drama*, ed. Peter Lewis (London: Longman,
1981) 56.

did have . . . an imaginative awareness of sounds and silence."[72] James Knowlson

also reminds us that: "The BBC invitation prompted Beckett to think for the first time

about the technique required for a medium in which sound and silence are its sole

components."[73] Tyrone Guthrie privileges radio in contrast to film or stage drama

because "the impression they [the audience] receive, though limited [to hearing], is

highly concentrated in quality."[74] The human voice is only one of the acoustic tools

the radio dramatist has at his or her disposal. Other available elements include sounds

and music, which naturally have varying significances in different plays. In Guthrie's

instructions for *Squirrel's Cage* he demands "one stroke of a bell, then the scream of a

siren, suggesting a rush through time and space."[75] Sounds here suggest the passage

of time, and this kind of effect is repeated in Beckett's *Embers*, where Henry and Ada

discuss how to train horses' hooves to mark time. As I have already noted, Guthrie's

The Flowers has "a rhythmic sound of splashing, moving seas" at the end of each

scene.[76] This enacts Edward's physical engulfment as well as reflecting his inner

turmoil; however, the sea sound is only used to connect different scenes or conclude

the play. In contrast, Beckett makes the sound of the sea audible throughout *Embers*,

and Henry constantly draws our attention to its disturbing impact on him.

For Louis MacNeice, sound effects and music do no more than support the

verbal performance. For him, the use of music is "to establish an emotional

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[72] Qtd. in Louis Niebur, *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop*, Oxford Music/Media Ser. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) 20. Quoted originally from: Donald McWhinnie, "Writing for Radio (I)," *Ariel* 2 (1957): 7.

[73] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 428.

[74] Guthrie 8.

[75] Guthrie 14.

[76] Guthrie 140.

atmosphere or to register a change of mood more vividly, and more quickly, than words alone," and the use of music either "by itself, before, between or after the spoken passages" can enhance verbal expression or form "an atmospheric background to speech."[77] Music is marginal and subordinate: "the music must not attempt to usurp the primary role and turn the whole thing into a concert."[78] To Martin Esslin, music "can punctuate climaxes, suggest moments when the action takes wing into dream or reminiscence, and provide a psychological counterpoint to the text."[79] Music features in the interludes in Guthrie's *Squirrel's Cage*, whereas in *Matrimonial News* it has the same effect as singing in *Christopher Columbus*. The music or songs in these radio plays are peripherally inserted as background or to connect scenes. For Beckett in his radio drama, music and singing have a purpose in their own right that cannot simply be reduced to background, and they take on shifting values across his plays. More importantly, Beckett eventually even gives a role for music as a character in its own right – music interrogates, opposes, or acts as the counterpart of Words in *Words and Music* or Voice in *Cascando*. Music, we might say, achieves its autonomy in Beckett's radio drama – a topic I shall examine more fully in Chapter Four.

I have suggested that Beckett's strikingly novel treatments of darkness and internal voices are his landmark radio achievements. Although we cannot know if, or how much, Beckett absorbed a knowledge of technique from his predecessors' radio drama, we can certainly acknowledge his new departures in radio art and agree that his work has illuminated what those precursors merely gestured towards. However, the discussion of aesthetic features on radio necessarily also involves the development

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[77] MacNeice 401.

[78] MacNeice 402.

[79] Esslin, *Mediations* 183.

of radio technology, which makes possible the presentation of acoustic elements
according to the artistic effects required. I will therefore examine how Beckett's
productions contributed to the overall technological development of radio drama.

Acoustic effects in radio plays are necessarily subject to the limits of
contemporary technology. Radio productions often posed severe technical challenges
for broadcasting such as, according to John Drakakis, "holding large casts in one
studio for broadcasting" or "controlling sound effects."[80] Guthrie clarifies that his
microphone plays were not "performed, as a rule, in one 'Studio,' but in several."[81]
Squirrel's Cage, for example, "uses four [studios] – one for the actors, one for the
chorus, one for the 'noises,' and one for the orchestra" – a cumbersome arrangement.
The production also relied on a "Mixing-panel," as Guthrie calls it, to control the
volume of recorded music, sounds and voices, and to manipulate them (by fading in or
out, for example) during the play. The use of the panel contrasts the realistic scenes
with the psychological tension of the interludes: the former "should be played
intimately," but the interludes "are to be bold and reverberating, each one working up
to a thunderous climax."[82]

The "dramatic control panel" resolved many technical obstacles when
introduced to BBC Radio Drama in 1928. Sounds, voices, and music could then be
pre-recorded and stylised – curtailed, duplicated, amplified, turned up or down, and so
on. Different levels of volume can then suggest physical distancing: the sound of
Christy's cart grows louder as it approaches Maddy in *All That Fall* and the sea

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[80] John Drakakis, introduction, *British Radio Drama*, ed. Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981) 5.

[81] Guthrie 11.

[82] Guthrie 14.

becomes louder as Henry approaches it in *Embers*. [83] Volume thus translates

geographical space on the radio. Although the panel was available to assist with sound

effects, the rural sounds used for the BBC production of *All That Fall* in 1957 were

not recorded animal sounds from the control panel, but human imitations. The

unprecedented sound effects of "[s]heep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together," as

in Beckett's stage direction, was beyond what the panel could deliver at that time.[84]

As Assistant Head of the radio drama department, McWhinnie objected to the use of

real animal sounds, because "the actual sound of a cow mooing, a cock crowing, a

sheep bleating, a dog barking, are complex structures, varying in duration and melodic

shape; to put these four sounds in succession would be to create a whole which is only

too obviously composed of disparate elements."[85] Moreover, Esslin

comments—surely correctly—that "Recordings of actual animal sounds could never

have been blended into the stylized convention of the play."[86] The unconventional

soundscapes of *All That Fall* clearly posed an extreme challenge to the technology of

the time. McWhinnie explained to Beckett:

> I am sorry to disturb you about the animals. Of course we have realistic
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> recordings, but the difficulty is that it is almost impossible to obtain the
>
> right sort of timing and balance with realistic effects. By using good
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> mimics I think we can get real style and shape into the thing. The other
>
> factor is that existing recordings are very familiar to our listeners and I do
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> feel that without being extreme we need, in this particular case, to get

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[83] Beckett, *CDW* 172, 259.
[84] Beckett, *CDW* 172.

[85] McWhinnie 133.

[86] Esslin, *Mediations* 130.

away from standard realism.[87]

Beckett was displeased with the human imitation of animal sounds and expressed his reservation about it in a letter to McWhinnie: "Things I liked particularly: the double walk sound in the second half, Dan's YES and their wild laugh (marvellous). . . . I didn't think the animals were right."[88] Although the human imitation of animals disappoints the playwright, the use of recorded sounds would hardly satisfy the script, and this problem points to a contemporary technological deficit.

Esslin recognises the technical difficulties in his observation that "Beckett's script demanded a degree of stylized realism hitherto unheard of in radio drama, and new methods had to be found to extract the various sounds needed."[89] In fact, Douglas Cleverdon and McWhinnie from the Department of Drama and Features attempted to create new sounds for experimental radio plays. In a study of the first twenty-five years of BBC sound effects, musicologist Louis Niebur suggests that the creation of new sound should aim at an "anti-realist aesthetic, embracing sound techniques geared toward the odd, surreal, and distorted, and existing as a bridge between poetry or music and reality" – all of which involve alienated use of familiar naturalistic sound recordings.[90] As with Esslin's invocation of Bertolt Brecht's key dramatic principle of the "alienation effect," such innovation "is intended to activate the audience's critical, intellectual attitude."[91]

The technical insufficiencies in the first production of *All That Fall* led to the

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[87] Qtd. in Esslin, *Mediations* 128-29.

[88] Knowlson 433.

[89] Esslin, *Mediations* 129.

[90] Niebur 8.

[91] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, fwd. Esslin, 3rd ed. (New York: Vintage, 2004) 410.

establishment of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop by Harry Desmond Briscoe and

Daphne Oram in 1958. It was a unique experimental studio, according to Briscoe and

Roy Curtis-Bramwell, where "music and sound first pioneered in Europe as *musique*

concrète and electronic music were united with the needs of the BBC, and emerged as

radiophonic music and sound."[92] In other words, BBC radiophonics are a variation of

German *elektronische Musik* or French *musique concrète*. In Germany the composer

Herbert Eimert, together with like-minded musicians such as Karlheinz Stockhausen,

explored the electronic sounds that the post-war avant-garde called *elektronische*

Musik, initially in Cologne. The other European centre of experimental music was

Paris, where French acoustician Pierre Schaeffer invented *musique concrète* in 1948,

whereby he plucked a sound from its original setting and manipulated it in a different

artistic context. The discovery was made in pursuing what he termed "the music in

between," and he created his "phonogene" machine with the breakthrough of

tape-recording.[93] Sounds could then be extracted from the tapes and mixed together to

create complexity. This experimental concrete music inspired a number of British

radio producers, sound artists or playwrights (including McWhinnie, Douglas

Cleverdon, Fredrick Bradnum, Giles Cooper, Daphne Oram and Desmond Briscoe),

and it subsequently stimulated the invention of the "radiophonic" at the BBC.

McWhinnie's interest in stylised experimental sound also derived from his visit in the

mid-1950s to Schaeffer's sound studio at the *Club d'Essai* at the

Radiodiffusion-télévision française (RTF) in Paris. According to McWhinnie,

radiophonic sounds "have no near relationship with any existing sound, they are free

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[92] Desmond Briscoe and Roy Curtis-Bramwell, *The BBC Radiophonic Workshop: The First 25 Years* (London: BBC, 1983) 9.

[93] Briscoe and Curtis-Bramwell 12. McWhinnie explains the notion of "*concrète*" in that "it is produced from concrete material, whereas traditional music is conceived in the abstract, noted down, and then made 'concrete' by the instruments which play it" (McWhinnie 86-87).

of irrelevant associations, they have an emotional life of their own."[94] However, the

BBC Radiophonic Workshop drops the term music from *musique concrète* or

elektronische Musik because the sounds are manufactured through technical processes,

which are considered "Not music at all."[95]

Desmond Briscoe and gramophone operator Norman Baines introduced these

experimental sounds due to the impetus provided by Beckett's *All That Fall*, which

"was the first programme to contain what later came to be known as 'radiophonic'

sound, and it is acknowledged as one of radio's classic productions."[96] Magnetic tape

was not available in England for practical use in the early 1950s; however, after

Beckett's first radio production, and the use of the tape recorder on stage in *Krapp's*

Last Tape (1958), the potential of this machine was clearly demonstrated. Beckett's

radio work was thus produced and broadcast in an epoch of great aesthetic and

technological advance.

As radio drama matured, advanced techniques offered more convincing and

realistic performances. The establishment of the Radiophonic Workshop benefitted

Everett C. Frost's production of *All That Fall* for "The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays"

in 1986.[97] There is, however, a conflict between a sense of fantasy in this radio play

and realistic acoustic effects. Beckett instructed Frost to use "recordings of the

animals specified for the rural sounds," and yet the effect remains essentially

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[94] McWhinnie 86.

[95] Briscoe and Curtis-Bramwell 22. In recent years, however, musicians have developed it as electronic music.

[96] Briscoe and Curtis-Bramwell 14.

[97] The 1986 American production of Beckett's *All That Fall* is presented by *Evergreen Review*.

unrealistic.[98] The reason for this is that the problematic sequence (one animal sound

follows the other, and finally they all join forces at the same time) cancels out the

realistic sounds, thereby justifying Ian Rodger's words that "Realistic presentation of

natural conditions by means of stereophony can achieve little if the dialogue is not

convincing and the listener is not gripped to know what is going to happen next."[99]

Though Beckett insists on having authentic recordings of animals, the aim of realism

is undermined by his text.

The nature of radio is *acousmatique* or "acousmatic," a term used by Pierre

Schaeffer and covering much the same ground as "radiophonic" in my opinion. Radio

as acousmatic necessarily generates unrealistic effects because sounds and voices on

the radio are heard without being seen. The acousmatic voice subtracted from its

visually present human origin can, as I have noted above, blur the distinction between

actual speech and private thought made audible. Without visually confirming what we

hear, radio can give full embodiment to phantoms, ghosts, and dreams. This is why we

find Beckett's radio drama so often akin to the dreamlike acousmatic effect, which

evokes a connection between the aural and the irrational. The Canadian composer R.

Murray Schafer uses the term "schizophonic" in *The New Soundscape* to describe the

splitting of sounds or voices from their original sources.[100] So far this is similar to

radiophonic sound or voices, but the notion of "schizophonic" goes beyond this to

suggest that electroacoustic sounds and copies of the original recordings can create an

effect of the uncanny, which is certainly relevant to certain moments of *All That Fall*

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[98] Everett C. Frost, "Fundamental Sounds: Recording Samuel Beckett's Radio Plays," *Theatre Journal* 43.3 (1991): 365.

[99] Ian Rodger, *Radio Drama* (London: Macmillan, 1982) 141.

[100] R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher* (Ontario: BMI Canada, 1969) 43.

such as Maddy's highly agitated voice in her soliloquy: "what's wrong with me, what's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms! [*Frenziedly*.] ATOMS!"[101] Such applications of radiophonic soundscape in McWhinnie's view "translate realistic sound into symbolic sound."[102] Realistic effects are therefore undermined by the suggestion of frenzy. Beckett's radio drama unusually combines acoustic performance with radiophonic sounds, and the effect is unsurprisingly disturbing.

Donald McWhinnie's general principle of radio aesthetics is that "In radio, as in poetry, we attain definition by concentrated intuitive short cuts, not by a mass of elaboration and detail."[103] Sound effects here aspire to a less literal application than in realism, and achieve more imaginative poetic form since, according to Esslin, sound manipulation "has developed its own forms of music."[104] Esslin points out that Beckett's experimental use of radiophonic sounds is "a resurgence of experiments towards more abstract forms of radio drama: montages of pure sound, pure language, fragments of reality filtered through electronics and collages of sound patterns."[105] Radiophonic effect is a combination of the schizophonic and the expression of music as "poetry of pure sound and linguistic experimentation." Esslin therefore suggests that "the radio play approximates musical form."[106] Whether this is or is not true as a general principle, Beckett's radio plays have doubtless made such attempts, as I shall

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[101] Beckett, *CDW* 177.

[102] McWhinnie 148.

[103] McWhinnie 51.

[104] Esslin, *Mediations* 184.

[105] Esslin, *Mediations* 185.

[106] Esslin, *Mediations* 181.

examine in more detail in Chapter Four.

2.   Avant-garde Radio Aesthetics: The European Connection

I shall now move on to discuss some theoretical issues concerning European radio art and theory, leading to an analysis of Futurism and Surrealism as helpful aesthetic contexts for Beckett's radio plays. As is well known, Beckett was deeply immersed in European avant-garde culture in his early years, and I shall examine the biographical evidence of this below. I begin here with Futurist debates about radio, since these were some of the earliest twentieth-century avant-garde responses to the new medium, and I will then move on to the German and French debates, for these were artistic cultures with which the young Beckett had close personal connections.

Futurism—whether Italian or Russian—highlights and celebrates the industrialisation of the modern period; speed, violence, warfare and technology are among its central aesthetic themes. Given this use of technology as an impetus to literary creativity, we might at a push find faint Futurist reverberations in Beckett's *All That Fall*, for this play is replete with various means of transport: cart, bicycle, car, limousine, and train. The latter modes in particular articulate a certain celebration of speed linked to what Jane Rye terms the Futurist attention to "metals – their alloys, fusions and combinations; to discover new sources of passion in the dramas of the chemical laboratory or the tragedy of the blast furnaces" in the "mechanical kingdom."[107] There is, however, also an awareness of the dangers of speed as when Mr. Slocum's limousine runs over a hen or a child dies after falling from the train. Critics from Hugh Kenner onward have stressed a strong tendency towards the

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[107] Jane Rye, *Futurism* (London: Studio Vista, 1972) 115-16.

mechanisation of the body in Beckett's work. For Kenner, this takes the form of the "Cartesian Centaur," the perfect union of body and machine as incarnated in the Beckett character on his bicycle. In the radio plays, this phenomenon takes on a more appropriate technological form. In *Rough for Radio I* the anonymous protagonist He switches knobs on and off to play or stop the airborne voices and music, so that when Henry instructs himself "on" in *Embers* or Fox is brutally told to go "on" in *Rough for Radio II*, it is as though these characters have themselves, to an extent, become radios that need to be switched on or off to make them physically move forwards (Henry) or to continue with psychological free-associationism (Fox).

A second promising linkage between Futurist radio theory and Beckett's radio drama lies in the former's attitudes to language and noise. Timothy C. Campbell has demonstrated the relationship between radio and F. T. Marinetti's concept of "wireless writing" (*immaginazione senzafili*). According to Campbell, radio communication without the medium of the telegraph wire is analogous to Futurist wireless writing in that the latter "[removes] words that hinder the easy transmission of sense data into their written analogue" and is thus a mode of free expression or "words in freedom" (*parole in libertà*).[108] He suggests that actual wireless technology is a direct influence on Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto, and that the imaginative mode of wireless writing leads to the Futurist demand for words in freedom. Marinetti states that:

> Words in freedom are an absolutely free expression of the universe in which prosody and syntax have no part, a new way of seeing and feeling, a measuring of the universe as a sum of moving forces. These forces intersect in our conscious and creative self, which records them exactly, using every possible means of expression. . . . In this way, the

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[108] Timothy C. Campbell, *Wireless in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006) 91.

> free-wordists orchestrate color, noises, sounds, form evocative combinations out of the material of language and patois, arithmetic and geometric formulas, old words, distorted words and invented words, animal cries and engine noises, etc.[109]

This new mode of expression shatters the traditional system: language is distorted, transformed, and reassembled in a new formation. This new orthography aims to "achieve the *psychic onomatopoeic chord*, sonorous but abstract expression of an emotion or a pure thought" that offers direct affective expression, free from grammatical or syntactical bondage.[110] This, then, is the Futurist proposition of "words in freedom" when syntactical structure "is replaced by the emotional perspective, which is multiform."[111] If the introduction of onomatopoeia can "render all the sounds and all the noises of modern life, even the most cacophonous" as "the raw elements of reality," then radiophonic art could be considered an example of words in freedom.[112] Hence it is that Beckett's radio art contains Maddy Rooney's panting and screaming, the clashing of train couplings, the sound of dragging feet, the click of switches, the ringing of telephones, clashing of stones, dripping of water, thumps with rulers and clubs, raps of batons, and so on. Cacophony becomes a positive creative principle for Beckett, as it is for Futurism.[113]

The German-language debate about radio was particularly lively in the 1920s

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[109] F. T. Marinetti, *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, trans. Elizabeth R. Napier and Barbara R. Studholme (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002) 86.

[110] Marinetti 89.

[111] Marinetti 92.

[112] Marinetti 88.

[113] It is a similar concept to the "radiophonic body" as in Jeff Porter's article "Samuel Beckett and the Radiophonic Body: Beckett and the BBC," *Modern Drama* 53.4 (2010): 431-46. This reflects Beckett's attack on linguistic expression, which I will address in full in Chapter Four.

and 1930s, and Beckett had close connections with German culture in this period. Prompted by visits to his beloved uncle "Boss" Sinclair in Kassel, Beckett stayed in Germany for six months between 1936 and 1937. The trip was an inspirational pilgrimage of aesthetic, philosophical and psychological stimulation, particularly in his interactions with local artists. He was, for example, preoccupied with new paintings, with a preference for "stillness and the unsaid" in the work of Willem Grimm and Karl Ballmer.[114] So fruitful was this trip for Beckett that Mark Nixon suggests that he "perceived Germany as a potential remedy for emotional troubles, as well as an aesthetic and cultural space that could provide inspiration for his writing."[115] References to German culture do turn up in the radio plays, though to nineteenth-century rather than to avant-garde works (Schubert and *Effi Briest* in *All That Fall*).

The pros and cons of radio as a new medium were vigorously argued out by German-language intellectuals. Bertolt Brecht in his "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication" (1932) maintained that radio was flawed and urged mutual communication with "a vast network of pipes" by means of which one could both transmit and receive.[116] In an article on "Radio Play or Literature?" (1929), the Austrian and Jewish playwright Arnolt Bronnen celebrated radio as a positive literary alternative which could "wield the greatest power today in the verbal arts."[117] In contrast, M. M. Gehrke saw radio as an intrusion into the domestic home in a joint

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[114] Qtd. in Knowlson 239. Original source: Samuel Beckett's German Diaries (hereinafter SB's GD), notebook 2, 26 Nov. 1936.

[115] Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Continuum, 2011) 18.

[116] Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication," *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 616.

[117] Arnolt Bronnen, "Radio Play or Literature?" *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 611.

article with radio theorist Rudolf Arnheim entitled "The End of the Private Sphere" (1930). She argued that collective solidarity is achieved by mass transmission, while accusing radio technology of penetrating households and turning the individual radio listener into "a pirate listener."[118] Although Arnheim agrees about the intrusive effect of radio, he opposes the view of collectivism due to social class. On the other hand, the German and Jewish literary scholar Arno Schirokauer argues in his "Art and Politics in Radio" (1929) that unlike other modes of art that take place in a social venue (such as theatre), the art of radio owes its distinctive characteristics to its private reception.[119] However, we should note here (to anticipate my discussion in the next chapter) that once the Nazi party came to power in 1933 it made its own, very distinctive political use of radio as a means of mass communication.

Probably the most important of these early German radio theorists is Rudolf Arnheim, who examines the specific characteristics and aesthetics of radio in his *Radio* (1936). He is not only attentive to the musical theory that views word as sound, but also interrogates the ethical relationship between listeners and what they hear. Gaby Hartel has drawn connections between Beckett's radio plays and Arnheim's radio theory by arguing that Beckett in effect materialises Arnheim's radio theory. Although "Beckett may have developed his sensitivity for the needs of the medium solely from his experience as a radio listener," she suggests that it was rather the case that "his own radio pieces . . . materialised Arnheim's thoughts on the power of sound

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[118] M. M. Gehrke and Rudolf Arnheim, "The End of the Private Sphere," *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 613.

[119] Arno Schirokauer, "Art and Politics in Radio," *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, eds. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 609-10.

emerging from the silent void."[120] Her analysis provides a preliminary focus on sound

and the non-visual nature of radio as fundamental features on which radio theory must

be built. She also points out how Arnheim uses "the material of voices" as

"instruments" and how he hypothesises the possibility of staging "a contest between

language and music as a radio play;" without mentioning that the latter suggestion is

splendidly achieved in Beckett's *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. I will return to the

former issue, of voices as instruments, in Chapter Four.[121]

The art of radio not only embraces the Futurist ambition to incorporate modern

cacophony, but also suggests the potential of using the medium to gain access to the

psyche, a project associated with Surrealism. Beckett had a certain biographical

involvement with Surrealism, for he established a social network with Surrealist artists

in Paris in the 1920s and 30s. He translated several Surrealist prose pieces and poems,

which were published in an issue of *This Quarter* guest-edited by André Breton in

1932. He also translated many other Surrealist poems such as "The Approximative

Man" and "Reminder" by Tristan Tzara and Ernst Moerman's "Louis Armstrong."[122]

More importantly, Beckett's translation of several poems by two of the Surrealist

founders Breton and Paul Eluard, including a section of their cooperative work

Simulations from *The Immaculate Conception* (1930), has been shown to have

influenced him significantly. In *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*, the editors

Seán Lawlor and John Pilling reveal that in a letter to Thomas McGreevy (dated

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[120] Gaby Hartel, "Emerging Out of a Silent Void: Some Reverberations of Rudolf Arnheim's Radio Theory in Beckett's Radio Pieces," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 19.2 (2010): 225-26.

[121] Hartel 225.

[122] See Samuel Beckett, *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*, eds. Seán Lawlor and John Pilling, critical ed. (London: Faber, 2012). Original source: *The Surrealist Number* in *This Quarter* 5.1 (1932): 72-75, 86-98.

January 18, 1935) Beckett drew a contrast between Lucia Joyce's psychotic illness and Breton and Eluard's Surrealist simulations of irrationality.[123] Irish poet Denis Devlin wrote in a letter to McGreevy about meeting Beckett: "I was delighted to hear his account of the meeting with Breton and Eluard; Breton impressed [Beckett] and Eluard inspires affection."[124] Although we cannot fully determine how much Surrealist concerns affect or inspire Beckett's work, we can at least say that translation from Surrealism was aesthetically rewarding for him, as he reveals in a letter to McGreevy that "it was always a pleasure to translate Eluard and Breton."[125]

Certain critics have already stressed Beckett's debt to Surrealism. For example, Daniel Albright operates within a Surrealist framework in his *Beckett and Aesthetics* to probe how Beckett includes different kinds of technology in his art. In his "Introduction: Beckett and Surrealism," Albright illuminatingly links such late prose such as *Company* (1980) or *Worstward Ho* (1983) to Surrealist paintings by Giorgio de Chirico. My conceptual focus on Surrealism differs from his because I intend to argue the linkage between Surrealist psychological theory and radio aesthetics as a context for Beckett's own radio drama; I will stress André Breton's *Manifestoes of Surrealism* as the theoretical basis, while also paying particular attention to Paul Deharme's radio theory.

I will start with an examination of Surrealist automatism, which resembles the Futurist words in freedom. André Breton disclosed in the first "Manifesto of Surrealism" that automatism suggested itself to him when he listened to the ramblings

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[123] Seán Lawlor and John Pilling eds., *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*, by Samuel Beckett, critical ed. (London: Faber, 2012) 362. This letter is not included in *Letters of Samuel Beckett*.

[124] Qtd. in Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* (hereafter *LSB*), eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, et al., 4 vols. to date (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009-) 1: 169.

[125] Beckett, *LSB* 1: 135. Letter dated 18 Oct. 1932.

of shellshock victims in a hospital in 1919. He and Philippe Soupault experimented

with automatic writing based on their experiences in the hospital, jotting down

whatever came into their minds without restraint, and this work was then published in

The Magnetic Fields (*Les champs magnétiques*) later that year. Breton and Soupault

claim in their collaborative work that they have scribbled down the "self-sufficient

murmur" from the "voices" in their minds, and they insist that the attempt to retrieve

forbidden psychic activity from the unconscious must not be interfered with by the

conscious mind.[126] This practice of automatic writing explains how Breton came to

define Surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to

express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual

functioning of thought."[127] This pure state involves "the absence of any control

exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern," so as to gain free

access to all notions or images formulated in the unconscious. Breton acknowledges

that people have long lived under a repressive social system, fending off irrational

thoughts that violate everyday decorum. Surrealist practice is therefore far removed

from day-to-day sense-making, whilst coming close to the condition of dreams.

We may invoke the example of Surrealist automatic writing in relation to

Beckett's second radio play *Embers*. Henry's compulsive retelling of the story about

Bolton and Holloway certainly has features of Surrealist automatic writing. Fox in

Rough for Radio II and Voice in *Cascando* also engage in the free play of thought,

with non-identical repetition in Voice's Woburn story or Fox's babble of images. The

most salient point of connection with Surrealism in Beckett's radio plays, however, is

a pervasive sense of alienation. The aberrant opening sequence of animal sounds in *All*

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[126] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1972) 91.

[127] Breton 26.

That Fall, for example, is an ideal paradigm of alienated sonority. Strange occurrences of unrealistic sounds can disorientate an apparently stable milieu, which yields a characteristic Surrealist effect. For example in *Embers*, although Henry reveals to his father that they are by the sea, the sounds of horses' hooves, the dripping of water, or the slam of a door are inserted according to Henry's request for them. The acoustic strangeness of such phenomena undermines realist interpretation of the play's dramatic setting and achieves a surreal impact. With their aberrant soundscapes and the practice of automatic writing in the compulsively repeated stories they contain, I propose that Beckett's radio drama can be associated with Surrealism.

Futurist wireless writing enhances mechanical expression, whereas Surrealist automatic writing is paradigmatically associated with dreams, not only because Freud's theory in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) is the theoretical basis of Surrealism, but because dream activity is highlighted from the start as a Surrealist experience. When Breton first coins the term Surrealism in "The Mediums Enter," it is described as "a certain psychic automatism that corresponds rather well to the dream state."[128] Dreams are the most prevalent practice of automatism due to their freedom of expression: in them the association of images, however whimsical or fantastic, follows the principle of automatism. Closely linked to the dream state, the Surrealist presentation of the unconscious psyche, according to Breton, "can only be fairly compared to that of madness."[129] One might then argue that a Surrealist emphasis is suggested in the original script of *All That Fall*, in which "Beckett wrote supplying the only amendment: in the very first line of dialogue he changed the phrase which originally ran 'all alone in that *crazy* house' to 'all alone in that ruinous old house'"

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[128] Breton 90.

[129] Breton 175.

(my emphasis).[130] In his formulation of "a Surrealist Aesthetic of Theatre," David G. Zinder has stressed that "the Surrealists found almost inexhaustible intellectual, spiritual, and artistic sustenance in the psychological mechanisms of man, particularly dreams and the irrational, and their marvellous or magical intersections with reality."[131]

Breton's attempt to resolve the demarcation between dream images and reality in the surreal relates to Paul Deharme's radio theory, which is an effort to access the psyche and its dream-like experiences in radio. A radio theorist during the early experimental stage of the medium, Deharme became better known for incorporating radio art into commercial advertisements during the 1930s in France. In his "Proposition for a Radiophonic Art" (1928), he points out that the wireless enables listeners to evoke images "analogous to those of dreams."[132] He thus famously links the medium to the unconscious in his most notable and influential formulation of "radiophonic art." He suggests the possibility that radio can manipulate audiences when information delivered penetrates the unconscious, and this claim is further elaborated in his *Pour un Art Radiophonique* in 1930. In the "blind art" of radio, he proposes that the medium achieves direct contact with the unconscious by "avoiding to awake the conscious mind and its disturbing actions."[133] We should note that Deharme's radiophonic art draws heavily on psychological or psychoanalytic suggestions on how to access the unconscious, based on avant-garde Surrealist

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[130] Esslin, *Mediations* 128.

[131] David G. Zinder, *The Surrealist Connection: An Approach to a Surrealist Aesthetic of Theatre* (Ann Arbor [MI]: UMI, 1976) 36.

[132] Paul Deharme, "Proposition for a Radiophonic Art," introd. and trans. Anke Birkenmaier, *Modernism/Modernity* 16.2 (2009): 406, 410.

[133] Deharme 407.

principles. This link between radio and the psyche is a landmark discovery in

Deharme's theory, because images invoked on the radio, in his view, effect a

parallelism with dreams.[134] Radio techniques can thus strengthen the evocation of

dreams, and radio drama allows dreams or the unreal to come to the fore in its use of

music, achieving what Deharme sees as a Surrealist effect.

A Surrealist connection is also suggested when Martin Esslin offers his insight

into the use of radio in the production of Beckett's *All That Fall*: "radio can create a

subjective reality halfway between the objective events experienced and their

subjective reflection within the mind of the character who experiences them – halfway

between working consciousness and dreamlike states, halfway between fact and

fantasy, even hallucination."[135] The stark conflict between dream or fantasy and

naturalistic presentation can be harmonized in radio because the audience's faculty of

vision is turned inward when listening is the only faculty involved. Listeners employ

their inner vision to form mental pictures according to what they hear on the radio.

Since "Concentrated listening to a radio play is, thus, more akin to the experience one

undergoes when *dreaming*," Esslin suggests that there is a connection between radio

and the unconscious in Beckett's radio work.[136] He considers radio drama in general

"as a vehicle for a serious poetic exploration of the human mind, a minority art form

with great potential depth of insight and width of imaginative range."[137] Radio is such

a challenging dramatic medium that McWhinnie remarked in 1957 that "My

impression is that if he [Beckett] is to write at all in the near future it will be for radio,

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[134] Deharme 406.

[135] Esslin, *Mediations* 131.

[136] Esslin, *Mediations* 177.

[137] Esslin, *Mediations* 186.

which has captured his imagination."[138]

The obscure nature of Beckett's radio plays and the suspension of seeing in the listeners' engagement with radio as a medium forbid a coherent realistic analysis of these works. However, when John Drakakis comments that "what the medium could do best was to represent the psychological processes of the human mind," I would like to stress that it is not only radio itself but the obscurity of the script that successfully produces the psychic representation.[139] We should invoke Deharme's radiophonic art here and insist that the connection between radio and the performance of the psyche leads to a Surrealist interpretation. In other words, radio does double duty for Beckett: first, its close association with the psyche enables the registry of uncanny instabilities, intensifying Beckett's characteristic style of indeterminacy; and second, problematic sounds or voices can be interpreted as inner sounding or voicing, as a kind of stream of consciousness. Thus radio is a proper channel for Beckett's ambiguous or surreal radio drama because, as I have insisted above, it in various ways blurs the distinction between reality and the unreal: listeners cannot see and are thus deprived of the only way to confirm the actual narrative situation in his radio plays. Radio supports Beckett's attack on realism and is a fitting mode of Surrealist realisation, particularly when the sound effects or voices can be produced "without context, without definition" and even without "shape or substance," in Donald McWhinnie's formulation.[140]

With Marinetti's wireless writing, Arnheim's radio theory and Deharme's radiophonic art in the background of my examination of the radio plays, we can see that Beckett has developed the art of radio based on certain Futurist and Surrealist

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[138] Qtd. in Knowlson 431. Donald McWhinnie, internal memo, 21 Feb. 1957 (BBC).

[139] Drakakis 24.

[140] McWhinnie 24.

principles. In dealing with voices as the central issue in Beckett's work, Esslin observes that "The intricate texture the critic has to unravel is therefore nearer, in its structural principle, to the organic associative organization of images in a dream than to the calculated pattern of a crossword puzzle. The puzzle is there, but it is an organic growth."[141] However, Esslin suggests that "having summoned up the voices from his subconscious," Beckett does not "merely record them in automatic writing;" I therefore suggest that Beckett may have gone beyond Surrealism to make a fruitful linkage with Futurist aesthetics.[142] In fact, Jane Rye suggests that Surrealism and Futurism do indeed partly overlap: "Anticipating the Surrealists, the Futurists declared that discoveries of the subconscious, and of 'ill-defined forces' must be brought to the stage."[143] The medium of radio, as an ideal playground for the disembodied voice, enhances drama in performance, and the radio as a technological device in its own right underscores the Futurist concern with the mechanical and celebrates the Futurist emphasis that humanity can triumph over nature. Therefore, both movements exhibit their connection to the radio: the Futurist expression of words in freedom can articulate Surrealist unconsciousness, because the radio is the Futurist technological medium which channels the Surrealist psyche.

These frameworks discussed here enhance the exploration of the exposed psyche, which creates for itself an expression of onomatopoeia in words in freedom or automatism. Futurist and Surrealist frameworks not only complement each other in some respects, they also constitute an expanded radio theory which we can use to contextualise Beckett's radio art from 1957 onwards.

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[141] Esslin, *Mediations* 88.

[142] Esslin, *Mediations* 87-88.

[143] Rye 121.

3.   Beckett's Pre-Radio Work: Aural Training in the Pre-Radio Fiction

When Beckett turned to writing for radio, critics soon registered their sense of the particularly appropriate nature of the new medium to his earlier aesthetic concerns, above all in his fiction. Accordingly, my third literary context for the study of the radio plays is Beckett's own early fiction. Hugh Kenner, in 1961, shrewdly argued that "radio proves to be the perfect medium for Beckett's primary concern: the relationship between words, silence and existence."[144] I shall consider these earlier writings as anticipations of elements that can be developed more fully and concretely through the medium of radio. In particular, I shall evoke his pre-radio work as a kind of training for the reader in unusual and specialist acts of listening and hearing that (as I will show in Chapter Four) Beckett can then make actual for the listener in the striking sound effects of his radio drama.

The notion of training is not foreign to Beckett's own writing, and its most vivid expression occurs in the context of specialist listening. One of the most memorable experiences of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house is the arrival of the father-and-son team of piano-tuners, the Galls, and Watt interprets their behaviour in the music room as the professional training of the son by the father: "[Watt] took it rather to mean that Mr. Gall Senior, feeling his end at hand, and anxious that his son should follow in his footsteps, was putting the finishing touches to a hasty instruction, before it was too late."[145] I want to take this as an emblematic scene for the fiction as a whole and to see Beckett himself as the "piano-tuner" who is putting his reader

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[144]   Qtd. in Beryl S. Fletcher, et al., *A Student's Guide to the Selected Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber, 1978) 72. Cited originally from *Spectrum*, Spring 1961.

[145]   *Watt* in Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 225.

through a prolonged training course in unusual sounds and strange acts of listening. At the end of *More Pricks Than Kicks*, for example, Hairy predicts that Belacqua's corpse "will give the bowels of the earth a queer old lesson in quiet," and it is certainly just such a queer lesson—or rather series of lessons—in both sound and quietness that Beckett's fiction intends to deliver to us, his readers.[146]

I will examine three modes of training in relation to curious acts of listening and hearing in Beckett's pre-radio fiction: first, distinguishing external listening from internal hearing; second, listening to faint sounds and silence; and third, grasping incomprehensible speech as pure sound element. As we saw in the debate about Beckett as modernist, he is intrigued by the Cartesian split of body and mind, and this concern underscores his fiction's attempt to differentiate external listening from internal hearing. We may invoke an example from *Molloy* when Molloy insists that "It's with your head you hear it, not your ears" – hearing with or in the head is thus firmly distinguished from banal, everyday listening with the ear.[147] *The Unnamable* illuminates the division of the mind from the physical world more explicitly when the protagonist identifies himself as the tympanum, further stressing the significance of hearing with the inner organ of the ear:

> Perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the *tympanum*, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I

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[146] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 218.

[147] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 36.

don't belong to either.[148] (My emphasis)

Echoing the Cartesian mind-body split, hearing in the mind is severed from listening to external ambient sounds, and *Murphy* also suggests such a model when the protagonist's "mental experience . . . [is] cut off from the physical experience."[149] It is when Murphy's body is restricted in his rocking-chair that internal sounds or voices of the mind are activated. Thus, not only is the Cartesian split recognisable, but the linkage of both sides is also suggested. This distinctive segregation is continued in *Molloy* when Molloy experiences noise that he always hears "whether [he] listen[s] to it or not," because it is an internal sound. The aural training here entails the recognition of "a sound which begins to rustle in your head, without you knowing how, or why. It's with your head you hear it, not your ears, you can't stop it, but it stops itself, when it chooses."[150] However, the separation between internal hearing and external listening may not be absolute, for Watt admits that for him "the distinction between what was inside [the brain] and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw," because "Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it."[151]

Having recognised the segregation of the mind from the body in Beckett's work, I want to suggest that the liberation of that inner "mental chamber" is obtained when physical movement is restricted, as is Murphy's.[152] Perhaps internal hearing could be rationalised as the working of imagination, or a stirring in the depths of

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[148] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 376.

[149] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 68.

[150] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 36.

[151] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 202-03.

[152] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 68.

memory, since the latter motif is very central to Beckett due to his emphatic study of

Marcel Proust's work. In the process of reminiscence our memories, voluntary or

involuntary, attain temporary existence in the form of images or voices from the past.

Certainly both sight and sound haunt Beckett's characters, but he always emphasises

the memory of the voice, or memory stimulated by sound or voice, as I shall

demonstrate in my detailed study of *Embers* in particular.

After acknowledging the separation of internal from external voices, Beckett

introduces us to his second mode of training in listening: appreciating faint sounds in

close approximation to silence, and also, paradoxically, silence itself. However, it is

not just the act of listening, but specifically what we are asked to listen to that

challenges our acoustic perception. Mary Bryden outlines two kinds of

silence—"*taciturnitas* (silence relative to other sounds), and *silentium* (absolute

silence)"—in her book *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (1998), and I will use

these categories as a basis for differentiating minimal threshold sounds as opposed to

complete silence in my discussion of the novels.[153] Bryden suggests that Beckett's

sensitivity to the acoustic is pervasively demonstrated in his fiction (*The Unnamable*)

and prose (*Texts for Nothing*) which "exhibit an extraordinary acute attunement to

sound: not just to noise, but to intimate, ambient sound."[154] I therefore want to stress

Beckett's attention to faint sounds, for example, in the Trilogy. Molloy asks readers to

listen to the faint rustle of leaves when they almost "made no sounds, motionless and

rigid, like brass."[155] Malone also leads us to experience "the faint sound of aerial surf"

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[153] Mary Bryden, "Solitude, Stillness, Silence and Stars," *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998) 174.

[154] Mary Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence," *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Bryden (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 24.

[155] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 83.

in an appropriation of the sound of minute particles barely audible to the ear.[156] This
pressure to capture minimal sounds in the thin air demands an intensified level of
perception – readers must imaginatively learn to strain their ears in the exercise of
such attenuated listening.

We can invoke an example from *Watt*, when the protagonist takes a break from
his journey and listens "to the little nightsounds in the hedge behind him, in the hedge
outside him, hearing them with pleasure, and other distant nightsounds too, such as
dogs make, on bright nights, at the ends of their chains, and bats, with their little
wings," and the extension of his acoustic perception of the night leads ultimately to
the choir of frogs.[157] Listening to minuscule ambient sounds is so recurrent in the
Trilogy that the task of imagining "the noises of the night, the owls, the wind in the
leaves, the sea when it was high enough to make its voice heard, and then the other
night sounds that you cannot tell the meaning of" is constantly assigned to its
readers.[158]

It is not only the faint sounds of nature that Beckett highlights, but also
humanly marginal sounds, as with the footfalls in *Watt* and *Mercier and Camier*. Watt,
for example, first problematizes inaudibility when he questions how there could be
"some person so skilful on his legs, that his footfalls made no sound."[159] Later he
notices the weak sound of footfalls: "Faintlier, faintlier came the footfalls to his ears,
until of all the faint sounds that came, by the abandoned air, to his ear, not one was a

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[156] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 215.

[157] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 194.

[158] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 268.

[159] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 197.

footfall, as far as he could judge."[160] Footfalls in *Mercier and Camier* are not only

audible, but identifiable if given acute attention: "all ears for the footfalls, footfalls

distinguishable from all the other footfalls."[161] These faint ambulatory sounds

anticipate Beckett's delivery of the actual sound of footfalls during Maddy's journey

to and from the station in *All That Fall*, or the much more muted shuffling of Croak's

carpet slippers in *Words and Music*; as ever in Beckett, radio can concretise what

printed fiction can only theorise. As I have previously noted, adopting Wayne Booth's

old distinction, radio can actually "show" what fiction can only "tell."

Beckett asks not simply for an engagement with barely audible sounds, but

also with silence itself. In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the protagonist

Belacqua points towards silence as the kind of experience expected of the reader,

"between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals."[162] The stress on

silence caught between words mirrors Elisabeth Marie Loevlie's understanding of

Beckettian silence as an interval of noise. She argues in her *Literary Silences in*

Pascal, Rousseau, and Beckett that "the trilogy produces endless writing against

silence, repeatedly fighting it off," and suggests that "Writing is the necessary

fluctuation that wards off any frozen or fixed stabilization of silence," because in

order for silence to be registered, words must establish an antecedent presence.[163]

Perhaps this in-betweenness of silence in the "unfathomable abysses of silence"

evoked by Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, according to Beckett, is the key to that

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[160] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 360.

[161] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 465.

[162] Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. and fwd. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983) 49.

[163] Elisabeth Marie Loevlie, *Literary Silences in Pascal, Rousseau, and Beckett* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003) 208.

enigmatic phrase "a Beethoven pause" in *More Pricks Than Kicks*.[164]

However, I will not here inquire into the meaning of Beckett's dramatic pauses and silences (that is a task for Chapter Four). Instead, I will focus on three different levels of silence in these novels: internal silence, external (physical) silence, and the combination of both. First, Molloy and Moran lend us their sensitive ears when we are instructed "to be silent and listen," to "detect, beyond the fatuous clamour, the silence of which the universe is made."[165] Such moments invoke internal silence as an emptying out of thoughts such as that sought in Buddhist meditation. It is, therefore, a condition of internal void that constitutes one of the levels of silence.

Watt's listening to "the soundless tumult of the inner lamentation," on the other hand, suggests that sounds within the head are released by the silent atmosphere – and this constitutes my second level of silence.[166] As "long silences" break up the argument between Mercier and Camier, "thought" breaks in, in the "depths of meditation."[167] Generalising from the experience that "silence was in the heart of the dark" in *Malone Dies*, we can suggest that external silence stimulates internal voices or sounds, as with Murphy in that earlier novel.[168] Since Beckett is fascinated by silence and darkness, perhaps a connection can be drawn from "an ecstasy of darkness, and of [external] silence" in *Watt*.[169] French musicologist Vladimir Jankélévitch argues that "In the dark, our auditory perception is enhanced:" a voice or sound

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[164] Beckett, *Disjecta* 172; Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 100.

[165] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 122, 116.

[166] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 346.

[167] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 391.

[168] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 197.

[169] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 311.

issuing from darkness will be the most disturbing because all sorts of unconscious fear and repressed anxiety are encapsulated in such sounds.[170] This is also the way that Mercier attends to the murmurs or to the rain "in the dark" that "the long day had kept from him" in *Mercier and Camier*.[171] Silence, and its relation to darkness, suggests an intensified aural perception. According to contemporary musician David Toop, "Silence, often highly valued for the memory of undisturbed peace, becomes unbearable, since this is when tinnitus creates maximum distress."[172] The termination of external sound, in other words, allows easier access to internal sound comprising tinnitus and thoughts. Silence is therefore affiliated with darkness in Beckett, enhancing the zone of freedom by liberating listeners' associations and mental pictures as suggested in *Murphy*; as we have seen, both silence and darkness offer a sense of "ecstasy" for Watt.[173]

However, these preliminary levels of silence hardly compare with the final level of silence, which makes itself felt in the "drops of silence through the silence" in *The Unnamable*.[174] This depth of silence is a confluence of the previous two – a juxtaposition of internal silence with its external counterpart; there is an act of "eavesdropping" on silence from within, "when [external] silence falls!"[175] It may be a simple case as in *Mercier and Camier* when the two protagonists fail to converse with each other, and the physical silence fails to stimulate internal reverberations with

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[170] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003) 138. Original title in French: *La Musique et L'Ineffable*, 1961.

[171] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 478.

[172] David Toop, *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2004) 69-70.

[173] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 311.

[174] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 376.

[175] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 345.

"their minds two blanks."[176] These three different levels of silence and the persistent

effort to attune to faint sounds in Beckett's fiction are central issues that I will explore

further in my discussion of the radio drama in Chapter Four. His fiction can only

describe or theorise these silent or muted phenomena, whereas the radio plays can

actually deliver them through their innovative sound effects, showing rather than

telling.

The final mode of training in the pre-radio fiction aims at making sense of the

inconceivable as pure sound element, particularly in the protagonists' struggles to

comprehend puzzling voices or words in the Trilogy. For example, Molloy confesses

that his utterance is equivalent to "the buzzing of an insect," and this curious

observation suggests a possible alternative mode of expression in contrast to everyday

language.[177] We have a similar case when he fails to understand the meaning of

"papers" when interrogated by the police.[178] Moran has difficulty comprehending the

voice ordering him to pursue Molloy, and the protagonist Saposcat in Malone's first

story "could make no meaning of the babel raging in his head, the doubts, desires,

imaginings and dreads."[179] Malone himself is confused when "Words and images run

riot in [his] head, pursuing, flying, clashing, merging, endlessly."[180] Similarly, Watt's

articulation becomes incomprehensible due to "the rapidity of his utterance and the

eccentricities of his syntax."[181] Mercier is acutely aware that language can only

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[176] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 391.

[177] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 45.

[178] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 16.

[179] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 187.

[180] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 192.

[181] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 228.

"disguise" his feelings; when he seeks to convey his thoughts, "Words fail him" repeatedly.[182] In the protagonists' struggles to come to terms with internal murmurs and babble in silence, or to make sense of inconceivable and incomprehensible sounds, voices and silence are prioritised.

Moran's approach may provide a key insight here: he realises that in order to understand what he hears, he must abandon traditional understandings of language and adopts a new approach. He arrives at an epiphany from the training he had earlier assigned for himself (also intended for his son): "I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language."[183] Watt's invented expression, which perhaps only he can make sense of, provides an alternative to articulate by confronting the linguistic system: "*Ot bro, lap rulb, krad klub. Ot murd, wol fup, wol fup. Ot niks, sorg sam, sorg sam. Ot lems, lats lems, lats lams. Ot gnut, trat stews, trat stews.*"[184] Invoking the case of Molloy, he adopts a new paradigm when he drums his code into his mother's skull as an alternative system that avoids articulation: "I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull. One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five goodbye."[185] Here, then, is an example of success in communication by alternative modes not possible with language.

Such impediments to communication are why Kevin Branigan proposes in

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[182] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 412, 447.

[183] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 169-70.

[184] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 303.

[185] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 14.

Radio Beckett the notion of "white voices." He comments that Beckett's "evocation of

an unworldly Silence in the radio plays and his development of blank or 'white voices'

belie an author who is leaving open the possibility of there being something more than

the physical."[186] In Branigan's borrowing of this term from Beckett, however, he may

have either misused or misunderstood it, for I believe that it should translate a manner

of atonality or even aloofness rather than silence. Consider, for example, the episodes

from *More Pricks than Kicks* when the woman is selling tickets in an emotionless

"white voice" in "Ding-Dong," or when Mr. Shuah's acknowledgement speech is also

made in a "less cordial" white voice in "What a Misfortune."[187]

Precisely because language has failed to communicate, non-linguistic or

illogical expression may be considered an alternative. However, perhaps the

articulated words are not meant to be understood as suggested in *The Unnamable*,

where "This voice that speaks . . . [is] indifferent to what it says."[188] Instead, Beckett

asks us to capture the performance of the speech act, free of syntactic and lexical

implications. We are instructed to learn the way in which Molloy repeatedly hears

words "as pure sounds, free of all meaning."[189] We should also recall a suggestion

offered in *The Unnamable*: "it's entirely a matter of voices, no other metaphor is

appropriate."[190] Voice is liberated from semantic reference to be experienced, in its

pure sonority. This attempt to free words from semantics will be the focus of my

discussion in Chapter Four. Beckett undermines our accustomed perception of the

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[186] Branigan 127.

[187] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 106-07, 190.

[188] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 301.

[189] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 45.

[190] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 319.

sound effects in his radio plays. He first asks listeners to pay attention to the acoustic

qualities of voice and sound, and then makes us acknowledge the neglected existence

of silence or of natural sounds. My discussion here also anticipates my later account

of musicality as the subtraction of meaning, where I shall extend the study of the

vicissitudes of aural signals in Beckett's plays, with a particular focus on silence and

music. The arduous effort of Beckett's fiction is best summed up in Watt's question:

"what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning?"[191] As I have

repeatedly stressed, the phenomena of hearing or listening to faint sounds or voices, or

to muted noises as near-silences, can only be theorised or speculatively imagined in

the fiction; however, Beckett can actually deliver these acoustic features in the radio

plays (the use and sound of sticks, clubs, batons, rulers or of feet shuffling; the telling

absence of sound in pauses and silences, or infinitesimal subtracted sounds, and so on).

Sounds and voices, in other words, materialise the written words of the radio script in

a sequence of works that are still path-breaking in the genre of radio drama.

It is not only the thematics of sound and silence (or near-silence) that allows us

to map continuities from Beckett's pre-radio prose and fiction to his radio plays, for I

also intend to examine a number of crucial narrative elements that anticipate the radio

drama. The pre-radio fiction anticipates the first radio play *All That Fall* with

particular reference to the role of and movement to and from the railway station, and

the motif of the train journey. Take this paragraph from *Murphy*, for example:

> He [Cooper] was turning into the station, without having met any
>
> considerable receptacle for refuse, when a burst of music made him halt
>
> and turn. It was the pub across the way, opening for the evening session.
>
> The lights sprang up in the saloon, the doors burst open, the radio struck

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[191] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 227.

up. He crossed the street and stood on the threshold. The floor was palest ochre, the pin-tables shone like silver, the quoits board had a net, the stools the high rungs that he loved, the whiskey was in glass tanks, a slow cascando of pellucid yellow.[192]

If Cooper's journey towards the railway station generates one of the earliest mentions of radio in all Beckett's fiction, Beckett's own use of radio as a creative medium in the late 1950s will—in reverse—generate the narrative motif of a journey to and from a railway station in Maddy Rooney's painful progress to meet Dan at Boghill station. Music is a common motif in both journeys – Cooper hears the "burst of music" from the radio, and Maddy will hear the gramophone playing *Death and the Maiden*. Moreover, Cooper's observation of the whiskey as "a slow cascando of pellucid yellows" startlingly anticipates the title of one of the later radio plays. "Cascando" is also the title of a 1936 poem by Beckett which, in asking "is it not better abort than be barren," explores the painful realm of sterility and childlessness that also comes through strongly in *All That Fall*.[193]

Trains are consistently places of danger or death in Beckett. The pseudo-couple Mercier and Camier meet the sinister figure of Mr. Madden on their train journey in that novel. Madden's parents had died in a providential "railway smash;" the accident mirrors the tragedy that occurs when the child falls out of the train in *All That Fall*.[194] As a farming apprentice, Madden had shown an unhealthy fascination with the destruction of young life: "the slaughter of little lambs, calves, kids and porklings and the emasculation of little bullocks, rams, billy goats and

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[192] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 164.

[193] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 33.

[194] *Mercier and Camier* in Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 409.

piglets."[195] We might therefore regard him as a first draft for that coldly sinister figure

Dan Rooney in *All That Fall* because he also reveals a "wish to kill a child" and to

"Nip some young doom in the bud," and he does indeed kill a child on the train on

which he travels back to Boghill.[196] This motif of the destruction of young life, which

in Madden is almost a systematic programme, will be important to my interpretation

of the Joyce/Beckett relationship in the context of late modernism in Chapter Five.

In *The Unnamable*, the protagonist tells of a woman who travels to the station

to meet her husband who is coming back from the war: "he comes back . . . from the

wars . . . she goes to the station, to meet him, he dies in the train, of emotion, at the

thought of seeing her again . . . that's love, and trains, the nature of trains, and the

meaning of your back to the engine, and guards, stations, platforms, wars, love,

heart-rending cries."[197] This episode predicts the narrative situation of *All That Fall*

when Maddy journeys out to fetch her husband Dan Rooney at the station, though the

death on the train here is of an adult rather than a child as in the play. War is the

context of the wifely journey to the station in *The Unnamable*, and though Dan

Rooney is not a returning combatant, I will want to evoke the Second World War

below as the ultimate horizon of Beckett's radio plays.

The Unnamable's evocation of "guards, stations, platforms" is given more

literary substance at the end of *Watt*, in a scene that also anticipates important thematic

elements of Boghill station. Watt journeys out from a railway station and returns to it

at the end of the novel. In fact, the opening sequence of animal sounds implying the

rural landscape of *All That Fall* is anticipated in the last part of this novel: Watt passes

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[195] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 410.

[196] Beckett, *CDW* 191.

[197] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 399-400.

by the deserted area with either an ass or a goat lying in the ditch on his way to the railway station. If trains are a place of death in Beckett, stations themselves are, contrastingly, places of community and comedy. When Watt finally arrives, the station pulls together a community of people—signal-man Mr. Case, station-master Mr. Gorman, the porter Mr. Nolan, Lady McCann, Arsy Cox, Herring-gut Waller, Cack-faced Miller, and so on—and a more sociologically specific, Irish-rural communal scene also takes place in the railway station in *All That Fall*. A strong element of crude comedy (Watt being flattened by the waiting-room door, Maddy obesely struggling up the station steps) is common to both scenes. The comic Irish community Beckett assembles around Boghill station might be regarded as his "daytime" version of Dylan Thomas's small Welsh fishing-village community in *Under Milk Wood*.

Therefore, not only do we find Beckett's concentration on voice and sound in the pre-radio works actually delivered aurally in the radio plays, but there is continuity of a cluster of Beckettian themes around trains and railway stations between the two bodies of work. Before returning to the issue of sonority in Chapter Four, I will now turn to psychoanalytic and historical readings of the radio plays.

CHAPTER TWO

Beckett, Trauma, War and Radio

"I remember once attending a lecture by one of these new mind doctors" – Maddy in

All That Fall.[198]

1.   Beckett and Psychoanalysis

I intend in this chapter to read Beckett's radio plays using a trauma-centered mode of interpretation and with full attention to their historical context. I will firstly locate the source of psychoanalytic interest in Beckett's literary works in his own intellectual and clinical background. Secondly, I will study the link between Beckett's neurotic obsession and the theory of trauma, leading to a crucial distinction between "acting out" and "working through" traumatic memory; thirdly, I will examine traumatic representation as enacted in the radio plays; and finally, I will make the connection between the impact of the Second World War and Beckettian trauma, and argue the appropriacy of radio as a means for traumatic representation. Trauma has become a very dominant trope in the discussion of twentieth-century culture, and trauma studies are as well represented in Beckett criticism as they are elsewhere.[199] What I seek to do here is to take that emphasis into the radio plays, with a strong focus on the historical function and meaning of radio to him in wartime.

Beckett was familiar with the Freudian theories of trauma and neurosis through

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[198] Beckett, *CDW* 195.

[199] See Jonathan Boulter, "Does Mourning Requires a Subject? Beckett's *Text for Nothing*," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 50.2 (2004): 332-50; Erik Tonning, "*Not I* and the Trauma of Birth," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 15.1-2 (2005-2006): 21-34.

his own reading in and experience of psychotherapy in the 1930s.[200] When the death

of his father William Beckett led to acute mental distress, his surgeon Geoffrey

Thompson advised him to try psychotherapy with Dr. Wilfred Bion in London

between 1934 and 1935.[201] During his treatment he took a keen interest in

psychoanalysis and ruminated on a wide range of psychoanalytic discourses and

terminologies (from Freud's "talking cure" to an extended understanding of Freud's

notion of hysteria as demonstrated in unpublished reading notes on Ernest Jones's

Treatment of the Neuroses [1920]). Though the interaction on a personal level between

Beckett and Bion ended when Beckett terminated his psychotherapy, Bennett Simon

suggests that the connection goes deeper than their doctor-patient relationship,

implying that they are imaginary twins in his article "The Imaginary Twins: The Case

of Beckett and Bion," a title which recalls that of Bion's own essay "The Imaginary

Twin" (1950).[202] The nature of their relationship is delved into further in more literary

terms in Steven Connor's "Beckett and Bion," where his major concern is to

determine how it comes through as the notion of the "pseudocouple" in Beckett's

literary writings.[203] Connor argues that "As the two men went their separate ways,

their concerns and procedures came closer and closer together."[204] In my view,

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[200] Beckett incorporates diverse psychoanalytic and psychological materials by Karin Stephen, R. S. Woodworth, Wilhelm Stekel, Carl Gustav Jung, Alfred Adler and Otto Rank. The last figure is discussed in *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett* (2006). See Shane Weller, "'Some Experience of the Schizoid Voice:' Samuel Beckett and the Language of Derangement," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45.1 (2008): 32-50

[201] Beckett, *LSB* 1: 239-41, 256-61. Letters dated on 1st January 1935 and March 10th, 1935. Ian S. Miller and Kay Souter discuss the psychotherapeutic connection between Beckett and Bion in *Beckett and Bion: The (Im)Patient Voice in Psychotherapy and Literature* (London: Karnac, 2013).

[202] Bennett Simon, "The Imaginary Twins: The Case of Beckett and Bion," *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 15 (1988): 331-52.

[203] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 291. The term is used in *The Unnamable*: "the pseudocouple Mercier-Camier."

[204] Steven Connor, "Beckett and Bion," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 17 (2008): 13.

Holloway, the doctor for both Henry and Bolton in *Embers*, might well be considered as a surrogate for Bion.

Beckett also acquainted himself with hospital routines through his experience with Thompson and Bion, and in autumn 1935 attended a lecture in London given by the renowned psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who greatly influenced him. Jung's story about a little girl who had dreamed of her own prenatal death and who "had never been born entirely," in his words, is first revisited in the addenda to *Watt*, as Angela Moorjani notes.[205] We then find a clear reference to this lecture in *All That Fall* when Maddy recounts a lecture given by one of the new mind doctors which includes the same story about a distressed girl: "The trouble with her was she had never really been born!"[206]

Beckett's close relation with James Joyce and his schizoid daughter Lucia, who was treated by Jung in Zurich, offered him an opportunity to witness clinical distress as an observer of Lucia's schizophrenia from 1935 in both London and Paris. The quest for psychological help in Europe is mirrored in *Embers* when Henry travelled to Switzerland to be rid of the "cursed" sound of the sea.[207] Henry's psychological trouble is bound up both with a hostile relationship with his father and the latter's possible suicide, and may therefore enact aspects of Beckett's own mental distress, caused by his father's death or by his literary father Joyce's anger over his abortive affair with Lucia.

Critical analyses which draw linkages between the literary works and Beckett's own psychotherapy abound. Typical examples include James D. O'Hara, who argues

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[205] Carl G. Jung, *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice: The Tavistock Lecturers* (New York: Pantheon, 1968) 107; Angela Moorjani, "Beckett and Psychoanalysis," *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 175.

[206] Beckett, *CDW* 196.

[207] Beckett, *CDW* 254.

in *Samuel Beckett's Hidden Drive: Structural Uses of Depth Psychology* that Beckett

draws on Jung's and Freud's concepts to formulate many of his works before 1957;

and Phil Baker, who draws extensive parallels between Freudian and Rankian

psychoanalytic narratives and Beckettian motifs in *Beckett and the Mythology of*

Psychoanalysis. Beckett's early literary works are themselves preoccupied with

psychoanalysis, as in his short story "A Case in a Thousand" (1934), which unfolds

the erotic trauma of a physician Dr. Nye which is rooted in his attachment to his

childhood nurse Mrs. Bray, and which demonstrates how he overcomes it when

treating her son's illness.[208] Beckett's obsession with psychoanalysis comes through

again in *Murphy* because that novel demonstrates different categories of psychological

illness such as melancholy, paranoia, schizophrenia, and the like, and includes a

detailed description of a mental hospital – the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Beckett's

Trilogy begins oedipally "I am in my mother's room" and contains so much Freudian

content that Maurice Nadeau suggested that, for some readers, its first volume, *Molloy*,

could be seen as "no more than a literary exposition of complexes belonging more

properly to psychoanalysis."[209] Angela Moorjani has investigated textual reversals of

the Oedipus complex that are "bound up with archaic mother-father imagos and with

both a paternal law *and* a maternal law from which [Beckett's writing] tries to break

free."[210] To undo the oedipal figurations, characters either move backward to the

womb or forward to death. An example of a journey motif as analogous to a return to

the womb is Molloy's beginning from his mother's room on page one and returning to

it as that novel ends. It is worth mentioning that Moorjani sees "the stone motif in

[208] Samuel Beckett, "A Case in a Thousand: A Short Story," *The Bookman* 86.515 (1934): 241-42.

[209] Qtd. in Phil Baker, *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1997) xi.

[210] Moorjani 184.

Molloy, *Godot*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*" as expressing an urge to return to an inorganic state of intrauterine existence as theorised in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[211] Stones therefore also play a significant role in the radio plays. Henry clashes two big stones noisily together on the beach in *Embers*, and Fox in *Rough for Radio II* exclaims: "Peter out in the stones!"[212]

Moreover, as we saw in Chapter One, his Surrealist connections in Paris are themselves partly accountable for Beckett's interest in the aesthetic uses of psychoanalysis. I accordingly intend to offer a detailed psychiatric interpretation of the radio plays in section three, and will initiate this study by introducing the concept and the general condition of trauma, followed by an introduction of two modes of traumatic memory as the basis to identify the neurotic performances of the radio drama.

2. Trauma Theory

The Greek term, trauma, originally referred to a physical wound or injury inflicted on the body. From the late nineteenth century onwards, with the emergence of psychology and psychoanalysis, and Sigmund Freud's central role in this, trauma became widely accepted as an injury within: it signifies a psychological wound or mental infliction. The term nowadays is often understood as something catastrophic that we could not conceivably deal with in our everyday life. However, recognizing trauma as a near-death experience is an oversimplified view and does not do it full justice.

Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth argues in *Unclaimed Experience* that trauma

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[211] Moorjani 174.

[212] Beckett, *CDW* 281.

refers to "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena."[213] The traumatic event thus recurs (when it chooses) in the present in the form of repeated memory, which is, in effect, a compulsive replay of the primal event. Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1970-1930* cautiously add that trauma is understood not as an event, but as the experiencing, remembering, or reliving of an event that calls for integration from the dissociative memory.[214] That is, trauma occurs precisely when the memory of the original upheaval revisits involuntarily. This viewpoint poses questions about how trauma occurs and why the re-experiencing only takes place after the actual event. Is it possible, fundamentally, to retrieve the direct memory of the primal experience where trauma occurs?

According to Micale and Lerner, the study of trauma at the turn of the twentieth century emerges from the discoveries of Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet – dominant figures of medico-psychological discourse. Although psychoanalysis starts with theoretical and therapeutic discourses on hysteria, Freud's work highlights the process of repression in terms of trauma, and I therefore intend to examine the relation between repression and traumatic memory.

According to Richard J. McNally's *Remembering Trauma*, the study of memory is essential to understand trauma. McNally supports the widely-held belief that there is a defensive mechanism preventing cataclysm from entering

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[213] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 11.

[214] Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, preface, *Traumatic Past: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1987-1930*, eds. Micale and Lerner, Cambridge Studies in the Hist. of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) xiii.

consciousness.[215] It is not that one loses consciousness when a catastrophe occurs,

because if one has indeed lost consciousness, no memory can be retained to begin

with and there is clearly then no possibility of retrieval afterwards. Drawing from his

understanding of Freud, McNally argues that "severe threats to life produce traumatic

neuroses only if the person remains conscious during the experience."[216] In order for

trauma to come about, one must have perceived the incident and have therefore

remembered it.[217]

The perception of the primal incident (where trauma is formed) is repressed

from conscious memory into the unconscious, and this explains why traumatic

sufferers fail to remember the original event. Freud considered repression as a

defensive tool against atrocity. Judith Herman concurs in her *Trauma and Recovery*

(1992): "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness."[218]

The defence mechanism of repression prevents direct contact with the original event

in the consciousness; the memory of the traumatic event is thus sheltered and remains

dormant in the unconscious.

Although remaining in an inactive state, "the story of trauma is inescapably

bound to a referential return," as Cathy Caruth puts it.[219] The return of the repressed,

according to McNally, takes the form of psychological symptoms in a traumatic

neurosis.[220] Caruth argues that trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out,

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[215] Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003) 5.

[216] McNally 120.

[217] McNally 121.

[218] Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic, 1992) I.

[219] Caruth 7.

[220] McNally 3.

that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" in conscious remembering; what is more, the reality or truth of the original event "cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language."[221] Trauma releases a voice from the internal wound which articulates itself in the form of diverse neurotic symptoms. Deciphering or unraveling these symptoms is vital to unlock the mystery of trauma.

Ruth Leys argues in *Trauma: A Genealogy* that trauma theories "evolve around *the problem of imitation, defined as a problem of hypnotic identification*," which she calls "*mimesis*."[222] The effect of traumatic memory is a mimetic repetition. Stephen K. Levine observes in *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy* that although trauma victims are incapable of remembering the primal event consciously, they "'repeat' the original wound" in symptoms of nightmare, flashbacks and intrusive recollections as the unconscious material none the less makes its presence felt.[223] McNally also stresses that traumatic memory at times escapes from the unconscious and returns in the form of nightmares, panic attacks and other unusual bodily movements.[224] For Levine, performances of traumatic symptoms can be viewed as mimetic wounds that repeat primal events.

In clarifying the nature of traumatic memories, psychiatrists Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart argue that they are "the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes,

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[221] Caruth 4.

[222] Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000) 8.

[223] Stephen K. Levine, *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2009) 55.

[224] McNally 6.

and be transformed into narrative language."[225] When victims fail to integrate the

primal scene, this dissociation later causes the painful return of the original event. It is

this "unassimilated nature," according to Caruth, the fact that the event is "*not known*,"

which causes the "return" of the haunting memory for trauma victims.[226] That is,

trauma creates a gap in the memory of the event, which is later filled by the return of

unconscious material. However, it is not simply the missing part of the violent event

that seeks its return, but "the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully

known."[227] To fully acknowledge the traumatic experience, as proposed by McNally,

one must recover the entire primal event from the dissociated memory.[228] Clinical

psychologist Renee Fredrickson agrees with McNally, asserting that "The bulk of your

repressed memories need to be identified, retrieved, and debriefed for healing to

occur."[229] The view is shared by another psychologist Edna Foa, who asks patients to

recall detailed descriptions of the traumatic event and to narrate stories about it

repeatedly until their anxiety abates.[230] Remembering and retelling the story of the

original event, in other words, will hopefully bring the unconscious memory to light

and is thus an essential process in mastering trauma.

Repetition (that key Beckettian theme) is linked to trauma because it involves

unconscious resurrection of the past event. Caruth stresses that if the knowledge of

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[225] Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. and introd. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 176.

[226] Caruth 4.

[227] Caruth 6.

[228] McNally 3.

[229] Qtd. in McNally 7.

[230] Qtd. in McNally 135.

"the threat of death in the past" is not acquired, "the survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again."[231] Her focus is not so much on how one encounters the threat of death, but how one "*survived, precisely, without knowing it*," for it is this that evokes traumatic repetition.[232] Similarly, Adam Phillips maintains in his article "Close-Ups" that "Repetition is the sign of trauma; our reiterations, our mannerisms, link us to our losses, to our buried conflicts."[233] Repetition, in this light, becomes a crucial index of traumatic memory.

Between the acknowledgment of traumatic effect (neurotic symptoms) and the knowledge of the traumatic event (the memory of the primal event) lie two modes of repetition, which are based on Freud's notions of "acting out" (repeated unconscious performances of traumatic symptoms) and "working through" (a conscious therapeutic process by repeating the story of the event as it originally happened). Victims unconsciously act out traumatic symptoms repeatedly, it is however by consciously working through the repetition of the primal event that treatment can take place. Dominick LaCapra further elaborates on these two modes of repetition in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001):

> In acting out, one relives the past as if one *were* the other, including
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> oneself as another in the past—one is fully possessed by the other or the
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> other's ghost; and in working through, one tries to acquire some critical
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> distance that allows one to engage in life in the present, to assume
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> responsibility—but that doesn't mean that you utterly transcend the past. It
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> means that you come to terms with it in a different way related to what

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[231] Caruth 62.

[232] Caruth 64.

[233] Adam Phillips, "Close-Ups," *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 142.

you judge to be desirable possibilities that may now be created, including

possibilities that lost out in the past but may still be recaptured and

reactivated, with significant differences, in the present and future.[234]

LaCapra stresses that the process of working through employs "critical distance" that

enables victims to "distinguish between past, present, and future."[235] It aims at

unfolding the original event through a conscious endeavour to remember, against the

unconscious resistances. LaCapra thus sums up the dilemma of both modes of

repetition in that trauma "brings about a dissociation of affect and representation: one

disorientingly feels what one cannot represent [the repetition of acting out]; one

numbingly represents what one cannot feel [the repetition of working through]."[236]

Working through trauma, according to LaCapra, "involves the effort to

articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never

transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of

that disabling dissociation."[237] The possibility of re-acquiring the original event lies

in a combined effect of accidental acting out while working through the trauma. As

Eric Leed argues in his "Haunting Memories," "the meaning of traumatic neurosis lies

in the relation of the sufferer to the cause of the suffering, not in the relation of the

specific case to a general type or model of disease—hysteria, neurasthenia,

schizophrenia—it is supposed to exemplify."[238] Instead of indicating a generalised

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[234] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Re-visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2001) 148.

[235] LaCapra, *WHWT* 143.

[236] LaCapra, *WHWT* 42.

[237] LaCapra, *WHWT* 42.

[238] Qtd. in Paul Lerner and Mark S. Micale, "Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historical Introduction," introduction, *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1987-1930*, eds. Micale and Lerner, Cambridge Studies in the Hist. of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 25.

pathology for trauma victims, it is more rewarding to identify the symptoms that trauma acts out unconsciously, while also facilitating a conscious critical process to work through the primal event, and this is the approach I shall adopt for my analysis of Beckett's radio plays in section three.

For van der Kolk and van der Hart, unlike the "social act" of narrative or ordinary memory, "traumatic memory is . . . invariable."[239] Similarly, van der Kolk and Rita Fisler also stress that traumatic memories "are invariable and do not change over time," while narrative memory is variable over time.[240] There is primordial truth in trauma because traumatic "memories are fixed in the mind and are not altered by the passage of time, or the intervention of subsequent experience." If such memories are fixed, it is because they are segregated from conscious narrative memories. This is also why the unhindered narration of traumatic "experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level" because language is governed by the conscious.[241] Caruth agrees with van der Kolk that traumatic memory is stored in a different psychic space from the ordinary narrative domain, but how then do we articulate traumatic memories when language fails?

Lenore Terr proposes a behavioural process to gain access to trauma, and this is achieved by articulating the unconscious via "posttraumatic play," a term that he coined.[242] Similarly, in the case of traumatic amnesia, van der Kolk theorizes a non-narrative form of expression when the primal memory is so radically dissociated

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[239] van der Kolk and van der Hart 163.

[240] Bessel A. van der Kolk and Rita Fisler, "Dissociation and the Fragmentary Nature of Traumatic Memories: Overview and Exploratory Study," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (1995): 520.

[241] van der Kolk and van der Hart 172.

[242] Qtd. in McNally 117.

from awareness.[243] He asserts that the original memory can be "entirely organized on an implicit or perceptual level, without an accompanying narrative about what happened" because, in his view, "trauma interferes with declarative memory (i.e. conscious recall of experience) but does not inhibit implicit, or nondeclarative, memory, the memory system that controls conditioned emotional responses, skills and habits, and sensorimotor sensations related to experience."[244] This is to suggest that while segregating itself from conscious narrative memories, traumatic memory is inscribed in the body that preserved authentic pain and suffering when the original event took place. Trauma is not only stored in the unconscious, but in the memory of the body—on such occasions as, for example, unconscious physical reactions to stressors—as an aspect of the representation of acting out traumatic symptoms. Therefore, the therapeutic hope is that by engaging with the performance of the body that acts out traumatic symptoms, fragments of the primal memory will be released so as to reconstruct the original experience.

3. Traumatic Representation in Beckett's Radio Plays

In my attempt to identify traumatic representation in Beckett's radio drama, I will first discuss how memories act as traumatic symptoms in these plays. There are a wide range of identifiable traumatic modes of acting out suggested by Richard McNally, and I will open this section with the two most relevant representations of traumatic memory in connection to the radio plays: intrusive recollections and flashbacks.[245] Distinguishing between these two models will help clarify different

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[243] McNally 177.

[244] van der Kolk and Fisler 512.

[245] McNally 105.

representations of trauma in the plays.

Maddy Rooney launches into her self-pitying soliloquy as she makes her way to the railway station in *All That Fall* and declares herself "destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness."[246] When her self-indulgent remarks lead to the notion of childlessness, she ends up frantically calling out her child's name "Minnie! Little Minnie!" The notion of childlessness reminds Maddy of her dead child, although we learn nothing further of the original circumstances of the loss of Minnie. Trauma-related words invoke the painful experience of losing her child in the form of intrusive recollection. In fact, this play repeatedly addresses the issue of the absence or loss of a child: Mr. Tyler is grandchildless because his daughter has had a hysterectomy, and a child dies on the train journey into Boghill station. Even the bucolic sounds of the rural environment can serve as painful psychic triggers for Maddy, for when she hears a lamb's bleat later in the play, she cries out: "Oh the pretty little woolly lamb, crying to suck its mother!"[247] To be on the road, as she constantly is in this play in her journey to and from the railway station, is to be repeatedly exposed to such potentially triggering stimuli.

We can find several examples of intrusive memory in *Embers*. When Ada reminds Henry not to get his boots wet, he immediately reverts to a similar incident twenty years ago. Her repeated use of "Don't" in the present takes him suddenly back to a moment of sexual intimacy in the past when she half-heartedly tells him "Don't!"[248] We might expect the memory of their first full sexual experience to be

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[246] Beckett, *CDW* 174.

[247] Beckett, *CDW* 194.

[248] Beckett, *CDW* 260.

pleasurable rather than painful, but given the intense displeasure with which Henry thinks of his daughter's conception in this play, pain may in fact predominate. Ada's "Don't" activates Henry's intrusive memory of the past, but when memory extends itself after the initial point of intrusive evocation, flashback memory takes over. In another example of flashback memory, when Ada mentions their daughter Addie playing the piano and riding a horse, Addie's unpleasant music and riding lessons immediately follow.[249]

In *Words and Music*, a brief intrusive memory supervenes for Croak when a speech given by Words referring to "the nose" and "the lips" evokes images leading to his memory of Lily.[250] An example of flashback memory occurs when Fox is tortured into producing words in *Rough for Radio II*: coercion leads to his reminiscences of his brother, Maud, the oceans and the seasons. However, his memory prolonged from these intrusive images contains exaggerated or fictional elements given, for example, in the impossible claim that his brother is inside him.

Having illustrated symptoms of traumatic memory in Beckett's plays, I intend to further clarify the difference between flashbacks and intrusive memory based on the distinction between involuntary or voluntary memory, and I shall invoke the analysis of these concepts in Beckett's book on *Proust*. As with traumatic memory, the occurrence of involuntary memory is uncontrollable because it "chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle," and it also takes place in the unconscious: "when we escape into the spacious annexe of mental alienation, in sleep or the rare dispensation of waking madness."[251] Involuntary memory is "explosive,

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[249] Beckett, *CDW* 258-59.

[250] Beckett, *CDW* 292.

[251] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 523, 522.

'an immediate, total and delicious deflagration;'" more importantly, it holds the possibility to "reveal – the real," and it thus has shared features with traumatic memory.[252] In contrast, voluntary memory, in Beckett's words, "is of no value as an instrument of evocation, and provides an image as far removed from the real as the myth of our imagination or the caricature furnished by direct perception."[253] As a "distorted image" formed in the conscious, voluntary memory is related to ordinary memories because they are both subjective and "easily become inaccurate when new ideas and pieces of information are constantly combined with old knowledge to form flexible mental schemas."[254]

Both intrusive recollections and flashbacks involve involuntary memory. However, unlike intrusive recollections that provoke an abrupt disturbance, flashbacks start subtly and increase their intensity over time; according to McNally, flashbacks "seldom replicated actual traumatic experiences" because they are distorted and exaggerated versions of the actual primal event.[255] Flashback memory involves various degrees of distortion and fails to achieve authenticity to the actual event. Thus Henry's flashback memories of Addie's agony in her lessons in *Embers* are considered exaggerations of what actually happened in the past. Clues to the distorted nature of the memory are given in the play. The music master corrects Addie's mistake and scolds her emphatically and almost violently, and the riding master insists that she follows his strict instructions; both episodes end with Addie's howl amplified to

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[252] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 523.

[253] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 513.

[254] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 540; van der Kolk and van der Hart 171.

[255] McNally 105, 115-16.

"*paroxysm*," mixed with an eerie echoing effect in the original BBC production.[256] The haunting amplification strikes an odd note in the narrative flow of the memory; thus, the intensified crying strikes us as a falsified overstatement of the actual scene.

However, if the mimesis of trauma suggested above is "absolute repetition, a recurrence of the same" event, then the outcome of the traumatic representation examined above constitutes a "failed *mimesis*," because the victims are incapable of reproducing an identical replay of the original event.[257] The failure of identical repetition may also result from narration itself because articulating traumatic memories in language may compromise truthfulness and prevent the full restoration of the original event. This is why Christina Wald confidently comments that "a literal return to the perceptual reality of the traumatising event" is "a reproduction of the trauma that is always already distorted."[258]

Flashbacks contain both involuntary and voluntary dimensions of memory: sufficient exposure to trauma-related stimuli evokes involuntary memory from the unconscious, and the continuation from this point of abrupt intrusion is then the conscious remembering of voluntary memory. If so, I suggest that it might be inaccurate to maintain that intrusive recollection is a failed mimesis; however, since it is aroused and vanishes immediately, the transiency of intrusive memory thwarts a comprehensive reconstitution of traumatic memory. Intrusive recollections, in this light, are only a sudden revival of involuntary memory that last briefly, and they require extended voluntary memory to bring the entire traumatic event to light. "When one element of a traumatic experience is evoked," according to van der Kolk and van

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[256] Beckett, *CDW* 259.

[257] Levine 66, 61.

[258] Christina Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 96.

der Hart, "all other elements follow automatically;" a prolonged continuation of an intrusive recollection that extends itself into conscious remembering therefore aims at mapping the traumatic event.[259] Since the extended material, which involves degrees of falsification, adheres to the intrusive evocation, the process as a whole alters the authenticity of traumatic memory. This is perhaps why Cathy Caruth argues that memory "is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression."[260]

Distorted memory certainly accounts for the way in which Henry works out the possibility of certain details of what happened to his father in *Embers*. At the beginning of the play, Henry mentions how he inherits money from his father and moves across to the cliff side of the bay, where he is certain that his father would never have gone.[261] However, when Ada reveals to Henry that when she had passed his father, he was "looking out to sea;" this information later generates minute alterations to Henry's previously formed conviction about his father.[262] Henry's soliloquy of reminiscence towards the end of the play is constructed by articulating what Ada has told him—"passed you [Ada] on the road, didn't see her, looking out to. . . . [*Pause.*] Can't have been looking out to *sea*"—leading to his changed assumption that his father had indeed "gone round the other side [of the bay]."[263]

Beckett's radio plays are replete with failed mimesis of non-identical repetition. At the micro-level, for example, Fox's utterance of "That for sure, no further" in

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[259] van der Kolk and van der Hart 163.

[260] Caruth 15.

[261] Beckett, *CDW* 253.

[262] Beckett, *CDW* 262.

[263] Beckett, *CDW* 263.

Rough for Radio II is repeated with a slight difference later: "That for sure, no denying, no further. . . ."[264] Also, the speeches by Words on the different themes of sloth and love in *Words and Music* are almost identical. At a larger narrative level, Henry's Bolton-Holloway tale in *Embers* is told at the start and again towards the end of the play; however, variations in the story told are noticeable. Henry shifts several times between shutters and hangings or curtains for the windows of Bolton's house. Not having a definitive storyline is suggestive of the impossibility of acquiring the truth of trauma; in such compulsive telling in non-identical repetition, Henry can "never finish anything, everything always went on for ever."[265] It is also worth noticing that Bolton pleads with Holloway for an anaesthetic injection, and their doctor-patient relationship is thereby established. The shifting of scenes between darkness in the house and the snowy-white external world as Bolton repeatedly draws the hangings open and shut is referred to as a "maddening thing."[266] Bolton and Henry both seem deeply disturbed, but Henry, unlike Bolton, does not have a physician like Holloway making therapeutic efforts on his behalf. Henry's state mirrors the condition of traumatic victims in their struggle to find pieces of information to add to the missing fragments, or to replace the falsified parts of their stories.

Other modes of traumatic symptoms can shed additional light on the enactment of trauma in the radio plays. Christina Wald investigates performances of trauma in contemporary drama in *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia* and points out that there are other trauma-related symptoms, including a wide range of conditions "from

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[264] Beckett, *CDW* 279.

[265] Beckett, *CDW* 254.

[266] Beckett, *CDW* 264.

hyperalertness to numbness and alienation" and even "dissociative states."[267] Richard McNally lists a series of symptoms such as: derealisation—an unreal sense of one's surroundings; depersonalization—a sense of dissociation from one's own body; sense of time in abeyance; and amnesia.[268] It is particularly rewarding to invoke his understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder (hereafter abbreviated as PTSD), first recognized as a mental disease in 1980 based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. First, he describes the re-experiencing of intrusive recollections, flashbacks, or dreams in which "sufferers seemed to relive it [the traumatic event] again and again as if it were happening in the present."[269] Secondly, there is a sense of alienation and emotional numbing, and finally, PTSD also comprises a wide range of further symptoms, such as "hypervigilance for threat, enhanced startle response, sleep disturbance, memory and concentration impairment, avoidance of distressing reminders of the trauma, and guilt about having survived when others did not."[270] Having dealt with the two modes of intrusive recollection and flashbacks in the radio plays, I intend to draw upon the long list of traumatic symptoms suggested by these specialists to make a fuller coverage of traumatic representation in this body of work. I will discuss four more of the most relevant symptoms—alienation, amnesia, anachronism and fragmentation—that emerge as indicators of trauma in the radio plays.

A sense of alienation in the modes of derealisation and depersonalization is clearly abundant in Beckett's work – as evoked in his study of *Proust* where

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[267] Wald 94.

[268] McNally 172.

[269] McNally 8.

[270] McNally 8-9.

perception "has been assimilated to the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness, and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation."[271] Alienated derealisation focuses on the alteration of our perception of the world; that is, one is self-banished from one's familiar local territory. Thus in *Embers* the sea is an uncannily "strange place," as Henry talks to his dead father there.[272] He even draws listeners' attention to the sea sound to stress the aberrant surroundings: "the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea."[273] The shingle beach in this play is an unsettlingly liminal location: situated between the land and the sea, between dry and wet, it belongs fully to neither of those firmly delineated binary opposites. And its spatial liminality seems here to facilitate a temporal liminality too, for this is a location where Henry slips between past and present, where those two distinct binary zones thoroughly interpenetrate each other.

The rural surroundings in *All That Fall* also reveal estrangement when the sounds of sheep, bird, cow, and cock are performed in a meticulously choreographed series, first separately then together; thus a sense of alienation is foregrounded at the very beginning of this play.[274] What is more, the sounds responding to Maddy's later observations also strike an odd note: "The wind—[*Brief wind.*]—scarcely stirs the leaves and the birds—[*Brief chirp.*]—are tired singing. The cow—[*Brief moo.*]—and the sheep—[*Brief baa.*]—ruminate in silence. The dogs—[*Brief bark.*]—are dust."[275] This unlikely sequence defies our, and her, common perception of how animals should

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[271] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 513.

[272] Beckett, *CDW* 253.

[273] Beckett, *CDW* 253.

[274] Beckett, *CDW* 172.

[275] Beckett, *CDW* 192.

sound. Maddy seems, in this play, to be getting out and about again after a protracted period of physical convalescence. This is certainly positive in one sense, breaking her out of the Miss Havisham-like psychic enclosure of the old woman "All alone in that ruinous old house" created in the opening lines.[276] But being out on the road in the public world again proves as dangerous as it is potentially therapeutic, for it exposes her to new, unexpected stimuli that may serve as triggers to traumatic recollection. After all, at the end of this play another child will die (in the railway accident), as if Maddy's own traumatic loss is actually repeating itself in the present of the text.

Depersonalisation announces itself when strange behaviour or bizarre movements manifest themselves without logical explanation. Such breaks are identifiable in deviant linguistic acts, as when Maddy not only admits that she is "a hysterical old hag" in *All That Fall* but also notices her own "bizarre" manner of speech.[277] Dan Rooney also discerns this abnormality in his wife, and announces that she is "struggling with a dead language," which she herself admits to be "unspeakably excruciating."[278] These rather general statements are given vivid embodiment in Maddy's interrogation of herself—"What's wrong with me, what's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms!"—and a frenzied scream of "ATOMS" follows; her sudden outburst in the original BBC production is even more at odds with normal utterance.[279] Maddy also displays unusual emotional outbursts as she reveals excessive enthusiasm when offered a seat by Mr. Slocum, or in the sudden discharge of giggles during the

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[276] Beckett, *CDW* 172.

[277] Beckett, *CDW* 178, 173.

[278] Beckett, *CDW* 194.

[279] Beckett, *CDW* 177.

excruciating process of entering his limousine, or even in her reaction to a possible train accident: "A collision! Oh that would be wonderful!"[280] All of these are bizarre verbal acts that serve as indicators of Maddy's mental breach with her grotesquely overweight body. Based on the abnormality evidenced in the dissociative traumatic nature of her behavioural oddities, it is no wonder that Dan asks Maddy: "Have you taken leave of your senses?"[281]

The second PTSD symptom of amnesia is quite unlike everyday forgetfulness, as dissociative amnesia involves an inability to recall pivotal snippets of a traumatic incident.[282] In the diagnosis of PTSD by the American Psychiatric Association, we have the following description of this symptom:

> Intense psychological distress . . . or physiological reactivity often
> occurs when the person is exposed to triggering events that resemble or
> symbolize an aspect of the traumatic event. . . . The person commonly
> makes deliberate efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations
> about the traumatic event. . . . This avoidance of reminders may include
> amnesia. . . .[283]

The amnesiac inability to situate the traumatic event in a complete whole recalls the condition of Fox in *Rough for Radio II*. His amnesia perplexes Animator and Stenographer, because they lament on his narrative "deficiencies" during their session with him.[284] The missing content is perhaps the significant component that would

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[280] Beckett, *CDW* 177, 178, 186.

[281] Beckett, *CDW* 188.

[282] McNally 173.

[283] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*, 4th ed. (Washington: Amer. Psychiatric Assn., 2003) 463-64.

[284] Beckett, *CDW* 276.

release Fox from his traumatic condition; thus, Animator blames himself for having failed to evoke it from Fox whenever the latter rehashes the old materials that he has already divulged.

Traumatic disruption also occurs in the perception of time as anachronism, the third symptom I will highlight here. When a traumatic memory recurs uncontrollably, the duplication of the past event in the present can blur the distinction between imagination and reality. Past memory reproduces itself as present, with the effect as in Beckett's *Proust* that "the experience is at once imaginative and empirical."[285] Disordered memory causes a breach in the linear flow of time; that is, one is confused about the perception of time when the memory recurs repeatedly in response to trauma and produces a sense of timelessness. As we have noted, *Embers* is liminal both spatially and temporally; opposites pass porously over into each other here. Henry's concern to train a horse to mark time further emphasises his need to reaffirm an ordered, linear sense of time.[286] Ada too has "lost count of time" when asked about Addie's age, for she is enveloped in a condition in which time is indifferent.[287] These examples point towards the traumatic condition of anachronism.

Dominick LaCapra explains that trauma causes anachronism (and disorientation) because traumatic memory:

> returns in nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety attacks, and other forms of intrusively repetitive behavior characteristic of an all-compelling frame. Traumatic memory (at least in Freud's account) may involve belated temporality and a period of latency between real or fantasized early event

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[285] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 544.

[286] Beckett, *CDW* 253, 257.

[287] Beckett, *CDW* 261.

and a later one that somehow recalls it and triggers renewed repression or foreclosure and intrusive behavior. But when the past is uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no difference between it and the present. Whether or not the past is reenacted or repeated in its precise literality, one feels as if one were back there relieving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses.[288]

Thus van der Kolk and van der Hart argue that trauma victims "tell the story of their traumatisation with a mixture of past and present."[289] Lawrence L. Langer studies the memory of a trauma sufferer and discovers a mixed perception of time as "a permanent duality, not exactly a split or a doubling but a parallel existence," which traps the victim in a condition of "*simultaneity.*"[290] Drawing on a case study from Auschwitz, Langer discovers that "witnesses are both willing and reluctant to proceed with the chronology, they frequently hesitate because they know that their most complicated recollections are unrelated to time."[291] His study of the testimonies shows that linear time—what we might, in literary terms, call the time of novelistic realism—is irrelevant to traumatic suffers and cannot be synchronised with their memory of the event.

Repetition always breeds confusion, and this is why after having "been up and down these steps five thousand times," Dan ends up not knowing how many stairs there are in *All That Fall*, and also why Henry does not know if he has his jaeger underwear on: "What happened was this, I put them on and then I took them off again

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[288] LaCapra, *WHWT* 89.

[289] Van der Kolk and van der Hart 178.

[290] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Heaven: Yale UP, 1991) 95.

[291] Langer 174.

then I put them on again and then I took them off again and then I took them on again."[292] Remembering a catalytic event is traumatic, precisely at the moment when one "suffers from the hallucination that what has been left behind is still before him," and it involves what Beckett terms Proust's "cruelty of memory."[293] According to Stephen K. Levine, repetition of traumatic memories "cannot be integrated into a continuity of the temporal flow of the person's experience; it is discontinuous, a break in history which is interruptive, recurring again and again."[294] Since traumatic repetition involves an involuntary process, it is no wonder that victims are confused about the sequence of incidents.

Repetition invokes a disorder of memory, which is a key symptom of the modern-day diagnosis for PTSD: it stresses that the horrifying event from the past haunts the present and causes mental distress.[295] In *Embers*, there are times when the sea becomes rough in response to Henry's turbulent emotions, as when he is caught in his momentary reminiscences of what happened to Ada twenty years ago. At times, he summons other sounds or tells the Bolton-Holloway story in order to drown out the sound of the sea, and Ada recalls how Addie caught Henry "talking all the time" to avoid hearing the sea.[296] Ada questions why Henry hates "a lovely peaceful gentle soothing sound" and why he is unable to stay away from the sea, and I suggest that his reaction to the sea epitomizes his unconscious psyche. Evidently the sea has an impact on Henry because he is traumatised by his father's possible suicide by drowning.

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[292] Beckett, *CDW* 189, 257.

[293] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 537.

[294] Levine 71.

[295] McNally 9.

[296] Beckett, *CDW* 260.

Marjorie Perloff suggests that "the sea . . . is the scene of his father's probable suicide,"

judging from the implication of Henry's remark: "that evening bathe you took once

too often," and the fact that they never found the body.[297] Paul Lawley also suggests

that "This death bears a deeply ambiguous relation to suicide, and suicide casts its

shadow over the whole play."[298] Duncan McColl Chesney elaborates on Perloff's

assumption about paternal suicide, leading to the association of the sea and Henry's

psychological problem with its sound: "Henry cannot escape the sound of the sea that

reminds him of his father's apparent suicide many years ago, for which he still feels

guilt and which seems to be the defining experience of his life."[299] The oppressive

effect of the sea where the silence below the surface is "as quiet as the grave," fails to

comfort Henry because he knows that the sea *is* his father's grave.[300] The use of

gramophone, voice or the rival sounds of hooves or drips to "drown it" has no chance

against the sea's own drowning power that is brought home to the listener by every

sea-sound-filled pause.[301]

  As we have seen, a traumatised person has no recollection of how the incident

happened as a result of the defence mechanism which represses it in the unconscious;

however, an unconscious reaction is aroused when a relevant impetus is proffered. For

Henry, the cause of the trauma remains hidden in his unconscious; the sound of the sea,

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[297] Marjorie Perloff, "The Silence That Is Not Silence: Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett's *Embers*," *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*, ed. Lois Oppenheim, Border Crossings 2 (New York: Garland, 1999) 253-54; Beckett, *CDW* 253.

[298] Paul Lawley, "*Embers*: An Interpretation," *The Beckett Studies Reader*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1993) 105.

[299] Duncan McColl Chesney, *Silence Nowhen: Late Modernism, Minimalism and Silence in the Work of Samuel Beckett*, Currents in Compar. Romance Langs. and Lits. 217 (New York: Peter Lang, 2013) 171.

[300] Beckett, *CDW* 261.

[301] Beckett, *CDW* 261.

however, is a stimulus for the traumatic incident that triggers his uncontrolled reactions. It thus becomes clear both why he always returns to the sea unconsciously, and why he dreads its sound without knowing why.

Such a return to the source of evocation is also presented in *Rough for Radio I*, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. As I have suggested in the epigraph to the Introduction, the male protagonist He constantly twists the knobs to play the faint sounds of Voice and Music in *Rough for Radio I*; he even calls these elements his "need[s]," and the procedure of tuning into them has "become a need," a phrase which suggests his traumatic compulsion.[302] The less obscure texts of *Words and Music* or *Cascando* provide more clues as to the use of Voice or Words and Music as traumatic stimuli. Croak demands that Words and Music play together, and his emotions are constantly evoked, leading to his memory of the nose, the lips and Lily.[303] The same endeavour is also suggested in *Cascando*, despite the fact that Opener no longer reveals any emotional involvement in the performances of Voice and Music, but simply demands that they open and close.

Fragmentation of narration is the final symptom of trauma I will discuss here. In the cases of the Bolton-Holloway story in *Embers*, Fox's soliloquy in *Rough for Radio II* and the Woburn story in *Cascando*, the articulations of Henry, Fox and Voice are incomplete and broken. Edna Foa states that traumatic narration is often fragmented into "repeated phrases, speech fillers, and unfinished thoughts that disrupt the smooth flow of the story."[304] Amnesia thus prevents the constitution of a comprehensive narrative structure. Van der Kolk also observes that trauma survivors

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[302] Beckett, *CDW* 269.

[303] Beckett, *CDW* 292.

[304] Qtd. in McNally 135.

are unable to constitute a coherent narration while reconstructing their painful stories, and regards this as due to their highly unstable mental condition.[305] When victims recall their traumatic experience, the release of abreaction (release of emotional tension in response to traumatic evocation) may interfere with shapely utterance. Stephen K. Levine argues that trauma "fragments experience and prevents any totalization into a whole," so the narration of a traumatic event is often dissociative, repeated and emotional, and some significant episodes are forgotten or omitted.[306]

In *Proust*, Beckett suggests that "When the subject is exempt from will the object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental apperception that can capture the Model, the Ideal, the Thing in itself."[307] He thus implies that the retrieval of the real is achieved through transcendence of time and space in involuntary memory; however, the engagement with trauma often involves both voluntary and involuntary memory, and the real image of involuntary memory is distorted when voluntary memory supervenes. Dominick LaCapra notes that the nature of trauma "invites distortion, disrupts genres or bounded areas, and threatens to collapse distinctions."[308] With the impossibility of totality, "The traumatic imagination"—to use Levine's term—"rejects the notion of art as providing meaning in extreme suffering" because traumatic fragmentation fails to deliver the full story of the event.[309] It is accordingly more

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[305] Qtd. in McNally 135.

[306] Levine 17.

[307] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 552. This formulation also looks forward to my discussion of modernist epiphany in Chapter Five section two.

[308] LaCapra, *WHWT* 96.

[309] Levine 18.

sensible to grasp that "it [trauma] just *is*."[310]

It is thus essential for memory to aspire to a legitimate and comprehensive narration, without being distorted by the speech act. According to Beckett's *Proust*, the performance of suffering "opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience," and he notes that:

> the central impression of a past sensation recurs as an immediate stimulus which can be instinctively identified by the subject with the model of duplication (*whose integral purity has been retained because it has been forgotten*), then the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself, annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction.[311]

The sensation of past traumatic experience remains intact, and the memory is inscribed in the body. Such memory may be retrievable from the engagement of the body; however, conducting observation of the aberrant body is impossible since the very nature of radio (which is my focus here) forbids visual contact. How, then, do we access the traumatic memories of the body without actually seeing physical movement in performance?

If, according to Beckett, a "strange real voice" is used to measure "its owner's suffering," then Maddy's wild laughter in *All That Fall*, according to Donald McWhinnie, conveys a "cynical belief in survival" in Beckett's work.[312] Drawing also from the suggestion in *Proust* that the first nature deals with the suffering of being and dying, and that anxiety contains reality, the performance of suffering in the radio plays

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[310] Levine 17.

[311] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 520, 543.

[312] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 519; McWhinnie 150.

is clearly connected to the real and seeks to re-establish the original traumatic event.[313]

"The suffering of being," according to Beckett, is "the free play of every faculty" in their engagement with trauma.[314] Such engagement is derived from the protagonists' aural performance (such as wild laughter or howling) on the radio. Fox's vehement reactions when his memory of past acquaintances Maud and his brother emerges in *Rough for Radio II*, or Croak's agony when responding to certain evocative key words in *Words and Music*, are examples of how the traumatic memory of the body is translated to aural performance without distorting its meaning on the linguistic level.

Van der Kolk and van der Hart suggest that "The more the contextual stimuli resemble conditions prevailing at the time of the original storage, the more retrieval is likely. Thus, memories are reactivated when a person is exposed to a situation, or is in a somatic state, reminiscent of the one when the original memory was stored."[315] Trauma-related words or stimuli referring to the specific locale and condition of the primal event serve as "Automatic stimulation," which causes victims "to immediately access sights, sounds and smells related to earlier traumatic events."[316] Victims are convinced that they are reliving the past. Enforcement of stress is believed to improve memory, but this is functional only up to a certain level. Securing the right means and level of stimulus can apparently improve access to the traumatic memory.

Such exposure to stimuli is analogous to the moment when the hinny is whipped to make her advance in *All That Fall*, and it is interesting that Maddy is enthusiastic about the practice and would gladly receive such affliction herself: "If

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[313] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 515-17.

[314] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 516.

[315] Van der Kolk and van der Hart 174.

[316] McNally 178.

someone were to do that for me I should not dally."[317] Similarly, in the vivid torture

scene in *Rough for Radio II*, Fox receives blows from the whip or kisses, as impetus to

"stir some fibre" and help him to advance.[318] Animator clearly sympathizes with

Fox's plight both physically and mentally, but physical pain seems necessary to gain

access to trauma, although Animator is also aware of the futility of his efforts in

addressing Fox: "It [Fox's condition] does not lie entirely with us, we know. You

might prattle away to your latest breath and still the one . . . thing remain unsaid that

can give you back your darling solitudes, we know. But this much is sure: the more

you say the greater your chances."[319] The outcome is locally positive when Fox does

respond to Animator's torment, and he has indeed made some remarkable

breakthroughs in his memory, although there are also times when the level of stress is

overwhelming and he simply faints away. Oddly, it is the kisses rather than the blows

of the whip that cause him to faint, which suggests that Fox is not so much tormented

by physical suffering as by human affection or "a touch of kindness."[320] As I have

repeatedly stressed, to attempt to restore trauma directly in conscious narration is to

distort it, thus specialists like van der Kolk or Caruth seek traumatic memory from the

articulation of the body in terms of screaming, panting, laughing and the like.

Christina Wald stresses that the traumatic moment can "be only lived through

physically," because the body can replay the memory of trauma without

falsification.[321]

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[317] Beckett, *CDW* 173.

[318] Beckett, *CDW* 282.

[319] Beckett, *CDW* 281.

[320] Beckett, *CDW* 278. I will return to this issue, from a Foucauldian viewpoint, in Chapter Three
section one.

[321] Wald 97.

Given our study of the paradigms of traumatic repetition, we are able to identify symptoms, to understand how obsessional neuroses or traumatic impulses govern the actions of victims, and to grasp how trauma surfaces from the unconscious to declare its existence. We now need to look further into the sources of trauma in Beckett's radio plays. For example, the dynamics of Henry's affliction in *Embers* indicates a hostile relation with his father and the possibility or even likelihood of the latter's suicide, and it is clearly the case that he is traumatised by this relationship. We can interpret the entire play as Henry's endeavour to be reconciled with his father. The son discloses in a flashback memory that his refusal to go for a swim results in his father's attack: "A washout, that's all you are, a washout!" The emergence of this memory causes agony, and is evidently a traumatic scar his father has branded upon him. Henry is convinced he has let his father down, and is haunted by his father's negative opinion: "You wouldn't know me now, you'd be sorry you ever had me."[322]

When we catch Maddy's constant slips of the tongue in *All That Fall*, we may conclude that her mental distress is in part inflicted by Dan. For example, Maddy protests against Mr. Tyler putting his hand on her shoulder for balance by stating "No, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean."[323] This mistake is made again when Mr. Tyler rushes her to the train station, which irritates her into exclaiming: "Will you get on along with you, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean."[324] Maddy's slip of the tongue should not be reduced to a mere verbal mistake, but articulates her unconscious resentment. When she pleads repeatedly with Dan to be kind to her, her appeals suggest that she has

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[322] Beckett, *CDW* 256.

[323] Beckett, *CDW* 175.

[324] Beckett, *CDW* 176.

suffered from his cruel bitterness and from the fact that she is stuck with him.[325] Thus,

when Maddy encounters similar circumstances as triggering points (either being asked

to exercise kindness or being forced against her will), her repressed compulsive

agitation erupts. Provoked by Mr. Tyler, her slips of the tongue are actually an

unconscious protest intended originally for Dan.

Stephen K. Levine considers that Beckett's work successfully represents

trauma, because he often sends his characters on a chaotic and meaningless journey

that gives readers "the horizon of terror" instead of a beautiful "harmonious

totality."[326] The journey motif is evident in Maddy's arduous walk to and from the

train station in *All That Fall*, in the mental quest whereby Henry seeks to retrieve a

traumatic memory of his father in *Embers*, or in Woburn's obscure journeying in

Cascando. Beckett's writing also seems to echo Dominick LaCapra's comment on the

literature of traumatic writing:

> Some of the most powerful forms of modern art and writing, as well as
>
> some of the most compelling forms of criticism . . . often seem to be
>
> traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma.
>
> They may also involve the feeling of keeping faith with trauma in a
>
> manner that leads to a compulsive preoccupation with aporia, an endlessly
>
> melancholic, impossible mourning, and a resistance to working through.[327]

Beckett's writing does indeed resist closure, and the dynamics of plot resembling a

continuous labyrinth is certainly suggestive of traumatic writing. I have indicated

examples of traumatic symptoms in the radio plays and suggested causes of trauma for

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[325] Beckett, *CDW* 197, 188.

[326] Levine 18.

[327] LaCapra, *WHWT* 23.

Beckett's characters: Maddy is traumatized by the death of her daughter and her

husband's behaviour in *All That Fall*, and Henry by both his relationship with his

father and the latter's suicide in *Embers*. However, it remains highly unlikely that we

can single out a specific event that traumatises the characters, due to the elusive nature

of the radio plays. Moreover, the study of traumatic representations often leads to even

more enigmatic and complex issues of therapy in clinical practice. I do not intend to

discuss therapeutic treatment leading to traumatic replay of the original event here, but

we should at least note that Maddy Rooney has some limited insight into her own

psychological disturbances. She admits to a "lifelong preoccupation with horses'

buttocks," which (if we remember Addie's horse-riding lessons in *Embers*) may itself

be related to the traumatic death of her daughter; as my epigraph to this chapter

suggests, she has been to lectures by the "new mind doctors" to try and find insight

into and presumably help for her condition.[328] The mind doctor in question (based on

Carl Jung) tells the story of a girl who "had never really been born" and who died

shortly afterwards, an apt analogy to Maddy's own lost daughter, but perhaps also a

metaphor for all those characters who are caught up in old compulsions and cannot

hoist themselves free of them.[329] I suspect that vertical motion in this play (which is

largely a matter of horizontal journeying to and fro) represents an effort at such

psychic self-transcendence, as with Maddy's extraordinarily laboured climb up the

station steps. For when she reaches the top, she does momentarily have a serene and

commanding aerial view of her surroundings: "the hills, the plain, the racecourse with

its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside

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[328] Beckett, *CDW* 195.

[329] Beckett, *CDW* 196.

station . . . I see it all."[330]   But, as the play's title powerfully suggests, such rare

moments of psychic harmony cannot be sustained: however high you climb, you

inevitably fall again, as symbolised by the falling rain at the end of the play. You fall

either physically in the pratfalls of *Waiting for Godot*, or more metaphorically, back

into your obsessions and symptoms.

4.   Beckett and the War

The last section of this chapter moves beyond identifying traumatic symptoms

and local causes of trauma in the radio plays to explore the ultimate roots of

Beckettian trauma in relation to the historical event of World War Two. Many Beckett

scholars have detected the imprint of trauma in Beckett's work, which they link to his

pre-war and wartime experiences. I shall therefore seek to marry close textual analysis

of the radio drama with such shaping historical influences as Beckett's experiences in

Germany before the outbreak of World War Two, his involvement in the French

Resistance during the war, and his participation in the Irish Red Cross immediately

after it. I will use his letters and German Diaries, and adopt a testimonial approach

based on his involvement in the war to suggest how his writing comes to terms with

trauma, and how both his radio plays and the medium of radio itself for him are tied to

the experience of war. I shall be heavily reliant here on two published volumes of *The*

Letters of Samuel Beckett, Mark Nixon's critical commentary on *Samuel Beckett's*

German Diaries 1936-1937 (2011), and James Knowlson's biographical account in

Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett (1996).

Before the war, Beckett made trips to Germany for artistic purposes; his

engagement with local painters made him recognize "the difficulties that they were

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[330] Beckett, *CDW* 185.

experiencing with the Nazi authorities."[331] Through the circle of the numerous

painters or art collectors he associated with in Hamburg, Knowlson suggests that

"Beckett gained his clearest insight into the forms that Nazi opposition to them and

their work was taking."[332] In a letter to Mary Manning Howe, Beckett commented on

the terrible state of Germany which impeded artists to the point that "All the modern

pictures are in the cellars."[333] Although he couldn't have predicted that war would

break out soon after he returned to Ireland, the conditions he had learned of previously

made him genuinely concerned about artistic expression under the politically imposed

restrictions. On learning over the radio on 3 September 1939 that war had broken out,

Beckett returned to France the following day, possibly because he wanted to assist his

friend Alfred Péron to evacuate his family, or apparently according to Beckett because:

"I preferred France in war to Ireland in peace."[334]

However, he could not have understood the full seriousness of the war, and his

presence in France at that time jeopardised his safety. This perhaps explains why

Beckett confided to George Reavey his wish to return to Ireland via Spain.[335] His

attitude was seemingly ambivalent at this stage: he was aware of the risk and dangers

he exposed himself to, yet on the other hand, he wished to fight against the Nazi

regime as he stated that: "you simply couldn't stand by with your arms folded,"

despite the neutrality of his country.[336] Partly due to the practical difficulty of going

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[331] Knowlson 237.

[332] Knowlson 238.

[333] Beckett, *LSB* 1: 397. Letter dated 13 December 1936.

[334] Knowlson 297; qtd. in Israel Shenker, "An Interview with Beckett" (1956), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge, 1979) 146.

[335] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 3.

[336] Knowlson 304. Samuel Beckett to Alec Reid, Paris, 10 Feb. 1966 (Reid, in private hands).

back to Ireland after the outbreak of war, and partly because his Jewish friend Paul

Léon was arrested during the second mass round-up of Jews in Paris on 21 August

1941, Beckett joined the French Resistance in the cell called "Gloria SMH" on 1st

September.[337]

Names within the cell were kept in utmost secrecy, even nicknames were

avoided because once captured by the Nazis, "Agents could not reveal under torture

what they did not know."[338] Although Beckett was not exposed to immediate danger

as an agent, Knowlson comments that his handling of classified documents was

perilous because of the:

> delivery to him of the scraps of paper which could have caused a lot of
>
> suspicious traffic to his flat; the physical presence of clandestine material
>
> there, while he was processing it; and finally, and most dangerous of all,
>
> since the material had not yet been miniaturised, the transportation of the
>
> sheets of typed information to his own contact.[339]

When the war was over, Beckett returned home and visited his mother whom

he had not seen for many years, but he was soon anxious to return to France. An

opportunity arrived when the Irish Red Cross decided to build a hospital in the

destroyed town of Saint-Lô in Normandy; Beckett was hired as interpreter and

storekeeper to the unit.[340] When he arrived, he was deeply shocked by the sight of

Saint-Lô:

> St. Lô is just a heap of rubble, la Capitale des Ruines as they call it in

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[337] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 21n9. Léon had been James Joyce's assistant and was deported to Auschwitz on 27 March 1942.

[338] Knowlson 305.

[339] Knowlson 309.

[340] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 15. Samuel Beckett to Gwynned Reavey, 21 June 1945.

France. Of 2600 buildings 2000 completely wiped out, 400 badly damaged

and 200 "only" slightly. It all happened in the night of the 5th to 6th June. It

has been raining hard the last few days and the place is a sea of mud. What

it will be like in winter is hard to imagine. No lodging of course of any

kind. We stayed just with the chatelaine of Tancry, about 4 miles out, in a

huge castle with a 12th century half wing still standing. But since last

Wednesday we have been with a local doctor in the town, quite near the

hospital site, all 3 in one small room and Alan and I sharing a bed! We are

chivvying the architect to get at least one hut ready, even without water or

sanitary arrangements, so that we can occupy it.[341]

The experience at Saint-Lô had such an abysmal impact on Beckett that he wrote a

report on "The Capital of Ruins" for Radio Telefís Éireann on 10th June 1946, and this

may be his first encounter with radio as a writer:

When I reflect now on the recurrent problems of what, with all proper

modesty, might be called the heroic period, on one in particular so arduous

and elusive that it literally ceased to be formulable, I suspect that our pains

were those inherent in the simple and necessary and yet so unattainable

proposition that their way of being we, was not our way and that our way

of being they, was not their way. . . . some of those who were in Saint-Lô

will come home realising that they got at least as good as they gave, that

they got indeed what they could hardly give, a vision and sense of a

time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an

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[341] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 18-19. Samuel Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy, 19 August 1945.

inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again.[342]

Although it remains unclear if the piece was actually broadcast, this experience may contribute to his later exploration of radio for aesthetic purposes. So, radio and war come personally together for Beckett in a way that encouraged active writing for the medium, and this particular piece is a first-hand response to the war, which will support my later description of him as a witness of it. Indeed, the "sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins" would serve as a good overall description of Beckett's entire literary career.

The impact is also revealed in his highly enigmatic poem "Saint-Lô" (1946):

> Vire will wind in other shadows
>
> unborn through the bright ways tremble
>
> and the old mind ghost-forsaken
>
> sink into its havoc.[343]

This powerful poem gives the impression that the debris of the destroyed town and its shadowy past lay the ground for the future reconstruction of Saint-Lô. Beckett seems to ask his readers that they remember the "havoc," for fear that the catastrophe that took place here in the past should be "ghost-forsaken" when the rebuilding is complete. According to Knowlson, the emotional impact of all this is substantial enough for us to regard Beckett's postwar work as traumatic writing: "It was there that he witnessed real devastation and misery: buildings—each one someone's home—reduced to rubble."[344]

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[342] Qtd. in Eoin O'Brien, "Saint-Lô: 'Humanity in Ruins,'" *The House of Industry Hospitals 1772-1987 The Richmond, Whitworth and Hardwicke (St Laurence's Hospital): A Closing Memoir*, ed. and comp. O'Brien, Lorna Browne and Kevin O'Malley (Monkstown: Anniversary, 1988) 284-85.

[343] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 38. "Saint-Lô" was published in *The Irish Times* on 24 June 1946.

[344] Knowlson 350. See Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland* (Dubin: Black Cat, 1986) 333-37.

The connection to radio broadcasting is also evident in the way that Beckett immediately went to France to assist his friend Alfred Péron when he heard Chamberlain announce the outbreak of war with Germany on the radio. On another occasion, he showed distaste after listening to Adolf Hitler and Goebbels's speeches on the radio.[345] Beckett thus experienced how radio broadcasting was utilized as an important tool for transmitting information and Nazi propaganda in wartime. The propagandist value of broadcasting is also recognized by Martin Esslin, drawing from his experience of working with the BBC as a translator at the outbreak of the war: "I succeeded in getting transferred into the section which broadcast in German to Germany and was, in fact, the very fascinating front line of the psychological and propaganda battle with the Goebbels propaganda machine."[346]

The cultural politics of radio in World War Two has been explored by historian Asa Briggs in *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom.* European listeners during the war see radio as a "source of consolation" according to a Romanian listener, or as "the only ray of hope," as a Hungarian listener puts it.[347] So important was radio that André Philip, who escaped from France and took part in de Gaulle's Government as an Interior Minister for the Free French during the war, announced that "If there is resistance in France, it is due to the BBC."[348] Briggs suggests that the widespread broadcasting of BBC news reports led to the unity of separate resistance operations across the Europe. Not only did listeners tune in for news, however, but "the audience

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[345] Knowlson 261. Qtd. originally from SB's GD, notebook 1, 6 Oct. 1936.

[346] Esslin, *Mediations* 2.

[347] Qtd. in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965-95) 3: 12.

[348] Qtd. in Briggs 3: 11.

for radio drama actually doubled between 1939 and 1945."[349] Radio was also an

important part of military action: "During the Second World War wireless, offering

flexibility and mobility, became in its various forms [such as radio or wireless

telephony] the most important method of military communications."[350]

I have focused on Beckett's involvement in the French Resistance during the

war and his participation in the Irish Red Cross effort to support the war-stricken town

of Saint-Lô, and I have stressed how his experience of the war is tied to radio

broadcasting. However, it is problematic to view the war as the source of Beckettian

trauma, for his works famously or notoriously defy obvious connection to any

historical event. According to Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*, "Beckett's refusal to

interpret his works . . . combined with the most extreme consciousness of techniques

and of the implications of the theatrical and linguistic material, is not merely a

subjective aversion: As reflection increases in scope and power, content itself becomes

even more opaque."[351] However, not readily yielding meaning should not suggest that

his work is void of meaning or meaningless, and Adorno insists that Beckett's

disapproval of interpretation "does not mean that interpretation can be dispensed with

as if there were nothing to interpret; to remain content with that is the confused claim

that all the talk about the absurd gave rise to."[352] Dominick LaCapra, on the other

hand, refers to Beckett's unconventional narration as an index of his intention to

address "the problem of absence" by excluding "events in any significant way and

[349] Briggs 3: 46.

[350] I. C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot eds., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 721.

[351] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, introd. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone, 1999) 27.

[352] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 27.

seem to be abstract, evacuated, or disembodied."[353] Beckett's style of writing thus

circulates around a central void, and it mirrors LaCapra's notion of "Emulative writing"

as an "unmodulated orphic, cryptic, indirect, allusive form that may render or transmit

the disorientation of trauma but provides too little a basis for attempts to work it

through even in symbolic terms."[354] This mode of writing perhaps evokes the

encrypted files or anagrammatic messages transported and exchanged among secret

agents in wartime. However, LaCapra's suggestion is more related to trauma by

considering how emulative writing "opens itself to the reinscription or emulation of

disorienting, disruptive, post-traumatic movements in the most powerful and engaging

literary texts or works of art."

The "indirection or veiled allusiveness" of Beckett's work is associated with

LaCapra's testimonial writing, characterized as that is by absence of theme or

controlling plot:

> It may even be a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some
>
> extent, working over and through trauma whether personally experienced,
>
> transmitted from intimates, or sensed in one's large social and cultural
>
> setting. Indeed, such writing, with significant variations, has been
>
> prevalent since the end of the nineteenth century in figures as different as
>
> Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Flaubert, Woolf, Blanchot, Kafka, Celan, Beckett,
>
> Foucault, and Derrida. One crucial form it takes—notably in figures such
>
> as Blanchot, Kafka, Celan, and Beckett—is what might perhaps be seen as
>
> a writing of terrorized disempowerment as close as possible to the
>
> experience of traumatized victims without presuming to be identical to

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[353] LaCapra, *WHWT* 49.

[354] LaCapra, *WHWT* 106.

it.[355]

LaCapra goes on to stress that Beckett's work approximates to "testimonial art" because it is filled with "experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulation of trauma in what might be called traumatized or post-traumatic writing ('writing' in a broad sense that extends to all signification or inscription)."[356] An underlying matrix of testimony and trauma in Beckett's writing is therefore suggested. David Houston Jones's monograph *Samuel Beckett and Testimony* (2011) links a testimonial study of Beckett to the event of Auschwitz, and this connection is reinforced by Adorno's comment in *Negative Dialectics* that "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps – a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban. What is, he [Beckett] says, is like a concentration camp."[357] Elsewhere Adorno candidly addresses Beckett's hidden notion of the Holocaust in the following observation:

> At ground zero, however, where Beckett plays unfold like forces in infinitesimal physics, a second world of images springs forth, both sad and rich, the concentrate of historical experiences that otherwise, in their immediacy, fail to articulate the essential: the evisceration of subject and reality. This shabby, damaged world of images is the negative imprint of the administered world.[358]

From LaCapra's suggestion to Adorno's assertion, the connection to World War Two has to be tentative because Beckett's obscure texts do away with an interpretive centre

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[355] LaCapra, *WHWT* 188, 105-06.

[356] LaCapra, *WHWT* 105.

[357] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (1966; London: Routledge, 1973) 380.

[358] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 31.

or a controlling theme, or with reference to any particular historical event. Although

Beckett did not explicitly write about his experience of the war, his works can be

associated with the writing of testimony, as responses to his traumatic experience of it.

We therefore need to turn our attention to Beckett's elusive style of writing,

and to explore how the very act of writing for him serves as a representation of trauma.

I will now compare Freud's traumatic writing to that of Beckett to strengthen my

argument about the underlying impact of trauma connected with the war. According to

Freud's *The Origins of Religion*, trauma "may happen that a man who has experienced

some frightful accident—a railway collision, for instance—leaves the scene of the

event apparently uninjured."[359] With Freud's notion of traumatic neurosis in mind, I

will also invoke Cathy Caruth's analysis of "unconscious departure" to better

understand traumatic writing. She argues that "The trauma of the accident, its very

unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure," understood as the disintegration of

the primal event.[360] The unconscious act of departure, causing a belated return of the

traumatic event, "bears the impact of history;" Caruth argues that Freud's writing,

specifically his *Moses and Monotheism*, is "a historical act" based on his practice of

traumatic repetition:

> [*Moses and Monotheism*] is the site of trauma; a trauma that in this case,
>
> moreover, appears to be historically marked by the events that . . . divide
>
> the book into two halves: first, the infiltration of Nazism into Austria,
>
> causing Freud to withhold or repress the third part, and then the invasion
>
> of Austria by Germany, causing Freud to leave, and ultimately to bring the

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[359] Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Religion:* Totem and Taboo*, Moses and Monotheism *and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson, Penguin Freud Lib. 13 (1985; London: Penguin,1990) 309. I am pleased to note the coincidence of Freud's mention of railway trauma here and Beckett's assorted evocations of death and disturbance on trains or at stations in his fiction and *All That Fall*.

[360] Caruth 22.

third part to light. The structure and history of the book, in its traumatic

form or repression and repetitive reappearance, thus mark it as the very

bearer of a historical truth that is itself involved in the political

entanglement of Jews and their persecutors.[361]

Freud admits in "Summary and Recapitulation" that his own work is a repeated

version of what he has previously written in *Moses and Monotheism*: "The part of this

study . . . is nothing other than a faithful (and often word-for-word) repetition of the

first part [of the third Essay]," and he even admits that "Actually it has been written

twice."[362] In her book *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia*, Christina Wald also sees

Freud's compulsive repetition as his reaction to traumatisation, when he was

prevented from experiencing the original event in the conscious.[363] Freud's repetitive

writing may alert us to the possibility that repeating materials within one's own work

can be considered as writing in the wake of trauma. Moreover, Caruth observes that

Freud translates his work from German (his first language) to English, and this is also

an act of repetition due to the "rewriting of the departure within the languages of

Freud's text."[364] Translating one's own work into other languages can thus also on

occasion be seen as neurotic repetition of trauma.

We can apply Caruth's suggestion to Beckett's work, and see that too as a

response to a traumatic impact. Not only did he admit in a letter to Georges Duthuit

that he is "by nature obsessive," but he acknowledges that his habit of keeping a diary

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[361] Caruth 22, 19, 20.

[362] Freud, *The Origins of Religion* 349.

[363] Wald 98. However, Freud's repression is too much bound up with oedipal fantasies, which might lead to an irrelevant discussion in this chapter, and too much concerned with the compulsion of repression instead of the memory of trauma, which is the main concern in this part of my study.

[364] Caruth 23-24.

is an act of compulsive obsession: "The little trouble I give myself, this absurd diary with its lists of pictures, serves no purpose, is only the act of an obsessional neurotic."[365] His confession almost suggests that the act of writing is in fact his acting out of traumatic repetition. It might also be viable to argue that his relentless practice of translating from one language to another, as with Freud, is an enactment of traumatic neurosis. Beckett's literary work is characterized by repeating similar thematic concerns, yet none of the formulations is identical. Such non-identical repetitions in search of an impossible closure invoke Adorno's response: "Spurious infinity, the inability to close, becomes a freely chosen principle of method and expression. Beckett's play, which, rather than stopping repeats itself word for word, is a reaction to this."[366] What is more, literary repetition in this mode extends from one genre to another when Beckett tackles similar themes across short stories, novels, theatre plays, radio plays, television plays, and a film. And when he translates many of his works from English to French or German, or vice versa, he always effects minute variations upon the original works. It is as if Beckett, in the very act of writing, is compulsively striving to come to terms with his own experience of trauma.

Beckett's habit of writing thus plays out his neurotic obsession, and an extended practice of neurosis is enacted in counting, both biographically when "Counting pennies would do as well," and, famously, in his characters.[367] Dan is clearly obsessed with counting in *All That Fall* when he complains to Maddy: "We could have saved sixpence. We have saved fivepence;" and such relentless counting continues: "Your season-ticket, I said, costs you twelve pounds a year you earn, on an

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[365] Beckett, *LSB* 1: 150 (letter dated around April or May in 1949); qtd. in Knowlson 252 (SB's GD, notebook 4, dated 2 Feb. 1937).

[366] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 147.

[367] Qtd. in Knowlson 252. SB's GD, notebook 4, dated 2 Feb. 1937.

average, seven and six a day . . . Add to this—or subtract from it—rent, stationery, various subtractions, tramfares . . . you would add very considerably to your income;" even counting stairs, as I have noted, is included in the practices of neurotic obsession.[368] Murphy's biscuit-counting in that novel, and the stones swapped between pockets in *Molloy*, are further notable paradigms of the protagonists' obsessive neurosis. Further such acts can be included: for example, as a blind man, Dan is intently concerned about which way he is facing, and this is a similar to Hamm's obsessive need to be in the centre of the stage in *Endgame*. Ada's comment in *Embers* about geometry may suggest a similar impulse, because counting and mathematics suggest a world of manageable idealities. As neurotic behaviour, counting aims at consolidation and control, even though it may offer nothing more than a mere illusion of stability.

According to Cathy Caruth, writing in the form of "Repetition . . . is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's own survival.*"[369] As a survivor of his Resistance cell, it can be said that Beckett too is writing repeatedly to claim his survival. Caruth goes on to suggest that "If history is to be understood as the history of a trauma, it is a history that is experienced as the endless attempt to assume one's survival as one's own." Her insight also evokes the way Beckett's characters are driven to their compulsive story-telling—as with Henry's Bolton-Holloway story in *Embers* or the Woburn story in *Cascando*—to mark their existence on the radio and also to signal their survival of traumatic events.

Dominick LaCapra uses the term "Secondary traumatization" in *History in*

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[368] Beckett, *CDW* 193.

[369] Caruth 64.

Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory to refer to a removed yet acute experience of trauma, which is arguably a more suitable term for Beckett, given the nature of his involvement in the war.[370] We may say that Beckett suffered from secondary trauma as "in the case of those who treat traumatized victims or even in the case of interviewers who work closely with victims and survivors."[371] That is, secondary traumatization is inflicted on those who form a strong tie to the victims of war. This is surely the case when Beckett grieved at what happened to several of his friends: Paul Léon was arrested, starved, and tortured by the Germans and died afterwards; Alfred Péron was arrested and deported to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp; and Surrealist poet Robert Desnos, a member of the Resistance group AGIR from 1942, "died like Péron on his way home from deportation."[372] The aftermath at Saint-Lô, or even the appalling sight of the heavily bombed city of London, contributes to the possibility that Beckett is traumatized by the war, at least in the secondary sense that LaCapra suggests. We should also invoke Caruth's suggestion that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound."[373] Trauma is contagious and can pass from victims to the individuals who are engaging closely with them.[374]

I will now draw some tentative connections between the radio plays and Beckett's experience of the war. The rural sounds in *All That Fall* may suggest

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[370] Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004) 128.

[371] LaCapra, *WHWT* 102.

[372] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 19, 21nn8-9.

[373] Caruth 8.

[374] LaCapra, *WHWT* 142.

childhood memories, but might also be derived from his wartime experience of hiding in Roussillon in southern France.[375] When Maddy announces to Mr. Tyler that "This dust will not settle in our time," she is surely alluding to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's infamous "peace in our time" declaration in 1939; Kevin Branigan accordingly concludes that Beckett's first radio play is "a profound commentary on language's—and music's —fall from grace during the Second World War."[376] The tense, fraught, highly enigmatic conversation between He and She at the start of *Rough for Radio I* when they turn the knobs of Voice and Music, may hark back to the tension of listening to Allied radio in Nazi-occupied Paris. *Rough for Radio II* is highly suggestive of a torture sequence in a concentration camp or a torture chamber for Resistance agents. The name Dick in this play may remind us of Beckett's close friend Alfred Péron (also known as Dick) who held an important post in the French Resistance.

I have stressed the role that radio played in Beckett's experience of the war, so it may also be interesting to ask here what social role radio fulfilled when his radio plays were broadcast from 1957 onwards. In *All That Fall* Maddy asks "What would we want with dung, at our time of life," and the question is equally valid to ask of the radio, in the late 1950s and early 60s.[377] Does Beckett attempt to register the oblique but telling impact of the war in his radio plays as a reminder of "old times," now that "the best of [the epoch of radio] is past?"[378]

Radio may unleash unconscious memories among traumatized listeners,

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[375] Knowlson 325.

[376] Beckett, *CDW* 176; Branigan 139.

[377] Beckett, *CDW* 173.

[378] Beckett, *CDW* 189.

because, according to McNally, "hearing the voices of survivors would presumably trigger recollection in those whose memories were blocked from awareness."[379] Listening to Beckett's radio plays, as representations of trauma, can itself be traumatic because it may trigger listeners' empathy with the characters to the point where they too are affected by traumatic contagion. If it were possible, it would be interesting to investigate listeners' feedback during the broadcast of these plays in the late 1950s and after. For, at that period, the public in general was still greatly affected by the war and the horror of the Holocaust. We should note that, according to Freud, trauma is always in latency because "In the course of the next few weeks [after the primal incident] . . . he [the sufferer] develops a number of severe psychical and motor symptoms which can only be traced to his shock, the concussion or whatever else it was."[380] There is a lapse of time between the primal incident and its return as traumatic symptoms: "The time that has passed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is described as the 'incubation period,' in a clear allusion to the pathology of infectious diseases. . . . in the characteristic that might be described as 'latency.'"[381] By the time that Beckett's radio plays came out, then, some twelve or more years after the war, this may have been an opportune time for the public to confront their hidden war-related trauma while dealing with their repeated symptoms.

It seems to me that Beckett's radio plays are the place where he can most effectively explore trauma. Although the traumas depicted in the plays—Maddy's loss of her daughter, Henry's painful relation with and loss of his father, and so on—are not thematically connected with World War Two, I would suggest nevertheless that the

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[379] McNally 6.

[380] Freud 309.

[381] Freud 309-10.

latter is their underlying matrix. I want now to reflect on the relation of radio to the expression of trauma, and to the ways people listen to trauma. My approach to radio is to ask how it can become a medium to deliver traumatic performance, to evoke a transferred distress in its listeners.

If Beckett's radio plays do indeed present trauma, then the audiences are actually listening to traumatic wounds. "Bearing witness to a trauma is," according to Dori Laub, "a process that includes the listener" because "only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen to—himself" and re-weave the broken chain of his testimony.[382] Laub stresses that the essential role of the listener is to authenticate victims as a witness of atrocity in retelling their story of the unbearable past. On the other hand, "The absence of an empathic listener" as "*addressable other*" results in "annihilation of a narrative that, fundamentally, *cannot be heard* and of a story that *cannot be witnessed.*"[383] Without a listener, victims fail to engage with their own pain in a deep enough manner. Hence, testimony demands listeners in the act of the victims' retelling of their traumatic experience.

The demand for a listener or a companion—memorably given to us on stage in the role of the auditor in Beckett's *Not I*—is also evident in the radio plays. Henry asks Ada to listen to his story about Bolton and Holloway in *Embers*, and the female character is asked by the protagonist to listen to Voice and Music in *Rough for Radio I*. Laub proposes that when victims are aware of the existence of an audience, they will start to listen attentively to their own voice and even begin to weave a chain of traumatic testimony. Perhaps the demand for a listener in the radio plays seeks to authenticate the fragmented and compulsive stories they tell, as an act of bearing

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[382] Dori M.D. Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 70-71.

[383] Laub 68.

witness. Therefore, Animator and Stenographer in *Rough for Radio II* enact the role of listeners to bear witness to Fox's trauma in his broken soliloquy. Opener in *Cascando* serves as listener when Voice tells the story of Woburn, so that this narrative too may bring trauma to light.

The role of the listener in the plays themselves anticipates the way that radio listeners hear the plays. If the function of radio in traumatic performance is to stimulate the audiences' memory of traumatic events from the unconscious, it might well be objected that other forms of literary expression could also achieve this effect. So what makes radio a distinctive medium of traumatic representation? How has Beckett's experience of radio in the Resistance during World War Two affected the role of radio for him? Certainly other literary forms can depict trauma; however, I would tentatively suggest that radio is a more advantageous medium in performing these unstable themes because of its lack of a visual dimension, and because of its Surrealist connection to the unconscious as discussed in Chapter One section two. Due to the nature of trauma and its compulsive return, the very condition of traumatic performance is ambivalent; this is why the visual lack of the medium of radio (if we hark back to Paul Deharme's radio theory) more effectively presents the condition of trauma than other media that require the gaze. Every individual trauma is different, even Holocaust survivors experienced different aspects of the same event. Hence traumatic presentation, aiming at evoking individual pain, cannot be singular or identical. Stage, film or television represent trauma in almost too immediate, specific and sensuously concrete a fashion; however, sounds and voices without sight may stimulate a wide range of interpretations that can better effect connections to listeners' own memories. Aesthetically speaking, both radio and trauma retain a lack or gap that initiates a quest to fill it, either with visual images or with unconscious memories (or

both). As it is impossible to know exactly what victimized listeners are traumatized by, open-endedness in this area is advantageous and has a better chance of addressing a wide spectrum of traumatic pain.

Through the endeavour to fill in the gap or compensate for the lack, according to Laub, "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself."[384] In victims' testimony, listeners become co-authors of the primal event and form their own story when partaking in victims' memories, and this is why listening to such stories makes the listener both "a witness to the traumatic witness and a witness to himself."[385] In the case of Beckett, listeners are witnessing Beckett's war-related trauma as well as inspecting their own, because it is possible that in the late 1950s they retain a traumatic wound without realizing its existence.

The open-ended, non-visual nature of the medium enables the presentation of the ambiguous theme of trauma. Beckett's fascination with vagueness and uncertainty as his signature style strikes a chord with the characteristics of testimonial writing as discussed above – whether relatively overtly, as in the torture and interrogation sequences of *Rough for Radio II*, or more indirectly in other plays. Listeners cannot determine the actual situation of the ambiguous plot visually, thus using radio (and perhaps radio only) for traumatic presentation can enhance the therapeutic purpose. Since the sounds and voices from the radio disappear in thin air as soon as they are produced, this ephemeral and insubstantial aural element strengthens the ghostly effect of instability and enhances the possibility of traumatic association.

The Second World War had a profound impact on Beckett and contributed to

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[384] Laub 57.

[385] Laub 58.

his remarkable literary productivity afterwards. In fact, Knowlson confirms the effect of the war, arguing that "It is difficult to imagine him writing the stories, novels and plays that he produced in the creative maelstrom of the immediate postwar period without the experiences of those five years."[386] However, it is sometimes suggested that the proliferation of Beckett's work might not be caused by a single significant incident, however important, but rather by a constellation of experiences. Knowlson points out that:

> the notion of "THE Revelation" also obscures several earlier and less sudden or dramatic revelations: the certainty that he had to dissociate himself at an early stage from Joyce's influence; the reassessment necessitated by almost two years of psychotherapy; the effect on him of being stabbed and in danger of dying; the freedom to discover himself as a writer that living away from Ireland, freed from his mother's sternly critical influence, offered him; the impact of the war years, when his friends were arrested and he was forced to escape and live in hiding; and the greater objectivity that working with others at St-Lô allowed him to assume with respect to his own inner self. The ground had been well prepared.[387]

We should certainly allow for other and earlier biographical events playing their part in the disturbances of Beckett's psyche; but the vast historical cataclysm of World War Two catches up and transforms all such merely personal disturbances, and constitutes the matrix of trauma from which so much of Beckett's later literary work, and especially his radio plays, was born.

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[386] Knowlson 351.

[387] Knowlson 353.

CHAPTER THREE

Rough for Radio II and *What Where*: Towards a Foucauldian Reading

"Restraint and coercion were sometimes unavoidable, but must always be exerted with the utmost tenderness."[388]

In an interview with Charles Ruas in *Death and the Labyrinth*, Michel Foucault declares:

> I belong to that generation who, as students, had before their eyes, and were limited by, a horizon consisting of Marxism, phenomenology and existentialism. Interesting and stimulating as these might be, naturally they produced in the students completely immersed in them a feeling of being stifled, and the urge to look elsewhere. I was like all other students of philosophy at that time, and for me the break was first Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, a breathtaking performance.[389]

We can therefore find references to and quotations from Beckett at key points in Foucault's work. In "What is an Author?" he quotes "what does it matter who is speaking" from Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*, to reflect on the mode of expression in contemporary writing.[390] Another example is the inaugural address he gave at the Collège de France, where he invokes one of the protagonists of Beckett's Trilogy as he

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[388] *Murphy* in Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 96.

[389] Qtd. in Charles Ruas, "An Interview with Michel Foucault," *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, by Michel Foucault, trans. Ruas, introd. James Faubion, PS John Ashbery (London: Continuum, 2004) 176.

[390] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, et al. (London: Penguin, 1994) 205-22.

says: "I should like to have heard . . . the voice of Molloy."[391] Such instances give a

sense of Beckett as a pervasive and formative presence for Foucault, leading to

Richard Begam's provocative suggestion that "much of what we associate with

poststructuralism, both in its thematic preoccupations and in its formal innovations,

may be traced back to Beckett's five novels. This is most evident in Foucault's work

on 'cogito and madness,' 'the death of the author' and the 'end of man.'"[392] However,

I shall not deal with the issue of how Beckett influences Foucault any further here,

because the purpose of this chapter is to apply Foucault's theory to Beckett's radio

play *Rough for Radio II* and his theatre play *What Where* (1983).

Although my thesis is focused on the radio drama, this chapter includes the

theatre play *What Where* as well as *Rough for Radio II* for the following reasons.

Firstly, there is hardly any other Beckett work where violence and physical

punishment are so ubiquitous (unlike *Waiting for Godot*, say, that has a single episode

of coercion when Lucky is whipped). Secondly, my discussion of *What Where* only

aims at secondarily supporting my project of interlacing Beckett's work with

Foucault's theory; thus it will not, and should not, distract from my overall attention to

the radio drama in this thesis.

This chapter is based on Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and

panopticism in *Discipline and Punish* and *Power/Knowledge*, and is divided into three

sections: an analysis of coercion in the enforcement of docility, a discussion of

practical surveillance as panoptical institution, and my suggestion that we extend

Foucault's panoptic concept to the apparatus of radio itself in Beckett's radio drama.

Foucault's conceptual notion of disciplinary power stresses "the great confinement on

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[391] Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 215.

[392] Begam 11.

the one hand; the correct training on the other;" the former highlights the confining institution whereas the latter stresses docility.[393] I will therefore discuss issues around coercion and docility in *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where* in section one. In section two, I analyse the other mode of disciplinary power—confinement—in both plays as a critical basis to foreground the validation of Foucault's theory. But I will also combine his emphasis on disciplinary power with his notion of a panoptical institution to theorise Beckett's radio drama. I aim at reading Foucault's panopticism in a different light by juxtaposing it with the avant-garde medium of radio, and will examine his insight into the technology of the panopticon to show how the mechanism of surveillance is institutionalised within this apparatus. Although Foucault's panopticism has always been associated with visual surveillance, I propose that the function of visibility can be internalized. Thus I will argue that radio can be an alternative kind of monitoring medium. The study reassesses the power endowed in a confining apparatus in relation to the technological development of radio. The aim of my argument is to establish, in the final section, what I shall term the panoptic use of radio based on the way the medium is involved in presenting Beckett's radio drama.

1.   Coercion and Docility

This section explores the phenomenon of coerced docility in *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where* within the framework of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power. Such power deals with the employment of violence or torture, where "power is exercised as power, in the most archaic, puerile, infantile manner."[394] A famous

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[393] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Gordon, et al. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980) 198.

[394] Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and introd. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 210.

Beckettian example of this is the master-slave relationship between Pozzo and Lucky

in *Waiting for Godot*, in which Pozzo mercilessly whips Lucky to get him to move on.

An extended version of this conspicuous mode of coercion occurs when violence is

inflicted not on a human being, but on an animal. In *All That Fall*, for example,

Maddy suggests giving the hinny a harsh welt in order to make her move.

In fact, we can find the practice of violence on a different level throughout the

radio plays. For instance, in *Word and Music* Croak, the coordinator, forces Words and

Music to cooperate as an act of violence. Similarly, Voice and Music are dominated by

Opener's orders for performance in *Cascando*. The dominating subject coerces the

conditioned object into obedience, and this oppositional relation clearly enacts the

tension of power in these plays. However, I shall not examine these examples of

implicit violence, but shall focus on explicit coercion instead, because this is where

power is straightforwardly implemented. Foucault's disciplinary power operates in the

practice of coercion by enforcing docility onto the subjugated, as I shall demonstrate

below in *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where*.

I must also introduce Foucault's notion of productivity here in order to

understand the purpose of disciplinary power and coercion. According to Foucault,

productivity is the aim of power because "power produces . . . reality; it produces

domains of objects and rituals of truth."[395] That is, the aim of productivity is to

acquire the knowledge of truth, and he goes on to clarify as follows:

> [Knowledge] is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice, and
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> which is specified by that fact: the domain constituted by the different
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> objects that will or will not acquire a scientific status (the knowledge of

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[395] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977) 194.

psychiatry in the nineteenth century is not the sum of what was thought to be true, but the whole set of practices, singularities, and deviations of which one could speak in psychiatric discourse).[396]

We humans are concerned with the knowledge of truth in relation to power. Foucault argues that "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth." Therefore, we are driven by force "to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth."[397] We are bound to the question of knowledge because we are enclosed and enveloped in its relation to power where "power *is* 'always already there,' . . . one is never 'outside' it, . . . there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in."[398] In other words, knowledge is the aim of disciplinary power. That is also to indicate that disciplinary power responds to the unconscious compulsion to know the truth, to acquire the knowledge that is veiled from conscious awareness, by employing coercion to aid in its production. We can see such coercion at work in *What Where*, whose characters are tied to the procurement of "what" has been said and "where" it has been said – Foucauldian productivity to know is a key issue in the employment of power here.

Foucault suggests that "The chief function of the disciplinary power is to 'train'" by enforcing strict discipline, which is also the necessary means to produce knowledge; thus I will investigate how docility is employed as one of the coercive

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[396] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Travistock, 1972) 182.

[397] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordan, trans. Gordon, et al. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980) 93.

[398] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 141.

disciplines in both *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where*.[399] Docility results from

training the body to "be subjected, used, transformed and improved . . . manipulated,

shaped, trained," so that it "obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its

forces."[400] The process involves meticulous moulding of automatic response to the

imposed signal, which "contained in its mechanical brevity both the technique of

command and the morality of obedience." In other words, power demands obedience

from the subjugated body for manipulation and control, and I will examine how this

mode of discipline is exercised on the characters in both plays.

 Rough for Radio II is a radio piece written in French in the early 1960s as

Pochade radiophonique, and subsequently it was published in English in Beckett's

own translation and broadcast on the BBC in 1976. The plot is replete with orders

given and obeyed among four characters – Animator, Stenographer, Fox and Dick.

The play begins when Animator checks with Stenographer about the tools for

documentation – writing pad and spare pencils. Animator issues commands to Fox and

the mute Dick, while Stenographer documents Fox's monologues and reactions.

Whenever Animator demands movement or speech from Fox, he thumps his ruler on

his desk and then Dick, possessing a bull's pizzle as a whip, produces formidable

thuds accordingly. When Animator's direct order to Fox fails, he instructs Dick to

whip Fox to ensure obedience. The enforced physical coercion highlights the tension

among Animator, Dick and Fox, and justifies my focus on docility in this play.

 What Where, in contrast, features a rotated series of interrogations among four

characters—Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom—to establish "what" has been said and "where"

it has been said. Voice of Bam (in the shape of a small megaphone appearing on a

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[399] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 170.

[400] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 136; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 166.

different stage level from the other four characters) narrates the setting and the objective of the interrogation, and he monitors the process among Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom. Interrogations fail to produce answers to the questions of "what" and "where," and it appears that these questions (without contexts) are unanswerable. This play is so obscure that audiences cannot find out when these episodes of interrogation actually occur, only the passing of seasons from spring to winter is acknowledged. Coercion is used to produce answers, but the procurement of knowledge fails in this repeated and circular process. We should note, in relation to the curious names of the characters, that two of them—Bom and Bim—had already been used in *Murphy* to denote the sadistic male nurse and his twin brother at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat.

Both plays display prominent practices of coercion that employ violent discipline to control the body and produce docility, and I will first discuss the enforcement of docility on the mute figure of Dick in *Rough for Radio II*. Dick reacts to the thudding sound made by Animator's ruler: "[*Ruler.*] On! [*Silence.*] Dick!" "[*Ruler.*] Silence! Dick! [*Silence. Musing*]."[401] It is quite unusual to ask a human being to react to a thudding sound unfailingly in this way; however, this sort of response would make sense if the subjugated character had received a former coercive training to ensure his or her docility. Dick obeys Animator's instruction and responds to the thump of the ruler as a signal to whip, and this reveals that Dick is thoroughly subordinated to the Animator's authority. Although the enforced procedure of docility that Dick has undergone is unspecified in this play, his obedience to Animator is so evident that coercive discipline must have been exercised upon him, and the productivity of his disciplined body is the whipping of Fox.

Coercion is exercised on Fox when listeners hear his cries in response to

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[401] Beckett, *CDW* 277.

Dick's whipping: "Dick, if you would. [*Swish and thud of pizzle on flesh. Faint cry

from Fox*]."[402] Dick whips Fox in order to ensure the latter's obedience to Animator's

orders. When Fox hears Animator's command: "On," Fox is expected to respond to

his order and produce words accordingly (we should again note here that the term "On"

has an overtone of switching on a radio). However, whenever Animator's order fails,

Dick is ordered to whip Fox in punishment. What happens to Fox responds indirectly

to a warning given in *The Unnamable* that "you'll be punished, punished for having

gone silent."[403] Fox values solitude dearly in the play, but to avert physical torture he

has to obey Animator's command and break his silence. It is worth noting too that

Animator's command is encrypted as a signal in the thumping of the ruler, a

scaled-down version of the inevitable Beckettian stick or club, which is then

reinforced by Dick's whipping. Fox fails at times to respond to the thudding sounds

made by Animator's ruler; in contrast, the success rate is improved after Dick whips

him – an immediate physical torment. The intensity of coercion thus guarantees

docility, as Beckett wrote in a personal letter that one must "suffer enough to be able

to stir."[404] The process of Fox's reactions to the thump of the ruler while, at times,

receiving punishment from Dick's whip suggests a training process designed to make

Fox a docile body.

Brutal affliction fails to facilitate docility in this play at times; therefore,

Animator strategically alters his coercive method from violent punishment to a more

humane approach. At first, Animator forces Fox to resume his monologue, involving

reminiscences of his twin brother and a woman: "my brother inside me, my old

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[402] Beckett, *CDW* 277.

[403] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 388.

[404] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 405.

twin, . . . Maud would say, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him suck if he's still alive."[405]   When Fox stops responding to Animator's demand backed up by the usual stimulation of physical torture, the latter makes Stenographer kiss Fox: "[*Stenographer kisses Fox. Howl from Fox.*] Till it bleeds! Kiss it white! [*Howl from Fox.*] Suck his gullet!" The purpose of kissing here is to stimulate Fox "In his heart, in his entrails – or some other part." [406]   For Fox, this humane approach is a more intense measure than physical affliction and causes him to faint. Stenographer's display of human affection turns out, paradoxically, to be a more excruciating punishment than being whipped, and this transition from brutal corporeal torture to a humane approach was predicted in Foucault's historical documentation of a shifting regime of punishment in *Discipline and Punish*, whereby the covert punishment of surveillance or imprisonment replaces the open display of coercion as violent spectacle.

Why does Fox react so dramatically to human kindness, and why does Animator or Stenographer pay such acute attention to Fox's human traits? According to the two officials, Fox is caught in an indeterminate state, detached from any human associations. His ability to withstand physical coercion may be seen as equivalent to the animalistic perseverance suggested in *The Unnamable*: "like a caged beast born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, born and then dead, born in a cage and then dead in a cage, in a word like a beast" – a formulation that vividly evokes Foucault's conception of animality.[407]   For in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault argues that the reduction to animalistic behaviour strengthens physical endurance because "Animality . . . protected the

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[405]   Beckett, *CDW* 279.

[406]   Beckett, *CDW* 282.

[407]   Beckett, *LSB* 2: 380.

lunatic from whatever might be fragile, precarious, or sickly in man. The animal

solidity of madness, and that destiny it borrows from the blind world of beasts, inured

the madman to hunger, heat, cold, pain."[408] Any sane human could hardly endure

such harsh whipping, unlike Fox whose physical capacity is intensified beyond human

limits. Foucault applies the concept of animality to the condition of the mad in general,

and Fox's reduction to animalistic behaviour resembles this notion, even though it is

impossible to confirm that he is actually insane. Fox's connection to animality may

also be inferred from his name, and his animal behaviour also comes through in his

bodily cries.

Coercion is exercised to condition Fox's animality because "Unchained

animality," according to Foucault, "could be mastered only by *discipline* and

brutalizing;" thus Fox is tortured and punished like an animal to yield obedience in the

training of docility.[409] Due to his animality, Fox's human traits have been expelled,

and the potential restoration of them proves unbearable. At times, Fox weeps and jibs

when he remembers the past, since memory is a distinctively human faculty.[410] He

reacts so violently to an agonizing reminiscence that he cannot help screaming: "Let

me out! Peter out in the stone."[411]

The second half of Beckett's novel *Murphy* is situated in the Magdalen Mental

Mercyseat, a mental hospital, and its disciplinary procedures can offer some insight

here. As already suggested in the epigraph to this chapter, Murphy observes that the

doctors "would never on any account be rough with a patient. Restraint and coercion

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[408] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988) 74.

[409] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 75.

[410] Beckett, *CDW* 279.

[411] Beckett, *CDW* 281.

were sometimes unavoidable, but must always be exerted with the utmost

tenderness."[412] This attention to tenderness anticipates Stenographer's kisses, even

though they cause Fox to faint; his loss of consciousness, I suggest, results from

rejection of human affection. Fox is clearly withdrawn from humanity, therefore he

withstands the violent blows as would a wild beast. Thus, when Animator urges Fox to

be "reasonable" by continuing the process of remembering the past, the endeavour

fails because the notion of reason is beyond him due to his self-banishment from

humanity.[413] This is also why Animator's alternative approach of enforcing human

affection backfires. Fox's animality has depleted his human characteristics and

subsequently prevents him from returning to his former human life; as Fox says,

"lived I did."[414] It is no wonder that Animator and Stenographer are enthusiastic when

they spot an occasional revelation of human traits from Fox in the play. For example,

Stenographer is astonished that Fox smiles at her regarding the observation of his

"permanence and good repair."[415] Both are struck when Fox for the first time "*named*"

Maud, which, according to Animator, is a landmark improvement of his memory.[416]

They single out his ability to smile, to gag or weep, and most significantly, to

remember someone as signs of the possibility that Fox might return as a rational

human being. Whether he can finally "be free"—and what this might mean—is

indeterminable; however, I want to point out that his condition also subjugates

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[412] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 1: 96.

[413] Beckett, *CDW* 281.

[414] Beckett, *CDW* 277.

[415] Beckett, *CDW* 276.

[416] Beckett, *CDW* 280.

Stenographer and Animator reciprocally, as I shall discuss in detail later.[417] In the light of the employment of disciplinary power shown here, the tasks of relieving Fox of his animality and of resurrecting his memory of the seasons, his brother and Maud would be the productivity of coercion, if it succeeds.

Turning to the stage play *What Where*, Bam conducts interrogations with Bim, Bem and Bom to discover if their endeavour to extract a confession from the tortured person has been successful. Since they have failed, they in turn receive punishment by being "given the works."[418] The punishment involves not only the violence meted out, but also the process of weeping, screaming, begging for mercy, passing out and not being able to revive after fainting. This is the procedure of coercive torture, the productivity of which is the confession of "what" has been said and "where" it was said. Unfortunately, the excruciating drill is doomed due to two considerations: Bim, Bem and Bom respectively fail to produce answers when being tortured, and when they become torturers, they are equally unsuccessful in making their tortured objects confess; such is also clearly the case for Bam when he leads Bem out to punish the latter into confessing.

The process of interrogation, together with the torture sequences directed at confession in *What Where*, often provokes a political reading; for example, Graley Herren suggests that a "Kafkaesque trial against unanswerable charges generates a continuing cycle of torture."[419] Some critics relate the play to the performance of memory: S. E. Gontarski calls it "a memory play," and Herren elaborates on this point, arguing that "Not only is this a play about V's shadowy recollections, but it is also a

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[417] Beckett, *CDW* 284.

[418] Beckett, *CDW* 501-04.

[419] Graley Herren, "Facing the Darkness: Interrogations Across Genre in Samuel Beckett's *What Where*," *The Midwest Quarterly* 43.3 (2002): 324.

play replete with Beckett's remembrance of things past."[420] He also points out that

Beckett's literary characters from *Murphy* and *How It Is* reappear and suggests that the

author's personal involvement in war comes into play too.[421] The notion of

punishment or confession in the torture chamber is surely linked to the war as

suggested above in Chapter Two. Similarly Fox's hood, gag, blind and plugs in *Rough*

for Radio II suggest a tortured prisoner of war.

Other critics consider *What Where* a play of the mind in that Bam, Bem, Bim

and Bom all look alike, and because the location of the play does not represent a real

place. Herren argues that "the striking similarities in names and appearances suggest

that *all* of the players are fragments or 'shades' of the same character."[422] We may

invoke Foucault here and suggest that the Voice of Bam exhibits "an internal dynamic"

representing "the unceasing effort of a consciousness turned upon itself, trying to

grasp itself in its deepest conditions."[423] The stage positions of Voice of Bam and the

four other characters also underscore the possibility that this is a mind play. According

to the stage directions, Voice of Bam is on a different level from the others,

monitoring their conduct and dialogue from an elevated observational position. Voice

of Bam always stays above with the megaphone, whereas the remaining four come

and go on ground level. The main task for Bam is to conduct interrogations among

Bim, Bem and Bom, and to allocate punishment when confession fails. Moreover, the

ground level for Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom is the milieu for Voice of Bam to supervise

the episodes of interrogation and torture.

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[420] S. E. Gontarski, "*What Where*: Revised Text," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 2.1 (1992): 12; Herren 325.

[421] Herren 325-26.

[422] Herren 327.

[423] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 13.

The forum where the interrogation takes place among Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom clearly reveals the dominance of Voice of Bam. Occupying a higher position than the other four characters, Voice of Bam seemingly controls the play and manages to "switch on," "switch off" or even "start again" as he pleases, in contrast to the confining enclosure that chains the other characters in rotated interrogations until they confess.[424] However, as Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom do not confess, the interrogation relentlessly continues. The concluding statement of Voice of Bam— "Make sense who may"—leaves all questions unanswered, because they are unanswerable.[425] Coercion at this current level fails to produce confession, thus interrogation and punishment will continue.

Given that Voice of Bam seemingly controls the procedure of interrogation for the other characters, this may appear to suggest that he is in possession of a power beyond them. However, Foucault maintains that "No one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power," and that there is a dynamics of power in which it "is always exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other."[426] Joseph Rouse argues that "Foucault's understanding of both knowledge and power [is] *dynamic*," and this dynamic reveals the binary roles of enforcers and receivers.[427] The opposing roles are evident in *Rough for Radio II* when Fox, Dick and Stenographer obey Animator's orders. Dick's obedience to Animator's orders reflects the latter's superiority in the hierarchical chain of power, just as Dick is above Fox in their relation of power. More interestingly, there are different levels of coercive

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[424] Beckett, *CDW* 471.

[425] Beckett, *CDW* 476.

[426] Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" 213.

[427] Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 96.

punishment in the hierarchical power-relation: Dick's whip trumps Animator's ruler, and Stenographer's touch of human kindness trumps them all. A hierarchy of coercive discipline is employed and this stratified power disciplining the docile body reinforces Foucault's suggestion that "the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical" in the organization of "ranks."[428]

This ranking system in the structure of power is also evident in *What Where* because the authority of power comes directly from Bam to Bem, Bim and Bom respectively. Bom is a torturer as the play starts, then Bom is tortured by Bim. As the play ends, Bim is about to be tortured by Bem, and Bem by Bam. Beckett informed Nicholas Zurbrugg that the play was "a puppet play" precisely due to its distinctive display of hierarchical power.[429] We might feel that the same is true of the master-slave relation between Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, because hierarchical power is evidently employed there too. However, Beckett discredits a hierarchical interpretation when he remarks: "I don't like the suggestion and the attempt to express it of a hierarchy of characters."[430] Such disbelief in hierarchy will now be explored more fully in these texts.

I want to argue, however, that instead of refuting the dynamics of power altogether, we may see the monotonous trajectory of the hierarchy as the object of Beckett's attack. As a case in point, *What Where* is replete with rotated torture, whereby the torturer can in turn become the tortured. In the process of interrogation, Bem, Bim and Bom all experience dual positions and equal obligations as both

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[428] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 148.

[429] Nicholas Zurbrugg, "*Ill Seen Ill Said* and the Sense of an Ending," *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, eds. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) 152.

[430] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 431.

torturer and tortured. All three of them obey their superior Bam's order, to both enforce torture and to be tortured in the process of confession. Therefore, the direction of power is not singular because, according to Foucault, "disciplinary power became an 'integrated' system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised." It is "organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally."[431]

The interchangeable role of torturer and tortured can thus reverse the relation of power. Foucault argues that discipline, in effect, "is an art of rank" because "It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and creates them in a network of relations."[432] Therefore, the position in the network of power as torturer or tortured in *What Where* is not absolute, but relative and reciprocal. Graley Herren also notices such reversibility in power relations based on his observation of Voice of Bam: "V's paradox is that he is at once master and victim of this darkness. On the one hand, he exercises complete imaginative control over his dark field of memory. On the other hand, he is losing his own tenuous grip on any phenomenal reality, as darkness and silence progressively enshroud him."[433]

Foucault clarifies that "power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations."[434] The dynamics of power does not

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[431] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 176.

[432] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 146.

[433] Herren 332.

[434] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 198.

maintain a singular form because it has multiple or reversible relations. In other words, power, according to Foucault, is ubiquitous:

> One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over the others. It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised. This seems to me to be the characteristic of the societies installed in the nineteenth century. Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns. Certainly everyone doesn't occupy the same position; certain positions preponderate and permit an effect of supremacy to be produced.[435]

The authorities of power are variable because every individual is caught in the web of power relations and is affected by it. Having demonstrated the erratic dynamics and interchangeability of disciplinary power in *What Where*, we can take this model across to *Rough for Radio II*. First, Dick embodies a dual role due to his twofold-task: on the one hand he obeys Animator's commands, and on the other he administers physical punishment to produce speed and movements from Fox. I have suggested above that Dick must already have endured discipline exercised by Animator, but he also takes the role of the punishing enforcer; his position in the dynamics of power is therefore interchangeable. Fox receives direct punishment from Dick's whip, but Dick himself is at the beck and call of Animator. Thus Animator's sovereign power is above both Dick and Fox, for he controls Dick's actions directly and tortures Fox at well. Unlike the situation in *What Where* in which all the suffering characters will have their turn to be torturers, in *Rough for Radio II*—apart from the ambivalent Dick—Animator is the

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[435] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 156.

absolute torturer while Fox is the emphatic sufferer.

Although Animator tortures Fox in order to help liberate him from his trapped animalistic state, I want to argue that Animator and Stenographer are themselves reciprocally confined by Fox's condition. In fact, Foucault points out that there is a reversal of power in the hierarchical relation – since at one point, necessarily, the coerced "were 'subjected as pupils to the discipline that, later, as instructors, they would themselves impose.'"[436] When Animator confesses toward the end of the play that "Tomorrow, who knows, we may be free," we can see that he and Stenographer feel themselves confined by and in a sense subjected to Fox's condition.[437] In Animator's meticulous analysis of Fox's soliloquy, he eagerly points out Fox's unprecedented act of naming Maud, which inspires him to ask "Can it be we near our goal?"[438]

Animator admits that both he and Stenographer "do not know, any more than [Fox], what exactly it is [they] are after, what sign or set of words;" thus Animator (if we consider his role to be that of a kind of psychiatrist) is also trapped by not clearly knowing how to treat Fox.[439] On this reading, the coercive procedure inflicted on Fox is a measure aimed at curing him, and the goal of productivity here is arguably to retrieve his traumatic memory or memories. Though we can hardly see Fox as any kind of torturer, Animator is none the less tormented by his failure to treat Fox. Thus, Animator is also confined and conditioned by the coercive discipline he executes upon Fox, and this plight mirrors Foucault's words: "he inscribes in himself the power

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[436] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 295.

[437] Beckett, *CDW* 284.

[438] Beckett, *CDW* 281.

[439] Beckett, *CDW* 282.

relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."[440] Furthermore, Animator is affected by Fox because he claims to be astonished by the latter's monologue, and the sniffing and snivelling accompanying his sentimental comment on that monologue is also tied to Fox's progress. Moreover, since Stenographer recounts that Dick "functioned" twice in response to Fox's twitching, even Dick is in a sense also conditioned by Fox.[441] Though physical punishment is enforced by Animator and Dick on Fox, the latter's words and actions reciprocally effect a metaphorical torturing of Animator and Dick; the hierarchy of power is thus to a point reversible in *Rough for Radio II* as well as in *What Where*. Elsewhere in Beckett's work we can see a state of mutual bondage in the master-slave relation. In *The Unnamable*, for example, the subjugated protagonist reveals that "my good master, perhaps he is not solitary like me, not free like me, but associated with others, equally good, equally concerned with my welfare, but differing as to its nature."[442] Whatever their role is, coercer and coerced are reciprocally conditioned by one another. There is thus an interchangeable relation in the power machine whereby one can be the tormenter on one occasion and the tormented on another, just as the perplexing endings of both plays themselves refuse closure.

Invoking Beckett's famous concept of the pseudo-couple from *The Unnameable*, we can apply this term to the reversible power relations that I have been trying to focus on here. The relationships between Fox and Dick, Stenographer and Animator in *Rough for Radio II*, or between Bam and Bem, Bem and Bim, and Bim and Bom in *What Where*, are examples of binary pairings that play out a complex web

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[440] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 202-03.

[441] Beckett, *CDW* 277.

[442] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 307.

of power-relations. Such figures "cannot do without a partner," according to *nouveau romancier* Nathalie Sarraute, because each character is co-dependently bound up in their relationship with the other:

> movements are set in motion, the obstacle that gives them cohesion, that keeps them from growing soft from ease and gratuitousness, or from going round and round in circles in the monotonous indigence of ruminating on one thing. He is the threat, the real danger as well as the prey that brings out their alertness and their suppleness, the mysterious element whose unforeseeable reactions, by making them continually start up again and evolve towards an unknown goal, accentuate their dramatic nature.[443]

Just as in *The Unnamable* one is both "the teller and the told" of a story, both halves of the binary opposition must coexist.[444]

Returning to the Foucauldian question of productivity, coercion in confinement aims at restoring memory as with Fox in *Rough for Radio II* or at producing a confession as in *What Where*. However, productivity is not guaranteed, since in both plays all of the characters are rotating in an endless series of torture, literal or metaphorical. Fredric Jameson suggests that this unknown agenda in its unforeseeable journey is "mere repetition; while it is the cyclical closure of the pseudo-agon [the Hegelian Master-Slave relationship] that generates all of the violent impulses."[445] That is, audiences are watching a repetitious movement performing what Beckett calls

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[443] Nathalie Sarraute, "Conversation and Sub-conversation," *The Age of Suspicion*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Braziller, 1963) 93-95.

[444] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 303.

[445] Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979) 61.

in a letter "Labyrinthine torment."[446] Both *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where* fail to

produce, or, at best, have yet to produce: what remains instead is a labyrinthine

succession of coercions. In a conversation with Foucault, Jean-Pierre Barou observes

that "One has the feeling of confronting an infernal model that no one, either the

watcher or the watched, can escape," and this feeling surely governs both of these

plays.[447] Such endless coercion may recall both Dante's *Inferno* and Jean-Paul

Sartre's *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*, 1944), where all the characters are trapped in their

confining milieu and are conditioned by one another. It is worth noting that the highly

literate Animator, who at one point harks back to his "days of book reviewing," does

indeed allude to Dante in the course of *Rough for Radio II*.[448]

When Beckett remarked of *Waiting for Godot* in a letter: "Do try and see the

thing primarily in its simplicity, the waiting, the not knowing why, or where, or when,

or for what," his words mirror the situation of both plays I am examining here.[449] The

questions asked in *What Where* are not intended to be answered, and the words and

images tortured out of Fox are not meant to be intelligible. What then, we may ask, is

the purpose of performing these puzzling sequences of coercion? We may invoke

Graley Herren's observation that in *What Where* "V seems less concerned with

soliciting answers from his 'defendants' and more concerned with controlling the pace

and pattern of the proceedings" – to the point where, "in the absence of answers, he

can at least find consolation in the *form* of questioning."[450] Herren argues that *What*

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[446] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 308.

[447] Qtd. in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 156.

[448] Beckett, *CDW* 280.

[449] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 610.

[450] Herren 327.

Where parodies "any attempt to impose intelligibility upon their stubborn [un]intelligibility" and he stresses that "Beckett's primary focus is on the process and form of interpretation, not on its result."[451] If Beckett does indeed focus on the process without actually finding answers from the characters, then this emphasis recalls Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's argument in *A Thousand Plateaus*, for the exhaustion of circular torture in the plays finds fitting representation in their proposed line of flight. Without a proper beginning or satisfying resolution to Beckett's plays, we are kept in the multiplicities of the rhizome. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizomatous trajectory means that everything starts and finishes "from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing," and this is a fitting description of the unsettling condition that Beckett has depicted in both *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where*.[452]

2. Surveillance and Panopticism

To make fuller use of Michel Foucault's theory, I shall in this section investigate another relevant mode of disciplinary power—the institution of confinement—by discussing the mechanisms of surveillance and the famous notion of the panopticon in relation to Beckett's plays. As with coercive docility, Foucault argues that confinement is also regarded as one of the "'inhuman' practices . . . to restore man to what was purely animal within him."[453] Confinement thus supplements the condition of animality to make a body docile. Confining institutions, according to Foucault, aim at implementing power so that it "becomes embedded in techniques,

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[451] Herren 334.

[452] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004) 27-28.

[453] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 75.

and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material interventions."[454] Unlike explicit physical infliction, power shifts from overt coercion to a more covert mode. While the programme of docility implements disciplinary regulations on the coerced, the confining architecture may bestow power from the concrete enclosure on the confined victim. I shall argue that confinement where the enforcement of violence is comparatively inconspicuous may reveal the deployment of disciplinary power in a different light.

In a recent study connecting Foucault's panoptic system with Beckett's work, Mohammadreza Arghiani reveals the panoptic power at work in *Molloy*.[455] He recognises that the mechanism of surveillance applies when Moran obeys orders and carries out his mission to search for Molloy. He submissively follows Youdi's order because he fears that the process of performing his duty is being monitored, possibly by his housekeeper Marta and the priest Father Ambrose. Arghiani proposes that on account of such surveillance the relationships depicted in the novel resemble those of a panopticon. Anthony Uhlmann also makes use of Foucault's concept of surveillance in his *Beckett and Poststructuralism* and places the Trilogy at the centre of his concerns. In his reading of *Molloy*, Uhlmann also argues that Moran carries out his orders due to his "consciousness of surveillance."[456] However, both critics invoke surveillance in *Molloy* without fully introducing the conceptual system of the panopticon. My own application of Foucault's thought to Beckett's plays highlights how disciplinary power is employed in a confining architecture, a point which has been insufficiently discussed to date. I will initiate the discussion by stressing the

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[454]   Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 96.

[455] Mohammadreza Arghiani, "Deconstructive Study of Man's Deplorable Status in the Panoptical Society of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy,*" *Studies in Literature and Language* 3.2 (2011): 87-91.

[456] Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 48.

resemblance between the panopticon and the location of Beckett's plays, so as to examine later how power operates in the enclosed panoptic milieu.

The location of Beckett's work, including his radio plays, is always obscure. As we have seen, the rural sounds, the Irish accent and vocabulary, and the announcement of the station of Boghill weave the illusion of a realistic milieu in *All That Fall*, but its stability is shattered by the unusual performance of sounds and voices in that play. If location is thus ambiguous in *All That Fall*, it is still more problematic in *Rough for Radio II* and the other radio plays. In *What Where*, the question of where the characters are enclosed is further unsettled by probing why they are confined. Determining the location in *What Where* and *Rough for Radio II* is thus presumptuous. Although it is impossible to suggest precisely where we might be in Beckett's plays (or one may speculate about possible locales without any consensus emerging), the characters' confinement within an enclosed milieu is emphasised. It is therefore essential to seek beyond actual location, and to discover the nature and function of the enclosure in these plays instead.

For Foucault, confinement is exercised in architectural premises such as prison, hospital, school and so on. He emphasises that the benefit of confinement lies in its demonstration of power in its naked form:

> Prison is the only place where power is manifested in its naked state, in its most excessive form, and where it is justified as moral force. "I am within my rights to punish you because you know that it is criminal to rob and kill. . . ." What is fascinating about prison is that, for once, power doesn't hide or mask itself; it reveals itself as tyranny pursued into the tiniest details; it is cynical and at the same time pure and entirely "justified," because its practice can be totally formulated within the

framework of morality. Its brutal tyranny consequently appears as the serene domination of Good over Evil, of order over disorder.[457] Prison represents power in its undisguised form, but it is the precise means whereby a confining architecture wields power on the confined body that I intend to examine.

Beckett's letters reveal that he visited "the Lüthringhausen penitentiary" in the Rhineland, and he also uses prison as an aesthetic metaphor, as when he suggests that Bram van Velde's painting shows "fidelity to the prison-house, this refusal of any probationary freedom."[458] A prison-like condition is suggested in *Rough for Radio II* when Fox articulates his confinement as surrounded by "all stones all sides."[459] Stones, according to Foucault, "can make people docile and knowable" because "The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure—thick walls, a heavy gate that prevents entering or leaving—began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies."[460]

The walls of a confining institution such as a prison result in docility due to the following procedures:

> distributing individuals, fixing them in space, classifying them, extracting from them the maximum in time and forces, training their bodies, coding their continuous behaviour, maintaining them in perfect visibility, forming around them an apparatus of observation, registration and recording, constituting on them a body of knowledge that is accumulated and centralized. The general form of an apparatus intended to render

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[457] Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" 210.

[458] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 563, 130.

[459] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 277.

[460] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 172.

individuals docile and useful, by means of precise work upon their bodies, indicated the prison institution, before the law ever defined it as the penalty *par excellence*.[461]

The precise task demanded of Fox in the confining milieu of *Rough for Radio II* is that he articulates the right words, while in *What Where* Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom have to find answers to "what" has been said and "where" it has been said. Confinement in a milieu such as a mental hospital or prison thus asserts power via control over and regulation of the subjugated, while the purpose of this mode of disciplinary power is "transforming individuals."[462] The programme of transformation bestows technical control over the prisoner as a means of manipulation, which enacts disciplinary power. Those who occupy the role of prison guard enforce programmes within the institution. Docility befalls the prisoners on account of the institution's "exhaustive disciplinary apparatus: it must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude to work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind," according to Foucault.[463]

Confinement, however, includes the "juridico-economic" power of punishment as well as a general form of "technico-disciplinary" power enacted in the programme.[464] In a prison, a juridical system evaluates the prisoners' conduct to decide on the enforcement of training or punishment. The location of *What Where* could conceivably be a prison due to its enclosed milieu, and the plot shows both the technical power of coercive punishment and the juridical power of interrogations in

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[461] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 231.

[462] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 233.

[463] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 235.

[464] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 233.

action. Juridical power is not necessarily limited to a prison alone, however, but operates in other institutions such as the hospital, clinic or asylum. Although juridical interrogation is not fully explicit in *Rough for Radio II* (nor is it quite ruled out), the institution of this play might equally be a hospital or clinic, because Animator is seemingly treating Fox to cure him of unspecified mental distress as suggested above.

Foucault argues in *Madness and Civilization* that there is a conceptual shift in the notion of the juridical system, because judgement can be extended to the wider concept of a confining institution, such as "a juridical space where one is accused, judged, and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trial in psychological depth – that is, by remorse. Madness will be punished in the asylum, even if it is innocent outside of it."[465] The panoptic system, in other words, can be exercised in a hospital, asylum or clinic as well as a prison, because they are all institutions of both the technical disciplinary power of coercion and the juridical power of the penal system. They all involve the practice of observation, making a diagnosis, disciplining those who are institutionalised and keeping a record of their routines and progress.

Having explained the role of confinement, I will now explore the function of a panopticon. Foucault's interest in the panopticon is triggered by his study of the medical gaze as an institutionalised mechanism.[466] He explores this gaze in *The Birth of the Clinic* where "The observing gaze refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless. Observation leaves things as they are; there is nothing hidden to it in what is given."[467] What is more, "The gaze will be fulfilled in its own truth and will have

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[465] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 269.

[466] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 146.

[467] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989) 131.

access to the truth of things," which benefits the aim of the productivity of disciplinary power.[468] In the employment of such power, the purpose of observation is to gain truth and knowledge. In the institution of the clinic, the medical gaze quests for "invisible truth" from the "visible secret" of intelligibility when observation is made of an individual.[469] In his later work, Foucault shifts from the medical gaze to the panopticon.

Foucault's concept is indebted to Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* (published at the end of the eighteenth century), and he quotes extensively from Bentham's panoptic scheme in *Discipline and Punish*. Bentham designed the panopticon as a type of prison building which would allow an observer situated in a central tower to observe all the prisoners in a peripheral ring, without himself being seen. Although the design was never actually built, Foucault is deeply impressed by Bentham's invention of "a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance."[470] However, he points out that Bentham's stress on the "archaic" gaze of this eighteenth century device is in conflict with the design which is "very modern in the general importance it assigns to techniques of power."[471] Bentham's panopticon aims at transparency, "visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zone of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zone of disorder." His design of a penal architecture installs an "overseeing gaze" to gain "'all-seeing' power," but Foucault's focus on the panopticon diverges from this, for he emphasises that the panopticon is a machine or mechanism

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[468] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* 132.

[469] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* 211.

[470] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 148.

[471] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 160.

of power.[472] He therefore modifies Bentham's concept and proposes that it "must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning" in its representation of "a pure architectural and optical system," instead of being the fixed notion of a "dream building."[473] That is, Foucault's concept is an *idea* of panopticism. He focuses on the function and effect of surveillance, as suggested in the medical gaze, not on the concrete architecture itself.

Surveillance is tied to visibility in Bentham's panopticon because the confined person "is seen, but he does not see."[474] Invisibility applies for the observer, and the tower "is a guarantee of order." Power operates when it is assumed that prison guards are watching the prisoners, but the actual enforcement of supervision on each prisoner remains unverifiable: "Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so."[475] Since the prisoner cannot confirm if the director is watching him, he or she assumes that he is being watched at all times. Anthony Uhlmann observes that in *Molloy* "The source of Moran's fear, his consternation . . . is hidden from view," and this too is the effect of unverifiable visibility.[476] That is, power in the relation between the visible prisoner and the invisible director aims at the prisoners internalising a sense that they are being watched. Hence, they will later discipline themselves automatically due to such supervisorial invisibility.

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[472] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 152.

[473] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 205.

[474] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200.

[475] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201.

[476] Uhlmann 48-49.

Foucault is intrigued by Bentham's design of a panopticon that manages "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[477] With this automatism at work, "it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so." Thus, the observer does not have to be there at all, as long as the observed are convinced that they are being watched. This echoes Foucault's notion of the internalised "inspecting gaze" because "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself."[478]

I want to suggest that the confined milieu in *What Where* and *Rough for Radio II* bears some resemblance to a panopticon. According to the stage direction, Voice of Bam is "in the shape of a small megaphone at head level" on the left side of the stage, separate from other characters who are situated on the playing area at stage right.[479] Although both parties are surrounded by shadow with the spotlight dimly lit, Voice of Bam can clearly survey the other four characters because he comments on and orders movements from the others. On the other hand, based on what we gather from the play, the other four characters cannot know the actions of Voice of Bam. Indeed, it is impossible to observe his movements because the body below the megaphone is missing on the stage. This physical absence, however, does not prevent our awareness

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[477] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201.

[478] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 155.

[479] Beckett, *CDW* 469-70.

of his existence. Although the milieu revealed in *What Where* does not precisely resemble Bentham's panopticon, the operation of surveillance on this confining stage is in keeping with panopticism. For example, when Bem, Bim and Bom are being supervised by Bam, he in turn is also supervised by Voice of Bam. Similarly, in *Rough for Radio II*, Fox is disciplined under Animator's regulation, and both Animator and Stenographer observe and record Fox's actions and speeches in the utmost detail. In both cases, then, a central figure observes, controls, makes demands and compels performance from the other characters. Thus, supervision or surveillance is conspicuous in these plays, even if this takes a more horizontal than vertical form in *Rough for Radio II* as compared to *What Where*.

Prison, according to Foucault, is "the place where the penalty is carried out," and is "the place of observation of punished individuals;" surveillance is institutionalised in a location where disciplinary training and punishment take place.[480] The aim of "regular observation" within the apparatus of confinement is to place "the patient in a situation of almost perpetual examination."[481] In order to pass judgement on the conduct of the prisoners, it is necessary to work out a system to observe their behaviour and to examine the outcome of their work. It is in this way that the director determines what sort of punishment or training should be enforced. Therefore, "The practice of placing individuals under 'observation' is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures."[482] Stenographer carefully notes down her detailed observations of Fox, and Animator maintains that "I have my own method" in his session with Fox in

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[480] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 249.

[481] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 186.

[482] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 227.

Rough for Radio II.[483] The radio play thus echoes the programme of panopticism, for

"A meticulous observation of detail, . . . for the control and use of men" involves "a

whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions,

plans and data."[484] Foucault proposes a system of supervision in which the role of

surveillance is two-fold:

> the first involved material tasks (distributing ink and paper, giving alms
>
> to the poor, reading spiritual texts on feast days, etc.); the second
>
> involved surveillance: the "observers must record who left his bench,
>
> who was talking, who did not have his rosary, or Book of Hours, who did
>
> not comport himself properly at mass, who committed an impure act,
>
> who indulged in idle talk or was unruly in the street."[485]

The role of the supervisor is to assign the subjugated person to perform an allocated

task and to document in detail the manner in which the work is done. Such is the case

when Bam in *What Where* demands that Bim, Bem and Bom execute "the works," and

requests reports on how they do so (that is, if their victims weep, scream or beg for

mercy). The material task is carried out in *Rough for Radio II* when Animator has Fox

whipped to recall memories from his past, and surveillance follows when Fox's

reactions of weeping or screaming and the content of his recollections are observed

and recorded. Surveillance must exercise a dual function, because "the questionnaire

without the examination and the examination without the interrogation were doomed

to an endless task: it belongs to neither to fill the gaps within the province of the

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[483] Beckett *CDW* 278.

[484] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 141.

[485] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 175-76.

other."[486] The mechanism of surveillance anticipates a definitive resolution from observation both during the process of performing tasks and during the interrogation concerning the result of work done.

The effect of "constant supervision, the pressure of supervisors, the elimination of anything that might disturb" highlights the effective use of time.[487] Hence, what matters between the execution of material tasks and surveillance is efficiency. Thus, like the brisk agent he is, Malone refers to his time-table of story-telling in his labyrinthine pursuit of Molloy in *Malone Dies*.[488] The application of "*time-table*," in Foucault's view, is a way to accelerate the disciplinary process because it helps "establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition" in order to supplement the procedures of task and surveillance.[489] The passage and pressure of time can be observed when in each season of the year a juridical confession is allocated to one of the four characters, Bim, Bem, Bom and Bam, in *What Where*. The schedules for the four characters constitute four seasons, the cycle of a year, and it is likely that the cycle persists in the years that follow. This rotation of confession and punishment is what I consider a time-table to facilitate panopticism.

The time-table is also strongly emphasised in *Rough for Radio II*, because Stenographer pays particular attention to the time and reminds Animator how much (or how little) remains before the session with Fox terminates. A time-limit for the session is cautiously announced when she reminds him that "you could not have

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[486] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* 137.

[487] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 150.

[488] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 175.

[489] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 149.

waited a moment longer, time is up."[490] Hence, the duration of punishment is brought

to a particular focus: as Foucault says, "it must be adjusted to the 'useful'

transformation of the inmate during his term of imprisonment. It is not a time-measure,

but a time finalized."[491] What is more, the session with Fox is of regular occurrence.

When Animator encourages Fox by stating "I hope you have had a refreshing night

and will be better inspired today than heretofore," this shows that Fox is regularly

examined under Animator's supervision.[492] When the latter says to Stenographer,

"Tomorrow, who knows, we may be free," we notice how they are reciprocally

conditioned by Fox's progress (or lack of it).[493] The time-table indicates the schedule

for Fox's sessions and his possible progress, and the team's regular checking of the

confined object demonstrates in detail how surveillance works. Thus, the scheduled

time with Fox in *Rough for Radio II* and the passage of the four seasons in *What

Where* are, in my view, a regular time-table imposed on the confined objects. The drill

of task-giving, observation, examination and economized time control to exercise

disciplinary power with regularity aims ultimately at obtaining individual

intelligibility. But, if such intelligibility is the aim of Foucault's panopticism, the

problem is that it is neither promised nor delivered in Beckett's work.

Neve Gordon comments that "Not only are humans situated and limited by a

social context, but they are also constituted by the context, while the context itself is

an effect of power."[494] Every individual is surrounded by their social context, which

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[490] Beckett, *CDW* 283.

[491] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 244.

[492] Beckett, *CDW* 275.

[493] Beckett, *CDW* 284.

[494] Neve Gordon, "On Visibility and Power: An Arendtian Corrective of Foucault," *Human Studies* 25.2 (2002): 129.

is, according to Foucault, "a singularly confessing society," thus, "one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. . . . One confesses – or is forced to confess."[495] Confession is inevitable because we are part of such a society. On the other hand, observation is also essential because knowledge is derived from a process of "observation, interrogation, decipherment, recording, and decision that may be exercised by the subject of medical discourse."[496] Foucault proposes in *The History of Sexuality* that hierarchy facilitates dominance and is a mechanism to "have access to his [the prisoner's] own intelligibility . . . to his identity."[497] The mechanism of surveillance thus involves a hierarchical distribution of power. "This surveillance," according to Foucault, "is based on a system of permanent registration: reports from the syndics to the intendants, from intendants to the magistrates or mayor."[498]

Foucault's stress on holding "the prisoner under permanent observation" so that "every report that can be made about him must be recorded and computed" can be seen in operation in *Rough for Radio II*.[499] During Animator's session with Fox, every trivial detail is recorded by Stenographer: "the report on yesterday's results" includes detailed observation of Fox's physical gestures such as "animal cries," and the interrogators even contemplate improvements of documentation that would "provide a strictly literal transcript, the meanest syllable has, or may have, its importance."[500]

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[495] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1990) 59.

[496] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 182.

[497] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 155-56.

[498] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 196.

[499] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 249.

[500] Beckett, *CDW* 276.

This is particularly the case because Animator and Stenographer do not know what exactly they are looking for in Fox's soliloquy, and Animator suggests that "the more you [Fox] say the greater the chances" of the right words emerging. This is also why Stenographer anxiously stresses that "The least word let fall in solitude and thereby in danger . . . of being no longer needed, *may be it*."[501] Similarly, when Voice of Bam says "Bom appears. Reappears" at the start of that play, Voice of Bam both confirms that Bom must have appeared before, and that he still has recollections of an earlier interrogation.[502] The significance of documenting an interrogation, according Foucault, is that:

> The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. The procedures of examination were accompanied at the same time by a system of intense registration and of documentary accumulation. A "power of writing" was constituted as an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline.[503]

He goes on to say that the observation of the subjugated person within a panopticon "should go back not to the circumstances, but also to the causes of his crime; they must be sought in the story of his life."[504] Foucault stresses that the mechanisms of confinement "are intended to alleviate pain, to cure, to comfort – but . . . all tend, like the prison, to exercise power of normalization."[505] He also stresses that the prison is

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[501] Beckett, *CDW* 281, 276.

[502] Beckett, *CDW* 471.

[503] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 189.

[504] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 252.

[505] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 308.

"a machine whose convict-workers are both the cogs and the products."[506] It is the productive goal of confinement enforced by the technique of documentation to liberate the confined object (be it the torturer or the tortured, the director or the subjugated) from their subjugated condition towards "normality." The aim of liberation from the confined condition mirrors Animator's hope that "Tomorrow, who knows, we [he and Stenographer] may be free" in *Rough for Radio II*.[507]

It is also worth pointing out that there is evident resistance to conformity in *Rough for Radio II*. For example, Stenographer, submissive to Animator's direction as she mostly is, nonetheless first suggests a more gentle approach towards Fox, then protests about the accuracy of the transcript, though both of her endeavours fail in view of Animator's dictatorship. As for Fox himself, though he knows that he will be punished for going silent, he at times keeps his silence, and this, I consider, is another example of resistance to power. The practice of resistance is at odds with Foucault's power relations; however, it is also clearly the product or by-product of the latter. Though power operates in multifaceted dynamics and tensions, it inevitably includes opportunities for resistance to it. I shall now move from the study of Foucauldian themes and mechanisms within these plays to a more speculative argument about radio itself as a kind of panopticon.

3.   Panopticism and Radio

Surveillance studies under the rubric of Foucault's panopticism have prevailed among scholars in recent years, and their relevance to contemporary society enables the association between panopticism and George Orwell's Big Brother in *Nineteen*

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[506] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 242.

[507] Beckett, *CDW* 284.

Eighty-Four (published in 1949) – a paradigmatic text for surveillance studies. Critics

have also developed new approaches in the field by incorporating new technologies.

For example, in *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, David Lyon

has compiled a series of new surveillance studies by fusing Foucault's panopticism

with contemporary technological applications. Lyon points out that a number of critics

spot deficiencies in Foucault's regime of surveillance studies due to its failure to

incorporate contemporary electronic technology; hence, he calls for the extension of

surveillance theory to surpass the limitations of Foucault's own panopticism.[508]

Kevin D. Haggerty also observes a growing expansion of panopticism into

various connections with new technologies. Haggerty rightly points out there is "a

host of other key qualities and processes of surveillance that fall outside of the

panoptic framework" in the light of new developments. Hence, a wealth of new

proposals results in the following coinages: "super-panopticon," "electronic

panopticon," "post-panopticon," "neo-panopticon," "omnicon," "global panopticon,"

"cybernetic panopticon," and so forth.[509] Remodelling Foucault's account of

surveillance is thus necessary to better accommodate technological innovation in

modern society. According to Haggarty, "Alternative models of surveillance are

apparent in [Foucault's] works on biopower;" for in his discussion of this latter

concept, Foucault stresses how technologies are "used for analyzing, controlling,

regulating and defining the human body and its behaviour," which is similar to the

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[508] David Lyon, "The Search for Surveillance Theories," *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, ed. Lyon (Cullompton: Willan, 2006) 4. Critics who point out flaws and limitations of Foucault's theory are: M. Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revelution 1750-1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); F. Webster, and K. Robins, *Information Technology: A Luddite Analysis* (Norwood [NJ]: Ablex, 1986); S. Zuboff, *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power* (New York: Basic, 1988); to name only a few.

[509] Kevin D. Haggerty, "Tear Down the Walls: On Demolishing the Panopticon," *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, ed. David Lyon (Cullompton: Willan, 2006) 25-26.

exercise of docility.[510] The employment of such "biopower" relies on the engagement

of institutions which can control people to "make them 'docile bodies.'"[511] Foucault's

biopower is created when the agent of power is mediated by technology, and in the

context of this thesis I wish to consider whether such technological mediation also

includes radio. However, it remains to be asked who is the agent of power in the case

of radio?

Foucault points out that "Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of

application."[512] Neve Gordon also clarifies this emphasis: "The individual is both an

effect of power and the medium of its articulation."[513] This is also the case with every

character discussed in the two plays I have examined in this chapter. I intend to argue

in this section that we can apply Foucault's panoptic notion to Beckett's radio

plays—where sounds and voices are mediated by the radio—though, naturally, it will

have to be a modified version of his panopticism that is applied here.

If biopower is included as an alternative to panopticism, then instead of

limiting its application to the original model of panoptic architecture, it opens the

possibility of incorporating new technology in surveillance studies. David Lyon thus

suggests that:

> surveillance theories produced within what might be called a modernist
>
> frame are as incomplete as those that some would dub postmodern. Or so
>
> I submit. Modern ones relate to the nation-state, bureaucracy,
>
> techno-logic and political economy, whereas the postmodern ones tend to

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[510] Haggerty 37; Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato, and Jen Webb, "Relations of Power," *Understanding Foucault* (London: Sage, 2000) 64.

[511] Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 66.

[512] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 101.

[513] Gordon 133.

focus on the ways in which digital technologies "make a difference."[514] Lyon suggests that the extension of surveillance studies incorporates innovative or digitized technologies, and a growing fascination has indeed arisen among Foucault scholars with new developments in this field. However, I have observed a misreading, or a misleading emphasis, among commentators who use Foucault's panopticism interchangeably with surveillance. I intend to argue, in the first instance, that critics (especially sociologists) confuse Foucault's panopticism with Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. Bentham's design of the panopticon is essentially different from Foucault's conceptual model. Nevertheless, critics correctly point out the possibility of applying Foucault's panopticism to new technology.

It is certainly a misconception to consider surveillance studies as equivalent to Foucault's panopticism. Theorists who do so often associate Foucault's panopticism with surveillance so as to emphasise visibility or the gaze in new technological applications. Consequently the role of actual watchers is highlighted, and this then results in a problematic link between surveillance and the gaze. For instance, Kevin Haggerty suggests that "it matters enormously who is actually conducting surveillance," and he argues that "the panoptic model provides no sustained account of the role or importance of the watchers."[515] He thus accuses Foucault of failing to investigate the role of the overseer in the panoptic apparatus. However, it is not Foucault's intention to stress the role of the inspector in his model of panopticism. Although visibility is addressed in *Discipline and Punish*, visual supervision is not strictly necessary when exercising power. Panopticism in fact dispenses with the actual gaze and focuses on an internalized self-discipline instead. What is more, this

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[514] Lyon, "The Search for Surveillance Theories" 10.

[515] Haggerty 33.

internalized visibility may even be extended to include radio as a medium of panopticism.

To regard radio as a medium of panoptic power may appear inappropriate since the role of the gaze or visibility in surveillance seems impossible in the case of an auditory medium like radio. However, as Foucault suggests that "the 'media' of opinion" are "a materiality caught up in the mechanisms of the economy and power in its forms of the press, publishing, and later the cinema and television," then it may be possible that the model of panopticism can also be applied to these technologies.[516] Neve Gordon argues that visibility, in relation to surveillance and disciplinary power, can be examined "*in the sense of being seen and heard*" among the different forms of power that Foucault's theory includes.[517] According to Foucault, "Visibility is a trap" due to overemphasis on the function of gaze and visibility, while surveillance should be seen as a mechanism of power within a concrete institution.[518] The function of the gaze for him is technical, and visibility is considered a mechanism of self-inspection from within. For this reason, the medium of radio can also serve as a mechanism of panopticism and it may not contradict the purpose of observation, specifically when listeners can monitor the radio programme by analysing every sound or voice coming from the radio.

While the gaze effects surveillance in a panopticon, I intend to argue that listening to the radio broadcast can serve a similar monitoring function. Both surveying and listening can fulfil the purpose of monitoring within the system of panopticism. Hence, if surveillance studies apply to technologies such as CCTV, I

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[516] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 161-62.

[517] Gordon 132.

[518] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200.

want to suggest that its application is also valid to radio and the auditory relationship

we have to it. I would now like to try a bolder, more experimental extension of this

argument to our relation as listeners to Beckett's plays on the radio.

The view of radio as a medium of panopticism also suggests its confining

effect. In fact, the confinement state created by the use of radio is mutual: both the

radio plays and the listeners on either side of the radio are subjected to a condition of

constraint. In other words, both the listeners and plays mediated by the radio are

bound up with one another, in the mode of "a mutual 'hold,'" in Foucault's words.[519]

Radio listeners take up the role as observers, monitoring the play during broadcasting

when listening to its sounds and voices; at the same time, they conduct a wide range

of tasks such as evaluating, analysing and interpreting the meaning of the aural

elements. This process parallels the procedure undertaken by the panopticon overseers.

The purpose of the role of the observer—both listeners and surveyors—is to collect

information or knowledge from the subjugated – the confined prisoners or, in this case,

the radio plays. Therefore, radio listeners are conditioned by examining materials

while monitoring during broadcasting.

Listeners are tied to their roles of comprehending the meaning and significance

of the plays on radio, and of determining their value. This echoes Roland Barthes's

suggestion that "the reader [or here, the listener] . . . is simply that *someone* who holds

together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted."[520] Due

to its intertextual nature, a text may contain the possibility of multiple interpretations,

and the selection among various analyses, according to Barthes, is made subjectively

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[519] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 159. Foucault argues that "the system of power takes a pyramidical form" in the hierarchy, therefore "The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual 'hold.'"

[520] Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: HarperCollins-Fontana, 1977) 148.

by the reader. Thus, audiences draw their own connections and conclusions while engaging with the play they listen to. On the other hand, the role of listener is conditioned by the need to undertake analysis from the monitoring of a particular play. What is more, audiences are physically confined when listening to the radio. Although they may move freely in comparison to watching a theatre play, radio listeners are restricted in a room, however spacious it may be, and are subjected to the limits of radio reception in order to hear the broadcast. This restricted mobility and the limitation on the transmitting range for radio reception set the receptive parameters, evoking the confinement of panopticism.

The role of listener involves conducting analysis from the process of monitoring when listening to the radio plays – the subjugated content to be examined. There is accordingly a parallel between listeners to the radio and the role of listeners within the radio plays themselves. As we have seen, both Animator and Stenographer enact the role of listener in *Rough for Radio II*, and they document, analyse and evaluate Fox's monologue. Similarly, Croak in *Words and Music* listens attentively to the performance of Words and Music, and is affected by the latter to the point of groaning, calling out Lily's name and evoking the image of the face. The most vivid analogy between actual radio listeners and listeners in the radio plays can be found in Beckett's sketch for a play – *Rough for Radio I*. The male protagonist He is in possession of two knobs which control Voice and Music. Unlike other radio plays that involve the characters of Words or Voice and Music, here they are not full-fledged characters in their own right, but two separate switches on a radio-like device. Furthermore, He as listener focuses solely on the performance of Voice and Music, and makes a series of observations throughout the play: that they are alone, are not able to see or hear each other at first, and then later, that they are ending together as if

their final collaboration promises closure.

What I intend to argue further is the effect of self-imposed discipline on the side of the subjugated. However, this inquiry is only possible when referring to how the author relates to the panoptic impact when composing the radio plays. As with the redundancy of the actual existence of the overseer in Foucault's panoptic system, so actual listeners to radio are not necessary. After all, perhaps no listeners are listening to the programme at all, so how does panopticism work for Beckett?

When writing for radio, playwrights must be aware of their target audiences because the works are intended to be broadcast and heard. Certainly Beckett as an experienced playwright must be conscious of the fact that once his radio plays are released, he will automatically receive feedback or censorship. Beckett was in fact a recurrent victim of censorship. *Watt* was banned in Ireland on 19 November 1954 and *Molloy* on 13 January 1956, as stated in his letter: "all editions of *Molloy* have been banned in Ireland."[521] *Esperando a Godot* was performed in Madrid, despite a ban on publicity and public performance on 28 May 1955, and in a letter to Pamela Mitchell dated 7 February 1955, Beckett wrote: "It appears the play [*Godot*] has been violently attacked by the Roman Catholic press in Holland, that the municipality of Arnhem got the wind up and were on the point of banning the production, saying it was a homosexual work;" and "the threat of action for obscenity" is why *Malone Dies* was rejected.[522] Such experiences suggest the possibility that Beckett's creative process is disciplined or coerced by his awareness of being monitored by publishers as well as his audience, as revealed in this letter: "My audience, the high cultivated kind, brought me back in no time to decent behaviour, with shoals of quotations from the usual

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[521] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 601.

[522] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 521-22, 614.

untouchables. From far off I could hear voices grave, sweet and reasonable, taking

advantage of the loudmouth to become even more stinkingly poisonous than usual."[523]

Martin Esslin has therefore interpreted *Rough for Radio II* as a representation of

Beckett's creative process:

> we must regard the Animator as the Critical faculty trying to shape the
>
> utterances of the voice that emerges from the subconscious, while the
>
> stenographer is the recording faculty and, also, in her distress about the
>
> spurious sentence the Animator inserts in the text, the artist's conscience;
>
> Dick, the torturer, is the artist's determination to stimulate his
>
> subconscious by suffering; the stenographer's disrobing and kissing of
>
> Fox represents analogous attempts to stimulate the subconscious by
>
> erotic fantasies.[524]

Animator's literary references to purgatory in the *Divine Comedy* and to the works of

Laurence Sterne enhance the meta-literary dimension of this play. Beckett's later radio

plays also enact the process of the author's creativity when he constantly uses

Words/Voice and Music as the stimuli for the protagonists. In the light of this, Esslin

comments that the later radio plays are "among Beckett's most personal and revealing

works," in which "he deals with his own experience of the creative process both as a

quest for fulfilment and release and as a form of compulsion and slavery."[525] It is in

this way that Beckett's radio plays mirror the author's creative struggle while

imposing a panoptic surveillance on his creativity.

If Esslin is right to suggest that *Rough for Radio II* mirrors Beckett's creative

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[523] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 84-85.

[524] Esslin, "Beckett's *Rough for Radio*" 102.

[525] Esslin, "Beckett's *Rough for Radio*" 103.

process, perhaps we can understand why Animator alters Stenographer's dictation by insisting on the insertion in it of the phrase "between two kisses" near the end of the play.[526] Esslin argues that the role of the Animator dramatizes "the conscious, critical part of the artist's mind" and that it "falls victim to the temptation to cheat and to insert material which is not a genuine product of his inner voice into the finished text."[527] Recording word-for-word from Fox would only make a biography out of the materials; however, adding falsified facts transforms the documentary into a piece of fiction, which is Beckett's aim as creative writer. Interestingly enough, Animator's falsified dramatization based on documented facts reflects the way that readers or audiences often read Beckett's literary background or historical involvements into his work, as I have argued in Chapter Two. However, unlike the role of the listener in bearing witness to trauma, the function here is to enable the author to discipline himself to create.

Roland Barthes argues that "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text" because interpretation will be constrained by the ideological framework of the author.[528] This echoes Foucault's observation that "The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning:" "The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture.[529] This "author function" endows literary discourses with an authoritative truth to be accepted, because it "is linked to the juridical and institutional

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[526] Beckett, *CDW* 284.

[527] Esslin, "Beckett's *Rough for Radio*" 101.

[528] Barthes, *Image Music Text* 147.

[529] Foucault, "What is an Author?" 221, 211.

system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses."[530] In the light of this, Barthes suggests that "only language acts, 'performs,'" and rather than allowing the author to confine readers' interpretations, he proposes "The Death of the Author" to enable liberty of interpretation on the part of the reader.[531]

On the other hand, Barthes's proposition in "The Death of the Author" is evidence of the existence of Foucault's "author function" when the ideology of the author's past work comes into play in the present work. In the case of the radio plays, Beckett has imposed an internalised examiner to monitor his creativity, reproducing the effect of panopticism. Arguably, his radio plays are his endeavour of self-inscription: that is, he inscribes the process of creating his work in the plays themselves. It is also possible to argue that Beckett appeals to the listener: "One must internalize, adapt, and imaginatively interrogate the voice. Beckett *stimulates* artistic manipulation in order to *stimulate* companion acts of (re)creation from his viewers. When the players, V, and finally Beckett 'switch off,' it is the spectator's cue to switch on."[532] That is to say, in the person of the Animator Beckett internalises the censoring inspection of his work and coerces his rebellious aesthetic aspirations in order to fulfil his obligation as an author to create according to editors' approval and readers' taste. According to Anna McMullen:

> The author not only interrogates himself (or his own other[s]) as material
> for his fiction, but the work is interrogated by its reader, critics or, in the
> case of drama, directors, actors, or reviewers. The play [*What Where*] can
> therefore also be seen as a parody of the author's, director's or indeed

[530] Foucault, "What is an Author?" 216.

[531] Barthes, *Image Music Text* 143.

[532] Herren 335.

critic's attempt to *interpret* or extract the truth from the writers' work: the

English text describes the process of torture as giving him "the works" and

the French text uses the verb "travailler" – both suggesting enforced study

sessions![533]

This reflexive self-inscription, in which works enact their author's own processes,

echoes Foucault's comments in his only book about literature: *Death and the*

Labyrinth, a study of Raymond Roussel. He argues that Roussel's work reflects his

view of the relation between authors and their creation:

it is better to try to understand that someone who is a writer is not simply

doing his work in his books, in what he publishes, but that his major

work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books. The

private life of an individual, his sexual preference, and his work are

interrelated not because his work translates his sexual life, but because

the work includes the whole life as well as the text.[534]

Foucault concludes from such self-reflexivity between author and work that "The

work is more than the work: the subject who is writing is part of the work."[535] With

an eye to Roussel's technique or style, Foucault compares him to "the machines which

produce the tales, and it is also the tales which remain within the machines."[536] The

function of the machines is, on the one hand, to "safeguard the images, uphold the

heritage and royalty, maintain the glories with their sunbursts, hide the treasures,

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[533] Anna McMullen, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 44.

[534] Ruas 186.

[535] Ruas 186

[536] Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas, introd. James Faubion, PS John Ashbery (1986; London: Continuum, 2004) 79.

record the confessions, suppress the declarations."[537] On the other, they help to "insure this preservation beyond its limits – to make things happen, overcome obstacles, pass through reigns, throw open the prisons and divulge secrets, to reappear on the other side of the night, defeating memory in sleep."[538] This is also the case with Beckett and his radio plays: Beckett is the machine that produces his work, and his work remains within the machines as a part of the entire mechanism. To conclude, then: I have extended the argument of Foucault's panopticism in a more metaphorical direction, and I have used this model both to reflect on Beckett's aspirations when turning to radio as an alternative literary practice and to illuminate his creative process in the plays, which in the case of *Rough for Radio II* and *What Where* is interpreted as coercion, due to internalized monitoring of his own work.

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[537] Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth* 77.

[538] Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth* 77.

CHAPTER FOUR

Towards Minimalism: A Study of Silence and Music in the Radio Drama

"In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to

feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All."[539]

Having dealt with thematic aspects of the radio plays—trauma, panopticism—I

shall now return to the concerns raised in Chapter One section three and address

formal issues of silence and music in this chapter. Rather than treating the plays singly

as I have previously, I shall, in addition, reflect on the overall aesthetic trajectory that

all six of them constitute when taken as a single project. The aims of this chapter are

three-fold, and I will conduct separate discussions of silence, music and the concept of

minimalism based on textual analysis and my own acoustic responses to Beckett's

radio drama. Building on the discussion of three modes of silence in the pre-radio

novels in Chapter One, I will here distinguish seven different categories of silence

based on its diverse functionalities and significance in the radio drama. I will then

suggest that the expression of the inexpressible in Beckett's zero-degree of silence

mutates into the art of music, as an alternative mode of expression, and I shall explore

the role of music in the radio plays in detail in section two. The exploration of

near-silence, and the non-referential nature of Beckettian musicality points to the logic

of minimalist aesthetics. Thus, I will propose in the final section of this chapter the

nexus in the radio drama of silence, music and minimalism.

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[539] Beckett, *Disjecta* 172. Letter to Axel Kaun (1937).

1.   **The Art of Silence: Experiencing Minimal Sound**

Silence has already attracted much critical attention because it is one of the most pervasive Beckettian themes across different genres. In an important declaration of aesthetic purpose he asks:

> why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?[540]

Beckett's exploitation of the inaudible "sound" of silence as a recurrent theme leads to my reassessment of the sound of the unvoiced and its meaning. To understand the "unfathomable abysses of silence" in his radio plays we must question again the meaning and function of silence. Unlike other literary media, radio can realise silence in actual performance, though with very different significances in different contexts.

Beckett critics and scholars have addressed various aspects of silence.[541] In his study of the pragmatic use of silence, Clas Zilliacus suggests that in the radio drama "Silences are defined by their context; the context determines their functions."[542]

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[540] Beckett, *Disjecta* 172.

[541] For example, Helene L. Baldwin's *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence* (1981) investigates the analogies between Beckett's work and negative mysticism. Michael Goldman associates silence with destructive force (particularly after the war) as the articulation of nothingness in "Vitality and Deadness in Beckett's Plays" in *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context* (1986). In a more relevant case, Ihab Hassan examines literary silence in *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (1971) as a metaphor for Beckett's entropic style based on his protagonists' struggle with language. His attempt to marry Beckett's language as "the syntax of nonsense, the grammar of absurdity" to silence is relevant to my later discussion of the musical (Hassan 260). What I intend to interrogate, in contrast to Hassan's focus, is literal silence and its meaning in acoustic occurrences. A very recent study by Duncan McColl Chesney, *Silence Nowhen: Late Modernism, Minimalism and Silence in the Work of Samuel Beckett* (2013) deals with *sigetics* (Martin Heidegger's term for discourse of silence), but tends only to focus on Beckett's own reticence in *Waiting for Godot*.

[542] Zilliacus 157.

Occurrences of silence thus serve divergent purposes based on their textual bearings.

Kevin Branigan points out in his study of Beckett's radio drama that "The words are

incapable of conveying truth, memory or simply communicating," whereas silence

(which is, as he demonstrates, also strategically used in Robert Pinget and Nathalie

Sarraute's radio plays) can potentially achieve such effects.[543] He suggests that

silence purifies the aural dimension when sounds and voices are suspended and this, in

his view, constitutes Beckett's radio aesthetics of silence. My discussion of silence in

this chapter is in part an extension of Zilliacus's analysis of its functions and

Branigan's focus on its impact, but my research also parts company with theirs

because I intend to argue how silence can lead ultimately towards aesthetic

minimalism, which I discuss in section three below. In contrast to the three models of

silence found in Beckett's pre-radio fiction, I shall here expand my inventory based on

the radio plays and address seven different categories of silence: 1. silence versus

pause; 2. the near-silence of infinitesimal sounds; 3. absolute silence; 4. contemplation

as a pragmatic radio tactic in silence; 5. solitary silence as trauma; 6. silent existence;

and 7. silence as disintegration of language. We should note, however, that in practice

the distinction between these different categories is not always clear-cut; there can be

instances of overlap. I also intend to stress the distinctiveness of the radio plays in

contrast to the pre-radio fiction and the Trilogy, and the actual acoustic experience of

the plays will therefore be a focus of my analysis. I will move between the textual

analysis and silence to theorising the actual performance of silence in both the first

BBC radio productions and Everett Frost's subsequent productions of the following

plays: *All That Fall*, *Embers*, *Rough for Radio II*, *Cascando* and *Words and Music*.

It is worth stressing the differentiation of silence from pause at the very start of

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[543] Branigan 29.

this discussion. The radio practitioner Paul Deharme introduced a montage technique called "chronometrics of representation" that aims at determining the number of pauses, silences, musical or spoken words as his contribution to the art of the radiophonic.[544] However, this principle falls short of analysing how long a pause or a silence should last. "Silent moments," as defined by Zilliacus, "are distinguished by frequency and duration."[545] The difficulty for his approach is that a universal standard for measuring the duration of silences and pauses is unlikely, let alone the finer differences between a short pause and a long pause that Beckett also uses in the radio plays. The distinction between silence and pause remains a fundamental puzzle even in a scientific approach. Since the presentation of pause and silence is the same—the cessation of sound—how can the audience tell them apart except by checking the terminological differences in the printed texts? Alternatively, we may distinguish between pause and silence based on their separate functions and significance. I will first draw on Zilliacus's summary of Ad. Stender-Petersen's analysis of the function of pauses in Anton Chekhov's theatre plays as a point of reference from which to measure how Beckett's own practice differs:

> Pauses serve to structure monologues and soliloquies, and to intensify the loneliness expressed by these. Pauses illustrate a lack of contact between two people, in a tragic or comic manner, or even in caricature. Pauses serve to slowly increase tension in the auditorium: retardative in effect, they underline the inevitability of things to come. Pauses frequently serve to accentuate a chasm between idealism and cynicism, between innocence and experience. Pauses underline the importance, from the speaker's point

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[544] Deharme 410.

[545] Zilliacus 155.

of view, of his utterances.[546]

Despite this helpful model, the ultimate differentiation between silence and pause remains enigmatic, and Beckett repeatedly uses both in his radio drama.

I wish to suggest in my first category that a silence can be a disconfirmed pause. To draw an example from avant-garde music, when John Cage raises his hands to signal the start of his piece *4'33"* (1952), his gesture is suspended, which accordingly appears to be a pause before a movement. When the next movement does not follow, audiences then realize that this is a silence intentionally made. Silence is thus understood as disconfirmed pause, from which we can infer that pauses are used as an indication to continue. Pauses in Beckett's radio drama are often inserted in a monologue, allowing a character to catch breath, or as a transitional gap to anticipate the words or movements that follow. In *Cascando*, for example, pauses interleave a series of separate statements and instructions in the opening lines: the statement "It is the month of May . . . for me," is followed after a pause by self-confirmation, "Correct," and finally after another pause by the declaration "I open."[547] A number of pauses aim at integrating the constituent articulations by Words in *Words and Music*, and they form a semi-conscious gesture of abeyance in the middle of a monologue. It is only when listeners later realise that nothing follows from a silent moment that it is no longer a pause but silence.

For my second category, I will argue that silence can be a background of infinitesimal sounds, specifically when we are asked to attend to the "sound of dying, dying glow," or to catch a sound that is "as quiet as the grave" in *Embers*.[548] Not only

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[546] Zilliacus 157-58. Refers to Ad. Stender-Petersen, "Zur Technik der Pause bei Čechov," *Anton Čechov 1860-1960: Some Essays*, ed. T. Eekman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960) 187.

[547] Beckett, *CDW* 297.

[548] Beckett, *CDW* 255, 261.

does this mode of silence, or rather near-silence, hark back to my discussion of our pre-radio Beckettian training to listen to faint sounds, but the posture of Woburn in *Cascando*—"he's down . . . that's what counts . . . face in the mud . . . arms spread . . . . . . he gets up, knees first . . . hands flat . . . in the mud . . . head sunk . . . then up"—echoes the strange acts of listening discussed in Chapter One section three.[549] Unlike in his fiction, however, it is through the radio that the attempt to "make silence audible on air" is possible.[550] Beckett is acutely aware of the limitation of our acoustic perceptions, and he confronts us with the challenge to listen to dying embers in the radio play of that title, although we hardly hear any sound made in the first BBC radio version or subsequently in Everett Frost's American production. Perhaps these are, according to Branigan, "dying sounds, diminishing, but not quite out of earshot."[551] Our hearing is thus sensitised to these infinitesimal sounds as almost-silence. In contrast to the silence of embers, the sounds made when Henry stands up or sits down on the shingle are heard clearly in both the BBC's and Frost's productions.

I now wish to discuss the threshold sound of almost-silence further, which will open up other questions addressed in my subsequent categories of silence. Participants who underwent the experiment of John Cage's sound-proof or "anechoic" laboratory in 1951 claimed that they did in fact hear something.[552] This result suggests three

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[549] Beckett, *CDW* 298.

[550] Branigan 57. See also Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett Theater* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980) 35.

[551] Branigan 122.

[552] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1961) 8. Cage says: "For certain engineering purposes, it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber, its six walls made of special material, a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. . . . the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood circulation."

possibilities: first, that there are ultra-sonic elements that pass through our ears unnoticed because they are not acoustically perceptible by us (for example, dolphins or mammals pass signals using high-pitch sound waves in communication, undetectable by human ears), and these may be included in the near-silence of infinitesimal sounds. Second, it may not be external sound that Cage's subjects hear after all, but their own internal sounds (of nerves, cells or even blood), which provokes the English experimental musician David Toop to observe that "so-called subjective tinnitus—a sound that can't be heard by another person—may be the sounds of the brain at work."[553] This nearly-silent internal noise opens the possibility of problematizing the notion of absolute silence, which is what I will explore next. The final factor in Cage's experiment also involves internal sound, but deals with a different scale of listening involving thoughts, memory or imagination (leading to my suggestion below of a fifth category of silence). These suggestions illuminate the effects of the infinitesimal sound that one is exposed to at all times, and which can be intensified in proportion to one's exposure to external silence. More importantly, silence at the very threshold of audibility is relevant to my argument about minimalism in section three.

Given the second outcome of Cage's experiment, I want to raise as my third category here the possibility of absolute silence. The French musicologist and philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch says that "Absolute silence, like pure space or bare time, is an inconceivable limit."[554] Total silence is inconceivable – even, or especially, when we think about it, for thinking itself may be a kind of noise. Even when we are not caught up in the activity of thinking, the tinnitus noise made by brain cells or

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[553] Toop 69.

[554] Jankélévitch 136.

nerves gives us a ringing or hissing disturbance that we cannot get rid of. The

supposedly silent background is replaced by "a perpetual din" of noise, because it

"constitutes a sonorous foundation, suspended under silence."[555] The underlying

background, from this viewpoint, is not silence, but noise. In *Embers*, the background

of the play is not silence but the noise of the sea, which Branigan neatly captures in

his suggestion that the sea is "silence made audible."[556] It is worth noticing that in

this play Henry visits the strand repeatedly in order to drown out his internal sound of

the sea, which is connected with his traumatic past. Therefore, if the ambient sound of

nature or of a radio production is noise due to the inconceivability of absolute silence,

then the condition of silence, as a more or less comparative term, can be intentionally

and locally inserted by the dramatist.

For my fourth category, I will argue that the pragmatic occurrence of silence in

Beckett's radio plays not only suggests thinking activity by the characters, but also

allows listeners to think or contemplate, based on the manner in which external silence

intensifies internal stimulation. Silence may play a pragmatic role that allows listeners

to absorb the radio play, and in Beckett's radio drama it is proffered purposely for the

scrupulous inspection of sounds, voices and music. Jankélévitch suggests that "silence

is the necessary condition for 'contemplation'" because it can represent a reflexive

moment to provoke profound thoughts.[557] For example, after Maddy questions herself

in *All That Fall*: "Why do I halt?" silence immediately follows, which allows both

character and listener alike to brood upon the question and possibly formulate an

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[555] Jankélévitch 135.

[556] Branigan 121.

[557] Jankélévitch 150.

answer. Such is also the case when she asks "Will [the weather] hold up?"[558] The

question is no longer just rhetorical but demands full-scale contemplation in silence.

Thus we may think in Beckettian silence, if we choose to. After Opener closes the

articulation of Voice and Music in *Cascando*, silence provokes reverie. And as Voice

repeatedly tells the story of Woburn as if to find out "what's in his [Woburn's] head,"

the inquiry provokes Opener as well as listeners to draw connections in silence.[559]

The effect of Voice (or Words) and Music has a similar impact on Croak in *Words and*

Music and evokes the memory of the face and Lily. The collaborative effort of Words

and Music succeeded by a long pause causes Croak's murmuring of "The face.

[*Pause*.] The face. [*Pause*.] The face. [*Pause*.] The face."[560] The improvisation by

Words and/or Music thus stimulates Croak's memory in the silence that follows.

Although reference to silence is rarely found in this text, its occurrence and effect is

seemingly interchangeable with the long pause in both the BBC's and Frost's

productions. Echoing Paul Deharme's suggestion, silence is thus a pragmatic radio

tactic to give listeners time to digest materials from the performance, merged with the

primary function of contemplation (which takes the lesser operation of digesting to a

new depth).[561]

My fifth category evokes a potentially therapeutic function of silence in

Beckett. Thomas J. Cousineau observes the "healing power of silence" when Beckett's

works are able to "dissipate the dead language of illusory self-representation and to

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[558] Beckett, *CDW* 172.

[559] Beckett, *CDW* 298.

[560] Beckett, *CDW* 291.

[561] Refer to Deharme 409.

awaken a healing word."[562] According to music therapist Julie P. Sutton, therapists

"commonly defin[e] silence as space within which anticipation, reflection, and an

awareness of self are possible."[563] She suggests that the "therapeutic stance is

possible within the inner, silent space . . . that suspends time and opens up possibilities"

for the unconscious to unfold the trauma.[564] The suggested therapy may be enacted in

clinical silence, the impact of which will cause traumatic replay, as in my discussion

of the acting out of trauma in repetition in Chapter Two. I have suggested silence as

contemplation already in *Cascando*. However, the effort to open and close Voice and

Music is made repeatedly, and in the BBC radio production that the dynamics of the

performance of Voice and Music first follows a reductive trajectory, then "the

reawakening" of "the month of May" punctuates a return to a state of forceful flux.[565]

Both Voice and Music respond to the Woburn story to evoke the "vague memory" in

Woburn's head.[566] The repeated process fails to end because however close the chase

may be according to Voice, Woburn is never caught. The practice of repetition linked

to trauma is also enacted in *Words and Music*. Seemingly the role of Words and Music

as stimuli for Croak aims at provoking traumatic memory due to his sorrow over the

face and Lily in the BBC radio production. Interestingly, the rhetorically structured

speech given by Joe (in the role of Words) repeats itself across different themes as

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[562] Thomas J. Cousineau, *After the Final No: Samuel Beckett's Trilogy* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999) 17-18.

[563] Julie P. Sutton, "The Air between Two Hands: Silence, Music and Communication," *Silence, Music, Silent Music*, eds. Micky Losseff and Jenny Doctor (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007) 182.

[564] Sutton 179. She goes on to suggest that "silence may hold what is traumatic about our inner life" (180).

[565] Beckett, *CDW* 301.

[566] Beckett, *CDW* 298.

demanded by Croak, and the intensity of the impact on Croak diminishes each time. However, when Joe is better inspired by Bob (in the role of Music) towards the end of the play, the former's speech finally contains refreshing materials that arouse Croak's memory, which is related to the strategy of increasing the intensity of coercion to stimulate traumatic memory in *Rough for Radio II*.

In his remarks to Fox in *Rough for Radio II* Animator refers to "the one . . . thing . . . unsaid that can give you back your darling solitudes," and the kind of solitude he refers to here is clearly linked to Fox's silent condition.[567] This linkage is also suggested when Beckett in a 1951 letter to Mania Peron asks her "To listen to the darkness, the silence, the solitude and the dead."[568] Kevin Branigan associates silence with loneliness when it manages to "isolate sounds, characters or words from each other; to act as impediments to communication."[569] I have suggested earlier that environmental silence intensifies internal perceptions. External silence may trigger an internal conscious or unconscious condition, and silence in affiliation with solitude intensifies introspection. *Embers* is paradigmatic here; for when Henry is alone, the external noise of the sea, which I have suggested earlier is a mode of silence, provokes his traumatic memory of Ada. The entire process of calling back Ada, of working through the memory of past events involving his father, is traumatic. Inward reflexivity is gained and intensified by external silence as the condition of solitude, and this is where one can anticipate trauma. Thus, the tie between silence and solitariness facilitates both the emergence and the potential healing of trauma.

My sixth category of silence interrogates existence. Borrowing an observation

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[567] Beckett, *CDW* 281.

[568] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 285.

[569] Branigan 114.

from *The Unnamable*, J. E. Dearlove argues that "The voice creates the narrator, who in turn embodies that voice," thus existence is conveyed through narration.[570] Narration enables characters to talk themselves into existence as a main concern in the Trilogy. In the light of this, Flloyd Kennedy is surely right to suggest in "The Challenge of Theorizing the Voice in Performance" that "the voice *is* the presence of the actor."[571] His suggestion, by extension, might also bear upon the way that listeners determine the existence of a character or object based on what we hear on the radio. Similarly, Mary Bryden suggests in *Samuel Beckett and Music* that listening and speaking are regarded as "attest[e]rs of presence."[572] Audibility is the means whereby listeners determine actual being (even though it may be an illusion) on the radio. If existence is determined by what the audience can hear or is allowed to hear, silence, or the absence of sound and voice, on the other hand, should suggest non-being or nothingness.[573] However, silence does not necessarily correspond to emptiness or the void; in fact, physical or mental movements can be made in silence. When Mr. and Mrs. Rooney are taunted by the Lynch twins in *All That Fall*, for instance, Dan's threatening gestures with his stick are made in silence in the first BBC radio production, though the movement is considered to be carried out for the twins flee from the Rooneys as a result. Their physical performance thus produces no perceptible level of sound for the listeners. In *Embers*, there is "Dead silence" as the "dreadful

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[570] J. E. Dearlove, "The Voice and Its Words," *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (Durham [NC]: Duke UP, 1982) 92.

[571] Flloyd Kennedy 406.

[572] Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence" 25.

[573] For the interpretation of silence as nihilism see: Michael Goldman's view of the destructive impact of silence in the post-war period in "Vitality and Deadness in Beckett's Plays," *Beckett at 80 / Beckett in Context*, ed. Enoch Brater (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986); or for silence as the articulation of nothingness see Joanne Shaw's *Impotence and Making in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy* Molloy, Malone Dies, *and* The Unnamable *and* How It Is (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

sound" of embers.[574] Though the existence of embers is textually affirmed, the sound

remains unheard throughout the play. Similarly in *Rough for Radio II*, Dick's presence

as a mute figure is only evidenced by his whippings of Fox upon Animator's demand.

It is worth mentioning that the original BBC production does voice Dick's existence –

he gasps when demonstrating his whipping technique at the beginning of the play,

while Frost's production is, in my view, more faithful to the text by making his

existence completely mute. These examples defy the conventional logic that what

does not appear in the play should remain silent or vice versa. As Maddy forewarned

us, "Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is

going on."[575] She speaks here as Beckett's spokesperson to insist that we as listeners

discount silence as lack of meaning or nothingness. The radio plays evidently show

that existence can be sustained in silence and that movements may be made beyond

the limitation of our acoustic reception.

On the other hand, Beckett also problematizes the existence of sounds or

voices that are heard by us. Following Henry's imitation of her voice in *Embers*,

Addie's actual voice together with the distressing events from the past are made

unsettlingly present. The existence of Henry's father is even more unsettling because

his own voice (as opposed to quoted words) does not feature at all in the play.

Moreover, Ada's corporeal existence is problematic though her voice does come

through. Regardless of the possibility of existence problematized by her silent

physical movements (she makes no sound as she sits on the shingle), her marginal

"*low remote voice throughout*" is a sharp contrast to Henry's voluble existence.[576]

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[574] Beckett, *CDW* 255.

[575] Beckett, *CDW* 185.

[576] Beckett, *CDW* 257.

Their unequal condition as revealed by such divergent levels of sound implies that

Ada is a ghostly figure summoned by Henry. She may exist only in his internal

dialogue with her. The impression of problematic existence evoked in the

disconcerting performance of sounds and voices suggests that the audience is listening

not just from Henry's viewpoint, but actually from within his mind.

In a parallel to Martin Heidegger's theory of *Dasein*, Beckett may be posing

the question as to whether existence is determined by our care or concern in relation to

others.[577] In *All That Fall*, for example, Maddy is acutely aware of her potential

inexistence when other characters are not concerned about her: "Don't mind me.

Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known."[578] Thus Miss Fitt

could not acknowledge the presence of Maddy, because she claims that her "heart is

not in it," i.e. she is not engaging with her surroundings.[579] Existence is thus subject

to the care or concern paid by the subject. One is prone to be so absorbed in a certain

affair that one pays no particular attention to others. For example, Maddy realises that

she wouldn't hear the sound of a steamroller when she "was so plunged in sorrow,"

just as Miss Fitt finds herself effectively alone in church due to her concentration on

her Maker.[580]

Moving finally to my seventh category, I will explore how disrupted

communication or the disintegration of language can lead to silence. Critics observe

that words in Beckett's work fail to convey meaning and that dissociated expression is

a recurrent motif of his oeuvre. Famous instances such as Lucky's tirade in *Waiting for*

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[577] Cf. Richard Begam's *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (1996) where he uses Heidegger as a postmodernist philosophical paradigm to situate Beckett.

[578] Beckett, *CDW* 179.

[579] Beckett, *CDW* 183.

[580] Beckett, *CDW* 181.

Godot or the torrent of words in *Not I* lose referential significance because the formulations and the manner of their utterance are far from comprehensible. Such a disruption between language and meaning is suggested in *All That Fall* when Maddy's bizarre voice is "struggling with a dead language."[581] Language is problematized because it undermines her communication with others and fails to incarnate her thoughts. The meaning embodied in language is in conflict with the words she actually verbalises. Roland Barthes argues in *Writing Degree Zero* that "the disintegration of language can only lead to the silence of writing," which exactly captures the plight of Beckett's protagonists in their speeches, especially in the tension between repetitious speech and sudden outbreaks of dead silence.[582] Silence can thus be used as a tool to dramatize the disintegration of language and the failure of communication. When words fail, silence intervenes. Echoing the discussion of silence as a relative term in my third category, we may say that only when words are cut short by silence can we experience silence as a contrasting term.

Beckett's work is replete with ruptured linguistic acts, which I intend to argue can be understood in terms of the function of silence. When Flloyd Kennedy distinguishes language, speech and voice from each other, he argues that voice can embody thoughts when articulated in language; whereas speech pathology occurs when language becomes unintelligible and meaningless. However, I believe that dissociating voice from speech and language can have a positive meaning in its own right, which I shall argue to be the expression of a specifically Beckettian music in section two below. In the radio plays, disrupted cooperation is a form of disconnected communication between Words or Voice on the one hand and Music on the other – a

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[581] Beckett, *CDW* 194.

[582] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) 81.

disruption which leads to silence. We witness this vividly in *Cascando* when the repeated joint efforts of Voice and Music, seemingly in rivalry with each other, always lead only to silence. Certainly we can identify dissociated communication (between the logic of language and the performance of sounds or voices), or disconnected or conflicting relationships (between Maddy and Dan or Words/Voice and Music) as examples in the radio plays of the rupture that unleashes silence.

I have examined seven categories of silence beyond the analysis of what silence implies on the printed page, since we clearly must take into account the actual performance and reception of the acoustic dimension which is so specific to radio drama. These manifold categories invoke the analyses of Jankélévitch, Cage and Deharme, who have made actual aesthetic experiments with silence; and I have suggested that, contrary to the nihilistic critical discourse which argues that silence is inexistence, existence continues beyond the physical or metaphysical perception of silence, so long as Beckett's protagonists or listeners show awareness of it.

The transition from literature to radio to explore the aural dimension conforms to Beckett's propensity in *Disjecta* to "act like that mad (?) mathematician who used a different principle of measurement at each step of his calculation."[583] Comparing radio with theatre, Clas Zilliacus observes that "Theatre practice can never by pause or silence effect a total cessation of impulses: only radio can."[584] Radio is potentially a more silent medium than theatre, but as I have argued, absolute silence is still impossible, even here. This is especially the case when, according to Steven Connor, "the atmosphere had most frequently become audible in the age of radio, namely in the forms of electromagnetic interference that in its early days was referred to . . . as

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[583] Beckett, *Disjecta* 173.

[584] Zilliacus 159.

'atmospherics.'"[585] We may speculate that Beckett challenges us to hear this silent atmosphere on the radio. In fact, Stephen Vitiello, an electronic musician and sound artist, says of one of his experiments: "we were able to hear the frequency of some of the lights as a sound frequency, thus listening to the lights" because "The microphones became a stethoscope through which I could listen to the pulse of the buildings."[586] This suggestion recalls the moment when Henry asks his father and concomitantly the audience in *Embers* to "Listen to the light," so perhaps radio can potentially make the silent sound of light or of the atmosphere audible.[587] On the other hand, as Kevin Branigan argues, "The radio plays challenge us to consider each sound and word, each pause and silence as musical units which hold equal status."[588] Thus, the presences of silence no longer die in the background, but are brought to the fore in Beckett's use of radio.

2. The Art of the Musical: Towards the Condition of Music

I will now shift my focus to explore the role and function of music in Beckett's radio drama. In Beckett's practice of synaesthesia as well as his rigorous attack on the propriety of language, we can find clues to his practice of shifting between national and artistic languages that ultimately gives rise to his aesthetic trajectory towards the musical. Beckett seeks in language a return to its non-referential function as material sound elements, a movement towards a semantically subtracted mode that highlights the phonic. This suggestion echoes my discussion of radiophonic

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[585] Steven Connor, "Strings in the Earth and Air," *New Formations*, spec. issue of *Postmodernism, Music and Cultural Theory* 66 (2009): 65.

[586] Qtd. in Toop 125.

[587] Beckett, *CDW* 253.

[588] Branigan 117.

sound in Chapter One, and I will reinforce its non-referential connection to music through textual analysis and acoustic experience of the radio plays. Beckett is famous (or notorious) for problematizing language, and he has made numerous attempts to seek expression in a foreign language or in unconventional modes of articulation such as colour. Such alternative expressive modes will then illuminate why language must be shaken loose from its meaning or from the linguistic system in order to approximate Beckett's ideal mode of expression. The discussion in this section is two-fold: first, I will argue that Beckett seeks to make words or voices act like music in the radio plays; second, I will argue that solitude is the common ground for silence as well as the shifting role of music across his radio drama, a claim that will lead to my discussion of minimalism in the final section.

Though it may seem tangential, I cannot think of a better way to start the discussion than to ask how to translate the expression of different colours? What does it mean when Beckett demands that Billie Whitelaw, the famous Beckettian actress, should present "no colo[u]r" in his productions?[589] Or what is the white or grey sound that he uses as guidance in production? When Alain Badiou asks "Which is the most appropriate colour for the empty place that constitutes the *ground* [*fond*] of all existence," he reveals his understanding that in Beckett "dark grey, or light black, or black marked by an uncertain colour. . . . designates being in its localisation, which is empty of any event."[590] This Beckettian greyness is an indication of the inexpressible abyss when words fail to convey meanings. Such fractured expressions point out the limitation of linguistics and the existence of the inexpressible. Whitelaw recalls Beckett's insistent demand for expressionless emotion and notes how she allies the

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[589] Kalb 234.

[590] Alan Badiou, *On Beckett*, eds. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen, 2003) 50.

moods of the voice to the expression of colour:

> I recognize an inner scream in *Not I*, something I'd been sitting on for a
> long time, and whatever it was connected with me very fundamentally,
> very deeply. But the words that I've got scribbled all over my texts are:
> "No colo[u]r," "Don't act," "No emotion," "Just say it." And if in
> doubt—and this applies to acting wherever, on whatever—don't do it, do
> nothing. That's a Golden Rule of acting. I think when he says, "No
> colo[u]r, no emotion," he means, "Don't act, for God's sake."[591]

Perhaps, then, Beckett demands a similar mode of expression to Roland Barthes's
notion of "a colourless writing, free from all bondage to a pre-ordained state of
language."[592] In the production of *What Where*, David Warrilow, another of the
notable Beckett actors, states his intention to "make it as grey as possible, uniform and
grey."[593] Whitelaw recalls acting in *Footfalls*: "I was in a sort of strange
no-man's-land, gr[e]y, neither here nor there. . . . this gr[e]y area."[594] The expression
of the grey tone is for her associated with a materialised, expressionless expression:
"When working with Beckett I am working with material . . . so I start off by being
like a robot . . I just tap it out like a robot."[595] Colour is referred to in order to
metaphorically represent the mood or manner of the performance; it is thus a new
language or new system for expression that Beckett brings to our attention. Such
greyness can be felt in Ada's emotionless voice in *Embers*, both in the BBC and Frost

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[591] Qtd. in Kalb 234.

[592] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* 82.

[593] Qtd. in Kalb 228.

[594] Qtd. in Kalb 235.

[595] Qtd. in Kalb 236.

productions. Similarly, the white voice mentioned in my Introduction to imply a flat

key of atonality, may be considered a surrogate expression to supplement the

deficiency of language. Although the definition of a grey emotion or a white voice is

not tangible, listeners seem to capture its implication from the context of Beckett's

work. It is in such aesthetic aspirations that Beckett comes close to the Futurist "words

in freedom," that project of new expression as opposed to the conventional linguistic

system, which I discussed in Chapter One.

Katharine Worth attempts to work out the sensuous impact of music based on

the experience of producing new versions of *Words and Music* in 1973 and 1984, and

she rightly comments that discussion of the text leaves out questions concerning the

acoustic such as the tone of a voice or the emotion of a character.[596] In *Cascando*, as a

case in point, "Music's role was represented only by a dotted line and the directions

for performance were minimal."[597] Music expresses anxiety in Worth's production of

Words and Music, and is rich in "Plaintive tones of viola and cello suggest[ing] the

tension, even fear, in the Opener's sombre declaration." She even relates the

performance of music to colour in the following observation: "Dark tones were part of

the musical sound, but the total effect was many-coloured," hence, the impact of the

experience is synaesthesia.[598] Morton Feldman confesses that he barely studied

Beckett's directorial notes for *Words and Music* when composing music for it: in his

defence, he argues that "I could never have written it using his terminology, because I

wouldn't know what his terminology meant. . . . It's like saying 'a thump.' . . . With

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[596] Katharine Worth, "Words for Music Perhaps," *Samuel Beckett and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 14.

[597] Worth, "Words for Music Perhaps" 17.

[598] Worth, "Words for Music Perhaps" 19. For discussion about synaesthesia, see Yoshiki Tajiri, "Beckett and Synaesthesia," *Samuel Beckett: Endlessness in the Year 2000*, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, eds. Angela B. Moorjani and Carola Veit (2001): 178-85.

Beckett, you realize that you don't understand the simplest word, like 'thump.'"[599]
The confusion caused by language is resolved in an alternative expressive mode, as
Feldman reveals: "you're looking in the eyes, you're looking at the body language. In
Beckett, you're looking for everything except his direction."[600]

The problem that ties expression to language is arguably why Beckett shifts
between languages, and its resolution is sought in a dissociative mode of language.
English, for him, is problematic because he "know[s] [it] too well."[601] Language as a
social tool aims at communication; thus the voiced words offer to correspond to a
representational world. However, the conundrum, as Beckett sees it, is how language
complicates our expression: "It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even
senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language
appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the
Nothingness) behind it."[602] There is, firstly, lack in language. According to Thomas J.
Cousineau, there is "deprivation" in language because "Words . . . appear as merely
shadowy tokens when measured against the real world that they presumably
represent."[603] For Kevin Branigan, language "is an impediment to our perception of
reality," such that one must find alternative forms of expression.[604] Secondly, there is
also, paradoxically, excess in language. A word may contain excessive connotations

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[599] Interview with Morton Feldman in Everett C. Frost, "The Note Man on the Word Man: Morton Feldman on Composing the Music for Samuel Beckett's *Words and Music* in *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*," *Samuel Beckett and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 52.

[600] Frost, "The Note Man on the Word Man" 52.

[601] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 170.

[602] Beckett, *Disjecta* 172.

[603] Cousineau 121.

[604] Branigan 155.

that no longer convey a straightforward meaning. Beckett's mastery of English

undermines expression in the way that a word is articulated "without referring to what

it is supposed to present," thus he alienates language from the customary linguistic

system.[605] Alain Badiou argues that Beckett uses French as a "solemn form of

distance between the act of saying and what is said;" he can therefore treat it as "an

instrument," a principle that "keeps the excessive precision of the English language at

bay."[606] Badiou seems to me to stress not so much translation between one language

and another, but rather the "separating function" whereby "the word declares what we

must disregard in order to face up to what may be of worth."[607]

        In my examination of the simultaneous lack and excess in language, the use of

language as a musical instrument severs it from conventional linguistic meaning and

extends to the way that sounds, voices and music are performed in Beckett's radio

drama. I will elaborate on this point by harking back to the landmark decision to write

in English in his first radio play. Having worked in both English and French, Beckett

returns to English in *All That Fall*, and the most obvious and pragmatic reason is that

the work is to be broadcast by the BBC. However, critics offer other, more interesting

and ambitious interpretations of this transition. For example, Badiou suggests that the

purpose of the return to English is to reduce its excessive reference, so as to formulate

"a kind of subtracted English, an English of pure cadence."[608] This is a helpful

suggestion that highlights the actual material sounds of the articulated words, leading

almost to a condition prior to language itself. It may also evoke the way that

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[605] *Malone Dies* in Beckett, *LSB* 2: 189.

[606] Badiou, *On Beckett* xxxv-xxxvi.

[607] Badiou, *On Beckett* 44.

[608] Badiou, *On Beckett* xxxvi.

expression is sought from the fall of a sound—echoing the title of *All That Fall*—as when Beckett told David Warrilow that "What I really was waiting for was the rain at the end" of *All That Fall*, which the first BBC radio production fails to offer but which is successfully delivered in Frost's radio production.[609]

Linda Ben-Zvi suggests that "Language . . . weakens and alters . . . sounds move from voiced to voiceless. Words lose their meaning; become archaic; phrases are no longer remembered, or only half-remembered. Languages even die; Gaelic, for example."[610] Her remarks gesture towards Beckett's intention to subtract meaning from linguistic expression based on the moments of dissociated articulation that I discussed in my seventh category of silence in the previous section. For example, Words in *Words and Music* strives to deliver eloquent speeches on sloth, love, and age, but the effect of a similar and externally imposed rhetorical structure on such radically different themes results in superficial and meaningless excess. Voice in *Cascando* fails to evoke profound emotions due to the fragmented Woburn story which he tells repeatedly. The failure to convey meaning in language forms an allegorical parallel with the disintegrated relationship between Words or Voice and Music in both radio plays. The compulsion to make Words or Voice cooperate with Music suggests a musical stratum tending towards the condition of full-blooded music, where meaning is no longer sought in language as such.

Branigan associates incoherent or broken speech with expression under distress.[611] Speech aims to articulate thought, but when words are affiliated with the conventional logic of language they become inexpressible. The attempt to speak one's

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[609] Qtd. in Kalb 233.

[610] Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett's Media Plays," *Modern Drama* 28.1 (1985): 22.

[611] Branigan 75.

mind in language is thus "excruciating" as suggested in *All That Fall*, because the expression is "unspeakable."[612] Flloyd Kennedy evokes a triangle among language, speech and voice, where the Beckettian rift divorces voice from social meaning; he argues that "the voice may be relegated (in discussion) to the realms of metaphor and thus be wholly deprived of its phenomenological presence."[613] To release a voice from language, one must look beyond the semantic content of dialogue and experience the acoustic as a phenomenon in its own right.

The voice of a character must aim at distinctiveness on the radio to portray the personality of the role. To make this happen Paul Deharme proposes "*Vocal masks* as the elements of a simple repertoire," such that, for example, a high-pitched voice suggests a youthful character.[614] Just as one wears a mask to identify oneself with the personality of the mask, so Deharme's notion enables characters to embody their roles through vocal imitation. Maddy Rooney's voice, for instance, is often overly enthusiastic with occasional outbursts of wild laughter and even frenzied screaming in *All That Fall*.[615] Her articulation thus reveals a hysterical nature. Although Beckett never states clearly that Maddy is hysterical, her tone of voice conveys such an implication. This demonstrates the "great advantage of an aural medium over print," according to Robert McLeish, since the unexpressed message is encapsulated "in the sound of the human voice – the warmth, the compassion, the anger, the pain and the laughter." A voice should therefore be "conveying much more than reported speech. It has inflection and accent, hesitation and pause, a variety of emphasis and speed" by

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[612] Beckett, *CDW* 194.

[613] Flloyd Kennedy 411.

[614] Deharme 409.

[615] Beckett, *CDW* 177.

means of which it can fully impersonate roles in radio drama.[616] Thus in *Embers*, Henry's distress comes through in his coarse voice and fretful tone, which are more dramatically presented in the BBC production than in Frost's in my opinion. On the other hand, Ada's emotionless laughter as greyness and her flat, robotic tone or white voice further underscore her ghostly presence in sharp contrast to Henry himself. This vocal difference suggests their segregation in different dimensions of being despite the fact that they manage to converse with each other.

The ambiguous settings and reduced plots in Beckett's radio drama may also be seen as strategies to draw the listeners' attention to the qualities of sounds and voices. The aural dimension here encapsulates how reality should be perceived, just as Rudolf Arnheim suggests that "the word is first revealed as sound, as expression, embedded in a world of expressive natural sounds . . . the elemental force lies in the sound, which affects everyone more directly than the meaning of the word."[617] Beckett is thus concerned about what comes *before* language, a question that many philosophers have also addressed. He strives to express the unspeakable by looking beyond semantics, so as to focus on purely sonic expression.

In *Disjecta* Beckett announces that he seeks to tear down the "mask" of language, and he endeavours "To bore one hole after another in it [language], until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through."[618] In so doing, he subtracts voice from the semantics of speech. In everyday utterance, we are constantly concerned with the meaning of the spoken words and with how reality manifests itself in speech. When Everett Frost speaks of how "audio art (or text/sound)

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[616] McLeish 7.

[617] Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound* (1936; New York: Da Capo, 1972) 27-28.

[618] Beckett, *Disjecta* 171-72.

productions" create "*ex nihilo*" and begin "from nothing and create structure and meaning out of words and sound, or better, out of sounding words," we can see that radio offers a focus on the aural which includes not just the voice, but more importantly, word-as-sound.[619] As in my discussion of radiophonic sound in Chapter One, this experience of word-as-sound, or of voice-as-sound in Pierre Schaeffer's account of "reduced listening," allows word or voice to be heard without us being distracted by its referential meaning.[620] Voice or sound is thus free from its obligation to make linguistic reference, especially in the curtailed, manipulated extraction of sounds in the radio plays. When sound cuts itself off from its primal context, it is exempted from original associations. The plucked sounds of Beckett's radio drama thus emancipate sound from its original landscape and memory, so that it carries no preconceived connections when inserted in a new context.

These plucked sounds, however, catch our attention as we endeavour to fathom what goes on in the play. Often such sounds are stylized, and our reception of them is also manipulated. In *All That Fall* such manipulation buttresses the assumption that our experience of the play is based on Maddy Rooney's viewpoint. When the birdsong follows her remark: "listen to the cooing of the ringdoves," we begin to listen attentively as she has requested, instead of letting the sounds pass by unnoticed, ignoring them as mere background noise.[621] When we are trained to listen to the sound of hooves or the drip summoned by Henry in *Embers*, these stylized noises challenge his memory of them, and also question the listeners' acceptance of how a sound should be embodied. Beckett first implements sounds in a stereotypical way,

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[619] Frost, "Why Sound Art Works and the German Hörspiel" 111.

[620] Qtd. in Toop 67.

[621] Beckett, *CDW* 192.

only to later undermine the inscribed ideology by magnifying them. In the BBC

production of *Embers*, the amplified sound reverberates with the original sound of the

drip, but the effect is so uncanny due to the non-identical repetition, that we wonder

why both treatments differ. We may conclude that the perception of the sound of a drip

is not universal, because dripping water makes different noises according to its milieu.

Hooves also have different aural effects depending on the surface on which the horse

is running and how fast it travels. These examples show Beckett sabotaging the

stability of a pre-established sound, by severing reference from its original source.

This non-referential use of language in fact approaches the condition of music, and

this is where we can anticipate Beckett's trajectory towards more overt musical

expression in these plays.

Words and Voice, though representatives of language, come to resemble music

in Beckett's radio plays. We can invoke Elissa S. Guralnick's exploration of the

function of music in radio drama. She argues that purely instrumental music is

"non-referential" and that therefore no images are stirred by it; and she suggests that

Beckett's terse use of language shows that he "aspired to the condition of music" by

"making language act like music."[622] Words or Voice are explicitly made to sing or

interact with Music in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. In fact, Guralnick observes

how Beckett "eliminate[s] narrative from language, so that words can make music

instead of telling stories" in both radio plays.[623] She has accordingly suggested the

formulation of "word-as-music" as Beckettian narratives are cut off from

sense-making.[624] The musical impulse is fully enacted when Words tries to sing in

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[622] Elissa S. Guralnick, *Sight Unseen: Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard and Other Contemporary Dramatists on Radio* (Athens [OH]: Ohio UP, 1996) 53, 80, 90.

[623] Guralnick 55.

[624] Guralnick 93.

Words and Music, and when Voice finally cooperates with Music in *Cascando*. Even the rhythmic footsteps in *All That Fall* strive for musical assimilation, according to Donald McWhinnie: "the footsteps of Mr. and Mrs. Rooney, their real journey, must gradually attract poetic and symbolic overtones, so that eventually even the wind and rain which beat against them are almost musical in conception." Such examples demonstrate what McWhinnie terms Beckett's "premise [of] the musicality of radio, where language lives exclusively as sounds."[625]

When Roland Barthes also asks how language manages to interpret music, his notion of intelligibility beyond linguistic limitation resembles the function of music in Beckett's radio drama.[626] Branigan argues that Beckett "seeks in music a freedom from explicit interpretation" in the radio plays.[627] Emphasising the non-referential nature of music, Jankélévitch says "words in themselves already signify something" whereas "music signifies nothing, unless by convention or association."[628] The signifying purpose underlying language is not usually sought in music because the main focus of music lies in what it *is* rather than in what it signifies. Music resembles silence in this sense because they both are an expression of the ineffable. At the same time, Jankélévitch reminds us that "music is not above all law and not exempt from the limitations and servitude inherent in the human condition."[629] In fact, music, as well as silence, may be emotionally expressive because, according to Mary Bryden, "The mood or language of discomfort is *translated* into music" as an embodiment that

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[625] McWhinnie 85.

[626] Barthes, *Image Music Text* 179.

[627] Branigan 93.

[628] Jankélévitch 11.

[629] Jankélévitch 15.

"plays upon the nerves and forms a vector for the pain-waves."[630] In an interview

with Bryden, the avant-garde musician Philip Glass argues that music "exists in a

world without objects and colloquial complications and so we have a certain freedom

in music which we don't have with words."[631] If music is free from the obligation to

signify, then it naturally abandons the intellectual function of speech. Thus, music

addresses what one intends to express, which is strictly inexpressible in words.

Although it is still the embodiment of our feelings, it is nevertheless a preferable

alternative to language.

　　　Walter Pater famously wrote: "*All art* constantly *aspires* towards the *condition*

of music."[632] Harold Hobson adopts Pater's formulation and comments that

"Beckett . . . aspires . . . to the condition of music," even though "He makes no precise

statements."[633] Alain Badiou recounts that "Beckett often remarked that only music

mattered to him, that he was an inventor of rhythms and punctuations."[634] In this

respect, Beckett is in contact with a wider aesthetic trend in modernist art. T. S. Eliot,

for example, entitles his poems with musical terminology such as "Preludes,"

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night," or *Four Quartets*. Beckett may indeed have inherited

this modernist legacy of the musical, as in his own formulation that "Drama is

following music."[635] In his rejection of the cacophony of semantic communication,

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[630] Mary Bryden, introduction, *Samuel Beckett and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 2.

[631] Qtd. in an interview in Mary Bryden, "Beckett and Music: An Interview with Philip Glass," *Samuel Beckett and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 193.

[632] Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," *Fortnightly Review* (1877): 140.

[633] Qtd. in Niebur 24-25. Cited originally from: Harold Hobson, *The Times* (London), January 20, 1957.

[634] Badiou, *On Beckett* 41.

[635] Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater* (London: John Calder, 1988) 16.

Beckett turns to musical effects as a counter measure. Critics have argued repeatedly that the condition of music is explored and exploited in his work, and certainly the assimilation to the musical is not first found in his radio drama. Mary Bryden, for example, finds in his earlier fiction and prose "a wealth of explicit allusion to the codes and conventions of the musical world."[636] She also observes that "his manuscript and typescript drafts resemble musical scores" because of his acute awareness of the aural elements.[637] Charles Krance argues that "Beckett's music is structured primarily along patterns of reiterated permutations."[638] A wide range of analyses of Beckett's musicality has thus been carried out, but these are mainly focused on his novels and prose work, and I here seek to extend this debate to his radio drama, building upon Kevin Branigan's work in this area.[639] In my view, it is the first Beckettian genre that can fully accommodate music, because it is an art form intended solely for the ear.

However, the traditional role of music, which aims at enhancing the presentation of emotions, is always peripheral. Rosemary Horstmann suggests that "Music is a powerful generator of atmosphere and mood."[640] Paul Deharme observes that rhythmic spoken words, or dramas accompanied by music, aim at ingraining an

[636] Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence" 37.

[637] Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence" 33.

[638] Charles Krance, "Beckett Music," *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Art, and Non-Print Media*, ed. Lois Oppenheim, Border Crossings 2 (New York: Garland, 1999) 93.

[639] See Mary Catanzaro, "Musical Form and Beckett's *Lessness*," *Notes on Modern Irish Literature* 4 (1992): 45-51; William Grim, "The Developing Variation in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*," *Romance Studies* II (1987): 47-52; Kenneth Gaburo, *The Music in Samuel Beckett's Play* (La Jolla: Lingua, 1976); Eric Park, "Fundamental Sounds: Music in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* and *Watt*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 21-2 (1975): 157-72; Heath Lees, "*Watt*: Music, Tuning, and Tonality," *The Beckett Studies Reader*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (Gainesville [FL]: UP of Florida, 1993) 165-85; Susan Field Senneff, "Song and Music in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 10 (1964): 137-50.

[640] Horstmann 30.

impression for the audience, at stressing the impact of specific messages.[641] Music is one of the conventional methods of enhancing drama, of intensifying emotions and developing a dramatic climax. It may make a production memorable, but in the conventional theatre it is never significant enough to play an independent role. This is why Rosemary Horstmann suggests that dialogue "can be supported by music and effects, but music and effects cannot relieve the dialogue of its responsibilities – they can only assist it."[642] Similarly, when Bryden suggests that music only "enhances the words rather than corroborating them," she receives agreement from Philip Glass.[643] Referring to his composition for Beckett's *Play*, Glass claims that silence stops when narration starts, and vice versa, but "In no case was the music in the foreground."[644] Music in Beckett's radio plays, however, exceeds this conventional supporting character because it has an active role to play. What is more, it crucially assists Beckett's battle with expression, since it can articulate a reality that is inexpressible in words. I will now examine how the musical intent is foregrounded in Beckett's radio plays and how music exceeds its conventional role in each play.

Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* is playing in the opening moments of *All That Fall*, and the music intensifies the solitude of the woman who plays the record which Maddy overhears on her way to the station. Beckett prefers Schubert's music because according to him it is "more nearly pure spirit than that of any other composer."[645] Bryden observes that *Death and the Maiden* provides "pause and

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[641] Deharme 403-13.

[642] Horstmann 27.

[643] Bryden, "Beckett and Music" 193.

[644] Bryden, "Beckett and Music" 194.

[645] Grindea, qtd. in Zilliacus 38.

spur."[646] Perhaps music in this instance functions as "a manner of silence" that stimulates internal reflexivity, as Jankélévitch has suggested, and which links to solitude: "as soon as music raises its voice, it demands solitude and insists that it occupy vibrating space alone, excluding other sounds."[647] Later, Miss Fitt hums a song to which Maddy sings the words uninvited; she thereby disturbs the intentional isolation of the former's music and provokes her abrupt anger. Miss Fitt demands tranquillity in music, and Jankélévitch confirms that "singing is a way of being quiet."[648] Music is barely present in *Embers*, only coming through as Addie plays a few bars of Frédéric Chopin's 5th Waltz in A Flat Major in her piano lesson, but it plays a much more active role in *Rough for Radio I*, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. In *Rough for Radio I*, cooperation between Words and Music is "unimaginable" or "unthinkable," because they both exist in isolation.[649] Similarly, Croak demands that Words and Music act together in *Words and Music*, and the consequence is an open protest from Words, accompanied by a hostile declaration of "Long la" from Music. Katharine Worth suggests that "Music's outburst could be seen as finally shaking Words out of self-consciousness."[650] Cooperation is more prominent in *Cascando* when Music and Voice do eventually manage to collaborate, although their joint effort results in cacophony. Music in these plays consistently manifests reluctance or even abhorrence towards the idea of cooperation, due to its preference for isolation.

I am attempting in this section to explore Beckett's musical intent in

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[646] Bryden, "Beckett and the Sound of Silence" 37.

[647] Jankélévitch 139.

[648] Jankélévitch 140.

[649] Beckett, *CDW* 267.

[650] Worth, "Words for Music Perhaps" 14.

assimilating the expression of Voice and Words to Music, and I seek to establish a common ground of solitariness for music and silence in the radio drama. When Frost organised the "Beckett Festival of Radio Plays" in 1986, he brought together two of Beckett's familiar actors in the production of *All That Fall*: Billie Whitelaw as Maddy and David Warrilow as Dan. How then does the Beckett actor or actress understand what the playwright tries to express in the text? How do they grasp his work and enact their role accordingly? When Warrilow performs in *What Where* he does not trouble himself with the meaning of the words in the text; rather, he avows disbelief in any "intrinsic meaning" behind the line "We are the last five," since what matters when it comes to "The action in performing a Beckett play is making the instrument resonate."[651] Clearly, in Warrilow's view, Beckett assimilates the characters or voices to musical instruments. Bryden remembers how "Warrilow has spoken of the Beckett actor as being like a musical instrument to be played by Beckett. So too has Billie Whitelaw."[652] Performers are transformed into musical instruments because Beckett demands an instrumental expression akin to music. In Whitelaw's own phraseology: "I feel that I place myself totally at his disposal, and I can be a tube of paint or a musical instrument or whatever."[653] Recalling the production of *Cascando* in which he played Opener, Frederick Neumann says: "As one plays one has this impulse to want to 'tune in' to one's thoughts . . . The cello player and Opener sort of alternated with the voices of the others around the table, speaking in chorus. And I just played *my* cello; I was just part of the music, I think."[654] Voices in Beckett's later radio drama are intended to

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[651] Qtd. in Kalb 229.

[652] Bryden, "Beckett and Music" 193.

[653] Qtd. in Kalb 235.

[654] Qtd. in Kalb 209.

make music and sing. The endeavour to silence words by inserting music is also, paradoxically, Beckett's attempt to make music out of words and silence, a way to liberate expression by obliterating its semantic implications. If instrumental music is at the core of Beckett's radio aesthetics, he also endeavours to make words or voice approximate to the state of music, as Words, rather than giving a well-formed rhetorical speech, finally sings in *Words and Music*.

The affiliation to the condition of music in Beckett's radio plays instigates a regressive or backward movement, with most critics generally noting a reductive minimalist impulse in the nature of his work. As I mentioned before, Beckett told Warrilow that he found "a number of weaknesses" in the BBC production of *All That Fall*, with the specific drawback that the anticipated rain did not fall. Warrilow concludes that Beckett's remark "says an awful lot. Part of it says, 'the less the better.' In other words, when you get the sound of the rain that's when you're getting the real stuff, on your way to silence."[655] Thus, it is the underlying silence or, in effect, solitude to which Beckett wishes to return, after Maddy's colourful picaresque adventures on the road. Frost observes that "The play required an approach that pared the audio production and sound effects down to essentials, so that the language and its exquisite revelation of character could emerge."[656] In his endeavour to materialise sounds and voices, and in his focus on music, Beckett savours his desired "literature of the unword."[657] His strategy is to make language lose its semantic dimension and allow pure sonority to resonate with emotions that are not expressible in words. Rudolf Arnheim observes that radio drama allows us to "feel ourselves back in that

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[655] Qtd. Kalb 233.

[656] Everett Frost, "A 'Fresh Go' for the Skull: Directing *All That Fall*, Samuel Beckett's Play for Radio," *Directing Beckett*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (Michigan: U of Michigan, 1997) 207.

[657] Beckett, *Disjecta* 173.

primeval age where the word was still sound, the sound still word."[658] This again evokes the backward movement towards silence or musical expression as a condition before or beyond language, and aligns Beckett with some other aesthetic projects of modernist primitivism. The return of words, voices, and sounds to raw aural materials, mirroring the radiophonic plucked sounds, announces that Beckett's literary trajectory is towards minimalism.

3.   Minimalism in the Field of Music

To move from the stage to radio as a forum for drama is already to radically reduce the aesthetic means at one's disposal, since radio appeals to a single sense only. To reduce language down from signification to sound, and to seek to move beyond sound itself in one's cultivation of silence, is to reduce those means still further. So it is no wonder that Beckett is seen as a precursor of the wider artistic movement of minimalism, and that a number of minimalist musicians such as Philip Glass, Steven Reich, John Cage and particularly Morton Feldman have worked with him or been inspired by him. I intend in this section to extend my discussions of silence and musicality in the radio plays into an exploration of Beckett's practice of, and relation to, minimalist aesthetics more generally.

Enoch Brater is one of the relatively few critics to explicitly examine the minimalist dimensions of Beckett's work, and his book *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater* is a study of the post-radio theatre and film of the 1970s and 80s, which, as he puts it, constitutes Beckett's later style. In these works he approximates the language of poetry with lyrical dialogues on the stage, and the dramatic effect is achieved through the minimalist style, as a continuation of his

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[658]   Arnheim 35.

earlier work. However, I regard this trend more specifically as an extension of Beckett's earlier experiments with radio drama, and my approach to the notion of minimalism differs from Brater's; for I aim at drawing a connection with the motifs of silence and music based on the radio drama. I will argue that Beckett intentionally makes music out of the acoustic elements of sounds and voices so that a connection to minimalist art-works (and specifically minimalist music) can be made in Beckett's radio drama. I propose that the inspiration from the radio drama and his involvement with the technology of radio, together with his exposure to the aural ambience, propels him towards minimalism and shapes his post-radio work. I will thus explore the way experience gathered from productions of his radio drama not only consolidates the art of the aural, but also sheds light on the concept of minimalism as a dominant impulse in his later style, as Brater terms it. Brater's critical stance towards minimalism is positive, because he stresses the inexhaustibility of the repeated permutation of a few key Beckettian resources. Beckett's affirmative use of minimal reductivism in turn mitigates that nihilistic affiliation with nothingness that many critics have seen as characteristic of his work. My discussion will extend the notion of reductive style to draw attention to the manner of repetition and the practice of the minimal in Beckett's radio plays. However, I doubt whether Brater's view of the positive function of minimalism in Beckett's work will remain true in his radio drama, especially invoking the acoustic temporal presence that leaves hardly anything behind.

I will first demonstrate how Beckett's radio drama is connected to minimalist aesthetic concerns based on the non-referential quality of the musical and a revealing trend towards reductivism. The art of the musical in the performance of sound, voice and actual music in the radio plays overlaps with minimalist concerns due to its non-referentiality. James Meyer argues that "Minimal work does not allude to

anything beyond its literal presence, or its existence in the physical world. Materials appear as materials; colour (if used at all) is non-referential."[659] The overlapping concern connects the minimal to the musical, and, by extension, to the way that voice and sound are extracted from their original context as raw materials, thereby constituting the fundamental element of the radiophonic in Beckett's plays for that medium. Materials return to sheer materiality so as to make instruments of language, actors, sounds and voices. The non-referential materiality of these sonorous elements of sounds, voices, silence and music thus moves towards a minimalist aesthetic.

On the other hand, the impact of silence, the acoustic experience of almost nothing, as well as the reductive style of the plot (at least after *All That Fall*) and the intense aural-centred engagement with the radio, also illuminate the art of the minimal on a different plane. Minimal style by definition involves a turning toward a stripped-down expression, a pared-down reductivism; it thus characterises Beckett's work because his texts are working towards compressed repetition with a gradually reductive dynamics. Furthermore, minimalism is more immediately felt in his radio drama than his other genres because the audience's perception, following the minimalist practice of aesthetic destitution, is limited to the sense of hearing. Even Beckett's focus on Nothingness in silence illuminates this undertaking. As discussed above, silence is an impossible limit because there are always minimal sounds existing as background or internal noise. Thus it is not Nothingness but Beckett's almost Nothingness that comes closest to the project of minimalism. We experience the law of reduction in terms of less-is-more in Beckett's radio drama, and this underlying impulse leads to minimalism. For all these reasons, I believe that Beckett's experiment with the aural dimension in his radio drama may have influenced the establishment of

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[659] James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000) 15.

the minimalist aesthetic tradition, and prepares a more refined reductivist aesthetic for his post-radio work.

When L. A. J. Bell takes up Enoch Brater's critical thematics, he develops a comparison between Beckett's fiction and the wider movements of music and art in the late 1960s and early 70s, and determines that Beckett's trajectory of "lessness" is the foundation of the minimalist programme based on a confluence of his reductive aesthetics and his ethics of the residual (linked to the Holocaust as theorised by Theodor Adorno, Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou).[660] Beckett has always worked towards the style of diminuendo or cascando, to borrow his own radio title: the texts, plots, settings, subject matter, colour and voice are pared down to barrenness. This consistent decrescendo style within his work enacts the very spirit of minimalism. What is more, the trajectory of Beckett's six radio plays also shows a decided trend towards reductivism. First, the large cast of eleven characters in the relatively naturalistic play *All That Fall* is reduced to a minimum of three (including Words or Voice and Music as characters) in the later radio plays. Second, plot becomes more and more abstract. There is a clear storyline in *All That Fall* about Maddy Rooney's journey to the train station to pick up Dan Rooney and their walk back together; the play has a specific physical geography and sociology with the announcement of Boghill station. *Embers* still has a physical setting by the sea, but the protagonists' confinement in *Rough for Radio I* and *Rough for Radio II* is mysterious, as is the unspecified locale of *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. The increasingly abstract plots together with the reductive style, brings the issue of minimalism to the fore. The dynamics of the six plays enacts a minimalist trajectory, and a gradual focus on Words

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[660] L. A. J. Bell, "Between Ethics and Aesthetics: The Residual in Samuel Beckett's Minimalism," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 20.1 (2011): 37.

or Voice and Music highlights a transitional movement from dissonance towards consonance, especially when Words and Music finally find a way to cooperate in that particular play. These examples illuminate why critics often determine minimalism as the appropriate global concept for Beckett's post-radio work. However, I find that Beckett's intention to make voice or words musical, together with his actual use of music and his exploitation of silence, not only throw light on minimalist aesthetics, but his radio plays, more radically, help to formulate essential features of the minimalist project.

Beckett's practice of regressive repetition is characteristic of the minimalist canon. His work seems to repeat the practice of lessening without end, just as, according to Michael Fried, one experiences "endlessness and inexhaustibility" and the possibility "of being able to go on and on" in a minimalist work of art.[661] This minimalist characteristic already comes through in Beckett's pre-radio fiction and theatre. The Trilogy, for example, is a repetitious journey home, with gradually diminishing stability and energy from the first episode to the last. Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot* the second act is almost identical to the first, only reduced in its dynamics (Pozzo is now blind and Lucky dumb). Alain Badiou suggests that "Beckett's poetics is thus constituted by a progressive alleviation of constraints, a demolition of that which delays the moment of immobility." A Beckett work must aspire to "The minimal set-up, the least set-up, that is, the 'worst' set-up … for there to be an infinitesimal or minimal sense for an unspecified [*quelconque*] question" to take place.[662] The regressive trajectory of ending without coming to an end is also illuminating for the radio plays. When the male protagonist He senses, seemingly in

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[661] Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1967) 165.

[662] Badiou, *On Beckett* 45, 87.

horror, that Music and Voice are "ending . . . ENDING" towards the close of *Rough for Radio I*, the dynamics of Voice and Music turns feeble and at times breaks off, but they never completely come to a close.[663] In *Cascando* and *Word and Music* Words or Voice and Music follow the entropic style of reduced variations in their repeated narrations and musical compositions in the BBC and Everett Frost productions. When Krance examines Beckett's work in musical terms, he finds that "The more minimal the piece, and therefore the more concentrated the power of its impact, the more maximal the relational potential . . . up to the point of exhaustion."[664] A regressive dynamics invokes exhaustion; however, Beckett's work fails to end, and it thus attains a kind of inexhaustibility, as Enoch Brater noted. Beckettian repetition is reductive to the point of near-exhaustion without being exhausted, and it is therefore associated with minimalism.

Beckett's entropic repetition is an aspect of minimalist style that can be linked to memory, and *Embers* is a paradigmatic work in this respect. Henry's memory of sounds, voices and events loses its dynamic during their repeated resurrections. Furthermore, if the events are associated with trauma as suggested in Chapter Two, then he may be on a painful journey of recovery where repetition can wear out the original traumatic impact. Edward Strickland argues that minimalist art "makes its statement with limited, if not the fewest possible, resources;" Henry too struggles with limited resources to work out a full view of his memory.[665] Thus, when Ada reveals how she met his father, Henry immediately loses another element from his traumatic conflict with his father. Eric P. Levy has suggested that "to express the experience of

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[663] Beckett, *CDW* 270.

[664] Krance 53-54.

[665] Edward Strickland, *Minimalism – Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000) 7.

Nothing from within, with minimum dependence on any conventional means of presenting experience in terms of subject and object, is perhaps Beckett's greatest triumph."[666] His fabricated story might ultimately reach the point where it is more real than the imagined figments of the inner sound of the sea, his father's questionable being, Ada's voice or Addie's unpleasant childhood incidents. In this case, what troubles Henry points to a mental problem in differentiating reality from fiction, a paradigmatic symptom of schizophrenia.

I will now demonstrate how the performance of the aural in Beckett's radio drama ultimately develops alongside the aesthetic of minimalist music. If Beckett's minimalist style arguably emerges around the 1950s and 60s, this is also when minimalism in the culture more generally reaches its peak. I want to ask if Beckett's experiment with radio drama makes a significant impact on, or even establishes the foundation of a minimalist canon (which is still ill-defined to date).

When Gregory Battcock's *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* codifies the movement in 1968, he covers many different art forms and media, including the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. The art of minimalist music remains ill-defined, and it relies on Glass and Reich or John Cage's silent piece as paradigms. However, a number of important minimalist musicians confess the influence of Beckett's work on them: Glass, who has composed music for Beckett's *Play* and *Cascando*, is a prominent example.[667] Morton Feldman, whose opera *Neither* is accompanied by Beckett's words, has produced music for *Words and Music*. A brief account of its production history is necessary here. Music was first composed for *Words and Music* by John Beckett, the author's cousin, in 1962. Although it pleased Beckett, the

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[666] Eric P. Levy, *Beckett and the Voice of Species: A Study of the Prose Fiction* (Totowa [NJ]: Gill and Macmillan, 1980) 4.

[667] See Bryden, "Beckett and Music" 194.

composer had reservations about it and withdrew his piece. In later productions,

Katharine Worth commissioned Humphrey Seale to produce music in 1973, and

Beckett suggested Feldman to Everett Frost for the American production in 1987.

Feldman's music is characterised by the unusual grouping of instrumental

sounds and features isolated quiet sounds. His music scores, according to David Toop,

are "a meditation on memory, sounds carrying the listener into a state in which

variations of sounds and repetitions of phrases that have gone before have the effect of

rubbing out their predecessors."[668] Feldman's concept of music thus enacts the

minimalist characteristic of repetition with variation, as well as the inevitable erasure

of memory due to repetition. This "rubbing out" effect of repetition is, as I have noted,

clearly exemplified in Beckett's play of memory *Embers* when Henry continuously

revives his deteriorating memories.

It is worth noting that Henry evokes his relationship with other characters

based on his remembrance of their voices. Italian philosopher, Adriana Cavarero,

argues that the voice "is always the voice of someone" because it is mingled with

memory.[669] However, as the play shows, the voice of Henry's father is no longer with

him. Presumably he had successfully summoned his father's voice before, but his

repeated endeavours have worn out the memory of it as Ada herself remarks: "You

wore him [Henry's father] out living and now you are wearing him out dead."[670] Thus,

when he resurrects his father's voice (either from how he remembers it, or, in this case,

by imitating it), it is an effort to come to terms with his dead father and also to wear

out the impact of their conflict in the past. Similarly, as the play progresses, his

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[668] Toop 92.

[669] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans.
Paul A. Kottman (Standford: Standford UP, 2005) 148.

[670] Beckett, *CDW* 262.

memory of Ada's and Addie's voices will potentially vanish too. John Cage suggests

in *Silence* that "Thinking had worn them [the sounds] out," and this is clearly also the

case for Henry.[671] Though he still manages to summon the sounds of hooves, a drip

and a stone, these solid sounds too will eventually be erased from his memory in spite

of—or rather, precisely because of—his   repeated attempts to revive them. The

impact of the traumatic repetition and its rubbing out effect invokes the way that

Feldman reads Beckett's *Proust* based on a "clinical understanding," a common

ground he finds with Beckett because he is himself "a very clinical composer," even

though their creative genres differ.[672]

　　The connection between Beckett and minimalism is reinforced by Philip Glass,

who argues in an interview that the modernist aesthetic involves the audience

embracing catharsis as a psychological mechanism: "we depended on the audience to

complete the work . . . in a non-literary theatre tradition, but the first and only place

that I found it in a literary tradition was in Beckett."[673] Beckett wittily involves

audiences in his radio drama, and this audience-centred approach is what Glass calls

"the classical way" of modernism, identifying "the viewer with the character."[674] We

are cast in the same dark position as Dan Rooney, the blind figure in *All That Fall*, for

we also "fail" to see when listening to the radio. This aural-centred quality together

with the need for an audience as the protagonist demands in *Rough for Radio I*, or as

Henry requests of Ada and his father in *Embers*, may mirror how Beckett bids his own

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[671] Cage 117.

[672] Qtd. in Frost, "The Note Man on the Word Man" 51.

[673] Qtd. in Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Interview with Philip Glass," *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Art, and Non-Print Media*, ed. Lois Oppenheim, Border Crossings 2 (New York: Garland, 1999) 146.

[674] Zurbrugg, "Interview with Philip Glass" 147.

audience to listen. This again suggests a traumatic imprint when listening to the plays, for Krance argues that Beckett asks "the listener to trace, follow, indeed listen for the drifts of both pre- and post-audible impulses as these surround the creative processes."[675] Thus, according to Glass: "when the audience looks at Beckett's work, the work is no longer an independent thing. It is the relationship between the work and the audience that we're talking about."[676] It is therefore the audiences' job to interpret the meaning of the work. Guy Debrock also argues that music—in this instance Feldman's composition for *Words and Music*—"is not telling a story, nor is it expressing sentiment. It is gesture, begging us, commanding us to react in some way."[677] The focus on gesture echoes John Cage's own in *4'33"* when the hands are suspended in mid-air as a gesture for viewers to make associations or have emotional reactions.

Having proposed the common ground of minimalism in the field of music in order to bring separate issues of silence, music and the musical intent into focus, I wish to also consider the medium of radio, which, I suspect, will also tends towards minimalist aesthetics. Radio, as I have said, is considered a deprived medium, since it uses only a single sense: hearing. Bryden agrees that intensified listening to sound and silence is available when "relieved of visual overlay or interference" on the radio.[678] Radio may therefore be an appropriate medium for minimalist music precisely

[675] Krance 54.

[676] Zurbrugg, "Interview with Philip Glass"147.

[677] Guy Debrock, "The Word Man and the Note Man: Morton Feldman and Beckett's Virtual Music," *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Art, and Non-Print Media*, ed. Lois Oppenheim, Border Crossings 2 (New York: Garland, 1999) 80.

[678] Mary Bryden, "Reflections on Beckett and Music, with Case Study: Paul Rhys's *Not I*," *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Art, and Non-Print Media*, ed. Lois Oppenheim, Border Crossings 2 (New York: Garland, 1999) 87.

because it concentrates on sound, to the exclusion of all other senses. After all, the
broadcasting of Beckett's radio drama has changed not just what we listen to, but also
our very mode of listening; for it dislocates our attention from signified to material
signifier, and more importantly still, it makes us aware of the radical existence of
silence and of noise. French philosopher Michel Serres argues that "we never hear
what we call background noise," and the sound of the sea is for him an example of
this.[679] When that sound features in *Embers*, it no longer merges comfortably in the
background because our attention is constantly drawn to it, as Henry asks of us. Radio
has successfully prioritised these marginal aural elements, which ties Beckett's project
of musicality to minimalist music.

I have, in this chapter, examined seven categories of silence, the different
purposes of music in the radio plays, and, based on these notions of silence and music,
parallels between the radio plays and minimalism at large. With the use of radio as a
suitable minimalist medium, Beckett has successfully reinstated the neglected
elements of sounds, silence and music in his radio drama. Branigan comments that
"Radio offers Beckett the ideal opportunity to present sonic worlds" and to experience
how "the words and sounds we hear achieve musicality: their sonic qualities and
patterns attained priority over their signifying status."[680] Radio has successfully
foregrounded these marginal aural elements, as against the conventionally held
supremacy of symbolic meaning or linguistic signification, and it thereby combines
Beckett's impulses towards the expression of music and towards minimalism.

In his persistent struggle with language, Beckett famously states in *Three
Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which

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[679] Michel Serre, *Genesis*, trans. Geneviève James and James Nielson (Michigan: U of Michigan, 1995)
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[680] Branigan 136.

to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express," and he accordingly seeks a new mode of expression in his work.[681] The problem, as Eric P. Levy argues, is that "No one explanation of human experience holds," which reveals Beckett's own concern for those situations where human experience is "denied any explanations but [is] desperately needing them."[682] His pursuit for proper means for expression is constantly enacted in his restlessly experimental mode of writing, and this is evidently also the case in his radio plays and through his very choice of the medium of radio in the first place. Beckett contrasts meaningless speech to meaningful silence or music as a counterpoint, whereby the question of expression is posed, problematized and answered. In his exploration of the acoustic elements exclusively, he has found the means "with which to express," and radio in its pared-down aurality gives him a medium "from which to express." What is more, we may argue that he has successfully expressed "Nothing" in both music and silence.

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[681] Beckett, *Disjecta* 139.

[682] Levy 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

Late Modernism in the Radio Plays

"Late! . . . we are doubly late, trebly, quadrupedly late."[683]

Having closely analysed the detail of Beckett's radio plays in earlier chapters, I intend here to seek a macroscopic framework to encompass his radio corpus—*All That Fall*, *Embers*, *Rough for Radio I*, *Rough for Radio II*, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*—and I will baldly state here at the start that my chosen ground is late modernism. Although the concept of late modernism is relatively new and not well defined, I will demonstrate how it can be the most helpful literary-historical and theoretical framework to understand the overall nature of Beckett's work for radio. I will, firstly, outline the general debate around late modernism; secondly, I will propose a limited model to re-examine the Joyce-Beckett relationship through Beckett's rewriting of Joycean elements in the radio plays (particularly *All That Fall* and *Embers*); and thirdly, by stressing how late modernism can be defined historically by World War Two, I will examine the role of radio in relation to that landmark event, and the consequences of this medium for the modernist ideal of aesthetic autonomy.

1.   Late Modernism

Applying literary-periodising terms to Beckett's work is a prevalent trend; however, this practice is hardly ever directed at his radio plays. As I suggested in my Introduction, it is the concepts of modernism and postmodernism that dominate Beckett studies; but I shall here seek a way beyond that binary impasse by working

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[683] *All That Fall* in Beckett, *CDW* 175.

with the newer notion of late modernism in relation to the radio drama. Since there is no definitive scholarly model of late modernism to invoke, I shall examine some of the particular constructs of it that critics have proposed, and will draw from these in an eclectic way to sketch my own model of late modernism for the radio-specific purposes of this thesis. All projects of literary periodization struggle to contain Beckett's work because his oeuvre spreads across many decades, genres and media. But his six radio plays may not pose the same difficulty of categorisation as his work in other genres because of the narrow span of time in which they were written (between the late 1950s and early 1960s). I therefore believe that we can benefit from an emerging definition of late modernism and will examine its suggestiveness for Beckett's radio drama.

Charles Jencks is best-known as a theorist of postmodernism in architecture, which he sees as a movement that breaks away from the functionalist elitism of modernist architecture (Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe) and in so doing allows such hitherto repressed elements as historical allusion, organic form, local building traditions, mass-cultural forms, and wit and pleasure back into architecture – without, for all that, simply repudiating modernism. But alongside this influential exposition of postmodernism, Jencks finds that he also needs a concept of "late modernism." Late modernism, in his view, is a continuation of modernism that "takes many of the stylistic ideas and values of Modernism to an extreme in order to resuscitate a dull (or clichéd) language."[684] Late modernism, on this showing, is practised alongside postmodernism (emerging in the 1960s), and both share the commitment "to the tradition of the New," although there their similarity ends, since

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[684] Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* 4th ed. (London: Academy, 1986) 46.

postmodernism can also embrace the cultural past as allusion or pastiche.[685] Once we start using a concept of late modernism, however, we shall have to retrospectively redefine modernism itself which must now be considered to be "high modernism," falling away (in ways I shall examine) in its later manifestation.

Writing in the wake of Charles Jencks and operating on a literary rather than architectural terrain, Fredric Jameson, Brian McHale, and Tyrus Miller all view late modernism as a complex transition between modernism and postmodernism, and they all include Beckett in their instances of it. Jameson too is best-known as a theorist of postmodernism from a Marxist viewpoint, but he also suggests that those writers and artists who do not fit comfortably in the camps of modernism or postmodernism need an intermediate label like late modernism, and he identifies Beckett as one of the late modernist icons alongside Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov. Invoking Charles Jencks's notion, Jameson sees such late modernist writers as "the last survivals of a properly modernist view of art and the world after the great political and economic break of the Depression, where, under Stalinism or the Popular Front, Hitler or the New Deal, some new conception of social realism achieves the status of momentary cultural dominance by way of collective anxiety and world war."[686] So transformative is the post-World War Two social crisis that the modernist canon can no longer sustain itself during the post-war years.

Literary critic Alan Wilde introduces late modernism as "a necessary bridge between more spacious and self-conscious experimental movements" of modernism

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[685] Charles Jencks, "Postmodern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions," *Chicago Review* 35.4 (1987): 49.

[686] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991) 305.

and postmodernism in his *Horizons of Assent*.[687] Taking Ivy Compton-Burnett and

Christopher Isherwood as literary examples of late modernism, Wilde examines the

contrasting practices and concepts of irony in modernist and late modernist fiction. He

argues that while modernists are concerned with the depth of truth and disconnect

themselves from the impoverishment of a fragmented society to delve instead in the

symbolic world that may restore meaning, late modernists reveal "a new attention to

surface" implying "a reversal—dramatic even when incomplete or unintended—in

epistemological assumptions," and abandon the ambition to resolve the dissociation

between literature and reality in their attempt to reconnect with the world.[688] Beckett

does not feature prominently in Wilde's study. He declares early on that he "regards

Beckett as a modernist figure," but I suspect the rich model of late modernism he

sketches in this book actually has more purchase on Beckett's work than he

believes.[689]

Arguing that "Postmodernism is not post modern . . . but post modern*ism*; it

does not come *after the present* (a solecism), but after the *modernist movement*," Brian

McHale posits Beckett's post-war Trilogy as "the model of 'limit-modernist,'" a

concept which he relates to Alan Wilde's "late modernism."[690] Such limit- or

late-modernist fiction in his view oscillates between the two dominants of

epistemological (modernism) and ontological (postmodernism) that he maps out in his

study of *Postmodernist Fiction*. In the subsequent *Constructing Postmodernism*, he

argues that "if Beckett qualifies for membership in the late-modernist category," it is

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[687] Wilde, *Horizons of Assent* 120-21.

[688] Wilde, *Horizons of Assent* 108.

[689] Wilde, *Horizons of Assent* 12.

[690] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987) 5, 13.

due to "his practice of art in a closed field."[691] McHale formulates late modernism's

relationship to modernism as follows: "modernist poetics begins to *haemorrhage*, to

leak away – though not fatally, since it is still (barely) possible to recuperate these

internal contradictions by invoking the model of the 'unreliable narrator,' thus

stabilizing the project of the text."[692]

By the same token, Tyrus Miller suggests that the "double life" of late

modernism, in his construction of the term, links "forward into postmodernism and

backward into modernism," as both a reaction to the aesthetics of (high) modernism,

and a response to current political and historical pressures.[693] While Fredric Jameson

had related Wyndham Lewis's style to "the contemporary poststructuralist aesthetic"

which signals "the dissolution of the modernist paradigm," Miller also refers to Lewis

as playing "a crucial role in the late modernist breakup and reconfiguration of earlier

'high' modernism."[694] His other examples are Djuna Barnes, Beckett himself and

Mina Loy. Concentrating on fiction as he does, Miller argues that late modernist

literature first appeared in 1926, and that it reacts against the "formal mastery" of

modernist fiction to draw "on a marginalized 'figural' tendency within modernism"

itself, and to "deflate the category of form."[695] Its simultaneous backward and

forward movement suggests that the concept of late modernism enables the

co-existence of overlapping and conflicting characteristics. Miller also points out that

late modernists struggle against the earlier modernist apotheosis of form by invoking

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[691] Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992) 28.

[692] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 12.

[693] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999) 17.

[694] Jameson, *Fables of Aggression* 20; Miller 11.

[695] Miller 18.

"the disruptive, deforming spell of laughter" and by satirising and parodying modernist symbolism. To anticipate my argument in section two, I shall construe Mr. and Mrs. Rooney's raucous laughter in *All That Fall* as Beckett's late modernist response to the style of modernist James Joyce.[696]

The most recent attempt to see Beckett in a late modernist framework is Duncan McColl Chesney's *Silence Nowhen: Late Modernism, Minimalism, and Silence in the Work of Samuel Beckett*, a study which brings several of the major themes of this thesis together. His formulation of late modernism is driven by emphases on silence and minimalism (themes that I too have discussed in Chapter Four) where he argues that silence "is related to contemporary movements in the visual arts and in music, in a general late modern impulse of minimalism."[697] He insists that Beckett approaches minimal form and meaning by hearkening to silence, and maintains that "Beckett's works remain true, to the end, to a minimalist impulse that is essentially modernist or late modernist, and that Beckett's aesthetic resists giving over to the postmodernism to which he was famously and originally linked by scholars such as Ihab Hassan."[698] Chesney's notion of late modernism is drawn from the field of painting (from the works of George Duthuit, Bram van Velde and Jack B. Yeats) because "in unwaveringly pursuing the minimalizing gesture of the modern, Beckett produces an art which is not only late in style, but even at this late date continues to be art, continues to challenge and complicate all of the traditional categories of aesthetics even as society and culture seem to have left him far

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[696] Miller 19.

[697] Chesney 10.

[698] Chesney 5.

behind."[699] Chesney, however, does not take his late-modernist emphasis into discussion of the radio plays apart from one paragraph on *Embers*.

Beckett's work illuminates the aesthetic inheritance of modernism, as well as constituting an internal revolt against it. He famously states in an interview with the American journalist Israel Shenker that he strives to break from the sort of modernism that is epitomized by Joyce:

> Joyce was a superb manipulator of material – perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. There isn't a syllable that's superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past . . . My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable – as something by definition incompatible with art.[700]

Steven Connor has well formulated the literary conundrum for Beckett: due to the grandeur and richness of the modernist legacy he adheres to, he is confronted with the impossibility of surpassing those great precursors.[701] In view of the insurmountable achievements of modernism that succeeding writers can hardly outdo, Beckett is acutely aware of the need to explore an alternative in literature, and he has succeeded in moving in the opposite direction from his mentors. His literary impulse is not so much an antithetical aesthetics as a project complementary to modernism, the trajectory of failure as a late modernist paradigm.

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[699] Chesney 150.

[700] Qtd. in Shenker 148.

[701] Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature" 70.

As Duncan McColl Chesney's book has already suggested, the minimalist style I have discussed in Chapter Four also bears upon this question of modernism. Andrew Kennedy points out that the "direction towards 'fundamental sounds'" in Beckett's art of lessening evolves towards minimalism, while at the same time it is rooted in modernist aesthetics.[702] The development of minimalism from Beckett's terse language invokes the way that, in Anthony Mellors's view, "The late modernist poets whose work forms the basis of this study [to identify art with one form of redemptive power or another] write on the brink of the postmodern abyss."[703] This Beckettian art of poverty also runs parallel to the deprivation of radio in performance (condemned to the sense of hearing only), to the paring-down effect due to repeated process, or to the recycled themes in the radio drama leading to minimalism.[704] The minimalist style both releases the energy of late modernist work as a point of departure from high modernism, and anticipates postmodernism.

Thomas S. Davis argues that late modernism is "modernism's late style," which "scarcely obey[s] the periodizing of literary history."[705] I would certainly agree that late modernism cannot be defined simply as a literary movement that comes after modernism without effecting a more rigorous formulation. Davis also notes that late modernism addresses two main issues: "the transformation and persistence of modernism and the function of modernist aesthetics in different historical situations;"

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[702] Andrew Kennedy 262. The study of fundamental or minimal sounds is discussed in full in Chapters One and Four.

[703] Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005) 42.

[704] I have made the connection between a lessening, reductive style and the art of failure or impotence in section two of the Introduction.

[705] Thomas S. Davis, "Late Modernism: British Literature at Midcentury," *Literature Compass* 9.4 (2012): 335.

this seems to me to be a useful model to determine late modernism based on different historical contexts.[706] Therefore, in the following section, I intend firstly to examine the double function of late modernism as it both succeeds and transforms modernism based on an examination of the Joyce-Beckett literary relationship, and to explore how Beckett's radio drama is in crucial respects indebted to as well as a transformative departure from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). I will then examine whether late modernism can be regarded as a satisfying global concept for the radio plays based on the historical demarcation of World War Two.

2.   The Joyce-Beckett Relationship

The discussion of avant-garde radio theory including the Futurist and Surrealist movements in Chapter One, and the impact of iconic avant-garde writers, particularly James Joyce and Marcel Proust (about both of whom he produced significant critical writings), shows that Beckett's literary trajectory is shaped by these important modernist paradigms. In his paradoxical fidelity to modernism by creatively deviating from its great practitioners, Beckett's style can aptly be called late modernist – a distinctive style that grows out of and goes beyond modernism. In this section I shall examine the Joyce-Beckett relationship through literary affinities between Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*Portrait* hereafter) and *All That Fall* and *Embers*, so as to determine the sense in which Beckett's radio plays can be profitably regarded as late modernist.

Joyce is, understandably, the most prominent influence for Beckett, and in returning to both Irish settings and the use of English as the language of composition in the first two radio plays, he could hardly avoid a new confrontation with his great

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[706] Davis 328.

Irish modernist precursor. P. J. Murphy, in his impressive *Beckett's Dedalus:*

Dialogical Engagements with Joyce in Beckett's Fiction, has reassessed the literary as

well as the personal relationship between the two figures by examining Beckett's early

fiction up to the Trilogy, and he argues that Beckett's dark revelation, a reverse

version of Joyce's epiphany, complements rather than opposes the Joycean tradition.

He suggests that Beckett follows in Joyce's footsteps to enact "spirits of rebelliousness"

in his practices of pastiche (due to his derivative literary referencing, or what James

Knowlson calls his "grafting technique") and of comic irony or parody, and that these

constitute a homage to as well as break from Joyce, by reconstructing Joycean

materials to formulate his own style.[707] For Murphy, the decisive break with Joycean

influence is *Watt*, "his 'war novel'" and "Beckett's hail (homage) and farewell to his

friend/father-figure and literary mentor," for linguistic and ontological problems are

the central issues for Watt (as well as for the protagonists in the Trilogy), while

Joyce's Stephen Dedalus is concerned with aesthetic and ethical dilemmas.[708]

Murphy's critical engagement is a helpful model for me to demonstrate how Beckett

both does and does not escape the modernist tradition in the relations between Joyce's

Portrait and his own radio plays (which are not discussed by Murphy), and this will

allow me to formulate a restricted but concentrated model of late modernism as a

significant departure from Murphy's critical project in his book (late modernism being

a term he does not use). I shall therefore now examine the Joyce-Beckett relationship,

particularly the issue of modernist epiphany which arises particularly from the way

that Beckett's plays are riddled with Joycean elements from *Portrait*. I shall also

demonstrate how he recasts Joyce's work to find his own style, as both a practice of

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[707] Beckett, *Disjecta* 33; Knowlson 106.

[708] P. J. Murphy, *Beckett's Dedalus: Dialogical Engagements with Joyce in Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2009) 10.

literary supplement and an assertion of aesthetic originality that will, in effect, constitute a late modernism. I will use *All That Fall* and *Embers* as my central texts (because they are more recognisably linked to Joycean themes than the other radio plays), to discuss firstly the assimilation of, then the separation from Joycean style. There can hardly be any doubt as regards how continuingly experimental, in both content and style, Beckett's dramatic writings are, and to that extent he sustains the modernist or Poundian impulse to "Make it new." But his works are, at the very same time, as we shall see, locked in an oedipal struggle with the founding modernist father: James Joyce. Far from breaking through to a radical Novum, then, Beckett's works are frustratedly caught up in a life-or-death struggle with the earlier modernist generation. This dual structure—extending but also contesting modernism—is what I mean here by late modernism.

The central issue of Joyce's *Portrait* is how the protagonist Stephen Dedalus encounters various epiphanies. P. J. Murphy refers to clouds, colours and most importantly the birdgirl in *Portrait* (I will discuss her in detail later) as various cues that are paralleled in Beckett's pre-radio fictions. However, I shall argue how these modernist epiphanies are prompted by diverse modes of *fall* – such as the moral fall of sex with a prostitute, the biblical fall referring to the disobedience of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, as well as the prior fall of the angel Lucifer, or the physical falls of light, darkness, smells and music from the environment. These symbolic and venereal falls are, I consider, central to Joyce's text as the threshold points of Dedalus's epiphany, which ultimately inspires his project of becoming an artist. As Dedalus chooses wisdom gained by "wandering among the snares of the world" and "its ways of sin" over a strict religious calling, he is tied to the fate of falling into sin: "He had not yet fallen but he would fall silently, in an

instant. Not to fall was too hard, too hard; and he felt the silent lapse of his soul, as it would be at some instant to come, falling, falling, but not yet fallen, still unfallen, but about to fall."[709] Beckett contrives a literary dialogue with Joyce by rewriting all manner of falls in *All That Fall* (as its title obviously suggests), and I shall now theorise these different modes. Clas Zilliacus points out the irony here: "Curiously, it is in a non-visual, verbal medium [i.e. radio] that Beckett's theme of falling now finds its most consistent and inclusive (fallings physical, religious, sexual, etc.) treatment."[710]

The most explicit rewriting of the imagery of physical fall in the radio play are the footfalls of Maddy's journey to the railway station. In the BBC production Maddy's rhythmic footsteps are represented by drum beats, echoing the preceding music from *Death and the Maiden*. Other modes of physical fall also make themselves felt when the material fall of the "vile dust" is linked to Maddy's remark that "This dust will not settle in our time."[711] Also significant is the fall of the rain as a prominent feature in this play. The forecast that "the rain will begin to fall and go on falling" is realised in the final downpour, that "tempest of wind and rain" at the end of the play, and the effect in the final scene may well be regarded as working towards the modernist tension that precedes an epiphany, or as the enactment of catharsis in relation to the previous revelation of a child falling to its death from the train.[712]

A wide range of symbolic falls are important indices to unravel how Beckett appropriates Joyce's *Portrait*, and such imagery makes particular reference to Dante

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[709] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Harper-Collins, 2011) 166-67. Hereafter quoted as *Portrait*.

[710] Zilliacus 42.

[711] Beckett, *CDW* 175-76.

[712] Beckett, *CDW* 181, 175.

and the Bible. P. J. Murphy examines the motif of purgatory in *Mercier and Camier* which, he claims, "combines essential characteristics of both the Joycean and Dantean Purgatories," though he stresses that Beckett is influenced more by Joyce's version than Dante's.[713] We can refer to the essay "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" as evidence of the influence that both Dante and Joyce have on Beckett. Dante is referred to in both Joyce's *Portrait* and *All That Fall*, in which Beckett alludes to the *Inferno*, and *Rough for Radio II* contains a specific reference to *Purgatory*. We might, then, imagine Joyce as Virgil to Beckett's Dante; but such a prestigious guide and mentor arouses deeply ambivalent feelings in the younger Irish writer.

The passage "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down" not only gives the title of the play, but it is also the most explicit excerpt from the Bible, implying an expected act of charity, as if in response to the request of Maddy Rooney for a helping hand to get up the steps at the train station or to get into Mr. Slocum's limousine.[714] The movement of elevating the fallen as a charitable act, or that of raising the head when it is sunk (an important gesture in *Embers* which I shall discuss later), may both be regarded as a pronounced anticipation of a modernist epiphany. Beckett is particularly attentive to the notion of a face elevated after it is sunken as if in distress, as when the protagonist raises his head in the final scene of *Catastrophe* (1982). It is as if he is saying, according to Beckett, "you bastards, you haven't finished me yet," and the spirit of this remark may help us understand the importance of the moment of elevation after the fall in his work more generally.[715] Thus Beckett is working through the concerns of Joyce's *Portrait* by means of these

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[713] Murphy 162.

[714] Beckett, *CDW* 198.

[715] Qtd. in Knowlson 680. Undated conversation with Knowlson.

shared religious and literary references.

At a specific moment of heated debate in Joyce's novel, Dedalus reveals that the first degree of spiritual pain is that of loss, as the "pain for a mother to be parted from her child, . . . for the poor soul to be spurned from the presence of the supremely good and loving Creator . . . then, to be separated for ever from its greatest good, from God."[716] *All That Fall* also approaches this issue and addresses various modes of loss, such as the loss of sight for Dan Rooney, the loss of a father for Jerry or for Mr. Barrell, or of both parents for Tommy. It is still more significant that there are multiple references to the loss of a child: Dan and Maddy's daughter Minnie has died; Mr. Tyler is grandchildless, for his daughter's womb, disconcertingly referred to as "the whole . . . er . . . bag of tricks," has been medically removed; and lastly, a child falls (or is pushed) out of the train and is killed.[717] In Maddy's retelling of the story about the mental trouble of a little girl, the problem with this child is that "she had never really been born," so there is a failure to come into life in the first place here, rather than a premature departure from it.[718] The focus on the loss of a child echoes Beckett's own therapy with Wilfred Bion, when he discovered his memory of being in the womb, i.e. of himself not yet born: "I certainly came up with some extraordinary memories of being in the womb, intra-uterine memories. I remember feeling trapped, being imprisoned and unable to escape, of crying to be let out, but no one could hear, no one was listening. I remember being in pain but being unable to do anything about

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[716] Joyce, *Portrait* 130-31.

[717] Beckett, *CDW* 174.

[718] Beckett, *CDW* 196.

it."[719] This experience suggests the way that Dan Rooney feels "being confined;" more significantly, the sense of being confined and imploring to be let out mirrors Fox's condition in *Rough for Radio II*.[720]   However, I want to argue that the recurrent loss of a child takes on an allegorical implication in *All That Fall* to suggest that the Beckett generation is stifled or even destroyed by the modernist tradition of its literary father, James Joyce.

Critics commonly hold that *Portrait* is autobiographical in that young Dedalus is a surrogate figure for Joyce; similarly, I wish to argue that blind old Dan Rooney is a surrogate for Joyce as a literary father-figure to Beckett. In *All That Fall* Dan has apparently murdered a child who fell or was pushed out of the train, which serves as a symbolic parallel to the way that the huge achievement of Beckett's literary father Joyce smothers his son's chance of success. Dan sinisterly expresses the "wish to kill a child" and to "Nip some young doom in the bud," and his remarks suggest how Beckett's literary path is itself doomed because Joyce's spectacular modernist achievement has erased the prospects of the succeeding generation.[721]

Joyce is thus a troubling symbolic father-figure for Beckett, and *Embers* is perhaps the most pivotal play for examining the Joyce-Beckett relationship. For example, the motif of blindness—both Dan in *All That Fall* and Henry's father in *Embers*—enacts Joyce's own impaired eye-sight.[722] Henry is, in his father's account, "a washout," a traumatising judgement that has shattered his being before the play

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[719] Samuel Beckett, *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett: Uncollected Interviews with Samuel Beckett and Memories of Those Who Knew Him*, eds. James Knowlson and Elizabeth Knowlson (London: Bloomsbury, 2006) 68.

[720] Beckett, *CDW* 195.

[721] Beckett, *CDW* 191.

[722] Qtd. in Shenker 147. Beckett did odd jobs for Joyce because "He was greatly handicapped because of his eyes."

even begins.[723] This judgemental paternal role is enacted again in the next generation

when Henry is disappointed by his own daughter Addie, due to her multiple instances

of failure (she does not look at the lambs, she cannot master her piano and

horse-riding lessons). Such disappointment leads to Henry's regret at engendering her

as he "wish[es] to God we'd never had her;" since Henry is himself a failure from his

own father's viewpoint, he is convinced that his father equally regrets having had

him.[724] If the role of son or daughter is taken as a surrogate for Beckett, then the

disappointed father-figure is certainly Joyce. Kevin Branigan in his book on the radio

plays shrewdly suggests that "The problem of influence of literary past masters is

seamlessly combined with the very human oedipal battle between Henry and his blind

father."[725] This radio play allegorically enacts the Joyce-Beckett relationship in the

sense that Beckett is conducting a literary inquest into his own lack of creativity when

confronted by Joyce as modernist precursor and icon. Therefore, Beckett invents a

dialogue with Joyce, for Henry's father's negative commentary—"a washout"—is

Beckett's articulation of Joyce's overwhelming literary impact that leaves little for

him to explore, and indeed has made him feel unaccomplished if not a downright

failure as a writer. In writing for radio in mid-century, Beckett is being as boldly

experimental in aesthetic terms as Joyce himself – indeed, more experimental, since

he is venturing into a technological realm that Joyce never entered. If in this sense he

is more modernist than Joyce, it is also the case that, in those radical new radio

experiments, he remains locked in oedipal conflict with Joyce, caught up in an

obsessive struggle with the earlier modernist generation; it is this paradoxical

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[723] Beckett, *CDW* 256.

[724] Beckett, *CDW* 256.

[725] Branigan 53.

deadlock—modernist experiment (in medium) caught up in regressive struggle with the Irish-modernist past (in terms of content)—that serves as my model of late modernism.

When Henry announces that he resembles his father in the way that he "can't stay away from it [the sea]" though he "never go[es] in," the sea takes on a symbolic bearing in relation to the motif of modernist epiphany.[726] Henry's dilemma in this play suggests the way that Beckett is locked in the grip of a Joycean literary grandeur which he cannot rid himself of—"Some old grave I cannot tear myself away from," as Henry sombrely puts it—but neither does he wish to take it fully on board.[727] In fact, Beckett here recreates a memorable moment of Joyce's *Portrait*. The episode by the sea where Stephen Dedalus meets the birdgirl (who "seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird") is refashioned in Henry's calling up of Ada by the sea in *Embers*.[728] In *Portrait*, the birdgirl is symbolic of a Venus or Muse figure whose existence inspires Dedalus to "swoon into some new world" of becoming an artist. The image of the birdgirl stays formatively with him; indeed, it passes "into his soul," leading to a symbolic fall as he opens himself "To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life," a pivotal moment that opens up to other modes of fall (such as the grey morning light, fragrances, darkness or brightness) in the following chapter.[729] P. J. Murphy argues

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[726] Beckett, *CDW* 254. For more studies on the modernist epiphany, see: Gerald Gillespie, *Proust, Mann, Joyce in the Modernist Context* 2nd ed. (Washington: Catholic U of America P, 2010); Wim Tigges ed., *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, Studies in Lit. 25 (1999); Birgit Neuhold, *Measuring the Sadness: Conrad, Joyce, Woolf and European Epiphany* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008).

[727] Beckett, *CDW* 258.

[728] Joyce, *Portrait* 176.

[729] Joyce, *Portrait* 177.

that Beckett first rewrites the Joycean birdgirl epiphany in *Murphy* when the prostitute

Celia enacts the Venus/Muse role. I propose that Ada resembles this Joycean figure in

the way that she is also a Muse figure who stimulates Henry's memory of his father.

Katherine Worth reflects on Ada as a Muse in her important discussion of "Women in

Beckett's Radio and Television Plays," where she points out that "women began to

come into their own in Beckett's theater at about the time he discovered the attraction

of writing for radio" – with Maddy in *All That Fall* being the first great example of

this.[730] The enactment of the Joyce-Beckett relationship through the staging of a

memorable female character is registered again when Donald Davie announces Maddy

to be "a sort of parody of" Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* – an insight that has not

yet been sufficiently explored in the critical literature.[731]

Beckett also rewrites the Joycean sexual epiphany in both radio plays. As

Dedalus sins with a prostitute (represented as another Muse figure) the physical

experience yields a momentary epiphany for him, and Beckett also evokes sexual

implications as Mr. Slocum (slow come, in a ribald pun) helps Maddy enter his

limousine in *All That Fall*. The effect here, however, is deflatingly comic, because the

panting and screaming of both elderly characters is a parody of sexual ecstasy. We are

reminded of Tyrus Miller's insight that late modernism employs laughter to put

derisive skids under the symbols and solemnities of high modernism. In *Embers*, in a

conversation that took place twenty years ago in which Ada repeatedly cries "Don't"

followed by Henry's repeatedly calling her "Darling," a narrative suggestion of sex by

the sea is also probable, echoing again the more sublimated scene of Dedalus with the

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[730] Katharine Worth, "Women in Beckett's Radio and Television Plays," *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990) 236.

[731] Donald Davie, "*Spectrum*," *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge, 1979) 155.

birdgirl by the sea in *Portrait*.

Ada's remark that "the carriage of a head . . . be bowed when one would have thought it should be lifted" serves as a reference back to the biblical fall in *All That Fall*, and again resonates with related imagery in *Portrait*. However, since Ada later reveals that the motionless posture of Henry's father sitting on the rock evokes "no detail you could put your finger on" or "make out," this demonstrates how Beckett fails to obtain the revelational kind of epiphany represented in Joyce's work.[732] Thus Beckett is reversing the effect of the fall by cancelling out the epiphany, in a sharp contrast to the Joycean text. The seashore, we might say, is a place where opposites—land/sea, wet/dry, life/art—are potentially reconciled in Joyce's *Portrait*, but where you dispiritedly fall between those opposites into a no-man's-land of neither/nor (rather than both/and) for Beckett and his character Henry in *Embers*.

As Henry is stranded on the verge of the sea, so Beckett is also trapped in an awkward liminal position confronting Joyce's Irish modernism as the symbolic sea that he cannot overcome. This late modernist stance also mirrors Woburn's stranded location in *Cascando*: "right the sea . . . left the hills . . . ," which one might also regard as an allegorical position between modernism and postmodernism.[733] Beckett has, as it were, attempted a brief dip in the field of modernism by revisiting Joycean motifs, in the way that Henry manages to "Stretch [his] old bones" by "[getting] as far as the water's edge."[734] The two radio plays discussed here are filled with numerous references to *Portrait*, thus constituting a rewrite of Joycean elements leading to potential moments of epiphany; however, he recasts these imminent revelations with a

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[732] Beckett, *CDW* 263.

[733] Beckett, *CDW* 297.

[734] Beckett, *CDW* 259.

twist by rejecting any epiphanic elevation.

For Joyce's Dedalus, a wide range of falls are crucial sources of inspiration, connecting to a subsequent transcendental revelation as stressed above. However, Beckett sets his style decidedly apart from that of his literary father by cancelling out the Joycean epiphany after the symbolic or physical fall. Such cancellation is sharply enacted in the final scene of *All That Fall* where the child falls (or is pushed) off the train; this produces no sense of full revelation or resolution, even at the basic detective level as regards the question of who murders the child. Just as murmurs and voices are important epiphanic elements for Dedalus, so the same elements are at Henry's disposal in *Embers* to help him remember his father. As the Muse figure, Ada helps to construct Henry's memory of his father, but resolution is still absent, for he remains puzzled as to whether his father has gone to the other side of the bay. Since Henry has no answer to the question he asks of himself, and Ada too no longer answers towards the end of the play, he is trapped in the loop of repetition with limited means, mirroring the way that his own compulsive Bolton-Holloway story continues without end. Though the radio plays contain many Joycean echoes of the pre-epiphanic fall, Beckett is able to dissociate his style from Joyce's due to a different appropriation of the moment after the fall, a literary innovation that shapes the direction of his aesthetics of permutation without final resolution.

As Beckett's story is never finished—famously, "I can't go on, I'll go on" from *The Unnamable*—so his multiple revisits of Joycean elements fail to deliver the modernist epiphany, which is an iconic failure, or rather a paradoxical success in failure, that sets his style decidedly apart from Joyce's own.[735] This cancelled epiphany is enacted in the subsequent radio plays involving Words/Voice and Music as

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[735] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 2: 407.

two separate faculties that stimulate inspiration. Words in *Cascando* adopts a similar rhetorical pattern to address several different themes; therefore, their impact on Croak to evoke images diminishes. The revelatory words that Animator seeks to get out of Fox in *Rough for Radio II* might themselves be regarded as a potential modernist epiphany. However, as Fox harks repeatedly back on old themes, the kind of breakthrough required by modernism—which would take us to T. S. Eliot's "still point of the turning world"—is not achieved, and Animator has surely failed as the play ends (though a failure for Animator is simultaneously an aesthetic success for his creator).[736]

The failed attempt at epiphany is equally shared by Music in the later radio plays. Unlike *All That Fall* which features both Schubert's music and the song hummed by Miss Fitt, there is hardly a memorable melody of a conventional sort in *Cascando* or *Words and Music*, but rather merely repeated tunings of similar composition, and these broken musical lines are hardly inspiring. In other words, Beckett transforms modernism's aspiration to music and pares down its impact as the protagonist fails to retrieve significant images from his memory. However, it is worth noting that Music in both *Cascando* and *Words and Music* enacts Stephen Dedalus's "confused music" in the way that it "seemed to recede, to recede, to recede, and from each receding trail of nebulous music there fell always one longdrawn calling note" in *Portrait* – the difference here being that Dedalus successfully gains a momentary epiphany linked to names and memories.[737]

When they hear the biblical reference that gives *All That Fall* its title, Dan and Maddy's exaggerated laughter is an act of comic blasphemy, echoing Beckett's own

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[736] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, rev. ed. (1944; London: Faber, 1979) 17.

[737] Joyce, *Portrait* 172.

sardonic mockery of the modernist epiphany. Again, as we have noted, late modernist laughter undercuts modernist aesthetic positivity. Donald Davie argues that "Beckett is a comic writer," and the humorous first radio play in his view stages Joyce's literary device of parody by appropriating language differently.[738] Maddy's phrase "never pause, till we come safe to haven" is an example of Davie's subtle notion of "syntactical over-elegance" to achieve a comical effect, and this, according to Davie, is where "Beckett stakes new ground away from Joyce."[739] Everything is caught in a suspension of repeated permutations and endless shuffling and reshuffling, because such is the impasse after Joyce's spectacular achievement that nothing genuinely new can come from it. Though Beckett takes on the Joycean fall, he also undermines the modernist epiphany by way of falling back on the old themes in a different order.

A wide range of falls and losses in Beckett's plays thus enact an aesthetic strategy of failure, the germ of Beckett's paradoxical success as an artist born out of the Joycean tradition of Irish modernism. Experimental though he is, Beckett also remains locked into the early model of modernism, and that frustrated struggle is fully reflected in the early radio plays creating a deadlock that we might well term late modernism. My attempt to analyse instances of falling echoes in many ways P. J. Murphy's notion of negative or reverse epiphany, and just as Murphy makes *Watt* the cornerstone of Beckett's break from Joycean aesthetics, so I would wish to stress the radio plays as a formative moment in this self-definitional process. Confronted with various theoretical impasses inherent in modernist aesthetics, Beckett cannot simply overcome the modernist style of Joyce, his literary mentor. Murphy comments that "Without Joyce's guidance, Beckett could not have reached this point at which the

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[738] Davie 154.

[739] Beckett, *CDW* 194; Davie 155.

need for new revelations is absolutely critical."[740] Therefore, his reversed aesthetics

of impotence and ignorance is prompted by his literary attempt to fail (at delivering

the modernist epiphany) "as no other dare fail," to quote Beckett's observation on

Bram van Velde's artistic project.[741]

Late modernism is the unique ground where Beckett's radio plays reach for

new, uncharted territories by reworking and undermining Joyce's inspirational fall –

that keyword in *Portrait*. In fact, there is an oppositional dynamics after the fall:

Stephen Dedalus benefits from a wide range of falls to elevate himself intellectually

and gain creative insight into becoming an artist; but in the case of Beckett's

characters, they just fall *tout court*. They tend to be locked in a perpetual struggle from

which the only way forward is to return to where they began and fall again,

anticipating a famous line from *Worstward Ho* (1983): "Ever tried. Ever failed. No

matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."[742] In this sense, the pile of tumbled-over

bodies in *Godot*—Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky in a jumble on the ground in

Act II—is a visual metaphor for this predicament, and it is enacted again in a minor

key by the fall of Croak's club at the end of *Words and Music* or by Woburn's

recurrent falls in *Cascando*. The introduction to Everett Frost's American production

of this play remarks that: "The title of the drama *Cascando* suggests, if anything,

falling."[743] Deirdre Bair writes in *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* that *Cascando* "was

originally called *Calando*, a musical term meaning diminishing in tone (equivalent to

diminuendo or *decrescendo*)," and she also mentions that the Italian translation of

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[740] Murphy 150.

[741] Beckett, *Disjecta* 145.

[742] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 471.

[743] *Cascando*, *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*, by Samuel Beckett, dir. Everett C. Frost, CD-ROM, 5 discs (n.p.: Evergreen Review, 1989).

cascando refers to the process of falling.[744]

Dan Rooney's strange Dante-inspired image of himself moving backward and Maddy forward evokes the movement of an oppositional pair heading awkwardly in the same direction towards home, and this image tells us something of the Joyce-Beckett relationship: their styles are opposed to each other, but they both remain in roughly the same overarching modernist tendency. As Beckett's imitation of Joyce's work is of a contestatory nature, he is therefore best regarded as a late modernist to properly segregate two connecting and yet distinct literary modes from each other (and perhaps we should now start describing Joyce as a "high modernist" to strengthen the point).

As the negative counterpart of Joyce, Beckett strives for uncharted literary possibilities, and he seeks expression of and through ignorance and impotence, a reversal of Joyce's aesthetics. In "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce," Beckett argues that "There is no difference . . . between the smallest possible chord and the smallest possible arc, no difference between the infinite circle and the straight line. The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent."[745] Extreme binary oppositions and radical conflicts might then, as he here suggests, turn out to be indifferent. He goes on to say that:

> The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the
> principle (maximum) of one another. Therefore, not only do the minima
> coincide with the minima, the maxima with the maxima, but the minima
> with the maxima in the succession of transmutations. Maximal speed is a
> state of rest. The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation

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[744] Deirdre Bair, *A Biography: Samuel Beckett* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978) 541. Bair claims that Beckett changed the title of *Calando* because it is a slang word for Camembert cheese in French.

[745] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 497.

are identical: in principle, corruption is generation. And all things are

ultimately identified with God, the universal monad, Monad of monads.[746]

This suggests that his own literary trajectory—an opposite direction from modernism

as exemplified by Joyce and Proust—is, in effect, a kind of return to it, albeit a

paradoxical one. According to Beckett, the minimum emerges from the maximum and

thus erases the distinction of both. The maximal fashion of Joyce's work and Beckett's

own minimalist style are thus two sides of a coin. Beckett rebelliously works out an

antithetical endeavour to that outlined by high modernism, that old grave he cannot

tear himself away from, only to remain within the same current of modernism (rather

than breaking out and through into something that we might term full postmodernism

in the Jamesonian sense). Even though Beckett's literary trajectory enacts a polarised

opposition to his predecessors, it remains rooted in the modernist principle because,

according to Irving Howe, "Modernism does not establish a prevalent style of its own;

or if it does, it denies itself, thereby ceasing to be modern."[747] This is perhaps why

Terry Eagleton comments that "If Beckett is more modernist than postmodernist, it is

because his world has shattered into fragments which leave rather at the centre . . . a

hole."[748] But since this is, specifically, a Joyce-shaped hole, as I have demonstrated in

this section, "late modernism" proves a better term here than either of Eagleton's.

Beckett is connected to Joyce not only in the way that he creates his distinct

style of impotence and failure, for his aesthetics is more generally shaped by the

influence of his predecessor's work. Though there are many recognisable references to

Joyce where Beckett is eminently following in the former's modernist footsteps, the

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[746] Beckett, *Samuel Beckett* 4: 497.

[747] Howe 3.

[748] Terry Eagleton, "Beckett's Paradoxes," *Crazy John and the Bishop: And Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork UP, 1998) 299.

contrast of Dedalus's epiphany and its reworking as cancelled revelation in the radio plays throws light on the notion of time in literary-periodising terms by segregating late modernism (of Beckett's kind) as a significant break from modernism. It is worth noting, at the level of empirical content, how many of the characters in Beckett's works are obsessed with the notion of being late – a motif that comes to a very intense focus in the exclamation from Mr. Tyler in *All That Fall* that I have taken as an epigraph for this chapter. When Stephen Dedalus announces in *Portrait* that "Time is, time was, but time shall be no more" and later stresses that "The past was past," these formulations may be taken as embodying Joyce's doctrine that an artist must sever his or her connections with previous literary fashion because "The past is consumed in the present and the present is living only because it brings forth the future."[749] In response, Maddy Rooney remarks that "Shrouding, shrouding, the best of it is past," and that "It will be like old times" after Dan suggests that they will "fall into the ditch" – these lines disclose Beckett's homage to Joyce's work by taking their cue again from the Joycean fall, and revealing that to the younger writer the modernist tradition is already "like old times."[750]

3.   Historicising Late Modernism

Having discussed Beckett's literary aesthetics as embodying the dual function of late modernist struggle that both clings on to and resists the modernist style, I will now examine how his radio plays may be seen as late modernist in conjunction with the specific historical event of World War Two. In section one of this chapter, I concentrated on the formal features that critics have attributed to their models of late

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[749] Joyce, *Portrait* 126, 150, 260.

[750] Beckett, *CDW* 189.

modernism, whereas now, clearly, I need to say more about their historical location of it. As we have seen, Tyrus Miller provocatively locates the start of late modernism as early as 1926, which, if the high point of modernism itself was 1922—the year of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*—is disconcertingly early indeed. In contrast, Fredric Jameson in *A Singular Modernity* construes late modernism as a belated modernist movement linked to the Cold War.[751] But his argument invokes geopolitical associations which may have little relevance to my discussion of Beckett's radio work. Jonathan Mayhew has suggested that if the pinnacle of high modernism occurred in the 1910s and 1920s, around or just after the Great War, then late modernism "is a second wave of modernist writing arising after World War II," and he specifies Beckett as "the prototypical late modernist writer" alongside Maurice Blanchot and Paul Celan.[752] The First World War is often seen as a founding event for modernism, and Beckett's radio drama would in contrast be late modernist due to its emergence after World War Two.

Irving Howe has suggested the encroachment of historical events on modernism in the sense that "Behind this extreme subjectivity lurks an equally extreme sense of historical impasse, the assumption that something about the experience of our age is unique, a catastrophe without precedent."[753] His critical insight is shared by Marina MacKay, who examines political tensions in *Modernism and World War II*, and who argues that late modernism is set against the historical background of the Second World War. Echoing Tyrus Miller's study, she argues that

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[751] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) 165.

[752] Jonathan Mayhew, "Fragments of a Late Modernity: José Angel Valente and Samuel Beckett," *Comparative Literature* 59.3 (2007): 229, 228.

[753] Howe 5.

late modernism signals "unambiguously a move away from the manifestos of the 1910s and the climatic year of 1922."[754] She points out that "the Second World War . . . was both a win and a winding up" that affected the mood of late modernism, which is on this showing a belated movement within and beyond modernism with specific historical reference to the post-war era.[755] Beckett's entire radio work takes place in the late 1950s and early 60s, yet as I have argued in Chapter Two, many of his earlier, formative experiences of radio, including his first text for radio on the ruins of Saint-Lô, are decisively connected to the Second World War. Moreover, these radio plays are certainly time-bound as Beckett never wrote for radio again.

I have already made an extensive connection between radio and the war earlier in this thesis, and I will here draw an analogy between the role of radio drama during the war and Marcel Proust's account of how the second nature of habit blinds the first nature of suffering and anxiety.[756] Asa Briggs remarks that the BBC had planned ahead "early in 1939 for a twenty-four-hour service of BBC news bulletins throughout the day," and those who had access to a radio relied heavily on news broadcasts for their knowledge of the progress of the war.[757] He also suggests that "It was during the Second World War rather than before it that it [radio] fully achieved what had always been its aim, that of informing, inspiring—and directing—a whole community."[758] Radio drama during the war was a way for listeners to while away the time or seek a temporary break from wider anxieties. Not only is the medium of radio thus generally

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[754] Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 15.

[755] MacKay 1.

[756] See Chapter Two section three for my discussion of Proust's notions of habit, suffering and anxiety.

[757] Briggs 2: 633.

[758] Briggs 2: 8.

associated with World War Two, but there are some specific references back to it in Beckett's radio drama (the dust that "will not settle in our time"), as I have argued in Chapter Two.[759] Thus, the historical context of the war supplements my earlier formalist understanding of late modernism. According to Alain Badiou, "An evental fidelity is a real break (both thought and practised) in the specific order within which the event took place."[760] The event of World War Two can therefore anchor the transition from modernism to late modernism. I intend, therefore, to treat Beckett's corpus of radio drama as a distinctive singular event of late modernism in the wake of World War Two.

In his recent study of *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America*, Robert Genter focuses on modernist practices in America after World War Two. He posits late modernism as a movement that challenges the old, high-modernist notion of the autonomy of art without abandoning modernist experimentation altogether, and he cites as examples of this aesthetic project the work of Kenneth Burke, Jasper Johns and Ralph Ellison. Genter suggests that late modernists did not "abandon the literary and cultural revolution . . . by their modernist predecessors, whose original goal was to explore new forms of consciousness and unearth new forms of perception in the hopes of transforming the world at large."[761] But modernism does now, as Kenneth Burke insisted, have to engage questions of communication and rhetorical efficacy that high modernism, in its contempt for public taste, had mostly avoided.

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[759] *All That Fall* in Beckett, *CDW* 176.

[760] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. P. Hallward (London: Verso, 2001) 42.

[761] Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2010) 4.

I will make the case for radio as the essential factor that sets Beckett's radio drama decidedly apart from modernism, and also from his work in other genres. In fact, radio is Beckett's first encounter with a technology that puts literature to actual performance. We could make a contrast here with the use of the tape recorder in the stage play *Krapp's Last Tape*, which simply establishes a self-enclosed circuit between young Krapp and old Krapp, with no wider communicative function at all. Thus, an analysis of Beckett's radio drama as late modernism must include discussion of radio technology. It is true that some recent scholars have seen radio as an archetypally modernist medium. Todd Avery ties radio to modernism in this way in his excellent study of *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938*, where he announces that radio is "the quintessentially new telecommunications medium of the modernist period."[762] He studies the involvement of British modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf with radio broadcasting. Since his focus is on how they help shape modern morality, he is concerned principally with ethical issues in his study of radio modernism. My view of Beckett's radio plays, however, is less concerned with their ethics than with their art and their far-reaching impact on listeners. So, we must ask whether Beckett's radio drama can challenge high-modernist aesthetic autonomy in the area of audio art through the medium of radio, as proposed by Genter's model of late modernism.

There is a crucial tension between Genter's and Jameson's accounts here. Jameson suggests that late modernism works out "the ideology of modernism and of the autonomy of art," and stands as "the survival and transformation of more properly modernist creative impulses after World War II."[763] He thus not only reinforces the

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[762] Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2006) 138.

[763] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 197.

view of late modernism as a post-World War Two—indeed, Cold War—event, but also stresses its radical continuation of the goal of aesthetic autonomy. The project of modernist autonomy is of a self-contained subject and form, an essentially self-referential artefact that dissociates itself from external linkages to social experience and mass culture. In other words, the autonomous work fails to connect to the public because modernist artists endeavour to make their work a distinctive self-expression, without concerning themselves with how or if it can engage audiences or viewers, those despised typists and house-agent's clerks of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). In contrast to such would-be autonomous art, full-blooded postmodernists seek pleasurable communication through their work, from Pop Art in the 1960s onwards.

Late modernism might be regarded as a bridge between the two grander paradigms of modernism and postmodernism, as in Genter's suggestion that late modernists "argued not only that the nature of the aesthetic form needed to be rethought in an age of mass media but that the general assumptions about the nature of subjectivity needed to be updated."[764] When employing radio as a mass medium, Beckett has an opportunity to consolidate his avant-garde art in his experiment with radio drama. Conor Carville suggests that subsequent late modernist artists responded to Beckett's relentless experimentation with technology as a way out of the alienated aporia of modernism and its doctrine of artistic autonomy.[765] When mass media are involved, late modernists seek public communication to counter the modernist problem of disruptive engagements with reader or audience. Whereas "The

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[764] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 197.

[765] See Conor Carville, "Autonomy and the Everyday: Beckett, Late Modernism and Post-War Visual Art," *Samuel Beckett Today/aujourd'hui* 23 (2011): 63-80. He focuses on late modernist visual art in terms of the connection between modernist autonomy and the minimalist aesthetic.

avant-garde scorns notions of 'responsibility' toward the audience" and poses "the question of whether the audience exists – or should exist" in its practice of autonomous art, Beckett's radio drama already—a priori, as it were—envisions the existence of listeners.[766] In the light of this, I want to address the question as to whether radio broadcasting necessarily induces communication, or whether, on the other hand, radio can indeed remain a neutral medium for an autonomous art. How do we understand the role of radio in Beckett's late modernist radio drama? Will the art of radio technology undermine or complement the integrity of late modernism as we have previously established it?

Radio may indeed enable a concentrated engagement, a near-autonomy in Beckett's radio drama, based on two factors. First, it resists reliance on any other sense than hearing; it thus enhances autonomy in its extreme aural concentration, its specialist mode of reception. Second, Beckett repeatedly refuses cooperation between different art forms and insists that his radio drama should not be performed in any other medium:

> *All That Fall* is a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies. I have already refused to have it "staged" and I cannot think of it in such terms. A perfectly straight reading before an audience seems to me just barely legitimate, though even on this score I have my doubts. But I am absolutely opposed to any form of adaptation with a view to its conversion into "theatre." It is no more theatre than *Endgame* is radio and to "act" it is to kill it. Even the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings—and I am quite sure Berghof has no intention of leaving it at that—will be destructive of

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766 Howe 15.

whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing's

coming out of the dark.[767]

Beckett's formulation strongly asserts the specificity of the medium, its self-enclosed

and specialist mode of reception which separates it off from culture more generally

and thus makes it a fit vehicle for the project of aesthetic autonomy.

Jameson argues that "high literature and high art mean the aesthetic minus

culture, the aesthetic field radically cleansed and purified of culture."[768] If autonomy

is achieved where art is severed from life, however, then radio might not be such an

autonomy-enhancing medium after all. Jameson disavows the notion that autonomy is

facilitated by the separation of art and life; instead, it is "a radical dissociation within

the aesthetic itself: by the radical disjunction and separation of literature and art from

[mass] culture."[769] Radio broadcasting can reach out to listeners essentially as a

public service representing quality culture (as with the BBC or ORTF), but it also has

many consumerist and commercial functions. Listeners across geographical borders

receive messages (political or commercial) or entertainment (music or radio drama)

from broadcasting, and radio is thus hardly autonomous in these respects. But as a

medium of communication, the manner of its delivery is at best a one-way

transmission, because listeners cannot offer feedback by using their own radios. As

Steven Connor points out in *Postmodernist Culture*, "what is oppressive about the

media is precisely the 'code' which in their very form they embody. This code

functions by the denial of response or exchange in mass communication." [770] In the

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[767] Qtd. in Zilliacus 3.

[768] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 179.

[769] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 176.

[770] Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, 2nd ed. (Malden [MA]: Blackwell, 1997) 53.

light of Jean Baudrillard's declaration regarding how mass media "fabricate non-communication" in his essay "Requiem for the Media," we can see that radio also fabricates false communication because the broadcaster "*prevents response*," and no channel for exchange between the transmitter and the receiver is available.[771] Connor elaborates on Baudrillard's critical stance and suggests that "A mass medium talks to its audience . . . while never allowing that audience to respond to it and, indeed, confirms its audience's muteness by simulating audience response, via phone-ins, studio audiences, viewers' polls and other forms of bogus 'interactions.'"[772]

Though we cannot determine if there is anyone listening at all or how concentrated they might be in their engagement with the broadcast, the possibility that radio may effectively reach out to listeners already cancels out its tendency to enhance aesthetic autonomy as a self-contained mechanism. Radio, we might say, meets autonomy and communication half way. Autonomy is not an absolute goal for Beckett, because he transmits his works by means of the public medium of radio. The supremacy of modernism, which he sustains in his experimental forms, is thus undermined by the accessibility of the mass medium. Unlike the dissociative communication of modernism, Beckett's radio drama is intended to be listened to, even though full communication between broadcaster and individual receiver through the radio is impossible, as Baudrillard argues. In fact, *Rough for Radio I* suggests precisely this movement—from the isolated modernist condition to a late modernist struggle for communication—without actually achieving it: Voice and Music in this play are controlled separately by two knobs and do not see or hear each other, but later the male protagonist He observes that they are "ending" and hesitantly suggests that

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[771] Jean Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media," *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. and introd. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos, 1981) 169-70.

[772] Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* 53.

they come together—"I don't know . . . like . . . [*Hesitation*] . . . one"—as the play draws to a baffling close.[773] *Cascando* also dramatizes a tension between autonomy and communication: the two autonomous forces of Voice and Music fail in the attempt to communicate "as though they drew together" or "had linked their arms," according to Opener's observation.[774]

We may argue that the texts of Beckett's radio plays preserve artistic autonomy in that they not only resist analysis, but are virtually indecipherable. However, the fact that these plays are broadcast to listeners should not be overlooked. Raymond Williams expresses the conflicting coexistence in modern society between elite minority culture—the "minority art of a time of reduction and dislocation"—and vulgar mass communications caught up in "the routines of a technologized 'mass' culture."[775] This conflict is enacted in the broadcast of Beckett's radio drama, where residual impulses to aesthetic autonomy and the project of mass communication are in fraught tension, a transitional phase fully in the spirit of late modernism (for postmodernism will brashly cancel out this tension in the direction of pleasurable mass consumption of its artefacts).

I want now to attempt a very brief reading of the radio plays as allegories of this tension between autonomy and communication, between modernism and the dynamics of radio as mass medium. We might see the extreme hostility articulated in *Cascando* between Opener and "they" (presumably his audience)—"They say, he opens nothing . . . I don't protest any more," and so on—as an extreme affirmation of

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[773] Beckett, *CDW* 271.

[774] Beckett, *CDW* 301, 303.

[775] Raymond Williams, "Culture and Technology," *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. and introd. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989) 131.

modernist autonomy and anti-communication.[776] But the key text here is surely

Rough for Radio II, where the densely hermetic imagery of Fox's monologue may be

seen as an uncompromising modernism: "That for sure, no further, and there gaze, all

the way up, all the way down, slow gaze, age upon age, up again, down again, little

lichens of my own span, living dead in the stones, and there took to the tunnels," or,

even more obscurely, "Me get up, me go on, what a hope, it was he, for hunger. Have

yourself opened, Maud would say, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him suck if he's

still alive, but no, no no."[777] Kevin Branigan has also made the connection between

Fox's discourse and modernism, describing the former as "a catalogue of separate

images [that] bears resemblance to the automatic writing which gained popularity

among the Surrealists."[778] Animator and Stenographer might then be seen as

embodying an alternative, late modernist aesthetic impulse, doing their best to elicit

something communicative—of a shared and public nature—from Fox's self-enclosed

and autonomous image-production. What they are looking for, on this reading, is that

word, phrase or image in his obscure discourse in which modernism would transcend

itself, would break out of its own imagistic self-enclosure into some wider

communicative or rhetorical function, just as Robert Genter argued of his American

late modernists.

I have here posited a model of late modernism based on Beckett's radio plays

in relation to both the Joycean (high) modernist tradition and their connection to the

Second World War, with a specific concentration on the medium of radio itself.

Beckett's radio drama thereby emerges as a potential middle ground in the project of

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[776] Beckett, *CDW* 300.

[777] Beckett, *CDW* 279.

[778] Branigan 181.

overcoming the modernist and postmodernist critical debate around his work. I have

found in his radio drama, rather than his work for other genres, a developed late

modernist aesthetics which potentially breaks beyond these unending critical debates

between literary modernism and postmodernism. Certainly Beckett's radio plays still

consistently display modernist thematic concerns, as well as that key modernist formal

impulse to "make it new;" we may even argue that they are an autonomous body of

work due to their growing elusiveness that listeners may find—indeed, repeatedly

have found—puzzling. However, Beckett throws a particular literary rigour into his

aesthetic mastery of failure: he paradoxically uses radio to contrive communication

(working against modernist disrupted communication) and to fail in the same gesture

(because radio listeners cannot actually transmit their opinion back to the broadcaster).

According to Jameson, Beckett's work "enable[s] a transition – a momentary overlap

and coincidence [of modernist and postmodernist movements] in which a fundamental

transfer can be effected."[779] I propose that Beckett's radio drama is precisely where

modernism and mass culture meet, where a fundamental transfer between them can be

effected – hence it is that I argue for and settle for a late modernist framework for

them.

The Joycean tradition leaves the Beckett generation little hope for literary

originality, and the debris and rubble of the war-stricken landscape are the raw

materials from which any new aesthetic project will have to be built. Both

considerations explain why Beckett undermines the modernist epiphany as his

distinctive literary project of failure, for post-war despair is far removed from

modernist catharsis or revelation. Beckett reveals to Israel Shenker that "My people

[in the work] seem to be falling to bits," that "there's nothing but dust" at the end of

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[779] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* 205.

his work, and the cancelled epiphany thus articulates the Beckettian experience "of a non-knower, a non-can-er [no-can-doer]," which, in my view, constitutes his response to the impact of war.[780]

Attaching the label of late modernism to the slender but valuable body of Beckett's radio drama has not previously been ventured by critics, even by such meticulous students of the radio plays as Clas Zilliacus and Kevin Branigan, and, as I have argued throughout, the radio plays release a particular Beckettian literary energy in this distinctive genre. Beckett writes in order to be different, and he achieves this effect by recycling repeated themes in different generic vessels. What I have stressed here is his experiment with a new medium to stimulate new impressions. He is, therefore, a modernist, an exponent of radical aesthetic experiment. However, in the light of his oppositional aesthetics, his obsessive relationship backwards to Joyce, that "old grave I cannot tear myself away from," Beckett is stylistically different from iconic modernists such as Joyce, Proust or Kafka (who have only a discredited realism to repudiate). If a terminological difference must intervene to separate Beckett from such predecessors, he is therefore a late modernist. Late modernism is an appropriate term to accommodate not only the textual content of the radio drama, but also his use of radio technology and broadcasting. Although my discussions across the chapters of this thesis use a variety of theoretical disciplines, aesthetic principles, and technological foci to illuminate Beckett's radio work, these assorted approaches come together in the argument that he should be considered as a late modernist. Offers of an overall aesthetic framework for his radio drama are in short supply, and my proposition—Beckett as late modernist—both sums up my own research on his radio drama and re-opens the well-worn modernist-postmodernist debate around this author.

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[780] Qtd. in Shenker 148.

CONCLUSION

Switching Off

In a chapter on Beckett in his well-known study *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin remarks:

> By writing in a foreign language, Beckett ensures that his writing remains
>
> a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with the spirit of language itself.
>
> That is why he considers the radio plays and occasional pieces he has
>
> since written in English as relaxation, a rest from this hard struggle with
>
> meaning and language. But accordingly he also attaches less importance to
>
> these works. They came too easily.[781]

The remark that the radio plays are less important because they "came too easily" hovers indeterminately here between Esslin's own impression of the work and Beckett's authorial evaluation that he is passing on to us. This dismissive judgement makes another appearance in Clas Zilliacus's *Beckett and Broadcasting* where he writes: "Reportedly, Beckett does not think very highly of his radio plays and occasional pieces in English: 'They came too easily,'" and it features again in Kevin Branigan's *Radio Beckett*.[782]

To accept this judgement is to concede that the emergence of Beckett's radio plays was underprepared and to devalue them in consequence. It is true that when prompted to write for radio by the BBC, Beckett confessed in a letter: "I should like very much to do a radio play for the Third Programme, but I am very doubtful of my

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[781] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 39.

[782] Zilliacus 10; Branigan 199.

ability to work in this medium."[783] Certainly working in the new medium could not have come easily, for Beckett had first refused the work, then brooded upon the possibility and finally accepted the task. In July 1956 he wrote to Nancy Cunard: "Never thought about Radio play technique but in the dead of t'other night got a gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something" – imagery which clearly points towards *All That Fall*.[784] I have argued that this "gruesome idea" arouses Beckett's aesthetic fascination with the aural—including sound, voice and silence as his most enduring literary obsessions—through the new medium of radio. Yet he confessed after finishing his first radio play that: "My ideas about radio are not even quarter baked and to write about my own work is a thing I simply can't do."[785] I intend in this brief Conclusion to challenge the dismissive view of the radio plays, this notion that "They came too easily" (whether it is Beckett's own or Esslin's), so as to justify their importance across his oeuvre and to insist on the literary recognition they deserve.

In the first place, we could show the emergence of decisive new kinds of content in the radio drama. Take the case of *All That Fall*, for instance. Martin Esslin writes rather cavalierly that "*All That Fall* touches many of the chords that are sounded in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* – but in a somewhat lighter and less searching manner."[786] On the other hand, and in a much more positive vein, Katherine Worth has argued that:

> It is a rather curious fact that women began to come into their own in

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[783] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 632n5.

[784] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 631. Letter dated 4 July, 1956.

[785] Beckett, *LSB* 2: 688. Letter dated 18 December, 1956, in response to Donald McWhinnie's request to write a piece about *All That Fall* for the *Radio Times*.

[786] Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 77-78.

Beckett's theater at about the time he discovered the attraction of writing

for radio. Perhaps something in the nature of the medium—its ability to

create ambiguous distances, maybe—fitted in with his attitude in those

days about the presentation of women characters in his plays.[787]

There is no role for women at all in *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame* has only a

supporting female role, Nell, living in her dustbin next to Nagg. *All That Fall* breaks

decisive new ground in gender terms, and the Beckettian line from Maddy Rooney to

the septuagenarian female speaker of *Not I*, one of Beckett's minimalist masterpieces,

is clear and direct.

Secondly, we can make the case for the radio drama by showing how richly it

responds to recent literary-theoretical concerns. In contrast to Zilliacus and Branigan's

book-length studies on Beckett's radio drama, my thesis has invoked a range of

theoretical approaches (from Futurist and Surrealist aesthetics, through Freudian

psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and Foucauldian panopticism, to minimalism and late

modernism). I have also explored diverse aesthetic concerns (including the

interrogation of sonority, the radiophonic and the musical) and addressed some key

thematic issues involving historical and cultural studies. The overarching question I

have asked throughout is how the radio plays and the medium of radio itself assert

their significance and distinctiveness across Beckett's oeuvre. On the one hand, these

plays resonate with many recurrent Beckettian themes from the pre-radio work, since

they unconventionally deliver sound, voice, silence and near-silence in actual

performance; on the other hand, they decisively advance his aesthetic style and shape

the practice of later works in different genres. Most importantly, on the basis of these

plays and this medium, I have come to determine Beckett as a late modernist (a

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[787] Worth, "Women in Beckett's Radio and Television Plays" 236. For further study of the role of women in Beckett's work, see Linda Ben-Zvi, ed. *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990).

literary-historical position rarely taken by Beckett scholars).

Let me restate, then, what I believe the literary-critical yield of these various approaches has been across this thesis. The formal issues of voice, sound and silence which are so prominent in the radio plays lead on in my view to expression through the musical and the minimal, as is demonstrated in the role of Music in *Words and Music* and *Cascando* (as examined in Chapter Four). Such expression bears close relation to the avant-garde celebrations of Surrealist automatism and Futurist words in freedom that I explored in Chapter One, as an alternative discourse in view of the inadequacies of language (that recurrent Beckettian theme). I have also associated the traumatic situation enacted in Henry's psychic difficulties in *Embers* to the disastrous historical event of World War Two as a response to the lively recent trend of archival work in Beckett studies. The exploration of the Freudian unconscious and its traumatic mechanisms later serves as a basis to study the motifs of confinement and coercion in *Rough for Radio II* (invoking Michel Foucault's theories for their fuller analysis). These discussions ultimately reveal an allegorical connection in the radio drama to Beckett's own creative process or struggle.

These heterogeneous theoretical approaches and aesthetic concepts foreground the literary merits of the radio drama and the distinctive qualities of the medium of radio itself. Therefore I must defend these plays against the claim—whether Esslin's or Beckett's (or both)—that they are "less important" or came "too easily," for I have shown throughout my thesis the complexity of these works, both as literary texts and as actual radio productions (by the BBC, Everett Frost and others). I have repeatedly stressed that Beckett's radio plays achieve an aesthetic prominence and theoretical weight that they have not yet been properly credited with, and I hope that this thesis has played a modest part in remedying that situation.

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