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**“MY PEOPLE SEEM TO BE FALLING TO BITS”:
IMPOTENCE, MEMORY, AND THE CO-
POSSIBILITY OF BODY AND MIND IN SAMUEL
BECKETT’S WORKS**

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requirements of the University of Westminster for the
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Abstract

The present thesis examines the representation of the impotent body and mind in a selection of Samuel Beckett's dramatic and prose works. Aiming to show that the body-mind relation is represented as one of co-implication and co-constitution, this thesis also takes the representation of memory in Beckett's work as a key site for examining this relation. The thesis seeks to address the centrality of the body and embodied subjectivity in the experience of memory and indeed in signification and experience more generally. In these terms, Chapter 1 analyzes the representation of the figure of the couple in Beckett's drama of the 1950s – as a metaphor of the body-mind relation – and, in light of Jacques Derrida's theory of the supplement and Bernard Stiegler's theory of technics, it discusses how the relationship between physical body and mind is defined by an essential supplementarity that is revealed even (or especially) in their apparent separation. Furthermore, the impotence that marks both elements in Beckett's writings, when it is seen to lay bare this intrication, can be viewed, in important respects, as enabling rather than merely privative. Chapter 2 discusses the somatic structure of memory as represented in four of Beckett's later dramatic works composed in the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly to Chapter 1, the second chapter focuses on the more "extreme" representation of bodily impotence in Beckett and demonstrates that rather than a merely "mental" recollection, memory in the work of Beckett is presented as necessarily experienced through, and shaped by, the body itself. In this light, then, it is shown that despite the impotence that marks the body in Beckett's work of the 1970s and 1980s, the body is a necessary site of memory and retains or discovers a kind of activity in this impotence. Finally, Chapter 3 shifts its attention to Beckett's prose works in order to explore how such works, reliant on language rather than the physical performance of actors onstage, sustain questions of embodied subjectivity at their heart. Specifically, the chapter argues that, on closer inspection, Beckett's "literature of the unword" is not an abstention from meaning and its materialization, but one that paradoxically foregrounds that "something" which remains an essential part of it, that is, an embodied subjectivity.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

In his oft-quoted interview with Israel Shenker in 1956, Samuel Beckett identified an important characteristic of his work through a contrast with James Joyce:

With Joyce the difference is that Joyce is a superb manipulator of material – perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of words. 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 towards omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. *I'm working with impotence, ignorance.* I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past.

(Graver & Federman 2005: 162; emphasis added)

The difference between Beckett's and Joyce's art is understood here in terms both of the practices and potencies of the two writers as well as of their works' demonstration, even representation of, such mastery or its lack. Superfluity is eliminated in Joyce, not by his words necessarily becoming fewer, and certainly not by their doing ever less but, instead, by the artist's or work's dominance of the "absolute maximum" potential of the words that are there. Hence, the tendency "towards omniscience and *omnipotence*" that Beckett identifies in Joyce. By contrast, Beckett claims that he is working with impotence and ignorance, and with an absence of mastery of his "materials". This implies humility, no doubt, along with a sense of labouring at the other end of the spectrum from Joyce, perhaps with irreducibly recalcitrant "material". And yet Beckett identifies this as his opportunity: the possibility of something artistically new, of what has not previously been "exploited". His work is the engagement with impotence and ignorance, not only in its own constructive process but also, we might suppose, in what it thereby often seeks to represent. Such techniques of reduction and impotence along with their representation in Beckett's work imply the author's own lack of mastery of his material (in stark contrast with Joyce), yet they also seem to locate a form of paradoxical agency in his work in which possibilities arise *through* such reduction and impotence themselves.

Of course, Beckett's writings have often been identified as representations of impotence and ignorance. Yet the representation of these "conditions" takes

different forms throughout Beckett's *oeuvre* and has been approached in a number of different ways in the secondary literature. So, we can find, for example, various instances of the characters' or narrators' inability to understand, where, it is implied, such cognitive incapacity might be permanent despite being itself recognized by the characters or narrators themselves: "And perhaps I understood it all wrong" we read in *Molloy* (1994: 59). Later in *The Unnamable* the narrator admits: "it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know" (ibid., p.418). Such representations of ignorance in Beckett have sometimes been approached as an absence of agency and, in turn, as one of the means "thwart[ing] any possibility of smooth motion, or sense of continuity" (Renton, 1992: 103) which is eventually what moves Beckett's art "steadily, cruelly, toward silence and immobility" (Hassan, 1967: 114). At the same time, such representations have also posed a difficulty to those critics who have sought to find a particular, determinate meaning underlying Beckett's work. For this reason, some have concluded that there might indeed not be a definitive or certain meaning or intention in the latter, but only "formal brilliance" (Levy, 2007: 1). For example, Hugh Kenner's early reading of Beckett's *How It Is* concludes that it is built "phrase by phrase into a beautifully and tightly wrought structure, [in which] a few dozen expressions permuted with a deliberate redundancy accumulate meaning even as they are emptied of it" (1968: 189).

Indeed, as the opening quotation suggests, some notion of impotence (as well as inability and restriction) also appears to animate Beckett's famous interest in "subtracting rather than adding" (Knowlson, 1996: 352), and thus his constructive processes and formal decisions. In this way, for some critics, the author's "syntax of weakness" (Casanova, 2006: 99) apparently manifests impotence *as form*, as well as theme. Beckett himself seems to acknowledge his own lack of mastery over his "materials", which, one could argue, is one of the forms that this very impotence takes for Beckett himself. At the same time, and as several commentators have noted, the question of agency and mastery, or their lack, is seemingly central to what much of Beckett's drama and prose represents. The distinctive site for this representation and exploitation of

impotence is the human body itself. Whether reading Beckett's early or late works, his drama or his prose, we often find an intense preoccupation with the depiction of the body. As early as 1938, when *Murphy* was published, Beckett presents us with Murphy's body tied to his chair, stripped, apparently, of all physical mobility or agency. In *The Trilogy* (1959) the body's impotence is depicted in those passages in which, for example, Molloy's legs become stiffened, and in Malone's inability to get up from his bed; as for the Unnamable, this immobile torso, placed in a jar, exclaims: "I have dwindled, I dwindle" (1994: 333). Later, in works such as *Happy Days* (1961), *How It Is* (1961), and *Play* (1963), Beckett presents his characters' bodies as, respectively, buried in a mound of earth, crawling in the mud, or confined in urns. Likewise, Beckett's works written in the last decades of his writing career often highlight the author's close preoccupation with what appear to be connected forms of bodily impotence: for instance, the body appears as restricted to a cylinder in *The Lost Ones* (1971), frail and vulnerable in *Footfalls* (1976) and composed and decomposed in *Worstward Ho* (1981).

In light of such examples (more could be listed), the present thesis explores aspects of Beckett's representation of the body in order to build on recent critical preoccupations by developing close readings of a selection of texts, and, in doing so, seeks to expand upon some existing accounts in attempting to show how a kind of *enabling* impotence is at work in them. The readings offered here suggest that the impotent bodies and minds represented in Beckett can also represent, as such, forms of distinctive agency and possibility rather than sheer incapacity and negativity. The readings focus particularly but not exclusively on the depiction of an impotence at issue in acts of memory, in several works, in order to make their case. There are many instances in the corpus where Beckett's characters find themselves with no absolute "mastery" over their memories and unable to remember the past. One of the most famous works directly dealing with the experience of memory is *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), in which Krapp is evidently presented as impotent in terms of his inability to control, remember or even identify with his own "material" (his tapes and, thus, his memories) and equally unable to re-experience the past without consulting his dictionary, his

notes and his tape-recorder. A close analysis of the way in which Beckett represents impotence and its relation to memory is one of the main concerns of the present work, which attempts to re-read the apparently depleted or destroyed agency of the bodies and minds Beckett represents.

As Beckett's own words in the opening quotation strongly suggest, impotence becomes manifest in his work both as an object of representation and in the literary forms or modes of representation characteristic of these works. The themes of impotence and memory will in later sections be linked, then, to some formal characteristics of Beckett's later works (particularly in my final chapter), in which many of the features more recognizably or conventionally employed in earlier works – plot, setting and figurative language, for example – are reworked or withheld: "On. No knowledge of where gone from. Nor of how. Nor of whom. None of whence come to. Partly to. Nor of how. Nor of whom. None of anything." (Beckett, 2009d: 129)¹

Considering the manifestations of mental and bodily impotence in Beckett, the question as to how such manifestations are to be critically construed arises. This "impotence" may certainly be associated with sexual inability, as several critics have observed, yet its broader definition refers to a lack of power, strength or vigour; an image that can be found in very many of Beckett's works and something that Beckett himself experienced throughout his life (the various health problems suffered by Beckett are well-known, and extensively detailed by James Knowlson in his biography of Beckett, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1996)). This lack of power or "mastery", as Beckett put it in the contrast with Joyce, is key in the author's work since, as will be more explicitly argued in what follows, it is precisely what enabled Beckett to exploit something that had never been explored before: what, for him, constituted a paradoxical form of agency revealed *through* the state of impotence itself.

As is well known, Beckett frequently made clear that he was "in no mood to offer explanations [for his work]" (Graver & Federman, 2005: 160), which is one of the reasons why, as Eric P. Levy has put it, "[e]very critic, perplexed by the

¹ The ways in which impotence is represented in Beckett's later works along with some critics' approaches to this issue will be more fully discussed in Chapter 3.

notoriously enigmatic passages or situations that comprise Beckettian art, confronts the problem of meaning [...] [in] the task of interpretation” (2007: 1). Such is certainly the predicament for any critic confronting the question of how to understand both Beckett’s extreme representations of bodily incapacity and his apparent aspiration, in the contrast with Joyce, to “work with” impotence itself. Fortunately, such questions have been a site of great interest in Beckett studies over the last few decades. A number of readings have sought to clarify such representations’ role in his corpus, often through reference to the influences exerted on Beckett during the composition of his writings. Early readings such as those of Hugh Kenner and Ruby Cohn, for example, are well known for approaching Beckett’s work in the light of René Descartes’ philosophy and viewing Beckett himself as subscribing to or at least representing a species of Cartesian dualism in his depiction of the mind-body relation and of the forms of bodily incapacity, in particular, that follow from this. Beckett’s writings have since been examined in the light of other philosophies such as poststructuralism (see, for instance, Uhlmann, 1999) and deconstruction (Connor, 1988), while, much more recently, critics have sought to offer new interpretations regarding the centrality of the somatic and the physical in the Beckett canon (see, for example, Tajiri (2007), White, (2009), Maude (2009) and Tanaka, Tajiri & Tsushima (2012)).

Before I move on to explain in what way the (impotent) body and mind will be examined in the following thesis, it is essential, then, to begin by exploring some of the most influential and productive ways in which these topics have been approached in the secondary literature to date, which is a rich and various resource for any such undertaking. First, I consider treatments of these themes which position Beckett’s works in relation to *philosophies* of the body, and of the embodied subject – and which, in doing so, sometimes consider their relation to philosophy, or philosophizing, *tout court*. This will help position and formulate the problem this thesis sets itself, which is to analyze in a selection of works the paradoxical productivity of impotence as theme and form, focusing on memory as a site of intricately agency and disability, body and mind.

Beckett and the Philosophy of the Body

Although, as recent archival work has shown, Beckett read the work of a number of different philosophers, particularly seventeenth-century rationalists, in interviews he often refused to admit reading philosophy at all. So, in an interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède in February 1961, when Beckett was asked "Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?", his response was: "I never read philosophers [...] I never understand anything they write" (cited in Graver & Federman, 2005: 217). While this may refer explicitly only to *contemporary* philosophers, Beckett's refusal at this point would seem to parallel, as Graver and Federman point out, Beckett's more general tendency to avoid offering specific interpretations or explanations for his writings – something that has always posed a difficulty as much as an opportunity for his critics. This situation is, however, particularly vexed, perhaps, for philosophical critics of Beckett (a problem which has itself often been said to be of philosophical interest). So, for example, in his 1997 book, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*, Simon Critchley suggests that the "writings of Samuel Beckett seem to be particularly, perhaps uniquely, resistant to philosophical interpretation", making every attempt at philosophical understanding seem either "to lag behind" or "to overshoot" the text (1997: 165-6), while others, most famously Jacques Derrida, have doubted the possibility of any actual "philosophical" account of Beckett, given the dangers of imposing a "supposed academic metalanguage" upon it (cited in Attridge, 1992: 60). Likewise, in her *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of Literary Revolution*, Pascale Casanova approaches Beckett's engagement with questions such as "what?" "how?" and "why?", considered by other critics to be philosophical in nature, instead "as questions addressed by the texts to themselves, queries about their own procedures and conditions of possibility" (2006: 4). Nonetheless, despite such emphatically "non-philosophical" approaches to Beckett, the studies that have read Beckett through or alongside philosophy are indeed numerous (among others, the studies of Hesla (1971), Butler (1984), Trezise (1990), Lane (2002), Banham (2002), and so on). In Richard Begam's words:

Generally, this literature [on the subject of Beckett and philosophy] has proceeded along one of two lines: either it has been genetic, detailing the kinds of intellectual influence a particular philosopher exercised over the writer – say Descartes, Geulincx, Berkeley, Schopenhauer, Mauthner; or it has been intertextual, mapping areas of theoretical confluence that connect Beckett with thinkers like Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Derrida.

(2002: 13)

Certainly, deriving *a* philosophy from the works – philosophy as concept, argument or proposition, at least – is, as Daniella Caselli writes, a perilous, misguided enterprise: Beckett is “an author too complex, too skilful [...] [and] too *good* to be reduced to any one system” (2010: 10). His value, then, consists, for such a reading, in resisting such reduction. In Leslie Hill’s words,

the more that is known about Beckett leaves the enigma of his writing intact. The paradox is one that has strongly affected the relationship between Beckett and philosophy. For at the heart of Beckett studies there remains an unrelenting demand for philosophical explanation which by its nature is impossible to satisfy.

(2004: 82)

This passage carefully suggests that the irreducible but unsatisfiable demand for philosophical explanation is located in what is called “Beckett studies”, but it also implies that this demand is occasioned by the “enigma” of Beckett’s work itself, which, it seems, is not exactly illuminated by criticism or philosophy in this respect. And so such interpretations are both inherently problematic – or impotent – but also a kind of index of a “paradoxical” relation, as Hill describes it, between Beckett and explanation, and even interpretation, more generally. Indeed, in these broader terms, Beckett is considered by some to be “among the most philosophical of writers” (Uhlmann, 2010: 84), since his work is often seen to raise a number of fundamental questions about the nature of being and meaning as such. This view has emerged partly owing to the complex character and interests of his writings and – his various denials notwithstanding – partly because of Beckett’s known interest in and reading of philosophy.²

² Anthony Uhlmann’s interesting article “Beckett and Philosophy” (2010) looks closely at Beckett’s acquaintance and engagement with different philosophies and also addresses the question as to whether Beckett’s works *are* philosophical, that is, whether they engage with and influence philosophers themselves. To this, Uhlmann answers positively by arguing that Beckett’s works are

Overall, a close, albeit varying, relationship has been constructed between Beckett's works and philosophy in several critical approaches to Beckett.

In fact, it is, arguably, the complexity and apparent interpretative openness of Beckett's works that has led to the emergence of such a *variety* of philosophical approaches in the secondary literature, a variety to which this thesis seeks to offer some contribution. Before doing so, however, I begin with a brief outline of some major approaches to and readings of Beckett in the light of different philosophies; taken in a broadly chronological order, beginning with some of Beckett's earliest readers in the 1950s and 1960s. The following references are, it should be said, by no means the only philosophical and critical approaches to Beckett's writings. Rather, they aim to include some major responses specifically to Beckett's representation of the body in his work and ones which, in different ways, are related to and address themes regarding embodied subjectivity which are at the heart of this examination of impotence in Beckett. In this way, the following references aim to supply the critical and theoretical background of this thesis, whose scope and objectives will, in turn, be laid out later in this introduction.

The earliest responses to Beckett's representation of the body are found in what is, according to Ulrika Maude, now considered to be "[t]he first wave of Beckett scholarship" (Maude, 2009: 1). Although not exclusively so, such a "first wave" can be most obviously identified, philosophically, with the work of those critics who read the representation of the body in Beckett's writings, first and foremost, in the light of René Descartes's philosophy and of the ideas associated with Cartesianism. Beckett's familiarity with Descartes is well known: he studied the philosophy in the École Normale Library and used some of the notes he had taken when he was asked by Tom MacGreevy to write a poem on the subject of Time so as to take part in a competition sponsored by the novelist, Richard Aldington, and the poet-publisher, Nancy Cunard. At the time, Beckett was looking for a way to earn money in order to be able to extend his stay in Paris, so he agreed to participate in the competition and thus wrote his first long poem

philosophical insofar as "they have had and continue to have profound effects on philosophical discourse" (p.93).

Whoroscope (1930) about Descartes' life and work. Maintaining a mocking tone throughout the poem, Beckett describes Descartes's days (which is the poem's relevance to the topic of Time) and specifically his odd taste in eggs. As Carney et al. put it, "the knockabout style of [...] [this] piece may suggest that Beckett viewed philosophy as little more than a source of humour and satirical material, [...] [yet this is something] belied by the frequency of philosophical motifs" that can be depicted in his works (2012: 3). Such philosophical – Cartesian – motifs can be readily found in Beckett's early works which, along with his familiarity with and interest in philosophy more generally, have encouraged some critics to draw firm links between his work and Cartesianism. In order to present and discuss some early "Cartesian" responses to Beckett's work, there follows a very brief review of the position of the body in Descartes's philosophy.

Famously, in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes considered the human senses to be potentially entirely deceitful, and hence was driven to find certainty on the ineradicability of the doubting subject itself. Thought is, according to Descartes, the essence of the subject and of its sovereign power.

I am – I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be. I now admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind (*mens sive animus*), understanding, or reason, terms whose signification was before unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing? The answer was, a thinking thing.

(2010: 13)

For Descartes, the mind effectively reduces all being to itself, insofar as all reality is subjected to the sovereign authority of the cogito. The human body is not the thinking substance, or even a mediating component of it, and with this representation of the body as accident, as a certain disposition of extended matter, goes a more general denigration of the body and the senses in Descartes's writing. The eminence accorded to the mind, in its self-transparency and invariance, is that of a "soul" pitted against a human body subject to change, deterioration, and death:

the human body, in as far as it differs from other bodies, is constituted only by a certain configuration of members and by other accidents of this sort, while the human mind is not made up of accidents but is a pure substance. For although all the accidents of the mind be changed – although, for example, it think certain things, will others, and perceive others, the mind itself does not vary with these changes. While on the contrary, the human body is no longer the same if a change takes place in the form of any of its parts: *from which it follows that the body may indeed, without difficulty perish, but that the mind is in its own nature immortal.*

(ibid., p.xx; emphasis added)

In Cartesianism, then, being is entirely subjected to thought, and the human body, “an extended and unthinking thing” (ibid., p.74), is marked as the subject’s other, what reasoning will legislate over. It is important to note, however, that within Descartes’s arguments for a secure rational basis of existence, as well as in his appeals to and characterizations of “clear and distinct ideas”, the existence of God plays a decisive (and notoriously circular) role. In particular, according to Descartes, we can be certain about things and the world around us only if we know that God exists. As he writes in his Third Meditation:

I must inquire whether there is a God, as soon as an opportunity of doing so shall present itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must examine likewise whether he can be a deceiver. For without the knowledge of these two truths, I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything.

(p.25)

Thus, for Descartes, the existence of a “God” who is “no deceiver” is what we entirely depend on in order to be certain of anything; an idea that is proven in his enquiry about the existence of God. But God will still be subject to the thinker’s own reflective finding. For this reason, in the Fifth Meditation, Descartes writes: “I have discovered that God exists, seeing I also at the same time observed that all things depend on him, and he is no deceiver, and thence inferred that all which I clearly and distinctly perceive is of necessity true” (p.64). In Descartes’s philosophy God is needed for the validation of anything we know but, equally, the knowledge of the existence of God itself will depend on the subject’s proper powers of reflection.

While such a conception of God has (unsurprisingly) been absent from dominant readings of Beckett since the 1950s, which tend, if anything, to stress his atheist or “absurdist” orientation, Descartes’s characterization of the body’s fundamental otherness to the subject and the concomitant de-authorizing of its claims to meaningfulness and sense *as* cognitive claims, let alone the idea of the thinking body as the very medium of any cognitive process, strongly influenced several of the “first wave” of Beckett critics. One of the most famous readings of the representation of the body in Beckett that draws upon Cartesianism in this respect is Hugh Kenner’s 1962 essay “The Cartesian Centaur”. The Cartesian Centaur, according to Kenner, is the man riding a bicycle to which the body of Beckett’s Molloy is specifically likened. In comparing the body to the bicycle (and more generally to a machine), Kenner thus seems to undermine any significant role it might have in largely negative, moralizing terms, describing it as “clumsy, sloppy, and unintelligible” (p.121). All these features of the body, in Kenner’s reading of *Molloy*, are emphasized by the ways in which its profound imperfection makes locomotion an arduous process:

Every hundred yards or so I stopped to rest my legs, the good one as well as the bad, and not only my legs, not only my legs. I didn’t properly speaking get down off the machine, I remained astride it, my feet on the ground, my arms on the handle-bars, and I waited until I felt better.

(Beckett, 1994: 16-7)

While Kenner’s reading, then, allows for at least some basic interaction between mind and body (as the metaphor of the bicycle must), there is nothing enabling about the body here, which is envisaged as a simple obstacle to agency or meaning (identified, in turn, with *disembodiment* as a result). Likewise, Kenner sees Mahood, in *The Unnamable*, as “pursu[ing] the *cogito* sufficiently to think of demanding proof that he exists” (ibid., p.129), and thus underlines his understanding of the *cogito* as a structure of proof on which existence depends. This Cartesian reading of the body in Beckett’s works is similarly to the fore in Kenner’s reference to *The Calmative*. Describing one of its scenes, Kenner writes:

Down a dead street [...] passes at an unassignable time a phantom cyclist, all the while reading a paper which with two hands he holds unfolded before his eyes. So body and mind go each one nobly about its business, without interference or interaction. From time to time he rings his bell, without ceasing to read, until optical laws of unswerving precision have reduced him to a point on the horizon.
(ibid., pp.121-22)

By contrast to the metaphor of the bicycle, this is more obviously dualistic, as there can apparently be no interaction at all here between reflective and extended substances, between body and mind, each of which go about their own “business”. More generally, in all these examples, the explicit reference to Cartesianism aims to describe a purported feature of Beckett’s texts: that agency and meaning are ideally disembodied. Pure minds endure and transcend their contingent entanglement in worldly bodies (which therefore represent only impotence or constraint). In Kenner’s Cartesian readings of Beckett, the body has, as such, a clearly negative role; the mind, it is implied, is where meaning and agency are constituted and enacted, while the body is only ever a frustrating (if perhaps ultimately ineliminable) restriction upon this. At least, if for Descartes the mind and body are two separate substances, and the mind is the sufficient precondition for individual existence, then Kenner’s readings strongly suggest Beckett’s works are animated by such a dualistic privileging of the mind.

Written a few years after Kenner’s text, Ruby Cohn’s 1965 essay “Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett” offers a similarly Cartesian reading. In spite of their “howl[ing]” and “stutter[ing] that their lives are *not* worth living”, she writes, Beckett’s characters “nevertheless continue to examine, propounding the old philosophical questions that have been with us since the pre-Socratics; on the nature of the Self, the World, and God” (p.169). Referring to the various philosophical allusions which appear in Beckett, such as Geulincx, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, Cohn also stresses the influence that Descartes’ philosophy exerted on Beckett’s poem *Whoroscope* (1930). More significantly, perhaps, Cohn reaffirms the constant presence of Descartes throughout Beckett’s writings (at least to the point at which she is writing) by arguing that even though “Descartes himself does not re-appear in Beckett’s subsequent work, Cartesian echoes sound through [it]” (ibid.). For instance,

Murphy is seen by Cohn as more or less the straightforward representation of a “split into a body and a mind” (p.170), whereas in the early novel *Mercier and Camier*, written in 1946, Descartes’s mind-body dualism is represented by the two separate protagonists of the novel: “Mercier may be taken as representative of the mind, and Camier of the body” (ibid.). This reading of the “couple” in Beckett is one I will come back to in relation to other texts below.

A similarly Cartesian approach to Beckett’s work is provided by John Fletcher who, in his book *Samuel Beckett’s Art*, argues that Descartes’s “life and thought have dominated Beckett’s work from the beginning” (1967: 126). Likewise, to take a final example, in his 1959 essay “*Murphy*: A Cartesian Novel” Samuel Mintz clearly suggests an identification between Beckett’s *Murphy* and Descartes: “For Descartes’ mind, read Murphy’s mind” (p. 161).

It is clear, then, that there were numerous early responses to Beckett that sought to read him in direct relation to Descartes’s philosophy.³ As the above examples show, such readings focused on Beckett’s representation of the body and mind as two separate, distinct entities, an argument which has been justified by the critics’ close attention to the impotence of the body in the author’s work in contrast to the power of the mind. Thus, such “first-wave” critics approached Beckett as the writer who, in his early writings especially, attempted to move beyond matter and the somatic in order to bring to the fore the more or less exclusive potency and agency of the mind, its Stoic endurance of or essential separation from its somatic instantiation.

As I will argue below, such a downplaying of the actual role that the body plays in Beckett’s texts can, as much subsequent criticism has shown, only provide an insufficient reading of Beckett since it inadequately responds to those instances when Beckett pays close attention to embodied experience as such. At the same time, it fails to account for what I will seek to elucidate as the paradoxical agency that Beckett accords to the body *in* its impotence. Before turning directly to this point, however, I want to consider some other ways in

³ For a fuller account of “the first generation of literary criticism of Beckett’s philosophical inspirations”, see Matthew Feldman’s (2006a) *Beckett’s Books: A Cultural History of the Interwar Notes*, London: Continuum.

which Beckett's work has been approached in the light of different philosophies, including those of Occasionalism, Existentialism and Poststructuralism. I do this so as to highlight the differences between these in terms of the body's place in each, as well as the critics' shift in approach from the early Cartesian readings outlined above. This will then be followed by an account of a few, particularly important, recent readings of the body in Beckett, in which I will seek to clarify how each informs the scope and objectives of the present thesis.

In his book *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (1996), Richard Begam, referring to Beckett's *Murphy*, writes:

Murphy himself begins from a position of dualism. This position is explicitly articulated in chapter 6 of the novel, when we are told 'Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind' [...] It is important to understand, however, that while Murphy starts from a Cartesian position, he carries its assumptions to a logical extreme that is anything but Cartesian.

(p.44)

While citing here the ways in which Beckett uses Cartesian ideas and motifs in *Murphy* – particularly in the novel's depiction of the character of Murphy himself – by contrast to Kenner or Cohn, who more or less explicitly read Beckett himself as endorsing a version of Cartesian "dualism", Begam opens up a distance between author and character at this point. At the same time, although Begam reads some instances in *Murphy* in light of Descartes's philosophy, he moves on to conclude that "the dualism that attracts Murphy" is not so much that of Descartes himself, as it "is a particularly radical kind advocated by Descartes' Occasionalist disciple, Arnold Geulincx, whose 'ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis' the narrator approvingly quotes" (ibid.). Begam therefore reads the novel as inscribing Cartesian motifs in a philosophical context that, while influenced by these, ultimately transcends them.

Beckett's letters to Tom MacGreevy indeed testify to his interest in Geulincx's philosophy. (In fact, he professed interest in several seventeenth-century rationalists, including Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz, as well as Descartes and Geulincx.) In a letter dated 16 January 1936, Beckett writes:

I shall have to go into TCD [Trinity College Dublin] after Geulincx, as he does not exist in National Library. I suddenly see that *Murphy* is [a] break down between his *Ubi nihil valet ibi nihil velis* (positive) and Malraux's *Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens* (negation).

(Fehsenfeld & Overbeck, 2009: 299)

Geulincx's and Malraux's statements on which Beckett bases *Murphy* are different or even contrasting, with the former suggesting a self-sufficient, if worthless, inwardness in which desire is overcome, and the latter a countervailing drive to break from one's alienation back into connection with the world and others via oneself or one's inwardness. Yet, Beckett chooses to employ both in his novel; an idea I intend to return to later precisely because it suggests an irreducible conflict, and perhaps an enabling one. Beckett's suggestion of the effect Geulincx's philosophy exerted on his work has, most recently, motivated one part of the so-called "archival turn" in Beckett studies (Feldman, 2006a), and has been exploited by a number of critics (see, for example, Tucker, (2012)). The merits of such a "turn" (and its broader antipathy to other "philosophical" readings not so clearly legitimated by the archive⁴) is not among my primary concerns here. Nonetheless, the ways in which Descartes's and Geulincx's philosophies differ, and the expression of Beckett's own interest in the latter as well as the ways in which Geulincx's influence on Beckett may complicate the author's so-called debt to Descartes is clearly of some importance in articulating a sense of a "positive" bodily impotence and will be more fully addressed in a close reading of *Murphy* in Chapter 3 of the present thesis.

For the moment, what can be said is that whereas Descartes places specific emphasis on the distinction between the mind and body and refers to God as the

⁴ This so-called "archival turn" has been most famously supported by Matthew Feldman in his essay "Beckett and Popper, or, 'What Stink of Artifice': Some Notes on Methodology, Falsifiability, and Criticism in Beckett Studies" (2006b), in which Feldman advocates an approach to Beckett's work which is entirely based on the use of archival tools and material. So as to increase "scholarly knowledge of our shared subject, Samuel Beckett" (p.373), Feldman draws on Karl Popper's "falsifiability" theory and argues that in order for arguments about or readings of Beckett to be worthwhile, they need to be subject to disproof; something that empirical readings of Beckett allow. It is precisely for this reason that Feldman criticises philosophical readings of Beckett. Feldman's proposition of a preferable empirical reading of Beckett, however, has been questioned by Garin Dowd in his 2008 essay "Prolegomena to a Critique of Excavatory Reason: Reply to Matthew Feldman" which demonstrates the restrictions of Feldman's proposed method in reading Beckett.

foundation upon which certain knowledge in general is built, for Geulincx the existence of God is precisely what ensures people's own "ignorance and impotence" (to cite again Beckett's own self-differentiation, in formal terms, from Joycean mastery and omnipotence). Individuals, for Geulincx, have no free will – it is only God who allows or forbids things to happen. Moreover, Geulincx's revised dualism is not pre-eminently concerned with the mind-body problem (as, according to the canonical reading, Descartes was), but rather it focuses on the nature of *all* causal relations. It might therefore be the source of a more intricate understanding of mind-body relations and the sources of agency – at least when it is juxtaposed, as it is in the quoted comment, with Malraux's dictum: *Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens.*

If studies of the influence of Geulincx's revised dualism on Beckett's work have complicated the Cartesian interpretations of first-wave criticism, another important body of work beginning in the 1960s, which breaks in significant ways with the readings of Kenner, Cohn, and others, reads Beckett in the light of the philosophy of existentialism.⁵ Nonetheless, it is important to point out that one of the ways in which existentialism differentiates itself from Cartesianism is itself based on a common aspect of these two philosophies. To clarify this point, it is worth quoting Jean Paul Sartre's words in his 1946 essay *Existentialism and Humanism*:

[W]hen we [existentialists] say 'I think' we are attaining to ourselves in the presence of the other, and we are just as certain of the other as we are of ourselves. Thus the man who discovers himself directly in the *cogito* also discovers all the others, and discovers them as the condition of his own existence. He recognises that he cannot be anything [...] unless others recognise him as such.

(2007: 53)

⁵ Such existentialist readings of Beckett's works are precisely what Adorno's famous essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" (1958) is opposed to. In his essay, Adorno focuses on the "barbarity" of writing literature after Auschwitz and argues that what Beckett presents both in his drama and prose works (which had come to be loosely identified with the existentialist concept of nothingness) cannot be approached as content. Rather, Adorno's reading of *Endgame* shows how Beckett's play is exemplary for its *negative* representation, that is, for its own inability to turn nothing into something and make it mean something in positive terms. A close analysis of Adorno's essay appears in Chapter 1 as it is closely related to the chapter's argument regarding the idea of negativity in Beckett's *Endgame*.

As shown here, Sartrean existentialism explicitly claims to share a similarity with Cartesianism, which, at the same time, is the basis for its divergence from the latter. According to Cartesianism, the subject discovers itself in the cogito, which is precisely what being is reduced to; an idea that Sartre's words above also suggest. For existentialists, according to Sartre, the "I" also verifies its existence when it says "I think", that is, in the cogito. However, this is simultaneously what marks the difference between the two philosophies since, unlike Cartesianism, existentialist thought also discovers the existence of the Other in the cogito. More specifically, in Sartre's philosophy the Other is what people discover when they discover themselves, as the Other *essentially* shares the world people live in. To put it in the Hegelian terms that clearly influence this articulation, self-recognition depends on the *recognition* of others (in both senses). Furthermore, Sartre writes:

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.

(ibid., pp.29-30)

For Sartre, then, existentialism emphasizes the notion of "nothingness" according to which human beings are free to realize themselves as they choose, to make of themselves what they want – at least insofar as there is neither a creator nor a normative conception for what a human being should be (to the extent, that is, that it has no essence to realize). This must be an intersubjective project, given the constitutive role of the Other in Sartre's account, although it is here expressed in terms that risk a voluntarist, individualist interpretation: "man"

chooses to be what “he” wants through his actions. In these terms, then, another difference between Cartesianism and existentialism becomes manifest, that is, the atheism that characterizes the latter. Unlike Descartes’ philosophy, which is largely based on the existence of God, for existentialism, according to Sartre, “there is no God to have a conception of [human nature]” (ibid.), which is precisely the reason why people are ontologically free to be anything they want.

The best-known existentialist readings of Beckett’s work are perhaps those which take its doctrines in the direction of Absurdism, among which efforts Martin Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) is pre-eminent. As its title indicates, Esslin’s book is closely preoccupied with the notion of the “absurd” which is, as glossed by Albert Camus in particular, often taken to be the central concept of existentialist thought in general, one in terms of which Sartre’s own plays, along with Beckett’s, are to be understood. Using Eugène Ionesco’s words, Esslin defines the notion of the “absurd” as “that which is devoid of purpose [...] Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (p.23). Looking closely at this “groundlessness of being”, which Esslin defines as a “sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition” (pp.23-4), he argues that this is precisely the theme of the plays of Beckett, Ionesco, and Genet, but also the ones of existentialists such as Sartre and Camus. Consequently, Esslin approaches several of Beckett’s theatrical works, such as *Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, by focusing on the absurdity of existence which Beckett’s characters encounter and, most importantly, by arguing that such absurdity and meaninglessness comprise the very ground of Beckett’s work: the metaphysical picture they promote. As he puts it:

Waiting for Godot and *Endgame*, the plays that Beckett wrote in French, are dramatic statements of the human situation itself. They lack both characters and plot in the conventional sense because they tackle their subject-matter at a level where neither characters nor plot exist. Characters presuppose that human nature, the diversity of personality and individuality, is real and matters; plot can exist only on the assumption that events in time are significant. These are precisely the assumptions that the two plays put in question.

(pp.75-6)

Among other existentialist readings of Beckett, Edith Kern's 1970 essay on *Happy Days* (1961) perhaps repays particular attention here, in that Kern places at least some emphasis on the representation of the body in Beckett's play (in which the protagonist, Winnie, is half-buried in a mound of earth) and refers to Sartre (as well as Martin Heidegger) so as to provide an existentialist reading of this representation. Of course, it is important to point out here that even though both Sartre and Heidegger were considered, broadly speaking, to be existentialists in their lifetimes – despite Heidegger's own refusal of the term – their philosophies differ in crucial respects. As Heidegger writes in his 1946 essay "Letter on Humanism" (a very hostile response to Sartre's "humanist" existentialism as presented in the latter's *Existentialism and Humanism* quoted above), Sartre's return to the Cartesian cogito only leads, for him, back to metaphysics, something which Heidegger himself argues misrepresents our understanding of Being:⁶

Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one. Every determination of essence of the human being that already presupposes an interpretation of beings without asking about the truth of being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical.

(1998: 245)

What Heidegger questions and opposes in Sartre's existentialism, then, is that the latter is grounded in metaphysics which, for Heidegger, is presuppositional or, as he puts it, a "technical interpretation of thinking" (p.240), failing to acknowledge the truth of Being. Referring specifically to Sartre's idea regarding man's discovery in the *cogito* Heidegger argues that, in this way, Sartre places thinking prior to existence precisely because his account of thinking is based on the subject rather than in the question of Being. Hence, for Heidegger, "[t]hinking is *l'engagement* by and for the truth of being. The history of being is never past but stands even before us; it sustains and defines every *condition et situation humaine*" (ibid.). To return to Kern's reading of Beckett's play, she

⁶ This critique of Sartre is one that will be crucially repeated in the early writings of Jacques Derrida, which had a profound influence on later Beckett criticism, as we will see, as well as on this thesis itself.

suggests what might be described as a very Sartrean rendering of the parallel that she finds between the way in which Beckett presents his characters onstage and Heidegger's notion of *Geworfenheit*, that is, "of man as 'thrown' into the universe and into desolate isolation" (p.169). This refers to the fact that what Heidegger calls *Dasein*, notoriously translated as "human reality" (*réalité humaine*) in the first French publication of *Being and Time*,⁷ always finds itself already in a certain environment or, in other words, as *always already in the world*. It is precisely this individual "desolation" in the realization that people are "condemned to be" in this world that Kern sees in the representation of Winnie as buried in earth in Beckett's play – a Heideggerian emphasis which is, in this instance, broadly at odds with the subjectivist aspects of Sartre (even if Kern presents it here in a broadly "humanist" fashion). At the same time, however, Kern also reads Winnie's constant need to be looked at by her husband Willie as reflecting a conception of the Other as necessary to the verification of our own existence, in a way which is more obviously Sartrean (rather than Heideggerian) in inspiration, but which similarly stresses a certain limit upon individual freedom.

Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* is also evoked by Kern in her reading of Beckett's novel *Watt* (1953). In *Watt* Beckett writes:

It was Tuesday afternoon, in the month of October, a beautiful October afternoon. I was sitting on the step, in the yard, looking at the light on the wall. I was in the sun, and the wall was in the sun. I was in the sun, need I add, and the wall, and the step, and the yard, and the time of year, and the time of day, to mention only these.

(Beckett, 2009e: 34)

Kern argues that by presenting Arsene's character's being "in the sun [...] and the wall, and the step, and the yard, and the time of year, and the time of day", Beckett manages thus to "obliterate all distinction between subject and

⁷ See the comments on both Sartre and his adoption of this translation in Jacques Derrida (1982), "The Ends of Man" in *Margins of Philosophy* (ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 115. It is in this vein, Derrida argues, that "the thought that dominated France [after World War Two] presented itself essentially as humanist". See also Catherine Malabou's commentary in "From the Overman to the Posthuman: How Many Ends?" in Bhandar, B. & Goldberg-Hiller, J., (2015b). *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 61-72.

object” (Kern, 1970: 187), a notion that seems here to correspond to the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein* (as the human existent) – not yet a subject but a thrown-project, absorbed into its world and projects which themselves are only derivatively to be characterized its “objects”.⁸

The importance of such broadly existentialist readings of Beckett’s works should not be underestimated, particularly to the extent that readings such as these “opposed” the earlier Cartesian, dualistic interpretations. As a philosophy, existentialism diverts from Cartesianism’s close emphasis on the mind by rejecting its dualistic framework of bodies and minds and instead supports the notion that “humans are necessarily embodied creatures existing in the midst of a world” (Wartenberg, 2008: 53). Despite this, however, Sartre’s conception of subjectivity (if not Heidegger’s), while no longer maintaining the mind-body split of Cartesianism, ultimately may be understood as reasserting (as his own references to the *cogito* and “humanism” imply) a form of sovereign power in the subject’s self-fashioning of existence as pure freedom that seems fundamentally at odds with Beckett’s own concern with impotence. As such, it can be argued that in readings such as the ones examined above, the central preoccupation with concepts related to individual freedom or choice, as well as structures of recognition by the Other, and debilitating or enabling “thrownness” into a world, entails that the role of the physical, material body in recognition, worldliness, and freedom, remains in this work relatively unexplored.

Of course, it is precisely Sartre’s concepts of “freedom” and “nothingness” that are famously criticized by Theodor Adorno in his essay “Trying to understand *Endgame*” (1958), as well as the identification of Sartre’s existentialist philosophy with Beckett’s own concerns. In this essay (which will be more fully analyzed in Chapter 1), Adorno argues that the so called “nothingness” that characterizes Beckett’s work (and especially his theatrical works, such as *Waiting for Godot*) cannot and should not be read as anything like a philosophical “content” or thematic of his plays. In fact, according to Adorno, “drama cannot simply seize on to negative meaning, or its absence, as content, without thereby affecting

⁸ This represents, of course in simplified manner, the problematic of Heidegger’s early (pre-“turn”) *Being and Time* (1927).

everything peculiar to it – virtually to the point of reversal to its opposite” (p.120). In these terms, then, Sartre’s concept of “nothingness” is merely *represented* in the latter’s theatre, which thereby becomes, for Adorno, “a clattering machinery demonstrating world views” (ibid.). By contrast, Adorno argues, Beckett’s plays are works which resist turning that “nothing” into something through their very form and structure. Commenting, then, on the significant role of the *negative* presentation in *Endgame*, Adorno argues that Beckett’s work becomes exemplary precisely because of its aim to put meaning on trial and thus demonstrate art’s failure to mean something in positive terms. Adorno’s essay remains an important test for any reading, such as mine, which wishes to argue for a kind of positivity or affirmation in the impotence and forms of embodied subjectivity presented in *Endgame*. My account of Adorno’s essay below will thus take up his still valuable, historicized reading of the forms of division and incapacity in *Endgame*, while trying to move beyond the radicalized negativity of his reading of the Beckettian subject.

If Adorno presents his reading of Beckett in opposition to existentialism, and Sartre in particular, Maurice Merleau-Ponty is another thinker who has often been identified with the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology, but who has had a rather different (and more recent) influence of Beckett Studies. In fact, however, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is significantly different from that of Sartre, particularly as regards its close emphasis on the role of the physical body in existence, as explored in his major work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Given the importance of his ideas for thinking the constitutive role of the body and a somatic monism in general, and in relation to Beckett’s representations of impotence in particular, a more extensive reading of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy – as well as its powerful influence on some of the best work on Beckett in this line – will appear in Chapters 2 and 3 of the present thesis. I leave it aside for the moment here.

While Merleau-Ponty’s thought suggests one body of French philosophy that points a way beyond the influence of Sartrean humanist existentialism on Beckett criticism, the lacuna regarding the role played by the body in Beckett is at least also partially addressed in poststructuralist approaches to the author’s

works, which, in crucial (and more influential) ways, framed themselves in opposition to both Cartesian and existentialist readings during the 1980s and 1990s. Michael Guest, for example, has examined some of Beckett's writings in the light of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and has argued that there are indeed affinities between Beckett and Foucault, in their concern with "practices and structures of surveillance, disciplines imposed upon the body; and the transformation of the body into a sign-subject by physical torture" (1996: 55). One of the works Guest examines in this respect is Beckett's late play *Catastrophe* (1982) where the Protagonist is placed constantly under surveillance by the Director. What is important in *Catastrophe*, according to Guest, is the way in which Beckett explores the ability of power to transform the physical body – as depicted in the figure of the Director who continually demands changes in the positions of the Protagonist's body as he silently stands on stage. This power, Guest argues, can also be found in other works of Beckett, including *The Lost Ones*, *All Strange Away*, and *Imagination Dead Imagine* "where an equally impossible omniscient narrator uses geometry to determine the form of the human body" (ibid., p.65).

The construction, shaping, and transformation of the body and the self have also been examined in comparable terms by Anthony Uhlmann. Uhlmann claims, for example, that reading Beckett in a poststructuralist light shows that "*The Unnamable* clearly concerns attempts to identify the self through recourse to language" (1999: 138), and thus implies the dependence of the self (and the body) solely on discourse. It is evident that such a reading rejects any Cartesian mind-body dualism; yet, it seems to imply that the role played by the body itself is still subordinated, only now to the sovereign power of discourse.

Elsewhere, drawing principally on Derrida rather than Foucault, among other well-known poststructuralist approaches to Beckett's works, Steven Connor's *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text* (1988) closely examines the Derridean conception of repetition, or iterability, and the ways in which it can be seen to function in Beckett's works in terms that parallel this broader discursive turn. For example, in his analysis of *Ohio Impromptu* (to which I return

in more detail in Chapter 2), the manifestation of repetition through the body appears as follows:

The six knocks which the listener delivers have the effect of halting the narrative [...]. The very comprehensibility of the code of knocks depends upon frequent repetition, too, for it can only have been through repetition that the code has been established between reader and silent listener.

(p.132)

Likewise, referring to Beckett's narrowing down of the body in his drama, Connor argues that "it is the narrowing down that changes the status of the visible portion of the body into that of a sign" (p.161).

Considering these instances, then, part of the fruitfulness of bringing Foucault's, Derrida's and others' work into relation with Beckett is evident in their ability to attend to the preoccupation with the body in ways that go beyond earlier Cartesian and existentialist readings. However, such poststructuralist interpretations of the 1980s and 1990s also tend, specifically, to emphasize the discursively produced body, downplaying the role and importance of the material, fleshly one. Consequently, it can be argued, and has been, that – as Connor's reading of the impotent, fragmented body on stage could be taken to exemplify, in its reduction of the latter to the status of the "sign" or what Guest terms a "sign-subject" – poststructuralist readings, in Rachel Russell's words, "eclipse the importance of pre-discursive physicality" (2000: 105).

It is significant then that more recent criticism has shifted attention far more directly to the representation of the material body in Beckett, and in so doing re-thought and resisted several of the dominant conceptions of the body that have guided much previous criticism. These critics closely examine the body's role and significance so as to restore it to its rightful place in his writings. Of course, and as I will develop below, such newer approaches address a variety of aspects of embodiment, but they can all be seen, by contrast to earlier poststructuralist readings, as foregrounding Beckett's close preoccupation with pre-discursive physicality and with the determining role the material, fleshly body actually plays in subjectivity and existence more generally.

Such a representation of embodiment in Beckett is the focus of, for example, Anna McMullan's recent book *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2010). McMullan demonstrates the constant challenge to and fragmentation of the Beckettian body, but nevertheless gives particular emphasis to a persistent corporeality in a way that differentiates it from poststructuralist readings. In exploring issues of embodiment in Beckett's dramatic works, whether on stage, radio, television or film, McMullan shows the different ways in which Beckett presents the body in his works as well as the different means he uses to do so by focusing on the cases in which the body loses its integrity onstage. Despite this, argues McMullan, the materiality of the Beckettian body is foregrounded in Beckett's drama which reflects the writer's preoccupation with issues of embodiment. Furthermore, as McMullan puts it, requiring the physical presentation of actors onstage and employing different props, Beckett's theatrical works emphasize both issues of corporeality and Beckett's own preoccupation with technology (as manifested in a work such as *Krapp's Last Tape*). Most importantly, this vulnerable body (rather than the mind or cogito alone) is argued to be necessarily the "site of subjectivity" in Beckett (p.4), and thus of a certain (albeit fragile) agency and meaning. In fact, as McMullan's reading shows, despite the fact that the physical body is marked by vulnerability in Beckett, its agency is partly manifest in the fact that it is what necessarily separates the self from the surrounding world. This can be seen in McMullan's analysis of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*, where she argues that even though the "visual integrity of the body is fractured through the proliferation of substitute bodies (such as the tape recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape* and the mound in *Happy Days*) and through what is seen", the body remains "the site of sentience, speech and memory" (ibid., p.45).⁹

Another example of a recent reading of the representation of the material body in Beckett – and one which has greatly informed the argument of the

⁹ As will be explained in the final part of this introduction, although my reading of this will be a little different, the representation of memory in Beckett will also be a central question of this thesis. Memory will be examined as a key somatic-subjective site in Beckett.

present thesis – is that provided by Ulrika Maude (2009) who, adopting a phenomenological approach based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), has explored the central and significant role the body plays in Beckett's work by paying particular attention to the role of the bodily senses in the construction of subjectivity. Addressing the centrality of sight, hearing and movement in Beckett, Maude argues that Beckett's characters can only conceive of the world and their own existence through their senses and, thus, their bodies. At the same time, Maude's response to the body's treatment in Beckett's works could be characterized as more "affirmative" than earlier readings, insofar as she does not see his plays or prose writings as reflecting some intention to downplay (or, even, negate) the role of the body in subjective experience, or as emphasizing the apparently sovereign power of discourse or language over it, but rather as foregrounding the body precisely through these physical difficulties the characters face:

in literature, as in our own private experience, we notice the body [...] more acutely when it troubles or delights us. The bodily experiences in Beckett's work, especially before the late prose, are often brought to the reader's or spectator's attention through the characters' difficulties in moving, in the falling, rolling, limping and crawling that recur in Beckett's writing. Similarly, Beckett foregrounds the body by making normal bodily functions, such as eating or excreting – Malone's 'dish and pot, dish and pot' – seldom appear normal or unconditioned in his work

(ibid., p.11).

In this way, Maude sheds new light on the restriction of the body in Beckett by arguing that any means the writer employs to challenge it can only foreground the body as a result. Thus, the bodily difficulties Beckett presents us with, both in his prose writings and on stage, remind us of the bodily and physical aspect of experience in general – *contra* Kenner and the Cartesians, we could add. Indeed, Beckett's preoccupation with the physical is so pervasive that he includes in his works images which present the characters engaging to an unusual degree in

several very everyday bodily functions such as eating or excreting, as Maude notes.¹⁰

The impotence that marks the body in Beckett's work – or what Maude describes as its characteristic “difficulties” – has also been examined by Joanne Shaw in her book *Impotence and Making in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy[:] Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable and How It Is* (2010), though in a significantly different manner from the critics mentioned above. As she makes clear in her introduction, the impotence that Shaw's book focuses on is understood in terms of both the characters' “powerlessness, helplessness and physical impairment” (p.9) and, most specifically, their inability to reproduce. This question of fertility or “making” that Shaw addresses refers to the idea of making bodies, selves and texts in Beckett's work. In doing so, at the same time, and recalling in certain respects earlier poststructuralist readings, Shaw also pays attention to the centrality of language in the process of “making”. Indeed, she argues that “the mind in Beckett, though separate from the body, directly makes that body. For Beckett, if you like, the body is *thought* into existence” (p.12; emphasis added). Hence, it becomes clear that Shaw's reading of the body is different from the other recent approaches outlined above as, on the one hand, it addresses the materiality of the impotent body in Beckett, but, on the other, suggests (perhaps paradoxically) that the latter seems to come into existence through language or thought. Thought and language are not identical, yet what Shaw's reading implies is that the body is, in a way, “dependent” on thought or language in order to be at all; an argument that fails to acknowledge the dynamics of the body itself. Furthermore, even though the distinction that Shaw draws between the impotent body (that is thought into existence) and the powerful mind seems to reiterate the Cartesian reading of Beckett, Shaw argues that her approach is different. In fact, she states that “Beckett and his narrators *trouble* the Cartesian

¹⁰ Beckett's preoccupation with such everyday bodily functions is, in fact, one of the aspects of his works which strongly exhibits the influence of James Joyce's work and *Ulysses* in particular, where Joyce explicitly presents his protagonist, Leopold Bloom, engaged in such everyday bodily functions. The relationship between Joyce and Beckett as well as the way in which the former affected Beckett's style in his early writings will be examined in the third chapter of this thesis.

duality” (p.12; emphasis added) since the mind in Beckett *makes* the body and thus interacts with it.

Another important recent work which directly addresses the impotent body in Beckett – and one which informs the current thesis – is Kathryn White’s *Beckett and Decay* (2009). White examines the theme of decay that is manifest in Beckett’s works – an idea that has led to views that Beckett “is a depressing writer, whose bleak outlook on the world offers audiences and readers a negativity” (p.1) – by paying close attention to physical decline and what she refers to as the “death of the word”. Furthermore, White opposes Cartesian readings of the Beckettian body and argues that what Beckett presents us with is precisely the deterioration of *both* body and mind, an inextricable deterioration. Another significant aspect of White’s book is her acknowledgement that it is precisely through the decay manifested in the characters’ bodies and minds that Beckett “portrays his wonderment at the human capacity for going on” (p.3); an idea (apparently somewhat “humanist” in form) that will be explored at length in this thesis.

If White’s book discusses bodily impotence in the context of a focus on decay, the articles in Mariko Hori Tanaka, Yoshiki Tajiri and Michiko Tsushima’s edited volume *Samuel Beckett and Pain* (2012) address how both physical and mental pain appear in Beckett’s works. Among the interesting readings included in this volume are Tajiri’s essay “Everyday Life and the Pain of Existence in *Happy Days*”, which draws upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas to approach the physical pain that Winnie experiences in *Happy Days*. Pain is the means through which Beckett allows his character to emphasize the importance of common things, which, in turn, constitute her as “a conscious subject ‘I’ [...] tied securely to a place as a base (‘here’) in the world” (p.163). Tanaka’s article, “The Body in Pain and Freedom of the Mind: Performing Beckett and Noh”, examines the physical intensity that Beckett demanded from his actors in order to “achieve the extraordinary poetry of his work” with reference to the practice of ancient Greek tragedy and Noh (p.97). Indeed, as Tanaka observes, the instances in which Beckett’s characters (and actors) are put in painful positions onstage are numerous: Lucky has a rope around his neck in *Waiting for Godot*, the

protagonists in *Play* appear in urns, and Mouth in *Not I* must not move throughout the play. However, Tanaka argues that, in this way, Beckett's actors are "freed" in certain important respects as they are not required to approach the plays intellectually, "but rather to respond physically or vocally to the situation in the text" (p.104).

In his book *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism*, Yoshiki Tajiri adopts a similarly innovative approach to Beckett's treatment of the body, and to what he calls "the prosthetic body" in particular – that is, the "body that harbours the inorganic other within it" (p.5). This concept or image is manifested in a number of Beckett's works such as *Not I* and *Happy Days*, where the protagonists feel as though their body or its parts are alien – and, as will become clear in Chapter 1, this idea parallels a core concern of this thesis.

What is important to note here is the way in which Tajiri's examination of the prosthetic body is different from, for example, the relationship between the body and the bicycle that Hugh Kenner refers to in "The Cartesian Centaur". For Kenner, the bicycle extends and epitomizes the deficiencies of the body which, according to Descartes's philosophy in Kenner's reading, is sundered from the values and virtues of the mind. By contrast, Tajiri argues that "a more careful consideration of the prosthetic body in Beckett quickly makes it clear that a Cartesian interpretation is far from sufficient" (p.46). Tajiri thus draws on Derrida's philosophy to establish a picture of a subject that is never entire, but always and essentially in need of supplementation (in other words, it is always "prosthetic", dependent on elements it must also exclude). Thus Tajiri is able to explore instances in Beckett's works which present the "dynamic interactions between the body and material objects [...], inside and outside, self and other" (p.6), and thus demonstrate the central role of physicality more generally.

Specifically, Tajiri examines the prosthetic body in *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body* in terms of sexuality and gender, paying close attention to the "interesting connection between the mechanisation of the body and a peculiar type of sexuality" (ibid., p.13). He also investigates different types of prostheses, those of the organs, of vision, hearing and voice – and the concomitant instability

of the body surface. In this way, he acknowledges what he calls the “regressive state” in which Beckett apparently presents the body, but at the same time stresses that, through these states, the physical remains in crucial ways intact and central:

Even *The Unnamable*, which appears to be aridly abstract and cerebral, and has often been treated as such, is in fact replete with vivid physical sensations. In fact, the narrator exclaims at one point: ‘How physical this all is!’

(ibid., p.12)

Tajiri’s reading of the body in Beckett’s works is therefore interesting and important for this thesis because it addresses a new aspect of the body in Beckett, that is, its essentially prosthetic “nature”. His reading approaches the different forms the fragmented body takes in Beckett’s work in an innovative way and, most importantly, stresses that despite Beckett’s challenge to the physical body in his writings, the latter remains an essential part of them. Even in works where the body seems to be absent, Tajiri argues, physical sensations can still be depicted, stressing thus Beckett’s close preoccupation with physicality, even where it appears most reduced, impotent or atrophied. In this way, Tajiri draws attention to an aspect of the author’s works which was not addressed in the Cartesian, existentialist or poststructuralist readings outlined above.

Finally, Laura Salisbury’s essay “‘Something or nothing’: Beckett and the matter of language” (2010) also emphasizes Beckett’s preoccupation with materiality but in a different way from Tajiri’s reading. Specifically, Salisbury’s essay looks at Beckett’s fascination with “the idea of silence and absence expressed in words, images and configurations of bodies and objects” (p.214) and argues that this fascination does not by any means create a mere void in Beckett’s work nor does it reduce the latter to nothing. To clarify this idea, it is worth quoting Salisbury’s words at length:

Beckett’s work seems peculiarly concerned with using the material frame of what *is* there in the texts to determine and construct gaps, elisions and silences which become strangely porous; presence seems everywhere to be leaking into them, making them fecund, teeming with signification. For there are signifying voids in which information is constantly being exchanged between presence and absence;

they are voids invaded by and replete with the conditions for the production of meaning rather than hermetically sealed spaces of nothing.

(p.215)

Salisbury's argument here is important insofar as it questions those views according to which Beckett's work (and especially his writings composed towards the end of his writing career) represent nothing other than a dynamic of reduction and, ultimately, an approach to silence and nothing. Interpreting Beckett's work in this way is, according to Salisbury, impossible as "there can be no 'nothing' that would count as the 'work', except those shapes constructed and displaced by the material that is present" (p.214-5). By contrast, Salisbury shows that the emergence of any language and thought is dependent on "a peculiarly embodied and materially productive void" (ibid.), thus foregrounding the vital role embodiment plays in the perception of any meaning. These ideas will be more fully addressed in Chapter 3, which explores the themes of impotence and reduction in Beckett's prose works, where I return to Salisbury's essay for the specific light it sheds on my argument regarding the essential role of embodied subjectivity in perception.

The question of the human subject

Considering only the different approaches to Beckett's work outlined above, it is evident that Beckett criticism's engagement with the representation and significance of the body has both changed and ramified very extensively since its "first wave" emergence (which can roughly be considered to be after the first production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1953). A key theme that has been addressed in all of the readings and approaches discussed so far is the question of the human subject: what subjective existing, knowing, and doing amount to, what their conditions and outcomes are, what their possibilities and liabilities are, and how these relate to the subject's embodiment (and its relation to the "mind" or consciousness). Indeed, the representation of subjectivity in Beckett as well as the implications of Beckett's works regarding the human subject, agency and disability, have been of central concern to virtually all Beckett critics.

According to the early Cartesian responses to Beckett, self and subjectivity were believed to be the synthesis of essential mind, as developed in Descartes's rationalism. As has been suggested above, Descartes's philosophy (and, in turn, critics such as Hugh Kenner and Ruby Cohn who have approached Beckett's writings in the light of Cartesianism) viewed the human subject as rational and unified through self-consciousness – through its status as thinking substance – in a fashion for which the Beckettian body then appeared as an obstacle to the completion of such self-consciousness itself.

By contrast, the critics who examined Beckett in the light of existentialism addressed the idea of subjectivity in a different fashion. These critics emphasized the role of the world in the constitution of subjectivity, or the emptiness of subjectivity according to which human freedom is to be more radically understood, rather than characterizing the subject as essentially mind, and mind as essentially reasoning. These critics explored the ways in which subjectivity is constructed precisely through encounters with the world, either through the exercise of radical freedom or through the quality of its pre-established engagements and projected negotiations of them. As Sartre writes in *Existentialism and Humanism*, “*existence comes before essence*”, a slogan foregrounding the fact that the individual is always in the process of becoming (2007: 27; emphasis added). The unified, rational subject in Descartes's philosophy becomes the radical free negativity of Sartre or the thrown project, the pre-subjective Dasein, of Heidegger. While, however, Cartesian readings like those of Kenner directly address the body's relation (or non-relation) to the mind, albeit in a way that emphasizes its negativity or subordination, the existentialist readings, particularly those indebted to Sartre, tended, ultimately, to marginalize an attention to the bodily *per se*, even if they managed, as Heidegger sought, to step beyond subjective metaphysics.

A different view of subjectivity is found in poststructuralist approaches to Beckett's works. Generally, poststructuralism questions the very idea of stability and metaphysical grounding – or what, notoriously, Derrida terms, in “Structure, Sign and Play” (1967), a “centre” – in order to emphasize the unavoidable instability of meaning and any categorial determination more generally. One such

“category”, according to poststructuralism, is the human subject itself, which is thus not viewed as stable or unified, let alone the ground of self-presence and explanatory certainty found in Descartes. On the contrary, poststructuralist readings of Beckett have identified and stressed the themes of plurality and difference in their analyses of subjectivity. What is more, many such readings of Beckett (such as Anthony Uhlmann’s *Beckett and Poststructuralism*) have foregrounded the processes of construction of the self and subjectivity through discourse in particular.

A different approach to the question of the human subject has been employed by several more recent approaches to Beckett. These readings have paid close attention to the role of the physical body in Beckett’s works and have not seen it as an effect of discourse, or only available in terms of discursive mediation. This body also mediates discourse, and in some of these accounts just *is* a subjective body – not the subject’s objective predicament or correlate. Such approaches have therefore explored how subjectivity in Beckett relies on physicality in order to be formed; Ulrika Maude’s reading (2009) strongly suggests this, for example.

The theme of subjectivity, the human subject, has therefore been widely explored in relation to Beckett’s *oeuvre*. This section has tried to sketch a critical movement from concepts of a stable, unified self (in which the essential self persists as a disembodied nucleus, however threatened or lacking in power its body might be) to ones marked by plurality, fracture and difference (where the persistence is of a complex sort, a subject intricately with its body, changed as its body changes, and where the body’s impotence takes on a fundamentally different significance). Such notions of plurality and fracture in terms of the body are central in readings such as Anna McMullan’s (2010), which pays considerable attention to the plurality of “bodies” Beckett presents us with in his drama, or in Steven Connor’s, where the representation of the Beckettian body as “fractured” is evident. Equally significant is the aim of many recent approaches to Beckett’s preoccupation with the physical and the material body to shed light on the importance of impotence in the author’s work and their demonstration that it is impotence that ultimately brings the body itself to the fore – not by merely

emphasizing the body as fragile, as earlier criticism argued, but rather, by foregrounding the essential role the body plays in existence more generally.

Considering and comparing the approaches to Beckett referred to above, what becomes evident is a striking range of emphases and insights, and some important differences. In particular, the earlier responses to Beckett's treatment of bodily impotence in his works placed an emphasis on the body's decrepitude in order only to provide a Cartesian reading which set off the resilient and intact mind which survives in utter separation from the failing body (a kind of Stoic humanism). This "negative" reading of the body, however, has been challenged by subsequent critics, who have sought to reveal the insufficiency of a Cartesian approach when reading Beckett, especially in terms of the centrality of corporeal physicality in the author's works. More specifically, the responses of critics such as Maude, Tajiri and White (among others) have, each in their own way, sought to subvert this earlier reading of bodily impotence by looking at the ways in which the fragmentation or disintegration of the body in Beckett is actually the means through which the latter highlights how central and essential the body is to subjective existence.

Acknowledging the importance of these readings of Beckett's writings, then, it is the aim of the present thesis to extend them in carrying out a sustained reading of just that aspect of the representation of the body in Beckett's writings that has often been considered in a straightforwardly negative sense, namely, its impotence. To be more specific, one of the main objectives of the current thesis, through the close readings of Beckett's works to be found in the following three chapters, is to explore the idea of the essentially physical body (also examined in the work of critics such as Maude and McMullan, for example) *within* the representations of impotence so prominent in Beckett's writings.

Evidently, the word *impotence* is a negative one. Used to refer to any sense of inability or restriction, the word "impotence" can be characterized as privative, the opposite of potency and power, manifested, in the case of Beckett, by the different ways in which Beckett's characters are unable to perform specific actions or are severely physically restricted. It is precisely for this reason that some Beckett critics have understandably approached the representation of

impotence as something necessarily negative and subtractive in their readings of the impotent body in Beckett's work. However, as a very interesting and useful article by Catherine Laws entitled "Beckett and unheard sound" suggests, such "negative" notions in Beckett (such as, in this instance, the notion of silence that Laws discusses) should not be defined as only negative since they are actually given a much more complex role in the writer's work.¹¹ It is worth quoting Laws at length to explicate this and how it is related to my own reading of impotence:

Silence is usually defined only negatively, as an absence, and particularly in Western culture specifically as an absence of or abstention from language. Beckett's earlier work appears to rehearse this, with silence mostly conceived in intentional terms only, articulated by and through the cessation of sounds. This entails a vacillation between the positive and negative characteristics of silence as opposed to sound, linked to uncertainty surrounding the distinction between apparently self-produced and external sound [...] [However, Beckett's later] voices move beyond the Western cultural and philosophical positing of silence only as a lack, breaking through 'this farrago of silence and words of silence that is not silence'.

(2010: 177-8)

Silence, then, is, as Derrida might say, "naturally" taken to be the binary opposite of speech and sound and, in turn, is defined in a profoundly negative sense, that is, as the actual absence or lack of speech and sound. However, as Laws argues, the customary relationship between silence and sound is not one of opposition in Beckett's work. Instead, she suggests, consideration of these two terms "leads to an alternative proposition: unheard sound" (p.183). Given this complexity of the role accorded to silence in Beckett, on Laws's account, I propose that the term "impotence" be treated and approached in an analogous manner here. Impotence is not approached as something straightforwardly negative in Beckett's work, that is, as merely the lack of potency, sovereign power or authority. Rather, the present thesis seeks to emphasize how, drawing on

¹¹ This complexity regarding the role played by silence outside the language/silence dichotomy in the work of Beckett has also been examined by Carla Locatelli in her article "Delogocentering Silence: Beckett's Ultimate Unwording", in Brater, E., (2005). *The Theatrical Gamut: Notes for a Post-Beckettian Stage*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 67-89.

Derrida's and Stiegler's conceptions of the supplement and the prosthetic, such a term plays a more complex role in Beckett's work.

The fact that impotence is not merely the representation of lack in Beckett is manifest, in this sense, in the *twofold* role it appears to play. On the one hand, as the close readings in the following chapters will show, in some of Beckett's works, impotence is depicted in the representation of the most reduced states where it is shown that *even in* such states embodied subjectivity – or the capacity to “go on” – is still possible, and, most importantly, essential for existence and meaning. At the same time, in a number of works Beckett also presents cases when this impotence, whether via bodily reduction, fragmentation, or restriction, may be presented as itself *productive*. As will be argued below, in these cases the impotence that marks the characters is precisely what produces distinct possibilities for them rather than mere endurance against the odds.

Exploring the ways in which both the body and mind are marked by impotence in Beckett, it will be proposed that the theme of impotence plays, in this light, a complex role in Beckett's works; one that foregrounds such impotence as productive or, as will be made clear, as possibility (as his own comparison with Joyce's potency suggests); and always as corporeal. In this way, the present thesis will argue in favour of an essential reciprocal relationship between body and mind, in which, despite the apparently “Cartesian” form of its representation in many of Beckett's works, such reciprocity or co-constitution is not only revealed by the depiction of impotence in Beckett's writings, but, I will argue, appears in them as something like a condition of possibility of different forms of agency that are produced through such impotence, or what, in his contrast with Joyce, Beckett describes as those possibilities to be “exploited” in a lack of “mastery” itself.

While, then, (embodied) subjectivity is one of the central issues in the current thesis, the argument develops approaches to the subject which, by contrast to humanist conceptions, see it as essentially incomplete, and which – drawing here on Derrida's philosophy – pays particular attention to those distinct properties (necessary for the construction of subjectivity and for embodied, subjective experience) which are essentially in supplementary or prosthetic

relations with it. Understood in this sense, impotence marks not only the liability or vulnerability of the corporeal to damage and decay, afflicting mind and body together, but also reveals the source and conditions of the subject in what we might call, following Derrida, a kind of *originary* impotence.

From this perspective, the preoccupation of Beckett's works with extreme and visible forms of specific impotence – of the kinds outlined above, and in the chapters that follow – also implies, on this reading, a kind of *general* impotence of effectively “ontological” status. Understood in terms of an “originary” lack of potency and power – or “vulnerability”, as McMullan describes it – which is constitutive of the possibility of subjectivity *per se*, agency is then always, paradoxically, dependent for its “power” upon this essential impotence. What therefore, I argue, appear as specific forms of re-potentialization of (a no longer straightforwardly “sovereign”) subjectivity in Beckett's work are also themselves made possible by this essential “incompleteness” of the subject and of its “power”. To put it another way, if Beckett foregrounds the inherent “vulnerability” of body and subject, or, indeed, of “being” itself, it is, I argue, precisely through this that new (embodied) capacities and possibilities, as well as new ways of “coping” with such inherent vulnerability or impotence, are constituted in his work. In this way, the present thesis will seek to elaborate a complex picture of impotence by paying particular attention to the specific representation of the act of memory, and its (necessary) relation to both the body and mind, in Beckett's works. To be more specific, memory will be shown to be what lays bare the co-constitution of the body and mind in this regard, as well as, so to speak, the co-implication of potency and impotence that constitutes their essential relationship in Beckett's writings.

However, before I move on to explain in more detail how memory is approached in the current thesis, it is important to note that memory was also explored by Descartes himself, as that which foregrounds, once again, the sovereign power of the mind argued for in the *Meditations*. In particular, Descartes refers to the role of memory in the formation of any clear and distinct ideas. Yet, significantly, he needs his God to explain and secure the process of trying to *remember* a clear and distinct idea we once had. This is because, in

Descartes's words, "I frequently recollect a past judgement without at the same time being able to recall the grounds of it [...] if I did not know that God existed" (cited in Williams, 1978: 190). However, since we know, Descartes claims, that God exists and he is no deceiver, "it is enough for us to remember that we have perceived something clearly, in order to be sure that it is true" (ibid.). The divine guarantee does not emphasize the innateness of memory (the Platonic position), but instead secures veridical memory as certain on the basis of another kind of memory or recall: the memory of an innate power to demonstrate God.

For reasons that should be already at least partially clear, memory in Beckett's work functions, on my account, in a very different fashion than in Descartes' philosophy, where its character remains determined by his rationalistic dualism, particularly insofar as it is referred to the supposedly reflective, constitutive powers of the subject as mental substance (with its divine guarantor). Cartesian memory is argued to be a mental activity which enables the subject to be certain about events and things and the world (something that needs validation by God); but it also plays a key role in securing the continuity and reliability of experience itself and, as in the quotation offered above, is the site or medium of any appeal to prior theses or to any deductive or inferential process. Only intuited givenness – the ineliminable cogito – can offer certainty, but this apparent primordality is also enablingly mediated by divine and experiential factors, which also it wishes to authorize on its own basis.

The present thesis, by contrast, identifies a more complex role for memory in Beckett's work. By refusing Descartes's dualism, as most recent critics have done, and thus his characterization of the mind and the circular reasoning it can be seen to entail, the present work shows how Beckett's works critically interrogate any common sense understanding of memory as located simply in the individual human subject, and its mental processes, by precisely externalizing it and even by presenting it in some instances as alien to the character to which it "belongs". Furthermore, the thesis re-thinks the somatic involvement and stakes of memory in thought (its being a condition for identity, for the intelligibility of self and agency) by exploring the ways in which memory "literally" manifests

itself in Beckett's drama and prose, focusing on the means Beckett employed to externalize memory and give it a phenomenological form in his work.

In fact, the externalization of memory is at the heart of several of Beckett's most significant writings. As Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate, Beckett's fascination with technological apparatuses is one central means through which he managed to give the phenomenological form of something "unseen" as memory itself. Such externalization of memory is approached, in the present thesis, in the light of the Derridean notion of the "supplement" as this sheds light on my argument regarding the essential supplementarity constitutive of the subject in Beckett as well as the necessary embodiment of subjectivity.

Here, it is perhaps useful to explain what Derrida means by the "supplement". Writing at length about the speech/writing opposition in *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida aims to demonstrate that writing is neither a mere representation of speech nor a supplement to the latter. Specifically, through this example of the speech/writing hierarchy, Derrida expresses his opposition regarding all such hierarchies by approaching the term "supplement" in a different fashion:

For the concept of the supplement [...] harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. [...] But the supplement [also] supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of presence.

(1997: 144-5)

Considering these two significations of the supplement, Derrida writes that "[t]his second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first" (p.145), thus showing that a supplement is not merely to replace what it supplements or to enrich that which needs supplementation. The supplement functions in both of these ways.

In this sense, then, the externalization of memory, but also the different forms of supplementarity (or prosthesis) we are presented with in Beckett's

works such as, among others, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame*, *Rockaby* and *That Time*, will not be approached in the following chapters as mere additions to the body (which thus imply and emphasize its vulnerability) or as what aim to replace what they supplement, that is, the physical mind of the characters. By contrast, approaching such representations in the way in which Derrida uses the term the "supplement" will foreground issues regarding the essential *co-constitution* of the body and mind (and the necessary relation of each to its "outside" or other) to be analyzed in the present thesis.

Derrida's work and specifically his deconstruction of existing hierarchies (such as speech/writing) as well as the supplementarity inherent to all subjectivity affected to a considerable degree the work of his former student, Bernard Stiegler. Stiegler's three-volume book *Technics and Time* (published over the period from 1994-2001) is particularly preoccupied with the notion of "technics" and its relation to memory. In the Introduction to his first volume, *The Fault of Epimetheus* (1994), Stiegler defines technics as a "process of exteriorization", or, in other words, "the pursuit of life by means other than life" (p.17). In their everyday lives, humans, according to Stiegler, are always in need of different non-living organs in order to be able to survive, as the everyday examples of eye-glasses, houses and clothes show. This is why, Stiegler argues, following Derrida, the human is always necessarily *prosthetic*.

Taking on Derrida's idea of the "supplement" so as to elaborate on the essential prostheticity of the human, Stiegler argues that technics always show us that "the mortal is a being by default, a being marked by its own original flaw or lack" (Stiegler, 2003: 156). Similarly to Derrida's "supplement" of the origin, "an always necessary addition – to give the illusion of a full plenitude or self-sufficiency – that displaces, replaces and re-marks a fundamental lack, void or abyss" (p.152) – when Stiegler argues about the default of the human, what he suggests is that there can be no "origin" without exteriorization, that is, without technics.

Referring to the origin of the human, Stiegler argues that precisely because of a constant need for different prostheses, such origin is neither biological nor

transcendental, but rather, *aporetic*: a non-origin, or a default of origin. He writes:

The ambiguity of the invention of the human, that which holds together the *who* and the *what*, binding them while keeping them apart, is *différance* undermining the authentic/inauthentic divide. [...] *Différance* is neither the *who* nor the *what*, but their co-possibility, the movement of their mutual coming-to-be, of their coming into convention. The *who* is nothing without the *what*, and conversely. *Différance* is below and beyond the *who* and the *what*; it poses them together, a composition engendering the illusion of an opposition.

(1994: 141)

It is clear, then, that for Stiegler (and Derrida), “human” being is always essentially exteriorized, always already *prosthetic*. At the same time, Stiegler argues, this generates a paradox, that is, the paradox “of an exteriorization without preceding interior: the interior is constituted in exteriorization” (ibid.). If this is to remark the necessary prostheticity of the human, it is not, however, to suggest that prostheses therefore somehow take over or subsume the human (which would be simply to invert the initial hierarchy of origin and supplement). Instead, according to Derrida and Stiegler, the notions of the “supplement” and *différance* show that one is nothing without the other: “the *who* is nothing without the *what*, and conversely” (ibid.). It is in this light that the co-possibility or co-constitution of the body and mind, and the role played by memory in this, will be read in a selection of Beckett’s works in the following chapters of this thesis.

Derrida’s and Stiegler’s ideas about the necessary exteriorization and prostheticity of the human, and of the relation of these ideas to issues of memory, will be taken as guides in what follows to the representation of impotence in Beckett. The presentation of the processes of memory will be related to the impotence (as, ultimately, a manifestation of originary default) that marks the characters’ bodies and minds in order to show how the relationship between the body and mind depicted in Beckett’s work can be understood as one of reciprocity and co-possibility, in such a way as to complicate any conventional division between mind and body (or, say, the symbolic-discursive and biological-

material)¹² as such. I aim to illuminate these issues, then, through a narrower focus on impotence and memory, taking a selection of works which respond to these emphases in close reading. In other words, I will focus on the representation of impotence in Beckett's work in its bodily and mental characterizations, taking the role of memory in many of the cases examined as a particularly striking problematizing of the mind/body distinction (as this was identified in early Beckett criticism) and of purely negative understandings of impotence. The thesis therefore hopes to contribute to the various, often broader debates about the body that have so enriched Beckett studies in recent years. These analyses will demonstrate, for example, through instances when Beckett's characters or narrators are presented as preoccupied with the act of remembering itself, the crucial role the bodies of Beckett's characters play in their experience of their past (memory), and the profound effect memory has on the body itself. To develop such arguments, the thesis sustains an interest in the issues of externalization and supplementation, introduced above, in Beckett's work.¹³

As the above references to critics' responses (especially early ones') strongly suggest, mind and body in Beckett have sometimes been thought of as separable and independent of each other (as, for instance, Ruby Cohn's reading of *Mercier and Camier* claims). This is in fact something that some of Beckett's works themselves clearly state as shown, for example, in *From an Abandoned Work*, where Beckett gives us the image: "just went on, my body doing its best without me" (Beckett, 2010: 66). What is more, the arguments for this separation have been supported by appeals to Beckett's use of exemplary pairs or couples which have, thus, been approached as representations of the body and mind in

¹² See Malabou, C., (2015a) "Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed?". In Bhandar, B. & Goldberg-Hiller, J., (ed.). *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 35-46.

¹³ It is important to clarify that in referring to the work of Derrida and Stiegler, the present thesis does not aim to provide a strictly "post-structuralist" reading of Beckett's work in this respect, such as that, for instance, pursued by Steven Connor (1988) which also draws on Derrida's thought. As will be made clear in the following chapters, whereas Connor's work reads the body in Beckett's work as a production of discourse, a body that becomes a sign or a mere site of signification, the current thesis will draw on Derrida's and Stiegler's ideas of externalization and prosthesis while addressing issues regarding the materiality and physicality of the body that have tended to be sidelined in early "deconstructive" readings of Beckett's work.

their separation. This is indeed something that emerges in a large number of Beckett's writings, as, for example, in *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Mercier and Camier*, and in which the figure of the couple is either manifested in the use of two different "characters" on stage (for instance, Hamm and Clov) or in another kind of couple consisting of one "character" and some form of technology (as in *Krapp's Last Tape*). Hence, given the objective of the present thesis to support the kinds of recent interpretation that move beyond the dualistic models of mind and body that informed "first-wave" criticism, the following will examine the use of the couple in some of Beckett's writings (a figure central to "first-wave" approaches), partly acknowledging the appeal and reach of this allegorizing of the couples, but also in order to show that such a relationship is essentially one of reciprocity and inextricability. Part of this demonstration will involve a detailed reading of the representation of memory in Beckett as, it will be shown, the latter is precisely what "deconstructs" the so-called division between the body and mind by being the site of a necessary imbrication of the material and the mental.

Hence, again, the exploration of memory in Beckett is crucial in respect to the objective of this thesis insofar as the representation of memory emphasizes that subjectivity is both always embodied in the individual human *and* necessarily supplemented by something (or somebody) "outside" of itself; something shown by the constant instances of memory's externalization in Beckett. At the same time, this is precisely the point where the nuance in the significance of impotence, its being a condition for forms of potency, that I seek to explore can best be seen. The necessary implication of potency and impotence is not restricted to representations of prosthetic memory, but that logic or dimension does present itself clearly in just that connection. In other words, as will be made clear in the following chapters, all the instances of impotence in Beckett – partly represented in the "failure" of memory, and hence a failure of "mastery" over the "materials" (to return to the comparison with Joyce) – are what most evidently suggest the ineliminable vulnerability of both body and mind to forms of destruction, but also the sense in which such vulnerability is a condition of subjectivity itself in the "first place".

Finally, it should be pointed out that the present thesis does not, in its focus on the mind-body relation (including its Cartesian construal) and on the capacity of the beings depicted by Beckett to “go on” (not merely despite but through their impotence), thereby seek to restore what could be defined as anything like a “humanist” reading of Beckett’s works; that is, a reading that would support, say, the resilience of the “sovereign” subject in the face of its various obstacles or disabilities. My focus on all those instances emphasizing the vulnerability and impotence of subjectivity (something that Beckett was so evidently preoccupied with) is meant – unlike “humanist” readings of Beckett which highlighted and supported the power of the entire, resilient subject, or at least its mind – to underline, instead, a conception of the subject as essentially incomplete and thus marked by a necessary impotence constitutive of the “human” itself (which is thereby never completely “human”, as it were). In this sense, if the “question of the human”, as it appears in Beckett, is, as Catherine Malabou has recently suggested (in her own return to Derrida), a question of “a singular and unique destiny of repetition” (that is not itself “specifically human”), then the human is not so much overcome here (as can sometimes be implied in certain *post*-human philosophies) as it is shown to be “what repeats itself *even when its essence is dissolved*” (Malabou 2015b: 62; emphasis added). In other words, what is required is something like a “non-humanist” understanding of the repeated persistence, in its very dissolution or incompleteness, of the “human”. It is this, I am arguing, that Beckett’s depiction of impotence as itself a site of productivity or possibility, in part, suggests.

The Structure of the Thesis

The three chapters of the thesis that follow examine some of Beckett’s theatrical works composed between the 1950s and 1980s, as well as three of his prose works written at the beginning and end of his writing career. The texts have been chosen not because they are the only ones that might respond to the chosen topics and themes, nor, on the other hand, because they are taken, or can be taken, to be some sort of key or representative sample whose analysis could simply be extrapolated throughout the corpus. (However, the analyses do try to

offer some connections and differentiations through cross-reference to other works.) Instead, the works are focused upon because they allow a clear articulation of this argument's contribution to the work on the body and impotence in Beckett and because they are amenable to close readings that allow for new emphases in support of that argument. The thesis aims to establish its concerns in relation to these works by demonstrating close analytical details that support its larger arguments. The choice of texts also aims to show an interconnected variety of topics and treatments relevant to that argument (different kinds of couple, kinds of prosthesis, kinds of possibility in impotence) and so help indicate its scope and develop its terms. The selection of primary texts allows, at the same time, for direct negotiation with some key critical moments or more general interpretative controversies and influences relevant to the thesis's arguments – whether Adorno on *Endgame*, an essay examined in Chapter 1; or more recent phenomenological and post-structuralist readings, such as those influenced by Merleau-Ponty. The selection also samples works from across Beckett's career, although its aim is not a developmental account as such; rather, the intention is to suggest a consistency of concern, as well as to suggest ways of relating what has been seen as a general formal tendency across Beckett's career towards minimalism and reduction of artistic means to the theme of impotence discussed here.

Both dramatic and prose works will be analyzed in the present thesis as this allows the argument to consider the difference in the ways in which Beckett deals with the representation of impotence and memory in each broad genre or medium. As will be argued, because of the theatre's essential reliance on a human form onstage (however challenged or interrogated by Beckett), the way in which the impotent body, mind and memory appear in them may seem to be more "straightforward" than in the prose works, which do not share such "immediate" representations, but rather are reliant on language and the performance of reading – something which is addressed explicitly in the works. Despite this, however, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, even in the prose works, Beckett shows his preoccupation with issues of an irreducible embodied

subjectivity and the necessary materialization of meaning in his depiction of impotence.

The works to be analyzed in each one of the following three chapters follow a broadly chronological order (starting from the drama of the 1950s in Chapter 1 and ending with the late prose of the 1980s in Chapter 3), which indicates various of Beckett's positions regarding the representation of the mind-body relation and memory over his career. Also, examining these texts in their chronological order might also suggest new connections between them regarding some themes common to works at particular stages of Beckett's career. For instance, it will be shown that throughout the 1950s Beckett made particular dramatic use of the figure of the couple, which he later largely abandons in his works of the 1970s and 1980s. These later works, however, are much more formally minimal and abstract, in terms of setting, character and plot. This cross-referencing, then, will seek to provide a deeper understanding of the development of Beckett's approach to the representation of the body-mind relation and of memory in his work.

Chapter 1 analyzes two of Beckett's dramatic works of the 1950s, namely *Endgame* (1957) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). In both of these works, Beckett deals closely with the figure of the couple, a feature of central significance to the writings of this period, and which has frequently been discussed. Martin Esslin (1961), for example, provides a reading of Beckett's use of the couple which explicitly reads this in Cartesian fashion. Indeed, the role Esslin attributes to the Beckettian couple in *The Theatre of the Absurd* is precisely what illuminates his Cartesian reading of Beckett's theatre more generally. Using *Waiting for Godot* as his example, Esslin thus argues that Beckett represents a form of Cartesian dualism in his writings, an argument justified by the presentation of the couple onstage. Specifically, Esslin views the Beckettian character as literally split into body and mind onstage, as depicted in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky: "Pozzo and Lucky represent the relationship between body and mind, the material and the spiritual sides of man" (ibid., p.48-9). Likewise, the couple presented in *Endgame* has, according to Esslin, the same essential role: "Hamm, blind and emotional; Clov, performing the function of the senses for him – all this

might represent different aspects of a single personality [...] the emotional and the intellectual selves" (ibid., p.66). Based on these interpretations, then, Esslin reads Beckett's plays in a specifically Cartesian light precisely because, as he argues, if the body and mind appear as distinct onstage (since each one is represented by a character in each one of the plays), this may be taken to imply that, for Beckett, body and mind are essentially independent of one another. Although in *Krapp's Last Tape* only one "literal" character is presented, Beckett's pairing of Krapp with his tape-recorder allows this play to be read, too, as a somewhat different representation of the "couple". Significantly, here also one tendency in some critical readings of the work has been to understand this as a representation of a split between failing body and a technologically-reproduced memory, where the latter is identified, most usually, with the active mind. (One of the aims of the chapter will then be to show how, in fact, the representation of memory in the play *relies* upon certain forms of embodiment that are far from simply passive in form, such that the re-presentation at stake in memory cannot be reduced to "mental" processes alone.)

The chapter, then, discusses such dualist readings of the "couple" in Beckett, since they point up most effectively the argument of the present thesis regarding the reciprocity or co-possibility to be found in the body-mind relation. In other words, looking closely at the way the couple is presented in *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, the first chapter explores how, while the body and mind in each may indeed be understood as represented by distinct characters or onstage entities, Beckett does not necessarily suggest that the relationship between the physical and the mental must therefore be one of opposition. In these terms, Chapter 1 stresses that the physical and the mental in Beckett are presented as constantly "involved" with one another precisely because of the co-dependence that their apparent separation requires; in other words, they are always essentially co-constituted and co-determined.

Aiming to foreground their actual co-constitution, the chapter reads the representations of the body-mind relation, and the specific role played by memory in this relation, in these two plays in light of Derrida's well-known theory of the supplement, first outlined in the 1967 book *Of Grammatology*. This serves

to clarify my argument's own emphasis on how in the couple each "part" constitutes the other while already being a part of the other's identity. Reading the couples in light of Derrida's "quasi-transcendental" argument concerning the relational character of "being" in general, which always already requires a structure of supplementation, and its extension in the recent work of Bernard Stiegler, allows me to think through the ways in which each "part" of the couple is always already a part of the other's identity, therefore, even though their relationship remains one of intricately otherness.

The chapter goes on to argue, in conclusion, that apart from giving rise to this dependency between the characters in each of the plays, the impotence that marks them is also presented as productive, since it is the condition of a necessary supplementarity that is essential to any subjectivity. Through a close reading of how the "active" role played by impotence manifests itself in each play, it is argued that, in *Endgame*, impotence is presented as the possibility of the subject's capacity to go on at all, most obviously through dialogue between the characters, while in *Krapp's Last Tape* it precisely enables the individual subject to experience the past involuntarily, and thus, paradoxically, in its quasi-Proustian "fullness" (as "explosive, 'an immediate, total and delicious deflagration' [...], abstract[ing] the useful, the opportune, the accidental" (Beckett 1999: 33)).

Chapter 2 focuses on some of Beckett's later theatrical works, written during the 1970s and 1980s: *Not I* (1973), *That Time* (1976), *Ohio Impromptu* (1981) and *Rockaby* (1981). Following Chapter 1, which shows how representations of the body and mind, and of the specific role played by acts of memory within this, are manifest in Beckett's particular use of the couple, this chapter aims to explore how Beckett deals with the embodied subject and the supplementarity inherent to memory in these much more minimalist later plays. These dramas have been chosen for analysis because they all share many similarities regarding their minimal setting and the more "extreme" representation of the body onstage. These four plays also differ from the two pieces analyzed in Chapter 1 in terms of the representation of memory which, exclusively and more evidently, takes the form of narration. Therefore, one of the

objectives of Chapter 2 is to question arguments which, emphasizing the more extreme fragmentation of the body in these works and the reduction of memory to voice, have described the listeners of all four plays as “passive”. This chapter will also address the question as to how Beckett’s use of the couple differs from the ones employed in the drama of the 1950s analyzed in Chapter 1. Specifically, it will be seen that partly because of this more evident bodily fragmentation onstage in these later works, the figure of the couple is not so straightforwardly present, as shown in the fact that these four plays examined in Chapter 2 employ one main character. Even in two of these plays, namely *Not I* and *Ohio Impromptu*, where two characters are presented on stage, Beckett problematizes the notion of “the couple” as such, either by reducing the role of Auditor, for instance, to four brief movements, or by placing two protagonists on stage who are as “*alike in appearance as possible*” (Beckett, 2009c: 137). As this chapter aims to argue, this reduced and reworked representation of the couple allows Beckett to address issues regarding the mutual effect of the embodied subject and its voice of memory in distinctive ways as well as place specific emphasis on the determining effect each one has on the other.

In terms of the more extreme fragmentation of the characters’ bodies in these plays, the chapter explores, too, the significance of their reduction to one single body part, an image that can be found in *Not I* and *That Time*, or their striking restriction to brief movements, as we see in *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*. Hence, looking closely at the role the body plays in this evident fragmentation, the chapter reads the latter not as a reflection of Beckett’s representation of the body’s disappearance, but rather argues that this extreme bodily reduction is precisely what emphasizes the body’s activeness in its impotence. What is more, whether the body appears as evidently fragmented or restricted in these plays, it is represented as having significant effect on memory, which is heard but not seen onstage (apart from the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, where the protagonist’s memory may be stored in a book – and, thus, seen onstage). At the same time, it is, however, orally narrated. Looking closely, then, at the way both the body and memory are represented in each of these plays, as well as how each one affects the other, it will be seen just how their relationship

sustains them even when the embodied subject is presented as having no physical contact with its voice of memory – comparing these to Krapp’s ability to actually *touch* his tape-recorder in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. As the chapter makes clear, even if through the slightest movements, Beckett shows that the body of the subject, as it is represented or performed in all four plays, affects its voice of memory by providing it with a certain structure and rhythm. At the same time, the protagonists in all four plays are presented as being closely – if not, solely – preoccupied with the experience of past memories, which in turn shows both the importance of memory in experience and the range of effects it has on the body itself.

To illuminate the argument about the significance of the impotence that marks the characters’ bodies and memories in these works, the chapter reads the latter in the light of the philosophy of phenomenology and specifically employs Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception and embodiment.¹⁴ The latter has probably been the most prominent twentieth-century philosopher, and contemporary of Beckett, to pay close attention to the role the body plays in our perception of the world and, following the important work of Maude (2009), the chapter shows how Beckett’s characterizations can be read in a phenomenological light. The chapter uses Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception in order to underline that the body’s impotence is not necessarily its weakness. Instead, following Merleau-Ponty, the chapter approaches a certain notion of impotence in terms its central role in the perception of the past (and the world more generally). In this way, then, employing Merleau-Ponty’s affirmative philosophy of the body’s “weakness” specifically in my reading of Beckett’s evident representation of impotence in the four plays analyzed in Chapter 2 allows me to think through the significance that Beckett himself places on the body’s reduction or lack of power in his work and to rethink this in a less straightforwardly “negative” way.

¹⁴ For a fuller account of the ways in which different aspects of Beckett’s work have been approached in the light of phenomenology, see Maude, U. & Feldman, M., (2009). *Beckett and Phenomenology*. London: Continuum.

Chapter 3 shifts attention from Beckett's dramatic writings to some of his early and late prose works. This shift of attention aims to examine how the embodied subject is represented not only in theatre, which (more or less by definition) requires the presence of the characters on stage, but also through language itself, to the degree that this is what all prose writings must be dependent upon. In this light, therefore, Chapter 3 analyzes three of Beckett's works, *Murphy* (1938), *Company* (1980) and *Worstward Ho* (1983), with the aim of focusing on those forms of physicality and materialization which essentially marks the writer's prose works.

This chapter provides a close reading of *Company* and *Worstward Ho* insofar as they are works which are directly related to the concerns of the present thesis. Firstly, in both texts Beckett's close preoccupation with the representation of the body is evident. In *Company*, for instance, the protagonist appears as lying in the dark and listening to the narration of memories (an image that can also be found in the dramatic works analyzed in Chapter 2), while in *Worstward Ho* Beckett's interrogation of the body's entirety is evident; as the close reading of this work will seek to argue, the text is constantly engaged in the construction and deconstruction of the body. Through the reading of *Worstward Ho*, it will be shown that this specific, intensely "abstracted" representation of the body in a prose work is what in fact allows Beckett to address issues regarding the necessity of embodied subjectivity and of forms of materialization to any meaning (however fractured, abstracted or uncertain). (*Worstward Ho* is also one of Beckett's works that has been extensively discussed, with reference to its "negativity" and drive towards nothingness.) In addition, this chapter analyzes *Company* insofar as it is one of the late prose works which most directly deals with the re-experience of the past, which will in turn allow me to compare if and in what way this representation differs from the way Beckett deals with issues of memory in his dramatic works. Based on these ideas, then, this chapter seeks to address and reveal the significance of embodied subjectivity in works which are entirely reliant on language, but also to emphasize that even in the most abstracted terms, embodied subjectivity is precisely essential for the possibility of any meaning. Lastly, in line with Laura Salisbury's examination of Beckett and

the matter of language, the chapter will develop the argument that “although language and the subjectivity it subtends are disabled and reshaped, they are, significantly, never reduced to nothing” (2010: 220).¹⁵

Alongside *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, a discussion *Murphy* (1938) is also included in this chapter despite the fact that it is one of Beckett’s earliest prose works. The reason this work is closely analyzed along with the later works that Chapter 3 explores is that it is one of the most prominent writings in Beckett’s entire oeuvre to deal with the impotence of the body and its seeming dissociation from the mind (as shown from the fact that it is one of Beckett’s works that has been most extensively discussed, philosophically, in the light of Cartesianism). Thus, the chapter looks closely at the way in which Beckett dealt with the representation of the body in the 1930s, and addresses the response of some early critics to the work’s representation of the so-called mind-body problem, with reference to the philosophies of both Descartes and Geulincx as well as their influence on Beckett. Despite the undoubted importance of this influence, however, the chapter seeks to provide a distinctive approach to *Murphy* by emphasizing that, notwithstanding the evident representation of Murphy as wishing to escape the physical world (his body) so as to find recourse to his mental world (his mind), a Cartesian reading of *Murphy* is far from sufficient. The chapter will seek to highlight that the way Beckett deals with issues of embodied subjectivity at the beginning of his writing career is by no means a simple matter, and that it oversimplifies matters to construe this novel as a representation of some wish to undermine the significance of the body or even to eliminate subjectivity altogether. Rather, Beckett’s approach to these issues is much more complex, as is shown by the fact that *Murphy* is a work which paradoxically maintains an echo of the physical that is, I argue, essential to the very separations which the novel engages.

The inclusion of these three works in one chapter enables an assessment of the resourceful consistency with which Beckett addressed issues of embodied subjectivity from the very beginning of his writing career. At the same time, it also

¹⁵ Laura Salisbury’s article “‘Something or nothing’: Beckett and the matter of language” will be more fully addressed in the close readings in Chapter 3.

highlights some of the ways in which Beckett's approach to this issue in his early and late works altered. The chapter thus discusses the extreme abstraction that marks both the style and form of the two later works (shown through comparison with *Murphy*), and demonstrates that this *formal* abstraction should not necessarily be approached as reflecting the *meaning* of these works. Thus, acknowledging that these later writings are indeed marked by formal abstraction, it is nonetheless argued that the latter should not be taken to be Beckett's means through which to suggest, for example, the disappearance of the body from literature or the sheer destruction of subjectivity.

In this sense, then, the chapter begins by referring to the different forms of materiality that unavoidably mark prose works in general, as this is implied in Beckett's own writing, and moves on to show that through the formal abstraction of his later prose works, Beckett leads his readers to the aesthetic proposition that the perception of any meaning is essentially reliant on an embodied subjectivity. At this point, the chapter again employs that part of Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception which focuses on the necessary and inextricable bond between any meaning and embodied subjectivity, in order to illuminate my argument concerning both the role and significance of the abstraction that marks Beckett's later writings and the representation of the impotent body in the prose works in so far as the latter are (more or less) entirely dependent upon language. In this way, the chapter concludes that the abstraction of the later prose should not be considered as a simple elimination of meaning, or its completed dematerialization, and hence a drive towards a pure "nothingness" that might be read in terms of either a final "self-sufficiency" of literary form or of a "pessimistic" philosophy. Rather, I develop Salisbury's insight into Beckett's "signifying voids [...] replete with the conditions for production of meaning" (2010: 215), and seek to think further about some of their implications with regard to his representations of embodied subjectivity.

Thus, through the appearance and disappearance of the body, or even its construction and deconstruction in *Worstward Ho*, for instance, Beckett makes evident, I argue, the impossibility of its disappearance and, most importantly, suggests that even when the body loses its literal presence (an idea which is

suggested by the difference between dramatic and prose works) meaning is only possible when there is an embodied subjectivity (as represented both by a listener perceiving that meaning – as in *Company* – or the reader him- or herself appealed to hypothetically in *Worstward Ho*).

Considering the aims and objectives of each one of the following three chapters, then, it is important to emphasize that the theme of impotence in the works examined in the present thesis manifests itself in different fashions. As will be made clear by the end of this thesis, bodily and mental impotence in Beckett do not merely play a subtractive role, that is, they do not merely aim to foreground an absence or purely “negative” lack. Rather, Beckett’s writings are marked by an oscillating emphasis between two separable but connected roles that impotence appears to play in them. On the one hand, Beckett underlines the cases when this impotence is evident in the most reduced states and functions as what reminds his reader or viewer of the necessity of embodied activity and its irreducibility even in such a reduced or abstracted condition. On the other hand, however, Beckett also pays attention, in specific instances, to those cases when this impotence produces or enables new possibilities for his characters’ existence, or even appears as the somatic basis of any subjective existence at all, not merely of the experiences which these subjects would not have had otherwise.

My demonstration regarding the complexity of the role of this impotence begins with the analysis of two of Beckett’s works for the theatre composed in the 1950s, and focuses on the role the couple plays in them. This is followed by four of Beckett’s dramatic writings of the 1970s and 1980s which are analyzed in terms of the way in which the body and memory are treated in more minimal settings. Finally, the last chapter examines some of Beckett’s prose works, with a particular emphasis on the question as to whether embodied subjectivity can ever reach its complete elimination. All three chapters, however, despite their different points of attention, have one single aim: to show that Beckett was a writer who was particularly interested in dealing with the theme of impotence in his work, but not merely to give it a subtractive or negative role. By contrast, as the present thesis seeks to illustrate, Beckett was most interested in exploring all

the possibilities emerging from the examination of the paradox entailed by the irreducible necessity of forms of impotence to the persistence and potential of embodied subjectivity itself. To return to the citation with which I began, if, by contrast to Joycean modernism, the distinctiveness of Beckett's oeuvre is defined, in part, by its "working with impotence, ignorance", it is, then, the question of what it means to "exploit" such impotence, as Beckett suggests, towards what is itself, paradoxically, a certain productive end that is at the centre of my argument in what follows.

Chapter 1 – The figure of the couple: Enabling Supplementarity and Impotence in Beckett's *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*

Images of bodily and mental impotence, as well as the examination of the effects of such impotence upon acts of memory, are pervasive in Beckett's oeuvre. This is certainly the case in two dramatic works that he composed around the late 1950s, *Endgame* (1957) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). The focus of the present chapter is on the close analysis of these two works in terms of the relationship that Beckett builds between the impotent body and mind, and how the nature of such a relationship is made explicit through Beckett's close preoccupation with memory and his dramatic uses of the figure of the couple.

The couple is a figure that has frequently been discussed in the secondary literature on Beckett, where it has usually been understood as one means by which Beckett sought to address issues related to the mind-body problem or to the dispersal of the self. In the current chapter, however, the figure of the couple will be approached in a somewhat different fashion, that is, it will be read as a representation of the differentiation between body and mind (an idea examined by much "first-wave" criticism) but one that precisely "deconstructs" a finally dualistic (and disabling) division between the body and mind through its depiction as the site of a *necessary* (and in an important sense enabling) imbrication of these categories, of the material and the mental. In these terms, then, the chapter aims to argue in favour of a mind-body co-constitution, rather than a separation.

As its title indicates, *Endgame* engages one of Beckett's major preoccupations: that is, the different endings that are presented and referred to throughout the play. The setting, as indicated in the stage directions, is a "*bare interior [with a] grey light*" which consists only of two small windows, a door, a picture with its face on the wall and two ashbins (Beckett, 2009b: 7). Outside this room, as reported by Clov, everything is "corpsed" (ibid., p.37). The characters of the play are Hamm, his apparent servant Clov, and Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, who are legless in two ashbins.

Possessing an even more minimal setting, *Krapp's Last Tape* presents us with only one character, Krapp, who on his birthday every year records a tape in which he narrates the events of the year which has just passed. The stage presents us with Krapp's "den" (Beckett, 2009c: 3) which consists only of "a tape-recorder with microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes" (ibid.), a few bananas, a dictionary and Krapp himself. It is Krapp's sixty-ninth birthday and he is about to record another tape. Nevertheless, having nothing to say, Krapp ends up listening to the tape which he had recorded on his thirty-ninth birthday: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that" (ibid., p.10).

The intention of this chapter is to examine how Beckett presents us with two different kinds of couples in these plays. It is their treatments of this theme or figure that links the two plays in terms of the argument undertaken here. In *Endgame*, Beckett presents us with two couples onstage achieved through the physical presence of actual, embodied characters, whereas in *Krapp's Last Tape* he apparently presents us with only one character, yet in fact, I will argue, only so as to deal with a different kind of couple: the doubling of the on-stage Krapp himself with the younger Krapp who is re-presented through the technological mediation of the tape-recorder. In both plays, the couples are read in the present chapter as effective representations or "allegories" of a seeming division of body and mind – a common interpretation of the figure of the couple in Beckett (see, for example, among other early readings, Ruby Cohn (1965)). As Matthew Davies has put it, for example, in a fairly recent text, *Endgame* is "centred on the Cartesian division of mental consciousness and physical reality" – with Hamm, since he cannot move, representing the former and Clov the latter (2009: 82) – while the relationship between the embodied Krapp on stage and the memories that he recovers from the tape recorder has similarly often been read as kind of allegory of the relationship between body and mind.

Starting out from such a reading will thus illuminate both my argument regarding the significance of the reciprocal relationship between the two elements making up each couple, as indicating a necessary co-determination of body and mind, and will also demonstrate that attempts to interpret them as

models of sheer dissociation fails to give adequate credence to what Beckett achieves through the figure of the couple, as well as the important role played by memory in this reciprocity as that which is simultaneously a matter of mental processes and material embodiment. The examination of the figure of the couple will thus lead in turn to a broader discussion of how Beckett deals with a form of co-constitution in each work, since each “part” of the couples in both pieces is presented as essential to the other, part of the other’s identity. My argument here will draw, in particular, upon the Derridean notion of the supplement and its extension in the early work on technics and memory of Bernard Stiegler.

One of the main objectives of Chapter 1, then, is to approach impotence as it is represented in Beckett’s work not as something essentially restrictive or as a sheer negation of possibility. Rather, in the following reading of both plays bodily and mental impotence is depicted as playing a considerably more complex role. More specifically, I will argue that such impotence is fundamental to the plays’ depiction of the “human” itself, as marked by a kind of *essential* impotence, in line with the argument outlined in my introduction, insofar as it is precisely this that establishes the basis for the couples’ relationship (*Endgame*) and what provides them with distinct possibilities of experience or action that would otherwise not be present (*Krapp’s Last Tape*). It is in this way that my interpretation thus also tackles the issue of what has often been read as Beckett’s fundamental negativity (or “pessimism”), especially as it is manifested in *Endgame*, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the role that “lack” or “restriction” play as conditions of possibility for experience in Beckett’s works.

The chapter consists of five sections. The first section begins with Adorno’s famous response to *Endgame* which, as probably the single most influential reading of the play, is presented first in order to characterize the relation of the current analysis to what is perhaps the most philosophically sophisticated argument for the essential negativity of the play. Adorno’s reading is also taken as significant for this chapter insofar as it presents an historical understanding of subjective dissociation as an exemplary site of this negativity. Famously, Adorno’s diagnosis is informed by his sense of enlightenment as domination: subjective domination and self-domination, of alienation from nature and the body along

with a fateful, blind collapse back into them. As such, my reading takes Adorno's insistence on the forms of Beckett's drama seriously, but does so, however, in an effort to develop a less negative account of agency and impotence in these plays.

This is followed by another four sections, each of which discusses an aspect of both the representation of the body and mind as well as the characters' specific engagement with memory in each of the plays. The second section, then, "Impotence and the couple in *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*", analyzes how Beckett deals with the couple in each play, and also what Beckett is enabled to examine through their use. Impotence is here argued to be a condition for the capacity of each character to go on or continue living at all. The third section focuses on arguments regarding the body-mind dissociation (an idea suggested by the representation of the body and mind onstage) and seeks to show, with reference to both plays, that dissociation is, in fact, precisely what Beckett rejects or *deconstructs* in his works, insofar as he presents the body and mind as necessarily co-constituted and co-determined, even as they are apparently separated in the "allegorical" depiction in the couple in the way that Davies (among others) suggests. The following section, "Memory and the characters' reactions to the past", discusses specifically the presentation and treatment of memory in these two plays by examining how the characters react when confronting memories of the past, and suggests that, in *Krapp's Last Tape* in particular, Beckett significantly complicates the distinction between forms of voluntary and involuntary memory that had fascinated him since his 1931 book on Marcel Proust in showing how, in each act of memory, both mind and body must necessarily be implicated and intertwined. "Comings and goings", the next section, explores the role of talk or dialogue in these plays, as a verbal expression of the couple, and argues that it is, above all, talk itself that the characters need in order to keep on living, as Beckett depicts them. These analyses allow a return, therefore, to the question of Beckett's alleged "negativity", and the possibility of a more "affirmative" understanding of the role played by representations of impotence within his plays.

In this way, then, beginning with an examination of bodily and mental impotence in both *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* and moving on to show how

both the body and mind are essentially co-constituted by looking closely at the plays' engagement with the conditions of possibility of memory in particular, the chapter provides a more complex reading of the impotence that marks both the body and mind in these two plays and of the dramatic concern with couples which characterizes the representation of their interrelation.

Adorno's reading of *Endgame*

After the discovery of the Nazi death camps at the end of the Second World War, Adorno expressed his famous suspicion about the contemporary possibilities available to art: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (1967: 34). Later, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, he explains this maxim further: "In its disproportion to the horror that has transpired and threatens, it [art] is condemned to cynicism; even where it directly faces the horror, it diverts attention from it" (1997: 306). Thus, placing the latest modernist art in a very specific historical context, Adorno critically claims that the "conditions of possibility" (Caygill, 2006: 83) for both lyricism and conventional realism no longer exist since art can no longer face the horror of catastrophe *directly*, something which is also illustrated, according to Adorno, in Beckett's *Endgame* where the death camps are only implied but never directly engaged. Based on this view, Adorno in turn proposes something like a new negative "aesthetic" which would disclose to its audience art's own inability or failure to reveal that horror. This is what defines Adorno's view on late modernist art, namely the fact that experience can no longer be represented or transmitted meaningfully since "there is no sensible or meaningful place from which to speak" (Holt, 2004: 268). After the historical catastrophe of Auschwitz, Adorno argues, the only approach is by way of negative presentation.

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno thus pays close attention to what he argues is a historical shift in the *meaning* of artworks, by claiming that, "given [our] historical experience", it is no longer possible for art to "ascribe any positive meaning to existence" as such (1997: 200). Meaning as a metaphysical truth has, in other words, lost its grounding, and for this reason, referring specifically to the catastrophe of Auschwitz, Adorno expresses his belief that the latter reveals culture's failure. Thus, Adorno claims, "chaos [is] the ever lurking precondition of

art” today (ibid.). Considering this, Beckett’s *Endgame* becomes for Adorno that work which, along with Kafka, most effectively embodies art’s *negative* vocation. In doing so, it puts meaning on trial and exemplifies the necessary failure of modern art in general to actually mean something in positive terms: “The interpretation of *Endgame* therefore cannot chase the chimera of expressing its meaning with the help of philosophical mediation. Understanding it can mean nothing other than *understanding its incomprehensibility*, or concretely reconstructing its meaning structure – that it has none” (Adorno, 1982: 120; emphasis added). Acknowledging that this “meaninglessness [...] has developed historically” (Adorno, 1997: 201), Adorno insists that “after the Second War, everything is destroyed, even resurrected culture, without knowing it” (Adorno, 1982: 122). Any positive meaning accorded to existence has been annihilated. What is manifest after the Second World War is thus the absurdity of all culture itself. This, Adorno argues, is what Beckett’s play represents, but in an essentially negative form. In Lambert Zuidervaart’s words:

If its dramatic structure and language remained meaningful in a traditional manner, the play [*Endgame*] could not express the absence of meaning. If the play did not cohere, nothing significant would be expressed. Beckett achieves aesthetic meaning while expressing metaphysical absurdity, and he does so by rigorously negating the traditional forms of dramatic meaning [...]. Metaphysical meaninglessness becomes the meaning of *Endgame* because its aesthetic meaninglessness acquires meaning as a determinate negation of the dramatic forms that used to *affirm* metaphysical meaning.

(1991: 155)

Thus, what Adorno claims is not that Beckett’s work is meaningless in the straightforward semantic sense of the word; rather, he stresses that what Beckett manages to do so effectively is to *negate* any positive meaning that might be given to existence, in light of its (historical) impossibility, by a kind of evacuation of dramatic form. Indeed, in order to emphasize that “not meaning anything becomes the only meaning” (Adorno, 1982: 137), Adorno identifies in *Endgame* what he refers to as “the mortal fear of the dramatic figures [...] that they could mean something or other” (ibid., p.137-138):

HAMM: We're not beginning to...to...mean something?

CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (*Brief laugh.*) Ah that's a good one!

(Beckett, 2009b: 40)

Part of what Adorno aims to show is that *Endgame's* meaninglessness is also applied to the identity of its characters. In fact, according to Adorno, "the catastrophes that inspire *Endgame*, notably the fact of Auschwitz which Beckett never calls by name [...] have shattered or disintegrated the conception of the individual" (cited in Critchley, 1997: 148). As such, identity becomes merely "the identity of annihilation" in *Endgame* (Adorno, 1982: 128). This is best shown by Hamm who, representing the creator, is the one who considers it his duty to exterminate anything from which humanity could start all over again. Here, in Adorno's words: "Subjectivity itself is at fault; the fact that one exists at all" (Adorno, 1991: 271-2).

Commenting on the "staggered, amputated dialogue" (Holt, 2004: 268) to be found throughout *Endgame*, Adorno notes that Beckett's struggle with language, his violation of syntax and grammar, becomes the means through which a tremendous disaster is conveyed, while filling the play with constant silences depicts the limits of language in the face of such a catastrophe: "the violence of the unspeakable is mimicked by the timidity to mention it" (1982: 123). Adorno's defence of the fact that "the name of disaster can only be spoken silently" (ibid., p.126) is illustrated, for example, when Hamm asks Clov whether he has not had enough of "this...this...thing" (Beckett, 2009b: 11). And, indeed, the characters' "timidity to mention" the disaster is manifested from the very beginning of the play: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished", Clov exclaims (ibid., p.8). What is finished or what *must* be nearly finished, however, is not defined.

Generally speaking, then, it could be claimed that the focus of Adorno's reading of *Endgame* can be found in the following statement: the calamity of *Endgame* has "mutilated [Beckett's figures] to such an extent that they cannot react differently – flies that twitch after the swatter has smashed them" (Adorno,

1982: 128). In the midst of such “a permanent catastrophe”, the condition of the characters is tragic to the extent that they are left without a choice; they are still alive – like the flies in his simile – even though everything around them is “Zero” and despite the fact that they know that nothing will ever sprout again (something which, in fact, they *need* to know) (Beckett, 2009b: 11).

Adorno’s reading of Beckett’s play is placed in a strictly historical context, yet his arguments regarding the negativity of the play remain relevant to the argument of this chapter regarding the role of impotence in the work of Beckett. As shown above, Adorno sees the characters of *Endgame* as helpless while having no choice but to continue living in the bleak world of the play, which, one could argue, is a form of impotence: “the persons, no longer persons, become instruments, of their situation” (1982: 145). Such an argument, however, perhaps underestimates those instances which address issues of agency on the part of the characters – an idea which will be elaborated and clarified in what follows. Furthermore, since Adorno views subjective dissociation as an exemplary site of a negative reading of the play, it can be argued that he, in turn, does not acknowledge the possibilities that such an impotence (partly manifested in instances of seeming dissociation) opens up. Rather, in his words,

None of them still has a properly functioning body; the old people consist only of rumps, having apparently lost their legs not in the catastrophe but in a private tandem accident in the Ardennes, ‘on the road to Sedan’, an area where one army regularly annihilates another. [...] Even the memory of their own particular [...] misfortune becomes enviable in relation to the indeterminacy [...] of universal misfortune – they laugh at it.

(p.142)

Despite this, in general terms, Adorno’s interpretation of *Endgame* as a fundamentally “negative” work is not unusual. Based on the play’s title, a term taken from the vocabulary of chess, many critics have argued, understandably, that *Endgame* represents some tragic end of humanity, where despair is depicted in the infinite cyclical repetitions which render the play static. It is important to point out, however, the difference between Adorno’s and other critics’ “negative” readings of the play in this respect. Arguing that *Endgame* is a play of

stasis, a considerable amount of Beckett criticism has claimed that what Beckett aims to represent in it is a “pessimistic” vision of the end of humanity and, as a consequence, the tragedy which marks the lives of his impotent and disintegrating characters. For example, considering the plot of *Endgame* as “nakedly built on cruelty, suffering and death”, Ruby Cohn, in her analysis of the play, focuses on the pessimism that prevails in the latter and on the “games [that] are at an end” (1969: 40-1). Likewise, Jane Alison Hale depicts the numerous repetitions manifest throughout the play and, most importantly, the absurdity of the characters’ predicaments as suggested by the fact that “nothing and nobody can actually be said ever to get anywhere, except perhaps a bit closer to an end whose very existence is uncertain” (1992: 72).

On the other hand, when Adorno claims that his approach to *Endgame* is a negative one, he does not mean to read the latter merely in a pessimistic light. Rather, his central argument is that Beckett’s play is exemplary in presenting its features negatively, that is, not positively or directly, as shown, for example, in his reference to the “meaninglessness” that he reads as its meaning. Adorno does not argue that meaning as such is missing from the play, but rather that, insofar as “meaning” can (now) only be negatively presented, meaninglessness becomes the very meaning of the play itself.

The significance Adorno locates in the tragic knowledge of the negative that *Endgame* presents lies, then, in the fact that, despite the circumstances of the characters themselves in *Endgame*, hope is not, as such, completely abandoned by the play itself. Rather, in line with a rigorously anti-utopian philosophy of negative presentation, elaborated in *Minima Moralia* as elsewhere, Adorno argues that hope cannot be positively presented in so far as this would itself become a form of mere consolation. The aim of art should be to face up to the real historical catastrophe and the absurdity it engenders, and for this reason hope must be *refused* and presented negatively so as to keep alive a hope for something other which cannot itself be presented. As he notoriously puts it in the final pages of *Minima Moralia*: “The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption” (Adorno, 2005: 247).

In line with Adorno's interpretation of *Endgame*, a correspondence between the historical catastrophe of the Second World War, and of the Holocaust in particular, and what Beckett actually presents onstage may certainly be strongly suggested. At the same time, however, Adorno's remorselessly negative reading of *Endgame* fails to acknowledge, I want to suggest, some other equally significant features which exist within the play as well. For, even though Beckett presents a banal condition which is full of repetitions, as well as a seeming despair since everything is at a "zero-point", he also, I will suggest, emphasizes a consistent ambivalence in the very quality of existence that the play represents: that is, the fact that even in a place where "There's no more nature" (Beckett, 2009b: 18), and in which the characters may express their wish only for the final end to come, still, at the same time, they "hesitate to...to end" (ibid., p.9). In these terms, arguably, the characters' hesitation must not be taken as a complete absence of choice, as Adorno's reading suggests, with its image of flies "mutilated to such an extent that they cannot react differently". Instead, this hesitation plays a more complex role in the play insofar as it can also imply the characters' possible acceptance of their condition as well as their intrinsic fear of, ending. As this opens up a field of possibility *immanent to* the impotence experienced by the characters, it is worth briefly exploring the potential for a more "affirmative" reading of the play in this respect a little further.

First of all, with regard to the question of how we are to understand the temporality of stasis and repetition that characterizes *Endgame*, it is worth noting that on closer inspection it actually becomes clear that the play in fact consistently addresses issues of change, as shown, for example, by the characters' bodies which, though confined and maimed, are constantly engaged with movement. Every time Hamm asks "What's happening?" Clov replies that "something is taking its course" (Beckett, 2009b: 40). In this manner, the play contains within itself an element of constant change, or in Clov's words, the *inevitable* heap. An allusion to the Sorites paradox, traditionally attributed to the ancient logician Eubulides of Miletus, is suggested here, according to which a heap lacks sharp boundaries since adding or taking away one grain does not turn

some grains into a heap, even though it is certain that at some point there will be one. As the following utterance puts it:

CLOV: Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand, that either. I ask the words that remain – sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say.

(Beckett, 2009b: 89)

Of course, although Beckett presents some changes, which may be tiny but are nevertheless there, and which take place in *Endgame* with regard to the characters' bodies for example, a parody of any notion of change itself is also manifest at some points in the play, in a way that tends to give credence to Adorno's interpretation. For instance, when Clov says "Things are livening up" (*ibid.*, p.36) it is clear that he himself parodies his own statement:

CLOV: Things are livening up. [...]
Well? Don't we laugh?
HAMM: [*after reflection*] I don't.
CLOV: [*after reflection*] Nor I.
[*He gets up on a ladder, turns the telescope on the without.*]
Let's see.
[*He looks, moving the telescope.*]
Zero ...
[*he looks*]
... zero ...
[*he looks*]
... and zero.

(pp.36-37)

Passages such as this also clearly underlie readings of the play that place particular stress on the different kinds of endings that are depicted in the play. Ruby Cohn, for example, states: "In *Endgame*, [...] games are at an end, and nobody feels like playing. *Yet the show goes on*" (1969: 40; emphasis added). In particular, from the very first line of the play, and over its entire course, the characters' utterances allude to the end of time, of bicycle-wheels, of pap, of nature, of sugar-plums, of pain-killers, of coffins, of light, of weather, of God, of motion, of the earth and sea. However, all these allusions to the end which have

been interpreted as Beckett's representation of the end of humanity *tout court* are constantly contradicted, or at least rendered questionable, by the characters themselves. For instance, Hamm's remark "Nature has forgotten us" (Beckett, 2009b: 18) is followed by the exchange:

CLOV: There's no more nature.

HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate.

CLOV: In the vicinity.

HAMM: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!

CLOV: Then she hasn't forgotten us.

(ibid.)

Even though Hamm knows that nothing stirs outside their room, still he expresses his disbelief concerning the inexistence of nature by claiming that Clov exaggerates. On the one hand, Hamm is certain that everything is "corpsed", yet, on the other, he clearly expresses his unwillingness to accept it. Moreover, after Clov states that there is no more nature "in the vicinity", Hamm again challenges Clov's statement by referring to the fact that their bodies, bloom and ideals are in constant decline and not static. Again, the irony and humour are manifest, as shown especially in Clov's next response: "Then she hasn't forgotten us" (ibid.). Whereas at the beginning Clov firmly remarked that "there's no more nature", as soon as Hamm challenges this statement, he immediately adjusts to what Hamm says without second thought.

Considering these instances, it is clear, then, that Beckett does not present the different endings that are referred to throughout the play as either certain or unavoidable, as might be supposed. Rather, precisely at the point where the characters seem to be most certain about these endings, Beckett problematizes the certainty and inevitability of any end as such. Take for example the moment in the play when Clov describes the world outside the room and deploys such words and phrases as "Zero" (p.37), "Corpsed" (ibid.), "The light is sunk" (p.38), "All gone" (ibid.) and "GRREY!" (p.39). At this point, Beckett presents the existence of a flea which the characters define as something which "humanity could start from [...] all over again" (p.41). In this way, the end of humanity which

is apparently presented as certain and inevitable in Clov's initial description is again rendered uncertain. This is further reinforced when Clov attempts to kill the flea in order to avert humanity from starting again; in fact, when asked if he did manage to kill it, Clov replies with uncertainty "Looks like it" (p.42).

Even more clearly toward the end of the play Hamm requests Clov to "let it end!", which suggests that Clov might not "let" it do so (p.86). This time the end is challenged not by the existence of a flea, but by a human being, a small boy whom Clov identifies as "a potential procreator" (p.87). Importantly, Clov is not requested to bring the gaff so as to kill the boy, whilst Hamm himself states that "If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here" (ibid.). At this point Hamm assumes the boy's death as he lets him live in a world which has been described as deadly to us; nevertheless, it could also be argued that the deadliness of the world outside the room is itself challenged by the very existence of the boy. Throughout the play, Hamm and Clov are presented as certain about the fact that "nothing stirs" outside, yet at the end of the play another human being is presented as possibly being alive out there. In this sense, what exists outside the room may not be quite what Hamm and Clov present to us as an audience (reliant upon their "unreliable" narration), questioning, in turn, Hamm's apparent certainty about the small boy's inevitable death itself.

Of course, the existence of the boy can hardly be taken for granted. Yet, if the boy does not exist and is only something that Clov makes up, then the existence of *everything* that Clov sees outside the room is rendered questionable. If, on the other hand, the existence of the boy is considered true, then, it challenges the certainty of the end, while, at the same time, raising the question as to whether actually there is life outside *Endgame's* room (and, as such, that the characters may have restricted themselves to their situation unnecessarily). Considering these alternatives, in my view, it is a little more convincing that the existence of the boy is to be taken as true on the basis of Clov's observation; certainly, this would seem to be the case if we are to follow Beckett's insistence that the content of the play should not be doubted but rather taken "as stated" (Harmon, 1998: 24). Indeed, doubting Clov's statement about the existence of the boy means effectively doubting each and every statement uttered by Clov,

which, in turn, suggests that the world outside the room of *Endgame* could be completely different from what the characters (or, at least, Hamm) imagine.

More significantly, as far as the significance of the play's depiction of states of impotence is concerned, the characters' own lives in *Endgame* are also presented in relation to their end. Indeed, against Adorno's image of the characters as "flies that twitch after the swatter has smashed them", "mutilated to such an extent that they cannot react differently" (Adorno, 1982: 128), there are several points in the play where the potential end of the characters' lives is presented as something that the characters themselves might actually have some kind of control over. Hamm, for example, expresses his wish to end his life in the following exchange:

HAMM: Why don't you finish us?

[*Pause.*]

I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me.

CLOV: I couldn't finish you.

HAMM: Then you won't finish me.

(Beckett, 2009b: 45)

Clov's response, "I couldn't finish you", has a clear double meaning. It suggests Clov's literal, physical inability to finish Hamm, his impotence, but also implies that it may be unethical for Clov to do so. Most importantly, however, while Hamm may wish to end his life, as soon as Clov replies that he cannot finish him, Hamm does not insist, something which might imply either a certain fatalism, as regards his own impotence, or Hamm's own hesitation. In fact, something like this is also indicated early on in the play:

HAMM: Enough, it's time it ended, in the shelter too.

[*Pause.*]

And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to...to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to –

[*he yawns*]

– to end.

(p.9)

Further on in the play, Hamm is presented as dreaming of the end as follows: “if I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with” (p.78). It is clear that for Hamm the precondition for the end is immobility and stillness as well as silence. Nevertheless, significantly, these are portrayed as themselves ultimately impossible in the play. Earlier, Clov states: “I love order. It’s my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its place, under the last dust” (p.66). Similarly to Hamm, Clov considers stillness and silence to be the prerequisites for the end, which only remain, however, a mere wish or dream since, as will be discussed at greater length in the ‘Comings and Goings’ section below, the characters cannot be still or silent because this would mean their death.

It is against the backdrop of Adorno’s “negative” interpretation of *Endgame* that my close analyses of issues such as impotence, memory, dissociation and the significance of talk in *Endgame*, as well as *Krapp’s Last Tape*, will fill out a range of emphases that differ from Adorno’s reading.

Impotence and the couple in *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*

In a letter dated January 5, 1958, Alan Schneider asked Beckett à propos *Endgame*: “Why are the faces of Hamm and Clov ‘very red’ and Nell and Nagg ‘very white’? (Has this to do with age, energy, ‘blood-pressure’?)” (Harmon, 1998: 27). He responded:

Faces red and white [...] because the author saw them that way. Don’t seek deep motivation everywhere. If there is one here I’m unaware of it. Actually illogical that H and C, living in confinement, should have red faces. Scenically *it serves to stress the couples and keep them apart*.

(ibid., p.29; emphasis added)

As indicated in his correspondence, and as will be further illustrated below, Beckett paid close attention to the visual distinction of the two couples in the play. Indeed, the theatrical use of the couple, as will be shown, is one of the most significant formal aspects of both *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Endgame* as dramas,

which enabled Beckett to address issues regarding the relationship between body and mind.

The couples in *Endgame* are Hamm and Clov, and Nagg and Nell. The latter exemplify one obvious way in which Beckett treats the body as impotent in *Endgame*. The references to their disintegrating bodies are constant; their sight has failed, Nagg has lost his tooth, whilst Nell admits that she is “perished” (ibid., p.23). Furthermore, from the first exchange of words between Nagg and Nell, the audience is presented with the two characters’ bodily confinement which also deprives them of their ability to express their love:

NAGG: Kiss me.

NELL: We can’t.

NAGG: Try.

[*Their heads stain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.*]

(ibid., p.21)

More than Nagg and Nell, however, it is Hamm and Clov’s relationship as constituted through their respective (and, in some sense, opposed) states of impotence that is brought to the fore from the very beginning of the play. Hamm sits “*in an armchair on castors*” and cannot walk, whereas Clov is the only character who can move in the play and who, specifically, cannot sit (Beckett, 2009b: 7). Hamm is blind, whereas Clov is not. Precisely because of such representation, Hamm and Clov have been often approached as two aspects of one self which Beckett presents as dissociated; an idea that has also been claimed about other works of Beckett in which the figure of the couple is employed.

What Hamm cannot do on his own is accomplished by Clov. Being blind, Hamm constantly asks Clov about the condition of things he himself cannot see:

HAMM: And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?

CLOV: [*lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, exasperated*] What in God’s name could there be on the horizon? [...]

HAMM: The waves, how are the waves?

CLOV: The waves? [*He turns the telescope on the waves.*] Lead.

(Beckett, 2009b: 38-9)

Moreover, Clov is persistently requested to provide Hamm with information about his physical condition:

HAMM: How are your eyes?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: How are your legs?

CLOV: Bad.

(ibid., p.14)

Beckett emphasizes, then, from the very beginning the impotence of his characters. He does not, however, approach and present such impotence as a mere absence of potency or power. For this reason, although we see the characters in both plays as being deficient either in sight or motility, for example, they are never depicted as completely passive or inert. On the contrary, Beckett exploits the effect that the dramatic use of the couple can have in this respect (something also shown, as we will see, in for example Krapp's active role in the selection of the memories he wants to listen to). It is worth noting, in this regard, the persistence in "going on" displayed, for instance, by Nagg and Nell who, despite their physical predicament and impotence, still feel the need to express their love to each other verbally. There is of course irony here; considering Nagg and Nell's predicament, what one might least expect would be this need to express their love. Nonetheless, a persistence is emphasized still in Nell's utterance after her failure to kiss Nagg, "Why this farce, day after day?" (ibid.), which implies that they attempt to kiss each other every day, despite knowing that they are unable to do so.

In the case of the more "active" Hamm and Clov, by presenting two characters who supplement each other in such an evident way, Beckett brings to the fore the degree to which the body may affirm itself *in* its impotence through its interaction with the other:

HAMM: I feel a little too far to the left.

[*Clov moves chair slightly.*]

HAMM: Now I feel a little too far to the right.

[*Clov moves chair slightly.*]

HAMM: I feel a little too far forward.

[*Clov moves chair slightly.*]
HAMM: Now I feel a little too far back.
[*Clov moves chair slightly.*]

(ibid., p.35)

As illustrated here, Beckett stresses the insistence of Hamm's impotent body on being moved and, most importantly, the fact that he actually manages to do so, albeit with Clov's help. Of course, if we consider Hamm to be the representation of the mind (and approach the body as merely subordinated to it), as a number of critics including Adorno have argued, it is clear that here it is the mind which is trying to demonstrate its absolute control, as shown by Hamm's commands to be moved in a particular way. This, however, fails to acknowledge the reciprocity of the body and mind that is actually foregrounded both in the above instance and in the rest of the play; a point reflected in the fact that the body's requirements themselves, as shown by what Hamm feels, are in fact neither silenced nor appeased by the "mind".

Moreover, the complementary relationship between Hamm and Clov and their restricted physicality becomes itself the means for Beckett to bring the body to the fore. The evident contrast between Hamm's immobility and Clov's unceasing movements stresses each character's body; that is, Hamm's immobility intensifies dramatically Clov's every single gesture, whereas Clov's continuous moving around the stage highlights Hamm's, as well as Nagg and Nell's, inability to walk. Among other things, this highlights, I want to suggest, the fact that – in the context of drama especially – any form of bodily impotence is what actually makes us pay particular attention to the ineliminable presence of the body itself.

Clov's predicament is not very different from Hamm's, even though he is the only character who can move around the stage and the one upon whom the rest of the characters depend. In fact, his dialogue with Hamm clearly illustrates that his own impotence does not render him entirely passive:

HAMM: Wait!
[*Clov halts.*]
How are your eyes?
CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: But you can see.
CLOV: All I want.
HAMM: How are your legs?
CLOV: Bad.
HAMM: But you can walk.
CLOV: I come ... and go.

(ibid., p.43)

Likewise, though maimed, the motility of Nagg's and Nell's bodies is not completely restricted as they pop up and down every now and then in their ashbins. In this way, it is clear how Beckett engages with the activeness of the body in a world where (as Adorno stresses) paradoxically "Nothing stirs" (ibid., p.37). Most importantly, depriving his characters of their movement enables Beckett to examine and focus on other aspects of the body. Normand Berlin's testimony, with reference to the BAM production of *Endgame* in New York, is telling in this respect: "I had no idea a face could be so rubbery, as if the mime, deprived of body movement, learned how to move his face and only his face to express anger, grief, hunger, annoyance, forgetfulness, boredom, indifference, love" (2009: 408). It is indeed extraordinary how Beckett manages not only to mutilate his characters' bodies, but also, at the same time, to present their remaining parts so effectively that their dynamism and energy are not by any means subordinated but rather foregrounded.

Enoch Brater's argument that in Beckett's dramaturgy "the figures [...] are more often than not subjected to a highly abbreviated form of physicality, one that demands the *doing* of more and more with less and less" sheds further light on the characters' predicaments in *Endgame* (2010: 346). This form of abbreviated physicality is manifested in Hamm's blindness and the fact that he is wheelchair-bound, in Nagg and Nell's confinement to their ashbins and in the fact that Clov, the only character who is not deprived of his ability to walk, is again restricted by being unable to sit. Despite the deprivation and restriction of the three characters' motility, however, movement remains a fundamental characteristic of *Endgame*. Thus, apart from seeing through Clov's eyes, the wheelchair-bound Hamm insists upon being moved around the room with Clov's

help, an image which underlines the body's constant engagement in action in spite of its impotence and confinement.

As Adorno rightly notes, in a tellingly "prosthetic" image, Clov, in this respect, "is also the glove with which the master touches the world of things, which he can no longer directly grasp" (1982: 144). In other words, Clov becomes the means through which Hamm can experience the outer reality that impotence otherwise denies to him:

HAMM: Take me for a little turn.
[*Clov goes behind the chair and pushes it forward.*]
Not too fast!
[*Clov pushes chair.*]
Right round the world!
[*Clov pushes chair.*]
Hug the walls, then back to the center again.
[*Clov pushes chair.*]

(Beckett, 2009b: 33)

More generally, the couple's evident interdependency is marked in a number of exchanges throughout the play:

HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.
CLOV: Then we'll die.

(*ibid.*, p.12),

HAMM: Gone from me you'd be dead.
CLOV: And vice versa.

(*ibid.*, p.79)

In this way, it can be argued that similarly to the tape-recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape*, which, as we will see, supplements Krapp and his deficient memory by enabling him to remember past events, Clov, a human rather than a strictly technical prosthesis, complements Hamm and his bodily deficiencies in sight, mobility and touch. Furthermore, it is as such that Beckett manages not to separate Hamm (mental consciousness) and Clov (physical reality) as if they were distinct and independent of each other (as in the broadly Cartesian reading), but

precisely to foreground their interdependence and mutual inextricability or co-constitution. Indeed, Hamm is not the only one in need; Clov also depends on Hamm for sustenance since, as we know, the latter is the only one who knows the combination to the larder.

To turn now to *Krapp's Last Tape*, written in the year following *Endgame*, while, by contrast to the latter, this play apparently presents only one character onstage, the couple is, in fact, I will argue, also one of its central features, manifested by the use of the tape-recorder on which Krapp's "memory" is stored. From the beginning of the play and over its entire course, we are actually presented with two selves; the physical Krapp onstage and the recorded Krapp on tape, a couple whose relationship is established due to the impotence apparent in Krapp's (in)capacity to engage with "his" past memories. Before proceeding to examine the way Beckett depicts the couple in this play, however, I consider how the physical Krapp who is actually embodied on stage is presented.

Krapp is one of Beckett's characters whose body is not evidently presented as maimed or mutilated in any way (in contrast to the rather "extreme" fragmentation of the characters' bodies in later plays such as *Play* (1964), *Not I* (1973) and *That Time* (1976), as we will see in Chapter 2), yet who appears to be marked by impotence nonetheless. From the very beginning of the play, Beckett stresses Krapp's bodily deficiencies: "*Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing*" (Beckett, 2009c: 3). Considering these stage directions, it can be argued that Beckett both problematizes and at the same time foregrounds the body from the outset; on the one hand, he presents Krapp's body as deficient in sight and hearing, but, on the other hand, insists that his protagonist must remain "*unspectacled*" (ibid.). Providing Krapp with spectacles, as a form of prosthesis, would be a solution to Krapp's deficiency in sight. By contrast, Beckett's insistence on leaving Krapp without glasses suggests an intention to foreground the impotence of Krapp's body as well as to explore the possibilities of the body itself despite – or, indeed, more significantly, *within* – this impotence. Equally, such impotence is manifested in the pivotal fact that Krapp cannot remember his past without using the tape-recorder as well as in the fact that the entire play is

based on the act of listening even though the protagonist is supposedly “*hard of hearing*” (ibid.).

In his description of the development of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett's biographer James Knowlson relates that when Beckett himself directed his play in the 1969 Schiller Theatre Werkstatt production he included “several pieces of additional action that established the image of Krapp as a weak, tired, failing old man” (1976: 53). Beckett's close attention to the body's weakness and impotence is apparent in Knowlson's recollection; nevertheless, much of his emphasis seems to be on the degree to which the body remains active in its own impotence. Thus, Krapp is near-sighted and hard of hearing, yet, throughout the entire play, as if by inversion, we are presented with the protagonist's attempts to browse and read his ledger so as to find the correct tape to listen to, and finally with Krapp listening to his younger recorded voice narrating past events. Beckett's minute attention to Krapp's body is illustrated in his detailed examination of Krapp's body parts, facial expressions, movements, and gestures. As Ulrika Maude observes, *Krapp's Last Tape* is a play full of “the noises of the body itself: Krapp's breath, panting slightly ... his shivers, the sounds of mastication [...] his sighs of satisfaction or coughing when he drinks; the sounds of Krapp moving on the stage” (2009: 17).

The relationship that Beckett builds between Krapp and his recorded self on the tape-recorder is itself one of tension in so far as Beckett emphasizes Krapp's confrontation with his past self and his attempt to actually control this confrontation. For this reason, we are constantly presented with Krapp's active, but also rather compulsive, role in the selection of his memories: “*settling himself more comfortably [...] knock[ing] one of the boxes off the table, curs[ing], switch[ing] off, sweep[ing] boxes and ledger violently to the ground, wind[ing] tape back to beginning, switch[ing] on*” (Beckett, 2009c: 5); “*switch[ing] off, wind[ing] back tape a little, bend[ing] ear closer to machine, switch[ing] on*” (p.7); and later on we are presented with a Krapp “*suddenly bend[ing] over machine, switch[ing] off, wrench[ing] off tape, throw[ing] it away, put[ting] on the other, wind[ing] it forward to the passage he wants, switch[ing] on [and] listen[ing] staring front*” (p.11).

These stage directions make clear that Krapp has the authority to select, interrupt and listen to specific memories more than once. It is thus worth remarking that the relationship between Krapp and the tape-recorder, as well as Krapp's manipulation of it, constitute those parts of the play which enable Beckett to exploit directly the technical opportunities that the tapes offer him, and to make sound one of the central themes of the play. In fact, Beckett was so interested in the use of the tape-recorder, and especially its sound, that throughout the development of the work, as S. E. Gontarski observes, he "amplified [...] Krapp's conflict" by adding more interruptions in the play (1976: 3). Indeed, in one of his letters to Alan Schneider Beckett stated: "when writing the piece if I had been more familiar with tape recorders I might have had Krapp wind back and forward *without switching off for the sake of the extraordinary sound that can be had apparently in this way*" (Harmon, 1998: 59; emphasis added).

Notwithstanding Beckett's fascination with the technical opportunities the tape-recorder offered, it can equally be argued that Krapp's ability to select which memories to listen to enables Beckett to indicate the significant role and effect of the body in the experience of the past in more general terms. This has been suggested by, for example, Andrew Kennedy who notes, in an essay on Krapp's "dialogues of selves", that Krapp "is free to shape or reshape these fragments of unpublished autobiography, selecting or adding to whatever he chooses. As mechanical aids to solitude, the tapes can be edited and replayed at random or according to the emotional needs of the moment" (1986: 104). From the very beginning of the play, Krapp is thus presented as able to interfere with that memory which has survived on the tape-recorder according to his needs. Hence, he initially chooses the particular "*entry he wants*" (Beckett, 2009c: 4), whilst as soon as he listens to his recorded voice he winds the tape back and forward so as to avoid listening to specific "haunting" parts of the narrated memory or to listen to specific parts of it more than once. Yet, at the same time, Krapp's twofold reaction to his past memories creates a tension between himself and the tape-recorder as manifested in the fact that even though Krapp attempts to control the

tapes he listens to, the latter are never completely controllable. He finds himself unable, in other words, to remain unaffected by them.

Beckett's interest in the relationship, rather than simple separation, between body and mind is then evident in both plays. Published one year before *Krapp's Last Tape*, in 1957, *Endgame* explores and deals with a kind of prosthetic supplementation of one (restricted or disabled) body mainly through the body of another character, Clov. (Clov's body, it is worth recalling, is itself partly dependent, at the same time, on the use of the telescope and the ladder, two forms of non-human prostheses, in order to see outside the window, just as Hamm is dependent on his wheelchair and gaff.) At the same time, it could be claimed that the master-slave relationship between Hamm and Clov that (with an allusion to Hegel) Adorno comments on functions as another dialectical relationship that takes the form of a prosthetic supplementation in itself, since it is the means through which Beckett shows that Hamm's wish to do something cannot be performed by himself but *must* be carried out by Clov.

In *Krapp's Last Tape* Beckett again deploys an image of prosthesis, though differently (and, in a way, more literally) this time. The extension of Krapp's memory is accomplished with the use of an actual technical object, the tape-recorder. In this way, although the notion of prosthesis is approached differently in each play, the concept helps register a similarity between the plays: how, through the different prosthetic supplements attached either to the body or mind, their co-constitution, each the prosthesis of the other, becomes dramatically manifest.

As I indicated earlier, Beckett's use of the figure of the couple can, in this sense, be productively read in relation to the Derridean notion of the supplement, so helping to illuminate the mutual reciprocity of the body and mind as depicted in both plays. However, in order to get a clearer sense of what Derrida means by the supplement, it is necessary to look more closely, first, at his deconstructive approach to questions of identity in more general terms. Famously, Derrida himself observed the degree to which he had avoided responding to or commenting directly on Beckett's work as he found its "complete" translation or reading an impossible task because, according to him,

Beckett's writings are themselves aporetic. Yet, reading Beckett's use of the couple in light of Derrida's theory of the supplement may shed some new light on a few of its most important features.¹

Generally, as is well known, deconstruction focuses on the network of binary oppositions and hierarchies that characterize the Western philosophical tradition with the aim to examine, expose and, finally, subvert them. Specifically, Derrida pays particular attention to what he terms the fundamental "logocentrism" that characterizes philosophy, and with his famous account of the speech/writing opposition, seeks to challenge what he describes, following Heidegger, as the "metaphysics of presence" that underpins it. As Robert J. Shepherd puts it, Derrida's "purpose is not to escape the organizing logic of logocentrism; it is to resist the binary, in the sense of problematizing it – in the way that a picture frame or a car window problematizes simple definitions of inside/outside" (2007: 236).

Referring to the speech/writing opposition that the Western philosophical tradition maintains, Derrida examines how philosophy, up to the present, has valorized speech in contrast to writing which has thus been considered as a mere exteriority. Reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work in the 1967 *Of Grammatology*, Derrida shows that speech has always been taken to be the heart of communication as well as a direct representation of thought, whereas writing has been taken to be a mere representation of speech and, thus, a sign of a sign: "The epoch of the logos thus debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning" (Derrida, 1967: 12-13).

Yet, Derrida shows, not only is speech always marked by those structures assigned to writing – secondarity, systematized differentiation, inessential supplementarity – but also writing is, in fact, what speech precisely depends on to make any sense (and even in order to characterize its privilege). Here, it is

¹ Specifically, in one of his interviews Derrida said with reference to Beckett: "This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; but also too close. Precisely because of this proximity, it is too hard for me, too easy and too hard. I have perhaps avoided him a bit because of this identification" (cited in Attridge, 1992). For a more detailed examination of the reason Derrida avoided responding to Beckett, see Andrea Oppo's recent work *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (2008). Bern: Peter Lang.

important to note that by “writing” Derrida does not only refer to the narrow sense of the word, that is, written words on a paper, but also to a broader sense of it which he defines as “arche-writing”. In the preface of *Of Grammatology*, “arche-writing” is defined as the “presence of the trace and trace of the presence” (ibid., p.lxix), as that which constitutes the condition of (im)possibility of *all* presence or identity as such, insofar as no element and no identity can be understood by *only* referring to itself, but only through its relation to that which is other to it (the “trace” of which is thus always essential to its “presence”). As Derrida argues, “the thing itself always escapes” (ibid.). Thus, through his famous analysis of the speech/writing opposition, Derrida shows that writing may, in a very specific sense, be said to be “prior” to speech; something which is apparent, in Newton Garver’s words, in the fact that “significance lies only with arrangement of elements, never with elements themselves. Strings of letters, for example, have meaning or lack meaning while the letters are not even eligible; sentences make sense or nonsense, which separate words cannot do” (1977: 670).

Hence, aiming to question further this binary opposition of speech/writing (and, more generally, other kinds of oppositions such as, for example, presence/absence, signifier/signified, and inside/outside), Derrida writes: “The exteriority of the signifier is the exteriority of writing in general, and I shall try to show [...] there is no linguistic sign before writing. Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign falls into decay” (Derrida, 1967: 14).

In fact, through his challenge to the speech/writing opposition and the problematizing of any kind of binary hierarchy, Derrida makes a more general argument regarding *all* forms of identities: that is, that every identity (and not only those that appear in language) needs supplementarity in order to “be” at all. Thus, while Richard Begam, for example, writing in an essay on Beckett, is correct to say that the fact that writing is always “prior” to speech “makes sense”, for Derrida, precisely insofar as there is no “speech”, no “originary voice” in which Truth, Nature, or Consciousness “speak to us” before they have been contaminated with the contingency of language, his subsequent assertion that all “forms of knowledge” are therefore “always *culturally* mediated, which is to say

available to us as forms of ‘writing’ rather than forms of ‘speech’”, risks missing the far more general claim about the relational form of *all* identity or presence in Derrida’s work (2002: 16-7; see Cunningham (2015)).

Specifically, referring to the idea of the supplement, which is normally taken to be a mere addition to something otherwise complete in itself, Derrida famously argues in *Of Grammatology* that, in fact, the supplement is not a prosthesis of minor importance that is simply added to an already existing identity (as shown in his account of “writing”, which has been taken to be a prosthetic supplement and a technics to the “natural” character of speech), but is rather always already a part of that identity itself. Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh’s account of Derrida’s example of the *pharmakos* is illuminating:

In ancient Greek culture there was a festival called the Thargelia, on the sixth day of which the Athenians purified the city. The ritual involved projecting the evil of society on to a scapegoat, who was then expelled from the city taking the evil with him: ‘The city’s body *proper* thus reconstitutes its unity, closes around the security of its inner courts ... by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression. That representative represents the otherness of evil that comes to affect or infect the inside by unpredictably breaking into it’. The city attempts to gather and enclose itself in the figure of a circle, banishing to the outside everything it is not. But, as Derrida notes, the *pharmakos* was always already inside the city walls, and played an important part in constituting its identity: ‘Yet the representative of the outside [*pharmakos*] is nonetheless *constituted*, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside. These parasites were as a matter of course domesticated by the living organism that housed them at its expense’.

(2007: 24-5)

What this example makes clear is that, according to Derrida, there can be no absolute distinction between inside and outside (or, for that matter, mind and body, or one part of a couple and its others); a supplement is not merely something exterior, but always already a part of the identity of what it supplements. To anticipate my argument below, it is then such a complex (and always *essentially* incomplete) distinction between inside and outside that, I am suggesting, can also be found in Beckett’s *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*, where each “part” of the couple in each one of the plays is by no means completely independent from the other, or reducible to it, but rather always already a part

of the other's identity as other and, most importantly, constituted in the very heart of the other itself.

Derrida's theory of the supplement has been extended in the early work of Bernard Stiegler (1994). Specifically, in his three-volume work *Technics and Time*, Stiegler is particularly preoccupied with the importance of technics to human life. Influenced by Derrida's theories of supplementarity, as focused on the philosophical conception of "writing" (as a specific "technology" itself), Stiegler pursues the latter in relation to technology *per se*, in order to make the argument that the human can, on this basis, be understood as itself always already prosthetic. As he puts it in the first volume of his work *The Fault of Epimetheus*: "Do we not see, in this original human, that 'human nature' consists only in its technicity, in its denaturalization?" (p.148).

One important consequence of Stiegler's argument in this regard is that the reliance of the human on tools and machines in order to survive is exemplified with particular force when it comes to questions of memory. Specifically, Stiegler examines the issue of technics in line with the question of time because, he argues, "technics, far from being merely in time, properly *constitutes time*" (p.27; emphasis added). Technics, on which people depend, is said to create time in so far as it is precisely what provides the human with the possibility both of transmitting memories from generation to generation and of anticipating the future. As Sean Gaston puts it, "[w]ithout technics there can be no memory, no heritage, no adoption, no invention. Technics give us time" (2003: 151). To the extent that the human *must* constantly employ technical objects in order to live, so these objects will pass from one generation to the next, giving the opportunity to individuals of future generations to access the past they have not lived.

In this sense, for Stiegler the technical is not to be understood as a mere question of the machine in its narrower sense, as that which assists an existing human subject at a certain historical stage of development, but as rather what *invents* human life. Technics, Stiegler argues, should be considered as "originary". Aiming to show the importance of technics, throughout his work, Stiegler seeks to show how the human must constantly search for non-living organs in order to survive. All these prostheses that the human requires, Stiegler argues, are, then,

precisely the basis of a specifically *human* memory. Thus, for Stiegler, our need for exteriorization and prostheticity are directly related to the invention of memory precisely because “there is time only because memory is ‘artificial’, becoming constituted as already-there *since* [...] its ‘having been placed outside of the species’” (p. 172).

Towards the end of this first volume, Stiegler discusses Husserl’s distinction of primary and secondary retention (belonging to the act of perception and imagination respectively). To this, Stiegler responds with reference to *tertiary memory* which is manifested in the exteriorization of memory into technical objects and, most importantly, what constitutes primary and secondary memory. Referring explicitly to the example of the experience of a melody, Stiegler proceeds to show, once again, how a prosthetic tool such as the gramophone makes memory possible. To be more specific, he argues that it is precisely the gramophone record (an example of a tool) that makes possible both primary and secondary retention. In Ben Roberts’s words,

in the gramophone record, more generally *in the recorded temporal object*, it is not perception which makes possible memory and the artefact but the artefact that makes possible both primary and secondary retention: the record allows both the perception of the melody and, crucially, the constant modification of that perception through repeated auditions.

(2006: 58-9)

Taking into account Derrida’s and Stiegler’s arguments regarding the necessary prosthetization and supplementarity of all identities, as well as the centrality of memory specifically in Stiegler’s work, their link with the mind-body relation that this chapter – and the thesis more generally – examines becomes clearer. It is precisely in this light that the following close readings of *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* will approach such a relation. As will be shown in what follows, it is indeed something like this complex supplementarity that characterizes the depiction of reciprocity or interdependence in both *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*. The relation between the mind and body in both plays will be shown to be one of inextricability precisely because the mind itself (similarly to the body) always requires extension. At the same time, approaching this

relation in this manner questions any “humanist” readings of Beckett’s work as it undermines the power of a “sovereign” subject and rather emphasizes its necessary prosthetization.

To return to the plays themselves, whereas in *Endgame* such prosthetization is manifested by the supplementary relationship between Hamm and Clov, in *Krapp’s Last Tape* it is accorded a more literal “technological” form, as manifested, specifically, by the dictionary and the tape-recorder that Krapp needs in order to remember his past (and, thus, more obviously related to Stiegler’s technical prosthesis, as necessary to the individual and collective human capacity for memory). Most importantly, however, what both plays stress is that each supplement is not solely a prosthesis of minor significance that is added to an identity, but always already a part of that identity itself. To be more specific, the supplementary relationship between Hamm and Clov, which is dramatically enabled by their physical and mental impotence (since this demands supplementation), and in which each functions as a kind of prosthetic supplement to the other, is precisely what also makes the two characters “keep going”. Thus the general interdependence of the couple outlined above (particularly in relation to its reading as an allegory of the mind-body relation) can be more accurately understood as a supplementarity, as the inclusive/exclusive logic at stake in this is more precisely characterized in this way.

Reading Beckett’s use of the couple in light of the Derridean notion of the supplement and Stiegler’s “originary” prosthesis hence sheds light on the fact that these two couples should not by any means be considered as purely independent of each other or two entirely separable identities, even if it is the case that (as several critics from Cohn to Davies recognize) an apparent separation is indeed part of what may seem to be dramatized in the plays. If we perceive the Hamm-Clov and tape-recorder-Krapp relationships to be representations of the mind-body relation, then what Beckett seeks to highlight is, instead, that each one is already a part of the other, and indeed, moreover, that each enables the constitution of the other.

In line with this argument regarding prosthetic supplementation, the following section will then develop a reading of co-constitution that differs from Adorno's account of blind, negative dependency, the collapse of dominative subjectivity into blank givenness, or a second nature. At the same time, the two following sections will also demonstrate the crucial role that Beckett's representation of memory, specifically, plays in the deconstruction of the mind-body division.

Dissociation or co-constitution?

The opening of *Krapp's Last Tape* presents Krapp finding "box ... three ... spool ... five" (Beckett, 2009c: 4):

[He peers at ledger, reads entry at foot of page.] Mother at rest at last Hm The black ball *[He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.]* Black ball? ... *[He peers again at ledger, reads.]* The dark nurse *[He raises his head, broods, peers again at ledger, reads.]* Slight improvement in bowel condition Hm Memorable ... what? *[He peers closer.]* Equinox, memorable equinox. *[He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.]* Memorable equinox? ... *[Pause. He shrugs his shoulders, peers again at ledger, reads.]* Farewell to – *[he turns page]* – love.

(pp.4-5)

Beckett here interrogates how, as one critic puts it, a body is "thwarted by its own corporeal limitations" (Ben-Zvi, 2009: 26). This, however, does not work, I think, merely to downplay the importance of the body itself, as Ben-Zvi's words might imply. Instead, through this interrogation, Beckett emphasizes the role the body plays in such impotence itself. In this vein, Beckett's minute attention to the physical body is reflected, for example, in all the bodily sounds that he includes in *Krapp's Last Tape* "as if to ensure that physical embodiment is not to be easily dismissed" (ibid., p.13). This is not to say that Beckett does not continually remind his audience of the body's deficiencies (indeed, this is crucial to what I am suggesting here); throughout the play Krapp's difficulty in remembering his past is constantly reinforced. For this reason, the protagonist needs to look at his notes, but still finds himself to be "puzzled" twice in the play as his reading does not help him remember the narrated past memories (Beckett, 2009c: 4).

However, reading is an action which also involves the reader's active imagination; thus, Krapp's reading of "*the entry he wants*" requires his attempt to imagine the specific memory he reads on the list (ibid.). Importantly, Krapp's reading of the list does not seem to activate his memory, so instead the protagonist turns to the tape-recorder to listen to the recorded voice which narrates past events, and it is only as he actually hears the voice of his recorded younger self referring to past memories that he seems to "re-live" the latter. On the one hand, it could then be claimed that Krapp's re-experience of the past as soon as he listens to the tape-recorder lies in the fact that the latter consists of a fuller *narration* of those memories in contrast to the brief notes that Krapp reads on his list. On the other hand, however, narration does not seem to play such an important role in the evoking of Krapp's memory since Krapp would presumably find himself puzzled if he re-read the same narration on a piece of paper again.

Thus the role the voice plays in Beckett's drama becomes manifest. Although the voice is evidently of great significance in terms of Krapp's capacity to re-experience the past, there is one point in the play when listening to the tape seems to be insufficient in the evoking of his memory:

there is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity [KRAPP *gives a start*] and the – [KRAPP *switches off, winds back tape a little, bends his ear closer to machine, switches on*] – a-dying, after her long viduity, and the – [KRAPP *switches off, raises his head, stares blankly before him. His lips move in the syllable of 'viduity'. No sound. He gets up, goes backstage into darkness, comes back with an enormous dictionary, lays it on the table, sits down and looks up the word.*] (ibid., p.7)

This passage seems to reinforce the impression of a dissociated self. Krapp's inability to remember his past without using the tape-recorder, itself supplemented by recourse to a dictionary, not to mention his difficulty in recognizing the memories he listens to and their location outside Krapp's body in the play – all suggests that dissociation seems to be the principal message. In his study *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, Steven Connor, for example, states that "in *Krapp's Last Tape* [...] the only way in which Krapp can preserve his voice is to

separate it from its origin in his body" (1988: 160). Connor's reading alludes to Derrida's philosophy and, particularly, his reading of Husserl's phenomenology, which, according to Derrida (1973), is based on the notion that in thought the subject can be fully presented to itself; that is, it can accomplish absolute self-presence in "hearing oneself speak". During this operation the subject speaks and hears itself at the same time. By contrast, Derrida claims that the subject cannot accomplish absolute purity of self-presence without being split from the "beginning". The subject cannot be presented to itself without being different from itself, as it is always exposed, as a condition of its very (im)possibility, to *différance* or (arche-)writing: "the operation of differing which at one and the same time fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay" (ibid., p.88). In light of Derrida's argument, then, according to Connor, the distinction between Krapp's body and his voice onstage (which survives on the tape-recorder) is a manifestation of the subject's inability to accomplish pure self-presence and, in turn, its split by exteriority. What needs to be noted, however, is that the tape-recorder in the play complicates this notion even further than Connor allows, since the act of tape-recording requires hearing oneself during the recording, yet listening to the recorded voice without playing the tape back is impossible.

Thus, while Connor rightly highlights the distinction between Krapp's body and voice (which is made evident onstage by the very use of the tape-recorder), yet he proceeds, rather more problematically in this light, to imply a more or less absolute *dissociation* of voice and body and even the complete diminishment and absence of the body which has been substituted by a mere voice. Indeed, this is implied in one of Connor's later works where he claims that the tape-recorder in the play "is the mechanism which preserves intact the evidence of [Krapp's] dismembering" (1998: 234). The tape-recorder is actually what makes us notice Krapp's prosthetization, while indeed we listen to the recorded voice more than to the voice of the physical Krapp we see onstage. Yet, Krapp's physical body is neither absent nor substituted in so far as it plays a central role in the constitution and experience of the past which the voice itself narrates. In terms of the discussion above, the voice in the play does not act merely as a supplement which attempts

to insinuate itself *in-the-place-of* something. *Contra* what Connor appears to imply here, the distinction between body and voice in the play is not an attempt to downplay the physical body or even merely to stress its insufficiency and diminishment.

Connor's distinction is, of course, between body and voice, not body and mind. Nonetheless, in a similar way, it can be argued that if the tapes themselves (when they are *not* in contact with someone like Krapp who tries to recollect and re-live their content) can function as the representation of Krapp's mind – in the same way as, for example, Davies considers the couple of Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* as a depiction of the mind-body relation – this becomes a problematic thought in relation to *Krapp's Last Tape* precisely because the tapes in the play are *only* presented in constant contact with the physical Krapp. It is exactly in this way that Beckett manages to shed light on the reciprocity between the body and mind in his play. In other words, presenting Krapp on stage as trying to re-experience his past, both body and mind are constantly in "contact" and, most importantly, the engagement with past memories and the re-experience of the past itself is precisely what problematizes any return to Cartesian distinctions between the body and mind. Throughout the play, we are reminded that memory is both mental *and* physical as is represented by Krapp's re-experience of his past through the tape-recorder, its voice, and his body.

It is clear that Krapp's memory is more easily triggered through listening to the technological re-presentation of his own past voice. Significantly, however, Beckett presents Krapp as needing to consult a dictionary too, which here functions as a supplement of a supplement, so to speak, in order to remember past events. Here again the physical body's predominant role in re-experiencing the past is manifested since the prostheses themselves need bodily memory to fill them out. Furthermore, the effect of Beckett's dramatization seems to underline the fact that Krapp eventually manages to re-experience the past precisely *through* his own body also. This involvement of the body in the evoking of memory and the re-experience of the past has been noted by Angela Rodríguez-Gago who observes that it is Krapp's bodily senses that most faithfully recall the past here: "his pacing and the

taste of his bananas have helped him to remember the year of the tape to which he wants to listen” (2008: 206).

In *Krapp’s Last Tape* Beckett deals, in this way, with a body which is marked by impotence, yet the latter turns out to be the means through which he foregrounds the body itself. In fact, Beckett employs contrasting scenes in the play, as, for example, when he has Krapp listening to the tape-recorder even though he has difficulty in hearing, so as to stress what the body can do in (or, here, despite) its impotence. Most importantly, Beckett demonstrates the mutual effect of the body and mind as manifested in the experience of memory. In this sense I concur with Sarah West that:

in *Krapp’s Last Tape* this ‘voice of memory’, while separate, is not autonomous, as Krapp mechanically determines when the voice should speak and when be silent. He can also revise what the voice relates by means of ‘post-mortems’, the ritual of starting a new recording by commenting upon a past one. Therefore, although the voices of his past selves have the power to affect him, Krapp has some degree of control over them.

(2010: 62)

Indeed, Beckett’s rejection of any simple mind-body dissociation can be identified in his presentation of the physical Krapp onstage playing a significant role in the actual manipulation of the tape-recorder and the selection of the memories he listens to, something which represents the reliance of memory on the somatic in everyday life. The experience of memory is what makes the reciprocity between the body and mind explicit as it needs both the body and mind in order to have any meaning or effect.

The central role of the physical body is especially brought to the fore when, acknowledging that there is “nothing to say, not a squeak”, Krapp wishes to confirm his physical existence in the present through physical means (Beckett, 2009b: 10). The image of Krapp confirming and reinforcing his physical existence calls into question Linda Ben-Zvi’s argument regarding Beckett’s intention to represent the wish of his characters “to rid themselves of corporeality” (2009: 13). Not only is Krapp’s material body one of the central aspects of the play, but Beckett also presents the protagonist himself as having the need to stress, rather than to rid

himself of, his own corporeality. Thus, as already mentioned, the play is full of bodily sounds, movements, gestures and expressions. Additionally, we encounter Krapp-at-sixty-nine having the same habits as Krapp-at-thirty-nine, an image which would problematize arguments regarding Beckett's presentation of a straightforward dispersal of Krapp's self. For instance, Krapp eats bananas in the present, which is something that was also done thirty years ago, as is Krapp's attempt to imagine specific past memories by closing his eyes, an image which illustrates that the experience of the past through memory is itself embodied.

Throughout the play a tension can be observed between the physically present Krapp and the recorded Krapp, which is also manifest between Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*. The fact that Hamm and Clov need each other does not simplify their relationship, as we have seen. On the contrary: throughout the play, Beckett constantly emphasizes this tension between them so as to remind us that they are in fact "opposites" who nevertheless *need* each other, or, in other words, that their individual impotence is what gives them, and makes always already necessary, their mutually enabling interdependence. This tension is similarly found in *Krapp's Last Tape* in the effect the tape-recorder has on Krapp, even though he attempts to control its use; for example, in Krapp's anger when he hears a part of the tape he does not want to, as well as in his constant forwarding of the tape so as to avoid re-experiencing specific memories. Nonetheless, Krapp is in constant need of the tape-recorder both because of his solitude and because the tape-recorder is what helps him remember his past. At the same time, however, the tape-recorder itself "needs" Krapp in order for the memories it contains to have any meaning at all.

Hamm and Clov are, significantly, unable to break their relationship per se. This is articulated by the characters themselves, as when Clov wonders:

CLOV: There's one thing I'll never understand. [...] Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me?

HAMM: No...Perhaps it's compassion.

(Beckett, 2009b: 84)

Moreover, there are numerous instances in the play when Hamm tries to impose himself on Clov by giving him orders, but where Clov attempts to disobey Hamm's commands:

HAMM: Look at the earth.
CLOV: I've looked.
HAMM: With the glass?
CLOV: No need of the glass.
HAMM: Look at it with the glass.
CLOV: I'll go and get the glass.
[Exit Clov.]
HAMM: No need of the glass!

(p.35-36),

HAMM: Open the window.
CLOV: What for?
HAMM: I want to hear the sea.
CLOV: You wouldn't hear it.
HAMM: Even if you opened the window?
CLOV: No.
HAMM: Then it's not worth while opening it?
CLOV: No.
HAMM: [*violently*] Then open it!

(p.73)

Based on his argument that the only meaning of *Endgame* is its very meaninglessness, Adorno remarks that the dialogue in the extracts above indicates that "the nonsense of an act becomes a reason to accomplish it" (1982: 141). It is clear that the tension that Beckett creates between Hamm and Clov, as shown in the above extracts, but also between Krapp and the tape-recorder, has however an even more important function than Adorno's "negative" reading allows: namely, that the more tension Beckett presents between them, the more effectively he foregrounds their interdependency. Referring specifically to the tension between Hamm and Clov, Beckett himself pointed out that it is persistent and, indeed, "the nucleus of the play" (McMillan & Fehsenfeld, 1988: 205). Presenting, thus, Clov's futile attempts to disobey Hamm as well as Krapp's inability to remain unaffected by the content of his tapes, Beckett emphasizes, above all, the inability of these two couples to "be" on their own without the

other. This is something clearly articulated in *Endgame* by the characters themselves:

CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?

HAMM: You're not able to.

(Beckett, 2009b: 50)

This closeness or inextricability was explained, on at least one occasion, by Beckett himself, during his direction of the play in Berlin, where his advice to the actors playing Hamm and Clov was: "Imagine their relationship is like flames and ashes. The flames are blazing and then they sink into ashes. But there is always the danger that the flames will blaze again" (Berlin, 2009: 407). Such an explanation is twofold. Firstly, it indicates the inextricable bond between Hamm and Clov, since ashes are an essential part of flames and vice versa, even while they are at the same time consuming each other. Secondly, the "danger" Beckett notes regarding the blazing of the flames stresses both the intensity and interweaving of the tension between the two characters; a tension which may never end.

The relationship that Beckett builds between Hamm and Clov onstage stimulates, then, thoughts about the role of the couple as such in Beckett's treatment of dissociation in *Endgame*. Apart from enabling Beckett to deal with issues of supplementarity and relation, the use of the couple also underlines, I want to argue, the author's ultimate deconstruction of the mind-body dissociation. For even though the physical appearance of the characters and their complementary relationship have been considered as suggesting a dissociated self (between Hamm/mental consciousness and Clov/physical reality), throughout the play Beckett does not, in fact, by any means imply the two couples' split into actually autonomous parts. Indeed, the impossibility of any such split is evidently demonstrated.

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, what Krapp-at-thirty-nine talks about at the beginning of the tape mirrors what Krapp-at-sixty-nine has already done on stage before listening to the tape, but also what the latter keeps doing as the tape continues the

narration. As soon as the tape begins, the voice of the recorded Krapp remarks that he has “jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope” (Beckett, 2009c: 5); an image that the audience has already seen onstage when, at the very beginning of the play, Krapp “fumble[d] in his pockets” and took out an envelope (p.4). This is a scene which is repeated later on in the play when Krapp attempts to record a new tape: “[Broods. Realises. Switches off. Consults envelope.] Pah! [Crumples it and throws it away. Broods. Switches on.]” (p.10). Furthermore, the eating of bananas is something which both Krapp on tape and Krapp onstage appear to do, whilst, “the new light above [Krapp’s] table [...] with all this darkness round” him is another image which is both narrated on tape and presented onstage (p.5). Similarly, Krapp on tape admits that he “love[s] to get up and move about in” (ibid.) the darkness, a scene which has already been performed by the physical Krapp on stage when he went “with all the speed he can muster backstage into darkness”, but also when he was pacing up and down while he was eating his bananas (p.4). These identifications between the narration on tape and what Beckett physically presents on stage raise questions regarding issues of dissociation in the play. However, as the above reading has made clear, such an image of dissociation is not employed by Beckett so as to indicate the dispersal of Krapp’s self. Rather, as the play develops, Beckett’s deconstruction of this seeming dissociation becomes increasingly evident especially through his use of the tape-recorder in the play. In other words, Beckett’s close preoccupation with the experience of memory in his play along with the way in which Krapp and the tape-recorder are presented – that is, in constant contact with each other – is what sheds light on the deconstruction of the mind-body dissociation since memory is the imbrication of the mental and the physical. So as to experience the past, Krapp needs both his body and mind.

In the case of *Endgame*, presenting Hamm as blind, Beckett stresses Hamm’s need for articulation; as Hamm himself tells Clov: “Before you go... [...] say something” (Beckett, 2009b: 88), and later on he demands: “Articulate!” (p.89). For this reason, we are constantly presented with Clov articulating and describing each one of his movements so as to let Hamm know what he is doing. Sarah West notes that:

In the Schiller-Theatre production of *Endgame*, Beckett insisted that speech and action should be separated: 'Never let your changes of position and voice come together. First comes (a) the bodily stance; after it, following a slight pause, comes (b) the corresponding utterance'.

(2010: 53)

That Beckett was interested in depicting the separation of speech and action in *Endgame* may suggest the dramatization of a dissociated self. Yet, the separation of speech and action as depicted in the character of Clov has a different function, namely that it enables Hamm to experience outer reality. Consider the following instances:

NAGG: Never mind me stumps.
[Enter Clov with biscuit.]
CLOV: I'm back again, with the biscuit.

(Beckett, 2009b: 17),

HAMM: No need of the glass!
[Enter Clov with telescope.]
CLOV: I'm back again, with the glass.

(p.36)

As shown here, Beckett presents Clov as articulating his act while acting accordingly. In this way, and despite the fact that the utterance describing how Clov will react and Clov's actual movement are identical, Beckett manages to portray the separation of speech and action that he himself highlighted when producing the play. This separation is represented even more evidently in other instances in the play when the characters' utterances and the way they actually perform are in contradiction with each other:

NAGG: Do you want to go in?
NELL: Yes.
NAGG: Then go in.
[Nell does not move]
Why don't you go in?
NELL: I don't know.

(pp.23-24),

CLOV: I'll leave you, I have things to do.
HAMM: In your kitchen?
CLOV: Yes. [...]
HAMM: Well! I thought you were leaving me.
CLOV: Oh not just yet, not just yet.

(pp.15-16)

Considering these examples, the following question arises: why does Beckett employ instances which imply the notion of dissociation in his works? On closer inspection, it becomes clear that Beckett includes such instances in his works *only to reject them*. At the end of *Endgame* – and this is one of the points where the central role of the couple is foregrounded – when Clov announces his decision to leave Hamm for the last time and when Hamm thinks that Clov has left, even though Clov is actually standing by the door, he begins articulating several commands to himself, which would otherwise address Clov: “Raise hat. [*He raises his toque*]. [...] And put on again. [*He puts on his toque*]. [...] Wipe. [*He takes out his handkerchief and, without unfolding it, wipes his glasses*].] And put on again. [*He puts on his glasses, puts back the handkerchief in his pocket*].” (p.91). Even though the need to articulate each action before its actual performance is also manifested by Clov prior to his exit, his description of each one of his actions is different here from Hamm’s because of the former’s need to provide the blind Hamm with an image of his movements. By contrast, Hamm, at the end of the play, applies all those imperatives to himself without (apparently) having anyone to listen to him. It is in this way that the final scene of the play could be defined, in terms of its treatment of dissociation, as the climax of the drama as a whole. Certainly, as has been shown, throughout the entire play Beckett implicitly deals with the notion of dissociation, but its very end is the point where Beckett presents the actual consequences of such dissociation by attempting to break the bond between Hamm and Clov. In this way, he underlines that dissociation can only lead to Hamm’s mechanical behaviour; an image which in turn suggests that there can be no life after that.

Memory and the characters' reactions to the past

To deepen the exploration both of the significance of the use of the couple and how Beckett treats the notion of dissociation in these two plays, it is necessary to look more closely at the specific way in which memory is presented. Thus, this section examines the different ways in which Beckett represents memory onstage as well as the characters' own reactions to the past. The aim is to demonstrate that while, at some points, the characters in both plays express their wish to control their past memories, the latter are never completely controllable. Furthermore, this section will make more explicit the crucial role played by memory in problematizing any arguments regarding the mind-body dualism in Beckett's work.

Memory, as something that is conventionally located inside the self, and, in particular, as internal to the individual subject's "mind", is presented as being outside the protagonist's body altogether, and thus externalized, in *Krapp's Last Tape*. This may be read in relation to Stiegler's theorization of memory's more general reliance on technics. Through a close reading of *Krapp's Last Tape* below, it will be shown that such issues of prosthesis and, specifically, the reliance of memory on technology are indeed key themes in Beckett's play also.

Examining the prosthetic voice in Beckett's work, Yoshiki Tajiri states that "it is possible to regard the voice as a prosthesis in that it is both inside and outside the body, something that belongs to but is alien to the body" (2007: 138). Tajiri's argument corresponds to the reading of *Krapp's Last Tape* outlined above since the voice which survives on the tape-recorder, though separate from the Krapp we see onstage, still belongs to him. At the same time, the voice is presented as alien to the body through Krapp's attempt to avoid listening to specific parts of the tape, and, most importantly, his difficulty in understanding what the voice of the tape-recorder refers to. Here, the word "alien" is not used to suggest that the voice of the recorded memory is completely unrelated to or distinct from Krapp onstage; rather, it aims to capture Krapp's reaction when hearing it, that is to say, his attempt to avoid hearing specific parts which he considers "haunting", as if they belonged to someone else's past. Despite Krapp's difficulty in re-living the memories he listens to, however, the tape-recorder which contains these

memories is what eventually enables Krapp to remember and re-experience his own past “in the first place”.

Tajiri’s notion of the prosthetic voice in Beckett can be elucidated further by being read in the light of the Derridean notion of the supplement. Even though the voice of memory is dislodged from Krapp’s body and is presented as exterior to the body, it is not completely alien to the latter; rather, the voice still belongs to Krapp “himself”. At the same time, the tape-recorder, which appears to function as a compensation for an “originary” lack, does not actually “insinuate itself *in-the-place-of*” the memory of the physical Krapp onstage (Derrida, 1967: 144-145). The memory of the physical Krapp is not a void that the tape-recorder only aims to fill, and in turn, replace. Rather, the tape-recorder functions as “a plenitude enriching another plenitude” (ibid.) in so far as, in order for the memories it contains to be experienced and re-lived, both Krapp’s physical body and mind are essential. The tape-recorder may be what actually triggers Krapp’s memory, but, most importantly, the actual re-living and re-experiencing of the recorded memories is accomplished only through Krapp’s own physical body and mind. Additionally, considering that the supplement is, on Derrida’s account, already a part of the identity which it supplements, it becomes clear how it is, above all, the co-constitution of the body and mind that is brought to the fore in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Even though it is presented as separate from and it functions as a supplement to the body and mind, the tape-recorder, along with the memories it contains, are already a part of Krapp’s identity, and, most significantly, they play an important role in constituting the latter.

Here, Stiegler’s account of the human’s *essential* need for exteriorization and supplementation is elucidating. Stiegler argues that with “the advent of exteriorization, the body of the living individual is no longer only a body: it can only function with its tools” (1994: 148). According to Stiegler, then, the human is always already in need of different forms of prostheses so as to function precisely because such a need is “originary”, that is, what defines the human. Such a “literal” representation of such a prosthesis is one of the main features of *Krapp’s Last Tape* where the tape-recorder is the actual exteriorization of Krapp’s memory. Moreover, in the same vein as Derrida, Stiegler argues that such prostheses are not

to be considered as separate or opposed to an “interiority”. Here, it is worth quoting Stiegler’s words at length:

The question is the very ambiguity of the word ‘exteriorization’ and the hierarchy or the chronological, logical, and ontological pre-eminence that it immediately induces: if indeed one could speak of exteriorization, this would mean the presence of a preceding interiority. Now, this interiority is nothing outside of its exteriorization: the issue is therefore neither that of an interiority nor that of exteriority – but that of an originary complex in which the two terms, far from being opposed, compose with one another [...]. Neither one precedes the other, neither is the origin of the other

(p.152).

In these terms, then, it becomes clear that the tape-recorder in Beckett’s play should not be approached as the device which is used to substitute or replace Krapp’s mind. By contrast, in the light of Derrida’s and Stiegler’s accounts, the tape-recorder as exteriority and the physical Krapp onstage, “far from being opposed”, constitute each other.

Apart from the way in which memory is represented in the play, via the technical-prosthetic medium of the tape-recorder, an influential distinction between different forms of memory, which Beckett himself was aware of when writing the play, also sheds light on the issues of impotence and supplementation at issue in this reading. As early as 1931, based on Proust’s distinction between *voluntary* and *involuntary memory*, Beckett expressed his own ideas about this distinction in his monograph *Proust*. Having rejected the former, as that which is “consciously and intelligently formed” (Beckett, 1999: 32), unable to evoke the past and thus “uniform, colourless, [and] distanced” (Maude, 2009: 15), Beckett summarizes Proust’s claim that the true re-experience of the past is made up of the experiences which are outside the realm of habit:

Involuntary memory is explosive, ‘an immediate, total and delicious deflagration’. It restores, not merely the past object, [...] but more because less, more because it abstracts the useful, the opportune, the accidental, because in its flame it has consumed Habit and all its works, and in its brightness revealed what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal – the real.

(Beckett, 1999: 33)

Beckett thus rejects, on the basis of Proust's famous distinction, "distanced" voluntary memory in his 1931 monograph in favour of the "real" of involuntary memory. Read in this light, it becomes clear that *Krapp's Last Tape* has something paradoxical about it as regards the type of memory it represents. Memory, in this play, is mainly enabled through the use of the tape-recorder which, in contrast to Krapp's mind, can be considered as faithful in recording and storing memories for long periods of time. In addition, Beckett presents Krapp as able to select, interrupt and listen to memories of his own choice more than once. What this seems to suggest is that in *Krapp's Last Tape* Beckett deals, above all, with what is indeed a form of voluntary memory.

However, closer analysis reveals that Beckett actually presents *both* types of memory in his play – through the figure of Krapp himself, he manages to express his rejection of voluntary memory as well as his belief that involuntary memory is the one which can actually evoke the past. The play begins with Krapp consciously selecting the tape he wants to listen to – a form of voluntary memory. As soon as he listens to his younger self saying "Thirty-nine today, sound as a –" (Beckett, 2009c: 5), Krapp is presented as reacting to what he hears and thus he winds the tape back to the beginning. What is significant to note is that, from this moment on, Krapp listens to the past memories that his younger self describes without any particular reaction, which in turn suggests that Krapp cannot actually identify with, re-live and re-experience the memories he listens to. This seems to correspond to Beckett's idea that "the aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for to-day's" because (Beckett, 1999: 13):

The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.

(ibid., p.15)

At the beginning Krapp cannot respond to the memories he listens to because Beckett's dramatization serves to show, on the one hand, that voluntary memory "is of no value as an instrument of evocation" and, on the other hand, to show the

change in the protagonist's character (ibid., p.14). This is further reinforced by the visual form that the movement from one vessel to the other is given in the play. We encounter Krapp changing reels which were recorded at different times, whilst his winding back and forward each tape he listens to also depicts the process of decantation.

The next stage direction which shows Krapp actually responding to the tape is the one which describes the protagonist closing "*his eyes briefly*" (Beckett, 2009c: 6). This apparently depicts Krapp's attempt to re-live what he hears through his own body; nevertheless, Beckett's text does not confirm whether Krapp actually succeeds in re-experiencing that past memory. In this way Beckett manages to reinforce the great effect of involuntary memory on Krapp that is manifested later in the play. Without knowing what the tape will talk about next, Krapp keeps listening to it and his first response to the tape, which seemingly shows that Krapp *is* able to re-live the past, appears when he "*joins*" the "*brief laugh*" (ibid.) of his younger self on tape:

Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! [*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.*] And the resolutions! [*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.*] To drink less in particular. [*Brief laugh of KRAPP alone.*]

(ibid.)

Listening to his 39-year-old voice commenting on the random passages of a tape "at least ten or twelve years ago" (ibid.), Krapp-at-sixty-nine joins with a laugh which suggests that he re-lives the actual meaning and significance of all the aspirations and resolutions that had marked his younger self's life.

Thus, while Beckett opens his play with a manifestation of voluntary memory, the image of his protagonist's blank face indicates that the memories that were "consciously and intelligently formed" were *not* in fact re-experienced (Beckett, 1999: 32). At the same time, Beckett transforms voluntary memory into involuntary memory in order to reveal the effects of the latter; Krapp may have begun listening to the memories he himself chose, but what the tape continues to narrate is something that Krapp is unsure of. Consequently, the effect of involuntary memory on Krapp, and more generally the effect of memory on the body, manifests itself in

a change of the protagonist's "level of attention, [whilst] the mask of his face ruptures, his body unbends, unfolds, moves away from his listening posture, the trunk and face slowly lift, a relaxation is produced of hand and face" (Maude, 2009: 19).

A similar scene to that described by Maude above is to be found at the very end of the play where Krapp realizes that he has nothing to talk about and thus continues listening to his recorded self:

- gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. [*Pause.*] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments – [*Pause.*] – after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over to get them in the shadow and they opened. [*Pause. Low.*] Let me in. [*Pause.*] I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

(Beckett, 2009b: 11-2)

This again is a memory which Krapp apparently manages to re-live. Involuntary memory, according to the book on Proust, is "provided by the physical world, by some immediate and fortuitous act of perception" (1999: 36). This last scene of the play, as Maude remarks, is fully experienced through the physical body of Krapp "in terms of sight, sound, tactile sensations, [and] the body in motion" (2009: 19).

At the same time, Krapp's failing memory is manifested in his inability to record anything for the year which has just passed. This suggests, apart from his solitude, an increasingly impotent mind. Throughout the play, the evoking of Krapp's memory depends on the tape-recorder in which his memories are contained and even though a device such as the tape-recorder seems to suggest a certain reliability of memory since it can preserve a past Krapp intact (albeit as necessarily technologically mediated), Krapp's difficulty in re-experiencing some of the memories the tape-recorder contains in their fullness is also evident. As West puts it:

Magnetic tape preserves Krapp's memories intact and a tape recorder enables him to access them exactly as they were recorded. While this mechanisation of the

storage and retrieval of memory may lead to a more faithful representation of the past, it does not necessarily follow that the recorded experiences will be any more re-liveable when played back.

(2010: 60)

Indeed, in the play such a “faithful representation of the past” that the tape-recorder suggests is challenged and reflected in Krapp’s difficulty in recognizing the memories he initially listens to. Yet, as has been suggested, the parts that Krapp does *not* choose to listen to, but which he hears unexpectedly instead, are recognised by Krapp and, most importantly, have a great effect on him.

Nonetheless, even though both the body and mind are impotent in this play, and interact and interfere with each other as such, Beckett again underlines that both of them are nevertheless active. Furthermore, Beckett’s minute emphasis on and preoccupation with memory is precisely what enables him to foreground the reciprocal relationship between them. Presenting Krapp as trying to remember the past and in need of different prostheses to do so, Beckett makes evident that any distinction or “dissociation” of the body and mind collapses precisely because memory is itself *both* mental and physical. As has already been suggested, in order to re-experience the past Krapp needs both his body and mind since any memory is re-lived when it is mentally recollected *and* physically experienced.

Considering this, and in light of Stiegler’s account, Krapp’s particular impotence in remembering the past is what sheds light on a *general* “impotence” that is intrinsic to the human as such. To explain this further, it helps to consider what Stiegler himself means by the “originary” lack of the human as he explains it in an interview with Peter Hallward with reference to the myth of Epimetheus. According to the myth, Stiegler explains, Zeus commands Prometheus to distribute qualities to the non-immortals, a task which is eventually carried out by Prometheus’ twin brother, Epimetheus. He distributes all the qualities but he forgets “to keep one for that mortal being we call man” (2003: 156). Thus, Prometheus, the myth says, is required to steal the technics with which artefacts are invented. “In this sense, [Stiegler argues] the mortal is a being by default, a being marked by its own original flaw or lack, that is to say afflicted with an original

handicap [...] and for which he has need of prostheses to supplement this original flaw" (ibid.).

Precisely because of such an "originary" lack, the human without a need for prostheses (or technics) is impossible for Stiegler. It is in this sense, then, that impotence is construed as enabling in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Krapp's inability to remember his past without any of the prostheses presented in the play is what renders him in a constant – and *essential* – need for exteriorization and prosthetization which, in turn, is precisely what enables him to re-experience his past and, thus, what makes the supplementarity between him and the tape-recorder enabling.

Taking this into account, the play reveals that in so far as one cannot function without the other, the mind needs the material body (and visa versa), by virtue of the very "impotence" that constitutes the human subject as such; something which is not to be regarded as "tragic" so much as it is to be recognized as necessary to humanity and subjectivity in general. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, specifically, the body's interference with the tape-recorder and in turn the supplementation of the mind by the material body is both enabled and emphasized by the material form that memory is given in the play. In West's words:

In addition to foregrounding audition in *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett also draws attention to the materiality of voices heard in the play. [...] The voices of Krapp's past selves also have a physical tangibility; they are recorded on tapes and stored on spools. Krapp can actually *touch* these silent voices.

(2010: 63)

Krapp's authority to choose and listen to specific parts of memory more than once, as well as his wish to avoid listening to other parts of the tape by winding the tape forward, draws attention to the question of what he wants to listen to, or ends up hearing. The contents of the particular tapes he listens to are worth considering. Thus, at the beginning of the play we are presented with Krapp moving around the stage, looking inside the drawers of his table, and eating two bananas after which "*he has an idea*" regarding the tape he wants to listen to (Beckett, 2009c: 4). As already mentioned, Krapp's pacing and the taste of the bananas, a different

manifestation of involuntary memory to Proust's famous madeleine cake, seem to be what enables him to remember but also decide which tape he will eventually hear.

Thus, Krapp finds the entry he wants, reads the notes on his list, and finally begins to listen to the tape in which the voice of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp is heard. As Krapp-at-thirty-nine continues the narration, he refers to his relationship with Bianca, and as soon as he points out a few distinct characteristics of himself "at least ten or twelve years ago" – "The voice! [...] And the aspirations! [...] And the resolutions!" (p.6) – Krapp-at-sixty-nine seems to re-live those memories as he joins in with a brief laugh. After that, Krapp interrupts the tape as he goes backstage, and when he returns he resumes the tape from the point where he stopped it. Nevertheless, Krapp interrupts the tape again, winds it back and hears the point where his recorded self refers to his mother's death and the word "viduity" which he does not understand before consulting the dictionary, a form of prosthesis to purely human memory that he brings onstage.

The next most interesting reaction of Krapp to what he hears on tape is illustrated when he "*switches [the tape] off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*" (pp.8-9) just before his younger self is about to name "the belief [he] had been going on all [his] life" (p.8). Prior to this explication, the recorded Krapp recollects "one dark young beauty" (ibid.) whom he describes rather passionately, while just after his description he refers to the scene with the black ball: "A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. [*Pause.*] I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. [*Pause.*] I might have kept it. [*Pause.*] But I gave it to the dog" (ibid.). After that, Krapp admits that one night in March (which may also be the night when the scene with the black ball and Krapp's encounter with the beautiful woman took place), he "saw the whole thing. The vision at last" (ibid.). It is clear that what Krapp on tape is about to name is rather important for Krapp on stage; nevertheless, the latter avoids listening to this part of the tape and winds the tape forward.

After Krapp switches the tape on again he hears his younger self ready to define what, in reality, "the dark [he has] always struggled to keep under" is (p.9). This is another part which seems to be "haunting" for Krapp onstage, as shown in

his curses and his winding forward of the tape, whereas after he switches the tape on for the third time he has the same reaction to what he hears, that is, he *“curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again”* (ibid.). What Krapp’s reaction suggests, especially in the first two instances of impatient interruptions, is his fear in confronting and re-experiencing memories which used to be of great importance for him thirty years ago. These two memories that Krapp avoids listening to refer to something that Krapp believed in and something that he struggled with *for his entire life*. Despite that, however, his younger self on tape seems to be ready to define these as something different from what he himself had thought them to be up to that point. In other words, it is as if the experiences of Krapp-at-thirty-nine enabled him to reach new conclusions regarding a belief he used to have in something (which remains undefined in the play) and the real meaning of the “dark”. So, Krapp’s fear of re-experiencing and re-confronting the new meaning provided for these two parts of his life, or, in other words, this “new” reality, may exactly be what forces him to wind the tape forward and curse so strongly.

The third time that Krapp curses and winds the tape forward can be understood as the protagonist searching for a particular part of the tape to listen to. In fact, after Krapp interrupts the tape twice, he listens to his recorded self saying this: *“—unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire—”* (ibid.); an expression which is different from the other two instances when Krapp interrupted the tape. At this point, Krapp on tape is not about to name or define anything; therefore, it may be suggested that Krapp on stage winds the tape forward rather impatiently as he wishes to listen to the part of the tape that follows. Indeed, as soon as Krapp switches the tape on again his recorded self describes his encounter with a woman at a lake; a part of the tape which Krapp listens to three times. This scene presents Krapp lying down with a woman: *“I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side”* (p.9). Krapp’s wish or even need to hear again and re-experience this specific memory is not only shown in his winding back of the tape so as to listen to it once more, but even more in his search for this particular

part of the tape after he quits his attempt to record something new; indeed, after Krapp puts on the tape again, we see him “wind[ing] it forward [directly] to the passage he wants” (p.11). At the very end of his recording, Krapp-at-sixty-nine states: “Once wasn’t enough for you. [Pause.] Lie down across her” (ibid.). This statement is immediately followed by Krapp’s search for the lake scene which reveals that what used to be unimportant is of great significance to him now. This scene is a passage which is related to issues of love and company both of which seem not to be a part of Krapp’s life any more. Thus, the play suggests, Krapp probably needs to re-live this memory so as to experience once again a feeling of companionship and affection, two emotions which Krapp’s present life lacks, since, as he himself admits, everything goes “back here to ... [hesitates] ... me. [Pause.] Krapp” (p.5).

Krapp’s reaction to his past is twofold in character: whereas at some points Krapp expresses his attempt to avoid remembering specific memories by forwarding the tape, he also expresses a feeling of nostalgia for the past that is most obviously manifested when he listens to some parts of the tape more than once. Moreover, the fact that Krapp preserves his past on tapes signifies, apart from his ineliminable mental impotence, his attempt to control it (something which he never fully achieves). As has been shown, the memories contained in the tapes cannot be completely controlled by Krapp; rather, they are presented as affecting him to an extent that precisely cannot be controlled.

The characters’ constant engagement with the past is also an image to be found in *Endgame*. Even though, as has been discussed above, Beckett also explores physical impotence through the second couple in the play, Nagg and Nell, he seems to give more emphasis to the way they engage with the past and specifically the relation of the past to their bodily infirmities. Given their confinement, Nagg and Nell are presented as having recourse to their own past memories. The first point in the play that reveals Beckett’s attention to this couple’s engagement with the past is when, immediately after Nagg asks Nell “Do you remember –” (Beckett, 2009b: 23), Nell replies abruptly “No” (ibid.) without letting him finish his question. Nell’s blunt reply suggests her wish to avoid engaging with the past on someone else’s prompting; a form of voluntary

memory. Nevertheless, this is later contradicted when, at another instance, Nell seems to engage in memories that are prompted by Nagg:

NAGG: When we crashed on our tandem and lost our shanks.

[*They laugh heartily.*]

NELL: It was in the Ardennes.

[*They laugh less heartily.*]

(*ibid.*),

NAGG: It always made you laugh.

[*Pause.*]

The first time I thought you'd die.

NELL: It was on Lake Como.

[*Pause.*]

One April afternoon.

(p.28)

Additionally, and not without comedy, Nell expresses a feeling of nostalgia every time she hears the word "yesterday":

NAGG: I've lost my tooth.

NELL: When?

NAGG: I had it yesterday.

NELL: [*elegiac*] Ah yesterday!

(p.22),

NAGG: The hollow!

[*Pause.*]

Could you not?

[*Pause.*]

Yesterday you scratched me there.

NELL: [*elegiac*] Ah yesterday!

(p.27)

Comparing the instances in which Nell remembers particular details of her memories to the two extracts above in which she expresses a feeling of nostalgia, it can be seen that whereas in the former Nell is presented as confident enough about what she remembers, in the latter her reaction is essentially mechanical. Nell replies in exactly the same manner as soon as she hears the word

“yesterday”, suggesting that her nostalgia is not caused by the remembering of a specific memory, but rather is ironically evoked by the abstract signifier (“yesterday”) itself. By comparison, Beckett, in the instance quoted above, presents Nagg as paying close attention to the fact that he has lost his tooth and, most importantly, underlines Nagg’s belief that what he has lost is of so great a significance as to render his condition parodically tragic.

What, then, Beckett examines through both couples depicted in the play is, above all, their differing reactions to the past. In particular, in their ashbins Nagg and Nell remember the accident they had when they lost their legs “in the Ardennes [...] on the road to Sedan” as well as the time they spent on Lake Como (p.23). In fact, both characters are presented as longing for their past, which seems to be so different from their present condition. By contrast, Hamm’s attitude toward the past is characterized by his wish to avoid remembering it, or by his attempt to control or thwart it. This becomes manifest when Hamm violently interrupts Nagg’s narration of the story he used to tell Nell by exclaiming “Have you not finished? Will you never finish?” (p.30) and by commanding Clov to “Clear away this muck! Chuck it in the sea!” (p.31). Hamm’s wish to control the past is further reflected in the closing of Nagg’s and Nell’s ashbins, where, as Jane Alison Hale remarks, “the act of putting the lids on the ashbins would thus represent an attempt to repress painful memories” (1987: 55).

The treatment of memory in *Endgame* can be understood as similar to the way Krapp reacts when remembering past memories in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Moreover, this approach to memory is similarly instantiated by Clov who, like Krapp who writes and keeps his memories on his tapes, apparently has only a memory that has been written (and thus “controlled”) by Hamm. This constitutes another example of characters’ attempts to control the past. The dialogue between Hamm and Clov clearly illustrates this:

HAMM: Do you remember when you came here?

CLOV: No. Too small, *you told me*.

(Beckett, 2009b: 45; emphasis added)

Like Hamm who wishes to avert the past, Clov reacts to memory with visceral fury. Thus, “yesterday” for him means “that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day” (ibid., p.51). Furthermore, Beckett’s representation of Hamm as reacting to the past suggests that, in certain respects, memory in *Endgame* is thereby more complicated than in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. In the latter, even though Krapp is in some instances presented as wishing to avoid the past, he eventually finds himself listening to one specific memory again and again, accepting thus his own past and present conditions. By contrast, in *Endgame* Hamm is unwilling to accept the difference between his past and present conditions at all. Consider the following:

HAMM: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter – and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. *I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I’d take him by the hand and drag him to the window.* Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness!

(p.52; emphasis added)

Hamm’s narration portrays the potent past “Hamm” when he was possessed of power and able to walk and see, a memory which negates his present condition onstage. His description of himself taking the painter by the hand and dragging him to the window is repeated in the room of *Endgame* but with one difference: the one who is taken by the hand and dragged to the window now is Hamm himself. Wishing to be constantly in power, to assert his sovereignty (*sans* supplement or prosthesis), Hamm does everything he can to feel himself the master once again. This is further illustrated when Hamm asks Clov to bring him the dog:

HAMM: [*groping for the dog*] Where? Where is he?

[*Clov holds up the dog in a standing position.*]

CLOV: There.

[*He takes Hamm’s hand and guides it towards the dog’s head.*]

HAMM: [*his hand on the dog’s head*] Is he gazing at me?

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: [*proudly*] As if he were asking me to take him for a walk?

CLOV: If you like.

HAMM: [*as before*] Or as if he were begging me for a bone.

[*He withdraws his hand.*]

Leave him like that, standing there imploring me.

(p.49)

What is manifest from the memories Hamm chooses to engage with is that he only wants to remember his past power and others imploring him. His strong wish to possess such power is evident as, even now, in his own impotence, Hamm commands Clov to serve him. Impotent as he is, his self-identity continues paradoxically to be dependent on his position as the one who controls both Clov's and his parents' lives.

“Comings and goings”

Referring to *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett himself explained to director Alan Schneider that “Krapp has nothing to talk to but his dying self and nothing to talk to him but his dead one” (Harmon, 1998: 59), a comment that could well be read in the light of Derrida's reading of Husserl's phenomenology as this was set out above. As has already been demonstrated, the play presents one character onstage, but at the same time two “selves”, the Krapp onstage and the Krapp on tape; an image which is further underlined in Beckett's comment.

The significance of Beckett's comment to his director about Krapp, however, lies also in his use of the words “dying” and “dead” to describe Krapp's self. The physical Krapp onstage does not only “talk” to the tape-recorder in his attempt to record a new tape; he also seems to talk to his younger self through the comments he makes while he is listening to one of his tapes and, most importantly, to his “present” self, Krapp-at-sixty-nine, when he tries to find the tape he wants or attempts to understand the meaning and significance of words such as “viduity”, “memorable equinox” and “black ball”. Arguably, Beckett's statement seems to imply that the source of talk in the play, which may either be the voice of the younger Krapp on tape or the physical Krapp onstage, is itself dead.

The portrayal of death in Beckett's writings has been examined by Simon Critchley (1997), among others, who notes that Beckett's characters conceive the time of dying as a possibility which is then denied by them. With particular

reference to Beckett's *Malone Dies*, and in broadly Heideggerian-Blanchotian terms, Critchley argues: "the voice gives itself the possibility of death as possibility on the first page of the text, 'I could die today if I wished, merely by making a little effort', only to deny this possibility, 'But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things'" (ibid., p.192). In addition to this, as Critchley claims, Beckett's characters resort to the narration of stories because, as Beckett himself wrote in *Malone Dies*, "in order not to die you must come and go, come and go" (1994: 232). The coming and going which is what keeps the characters alive is the stories they themselves narrate, something that Beckett himself explained in one of his letters to Alan Schneider dated November 21, 1957 à propos *Endgame*: "'Keep going etc' means 'keep asking me about my story, don't let the dialogue die'" (cited in Harmon, 1998: 23).

While perhaps most often remarked in the novels making up the *Trilogy*, the idea of death as a possibility, its denial by the characters themselves as well as their recourse to the narration of stories in order to remain "alive", can all also be found in the dramatic works *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*. In the former play, Beckett constantly presents Krapp as having need of stories, which seem to be his only companion in his solitude. Most importantly, the possibility of death is implied in the play by Krapp's inability to record anything new. This possibility, however, is immediately denied by Krapp himself, who quits his attempt to record something, and returns to listen to the "old" stories again. In other words, Krapp has recourse to the narrated stories so as to continue the "comings and goings" which keep him alive.

Likewise, throughout the entire course of *Endgame* what Hamm and Clov are involved in is, above all, talk. Even though their interchanges create a tension between them, as has been demonstrated above, still it is their conversing that makes them keep going. Talk appears to be essential in *Endgame* in so far as it is the only way for the characters to survive and to avoid silence and loneliness. For this reason Hamm needs to "babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark" (Beckett, 2009b: 78).

Yet if talk and the telling of stories (whether to another or oneself) is what keeps life going, and thus underpins “survival”, this is itself intimately related to the play’s depiction of (essential) impotence. Krapp’s interference with the tape-recorder is based on the fact that his body (and mind) is marked by its inability to remember his past without using the former, whereas Hamm and Clov are physically and emotionally dependent on each other and, owing to their interdependence, must keep asking something of the other. In both plays, however, their impotence is actually what establishes the basis of the characters’ relationship, conversation and actions. If each character in *Endgame* was potent and independent in the play, then they would not *need* to continue conversing. Instead, talk is what keeps them going. For this reason, impotence in *Endgame* is considered to be a condition of possibility for the capacity of their going on at all, so giving a specific dramatic form to what Stiegler, following Derrida, takes to be a kind of originary impotence that is necessary to life as such.² As the following exchange puts it:

CLOV: What is there to keep me here?

HAMM: The dialogue.

(p.66)

The significance of impotence to the possibility of “life” is also reinforced in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Krapp is presented as impotent and unable to remember anything about his past without using his tapes, whilst the latter are everything that Krapp has. Given everything Krapp has in his den and his reaction to the past, if he could remember the latter without the use of the tapes, then he would, we might imagine, probably choose to remember only the parts of his memories that he wanted to and, most importantly, he would be immediately aware of what those

² The ideas of life and survival are central to Derrida’s work and have been extensively discussed in Martin Hägglund’s influential book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (2008). Hägglund argues in favour of Derrida’s radical atheism so as to demonstrate that “any attempts to assimilate Derrida’s thinking to a religious framework are wrongheaded” (p.116). In these terms, Hägglund refers to Derrida’s ideas of life and survival, according to which life is necessarily defined as mortal and “every moment of life is a matter of survival” (p.1). Both ideas, Hägglund demonstrates, follow from Derrida’s theory of the *trace*, since in both cases “it is to remain after a past that is no longer and to keep a memory of this past for a future that is not yet” (ibid.).

memories were about. In other words, he would experience his past only voluntarily. By contrast, having the need to continue his “comings and goings”, but being unable to remember anything without listening to his tapes, the only way in which Krapp can re-experience the past is by turning on the tape-recorder even though he does not know what follows on the tape. In this way, it is, paradoxically, only in having to go outside of himself, through supplementation, that Krapp is given the opportunity to experience the past involuntarily and, thus, in something comparable with a Proustian fullness, albeit one that can, necessarily, never be complete as such.

Conclusion

As the present chapter has sought to demonstrate, the representation of the impotent body and mind is a crucial feature of both *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. Through my analysis of the plays, I have sought to approach the bodily and mental impotence that marks the characters of these plays in a way that, contra Adorno, foreground their more “affirmative” dimension. I have sought to give particular emphasis to the fact that such impotence must not necessarily be taken to represent merely a lack of potency, but rather what turns out to problematize the seeming mind/body dissociation that is implicit in both plays.

Beckett's use of the figure of the couple in both plays is the means through which we can understand his dramatic handling of the mutual reciprocity between the body and mind. As has already been shown, the notion of dissociation between and within Beckett's characters in these plays is indeed explored, but on closer inspection it can be claimed that such dualistic views are ultimately problematized through the plays' presentation of an *essential* reciprocity and co-constitution intrinsic to the couple, in which each element must supplement the other. Having presented Adorno's famous reading of *Endgame*, I have sought to show how my reading of the play differs as regards the “passivity” of the characters that Adorno sees. Adorno's “negative” reading of the play considers the characters as having no option but to continue living in the room of *Endgame*, whereas what I have sought to give emphasis to is those points where the play itself suggests the characters' activeness, despite their

impotence. Thus, my analysis of the play does not seek to show that Adorno's reading is simply false, but rather that it fails to consider some of the play's most important features, such as the issues of choice and authority, which have significant implications for our understanding of the play as a whole.

As the analyses of both plays above have suggested, a more complicated reading of impotence – whether bodily or mental – in Beckett's works can thus be provided (in contrast to a more simplistic reading which views such impotence as mere lack of what should be fullness). Hence, it has been argued that impotence functions as a possibility for the capacity to go on at all, as can be seen in *Endgame*, as well as what provides characters with distinct possibilities, as shown in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Even though the role Beckett gives to impotence in these two plays is marked by such oscillation, what needs to be taken into account is that in both plays it is presented, in part at least, as *enabling*. It is in this regard that the plays' treatment of memory is so important, insofar as it is here that any mind-body dualism is perhaps most emphatically deconstructed by Beckett.

Considering this, the next chapter will seek to examine four of Beckett's later works for the theatre, *Not I* (1973), *That Time* (1976), *Rockaby* (1981) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981) in which the figure of the couple is not straightforwardly employed as in the plays of the 1950s analyzed in this chapter. In this light, Chapter 2 will focus on the more "extreme" representations of impotence these later plays present us with and further explore Beckett's close preoccupation with the experience of memory which takes the form of narration in these four plays.

Chapter 2 – The representation of the body and memory in Beckett's later drama: *Not I*, *That Time*, *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*

Introduction

The readings of the preceding chapter have tried to suggest a kind of enabling supplementary relationship between the mind and the body, and between potency and impotency, in two of Beckett's best known works, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*. A critical consideration of the figure of the couple was developed in order to explore these relations, and was developed towards an account of *memory* as a key site of a supplementarity essential to the subject and of the necessary co-dependence and involution of the physical and the mental. Chapter 1 emphasized, especially in *Krapp's Last Tape*, how Beckett pays particular attention to the ways in which memory is experienced and to how it can be convened, interrupted or edited by the body itself – as is depicted, for example, in Krapp's ability to touch the voice of his memory through his tapes.

In order to characterize and develop this emphasis on the somatic and prosthetic dimensions of memory as the site of exemplary mental self-identification, the current chapter examines four of Beckett's theatrical works composed in the 1970s and 1980s: *Not I* (1973), *That Time* (1976), *Rockaby* (1981) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981). These four later works share, first, a representation of memory in the form of narration. Narration can also be found in the texts analyzed in the previous chapter, yet there it took a different form. At some points in *Endgame*, for example, Hamm narrates past memories, while in *Krapp's Last Tape* the tape-recorder is what narrates the past to Krapp. As will be argued in what follows, narration is, however, represented somewhat differently in the four works discussed here. In these later plays, Beckett gives the narration of memory the form of a voice which can only be heard, but not seen onstage (apart from *Ohio Impromptu* where it is represented by the use of the book), and by creating a significant "distance" between the body and its voice of memory. This contrasts with *Krapp's Last Tape*, where the representation of memory takes a

phenomenological form onstage and is something that Krapp can actually touch, and with *Endgame* where Hamm, the character who most often engages with the narration of the past, can be seen onstage. At the same time, what makes these further estrangements or complications more striking still, and what also supplies another link between the four works discussed here, is that the characters – throughout the entire course of these works – are presented as *only* engaging, in different ways, with the narrated past. That image is perhaps not so intensely evident in the two plays of the 1950s. These plays will thus be explored in terms of a particular, even more extremely marked impotence or deprivation, centring on their characters' apparent inability to have any physical contact with and thus touch the voice of their memory. Nevertheless, once again and despite changing and deepening the representation of impotence – indicated now partly through the absence (*Rockaby*, *That Time*) or problematizing (*Ohio Impromptu*, *Not I*) of interactive, dependent couples – this chapter tries to show not only how these plays trace out the limits of this impotence, but also their exploration of the particular possibilities this impotence opens up.

The following analysis is divided into three sections. Section one examines the two works that Beckett composed during the 1970s, that is, *Not I* and *That Time*; section two analyzes the plays of the 1980s, *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*. These four works are explored in this way because of the several similarities they share in terms of their representation of the body. Whereas in the 1970s works Beckett continues to express his main preoccupation with the fragmentation of the body, a decade later he apparently presents his characters' bodies in their "totality" (even though, as has been clarified both in the introduction and Chapter 1, the body can never reach such an "absolute totality" as it is always necessarily prosthetic). Even in these cases, however, it will be shown that impotence is still manifest in different ways. Analyzing the 1970s and 1980s plays separately can thus suggest one significant way in which Beckett's dramatization of impotence shifted focus, although any more general, developmental claim is not ventured here.

The analysis of the four works is followed by a third section entitled "Beckett's later theatrical works and phenomenology" which engages with some

of the main ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body and the importance it plays in the latter's account of experience generally. Specifically, and following, in part, from the discussions of Derrida's and Stiegler's philosophies of supplementarity in the previous chapter, this last section aims to read the use and significance of the body in Beckett's theatre through Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment so as to explore the body's role in how Beckett's characters experience the past. This last section addresses some questions concerning embodied subjectivity, and its essential supplementation, which will be more closely explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

Not I and That Time

Not I (1973) and *That Time* (1976) have many similarities, which is perhaps the reason Beckett himself referred to *That Time* as a "brother to *Not I*" (Knowlson, 1996: 600). Both plays present memory in the form of narration. Similarly, the way in which Beckett presents the body in these two plays is of great (and not unconnected) interest also. In contrast to *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*, which do not present the physical bodies of their protagonists as mutilated in any way (even though they are restricted and rendered impotent by other means), *Not I* and *That Time* not only fragment the body but also reduce it to a single body part: the mouth in *Not I* and the head in *That Time*. The choice to reduce the body to these two particular body parts seems important for the concerns of this thesis because it suggests an interest in anatomizing narration – especially in the case of *Not I* in which the mouth is the actual organ with which memories are articulated – while at the same time he renders the body impotent by depriving it of its ability to have physical contact with the voice of its memory (at least, similar to that of Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape*). Yet, despite this, as will be shown below, it can be argued that Beckett remains clear that, even when it is so evidently fragmented, as it is in these plays, the body is vital to any recollection of the past.

Not I is closely preoccupied with the voice of memory and the physical organ with which that memory is itself articulated. Beckett emphasizes not only the corporeality of the physical mouth but also the corporeality of sound and

voice. Thus, he pays close attention to the corporeality of the voice as a physical sound; a voice which exists through a physical organ. This is something that the setting of *Not I* foregrounds. By focusing solely on the mouth articulating past memories, the play constantly reminds audience and readers that the voice heard is itself a physical sound, a particular “product” of the body.

As Beckett’s stage directions indicate, the setting of *Not I* is extremely minimal: “*stage in darkness but for MOUTH, upstage audience right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow*” (Beckett, 2009c: 85). Throughout the entire play, the disembodied Mouth narrates a woman’s lonely, sad, life story which eventually turns out to be her own, despite the fact that she constantly uses the third-person *she* and indeed expresses a vehement refusal to use the first-person *I* at all. Beckett presents another character onstage, Auditor, who is “*downstage audience left, tall standing figure, sex undeterminable, enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba, with hood, fully faintly lit, standing on invisible podium about 4 feet high shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across stage intent on MOUTH*” (ibid.). Auditor’s dramatic role in the play is rather ambiguous, since he is “*dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated*” (ibid.). Nonetheless, in what follows, I will also consider whether Mouth and Auditor can be understood as taking on the form of a kind of “couple” in the play, despite the seemingly minimal participation of the latter.

Beckett’s source of inspiration for *Not I* is significant in this regard. In his biography of Beckett, Knowlson reports that Beckett once explained: “Image of *Not I* in part suggested by Caravaggio’s *Decollation of St John the Baptist*”, a painting which, according to Beckett, was “great, [...] really tremendous” (1996: 588). In fact, as Knowlson himself suggests, it was the watching figures included in the painting which most attracted Beckett’s interest:

perhaps even more striking than the partially disembodied head of John the Baptist in the Caravaggio are the watching figures. Most powerful of all is an old woman standing to Salome’s left. She observes the decapitation with horror, covering her ears rather than her eyes. This old woman emerges as the figure in Caravaggio’s masterpiece whose role comes closest to the Auditor in Beckett’s play, reacting compassionately to what he/she hears.

(ibid., p.589)

Perhaps more important still as an inspiration for the figure of Auditor, however, was an experience Beckett had during his stay in Morocco:

a solitary figure, completely covered in djellaba, leaning against a wall. It seemed to him that the figure was in a position of intense listening ... Only later did Beckett learn that this figure ... was an Arab woman waiting there for her child who attended a nearby school.

(ibid., p.589)

As these sources of inspiration suggest, Beckett is perhaps as closely preoccupied in *Not I* with forms of intense listening (as he describes the Moroccan woman), as he is with the speech necessary to Mouth's narration of her life story. What the entire play shows is Mouth narrating past memories and Auditor listening to her and expressing his compassion and perhaps his helplessness by raising his arms four times in the play. At the same time, Mouth's representation as narrating her own memories (in some respects, to Auditor) using the third person "she" is what enables Beckett to address, in this minimal dramatic setting, a number of issues regarding the body's ability to touch directly or immediately its voice of memory (and, hence, its necessary supplementation or mediation) even when it is so evidently marked by impotence.

These are all themes that Beckett again depicts in *That Time*, written three years after *Not I*. Equally minimal, this later play presents only one character and, specifically, only one part of his body, his head. As is the case with the two figures presented in *Not I*, the protagonist is given the abstract term "Listener" for a name, a name that is also used in *Ohio Impromptu*. This name is significant because, even though they do not use the name "Listener" as such, all four plays analyzed in this chapter present their characters as engaging in an "intense listening" of one kind or another.

The minimalism that characterizes *That Time* is emphasized in the same way as in *Not I*, that is, by keeping the stage in darkness while maintaining the light only on the protagonist himself: "*stage in darkness. Fade up to LISTENER'S*

FACE *about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre*" (Beckett, 200c: 99). Furthermore, the body in *Not I* occupies a similar place on stage as the one in *That Time*, that is, *"8 feet above stage level"* (p.85). In both plays, Beckett presents the fragmented body as elevated from the stage, and so, in turn, places more emphasis upon it.

In the case of *That Time*, what the audience sees onstage is only an *"old white face, [with] long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread"* listening to *"voices A B C [which] are his own coming to him from both sides and above"* (ibid.). In his stage directions, Beckett paid particular attention here to the continuity of the voices, insisting that they should *"modulate back and forth without any break in general flow except where silence indicated"* (ibid.). As with the other plays analyzed in this chapter, the voices heard throughout the play belong to the protagonist, while the story they narrate is the protagonist's life. Nevertheless, in contrast to *Not I* where a third-person narration is employed, in *That Time* the voices use the second person, *you*, as if addressing directly the protagonist himself. In this way, as will be argued in more detail below, Beckett manages to create a significant distance between the body onstage and the voice of its memory. This may seem to imply that the characters onstage are essentially passive listeners who are forced to listen to the narrated memories and do not affect the narration of memory at all (see, for example, Beckerman (1986) and Malkin (1999)). On closer inspection, however, both of these plays stress what is actually a reciprocal effect between the unfolding of the narrated memory and the character listening to it onstage.

The three voices, A B C, that the protagonist listens to follow different patterns throughout the play, except for the most logical one: ABC. These different patterns reflect Beckett's well-known fascination with the possibilities of permutation, an idea that is also explored, for example, in his earlier works *Molloy* (1955) and *Watt* (1953). Consider the famous example with Molloy's sucking stones:

I had say sixteen stones, four in each of my four pockets these being the two pockets of my trousers and the two pockets of my greatcoat. Taking a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, and putting it in my mouth, I replaced it in the

right pocket of my greatcoat by a stone from the right pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my greatcoat, which I replaced by the stone which was in my mouth, as soon as I had finished sucking it. Thus there were still four stones in each of my four pockets, but not quite the same stones.

(Beckett, 1994: 69)

A similar image is equally central to *Watt* – “as Watt told the beginning of his story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third, now he told its end” (Beckett, 2009e: 186) – although where in the extract from *Molloy* Beckett deals with issues of order and permutation within the narration, the one from *Watt* has to do with the order of the narration itself.

Such contortion of chronological order is also found in *That Time* where, throughout the play, the three voices are presented in three different patterns. In the first section of the play the voices speak as follows: ACB ACB ACB CAB. After this, there is an immediate pause whilst the breath of the protagonist is heard. The pause and the Listener’s breath mark the second part of the play also; however, the voices speak in a different pattern, that is, CBA CBA CBA BCA. Finally, in the third and last part of the play the voices speak in a still different permutation, BAC BAC BAC BAC, which is then followed by a pause and the protagonist’s smile.

It seems clear that the order in which the voices are presented is based on some specific principle. Antoni Libera’s commentary on the structure of the play elucidates this schema as follows:

The initial order of speech of the three voices, ACB, reappears for a fourth time as CAB (Voice A’s lines move from the first position to the second), after which, following a pause, it again changes to CBA (Voice A’s lines now move from the second to the third position). A similar shuffling occurs between parts II and III. Again after three repetitions, the initial order, CBA, changes into BCA (here Voice C’s lines shift from the first to the second position). Following a pause this order changes yet again to BAC (Voice C’s lines move from the second to the third position). This latter shuffling results in an order which remains unchanged to the end of the play.

(1989: 91)

Not only are the three voices presented according to a certain principle, but also, they were first “separated” according to kinds of memories each one would narrate. As Knowlson notes, “the different stories of A, B, and C [...] were intended at first to correspond roughly to three aspects of life – the factual, the mental and the affective. [Nevertheless, they] soon evolved into the stories of three distinct periods of the man’s life (‘The B story has to do with the young man, the C story is the story of the old man and the A story that of the man in ‘middle age’, he [Beckett] explained)” (1996: 601).

Apart from this, however, both *Not I* and *That Time* share a crucial similarity. They both present one main character (even though it will be shown that Auditor, whose action in the play may be minimal, is still of importance), and one who is physically fragmented and reduced to a body part that listens to (in the case of Listener) or narrates (as Mouth does) his/her own life story. As such, it could certainly be argued that the memories narrated or listened to in each of the plays are essentially uncontrollable by these characters themselves owing to the fact that they are deprived of an ability to physically manipulate them as, for example, Krapp does with his tape-recorder. Nevertheless, it will be important to my central argument in this chapter to show that, on closer inspection, this is by no means straightforwardly the case. Close reading of both *Not I and That Time* will attempt to clarify, therefore, the basis on which such an argument can be made.

Not I opens with Mouth narrating the birth of a girl whose parents have disappeared. What is striking from its very beginning is the way in which Mouth corrects, at certain points, her narration. Consider the following instance:

... out ... into this world ... this world ... tiny little thing ... before its time ... in a godfor - ... what? ... girl? ... yes ... tiny little girl ... into this ... out into this ... before her time ... godforsaken hole called ...

(Beckett, 2009c: 85)

As shown here, initially Mouth refers to this girl as a “tiny little thing”, but as soon as she attempts to continue her narration, she stops, asks two questions (“what? girl?”) and then moves on to change the phrase “tiny little thing” into

“tiny little girl”. This suggests that Mouth’s narration is somehow guided by an unidentified, unheard voice with which Mouth herself expresses her agreement: “yes ... tiny little girl” (ibid.). This correction takes place several times in the play, as shown in the following extracts:

so typical affair ... nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when - ... what? ... seventy? ... good God! ... coming up to seventy ... wandering in a field
(ibid.)

was perhaps not so foolish ... after all ... so on ... all that ... vain reasonings ... till another thought ... oh long after ... sudden flash ... very foolish really but - ... what? ... the buzzing? ... yes ... all the time the buzzing ... so-called ... in the ears
(p.87)

as of course till then she had not ... and not alone the lips ... the cheeks ... the jaws ... the whole face ... all those - ... what? ... the tongue? ... yes ... the tongue in the mouth
(p.89)

something that would tell ... how it was ... how she - ... what? ... had been? ... yes ... something that would tell how it had been ... how she had lived ... lived on and on ... guilty or not ... on and on ... to be sixty ... something she - ... what? ... seventy? ... good God! ... on and on to be seventy ...
(p.91)

nothing but the larks ... pick it up there ... get on with it from there ... another few - ... what? not that? ... nothing to do with that? ... nothing she could tell? ... all right ... nothing she could tell
(pp.91-2)

What the above instances underline is that Mouth has in fact some degree of control over the memories narrated throughout the play. Even though her narration is guided and somehow structured by a voice she seems to hear, Mouth processes what she hears, asks some questions and then decides to agree and change her narration, thus suggesting her active role within the play’s progression. Indeed, Mouth’s degree of authority and the fact that she willingly agrees to change her narration are substantiated when, at some points, she actually *refuses* to correct what she says according to the implicit demands of this voice: “when suddenly ... gradually ... all went out ... all that early April morning light ... and she found herself in the - ... what? ... who? ... no! ... she!” (p.86). This

occurs several times in the play, in spite of Mouth's refusal to alter her phrasing. In this instance, it is suggested that the unheard voice that Mouth hears prompts her to use a different pronoun (rather than to change the referent), whereas Mouth is marked, according to Beckett, by a "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" (p.83). In this sense, then, Mouth is not presented as simply passive with regard to those memories that seemingly speak "through" her; she may be reduced to a mouth, but at the same time she plays a significant role in her narration of her memories by providing the latter with her *own* structure, that is, by narrating it in the way she wishes (albeit to some restricted extent).

Of course, Mouth's use of the third-person *she* suggests, above all, that she is treating her past as if it is someone else's in *Not I*; a point which is foregrounded by her attempt even to "delude herself ... it was not hers at all ... not her voice at all" (p.89). This is an image which no doubt reveals that she is indeed "governed by duality" (West, 2010: 141). Yet, despite the persistence of this duality, which is manifest when Mouth refuses to use the pronoun *I*, it is her own body which makes Mouth realize that the voice is indeed hers, as is clearly shown in the following passage:

delude herself ... it was not hers at all ... not her voice at all ... and no doubt would have ... vital she should ... was on the point ... after long efforts ... when suddenly she felt ... gradually she felt ... her lips moving ... imagine! ... her lips moving! ... as of course till then she had not ... and not alone the lips ... the cheeks ... the jaws ... and whole face ... all those - ... what? ... the tongue? ... yes ... the tongue in the mouth.

(Beckett, 2009c: 89)

What is evident here, then, is that even though the narration never changes from third- to first-person, the body manages to "exceed" the persisting duality and make Mouth acknowledge, albeit momentarily, that the voice belongs to her "herself". It is in this context that Beckett also uses the figure of Auditor to emphasize the body's central role in the narration of memory. As has already been pointed out, Auditor's action in the play is quite limited in so far as he remains still throughout the course of the play but "*for four brief movements*" (p.85). These movements are, in Beckett's own words, "raising of arms from sides

and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion” (p.83). Significantly, Auditor moves in this manner every time Mouth expresses her refusal to use the first-person *I*: “... what? ... who? ... no! ...she!”. Referring to the role of Auditor in the play, Sarah West notes that

Mouth’s narrative has so far been referred to as a monologue, but this is perhaps misleading. In fact, *Not I* is a two-character play and it could be argued that there are distinct forms of dialogue implicit in it. Most obviously there is Auditor’s sympathy towards Mouth’s predicament, which is expressed in a gesture of ‘helpless compassion’.

(2010: 143)

Acknowledging that *Not I* is indeed a two-character play, West proceeds to compare *Not I* with other dramatic works of Beckett such as *Ohio Impromptu*, where only one of the characters speaks throughout the play, and *Rockaby*, in which again there is only one character but two voices. This is indeed a valid comparison; nevertheless, it is also important to look at the actual role and significance of Auditor’s four movements. As West rightly comments, despite the fact that Auditor’s action in the play is reduced to four brief movements, still they contribute to the play itself. After all, Beckett expressed an equal interest not only in the “tragedy” of John the Baptist’s mutilation but also in the figures that watched it (or listened to it). One question to raise here, then, is why Beckett chooses to present Auditor’s expression of compassion through gesture and not in any other way. In fact, I want to argue that Auditor’s brief movements affect the actual structure of the play (as this is constituted through the progression of Mouth’s spoken narration) and, more specifically, constitute an example of *somatically-directed structure*, corresponding, as will be shown, to the knocking of Listener’s hand on the table in *Ohio Impromptu* or *W’s “more”* in *Rockaby*.

Mouth’s reaction to her past memories is a particularly interesting feature of the play as it differs from all the other plays analyzed both in this chapter (*Ohio Impromptu*, *Rockaby* and *That Time*) and the preceding one (*Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Endgame*). Whereas characters like Krapp, Hamm and Clov express both their longing for specific past memories *and* their wish to avert others, the protagonists in *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu* are marked by a strong willingness to re-

experience their past memories, even the ones which remind them of their present solitude and sadness. This is shown, for instance, in the fact that Listener, in *Ohio Impromptu*, constantly prompts Reader to repeat parts of his memory which are related to his present sorrow, and in W's wish for "more" even though her memories remind her of her loneliness and her desperate need to find "another like herself".

Mouth's situation, however, is more complex. On the one hand, she herself narrates those memories and, as has been demonstrated, she chooses to alter her narration at some points. For this reason, it can be argued that if Mouth wished to avert her sad past memories, she would simply not refer to them; an image found in *Krapp's Last Tape* in which Krapp forwards the tape as soon as it plays back memories (as technologically mediated by recording) to which he does not wish to listen. On the other hand, however, Mouth narrates her memories using the third-person *she* as if her past was someone else's. For this reason, Mouth's reaction to the past is ambivalent and, in some respects, more complex than the other characters' in other plays. It is Mouth's body, though fragmented, that makes her realize that the narrated memories are indeed hers. In other words, her body is what helps her identify, momentarily, with her memories. At the same time, Beckett reminds us of the significant role the body plays by emphasizing that those memories (apparently retrieved from the mind alone) *require* Mouth's body itself so as to be re-experienced, even when memories seem to be so distant. For this reason, I would certainly concur with Ulrika Maude's argument that

the strange time and place sequences [...] [in Beckett's writings] become explicable in so far as the past is sedimented in the body itself, in a perpetual present continuous tense that leaves what has once been experienced and what can never truly be left behind irreversibly echoing in the characters' bodies.

(2009: 21)

The fact that memories, in Beckett's works, are themselves corporeal, in some sense, is not only reflected in the characters' ability to re-experience their past through their bodies, but, even more, in the numerous references to the

body itself that those memories consist of. Mouth may be reduced to a single body part, but her narration is so full of corporeal references that her body and its materiality are constantly constructed in her language:

she did not know ... what position she was in ... imagine! ... what position she was in! ... whether standing ... or sitting ... but the brain - ... what? ... kneeling? ... yes ... whether standing ... or sitting ... or kneeling ... but the brain - ... what? ... lying? ... yes ... whether standing ... or sitting ... or kneeling ... or lying ...

no part of her moving ... that she could feel ... just the eyelids ... presumably ... on and off ... shut out the light ... reflect they call it ... no feeling of any kind ... but the lids ... even best of times ... who feels them? ... opening ... shutting ... all that moisture ...

(Beckett, 2009c: 86-88)

In such passages, Mouth's narration is so strikingly full of bodily references that it is as if audience and reader can actually "see" her body. The references to different positions of the body and the minute details, such as the moisture of the eyelids, constantly emphasize the body's corporeality. Moreover, Mouth's narration, as the above examples suggest, has a speculative tone emphasized by the prompt to "imagine". Such speculation is important for Mouth because it opens up possibilities concerning her knowing of the body, as is shown in the different possible positions of the body that are mentioned.

In this way, then, while it would seem that the reducing of the body solely to a mouth would have to mean the severe diminishment, if not entire vanishing of the role played by the body in acts of memory (which might, as such, be thought to be reduced to a question of the mind alone), Beckett manages to emphasize the corporeality inherent to all memory instead. In Steven Connor's words, "the narrowing down of the body to one portion, or function, focuses the immediacy of the physical" (1988: 162). The body in *Not I*, as in many other works of Beckett, is presented in stripped-down forms which enable both readers and audience to pay attention to every single detail or change, regardless of how minor they may be. If, in Mouth's case, Beckett presented Mouth's "whole" body and had her narrate the same story, an attempt to underline the dynamics of the body and the vital role it plays in the recollection and re-experience of memories

would not be accomplished with this peculiar intensity, at least, since the audience would presumably not pay as much attention to her actual body as to her figure more generally. In other words, it is the loss of the *holistic* body onstage which precisely enables Beckett to get across the bodily nature of memories so efficiently. At the same time, what urges the reader or audience to pay close attention to the mouth “in itself” is both the reduction of the body to a mouth and the constant corporeal references that pervade the narration delivered by that mouth itself.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the figure of the couple is strikingly central to Beckett’s drama of the 1950s. And, of course, in *Not I*, since there are actually two characters – Mouth and Auditor – depicted on stage it could be claimed that the couple is one of the features of this play also, as it was in earlier works such as *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Endgame*. Yet, it is evident that he approaches this in a very different fashion here. Considering that Mouth is the one who narrates and Auditor is the one who listens to that narration, and also expresses his feelings about the former’s predicament, it may be suggested that these two characters form a couple to the extent that they are not presented as completely “independent” in the play; that is, that they do not play two completely separate roles.

Looking closely at *Not I*, however, the mind-body representation, and role of narrated memory, is not depicted in terms of a co-dependent division *between* two characters onstage (as in *Endgame*). Mouth cannot be taken to represent the body and Auditor the mind, or vice versa, for example. Insofar as Mouth and Auditor form a couple, then, it is not really in terms salient to the current argument. Instead, though fragmented, it is Mouth that is presented as having an effect on the narrated memories as she refuses, at least at certain significant points, to change her narration according to the voice she seems to hear.

That Time begins with Listener having his eyes open while breathing in a “*slow and regular*” manner (Beckett, 2009c: 99). It is important to note here that Beckett specified that Listener’s breath should be audible to the audience, something which, once again, suggests the author’s focus on the physicality and materiality of the body in such minimalist settings (an image that Beckett

employs emphatically in his work *Breath* (1969)). After a slow pause, voice A starts the narration of memories:

A: that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child when was that [*Eyes close.*] grey day took the eleven to the end of the line and on from there no no trams then all gone long ago that time you went back to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child that last time not a tram left in the place only the old rails when was that.

(ibid.)

Referring to a specific time in the protagonist's past life, the way voice A narrates this particular memory is highly interesting, I would suggest. There is a constant use of the second-person pronoun *you* despite the fact that the voice belongs to the protagonist himself. The use of this pronoun suggests that the voice addresses the protagonist, something that we would usually expect to occur, of course, between two different individuals. What is more, it creates a seeming distance between the character onstage and the narrated memories; an idea that Beckett explores in *Not I* also. Nevertheless, a difference between *That Time* and *Not I* lies in the fact that the memories in *That Time* are not only narrated but also turned into questions throughout the play. As indicated in the above extract, for instance, although the voice refers to an event that marked the time it talks about (in this case, the child's wish to look if the ruin was still there), it asks the question "when was that" twice, as if being unable to give more specific details about the period in which this happened, as if expecting an answer from the protagonist himself or even from another of the voices.

What is of greater significance, however, is the protagonist's response to this kind of narration. After voice A asks the question "when was that" for the first time, the Listener closes his eyes, which remain closed until the end of the first part of the play, that is, after the voices speak in the following pattern, ACB ACB CAB. Throughout the first part of the play, all three voices narrate specific memories from the three different time periods of the protagonist's life, such as the grown man's return to see a ruin where he hid as a child, his visit to the Portrait Gallery and his love with a woman:

C: when you went in out of the rain always winter then always raining that time in the Portrait Gallery in off the street out of the cold and rain slipped in when no one was looking and through the rooms shivering and dripping till you found a seat marble slab and sat down to rest and dry off and on to hell out of there when was that

B: on the stone together in the sun on the stone at the edge of the little wood and as far as eye could see the wheat turning yellow vowing every now and then you loved each other just a murmur not touching or anything of that nature you one end of the stone she the other long low stone like millstone no looks just there on the stone in the sun with the little wood behind gazing at the wheat or eyes closed all still no sign of life not a soul abroad no sound.

(ibid.)

Taking turns, the three voices continue narrating the same memories, while referring each time to more details about each one. For instance, consider how voice A's narration changes each time the voice takes its turn:

A: that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child when was that [*Eyes close.*] grey day took the eleven to the end of the line and on from there no no trams then all gone long ago that time you went back to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child that last time not a tram left in the place only the old rails when was that

A: straight off the ferry and up the nightbag to the high street neither right not left not a curse for the old scenes the old names straight up the rise from the wharf to the high street and there not a wire to be seen only the old rails all rust when was that was your mother ah for God's sake all gone long ago that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child someone's folly

A: Foley was it Foley's Folly bit of a tower still standing at the rest rubble and nettles where did you sleep no friend all the homes gone was it that kip on the front where you no she was with you then just the one night in any case off the ferry one morning and back on her the next to look was the ruin still there where none ever came where you hid as a child slip off when no one was looking and hide there all day long on a stone among the nettles with your picture-book

A: or talking to yourself who else out loud imaginary conversations there was childhood for you ten or eleven on a stone among the giant nettles making it up now one voice now another till you were hoarse and they all sounded the same well on onto the night some moods in the black dark or moonlight and they all out on the roads looking for you.

(pp.99-101)

In these citations the narration constantly changes by referring to more specific details about the *same* memory. Whereas the first time the voice is heard, it talks about the protagonist's search for a ruin, which was a place where he hid as a child, the second time it repeats this, but it also adds details regarding the child's way there with reference to the ferry, the wharf and the high street he must have passed through. Likewise, the third time the voice is heard it also refers to the rubble and nettles that he could see there, while it also mentions that the protagonist used to hide in the ruin for a whole day. Finally, as the last extract above shows, the voice does not directly refer to the child's search for the ruin, but its narration is clearly linked to the preceding one since it adds details regarding the child sitting on a stone among the nettles – which are also referred to in the third extract – talking to himself, whilst others were looking for him.

Such changes occur in voice B's and voice C's narrations also. What these narrations have in common, however, is that they all depict the character's solitude and loneliness, whilst they all employ the second pronoun *you* and turn those memories into questions. Indeed, the protagonist's loneliness is strongly depicted four times before the first part of the play ends. This is expressed in phrases such as "green greatcoat with your arms round you whose else" (p.100), "crawling about year after year sunk in your lifelong mess muttering to yourself who else" (p.101), "or talking to yourself who else" (ibid.). Such phrases convey the solitude the protagonist felt in the past, a feeling that he may have even now in the present. Interestingly, the phrase "who else" is also used in *Rockaby* in which W is apparently desperate to find someone else even though she ends up being alone. Most important, perhaps, is that the last phrase articulated by voice B, right before the end of the first part of the play, articulates not only the character's solitude, but also his need to make up stories in order to go on: "making up to keep the void out just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud" (ibid.). This significance accorded to storytelling is one that is dealt with in almost all of Beckett's writings – what Malone defines as "comings and goings": "in order not to die you must come and go, come and go" (Beckett, 1994: 232) – and indeed has already been examined in Chapter 1 with reference to both *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*. It is equally

manifest in *That Time* (and all the later works that the present chapter explores), and suggests the significance of recollection and the narration of memory in more general terms to Beckett's oeuvre.

As soon as the above pattern is completed, Beckett indicates that there should be a 10-second pause and "*Breath audible. After 3 seconds eyes open*" (Beckett, 2009c: 101). Apart from the emphasis given to the Listener's breath, which stresses the body's materiality, the fact that Listener's eyes open seems important here. As soon as the second part of the play begins, the Listener's eyes close again; a movement that is repeated at the end of each part of the play. Here, there is a striking similarity between *That Time* and *Rockaby* in terms of the characters' response to the narration. The opening and closing of Listener's eyes is very similar to W's "more" since both responses provide the narration itself with a particular structure. In Bernard Beckerman's words, the text of *That Time* "is segmented by precise gesture", which in turn suggests Beckett's intention to foreground the effect the body has on (the possibility of) memory and vice versa (1986: 158).¹ This particular movement is also similar to Auditor's in *Not I* in which the narration is again marked by gesture.

The role of the opening and closing of the Listener's eyes has been widely discussed by Beckett scholars. In general terms, it has been argued that the opening and closing of the eyes in all of Beckett's writings represents the characters' acceptance or rejection of reality (Brienza, 1982: 65) and highlights the action of perception (McMullan, 1993: 48). Despite this double process, Katherine Weiss claims that *That Time*, for instance, "presents us with a white face trying to shut out the black holes which absorb his spoken memory", implying thus that the protagonist simply wishes to avert or thwart his past, or even that memory is presented as haunting in the play (2000: 187; emphasis added). Yet,

¹ In his article "Beckett and the act of listening" (in Brater, E., (1986). *Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press), Bernard Beckerman acknowledges that the text in *That Time* is segmented by gesture, an idea that emphasizes the central role played by the body in the experience of the past. This is one of the main arguments of the present analysis also. However, by contrast to my analysis, Beckerman argues that in a work such as *That Time* "Beckett explores once again the relation of disembodied works to *passive hearing*" (p.157; emphasis added), which (paradoxically) contradicts his argument regarding the somatic structure of the narrated memories in the play.

this does not seem to be the case at least regarding the ways in which Beckett himself paid particular attention to the meaning of the closing of the eyes while directing the play. As stated in the rehearsal notes for the German premiere of *That Time* and *Footfalls* at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt, Berlin (which was directed by Beckett himself):

Beckett comments on the silence after each of the three parts: in these moments the man comes back to the present. While he was listening to his voice he was in the past ... During the listening everything is closed. In the silence he is startled to find himself in the present, everything is open.

(1977: 94)

As shown here, the protagonist does not close his eyes so as to *reject* the narrated memories and, more generally, the past. In fact, this expression of rejection should not be confused with Mouth's expression of rejection in *Not I* – it is of a different nature. As has been noted, Mouth only expresses her rejection of the voice she seems to hear simply because she refuses to alter the way she narrates her memories in accordance with it. Thus, closing his eyes enables the Listener to re-experience and re-live those memories, while the above description captures how effective the latter seem to be to the Listener. As Walter Asmus states, he is actually in the past while listening to the narration. What is more, Listener is not presented as being forced to close his eyes in any way throughout the play; instead it can be argued that the closing of his eyes as soon as the narration continues functions like W's request for "more" in *Rockaby*. Asmus claims that "it is not decided whether he opens his eyes and the voice stops for that reason or whether the voice stops and therefore he opens his eyes" (ibid.). Nevertheless, looking at the text of *That Time* more closely, it becomes clear that the narration stops first, and after 10 seconds the protagonist's eyes open, as shown in the following passage:

B: [...] of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud
[*Silence 10 seconds. Breath audible. After 3 seconds eyes open.*]

C: never the same but the same as what for God's sake did you ever say I to
yourself in your life come on now [*Eyes close.*]

(Beckett, 2009c: 101)

The opening of Listener's eyes does not cause the narration to stop, but rather to begin. As Asmus's notes indicate, the protagonist feels startled to find himself in the present, whilst the re-closing of his eyes as soon as the narration continues suggests his wish to "return" to the past. This, then, contradicts arguments such as Enoch Brater's which claim that "this Listener cannot sleep, he cannot rest in peace, for the fragments he hears awaken emotions he is *forced* to recollect by no means in tranquillity" (1987: 39; emphasis added). Here, Brater suggests a passivity of the body without authority or control. By using the verb "forced", he implies the protagonist's wish to avert the past and suggests that he does not willingly remember his past memories, which, in turn, render him a passive listener. Yet, the protagonist in *That Time*, as with all the other characters in the plays analyzed in the current and previous chapters, *cannot* be a passive listener. Indeed, the term is itself paradoxical. Not only does Listener wish to re-experience the past, but even more he responds to the narration of the past by asking for more.

Brater states that "the eyes suddenly open on us in desperate supplication, as if trying to remember something, some image, some emotion, some sign of life that might have once been lived, at least in imagination" (ibid.). In this way, Brater does not, I would argue, take fully into account the actual willingness of the body to re-experience its past memories. Seeing the body as being *forced* to re-live the past implies that its impotence be understood, first and foremost, as necessitating passivity. In short, Brater's argument omits to consider, first, the dynamics of the body as underlined in its ability to affect and segment memory despite its evident fragmentation and, second, the fact that those memories are turned into questions which are, in turn, presented as indeterminate. For these reasons, then, Beckett exploits the seeming distance that he creates between the body and its memory onstage in such a way to underline the potential activeness of an impotent body itself. Indeed, to build further upon arguments made in the first chapter of this thesis, to the degree that such a non-identity between body and memory is *essential* to the latter's very possibility, according to a logic of supplementarity, one might suggest that such "impotence" is in some sense essential to the activation of memory itself here.

The crucial role of the body is clearly depicted at the very end of the play where, in contrast to the end of each part of it, the protagonist opens his eyes and also smiles. Beckett himself stresses, in his stage directions, that the smile should be “*toothless for preference*” (Beckett, 2009c: 106), an image which makes the movement itself even more unexpected. The choice to present this image at the very end of the play perhaps aims at the same effect as in the later *Catastrophe*: there the protagonist unexpectedly turns to look directly at the audience as if saying to them, in Beckett’s words, “you bastards, you haven’t finished me yet!” (Knowlson, 1996: 680). This ending is exemplary in its reinforcement of a defiantly active body, necessary for any recollection of the past, despite (but also, in a sense, *through*) the extent to which it has been fragmented, maimed or rendered impotent.

Rockaby and Ohio Impromptu

Published in 1981, *Rockaby* has a strikingly minimal setting with only one character, a woman, whose name itself is reduced to a single letter, W. The woman is “prematurely old [with] unkempt grey hair [and] huge eyes in white expressionless face” (Beckett, 2009c: 125) sitting and being rocked in a chair with “rounded inward curving arms to suggest embrace” (p.126). As in *Not I*, the use of the light is important here, for Beckett employs it in such a way that the setting becomes even more minimal: light “subdued on chair. Rest of stage dark” (p.125). The bodily movements of the woman in the play are limited; she listens to the narration of V – which is her own recorded voice, heard throughout the entire course of the play – and she opens and closes her eyes, inclines her head, and, at some rare points, also joins V’s narration. The narration W listens to is about a lonely woman (probably herself) who “in the end went down/down the steep stair/let down the blind and down/right down/into the old rocker”, a description which, in turn, reflects what we see onstage (p.132).

Ohio Impromptu was published in the same year as *Rockaby* and was written in response to S. E. Gontarski’s request to Beckett to “write a dramatic piece for an International Symposium planned for May 1981 in Columbus, Ohio, to honour him [Beckett] on his seventy-fifth birthday” (Knowlson, 1996: 664).

Despite his difficulty in writing something on request, and after abandoning two attempts to compose something for Gontarski, Beckett eventually managed to produce the final piece. In *Ohio Impromptu* we are presented with two characters whose names, like W's in *Rockaby*, are reduced to the abstract terms "Reader" and "Listener". Beckett presents a similarly minimal setting in this play. In fact, he uses the light in exactly the same way as in *Rockaby* so as to give emphasis to those few objects he puts onstage: "*light on table midstage. Rest of stage in darkness*" (Beckett, 2009c: 137). Sitting at a "plain white deal table" on which there is only one "black wide-brimmed hat" (ibid.), the two characters are almost identical in appearance. Reader reads a story about a man who moves away from where he had lived and goes to live in a single room. The man is visited by a stranger who is sent by his former love to comfort him, and on each visit the visitor reads a "sad tale" to him (p.139). Similarly to *Rockaby*, what is narrated is reflected in what we see on stage, so it can be argued that the man in the narrated story is Listener, whilst the comforter is perhaps Reader himself.

It is clear that in both plays Beckett represents memory in the form of external narration and, more specifically, in the form of a story; a story that is heard in *Rockaby* and read from a book in *Ohio Impromptu*. This form of articulating memory provides the latter with an apparent impersonality. Yet Beckett deals with the notion of narration in such a way that the narrated memories, which are about the characters' own lives, affect the characters themselves and also evoke their reaction at different points. For instance, throughout the course of *Rockaby*, V narrates W's loneliness and her despair at finding "another creature there/somewhere there/behind the pane/another living soul/one other living soul" (p.131). Realizing that there is no one else but "herself/whom else" (p.128), W decides to go and sit "into the old rocker":

so in the end/close of a long day/went down/in the end went down/down the
steep stair/let down the blind and down/right down/into the old rocker/mother
rocker/where mother rocked/all the years/all in black/best black/sat and
rocked/rocked/till her end came/in the end came.

(p.132)

W's loneliness and agonizing despair at finding another person like herself are foregrounded through the repetition of the same memory, albeit in different words, throughout the play. Thus, W's memory regarding the fact that she is all alone and her search "for another/another like herself/another creature like herself/a little like/going to and fro" (p.127) is not only repeated several times in the play, but is expressed in subtly different ways also, as shown in the following passages: "so in the end/close of a long day/went back in/in the end went back in/saying to herself/whom else" (p.128-9); "in the end came/close of a long day/sitting at her window/quiet at her window/only window/facing other windows/other only windows/all blinds down/never one up/hers alone up" (p.130); and, finally, "all eyes/all sides/high and low/for a blind up/one blind up/no more/never mind a face/behind the pane/famished eyes/like hers/to see/be seen/no" (p.131). The desire to see someone equally lonely or even the need to think of shared loneliness are themes that are paid particular attention in *Rockaby*.

These features can also be found in *Ohio Impromptu* in which the story read from the book is about the sorrow the man feels after moving "from where they had been so long together" (p.137). Nevertheless, in this play Beckett also presents, through the narration of memory, the man's hope to find relief from his "Unfamiliar room. Unfamiliar scene. Out to where nothing ever shared. Back to where nothing ever shared" (ibid.), an image that is not found in *Rockaby*. The protagonist of *Ohio Impromptu*, however, does not manage to feel relieved, in so far as he is constantly wondering whether he could now turn back, "acknowledge his error and return to where they were once so long alone together" (p.138). Feeling lonely, the protagonist is visited by a man sent by his loved one:

one night as he sat trembling head in hands from head to foot a man appeared to him and said, I have been sent by – and here he named the dear name – to comfort you. Then drawing a worn volume from the pocket of his long black coat he sat and read till dawn.

(p.139)

After several visits, however, the visitor in the story (an image that is also reflected in what we see onstage) explains to the protagonist that the dear one said there is “No need to go to him again, even were it in your power” (ibid.), and thus the sad narrated tale is told for one last time. In these two later plays, as in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Endgame*, Beckett once again, then, presents those memories which, above all, depict the solitude his characters feel. To be more specific, the protagonists of both *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu* remain alone, an image that reminds us of Krapp’s condition: “then back here to ... [hesitates] ... me. [Pause.] Krapp” (p.5).

Nonetheless, one of the main differences between *Ohio Impromptu* and *Rockaby* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Endgame* lies in the fact that the characters in the later plays do not express their wish to avert the past in any way, as Krapp and Hamm do at certain points. Rather, W and Listener are presented as accepting these memories and, perhaps most significantly, as wishing for “more”, manifested either in W’s request for “more” or in the knocking of Listener’s hand on the table to prompt repetition.

Equally, the narration of memories itself provides another image that strongly reminds us of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in which Krapp can re-experience his own past by listening to his younger self’s voice on the tape-recorder. Whereas in *Krapp’s Last Tape* memory is presented in the form of first-person narration, in the two later plays the first-person narration turns into third-person narration, which makes it seem more impersonal or distant. Furthermore, Beckett problematizes more fully the question of *who* narrates memory in his later plays. Specifically, in a play such as *Krapp’s Last Tape* the author both clarifies that the narrator of Krapp’s memories is Krapp himself and clearly situates the source of the voice onstage, whereas in his later play *Rockaby*, for instance, the source of the voice remains unspecified throughout, beyond stating that it belongs to W. What is more, the near-identical appearance of the Reader and Listener in *Ohio Impromptu* challenges the notion of the narrator for it raises questions as to whether these two characters are actually one. It is in presenting memory in the form of a rather distant narration that Beckett manages to focus on the body and,

most importantly, to shed light on the physicality of the experience of memory (a point developed further below).

The way in which the bodies of the characters are presented onstage continues to be one of Beckett's main preoccupations in these works. One striking similarity between the plays is that the protagonists' bodies are – by contrast to much of Beckett's preceding drama – not presented as mutilated, damaged, or obviously reduced in any way. Nonetheless, Beckett does not fail to underline the notion of bodily impotence in other ways, in particular by stressing the restricted and minimal movements of his protagonists' bodies. Hence, in *Rockaby*, the only way in which W moves is by opening and closing her eyes, a movement which is itself minimized as the play progresses: “Eyes: Now closed, now open in unblinking gaze. About equal proportions section 1, increasingly closed 2 and 3, closed for good halfway through 4” (p.125). The rest of W's body is not willingly moved in any way throughout the entire play; nevertheless, W is constantly rocked in her chair, which is “controlled mechanically without [any of her] assistance” (p.126).

Likewise, in *Ohio Impromptu* the two characters' movements are limited. Both of them remain seated throughout the play. Reader reads the story and turns the pages of the book, then closes it at the end of the play, whereas the only way in which Listener moves is by knocking his hand on the table either to request a repetition of a part of the story or to prompt Reader to continue the narration. Apart from that, both characters only “raise their [bowed] heads and look at each other” at the very end of the play (ibid., p.140).

One difference between these two plays and the four earlier theatrical works analyzed, namely *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame*, *Not I* and *That Time*, becomes clear. These other plays clearly depict the actual fragmentation and physical impotence of the body; in *Endgame* Nagg and Nell are legless, Clov cannot sit, and Hamm is blind and cannot walk, whereas in *Krapp's Last Tape* Krapp's sight and hearing are deficient. Images of fragmentation are also found in *Not I* where Mouth is reduced to a mouth and in *That Time* where Listener is reduced to a mere head. In the two plays composed in the 1980s, however, Beckett does not seem to present us with any of these obvious bodily infirmities.

Rather, he appears to deal with impotence in a significantly different way, that is, by paying close attention to the minimal, restricted movements of the body under otherwise apparently “normal” conditions. In this vein, it is certainly arguable that not only depriving the body of its ability to move in general, but also of its capability of having any physical contact – with the “media” through which memory is re-presented in particular – may be considered a form of impotence also.

If memory in *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu* is not only externalized but, as has already been pointed out, takes the form of narration, this is, of course, also true of *Krapp’s Last Tape*. However, a further difference between *Krapp’s Last Tape* and the 1980s plays explored here is that Krapp is able to have actual physical contact with the media through which his memory is recalled (and thus rendered open to experience); that is, he is “potent” at least to the degree that he can touch and manipulate his tapes and the tape-recorder itself. By contrast, in *Rockaby*, Beckett’s use of an apparently unspecified source of narration becomes the means through which the voice of memory is precisely *not* given a visual, phenomenological form onstage. Thus, the protagonist in *Rockaby* cannot manipulate her memory through touch, as Krapp does, since the voice is heard, but never seen or itself embodied in the play. Moreover, even in *Ohio Impromptu*, where we can actually see both the character who narrates the story and the book which he reads it from, Listener is again restricted to knocking his hand on the table and touching the reader’s hand only once so as to stop him from turning the pages of the book.

It has been argued on this basis that the characters in these works are mere listeners who thus passively accept – and are, perhaps, only *able* to accept – everything the “voice” has to tell them. Mary A. Doll, for instance, argues – echoing Brater’s account of the Listener in *That Time* – that the voice in Beckett’s later writings “*forc[es]* its claim on the body”, thus implying the voice’s imposition on the body which unwillingly listens to that voice and merely accepts everything despite its own will (1988: 48; emphasis added). Similarly, Anna McMullan claims that “the figure [in *Rockaby*] does *not control* the voice, [even though] the four sections of the narrative and the accompanying motion of the rocker are

preceded by the four imploring ‘More’s uttered by the figure” (1993: 106; emphasis added). Like Doll, McMullan here suggests a passivity of the body onstage by contrast to the potent voice of memory which remains essentially uncontrollable.

Yet, *Rockaby*, in fact, *begins* with W’s voice saying “More” (Beckett, 2009c: 127) which is immediately followed by the beginning of “*rock[ing] and voice together*” (ibid.). This suggests, I would argue, not a complete impotence with regard to the voice in the play (to which the “More” would then be only a passive reaction), but rather that the woman’s request for more is, in fact, what enables the narration of the voice and the rocking to begin in the first place. The voice starts narrating the story of a woman who is all by herself and searches “for another/another like herself” (ibid.). Early on in the play, and specifically when the voice utters the phrase “time she stopped” (ibid.), W joins the narration for the first time. W’s own utterance of this phrase is again repeated as soon as “time she stopped” is heard for the second time and then, the third time that W utters it the rocking of the chair comes “*to rest, [and there is a] faint fade of light*” (p.128).

The same pattern is repeated when W says “More” again which, similarly to the very beginning of the play, leads to the rocking of the chair and causes (we assume) the narration of the voice to start once again. Furthermore, if, as has been noted, W joins the voice’s narration when the phrase “time she stopped” is heard, unlike in the first part of the play, here the rocking of the chair and the narration stop with the echo of the phrase “living soul”. The third and fourth “mores” requested by W have exactly the same function as the previous two, that is, to continue the narration and the rocking of the chair. However, the third part of the play is identical to the first one in terms of W’s articulation of “time she stopped” both in the middle of this part and at its very end, which again leads both the rocking and the narration to stop. Finally, the fourth and last part of the play is similar to the second one in terms of the points at which W joins the narration – that is, only at the beginning – whereas this part ends with the echo of a different phrase, “rock her off”. Presenting W as joining the voice’s narration is, in this way, the means through which the structure of the play implies her

intervention in the narrated memory. In this sense, W is by no means a passive figure onstage who merely hears a voice.

Examining the function of W's request for "more" with reference to Billie Whitelaw's performance of *Rockaby*, Jonathan Kalb writes:

The first and second 'Mores,' inflected as questions, imply two possible purposes: she may be instructing the voice to continue [...], which implies that its progress is under her control, or she may be pleading for the voice to stop, implying that it has a source outside her, or at least that she cannot stop it. The third and fourth 'Mores,' which sound like automatic responses, lines recited mindlessly on cue, raise other possibilities – that her words are unconnected to any clear volition, or that they progressively lose such connection as she rocks off.

(1989: 14-15)

Even though Kalb's reading of the play seems to acknowledge that W's "more" instructs the recorded voice, he only seems to present this as a possibility since this utterance, according to Kalb, may equally imply W's wish to stop the voice. Yet, it is hard to see how the choice of the word "more" can really be read in this context as a plea for something to end rather than to continue. Moreover, the difference between the first and last two "mores" that Kalb suggests is not entirely convincing to the extent that the only change in voice that Beckett himself indicates in the text is: "Towards end of 4, say from 'saying to herself' on, gradually softer. [...] W's 'more' a little softer each time" (Beckett, 2009c: 126).

Billie Whitelaw, who played the role of W in the New York performance of the play in 1984, stated:

I'm in the chair, and I feel that as long as I can hear my own thoughts, then I'm still there. And when the thoughts stop it's terrifying. It feels quite terrifying in that chair when the words stop. But whenever I say 'more' the 'mores' become weaker because she is fading into ... whatever. And so whenever I say 'more' it's like, 'Don't let me go yet'.

(Kalb, 1989: 20)

Whitelaw's words make clear that "more", on her account, could not convincingly function as a begging for the narration to stop, as Kalb suggests (ibid., p.14-15), but instead, in Whitelaw's experience of performing the role,

serves as a comforter to the protagonist and what enables her to affirm her present existence.

Equally, the four “Mores” uttered by W have a more important function than Kalb allows: they clearly structure the narration of the voice by segmenting it into four parts. In addition, although it does not interrupt the narration or cause it to begin, W’s joining in the line “time she stopped” foregrounds her own activeness at this point and can, as such, also arguably be considered an intervention, something that provides the narration of memory with a certain pattern and rhythm. In fact, both the body and the narrated memory are presented as having the same rhythm in the play. W’s body is rocked slowly, as indicated in the play’s stage directions: “*Rock: Slight. Slow*” (Beckett, 2009a: 126), whilst the narrated memory has the soft tone and slow rhythm of a lullaby, as suggested by the play’s French and English titles, namely *Berceuse* and *Rockaby* respectively. As Billie Whitelaw again suggests, in her interview with Mel Gussow: “I think of it [*Rockaby*] as a lullaby. Soft, monotonous, no colour, soothing” (2000: 88). In this light, and considering the ways in which the body affects the structure of memory’s re-presentation in *Rockaby*, by asking for more and, in turn, segmenting the narration into four parts, it could also be argued that the rhythm in which the body moves in the play is what affects the rhythm of the narrated memory itself.

In *Rockaby*, then, Beckett takes his depiction of the alien or “othering” experience of memory one step further than in his earlier works such as *Krapp’s Last Tape* by presenting it as apparently externalized or separated from the body and, most importantly, as reduced to a voice in the form of external narration. Nonetheless, typically, these stripped-down forms of his later works strongly emphasize that the more minimal these forms, the more intense is the portrayal onstage. This applies to the presentation of the physical body also in its relation to these play’s enactments of the re-presentation of memory, since, in the very intensity of the depiction of its restricted capacities, it cannot be considered as merely passive, in so far as Beckett constantly highlights the degree to which, even if through the subtlest movements or reactions, a certain form of potency

remains available and even necessary to the subject as embodied (and hence irreducible to mind alone). For this reason, Hale is right to remark:

In *Rockaby*, Beckett concentrates an entire human life in one image, several minutes, one movement, and a very few simple, short, and repetitive lines of text. By so doing, he insures that each element will produce its maximum effect upon spectators, for, in the theatre as in the scientific laboratory, *condensation entails intensity*. By reducing dramatic action and language to their bare minimum, he endows each small change with enormous power: the eyes closing, the light that fades slowly, a new line of text introduced in the middle of a group we have already heard several times before.

(1987: 146; emphasis added)

As in *Not I*, less truly is “more” here. The play reduces its character’s action to its bare minimum, but at the same time emphasizes that each time she is involved in action, that action itself is indeed an active moment. W’s action, as already noted, is markedly restricted to the opening and closing of her eyes, her articulation of the four brief “mores” and her intervention in the narration, but every time she is engaged in one of these actions, the effect is vivid. In this way, then, her response to the narrated memory becomes both dramatically potent and dynamic by virtue of its very reduction to the seeming “bare minimum”, endowing each act, as Hale puts it, with “enormous power”. Thus, I want to argue, in spite of being four short words, W’s four “mores” in the play are not expressions of a subject reduced to mere automation, as Jonathan Kalb for example claims, but rather presented as willed in ways that suggest a more complex relation between conditions of potency and impotency than sheer passivity would be able to account for.

The body’s effect on the representation of memory is even more clearly depicted in *Ohio Impromptu*. The play does not begin with the character’s “signal” to prompt the narration to start, as in *Rockaby*, but instead opens with the reader reading the story from the book in front of him. As soon as the first phrase is articulated, “little is left to tell”, however, the listener knocks his hand on the table, a movement which, though different, corresponds to W’s “more” in *Rockaby*. When Listener reacts in this way the reader repeats the phrase “little is left to tell” which, in turn, suggests that the knock on the table functions as the

means through which the listener communicates his wish to re-listen to a specific part of the narrated story. Most significantly, when the reader obeys Listener's request, he then waits for Listener's reaction: a second knock on the table which this time functions as his request for the reader to continue the narration. It becomes clear in the way that in *Ohio Impromptu* bodily involvement in the narration of memory is more persistent even than in *Rockaby*, since in the latter W only causes the narration to begin (at the very beginning of the play) or to re-start (at the beginning of each of the next three parts of the play). As soon as the narration begins there is no pause waiting for W's reaction signifying a wish to continue, as can be seen in the interaction between Reader and Listener in *Ohio Impromptu*.

To the degree then that we understand Reader and Listener as being representations of memory and the body respectively, it can also be suggested that the reader's waiting for Listener to tell him *if* and *when* to continue the narrative implies memory's essential reliance on the body in more general terms. As Steven Connor has observed, Listener's reaction to the narrated memory is reminiscent of Krapp's control of the tape recorder, something that underlines the dynamism of the body itself (1988). The ability of the subject's body, however reduced or restricted, to control memory substantially – though not purely or totally – is, in this way, suggested when the listener interrupts not only the narrative but even more the closing of the actual book, first by grasping the reader's hand and second by knocking his hand on the table at the very end of the play. Indeed, these small actions themselves may be said to emphasize the difference at this point between the "intense listening" depicted in these plays and what we might call mere "hearing", in so far as listening precisely requires the listener's attention to a sound.

The rest of *Ohio Impromptu* has the same pattern: that is, at certain points Listener knocks his hand on the table, Reader stops, repeats the phrase Listener wants to re-hear, followed by a second knock on the table which signifies Listener's request for Reader to continue the narration. This, however, occurs when Listener hears the phrases "then turn and his slow steps retrace", "seen the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long alone

together, my shade will comfort you”, “little is left to tell”, “saw the dear face and heard the unspoken words, No need to go to him again, even were it in your power”, and finally “nothing is left to tell”. Taking into account that the reader’s narrative is a “sad tale”, a story where “sadness, loss and solitude, contrasted with a memory of togetherness” prevail, it can be argued that the phrases Listener wants to re-hear are precisely those related to his own present loneliness (Knowlson, 1996: 665). Apart from this, however, the repeated phrase “little is left to tell”, which then becomes “nothing is left to tell”, seems to suggest both Listener’s attempt to realize and, perhaps most importantly, to accept that this story has come to an end; as well as his control over the narration. Furthermore, unlike Krapp who curses every time he listens to a memory related to his present condition, the listener in *Ohio Impromptu* reacts in a different way. That is, he only wishes to re-listen to some parts of his memory: those which precisely are sad and remind him of his present loneliness.

Since the listener’s knock on the table emphasizes the body’s capacity to have an effect on the re-presentation memory – indeed, to perhaps be necessary to it – it is thus problematic, as with *Rockaby* or *That Time*, to claim that the listener is the reader’s “master” or that Reader does nothing more than keep on “reading passively”, as Pierre Astier, for example, suggests (1986: 398). To describe the listener as “master” attributes an absolute power (or subjective sovereignty) to him and underestimates considerably the reader’s role. Moreover, it implies that the listener controls the reader without being affected by the latter, a characteristic typical of a more conventional depiction of, say, the master-slave relationship (which Beckett himself problematizes in the depiction of the couple Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* as elsewhere).

At the same time, it is certainly the case that deprived of his ability to have any direct, physical interaction with the material form in which his memory is re-presented, Listener, like W in *Rockaby*, manages nonetheless to exert some control over the reader’s story and provide the latter with a certain rhythm and structure. Like the tape recordings in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, memory in the play is presented as having been “stored” like a story in a book which may, in turn, imply that it needs to be read in the correct order so as to make sense. Despite this

seeming fixity and stability that the image of written memory in a book suggests, however, Listener manages to challenge these features by directing both the pace of the narration (Reader waits for him to knock again on the table to continue) and the parts of memory that will be repeated or even read in the first place, as shown in the following passage:

Now with redoubled force the fearful symptoms described at length page forty paragraph four. [*Starts to turn back the pages. Checked by L's left hand. Resumes relinquished page.*] White nights now again his portion. As when his heart was young.

(Beckett, 2009c: 138-9)

It is evident, then, that Beckett pays equal attention both to the ways in which the body, deprived of its ability to have any physical contact with the material form or media through which its memory is represented, manages nonetheless to actually “touch” and affect the latter by different means, as well as to the fact that the body is simultaneously affected by the voice of the memory to which is as much conjoined (in narration) as separated from.

The notion of memory as that which might be stored like a story in a book is famously discussed by Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay “The Storyteller”. The significance this essay attributes to storytelling can perhaps shed new light on Beckett’s representation of memory in the form of a story in *Ohio Impromptu*. In “The Storyteller”, Benjamin argues that the modern world is one devoid of shared experience and marked, above all, by the incommunicability of people’s experiences, especially in the period after the First World War. According to Benjamin, and this is the main focus of his essay, genuine collective shared experience is no longer possible in so far as the social and cultural conditions that made oral storytelling possible have themselves dissipated in modernity. “The storyteller”, Benjamin writes, “takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale” (1999: 87).

In this historical diagnosis, the dissolution of social experience is reflected in and reinforced by an acceleration of information processing and a

predominance of novelistic forms (which Benjamin describes as inherently individualistic in character): “What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature – the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella – is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it” (ibid.). With the invention of the novel, narrators have isolated themselves (as have readers), whilst their novels are only “dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, *one* battle” (p.97). This, in turn, is what makes the novel individualistic as well as giving it a fixed meaning; something that oral storytelling does not (and cannot) have. Being *written* and printed, the novel is thus rendered fixed in contrast to oral storytelling which is always open to re-telling. At the same time, Benjamin argues, the nature of the novel itself is individualistic because it is aimed at one reader, who is effectively isolated while reading it. On the other hand, oral storytelling is a collective, shared experience.

Likewise, information, the second characteristic “epic form” of the modern world (and one, according to Benjamin, that progressively displaces the novel itself), is subject to verifiability and, most importantly, is only valid at the time of its production: information, as he famously argues, “does not survive the moment in which it was new” (p.88). Furthermore, information cannot impart any wisdom to its reader, as oral storytelling can; rather, Benjamin states it is only used out of necessity and does not communicate with what we might describe as more emphatically somatic forms of memory.

The significance of both orality and literacy, which is central to Benjamin’s account of changing epic forms, has been most influentially discussed by Walter J. Ong in his book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982). Ong shows here how the invention of writing has transformed consciousness. What is interesting about Ong’s work is that he insists upon the possibilities that writing itself opens up, while, at the same time, asserting that, historically, orality is precisely what the technology of writing is dependent upon in the first place: “Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality” (p.8).² Moreover, in emphasizing (in similar ways

² Ong’s argument should not be immediately contrasted with Derrida’s challenge to the speech/writing opposition because Ong here is referring particularly to the conventional sense of

to Benjamin) the significant role orality may play in constituting the unity of a specific community of “people”, Ong writes:

When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker. If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout provided for them, as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered, to be re-established only when oral speech begins again. Writing and print isolate. There is no collective noun or concept for readers corresponding to ‘audience’. The collective ‘readership’ – this magazine has a readership of two million – is a far-gone abstraction.

(p.74)

In this context, then, the significance of oral storytelling, as that against which modern, written forms of narration (as in the novel) are defined, becomes manifest. In fact, this significance, for Benjamin, lies particularly in the effect oral storytelling has on people’s sense of shared experience and on memory more generally. In contrast to information and the novel which do not, Benjamin argues, allow the integration of the story into the reader’s own experience, the practice of oral storytelling is in some way out of time in that it can be related to people at any time and thus *transcend* real time. In this way, it “creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation” (Benjamin, 1999: 97), and hence is a form of collective memory as opposed to that individual written narration fixed with the printed form of the novel.

In this sense, then, one intriguing aspect of the presentation of the Listener’s memory as stored like a story in a book in *Ohio Impromptu* becomes evident. Beckett presents an actual book onstage in which the narrated story is written, but, at the same time, he presents Reader narrating the story out loud. Reading the use of the story in the play in light of Benjamin’s and Ong’s arguments, it becomes clearer that, in this way, not only does Listener himself identify with the narrative and integrate the latter into his own present condition, but also that such oral storytelling (dependent as it is here on the technological supplement of writing) allows the permeation of what is narrated and, in turn, its

“writing”, whereas Derrida’s philosophy is not restricted to this concept. This is why the word “arche-writing” is used in the latter.

otherness to what Benjamin defines in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” as the “homogeneous, empty time” of modernity (1999: 261). The ability of Listener to identify with the narrated memories shows that, in Beckett, memory is not simply an “object” that the characters accept or reject, but rather a necessary means through which the subject is itself constituted. Memory, even where it is articulated by an apparently disembodied and alienated voice, as in *Rockaby* or *That Time*, is only (re-)enacted as such through an embodied “intense listening”, which is thereby never merely passive or impotent, but necessary to any subjectivity (even if it also entails that the subject can thus never be fully complete “in itself”). Enoch Brater’s reading of the play is, in this respect, particularly illuminating:

Listener, similarly, is another kind of reader, one who scans sound cues, what this text calls ‘worn volume’. What he knows how to ‘read’ best are pauses, intonations, and reflections of the human voice. As Reader recites, ‘Could he now turn back? Acknowledge his error and return to where they were once so long alone together,’ Listener picks up the signal he has been silently waiting for. He readies himself for hand action, stopping Reader from turning back the pages to a passage ‘described at length page forty paragraph four,’ a line which, like those we remember from *Murphy*, *Watt*, and *Footfalls*, calls our attention to the mechanics of written literature. This is no passive listener, but an active participant in the drama. His knocking on the table, moreover, establishes him firmly in command as the prompter for each verbal action that takes place in this impromptu.

(1984: 135)

As we have seen, the intrication of body and mind as this is manifested in the possibility of acts of memory was depicted in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Endgame* primarily through the use of the figure of the couple. In the later works, however, the couple is no longer directly employed, even if its “residues” remain. Indeed, in *Ohio Impromptu* Beckett problematizes the very notion of the couple, in so far as he places two near-identical characters onstage and only *one* “*black wide-brimmed hat at centre of table*”:

L seated at table facing front towards end of long side audience right. Bowed head propped on right hand. Face hidden. Left hand on table. Long black coat. Long black hair.

R seated at table in profile centre of short side audience right. Bowed head propped on right hand. Left hand on table. Book on table before him open at last pages. Long black coat. Long white hair.

(Beckett, 2009c: 137)

Based on this near-identical appearance of the two characters, several critics have understandably argued that Beckett's main intention in the play is to represent the schism and dispersal of the self: "*Ohio Impromptu* [...] presents another of Beckett's 'pseudo-couples', pseudo in that they are not, properly speaking, [...] two persons, but dramatize the dispersed self" (Jenkins, 1984: 997). In this way, Jenkins' argument would seem to imply that the reader and listener in *Ohio Impromptu*, or even W and the recorded voice in *Rockaby*, reflect the representation of a total separation between the body and (a presumably non-somatic) memory in more general terms. Yet, as has been argued above, even though a dispersal of the self is suggested in the plays, Beckett dramatizes, through this separation, the interactions and dependencies between the constitutive elements of even the most dispersed selves. In this way, he emphasizes that each of these elements affects and is necessarily affected by the other, as represented by the listeners in both plays (Listener and W) who are able to "intervene" within or direct and thus affect the narrated memory (Reader and the voice) and vice versa. Even where, then, "memory" is apparently represented on stage in or through a dramatically "disembodied" form, similarly to the reciprocity or co-determination of the somatic and mental foregrounded in, say, the pseudo-couple of Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, the "relationships" depicted in the later plays remain ones of reciprocity in so far as they cannot, of necessity, be broken down into two autonomous parts.

In *Ohio Impromptu*, the narrative unfolded talks about the relationship between the man in the story and the comforter who visits him: "with never a word exchanged they grew to be as one" (Beckett, 2009c: 139). This also applies to the reader and listener onstage as neither of them exchanges a word throughout the entire course of the play. Nonetheless, the inter-dependence between them is powerfully manifested at the very end of the play when both Reader and Listener "*raise their heads and look at each other*" (p.140). This

creates a stark contrast with what precedes this moment, since both characters otherwise keep their heads bowed throughout most of the play. At the same time, the raising of the characters' heads specifically at the end of the play (something that is also manifest in *That Time*) has another function, something that Beckett himself explained with reference to *Catastrophe*. In Knowlson's words:

Beckett told me that in referring to what one might describe as the 'grand finale', a reviewer had claimed that it was 'ambiguous'. 'There's no ambiguity there at all,' he said angrily. 'He's [*Catastrophe's* protagonist] saying: you bastards, you haven't finished me yet!

(1996: 680)

This is an idea that can also be found in *Ohio Impromptu*, as the characters' raising of their heads at the very end of the play works against any arguments as to their passivity. The dynamics of both Reader and Listener are manifest throughout the entire play but are especially brought to the fore with this striking change in position at its conclusion.

Furthermore, by reducing *Ohio Impromptu* to such a minimal setting Beckett achieves the same effect already noted in *Rockaby*. He challenges stasis by giving power and significance to each one of the elements onstage. As Gontarski comments on the world premiere of the play at Columbus, Ohio (directed by Alan Schneider):

The play contains almost no movement, yet the final impression was balletic, precarious, the gesture suspended, the play balanced on its margin. Each knock, each turn of page, Listener's one arresting gesture, especially the climactic recognition – the slightest movement gained prominence against the stasis.

(1982: 136)

Both W and Listener pay particular attention to their narrated memories, acknowledge and process what is narrated, and, most importantly, respond to the latter, both emotionally and physically. Phenomenologically this could be read in terms of, for example, the Husserlian notion of intentionality, according to which the individuals' experiences are always experiences *of* something, and

thus directed toward that something itself. (Although, following Derrida and Stiegler here, we might say it is the necessity to go *via* this other, to be supplemented by it in order to be able to experience in the first place, which precisely undermines the self-identity of any subject as such without thereby simply negating it.) This is indeed the case with W and Listener in Beckett's works since both characters are constantly engaged with their memories of particular things, objects or feelings as experienced by themselves, that is, from a first-person point of view. The characters' own attention to what is narrated is of significance in this regard since *no* story has any meaning or importance without an embodied subject to listen to it.

Beckett's later drama and phenomenology

The above analysis has attempted to demonstrate and underline the centrality of the body to Beckett's later works for the theatre and also the physicality of memory. If in these later works Beckett is particularly preoccupied with an even greater restriction of the movements of the body than that to be found in his plays of the 1950s, it is so as to stress that, even when any immediate phenomenological form of memory is apparently taken away or disembodied, the somatic remains vital to the experience of memory.

In the final section of this chapter, I want to consider this briefly alongside the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenologist who is often considered as "the patron saint of the body" in modern post-Kantian philosophy (Shusterman, 2005: 151). Famously, Merleau-Ponty provides a dynamic reading of the body by arguing that our entire perception and existence is dependent upon it. What makes his philosophy particularly interesting – and relevant to the objectives of the thesis – is not only its aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of forms of bodily weakness (as this thesis seeks to do with regard to Beckett's representations of impotence), but also its scope in overcoming a series of philosophical dualisms such as those between body and mind, subject and object, the mental and the physical. Possible comparisons between Beckett and Merleau-Ponty have not gone unnoticed in previous scholarship, and have perhaps been examined most extensively in Ulrika Maude's *Beckett, Technology*

and the Body (2009). This section seeks, then, to supplement Maude's reading of Beckett in light of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy – while pushing this here in a slightly more “deconstructive” direction in light of my previous chapter's discussion of Derrida and Stiegler – and, in so doing, it hopes to shed some new light on the representation of impotence in Beckett's writings as it has been discussed so far.

Following Husserl, whose conception of intentionality was briefly referred to above, Merleau-Ponty proclaims his wish to return to phenomena or, as he writes in his main work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), to “reveal a ‘primary layer’ of sense experience” (p.227). To do so, he begins his work by criticizing both empiricism and intellectualism. Or, to put this in another form, Merleau-Ponty argues against both the concept of sensation as the basis of perceptual experience and the idea that perception can be reduced to mere judgment. Specifically, he states that the concept of sensation, upon which empiricism is based, is not as straightforward as it is believed to be, since, in fact, it “corresponds to nothing in our experience” (pp.3-4). Instead, everything that we perceive, Merleau-Ponty argues, is essentially involved in a relationship with an external, coherent environment and, thus, is never perceived or experienced in absolute terms: “The perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a ‘field’” (p.4). In reference to intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty notes that the latter sets no distinction between what we experience and our judgement of it. Such theories therefore support, according to Merleau-Ponty, the reduction of each perceptual experience to a mental cognition, and thus fail to take into account that experience is always essentially *embodied*.

Merleau-Ponty proceeds to argue that the basis of human experience, and it is upon this that his entire phenomenological project is based, is the body itself. Each experience has a bodily character and it can only be understood in bodily terms in so far as the body is what enables individuals to engage with the world as well as being the source of all perception and action. The body, for Merleau-Ponty, is thus constantly active. Here, it is important to note that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body does not deny the existence of mentality. Rather, his aim

is to underline the impasse of the mind-body dualism by showing that “our body is not an object for an ‘I think’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 177). In this sense, as Taylor Carman puts it, any mental phenomena, according to Merleau-Ponty, “occur only against a background of perceptual activity that we always already understand in bodily terms, by engaging in it” (1999: 206).

The everyday example of an individual experiencing a book, provided by David Cerbone in his commentary on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, illuminates the activeness of the body in experience:

Your bodily existence is not just intimated in your experience of the book, but is more directly manifest. In looking at the page, you are probably peripherally aware of your hands holding the book; you may also dimly discern the outlines of your glasses or the tip of your nose. Your attention may shift, gradually or abruptly, if you feel a sudden twinge or if your fingers gripping the book begin to fall asleep. Your body is not just present as a further object of perception, but is also manifest as active and perceiving.

(2006: 7)

As this example shows, the experience of the book is lived through the body itself. Again, when we experience a book, it is not that any mental perception of the book is nonexistent. This is not what Merleau-Ponty denies. Instead, as the example above suggests, the body becomes the medium through which the book is perceived and experienced in so far as it is what actually engages with it. In this sense, then, it can be argued that a connection between Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of perception and the account of a co-constitution of the body and mind that this thesis has sought to demonstrate in Beckett’s plays can be drawn.

Crucially, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is by no means a mere object like any other object we experience every day, but rather it is necessarily involved in a constant relationship with its environment and the background of the objects it perceives. As has already been mentioned, everything is in the middle of something else; thus, the only way in which objects (and the world more generally) can be perceived is in what Merleau-Ponty terms their background. As Cerbone’s example makes clear, in order for the experience of the book to have any significance and meaning, our bodies as such take into account any

implications it has such as, for instance, the way in which and the reasons why books are used. It is precisely the ability of the body to “understand” these implications, for Merleau-Ponty, that makes the body active: “To experience a structure is not to receive it into oneself passively: it is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance” (1962: 301). It is in this sense, then, that I am suggesting the “passivity” sometimes attributed to the listeners, say, in Beckett’s late drama would need to be complicated by recognizing the activity inherent to an embodied listening as such.

Reading *Ohio Impromptu* in this light, then, the importance of the body to Beckett’s drama is also underlined, while it becomes clear that Beckett stresses not only the activeness of the body in perception, but also that any kind of perception is essentially experienced in bodily terms. Indeed, the works examined in this chapter suggest that both the “perception” of the past and the processes of memory are exemplary of this agency in perception. The evident activity of the body in perception and the fact that any kind of experience is of a bodily nature are equally central to the other plays which this chapter examines. As has already been mentioned, in *Not I* Beckett presents the body reduced to a single part, but at the same time, the activeness of the body that he foregrounds throughout the play strongly suggests the constitutive role it plays in perception and the experience of the past in so far as it is precisely the restricted and fragmented body itself which enables Mouth to experience those narrated past memories as her own: “her lips moving [...] the cheeks ... the jaws ... and whole face” (Beckett, 2009c: 89). In fact, this seems to have been one of Beckett’s preoccupations from the time that he composed *Krapp’s Last Tape* at least: in that play, Krapp tries to close his eyes, as he used to do thirty years ago, so as to re-experience his past in bodily terms. The image appears in *Rockaby* and *That Time* as well.

In his book *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (2004), Jack Reynolds develops a cognate account of the active role the body plays in perception:

As hard as we may try, we cannot see the broken shards of a beer bottle as simply the sum of its color, shape, and so forth. The whole background apparatus of what that bottle is used for, what consuming liquids contained therein means for different people, and what it is for something to be 'broken' comes with, and not behind, our perception of that bottle. For Merleau-Ponty, perception cannot be characterized as a type of thought in a classical, reflective sense, but it is also far from being a third-person process in which we attain access to a rarefied, pure object. Just as Heidegger asserts we cannot hear pure noise, but always hear a noise of some activity, Merleau-Ponty maintains the objects that we encounter in the world are always of a particular kind and relevant to certain human intentions (explicit or otherwise), and we cannot step outside this instrumentality to some realm of purified objects, or for that matter thought. Perception, then, is not merely passive before sensory stimulation, but, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, is a 'creative receptivity'.

(p.8)

As shown in Reynold's example, perceiving any kind of object – or brokenness or fragmentariness – is never a mere reflection of it. Rather, such perception essentially requires our understanding of certain implications related to that object itself. Thus, our body, which is in constant contact with objects and the world more generally, is constantly active in so far as it is able to understand and consider such implications, and is their horizon; something which provides all kinds of experience with meaning.

Perhaps unexpectedly, this is a point that may also help to shed some further light on certain aspects of the oft-remarked "minimalism" of Beckett's later works, by way of a comparison with other discussions of such minimalism in the visual arts. In his "Art and Objecthood" (1967), probably the most famous critical account of minimalism in the visual arts written at the height of its influence, Michael Fried attacks what he calls the "literalist" *theatricality* of minimalist works such as those of Donald Judd or Carl Andre by placing them in opposition to the "presentness" (and, hence, humanness) he finds in the paintings of abstract expressionism. By "literal theatricality" Fried refers to the aim of minimalist works "to discover and project objecthood as such" in contrast to modernist works' aim "to defeat or suspend" it (*ibid.*, p.151). And this, according to Fried, is accomplished in several ways: most importantly, by minimalism's rejection of "anthropomorphism" as its basis, and what he

identifies as its phenomenological dependence on the beholder (by contrast to abstract painting).

Taking up Fried's argument, and referring to the minimalist rejection of what Fried terms anthropomorphism, Hal Foster writes:

The minimalist suppression of anthropomorphic images and gestures is more than a reaction against the abstract-expressionist model of art; it is a 'death of the author' (as Ronald Barthes would call it in 1968) that is at the same time a birth of the viewer: 'The object is but one of the terms of the newer esthetic One is more aware than before that he himself [*sic*] is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from the various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context'.

(1996: 50)

Indeed, this constant engagement of the spectator that minimalist works compel is precisely, according to Fried, what renders the latter incomplete without them and, thus, in turn, "theatrical". All these characteristics of minimalism, then, consist of what Foster calls "the minimalist crime: an attempt to displace late-modernist art by means of a literal reading that confuses the transcendental 'presentness of art' with the mundane 'presence' of things" (ibid.).

Fried's argument here is one also taken up by J.M. Bernstein in his more recent book *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (2006), where it is given a more detailed philosophical development. Here, Bernstein traces the idea of anthropomorphism back to Descartes and the modern, secular argument that people are constantly engaged in reading, decoding and interpreting processes so as to project human meaning onto an inhuman world. In this way, things in themselves – in what Bernstein describes (following Max Weber) as modernity's "disenchanted world" – are taken to have no meaning and to be *mere* things exclusively dependent on our perception and interpretation for their significance.

Considering this dependence of things on human meaning and Fried's view that minimalism aims to *hide* its anthropomorphism (which is what renders it "theatrical"), it appears that a non-anthropomorphic reading of art would then

entail that what appears in and as a painting (for instance) is not something to be experienced in terms of subjective expression, as modernist art (in Fried's or Bernstein's sense) suggests. Instead, eliminated from "all psychological associations and connotations" (Bernstein, 2006: 127), minimalist art (if considered to be non-anthropomorphic) becomes a *mere* object.

Yet, Bernstein contends, "insofar as minimalist works are works and not mere things, then they will continue to carry the full baggage of anthropomorphic projection, however hidden, sublimated, or disguised this anthropomorphism is" (p.128). Indeed, Bernstein argues, with evident proximity to Fried in this regard, the engagement of art with some measure of anthropomorphism is *essential*; something art cannot reject while still remaining art. In this vein, he stresses:

a *formation* (transformation or transfiguration) of the object that, however minimally or fragilely, silhouettes human intercourse with the material world – with eye or hand or body, always an inflection of the size of the body, its upright posture, the hand that grasps with its opposing thumb, the forward look, the eye's response to distance, colour, shape, and form.

(pp.126-7)

This helpfully frames for us some of the issues also at stake in the question of how to understand that "minimalism" which is similarly central to Beckett's works of the 1970s and 1980s. As the analyses of *Not I* and *That Time* above have suggested, for example, Beckett is closely preoccupied in such works with the representation of the body, however minimally or apparently reduced. At the same time, he seems to be equally interested in the settings of his works – or, to adopt a language closer to Merleau-Ponty's, with the body's necessary involvement in a constant relationship with its environment and the background of the objects it perceives – which are full of different kinds of objects that themselves contribute to the actual meaning of his writings (especially as these are presented on stage). Yet, despite their own "minimalism" (one that evidently marks the representation of the body itself in his writings, as we have seen), Beckett's works, in my view, also remain clearly anthropomorphic in the broad ways in which Bernstein identifies, and, as such, cannot by any means be considered as straightforwardly "literalist" in Fried's sense. Regardless of the

extent to which the body is restricted, fragmented or reduced, it is still foregrounded as a fragmented *body*, rather than a mere material object or disenchanted item, and it remains vital for any experience of the past and in perception more generally. Beckett's minimalist settings should not, in this sense, be taken to represent mere objects or things which are *merely* mundane. Rather, the way Beckett employs physical props, which are not expected to be used in the course of a play, in such minimal settings foregrounds even the tiniest change or the most ordinary prop whose significance might not have been manifest otherwise. If, in this light, the body's constant contact with objects and the world – or, in a more Derridean register, its necessary supplementation by what is other to it – is what provides all kinds of experience with meaning, as Merleau-Ponty claims, we might also identify, following Bernstein's account of minimalism, the "anthropomorphic" stake and interest of art more generally in this, and in the face of disenchanting models of objectivity, however apparently reduced or repressed that interest might be.

To return more directly to Merleau-Ponty, and relating Cerbone's example of the book experience to my own analysis of the importance of the book and storytelling in *Ohio Impromptu*, it can also be argued that the latter is equally open to being read in a certain phenomenological (as well as "deconstructive") light in this regard. As has already been shown in the analysis of the play above, Listener's body plays a crucial role in the perception of the story – an image which is underlined through Beckett's emphasis on the somatic structure of memory. Listener is able not only to listen to the narrated story but also to relate to it and decide at which point to prompt the reader to stop or repeat a particular part. This image recalls Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body's ability to understand the implications that any kind of object has when it is used – indeed, to push this slightly more in the direction of the kinds of deconstructive consequences that Stiegler draws from this, it suggests the essential reciprocity or co-determination at work here. At the same time, the evident activeness of the body depicted in Beckett's works highlights the forms of anthropomorphism still at stake in them (in Bernstein's specific sense) and, thus, underlines that what they depict is by no means *mere* objecthood.

This is not to say, as I made clear in my introduction, that in insisting on the ineradicability of a certain anthropomorphism in the artwork, I am also suggesting that we should return to anything like a straightforwardly “humanist” reading of Beckett’s work. Indeed, it is partly with this in mind, that, while acknowledging the evident divergences in their philosophies, I am keen, as Jack Reynolds puts it in his twin study of the two thinkers cited earlier, to stress here the ways in which Derrida’s and Merleau-Ponty’s different theorizations of the body and of alterity respectively “can serve to supplement and enrich each other” (p.xv) in the context of my reading of Beckett, emphasizing those strategies of Derrida’s and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophies that Reynolds describes as “curiously similar” (ibid.); in particular, as the latter makes clear, their shared concern to question dualistic hierarchies.

Most evidently, it is here the reliance of one side of such dualisms on what is “outside” of itself that marks it as *essentially* incomplete and thus entails an understanding of the human subject as defined by a kind of necessary “impotence” constitutive, in some sense, of the “human” itself. If the “question of the human” is, to re-cite Catherine Malabou from my introduction (herself working here through a citation from Derrida), a question of “a singular and unique destiny of repetition”, then the human is not simply negated or overcome in Beckett’s minimal and impotent depictions, but rather is perhaps better described as “what repeats itself *even when its essence is dissolved*” (Malabou 2015b: 62; emphasis added). This is, I think, in part what is meant by Bernstein’s own account of the finally ineliminable “anthropomorphic” dimension to the artwork in general.

The body’s limitations, which are constantly manifest in Beckett’s works, are indeed the reason why philosophy, after Descartes, has generally rejected the significance of the body, as Merleau-Ponty argues. Nevertheless, as Richard Shusterman observes, “the key to Merleau-Ponty’s strategy is to *transform* the recognition of the body’s weakness into an analysis of its essential, indispensable strength” (2005: 154; emphasis added). Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy tries to embrace the body’s limitations (or, in my sense, its impotence) by showing that these are essential to the capacity to have perspectives on objects and to

experience the world in general. One limitation the physical body may be considered to have, for instance, is that it inhabits one particular place. Yet this is what provides us “with an angle of perception or perspective from which objects can be grasped” (ibid., p.155). The body’s ability to change its place enables us to perceive objects from different perspectives.

The notion of perspective is directly linked, in this way, to one of Merleau-Ponty’s central ideas, namely motor intentionality. If, according to the phenomenological doctrine of intentionality, our experiences are always experiences *of* something and thus directed toward that something itself, for Merleau-Ponty the world we experience is only manifest in accordance with our bodies. For this reason, things are always perceived either as near to or far from us, here or there, and so on. My body is the horizon in which spatiality and movement are given, not simply more objective data for a disembodied subject.

In this context, then, it can be inferred that Beckett’s characters, too, experience their world in a fashion that can be elucidated phenomenologically, despite (or because of) the drastic restrictions customarily placed upon them. First of all, all the characters in the four works analyzed in this chapter are preoccupied with experiences *of* something, that is, their memories of past events and feelings. However, it is their bodies themselves which direct them toward such experiences. As has been shown, the body’s activeness in perception that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy highlights is one of the central images in Beckett’s writings also, since the bodies of all characters remain active in and throughout the perception of those experiences despite the fact that they are restricted in different ways and to different extents. This is why, I would argue, Beckett provides Mouth with the ability to choose the way in which she is going to narrate her story, and thus experience her past, and why he presents Listener and W as responding, through their bodies, to the narration by asking for more in *That Time* and *Rockaby* respectively. Likewise, through the knocking of Listener’s hand on the table which prompts repetition or the continuation of the narrative, Beckett deals not only with the representation of memory, but also how active the body has to be in the experience of the past and perception in more general terms.

Both Beckett and Merleau-Ponty aim, then, to bring the body to the forefront, while stressing its interdependence with not only the mind but with the world and objects “outside” of any embodied subject itself. The most important similarity their works share, however, is perhaps their distinctive effort not to denigrate the somatic, but to “embrace” the body’s limitations and weaknesses. In doing so, the drama works, as Shusterman writes of Merleau-Ponty, to “*transform* the recognition of the body’s weakness into an analysis of its essential, indispensable strength”, as Shusterman puts it (2005: 154; emphasis added).

Chapter 3 – Materialization and embodied subjectivity in Beckett’s prose works: *Murphy*, *Company* and *Worstward Ho*

The two preceding chapters closely analyzed some of Beckett’s dramatic works in terms of their presentation of the body, memory and mind on stage. As works for the theatre, these obviously require the physical presence of actors, even though, as has been shown, Beckett challenged this physical presence in different ways: either by fragmenting the body into individual, anatomized body parts or even by apparently “disembodying” it altogether in reducing the active subject to a voice alone. The analyses have attempted to show how these restrictions and reductions paradoxically *enact* a sense of persistent material embodiedness, specific somatic conditions of distinctive patterns of experience, memory and agency despite, or in some cases, by virtue of, the forms of reduction or impotence being presented. This chapter shifts its attention to some of Beckett’s prose works and aims to explore how issues of embodiment are treated in texts which, unlike dramatic works, are solely reliant on written language. It attempts to show how works of non-dramatic prose are in fact marked by forms of somatic materiality, and so are resistant to any reduction of the human to a purely disembodied consciousness or voice, and it offers close readings of three of Beckett’s works in order to suggest and develop the significance of this.

The first prose work analyzed is the early *Murphy* (1938). That discussion will be followed by a reading of two of Beckett’s most widely discussed later prose writings, *Company* (1980) and *Worstward Ho* (1983). This path is chosen in order to develop an argument for the centrality of the body even in the apparently highly abstracted non-dramatic prose works of the 1980s. Despite being one of Beckett’s earliest prose works, *Murphy* is included in the present chapter as it is strongly interested in the kinds of representations of and arguments regarding the body-mind relation that have been discussed in the two preceding chapters (particularly Chapter 1), and thus supplies some evidence of a continuing concern in Beckett’s oeuvre; but it also allows a consideration of salient differences, in terms of formal approach, to these issues when juxtaposed with the later works.

In particular, it is argued that while these later texts are rightly taken to be marked by extreme modes of abstraction and diminution, in which the somatic is not only restricted or depicted as impotent, but would seem to be effectively “de-materialized” almost entirely, *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, it will be argued, in fact maintain at their heart ideas and images of memory in which the somatic and forms of “materialization” continue to play a necessary role. By attending to the differing styles and formal approaches of these works, their highly distinctive representations of the body, memory, and mind – and their inter-involvements – can be appreciated.

Murphy is one of Beckett’s earliest works, yet it has questions concerning the nature of body and mind, and, particularly, the relationship between them, at its very centre, and suggests the author’s close preoccupation with this relationship from the beginning of his writing career. Indeed, with its famous scene of Murphy being rocked in his chair so as to find solace from the physical world and from his body, *Murphy* has been described by “first-wave” scholars as one of the author’s most obviously Cartesian works (see, for example, Cohn, 1962; Kenner, 1962). Addressing this Cartesian interpretation, already discussed in Chapter 1, will help reinforce and contextualize, with reference to the earlier, pre-*Trilogy* work of the late 1930s, the current thesis’s arguments concerning the distinctive and ineliminable role of impotence in Beckett’s mature drama. At the same time, the close reading of *Company* and *Worstward Ho* which follows also takes up these themes in terms of formal choices. After all, these two writings have been considered to be marked by modes of abstraction, reduction and diminution not only in their presentation of mind and body, but also in their very literary form and style. Thus, what follows will look closely at the way in which the body and mind are treated in these two texts and focus on the way in which some Beckett critics have used the *formal* abstraction of these works as the basis for their argument that what such works represent is, first and foremost, Beckett’s dismantling of subjectivity more generally. Specifically, through a comparison of *Murphy* and the two later writings, it will be argued that while their styles are indeed different, since the later works are not marked by the amplitude that characterizes *Murphy*, in terms of the construction and

appreciation of meaning, it is possible to question the assumption that the stylistic and formal reduction employed by Beckett in his later works functions so as to emphasize the disintegration of the body and mind – their falling apart or into pure dissociation.

Instead, drawing in part upon Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, outlined in the previous section, the chapter aims to provide a new reading of Beckett's use of abstractive means so as to foreground the "something" rather than the "nothing" that in fact underlies these writings. Specifically, reading these late writings in in this way, the chapter will seek to demonstrate that despite being reliant on what is certainly an "abstractive" language – in contrast to the theatrical works which require the physical presence of actors – one way in which Beckett's late prose addresses the notion of materiality and physicality is by suggesting that any experience of meaning *per se* is always already dependent upon an *embodied* subjectivity that is itself constituted through its necessary exteriorization.

Can literature be dematerialized?

The aesthetic effect of a prose work seems essentially different from that of a theatrical performance, and raises in more direct ways – as opposed to theatre's irreducible requirement for some form of physical performance – the question of to what degree any literary writing can get rid itself of its "material" dimension. In fact, this is a question that can be asked with reference to the prose works of any writer, since, as mentioned above, such writings are entirely reliant on language. Yet, it remains a question with a very specific interest to it in the case of a writer like Beckett whose works towards the end of his writing career are strikingly marked by different forms of abstraction and reduction. Could this be considered an abstraction or reduction towards some material or somatic condition of meaning, memory, experience, and narration?

Despite their reliance on language to address and represent different concepts, prose works are necessarily dependent on several senses of materiality. First of all, and most simply, the fact that such works are basically inscribed words on paper must always reinscribe the materiality of language

itself, its occupation of physical space. Furthermore, as will be shown below, the kind of enunciation presented in Beckett's later works (for instance, the use of second-person pronoun *you*) posits both a speaker and an addressee, whilst the use of different imperatives is itself a kind of inscription that is enacted in a reader (as, for example, in the case of the imperative "Say a body" in *Worstward Ho*). Moreover, the constant use of imperatives, which requires the addressee's actual performance (to say or imagine), and reflects or remarks explicitly that condition of any act of reading, also underlines the represented dependence on bodily reception in order for this enunciation to be experienced at all. If this is part of an audience's role in the theatre also, it does appear to be a more explicitly marked feature or focus in the prose works, if only in virtue of the apparently reduced material, sensory and somatic dimensions of the readerly as opposed to dramatic experience. Finally, the several references to and descriptions of, for example, the characters themselves as well as their different body parts and the world that surrounds them (as shown, for instance, in the narration of the protagonist's memories in *Company*) foreground the *representation* of material conditions in these senses as themselves a finally ineliminable dimension of the literary work.

An influential article discussing the materiality of language in the work of Beckett – and closely related to the argument of this chapter – is Laura Salisbury's "‘Something or nothing’: Beckett and the matter of language" (2010) published in a volume devoted to the exploration of the Beckettian nothing. Acknowledging the author's interest in the interiority of the skullscape, as found in several of his works across the canon such as *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), *Malone Dies* (1956) and *The Unnamable* (1959), Salisbury's essay pays special attention to Beckett's attraction "to ideas of negation, silence, [and] pause" (p.214); an attraction that is intensified in the author's later works. Relating these notions to the prevalent representations of "wounds, disabilities and decrepitudes" (p.220) in Beckett, Salisbury argues – in a neurological framework – that these "works indeed seem to play out, through textual experimentation, the deficits of articulation, cognition and perception that can be read according to the neurological damage that a penetrating head wound might inflict" (ibid.). Most saliently, Salisbury also seeks to read such "negative" ideas (and the notion of

“nothing” itself) that Beckett was attracted to here in a more “affirmative” manner than would be usual. As she puts it, “although [in such works] language and the subjectivity it subtends are disabled and reshaped, they are, significantly, *never reduced to nothing*” (ibid., emphasis added).

Given the different senses of materiality that literary prose works represent, exemplify, and exploit, I want to consider Beckett’s use of abstractive linguistic means in light of Salisbury’s argument and, drawing upon both phenomenology and a deconstructive thinking of the supplement rather than directly following up Salisbury’s own neuroscience interests, to address to what degree prose works can ever eliminate their “material” dimension – as well as what Beckett’s specific procedures reveal in that connection. As will be demonstrated, the formal abstraction which characterizes Beckett’s later works does indeed challenge conventional concepts of the represented body and the individuated and coherent character, but this challenge is not an attempt to reduce or, even, negate the body or subject, however (essentially) fractured and non-self-identical these may be, but, rather, to emphasize the underlying dependence of literature on an embodied subjectivity (of which there may be distinct and variable kinds) which cannot be eliminated if any literary work (or, indeed, any meaning more generally) is to be experienced. Indeed, as I suggested towards the end of the previous chapter, it is this that J.M. Bernstein (rightly, I think) identifies as negatively revealed, in some sense, through the very “minimalist” drive towards elimination. As he puts it: “insofar as minimalist works are works and not mere things, then they will continue to carry the full baggage of anthropomorphic projection, however hidden, sublimated, or disguised this anthropomorphism is” (2006: 128), revealing “a *formation* (transformation or transfiguration) of the object that, however minimally or fragilely, silhouettes human intercourse with the material world” (p.126). More to the point, my argument is that it is, in Beckett (if not, necessarily, in the work of other artists described as minimalist), such a complex and minimally necessary anthropomorphic dimension that is actually foregrounded through its seeming reduction to the minimum, and presented as the site of a certain possibility of experience as such. Through, then, the abstractive linguistic means deployed in

his later works particularly – and this is one of the main arguments of this chapter – Beckett foregrounds the extent to which, in fact, all the senses of materiality described above remain an essential part of acts of literature, however much they may “work with” impotence in the fashion he suggests.

Murphy

Read alongside his later works, which are marked by an increasingly severe minimalism, Beckett’s *Murphy* is formally and thematically distinct. Murphy, the central character of the novel, is a Dubliner who moves to London where he meets Celia Kelly, a prostitute who later becomes his lover. Once in London, Murphy is urged by Celia to find a job, something that Murphy himself does not want to do. Nevertheless, Murphy is eventually employed as a male nurse in the mental asylum Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. The novel subsequently narrates the search by a number of characters (Neary, Wylie, Miss Coonihan and Cooper) for Murphy, who has apparently disappeared and who they eventually find dead as a result of an accidental gas explosion.

In its relatively clear chronological structure, the kind of narration employed in *Murphy* could be described as similar (if by no means identical) to the conventional narrative structure of the nineteenth-century novel (and it has often been read as a parody of such). Its characters are not situated in those extreme or “fantastical” situations which characterize almost all of Beckett’s later writings (such as *Not I* or *That Time*) but are represented, for the most part, in broadly recognizable, even “realist” settings. Furthermore, events are precisely placed and dated, a feature which, conspicuously, Beckett later abandoned. In fact, such detachment from any specific time or place is one of the features that characterize Beckett’s abstractive style in his later writings: “One night as he sat at his table head on hands he saw himself rise and go. One night or day”, we read in *Stirrings Still* (1989). As will be made clear below, Beckett’s late prose works such as *Worstward Ho* or *Company*, for example, seem, unlike *Murphy*, systematically to reduce all references to outer reality, such that they appear as texts, as Casanova puts it, “indebted solely to [...] [themselves]” (2006: 21). Stylistically, then, when compared to the later works, *Murphy* is noticeably

“fuller” in both its vocabulary and details, and relatively unmarked by the formal minimalism or abstraction of the later works.

This fecundity of language that marks *Murphy* may partly be explained by his early relationship with James Joyce, to whom he was introduced by MacGreevy in the late 1920s. (One should, of course, recall here the comparison with Joyce, ventured in a 1956 interview with Israel Shenker, with which I began this thesis as whole, where Beckett suggests that his own (later) “working with impotence, ignorance” is to be contrasted, above all, with Joyce’s potency, his “making words do the absolute maximum of words” (Graver & Federman 2005: 162; emphasis added)). As James Knowlson writes:

There was a lot in the background and personality of the older Irish writer to attract Beckett. They both had degrees in French and Italian, although from different universities in Dublin. Joyce’s exceptional linguistic abilities and the wide range of his reading in Italian, German, French and English impressed the linguist and scholar in Beckett, whose earlier studies allowed him to share with Joyce his passionate love of Dante. They both adored words, their sounds, rhythms, shapes, etymologies and histories, and Joyce had a formidable vocabulary derived from many languages and a keen interest in contemporary slang in several languages that Beckett admired and *tried to emulate*.

(1996: 98; emphasis added)

Beckett himself described his first meeting with Joyce as overwhelming, and the influence of *Ulysses* is clear in various passages in the early prose. Considering this, it could be argued that Beckett’s style in *Murphy* – in terms of the “fullness” of the work itself, as well as its close preoccupation with the body – may have been partly affected by this early encounter with Joyce. As Knowlson notes, Beckett was fascinated by Joyce’s “intoxication with words and his working methods” (ibid. p.105). And, though far from identical to Joyce, such a fecundity (and, indeed, apparent “potency”) of language is also found in *Murphy*.

Certainly, in *Ulysses* Joyce exhibits a close preoccupation with the physicality of his characters and their experiences, which is manifested not only by the fact that, according to the famous schema passed on to Stuart Gilbert, he attributes one bodily organ as a symbol for each one of the novel’s chapters, but also by his detailed description of his characters engaging in the world of the

senses (Gilbert, 1963: 38). Consider, for instance, the famous scenes of Leopold Bloom defecating, masturbating and expressing his passion for kidneys (Joyce, 1992: 65). Given Joyce's characteristically visceral descriptions of the physical world and the human body, it can be argued that, still heavily under Joyce's influence, in *Murphy* Beckett adopted a comparable approach. For example, at the very end of the novel Beckett emphasizes the physicality of his characters and their being-in-the-world by referring to the most basic, if not abhorrent, aspects of matter with which Murphy has now become one: "the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit" (Beckett, 2009d: 171).

Yet, despite the evident effect that Joyce had on him, Beckett later came to realize that his own style would have to be different. As he put it in an interview in 1989: "I realized that I couldn't go down that same road" (cited in Knowlson, 1996: 105). For this reason, Beckett's later works are marked by an evident shift in style and form, a break with Joycean modernism, already broached in the interview with Shenker cited elsewhere in this thesis, and that will be explored further below. In the discussion that follows it will also be argued that even though the style of *Murphy* may lead one to argue that it is a good deal more of a traditional novel than Beckett's later prose works, on closer inspection it becomes clear that the features that suggest this are differently employed and have a completely distinctive effect. In fact, Beckett manipulates these "traditional" features in a way that emphasizes his challenge to novelistic realism in *Murphy*, as well as to those modes of "modernist" writing that expanded upon it, anticipating his later, more complete break with such modes.

Beckett's preoccupation with the mind-body problem, which we have already observed in his later writings, particularly in terms of the somatic conditions for memory, is foregrounded from the very beginning of *Murphy*, which presents the reader with one of the novel's central and most iconic images:

He sat naked in his rocking-chair of undressed teak, guaranteed not to crack, warp, shrink, corrode, or creak at night. It was his own, it never left him. The corner in which he sat was curtained off from the sun, the poor old sun in the Virgin again for the billionth time. Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible.

Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. The eyes, cold and unwavering as a gull's, stared up at an iridescence splashed over the cornice moulding, shrinking and fading.

(Beckett, 2009d: 3)

What is immediately striking about this passage, when read alongside the later works, is the minute attention Beckett pays to the physical position and state of Murphy's body. Describing it in such detail, however, was not apparently an easy task for Beckett. As he himself stated with reference to the novel as a whole, in one of his letters to Thomas MacGreevy, "I get held up over the absurdest difficulties of detail" (cited in Pilling, 1997). Nevertheless, the effect is impressive. The description is by no means "abstract", but rather distinguished by a visceral, physical vocabulary with a strong sensuous effect. This is exemplified by the passage's detailed description of the specific parts of Murphy's body: his shins, thighs, breast, belly, wrists and eyes. Moreover, the materiality of the world that surrounds Murphy is emphasized by the description of his chair which, as if it were an advertised product, Beckett parodically describes as "*guaranteed* not to crack, warp, shrink, corrode, creak" (emphasis added). The use of these verbs, one after the other, along with the faint alliteration, at the same time makes much more vivid the physicality of both Murphy's body and the world around it – even if these are physical events which, precisely, are *not* happening or going to happen. Far from being characterized by reduction and diminution, form and style are marked by amplitude and accumulation in a way that, in the 1956 interview with Shenker, Beckett identifies more with Joyce than with his own work.

Yet, as soon as this scene is presented, the reader is informed that the reason Murphy sits in this way is not only because "it gave him pleasure" (ibid.), but because what he most desperately wishes for is to be free in his *mind*. This then renders the descriptive style of the passage itself seemingly paradoxical; not only because of the physicality of Beckett's description, but because of the fact that Murphy himself must employ parts of the physical world, such as the chair he sits on and the scarves that he uses to hold himself in position, in order to feel

free in his mental world. The idea has some complicated consequences that will be more fully examined below.

This image, so famous that the entire novel is perhaps best known for it, suggests, at any rate, Beckett's existing concern with the mind-body relationship in the 1930s when the novel was composed and published. Thus, even though *Murphy* may not employ the kinds of mutilated, fragmented characters typical of the later works, it does not fail to depict Beckett's interest in the body and mind in a different way, that is, through the presentation of Murphy himself: a character who feels himself to be (rather than literally being) split between the two.

Indeed, Murphy's desire for full immersion in his mental world (his mind) and his wish to escape from his physical world (his body) is strongly emphasized throughout the novel. For Murphy, the "life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word" (p.4). This is a description which again underlines Murphy's strong wish to escape from the physical since a "pleasure" is partly a bodily, sensuous experience. And it is in order to feel such pleasure and freedom that Murphy rocks himself in his chair, which, we are told, is what makes his body quiet:

The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the iridescence was gone, the cry in the mew was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free.

(p.8)

As this implies, Murphy considers his body, above all, as something that restricts his freedom and thus something he must escape from. Murphy's consequent privileging of the mental is foregrounded throughout the novel, but especially in chapter 6, which is completely devoted to a detailed description of his mind. Here, the narrative voice in the novel explains that Murphy's mind is divided into three zones: light, half light and dark. In the first zone, Murphy felt that "the elements of physical experience [were] available for a new

arrangement” (p.71), whereas in the second “the pleasure was contemplation” (ibid.). However, it is the third zone which Murphy himself prefers to be in:

The third, the dark, was a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms. The light contained the docile elements of a new manifold, the world of the body broken up into the pieces of a toy; the half light, states of peace. But the dark neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line.

(p.72)

It becomes clear, then, that the reason Murphy prefers to be in the third zone of his mind is that it is only there he feels completely free from his body, which is described as “broken up into the pieces of a toy”. Without a body Murphy experiences an “absolute freedom”. Nevertheless, the question raised by this passage is precisely whether Murphy’s escape from the physical world can indeed be considered *absolute* in so far as it is a freedom presented as unfree. For here, again, Beckett produces a kind of paradox by presenting Murphy’s “freedom” as itself *dependent* on his physical restriction: “Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He *did not move*” (emphasis added). Thus, through this lack of freedom not only does this passage emphasize the impossibility of the *complete* abandonment of Murphy’s physicality, but, even more, it implies that Murphy’s condition could equally be regarded as “mindless” since it is precisely the body that is described as the means through which Murphy is able to immerse himself in his mental world. As such, its dissolution is the apparent dissolution of any determinacy whatsoever.

Murphy’s evident wish to escape the physical world so as to feel “free” solely in his mind can of course be taken to give force to those critical readings that have stressed the influence that Descartes’s philosophy exerted on Beckett during the composition of *Murphy*. Yet, it is worth looking more closely, in this regard, at the influence Beckett took from the actual philosophical works he was reading during the 1930s while he was composing the novel, and in turn

considering whether the novel in fact implies any simple mind-body dissociation or parodies the Cartesian conceptuality upon which such a dissociation is based.

In early criticism of his writings, as noted in my introduction and first chapter, Cartesian readings of not only *Murphy* but of Beckett's oeuvre in general are numerous (see, for example, Cohn (1962), Kenner (1962), Mintz (1959), Motor-Sir (1976)). Reading passages like the above, such critics argue that Beckett endorses the desire and, most importantly, the possibility of escape from the physical world. Yet, as will be made clear below, even in works such as *Murphy*, which deal so clearly with the character's wish to subordinate the physical, Beckett's parody of this wish can be discerned.

As we know, Beckett studied Descartes's philosophy in the Library of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in 1936, and, most importantly, as already mentioned in the introduction, employed the notes he had earlier taken on Descartes in the composition of his first long poem *Whoroscope*, which was written in 1930. Beckett's study of Descartes and, specifically, the fact that he based one of his first works upon his writings suggest that he was indeed interested in the philosopher's ideas. Yet, as I have already argued in my first chapter, this does not necessarily imply that Beckett actually endorsed a form of Cartesianism in his works; something that has certainly been argued with regard to *Murphy*, which was composed not too long after *Whoroscope*, between 1934 and 1936 (Cohn, 1962; Kenner, 1962). Beckett's presentation of Murphy as feeling "himself split in two, a body and a mind" (Beckett, 2009d: 70) has been interpreted by critics as what reveals the trace which his encounter with Cartesianism left on Beckett's early work. And as will be shown, such a Cartesian trace can indeed be found in *Murphy*. Nonetheless, the actual implications it has may be more complex than this sort of account supposes.

I will come to this in a moment, but, before doing so, it should be recalled that, as I detailed in my introduction, more recently a number of critics have, as part of a so-called "archival turn" in recent Beckett studies (Feldman, 2009), paid particular attention to the fact that, as well as Descartes himself, Beckett may have also been influenced by the ideas of the Cartesian and Occasionalist Flemish philosopher, Arnold Geulincx; an influence which, in itself, may complicate

Beckett's apparent debt to Descartes. As Van Ruler, Uhlmann and Wilson note (2006: 301), in some of his letters to Tom MacGreevy Beckett expresses his interest in the seventeenth-century rationalists by referring explicitly to Descartes, Geulincx, Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz. The fact that Beckett was influenced by Geulincx's philosophy in particular is manifest in the revelation which apparently occurred to Beckett in early 1936 during the composition of *Murphy*. In a letter dated 16 January, the author wrote to MacGreevy:

I shall have to go into TCD [Trinity College Dublin] after Geulincx, as he does not exist in National Library. I suddenly see that *Murphy* is [a] break down between this: *Ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis* (position) and Malraux's *Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens* (negation).

(cited in Knowlson, 1996: 219)

Geulincx's famous dictum *Ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis* has been translated as "Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will" (cited in Tucker, 2013: 16) and reflects Geulincx's emphasis on people's weakness and impotence as regards their capacity to make things happen in the world. At the same time, the dictum also suggests a form of inwardness which can be seen depicted in Beckett's novel when Murphy chooses his "little world" (his mind) over the "big world" (the physical world). By contrast, Malraux's *Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens* ("It is hard for someone living outside society not to seek out his own"; translation cited in Knowlson, 1996: 219) is explicitly oriented outwards from the individual subject and suggests one's fundamental need for social communication. If there is "break down" in *Murphy* between these two citations, as Beckett suggests, my suggestion would be then that that is precisely insofar as the novel must ultimately underline the *impossibility* of Murphy's complete escape from interaction with the physical world regardless of how strong his wish to do so may be.

As he himself put it, Beckett began studying Geulincx's philosophy "without knowing why exactly. Perhaps because the text is so hard to come by" (ibid.). Nonetheless, for my purposes at least, what seem most interesting at this point are the important differences between Descartes's and Geulincx's philosophies.

As discussed above in the introduction to this thesis, even though Geulincx is generally considered to have been a follower of Descartes, still his philosophy is, in certain respects, quite different from what we generally understand by Cartesianism as a body of thought. As David Tucker has recently asserted in his book *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing a 'Literary Fantasia'* (2013), Occasionalism does not merely aim to provide a solution to the problem of the way in which body and mind interact. Rather, it is preoccupied with the nature of *all* causal relations. In fact, Geulincx's Occasionalist "solution", as Jonathan Israel puts it in his study of the "radical" enlightenment, postulates "the absolute synchronization of bodies and minds *through divine intervention*" (2001: 389; emphasis added). This not only applies, according to Geulincx, to the interaction between body and mind, but to all kinds of interactions in human nature. Furthermore, emphasizing the experiences of both ignorance and impotence in his philosophy (two of the most central issues in Beckett's works also, as his contrast with Joyce in the 1956 interview suggests), Geulincx states that it is only God who provides people with the certainty that they have inadequate knowledge of things:

Nothing ever happens to me, properly speaking, because I will it, but rather because the true Mover wills what I will, just as He sometimes does not will what I will [...] for it follows from what I have said, that when it is not our human destiny to have power to do anything, neither should we will anything [...]: *Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will [Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis]*.

(cited in Tucker, p.17)

It is clear that Geulincx foregrounds, above all, then, individual subjects' *lack* of power or agency in making things happen; a lack which is compensated for only by the existence of God. For Geulincx, human free will is, as such, a mere illusion – it is only God who allows or forbids things to happen. Thus, regardless of a subject's will to do something, whether that something eventually happens or not can only be explained in its relation to God, that is, as a question of whether God actually allows that something to take place. In this respect, and as the above passage makes clear, Geulincx's philosophy is significantly different from that of Descartes. For, even though both philosophers emphasize the

necessary existence of God, Descartes' God is precisely the foundation upon which (a certain) knowledge in general is built (for man), whereas, by contrast, for Geulincx the existence of God ensures our *own* ignorance and impotence; a point which had, for Geulincx, a specifically ethical significance.

Before proceeding to examine what specific role Geulincx's philosophy might play in *Murphy*, it is essential to point out that even if, as is now generally recognized, Beckett took a particular interest in Geulincx's philosophy, that fact by no means implies that he is thereby making more or less covert references to God or theology in his writings. (The point is not, in other words, to locate some "hidden" theistic intent in *Murphy* or elsewhere.) For Geulincx, human beings are exclusively and totally dependent on God as the one who allows or forbids things to happen. Beckett, however, does not present any such power which can satisfy the needs of his characters, or compensate for their impotence. This absence, as we will see, is of considerable significance, and gives the thesis cited from Geulincx an emphasis on the restriction of action and will (rather than on God's power), with which the insight of Malraux can be balanced, or confronted.

According to Geulincx, one of the things of which humanity has essentially inadequate knowledge is, then, the way in which our bodies and minds interact; an idea which can be seen expressed, too, in Beckett's *Murphy*:

Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other. He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one. Perhaps the knowledge was related to the fact of the kick as two magnitudes to a third. Perhaps there was, outside space and time, a non-mental non-physical Kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension.

(2009a: 70)

Geulincx's emphasis on humanity's ineliminable ignorance about the interaction between the body and mind is echoed very clearly in the above passage. Yet Beckett evidently does not suggest or even imply that this ignorance

can be accounted for by God's omnipotence in causing such interaction, as Geulincx himself argued; the "third" magnitude is presented as mere placeholder here, a mystery, an impossibility, not this or that, outside all determinations which it needs to explain itself and its role.

It is worth exploring the implications of this a little further by focusing on one particular figure in Beckett's work. The image of the rocking chair is central to *Murphy* and at least some of his later writings. In *Murphy*, the rocking chair is important as it is what Murphy actually depends on in order to silence his body and to feel free in the world of his mind. And, as Chapter 2 has demonstrated, the rocking chair is also employed much later in *Rockaby* where it functions as an embrace to W. Before I proceed to examine what the rocking chair enables Beckett to do in *Murphy* (perhaps by contrast to *Rockaby*), it is useful, first, to consider this in its relation to Geulincx's pivotal discussion of the baby cradle, an image to which Beckett's use of the rocking chair in *Murphy* has been interestingly compared by one recent critic (see Tucker 2013).

The cradle is one of the images Geulincx employs to explicate the nature of people's inability to make things happen in the ways that they imagine. In fact, it is in referring to the cradle that Geulincx precisely emphasizes humanity's impotence by contrast to the omnipotence of God. David Tucker's explanation is illuminating:

Geulincx argues that just as a child, crying for its cradle to be rocked, will infer a principle of causation between crying for its cradle and the cradle being rocked, unaware as it must be of the actual intervening cause (its 'mother or nursemaid' [...]), so too a person habitually thinks of him/herself as causing things to happen by inferring comparable connections between willing something to happen and that thing's happening.

(2013: 50)

In these terms, and with reference to Anthony Uhlmann's *Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (2006), Tucker explains how critics such as Uhlmann have taken Beckett's use of the rocking chair in *Murphy* to function by analogy to Geulincx's notion of the cradle, as both Beckett and Geulincx stress an idea of physical impotence. It is certainly true that the rocking chair is highly important

for Murphy in so far as he believes that it is what enables him to exploit his dualism, and also that this is what provides him with a freedom in his mind, while darkening any causal connection between the body and mind. However, the two parts of this analogy also differ in key respects. In Geulincx's idea of the cradle, the material cradle is just a means to what the baby wants to achieve, that is, the rocking itself, a physical movement and sensation. The cradle and the nursemaid or mother are what the baby does not see or conceive in its correlation of crying to rocking. By contrast, while the physical is again at the heart of Beckett's use of the rocking chair, in this case it is a means to achieve not only rocking, but also what that rocking is itself the necessary *means* towards: a freedom of thought. Thus, the representation of Murphy as tying himself in the chair so as to feel free in his mind reveals that he actually uses the physical (paradoxically, to subdue it), in order to reach his "little world" and he thus assumes a measure of free agency over it. In other words, Beckett's *Murphy* brings to the fore how the mind may be what makes the body function, but, at the same time, the physical ties (in Murphy's case, literally so) are depicted as the precondition of the free mind itself; something which reveals the co-constitution or necessary "supplementarity" of mind and body rather than their separation. Geulincx's example of the baby in the cradle shows that eventually the baby does indeed get what it wants, that is, the rocking, thus stressing the omnipotence of God in giving the baby what it needs as well as the baby's ignorance regarding the actual cause of the rocking. By contrast, in *Murphy* Beckett, of course, shows that Murphy does not get what he wants, that is, the complete escape from his physicality. This fact may be taken to suggest that, *contra* Uhlmann, Beckett is parodying this dimension of Geulincx's philosophy within the novel.

Taking this into account, it can be suggested – and this is the main argument of the present analysis – that while, from the very beginning of his writing career, Beckett may well have been interested in the mind-body problem, and also no doubt affected by both Cartesianism and Geulincx's philosophy, he by no means expressed a commitment to these philosophies or presented the possibility of an absolute break from the physical in "Cartesian" terms. Hence, the use of the rocking chair is just one of the means through which Beckett may be read as

suggesting that even though Murphy is indeed presented as finding solace only in his mental world, still the bridge to the latter is essentially a part of the outer, physical world; an image which emphasizes the essential importance of physicality and the somatic in more general terms.

Murphy, then, maintains an echo of the physical throughout. Murphy's characterization may, in this sense, be placed alongside Beckett's depiction of Murphy's "other-half" in the novel, his lover Celia, who (not least because she is a prostitute) is thoroughly grounded in the physical world.¹ At certain points in the novel, even Murphy himself is presented as striving, but failing, to obliterate the passion he feels for Celia: "The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her" (Beckett, 2009d: 7).

In these terms, the presence of Celia in the novel is of considerable significance, in that it reminds us of the bond between the mental and the physical and, most importantly, depicts the inability to break away from the physical entirely. It also makes clear that such intrication of mental and physical does not imply some sovereign authority in the subject, let alone its unity or consistency. Specifically, this idea is represented by what Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja describes as the "aspect of Murphy's darkest and most irretrievable mental self" that Celia herself shares (2007: 117). This can be seen at the point where Celia attempts to use Murphy's rocking chair herself: "She got out of her clothes and into the rocking-chair. Now the silence above was a different silence, no longer strangled. The silence not of vacuum but of plenum, not of breath taken but of quiet air. The sky" (Beckett, 2009a: 94). It seems here that sitting on the rocking chair makes Celia reach a state of calmness and peace, whilst the amplitude of "the sky" and the silence of plenum both suggest a feeling of

¹ This argument is directly related to some important political questions concerning gender, which are beyond the scope of the current thesis, but nevertheless worth mentioning. Firstly, there is a danger, of course, that reading the "couple" of Murphy and Celia in terms of a gendered division between "mind" and "body" implies a thoroughly conventional hierarchy in which the male is generally associated with the rational and the mental, and the female with the irrational (and thus the somatic). At the same time, it raises questions related to the complicated reasons that underlie a woman's engagement with prostitution, and the degree to which Beckett may elide these in the novel. After all, such "grounding" in the physical, somatic world does *not* necessarily entail any simple choice to do so, given that – to put it baldly – other significant factors such as, for instance, poverty, may also *force* a woman to get involved with prostitution!

freedom and liveliness. Nevertheless, despite her attempt to escape into the mental world free from physicality, Celia, Beckett tells us, spent “most of the time [...] sitting in the rocking-chair with her face to the *light*” (p.44; emphasis given). Even more evidently, an image of ineliminable physicality is provided by Beckett when he presents Murphy as *incapable* of coming alive in his mind while in the mental asylum. Here, Murphy (as “mind”) has no sovereign power over his body’s tiredness, which, in turn, prevents him from escaping the physical world. Consider the following passage:

Murphy moved the radiator as close to the bed as it would reach, sagged *willingly* in the middle according to the mattress and tried to come out in his mind. His body being too active with its fatigue to permit of this, he *submitted* to sleep.
(p.110; emphasis added)

Here, again, Beckett generates a sort of paradox in the syntax of the text, since in order for Murphy to feel a freedom in his mental world – which is the place where he, in fact, feels alive – the body must actively mimic a dead nature, which in turn suggests the split that Murphy himself feels between his body and mind. The only way in which he can reach his “little world” is by making his body completely quiet. Yet, Beckett does not present Murphy as capable of achieving this. Thus, *through* this paradox he stresses that physicality is ineliminable and at the same time foregrounds the liveliness of Murphy’s own body despite himself.

Considering thus both the use of the rocking chair and the role played by Celia in the novel, it seems that in *Murphy* Beckett in fact explores and finally parodies (rather than simply affirms) the mind-body dualism so as to emphasize its limitations as well as the problems it raises. This is something that is perhaps most evident in the way he ends his novel. Here is the conclusion to chapter 12:

Some hours later Cooper took the packet of ash from his pocket, where earlier in the evening he had put it for greater security, and threw it angrily at a man who had given him great offence. It bounced, burst, off the wall on to the floor, where at once it became the object of much dribbling, passing, trapping, shooting, punching, heading and even some recognition from the gentleman’s code. By closing time *the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon; and before another dayspring greyened the earth had been*

swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit.

(p.171; emphasis added)

Similarly to the beginning of the novel, where Murphy is described being tied in his rocking chair, the very end of the book is also marked by its sensuous descriptiveness. Beckett uses physical words with a strong affect, such that the reader can seemingly *feel* how the packet containing Murphy's ashes is treated. In fact, the words "dribbling, passing, trapping, shooting, punching, heading" (with their repetitious rhythm) capture not only the tension of the situation, but also its parodic description, both because they are all football terms and because an object such as a packet with the ashes of a person in it is only comically expected to be involved in such a situation.

Likewise, the description of Murphy's ashes being "freely" distributed on the floor also suggests the parodic and ironic nature of Murphy's end since it is only now (as dead matter, presumably without mind or consciousness) that the latter is described as free, by contrast to the rest of the novel in which Murphy's strong wish to experience such freedom is presented, ultimately, only as an illusion. The depiction of Murphy's freedom at the end of the novel reflects the feeling of freedom he wished to experience as a "mote in the dark" with a "body broken up into the pieces of a toy". But, as we see, the only point at which Murphy actually manages to reach such a state is at the end of the novel when he is literally dead. Murphy's distributed ashes are eventually swept away and mixed with sand, beer, butts, glass, matches, spits and vomit. Beckett's choice to mix Murphy's ashes with these particular things creates a tension between the physicality of the language and a character who constantly denied that physicality itself and tried to reduce it precisely to this dead remnant. Thus, even at the end of the novel, we see that, despite all of Murphy's attempts to obliterate the physical world, he ends up being essentially a part of it (as indeed he always was).

“Abstractive” linguistic means in the later prose: *Company* and *Worstward Ho*

Some of the noteworthy stylistic and formal features of *Murphy* are strikingly absent from two of Beckett’s most widely read and commented upon prose writings of the 1980s, *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, written more than forty years later. Consider, for instance, the beginning of the latter:

On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.

Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid.

Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still.

(Beckett, 2009a: 81)

Comparing this opening with that of *Murphy*, the difference is immediately evident. “The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new” (Beckett, 2009a: 3), an example of a complete sentence of third person narration setting the scene of *Murphy*, becomes one single word “On” in *Worstward Ho*. In its own right, “on” can suggest movement and the urge to move on. Just as important, it is followed by the imperative *say*, which addresses a possible hearer and even the reader him- or herself. In fact, the question of how to understand this imperative is interesting in itself, in as much as it can have both a literal meaning, asking someone actually to articulate a body, *and* function as an idiom prompting the hearer and the reader to imagine one, to entertain a possibility.

Another difference that can be identified between *Murphy* and *Worstward Ho* is the relative stability and concreteness which characterizes the former in terms of its setting, plot and characters. *Worstward Ho*, by contrast, is bound “to scenes abstracted from recognizable geography and all but the most meagre particulars” (Salisbury, 2010: 215-6). Thus, the concrete London setting in *Murphy* becomes a mere abstract *place* in *Worstward Ho*, which the speaker attempts to determine: “First the body. No. First the place. No. First both.” (p.81). A similar indistinctness marks the characters – an old man, a woman and a child who remain nameless (unlike the identifiable “individuals” of the earlier novel)

whilst their bodies are constantly constructed and deconstructed throughout the work (an idea that will be more fully explored in the following section).

Additionally, as the above opening shows – and this is something that applies to the entire work – Beckett’s syntax in *Worstward Ho* underlines the radical difference between the later prose and the earlier text. The later work is strictly punctuated with full stops, giving it a distinctive staccato rhythm and tone:

First the body. No. First the place. No. First both. Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the other. Sick of it back sick of the either. So on. Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go. Where neither. Till sick of there. Throw up and back. The body again. Where none. The place again. Where none. Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till sick for good. Throw up for good. Go for good. Where neither for good. Good and all.

(p.81)

Whereas in his early prose works, such as *Murphy*, Beckett works through his own break from Joycean modernism, towards the end of his writing career, as shown above, he experimented with a drastically reduced language to such an extent that his break with what Casanova calls “what has hitherto constituted literature” is brought to the fore (2006: 89). Here, Casanova’s comment on what Beckett himself called “a syntax of weakness” during an interview with Lawrence Harvey is illuminating:

In this stubborn search for abstractive linguistic ‘terms’, Beckett, like a painter preserving the uniqueness of each of his canvasses, and increasingly as his oeuvre developed, tried to find the maximum autonomy, starting afresh every time, for each of his texts. The principle of independence of the texts – that is, their self-generation in isolation from any external connection – is started and justified by Beckett on the basis exclusively of the logic of the ‘head’. From the adoption of the first person in the texts of the late 1940s [...], he will write only what is ‘in the head’. None of this bears the slightest resemblance to an autobiography or confession. It is simply the *avowal of a writing that refuses the imperatives of realism* in order to mark out memories, voices from the past, childhood, shades of mother and father, images come to haunt the memory. All the intellectual mechanisms of the internal organization and exhaustion of a proposition also find their place; and the abstract image and shadow of a memory are the material of these texts, for which the category of ‘fiction’ is no longer apposite. [...] The autonomy of each text is a kind of reiterated manifesto *against the foundations of what had hitherto been regarded as constitutive of the literary*.

(2006: 89; emphasis added)

On this account, what Beckett challenged in his search for a different and somewhat abstractive style were, Casanova argues, the very foundations of “literature” itself. If he thus “refuse[d] the imperatives of realism”, as Casanova puts it, by experimenting with or even taking away certain literary features which have often been considered to be an indispensable part of a narrative literary work – such as, for instance, the coherency of characters as well as the use of dialogue and plot, as shown in the above comparison of *Murphy* and *Worstward Ho* – it was so as to be able to deal with what was “in the head”. For this reason, from the time of *The Trilogy*, and increasingly towards the end of his writing career, as is well known Beckett mainly focuses on the use of the first person narration. Akin to the modernist painter (as Casanova suggests), and unlike Joyce’s “modernism” which remains highly descriptive, Beckett develops a more “abstract” style in his later writings by focusing, first and foremost, on what is “in the head”: memories, voices from the past, childhood, shades of mother and father.

Of course, arguing that Beckett’s turn to what is “in the head” is different from Joyce’s “modernism” is not to suggest that Joyce’s works are not themselves preoccupied with such interiority, since many of his works famously depict the so-called “stream of consciousness”. (Indeed, this has generally been regarded as their most influential feature.) Despite this, however, the difference between Beckett’s and Joyce’s writings lies in the fact that, to follow Casanova, Beckett’s works show a striking break with any apparent reference to an outer reality as such. Here it is worth quoting Casanova’s argument at length:

Beckett accomplishes his project of an absolutely self-sufficient writing, generating its own syntax, vocabulary, self-ordained grammar, even creating terms that respond exclusively to the logic of the pure space of the text: no more referents, no more attempts to imitate reality or provide an equivalent to it, no more direct links of transposition or description of the world – a text that is indebted solely to itself for the fact that it could be written.

(2006: 21)

In works such as *Worstward Ho* or *Company*, then, the place and time are solely the ones of the text itself. By contrast, Joyce’s preoccupation with

interiority clearly does not present such a break with the “referent”. In *Ulysses*, for instance, where the entire last section of the book presents the “stream of consciousness” in Molly’s head, the referents to outer reality (Dublin, for example) are still constantly there.

Casanova’s “strong” reading of Beckett’s development towards the “abstraction” of his later works certainly provides, then, a powerful way of thinking through Beckett’s own distinction between Joycean potency and fecundity and his own “working with impotence, ignorance”, in which the latter itself appears as the successful achievement of a “project of an absolutely self-sufficient writing”, so fulfilling Beckett’s stated desire to exploit those forms of “impotence” that have failed to be exploited by literature “in the past” by directing these towards paradoxically potent ends. However, to the degree that this maximum autonomy of “literature” (a “self-sufficient writing”) is also an autonomy located “in the head”, as Casanova describes it, and which is evidently central in a work such as *Worstward Ho*, this does not, I want to argue, thereby suggest any simple privileging of the mind over the body as such nor an attempt to eliminate bodily presence. Rather, this abstract and reduced image and the shadow of memory prevalent in all the later works, become the very *material* of these works and, most importantly, remain reliant essentially upon the physical in key respects.

Apart from its strict punctuation, *Worstward Ho* is significantly marked by constant changes in phrasing, as shown, for instance, in “Back into. No. No out. No back” (Beckett, 2009a: 81), a perpetual correction which reflects on what is said but, at the same time, never frees itself from what it is trying to say; something which underlines the necessity and importance of saying. Specifically, these aforementioned characteristics, along with the very question “Whose words? Ask in vain” (p.88) that seemingly aims to determine who does the actual speaking, are all features which emphasize the metatextuality of the work and its actual process of composition.

Company, which was published three years before *Worstward Ho*, has many similarities with the latter. Consider, for instance, its opening: “A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine” (p.3). Like *Worstward Ho*, the way in which

Company begins implies an indistinctness and indeterminacy in terms of both its setting and its character – suggested by the words “dark” and “one” respectively. In addition, the opening sentence exhorts both the hearer and the reader to literally imagine, something that the beginning of *Worstward Ho* does as well. In this work, however, Beckett does not present us with a couple whose bodies are constructed and then negated, but rather with a person lying “on his back in the dark” listening to narrated memories.

Listening to a voice narrating memories or addressing the protagonists themselves is, of course, a common image in many of Beckett’s writings, such as *That Time* (1976), *Rockaby* (1981) and *Eh Joe* (1967). Yet there is a difference: these works have a protagonist (who remains nameless in the cases of *That Time* and *Rockaby*) listening to a voice, and, precisely because they are works for the theatre or for television, in both cases the audience can actually see the protagonist on stage (or screen). Furthermore, in some cases, such as *That Time*, for instance, the play itself even makes clear that the voice heard is the protagonist’s. These features, however, do not appear in *Company*. Being a prose rather than a dramatic work, *Company* does not involve the physical presence of an actor, but must rely solely on language for any possible aesthetic effect. Moreover, what makes *Company* a strikingly abstract work in something like the sense that Casanova suggests – and one whose subject has been considered by many Beckett scholars to be the representation of “a narrative consciousness fragmented into voices” (Robinson, 1995: 223) – is the evident indeterminacy of the identity of both the speaker *and* the hearer, the question as to whose memories are narrated (in contrast to *That Time*) and, most importantly, the constant interchange between second and third person narrations:

Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.

(pp.3-4)

You are an old man plodding along a narrow country road. *You* have been out since break of day and now it is evening. Sole sound in the silence your footfalls. Rather sole sounds for they vary from one to the next. You listen to each one and add it

in your mind to the growing sum of those that went before [...] The voice comes to *him* now from one quarter and now from another. Now faint now afar and now a murmur in *his* ear.

(p.8; emphasis added)

Here the interchange between second and third person narrations is evident. The voice, whose identity remains unspecified, addresses the listener by using the second-person pronoun *you*, whilst the change to third person narration, as shown in “The voice comes to *him* now” suggests both an address to someone else apart from the listener and a commentary on the voice’s narration. Moreover, to refer back to Casanova’s argument concerning abstraction, the above passages certainly emphasize the striking detachment of Beckett’s writings from concrete time and place. The place and time are the ones the text itself sets: “You have been out since break of day and now it is evening”.

In light of the above, then, and in implicit contrast to the amplitude that marks *Murphy*, one can certainly see why, consequently, some Beckett scholars have interpreted the late prose as marked by “an enormously restrictive economy” (Boulter, 2001: 131); a restrictive economy not only as definitive of its specifically formal dimensions, but also as the basis for an approach towards the actual *meaning* of the work.

To take another example, James Robinson claims, while examining Beckett’s style towards the end of his writing career and referring to the indefiniteness suggested by the form of *Company*, that what Beckett deals with in this work is “the struggle for self-realization in the devising of story and memory” – something that is never achieved. Robinson proceeds to argue that, as a result, the presentation of “disconnected images collapse[s] the continuity and so contribute[s] to the decomposition of writing” (1995: 223). Likewise, based on the lack of identity and determination in *Company*, Sarah Gendron reads the work in the light of Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the virtual subject and, thus, argues that “the subject splinters off into myriad simulacra” (2004: 53).²

² Gendron reads Beckett’s later writings in light of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference and demonstrates how both difference and the simulacrum are actually affirmed in Deleuze’s own philosophy -- which argues in favour of difference by showing that all identities are in fact effects of the latter. I do not have the space here, unfortunately, to consider the relationship between

Finally, based on the minimal form and syntax of *Worstward Ho*, Andrew Renton reads the work as Beckett's means to represent the impossibility of continuity:

Beckett's negative in *Worstward Ho* is altogether more pessimistic; even a double negative (which would normally denote a positive value) never seems quite positive in this context. Here there is 'No out', and in staccato phrasing the text thwarts any possibility of smooth motion, or sense of continuity, and brings the final stop to that old Beckettian paradigm, 'Still'.

(1992: 103)

All these interpretations emphasize the reduced style and form of Beckett's later prose writings and then identify reduction and disconnection as the meaning of the works *as a whole*. In other words, they do not acknowledge an abstraction only in terms of form and style (which is indeed evident), but they proceed to interpret this abstraction as precisely the means through which Beckett represents the destruction of meaning and the dissolution of the subject in more general terms. Nonetheless, these formal features must not simply be translated as mere representations of dissociated subjects. By contrast, I want to argue, the way Beckett uses such "restrictive" formal features questions any straightforwardly "negative" (or, as Renton puts it, "pessimistic") interpretation. For the texts also underline that meaning cannot be destroyed, no matter how hard one tries to eliminate it or reduce it to material atoms, while the precondition for that meaning is that very physical and material subject itself: "And now this...Squeezed down to this...How much longer would you say?...Till the whisper...You know...When you can't hear the words..." (*Eh Joe*).

This common identification of the formal abstraction of the works with their meaning is also shown, for instance, in Renton's interpretation of the use of strict punctuation in *Worstward Ho*, which he takes to represent an impasse, whereas the fact that the text is strictly marked by full stops may also serve as an emphasis upon the activity of the speaker in separating thoughts and significances as well as his control over the narration. This has been put well by

this argument and that of Derrida upon which this thesis draws in its account of the supplement and alterity.

James Williams, for example, who argues that “the voice of the late trilogy has an integrity which demands acknowledgement and respect” (2012: 254).

It is true that in both *Company* and *Worstward Ho* Beckett has preoccupations different from those of his earlier works. He is clearly interested in – among other themes which will be considered in the following section – the role of telling or imagining a story, which he presents through the reduced form he gives to his works. Despite this, however, in working with an abstractive, restrictive style, Beckett’s works also enable us to reconsider issues regarding subjectivity and the construction and comprehension of meaning more generally. It is these notions that the following section focuses on.

Embodied subjectivity and the materiality of language in *Company* and *Worstward Ho*

In his famous “German” letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett wrote: “To bore one hole after another in language, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today” (Beckett, 1983: 51-4). Considering Beckett’s words and the interpretations of the critics presented in the preceding section, it seems that what some of the latter see behind the holes Beckett bores in his language is merely *nothingness* (Hassan (1967); Steiner (1982)). And so they might overlook that *something* which is always present, even and especially in the most abstract terms. In this connection, I concur with Salisbury who argues, in an important reading, that

[o]n a closer reading, however, what appears through the newly made holes in the German letter is not muteness but the whisper of a peculiarly Beckettian form of silence that is characterized as sound rather than its negation, something rather than nothing.

(2010: 226)

Against readings oriented towards mere nothingness, this section will raise the question, then, as to whether the formal reduction and diminution that mark Beckett’s later prose writings must necessarily be taken to represent some form of deprivation *per se*. In other words, what follows is a reading of Beckett’s

preoccupation with reduction, which brings to the fore something that Molloy, very early in *The Trilogy*, remarks on: “To decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don’t torment me, but one sometimes forgets” (Beckett, 1994: 25).

As already mentioned, *Worstward Ho*, in its very name and form, is a work which appears to move in a direction towards the worst, or, as Beckett himself puts it, a direction towards a worse failure: “Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again” (Beckett, 2009a: 81). Thus, heading towards the worse, the text deals with the notions of addition and subtraction represented by the constant construction and deconstruction of concepts such as the body, the mind, place, and character. As the previous section shows, *Worstward Ho* begins with the need and obligation to “say a body” with “no mind”, even though there is “none” of either. As soon as the body is *said* (which may mean *articulated* or *imagined*), the narrator, emphasizing, at some points, the metatextuality of the work, attempts to find a place for the body to be in, while it sets about the actual creation of the latter. Consider, for instance, the following passages:

It stands. What? Yes. It stands. Had to up in the end and stand. Say bones. No bones but say bones. Say ground. No ground but say ground.
(p.82)

Another. Say another. Head sunk on crippled hands. Vertex vertical. Eyes clenched. Seat of all. Germ of all.
(p.83)

Where then but there see now another. Bit by bit an old man and child. In the dim void bit by bit an old man and child.
(p.84)

The text attempts to “build” a body which turns out to be what it calls a “twain”, an old man and a child. More importantly, however, as soon as this twain appears, the text moves on to negate it: “They fade. Now the one. Now the twain. Now both” (p.84-5). Apart from their fading, we are told that their actual body parts themselves suffer from reduction: “Those hands! That head! That near true ring! Away. Full face from now. No hands. No face. Skull and stare alone” (p.90).

The construction and negation of the body is constant throughout the entire work since the aim is to “try [to] worsen”. As Casanova’s analysis of the work puts it:

Having next stressed not the worst but the least [...], he [Beckett] undoes the twain but not conclusively, so as to retain a new possibility of worsening it: ‘Gone held holding hands they plod apart ... Not worsen yet the rift. Save for some after nohow somehow worsen on’. And then he increases the void between the old man and the child: ‘Two once so one. From now rift a vast. Vast of void atween ... That little better worse’. In the final references to the twain, the three shadows merge, indistinct and alike: all three have become ‘topless baseless hind-trunks. Legless plodding on’.

(2006: 20)

Throughout *Worstward Ho* Beckett is closely preoccupied with the continuous process of addition and subtraction. This process is apparent in the way the body is constructed and then “worsened”. Nonetheless, as Casanova rightly points out, Beckett always wishes to retain a new possibility of worsening, so he does not undo the twain “conclusively”. In this way, not only does Beckett emphasize the new possibilities of worsening, but, most importantly, he underlines the impossibility of destroying or eliminating the subject, or this subject, altogether. For this reason, even in the final references to the twain, the reader is presented with the shadows “plodding on”.

Based on this continuous process of addition and subtraction, *Worstward Ho* has been considered to be exemplary of Beckett’s later works’ practice “of ‘lessness’, continuing diminishment” (Robinson, 1995: 218), something which has, in turn, been taken to illustrate the author’s representation of “the dissolution of consciousness” (ibid., p.217). This is evident in critical readings like that of Renton who argues that the body is even more challenged in *Worstward Ho* than in earlier works: “It is no longer possible to imagine a body, but rather one must *hypothesize* one” (1992: 103; emphasis added), thus implying that the body has almost reached its point of complete dissolution.

Likewise, the emphasis the text gives to the addition and subtraction of each body part separately has even led to a renewal of a rather existentialist reading of Beckett’s intentions in this particular work. As I suggested in my introduction, existentialism’s preoccupation with pure individual subjective

freedom can, on more Cartesian readings, sometimes be taken to undermine the essential embodiment of subjectivity (stressed by Merleau-Ponty), since, to achieve this essential groundlessness of subjectivity, any bodily determinacy needs apparently to be dismantled. Boulter's emphasis on the addition and subtraction of separate body parts in *Worstward Ho*, and his argument that "the subject in [this work] is composed of fragments – bones, head, skull, eyes, hands – gradually coalescing into only the vaguest of images of a man" (2001: 132-3), could therefore be taken in a rather different direction by reading Beckett's gradual taking away of every single part of the body as motivated by a drive to see what is left afterwards, so to speak, and, hence, to reach a kind of pure state of the subject. In fact, this is a crucial part of, for example, Badiou's recent (and influential) reading of Beckett which takes such stripped-down forms to lead to what is "generic". As Gontarski puts it:

Badiou shows that Beckett's operations reiterate a 'methodical askesis' that goes back to Descartes and Husserl in its wish to 'suspend' everything that is inessential – the only rigorous path to reach the real and the true. [...] When Beckett reduces human subjects to paralyzed cripples, to mere ectoplasms stuck in a jar, when he wedges Winnie in a hole in *Happy Days* and imagines the narrator of *The Unnamable* as an egg-like sphere with a few apertures, this is a way of returning to a Cartesian and Husserlian *epoché* [...], finally exposing what is truly 'generic' in man.

(2010: 109)

To read Beckett's treatment of the body in *Worstward Ho* in this light, however, arguably obscures the necessity of the somatic as Beckett presents it, despite the quasi-mathematical formalism that Badiou, for one, claims to find within this work. Indeed, considering Beckett's reduction of the body as the means through which he takes away everything that is "inessential" in his writings, as Gontarski argues – and which considers it as having no authority and as something whose disappearance is indeed possible – provides what seems a partial and insufficient reading of the significance attributed to the bodily in Beckett's later work.

At this point, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophical account of the direct and inextricable bond between the world and the perceiving subject, already

discussed in the previous chapter, may help to illuminate some central aspects of my argument here. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), a work entirely devoted to the role of the body in our perception, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that the body “is our general medium for having a world” (1962: 169), or, in other words, that it is through and as their bodies that individuals experience the world. Merleau-Ponty thus argues, in an argument modified from Husserl and Heidegger, that the only way we can experience our world is from a particular perspective, and this is exactly where the central role of the body becomes manifest. It is the body, Merleau-Ponty argues, situated in space and having the ability to move, which enables individuals to perceive the world *in perspective*. For instance, referring to the cube as an example, Merleau-Ponty writes:

From the point of view of my body I never see as equal the six sides of the cube, even if it is made of glass, and yet the word ‘cube’ has a meaning; the cube itself, the cube in reality, beyond its sensible appearances, has its six equal sides. As I move round it, I see the front face, hitherto a square, change its shape, then disappear, while the other sides come into view and one by one become squares. [...] In order to be able to conceive the cube, we take up a position in space, now on its surface, now in it, now outside it, and from that moment we see it in perspective.

(pp.236-7)

For Merleau-Ponty, then, it is the body itself which actually makes possible *how* we perceive, and then infer further features of, the world. Most importantly, he proceeds to underline the importance of embodied subjectivity by showing that not only does the way we experience the world depend on the body, but, even more, that this world can have a meaning only when it is perceived by our bodies themselves; an idea which illuminates, I would suggest, the presentation of the body in both *Company* and *Worstward Ho*. Every single thing we experience, Merleau-Ponty writes

is correlative to my body and, in more general terms, to my existence, of which my body is merely the stabilized structure [...] The relations between things or aspects of things having always our body as their vehicle, the whole of nature is the setting of our own life, or our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue. [E]ven an unexplored desert has at least one person to observe it, namely myself when I think of it, that is, when I perceive it in purely mental experience. The thing is

inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually *in itself* because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity.

(p.373; emphasis added)

Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, every single thing (as an object of experience, at least), be it material or mental (an idea, a thought, a memory), is essentially bound to embodied subjectivity in order to be or have a meaning at all.

Approaching *Worstward Ho* in the light of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, then, it becomes clear that the bond here between the world and embodied subjectivity is similarly inextricable. Hence, we are initially reminded that the *complete* dissolution of the subject is by no means feasible: "On. Somehow on. Anyhow on. Say all gone. So on. In the skull all gone. All? No. All *cannot go*" (p.91; emphasis added). Later we read: "Go and come again. No. Shades cannot go. Much less come again. Nor bowed old woman's back. Nor old man and child. Not foreskull and stare" (p.99). Finally, at the very end, there is

Nothing to show a child and yet a child. A man and yet a man. Old and yet old. Nothing but ooze how nothing and yet. One bowed back yet an old man's. The other yet a child's. A small child's.

Somehow again and all in stare again. All at once as once. Better worse still. The three bowed down. The stare. The whole narrow void. No blurs. All clear.

(p.102)

Thus, despite the extent to which the body, the mind and, more generally, the subject seem to be challenged in this work, Beckett's text underlines that some form of subjectivity cannot be entirely eliminated as it is the active condition for the very construction and comprehension of meaning (including, as Bernstein reminds us, in the literary work itself), however minimally posited. Everything, that is, both mind and body, *cannot "go"*, he reminds us, any more than, according to a logic of complementarity, one of these substances can free itself from the other. As Casanova puts it, Beckett challenges the body and mind, "but not conclusively" (2006: 20) – because, I want to argue, doing so simply is

not possible: a co-possibility of the body and mind (to borrow Stiegler's term) is the precondition for a subject (including in writing) to exist at all. As shown in the passages above, the characters, after "gone from stare", suddenly appear again – "all in stare again" – whilst, despite being legless, Beckett presents them as still "plodding on". To be clear, this is not, therefore, to insist, in emphasizing the ineliminability of the subject in such co-possibility of body and mind, upon some quasi-stoic resilience of human agency in a conventionally humanist sense. On the contrary, it is to see such subjectivity as itself always requiring "an always necessary addition – to give the illusion of a full plenitude or self-sufficiency – that displaces, replaces and re-marks a fundamental lack, void or abyss" (Stiegler 2003: 152). What Stiegler calls the "invention of the human" (as much in the literary work as outside it) is, as he notes, always "ambiguous", since any "interiority" of the subject, whether located in the body or mind (or, indeed, in something like the literary work, as suggested perhaps by Casanova's conception of an "absolutely self-sufficient writing"), is always already dependent upon an exteriorization.

One obvious issue here is, then, that a complete dissolution of either the body or mind, or of the relationship between them, as well as of their constitutive relation to a world, also implies the necessary dissolution of meaning more generally, since it can only result in the inability to construct and comprehend meaning at all. As already mentioned, *Worstward Ho* begins with the imperative to *say*, which is emphasized throughout the work. Apart from *say*, however, the voice of the text uses many other imperatives such as "throw up", "fail", "try", and "fade". In this way, the obligation to act in different ways (imagining, articulating, failing) is central to *Worstward Ho* and, in turn, it is what renders necessary, demands, the very existence of a subject, however fractured and non-self-identical, in which case it may be either a potential hearer or the reader herself. In addition, by using such imperatives the voice directly creates images which need to be perceived and appreciated by an active agent in order to be *as images*, an idea which again echoes Merleau-Ponty: "The thing and the world exist only in so far as they are experienced by me or by subjects like me" (1962: 389). Specifically, this idea is manifest in the following passage from *Worstward*

Ho: "Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still." (Beckett, 2009a: 81). Here, the place is defined in terms of bodily orientation, something which stresses the central role the body plays in any experience more generally.

Finally, the fact that some form of subjectivity cannot be completely eliminated is implied even at the very end of *Worstward Ho*, which is often taken to exemplify Beckett's thoroughgoing negativity in the text:

Enough. Sudden enough. Sudden all far. No move and sudden all far. All least. Three pins. One pinhole. In dimmest dim. Vasts apart. At bounds of boundless void. Whence no farther. Best worse no farther. Nohow less. Nohow worse. Nohow naught. Nohow on.

Said nohow on.

(p.103)

Based on this turn of "Somehow on", stated at the beginning of the work, into "nohow on" at its the end (something that echoes Reader's turn of "Little is left to tell" into "Nothing is left to tell" in *Ohio Impromptu*), it has been argued that there is no way to proceed with the imperative to *say*, which again suggests that the mere termination of narration, imagination, or even language and subjectivity more generally is possible (see, for example, Robinson, 1995: 225). Yet, is Beckett's "nohow on" his way to say that there can (now) be no more subjectivity and, in turn, meaning? It at least sounds like a consciousness who has failed to identify a final impasse, or to declare some process terminated, and which now goes on, tracing this incapacity. Taking into account Beckett's own admission that "we *cannot* eliminate language all at once" (cited in Casanova, 2006: 92), I would argue that by "nohow on" Beckett's works do not suggest the obliteration of writing, meaning and the subject altogether, or, at least, if they *suggest* this they do so only in order to foreground that the achievement of such obliteration could only be (like Murphy's death) a reduction to dead matter without *any* meaning whatsoever. Thus, the "results", as it were, of Beckett's minimalist and abstractive style in a work such as *Worstward Ho* become evident:

through this particular style, when the necessary embodiment of subjectivity is severely challenged, we are nonetheless led to understand that even in this process of abstraction, there is meaning only insofar as there is some form of materialization and exteriorization, and, thus, the latter is what meaning precisely depends on in order to be. From the perspective of the ineliminability of the embodied subject in the production of meaning, as Daniel Katz puts it, what Beckett wants to remind us is that “there *has* to be a ‘saying’, an enunciation, regardless of the status of the enunciator” (1999: 177).

Beckett’s preoccupation with the necessity of speaking is even more evident in *Company*.³ Apart from the very “content” of *Company* itself, this is shown in the opening pages of the unpublished prose text “Verbatim” or the “Voice” that Beckett started composing in January 1977. In this piece, as its title suggests, Beckett aimed to present the voice as keeping company. In fact, in one of his letters to Ruby Cohn, he wrote: “Tried to get going again in English to see me through, say for company, but broke down. But must somehow...” (cited in Knowlson, 1996: 651). Despite this, however, Beckett eventually abandoned this prose work in May 1977, even though he integrated several of its ideas into what would be later known as *Company*.

As already mentioned, in *Company* Beckett presents us with a character lying on his back in the dark and listening to a voice narrating memories. Nevertheless, what renders *Company* different from Beckett’s earlier works, which are also closely preoccupied with the narration of memories, is the fact that the setting along with the identities of both the speaker and the hearer remain unidentified throughout the work, whilst the question of whose memories are narrated receives no clear answer.

³ Sarah West, in her recent work *The Performative Voice in the Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett* (2010), focuses on the use and importance of the voice in Beckett’s works and acknowledges the necessity of embodied subjectivity – an idea directly linked to the one of the present chapter – but only with reference to any attempt to stage *Company*. As already mentioned, any theatrical work requires the physical presence of an actor, regardless of the extent to which that presence onstage is challenged. The argument made here is that embodied subjectivity is equally necessary in prose works in so far as it is what the meaning of the latter necessarily depends on.

In fact, the way Beckett begins *Company* is quite similar to the opening of *Worstward Ho*. “A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.” is a sentence which is marked by an evident indeterminacy or abstraction, insofar as it specifies neither the setting nor whose voice is heard nor who the “one” actually is. Another similarity this opening shares with *Worstward Ho* is the use of the imperative. The text asks both the hearer and the reader to imagine something, which echoes the imperative to “say a body” in *Worstward Ho*. Even though Beckett uses two different words to form the imperative (“say” and “imagine”), as has already been explained, the use of “say” can function both as a request for literal articulation and as a prompt for imagination, the entertaining of a possibility. This, in turn, underlines Beckett’s consistent preoccupation with imagining in more general terms.

In the first pages of *Company*, the voice narrates some memories which are presented through an interchange between the second- and third-persons singular, as shown in the following passage:

An old beggar woman is fumbling at a big garden gate. Half blind. You know the place well. Stone deaf and not in her right mind the woman of the house is a crony of your mother. She was sure she could fly once in the air. So one day she launched herself from a first-floor window. On the way home from kindergarten on your tiny cycle you see the poor old beggar woman trying to get in. You dismount and open the gate for her. She blesses you. What were her words? God reward you little master. Some such words. God save you little master. [...]

Slowly he entered dark and silence and lay there for so long that with what judgement remained he judged them to be final. Till one day the voice. One day! Till in the end the voice saying, You are on your back in the dark. Those its first words. Long pause for him to believe his ears and then from another quarter the same. Next the vow not to cease till hearing cease. You are on your back in the dark and not till hearing cease will this voice cease.

(pp.9-10)

The first part of the narration seems to address the hearer himself, whereas the second part serves as a commentary on the hearer’s situation. Even though the narration of memories using the second person pronoun strongly suggests that the memories are the protagonist’s, the text does not confirm this. In fact, not only does the text not assert whose memories are narrated, it states that “by

far the greater part of what is said *cannot* be verified” (p.3; emphasis added). At the same time, the voice asks a series of questions that render the protagonist’s situation even more uncertain:

May not there be another with him in the dark to and of whom the voice is speaking? Is he not perhaps overhearing a communication not intended for him? If he is alone on his back in the dark why does the voice not say so? Why does it never say for example, You saw the light on such and such a day and now you are alone on your back in the dark? Why? Perhaps for no other reason than to kindle in his mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment.

(p.4)

Before I proceed to explain what effect I think is produced by this particular way of presenting the voice, it is important to note that, if his biographers are to be believed, *Company* is “closer to autobiography than anything Beckett had written since *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in 1931-2” (Knowlson, 1996: 651). Whether the memories in *Company* are indeed taken from Beckett’s own life is beyond the scope or remit of this thesis. What is important is the reason Beckett chooses to present *these* memories, autobiographical or not, in the way that he does, that is, through an unidentified voice which addresses an unidentified listener in an indistinct or abstracted setting.

Because of the abstractive linguistic means that Beckett employs to present the voice, as well as the character and the setting of *Company* more generally, it has been argued that the central idea that Beckett wishes to get across is a struggle for self-realization which is never achieved. This impression is reinforced by the interchange between the pronouns “you” and “he” that mark the narration. What Beckett wants to emphasize in *Company*, Robinson (for example) argues, is the split of the self as shown by the protagonist’s wish to say “I” despite his inability to do so:

The one on his back in the dark is not able to know whether the ‘you’ and the ‘he’ are the same person, himself; he yearns for a further realisation of the self in a ‘voice in the first person singular’: ‘What an addition to company that would be!’ The struggle for self-realisation in the devising of story and memory [...] exists in tension with the desire for an end [...]. The narrative voice first seems to urge that the one on his back in the dark create company, presumably to form a context for

identity, for self-consciousness: 'In order to be company he must display a certain mental activity'.

(1995: 223)

Likewise, Sarah Gendron claims that, in *Company*,

what is really being sought is the 'I'. [...] However, in spite of the voice's constant prodding for the hearer to become one with the 'I', this never happens. The few times that the pronoun 'I' is actually uttered it is always the 'voice' that articulates it, and never even in relation to itself.

(2004: 57)

It is indeed true that throughout *Company* the protagonist is not presented as involved in articulation at all, whereas the narrative voice itself only uses the pronouns "you" and "he", and even admits that "the unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person [is] I" (p.15). In these terms, what the above critical readings have in common is that they consider the protagonist's position as representative of a fundamental passivity. In fact, they both argue that the voice actually urges the hearer to articulate or identify with the narrated memories, even if the latter is unable to do so, thus overlooking Beckett's reference to the protagonist's activeness, which, as will be shown below, actually makes possible the very existence of the voice itself. For instance, from the very beginning of the text, just before the voice states that the "greater part of what is said cannot be verified", it says:

To one on his back in the dark. This he can tell by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again. Only a small part of what is said can be verified. As for example when he hears, You are on your back in the dark. Then he must acknowledge the truth of what is said.

(p.3)

Despite the fact that the protagonist is presented as lying in the dark, and only involved in slight movements, Beckett reminds us that it is the protagonist's body which confirms his existence. As the voice says, "you are on your back in the

dark” is something the protagonist identifies with *because of* his body.⁴ The voice also states that a “certain activity of mind however slight is a necessary complement of company” (p.4). It is this precise passage that Robinson cites in order to justify his argument about the passivity of the protagonist. In other words, aiming to read *Company* as focused, first and foremost, upon the representation of the dissolution of the subject, Robinson claims that the protagonist shows no mental activity and, for this reason, he cannot reach self-consciousness, or form a context for identity. This is why he later states that “the process of the fable so decomposes that the result produces the antithesis of company and thereby approaches, in the concluding words of the writing, a zero realization of self, self without context, self without company” (2004: 223).

In this way, then, critical readings can overlook not only that the protagonist in *Company* does actually show some mental activity – which is slight, but nevertheless there (“Mental activity of a low order”) – but also that the existence of the voice itself relies upon it in order to “be” at all:

That is why the voice does not say, You are on your back in the dark and have no mental activity of any kind. The voice alone is company but not enough. Its *effect* on the hearer is a *necessary* complement.

(p.5; emphasis added)

The voice clearly states that merely having a voice talking about something is by no means “enough”. Rather, for that voice to *be*, that is, to have any meaning at all, it must have an effect on the hearer, as it is a necessary complement. But how can a voice have an effect on the listener in the first place? Is it enough just to narrate memories the hearer can identify with? As shown both in *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, the answer to this question is finally negative. In order to be at all, the voice in *Company* is, first of all, dependent on, or is co-constituted by, being perceived and acknowledged (or “supplemented”) by the hearer himself.

⁴ Referring to the certainty that the protagonist of *Company* is supplied through his body, Ulrika Maude (2009) states that “his existence [...] is determined and even brought about by tactile, visual and acoustic sensations”. Maude’s interesting work closely examines the role of the senses in some of Beckett’s writings, with close reference to Merleau-Ponty’s celebrated discussion of the phantom limb.

In these terms, then, Beckett is not so much preoccupied with the representation of a negated meaning and self as, I think, through the abstractive means he employs, we are led to an encounter with the aporetic but irreducible place of subjectivity (however distorted or diminished in comparison to its “traditional” plenitude); one which is itself based on the co-constitution of the body and mind, as well as on its intrinsic relation to a “world” and to the other.

Both Robinson’s and Gendron’s readings identify what they take to be a wish on the part of the protagonist for the narration to come to an end. Gendron argues:

As the text progresses, this need for company becomes, for the ‘hearer’, a matter of desperation akin to an addiction. For although the narrator speaks of a certain relief in the thought of the ‘voice’ becoming silent, the ‘craving’ for company always inevitably ‘revives’. Little by little the ‘need’ to hear that voice again becomes overwhelming.

(2004: 57)

In these terms, narrated memories are presented as threatening; another burden Beckett’s characters cannot escape from. Yet, even though Beckett does indeed present his characters as temporarily wishing to escape from their past memories (as is, for instance, the case with Krapp in *Krapp’s Last Tape*), the main focus of *Company* is not, I would argue, on this wish for an end. Rather, it is underlined that “not till hearing cease will this voice cease” (Beckett, 2009a: 10), which, thus, brings to the fore the dependence (desirable or otherwise) of meaning on perception and vice versa, since to perceive is to perceive *some* meaning. The voice, here, is heard and not listened to by a hearer; thus, any questions about what is willed are not central. Yet, this hearing still and necessarily depends on its reception in order to be meaningful (and, hence, intelligible in any sense). In this sense, *Company* stresses that such a voice will cease if and only if hearing, that is, all subjectivity ceases. Without the protagonist to acknowledge and perceive the words the voice articulates, as Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the dependence of meaning and the world on perception suggests – and the voice in *Company* does not only function as the voice of memory, but

also as the source of images of the protagonist's world – the latter make no sense and can thus be considered as “inexistent”.

Another feature of *Company*, also found in *Worstward Ho*, is the voice's constant change in phrasing. For instance, at one point the voice attempts to determine the physical position of the protagonist while asking and answering questions:

But physically? Must he lie inert to the end? Only the eyelids stirring on and off since technically they must. To let in and shut out the dark. Might he not cross his feet? On and off. Now left on right and now a little later the reverse. No. Quite out of keeping. He lie with crossed feet? One glance dispels. Some movement of the hands? A hand. A clenching and unclenching. Difficult to justify. Or raised to brush away a fly. But there are no flies. Then why not let there be? The temptation is great. Let there be a fly. For him to brush away. A live fly mistaking him for dead. Made aware of its error and renewing it incontinent. What an addition to company that would be! A live fly mistaking him for dead. But no. He would not brush away a fly.

(pp.17-8)

Similarly to *Worstward Ho* where the voice, through its narration, both “creates” a place for the body to be in and constructs the body itself, in this passage the position of the body is again positioned by the voice: the opening and closing of the eyelids, the crossing of the feet, and the clenching and unclenching of the hands. At the same time, the metatextuality of the text is emphasized when the voice is thinking as to whether a fly must be added as an addition to company. In this sense, the voice seems to control the position of the character's body which, along with the constant changes in phrasing, emphasizes the formal indeterminacy that prevails in *Company*. The same effect is also produced by the voice itself which tries to identify the source of the speaker when it asks “And whose voice asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all” (p.15).

To conclude this final chapter, it is understandable, then, that Beckett's abstractive means in *Company* be approached as sheer reduction. But as elsewhere, and no matter how strongly the body, the character, and the setting are marked by indeterminacy or abstraction, one aspect of the complexity of Beckett's work is the way in which it affirms, through such reduction or

abstraction, the impossibility of their complete destruction and elimination (and of the subject with it), or of a final dematerialization of meaning.

Conclusion

In a letter dated 15 August, 1931 to Charles Prentice, referring to “They Go Out for the Evening” (which would later become a part of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*), Beckett wrote: “And of course it stinks of Joyce in spite of most earnest endeavours to endow it with my own odours. Unfortunately for myself that’s the only way I’m interested in writing.” (Fehsenfeld & Overbeck, 2009: 81)

Beckett’s acquaintance and relationship with James Joyce certainly played a significant role in the form his writings would take. As the letter above perhaps anticipates, Beckett came to understand, however, that his oeuvre would not be marked by the amplitude that characterized Joyce’s works. His close personal relationship with the latter and familiarity with his writings eventually made him realize that, in fact, his work would take an apparently opposite direction: Joyce, as the introduction to the present thesis clarifies and as is well known, was for Beckett an author who was working with amplitude and omnipotence, whereas Beckett’s works would come to be characterized by a “working with impotence”. Taking different forms in Beckett’s “art”, representationally, this notion of impotence is most evidently figured in those forms characteristically marking the body and mind in both his dramatic and prose works.

How to understand the impotent body and mind, and particularly the relationship between them that such an impotence generates or reveals, has been the main focus of the present thesis, and has been approached through close readings of a selection of Beckett’s writings. In particular, this thesis has sought to draw on the various and significant approaches to the question of the Beckettian body that are a prominent feature of the critical literature of the last twenty years or so, and to develop and supplement some of these arguments by exploring the different ways in which representations of impotence, in particular, appear in Beckett. As the introduction and following chapters have sought to show, from the early Beckett critics of the 1960s until the most recent ones, impotence has been acknowledged as an idea central to the Beckett canon. Yet it is by considering impotence as a kind of paradoxical, indelibly somatic activity

or agency, indeed an impotency that can be illuminated, at points, as a condition of any subjectivity whatsoever, and to do this by reading closely for what I have identified as the supplementary logic at work in several representations of such impotence, that this thesis hopes to make its contribution.

Used to refer to a sense of lack, disability or restriction, the word “impotence” – the opposite or absence of “potency” – is understandably considered to be a simply “negative” term, that is, a privative one. And, indeed, the instances in which Beckett presents us with such disabilities or restrictions in his work are abundant. From the early works of the 1930s – such as *Murphy* (1938) – until the very late ones of the 1980s – such as *Catastrophe* (1984) – Beckett’s writings, both dramatic and non-dramatic prose, are characterized by different forms of impotence – manifested in the representation of the body, the difficulty or inability to remember the past, or even the difficulty in the process of writing itself. As we read in Beckett’s famous last poem *What is the word* (1989):

what –
what is the word –
seeing all this –
all this this –
all this this here –
folly for to see what –
glimpse –
seem to glimpse –
need to seem to glimpse –
afaint afar away over there what –
folly for to need to seem to glimpse afaint afar away over there what –
what –
what is the word –
what is the word

(2009f: 117)

Here the abstract or ineffable “this”, “here” – characteristic, as we have seen, of the later writings in particular – seems to prompt a skeptical or alienated recession and fading, failure and then silence. It might be argued, however, that the implied worldly and perceptual viewpoint in fact remains in this poem, a kind of necessary “what” that is as much ongoing result as question (there is no

question mark or terminal punctuation completing the poem) and that what is perhaps proffered is an ineliminable need (however foolish) for the appearance of such a “what” (“need to seem to glimpse – afaint afar away”), however questioned or reduced to a “seeming” this desiring need might be.

This thesis has approached representations of impotence with such complications in mind, and sought to think these through less negatively than in many critical readings (beginning with those of Adorno, considered in my opening chapter). It has explored and acknowledged the more complex role depictions of impotence, in relation to body, mind and the possibility of memory, can play in Beckett. In doing so, and drawing on the insights of recent Beckett critics, my analyses have hopefully resisted more straightforwardly privative construals of impotence which would support the understandable but restrictive reading of Beckett as “a depressing writer, whose bleak outlook on the world offers audiences and readers a negativity” (White, 2009: 1).

Looking at the ways in which the relationship between body and mind is variously represented in Beckett’s drama and prose – a concern of Beckett scholarship from the very earliest “Cartesian” readings – all three chapters in this thesis have, at the same time, sought to suggest that the impotence that marks both mind and body in Beckett’s work is accorded significance in two distinctive, if ultimately interconnected, ways. That is to say, in some cases, such forms of impotence appear as enabling to the extent that they are precisely what allows or prompts the characters to “go on” even in the most restricted or desperate circumstances (perhaps, most obviously, in *Endgame*), while, in other works, such forms of impotence are depicted as productive in a rather stronger sense, as providing Beckett’s subjects with distinct possibilities to be “exploited”; possibilities that might be either unintelligible or inconceivable. The logic of supplementarity, derived from Jacques Derrida, and extended in Bernard Stiegler’s work, has helped identify some of the patterns of incompleteness, dissociation, restriction, and dispersion in these terms, as conditions of possibility for what they appear to defeat. These conceptual resources have also illuminated, I hope, some distinct Beckettian forms of the inextricable relations of material body with mental integrity, identity and self-presence – relations

which should not therefore be understood dualistically, as if in pure separation or blank opposition, any more than they suggest remainderless or harmonious monism. To illuminate this argument, the thesis has also placed close emphasis on the particular role and significance accorded to the experience of memory in Beckett's writings, as memory represents, I argue, a significant instance of the intrication of mind and body, subject and exteriority, self-possession and self-loss (something exemplified here in *Krapp's Last Tape*, as well as several of the later plays).

To explain this further, it is necessary to clarify the objectives of each one of the preceding three chapters as well as to make explicit how each one's scope has contributed to the argument of the thesis as a whole. Chapter 1 closely analyzed two dramatic works of Beckett published in the 1950s, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. The focus of this chapter was on Beckett's distinctive use of the figure of the couple, an emphasis that motivated these works' selection and juxtaposition. The couple is a feature of Beckett's works that has been quite extensively examined in the secondary literature – especially by “first-wave” Beckett critics – and it has most often been approached as a representation of the body/mind relation in its separation. Because of Beckett's close preoccupation with the fragmented, impotent body both in his drama and prose, however, the mind/body relation represented by the couple has often been approached rather negatively, at least in terms of the significance accorded to the body in such readings of Beckett's works. In other words, as shown mainly in the introduction and Chapter 1, the figure of the couple was viewed as the means through which Beckett downplays the role of the body in subjective possibility, or emphasizes it only as a failing, alienated exteriority to the potential potency of the mind.

In these terms, Chapter 1 followed some of Beckett's earliest critics in reading the figure of the couple in these two plays as representations of the body-mind relationship, while it aimed to provide a new reading of such a relation. Specifically, the chapter read the representation of the body and mind in these two plays in light of Derrida's notion of the supplement so as to argue in favour of a mind-body co-constitution or co-possibility rather than sheer dissociation. In

light of Derrida's philosophy, the chapter demonstrated how the body and mind are always already necessarily in a supplementary relation and, in these terms, how each one is crucially dependent on the other (as well as on the "world" of which they are inextricably, together, a part) in order to "be". Furthermore, this chapter attempted to demonstrate the crucial role played by memory in our understanding of the body-mind co-constitution in particular, as it is represented in Beckett. It was here that Bernard Stiegler's work on technics and memory was drawn upon. Following Derrida, Stiegler's theory of "the invention of the human", as articulated in his book *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus*, emphasizes (without thereby negating the significance of the human or subjectivity altogether) the human's need for exteriorization and prosthetization; an exteriorization or (originary) supplementation that is productive of temporal experience and memory, in the first place. This, I suggest, may help to illuminate the relationship of interdependence both between Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* as well as the more "literal" prosthetization of Krapp's memory in *Krapp's Last Tape*.

The second chapter of the thesis has placed specific emphasis on the somatic condition of any experience or narration of memory in Beckett's works. Aiming, first, to develop the argument elaborated in Chapter 1 regarding the necessary experience of memory through the body itself (rather than merely a "mental" recollection) and, secondly, to show how the impotence that marks the body in Beckett precisely foregrounds this, the chapter looked at some of Beckett's later works for the theatre, *Not I*, *That Time*, *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*. These four works were chosen for analysis insofar as they focus on the experience of memory – which is here presented in the form of narration. Furthermore, these plays share an evident minimalism at the level of both form and setting. For example, each play only consists of either one character (*That Time* and *Rockaby*) or two onstage (*Not I* and *Ohio Impromptu*); while, in *Not I* and *That Time*, such "minimalism" can be found manifested in the way the body itself is fragmented onstage: reduced to a mouth in *Not I* and a head in *That Time*.

Looking closely at the representation of impotence in these plays and the narrative supplementation of memory which, similarly to the plays analyzed in

Chapter 1, is once again externalized (but now presented in the form of voices which are only heard but never seen onstage), Chapter 2 sought to demonstrate that the bodily impotence central to these four plays does not, as might be expected, render Beckett's subjects (or the actors performing them) straightforwardly passive. Moreover, because in these plays we are presented with the protagonists listening to a voice which narrates memories, another objective of Chapter 2 was to demonstrate that the body remains itself a necessary site of the experience of memory. For this reason, it has been argued – in line with recent critics such as Sarah West, Anna McMullan and Ulrika Maude – that the body plays a determining and shaping role in the experience of memory by referring to those instances in the plays when the protagonists are able to identify with their narrated memories precisely through their bodies themselves (*Not I*) or, equally importantly, when the narration of memory itself is “edited” through somatic means (the knock on the table in *Ohio Impromptu*, the change of narration in *Not I*, the opening and closing of the protagonist's eyes in *That Time* and W's “mores” in *Rockaby*).

The chapter read the somatic structure of memory and the central role the body plays in this experience in light of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body and embodied subjectivity elaborated in his celebrated *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was considered in this context, first and foremost, because of the philosopher's aim to overcome existing dualisms – body and mind representing the cardinal instance for Merleau-Ponty, but solidary dualisms, such as that of subject and object, the mental and the physical, also being addressed. To suggest and elaborate how a variety of Beckett's works complicate such dualism has also been one of the central objectives of this thesis as a whole. Reading Beckett's plays in light of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy enabled me to approach the depiction and “exploitation” of impotence in a more “affirmative” manner and to stress the central role the body plays in memory and experience more generally in these works. In this sense, the chapter sought to show how Beckett's actors in these plays necessarily experience their past in bodily terms and how the impotent body actually “structures” such an experience of the past. This therefore allows for a particular somatic emphasis to be given to

my more general Derridean problematic and emphasis, stressing the supplementary logic that binds potency and impotence in such an account of embodied subjectivity.

Finally, Chapter 3 focused on some of Beckett's prose writings composed both at the beginning and end of his writing career. In contrast to the preceding two chapters – which explored the representation of bodily and mental impotence in Beckett's theatre – the objective of Chapter 3 was to examine the role of such representations in his prose works, which are essentially reliant on language rather than the physical performance of actors onstage. Thus, the central aim here was to raise a number of questions about whether the impotent embodiment of the subject, which is so central to the writer's dramatic works, can ever reach a point of disappearance in the prose, given that, being reliant on discourse, a physical presence of an actual "body" is not required as it is in theatre.

The chapter provided a close reading of *Murphy*, *Company* and *Worstward Ho* in these terms. The reason for the inclusion of these three texts in Chapter 3 is that, even though *Murphy* is evidently different from the other two works composed towards the end of Beckett's writing career, they all maintain different manifestations of bodily and mental impotence at their heart – a difference that is itself of interest and helps approach the question of how to understand Beckett's alleged "minimalism" or strategies of diminution in his later works. Looking at *Murphy* also enabled me to address Beckett's early preoccupation with the mind-body relation and, perhaps most strikingly, what I suggest is his foregrounding (and parody) of the paradoxes attendant upon any mind-body split as such (which were famously discussed with regard to Murphy's wish to escape his physical world).

If the reading of *Murphy* showed that issues concerning the body and mind as well as the relationship between them was one of close interest to Beckett from at least the 1930s onwards, the chapter also attempted to detail how, despite the strong wish of Murphy to find solace and freedom in his mind, the novel does not suggest Beckett's actual commitment to Cartesianism, despite the author's well-known familiarity with and interest in Descartes's philosophy

during this period. Or, better put, the chapter argued that, as any ascription of a philosophical commitment to the author seems perilous, the novel represents Cartesian motifs through a lens that complicates them considerably, and even ultimately refuses them. The analysis of *Murphy* suggested that, in fact, a parody of Cartesianism is manifest in the novel, albeit one with the serious intent of unfolding the paradoxes necessarily resulting from any attempt to separate mind from body and the physical world.

Through a close reading of *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, the chapter moved then to an examination of their “abstractive” linguistic means in relation to their representations of the body and memory. In fact, the analyses of these two late works and their comparison with the formal characteristics of *Murphy* made clear some important differences and characteristics. Whereas in *Murphy* we are presented with Murphy located in the “concrete” setting of London, in *Company* and *Worstward Ho* both the setting and the “characters” themselves are marked by an evident indefiniteness and abstraction. Meanwhile, the “fuller” third-person narration in the work of the 1930s shifts to an “abstracted”, indistinct narration in the later works also, which may, at some points, address the protagonist or the reader him- or herself and, in other instances, shift to third-person narration: “You were once. You were never. Were you ever? Oh never to have been! Be again. Same flat tone. Can he move? Does he move? Should he move? What a help that would be”, we read in *Company* (p.12).

Beckett’s abstracted language employed in these two later works was considered in relation to the ways in which the body itself is presented through and in such abstraction. For example, in *Company*, the protagonist is presented as lying on his back in the dark; an image which strongly suggests the restriction and impotence of the physical body. The body in *Worstward Ho* undergoes a process of “construction” and “deconstruction”: “Bow it down. Be it bowed down. Deep down. Head in hat gone. More back gone. Greatcoat cut off higher. Nothing from pelvis down. Nothing but bowed back. Topless baseless hindtrunk” (p.89).

Taking up concerns central to the earlier sections of the thesis, the chapter also addressed the representation of memory with reference to *Company*, in

which work it is a central feature. It was shown that *Company* (similarly to the four plays analyzed in Chapter 2) is preoccupied with the narration of memories by an apparently “disembodied” voice. Yet, the effect is strikingly different from the dramatic examples, insofar as in the dramatic works we can actually see the actor onstage (no matter the extent to which the physical form of Beckett’s actors is “challenged”), whereas in a prose work like *Company* any aesthetic effect is reliant on the work’s language, and thus, we might assume, sensorially and experientially diminished or reduced. Despite this, however, it was argued that precisely through the abstractive language of *Company* Beckett nonetheless creates and in fact emphasizes the central role played by the body in the experience of this narration. For this reason we are presented with a subject in *Company* being aware of his position and condition through his body. As Maude has put it, the narrated character in this work “is aware of this ‘by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again’. His existence, in other words, is determined and even brought about by tactile, visual and acoustic sensations” (2009: 10).

One of the central objectives of Chapter 3, then, was to show that images of the physical body, the experience of memory and – more generally – the body experiencing and perceiving remain central to Beckett’s “abstracted” prose works of the 1980s. Even though these works are characterized by a severe formal reduction and diminution, their language is marked by a necessary materiality, one that, following the argument of J. M Bernstein laid out in Chapter 2, should be understood as necessarily “anthropomorphic” in form (rather than as brute, disenchanting data or dead matter). On this basis, it was argued that subjectivity is an “element” that cannot be completely eliminated, even as it is always produced through an essentially impotent embodiment. Instead, to use Beckett’s expression, the chapter demonstrated that what lurks behind language is not a mere “nothing” but rather a “something”, after we bore a hole in it. I hope that this argument makes clearer how Beckett is not here presented as affirming some human essence or invariant kernel that endures against the odds, but that the subject, in its conflictual, dispersed, or discontinuous forms, is irreducibly somatic even while it is dependent on those forms themselves.

This brings to mind Beckett's famous words with reference to Tal Coat's work in the *Three Dialogues*: "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (Beckett, 1999: 103). This *expression* of a clutch of negations, with that final imperative – the *obligation* to express – is in fact what the third chapter tried to base its argument on and to interpret: no matter how much we try to eliminate language or materiality, neither can be entirely eliminated insofar as there is a subject to experience the demands of (or for) "meaning". In this connection, the chapter referred to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the inextricable bond between subjectivity and perception in order to illuminate its argument about the essential reliance of literature on an embodied subjectivity, however conflicted, dispersed, in more general terms. Thus, to return to Beckett's *Company* and *Worstward Ho*, we can still discuss the "meaning" of these minimal narrations because in order for those words of which such texts are composed to have any meaning, however difficult, some embodied subjectivity must be at work, necessarily. If this is always true, according to Merleau-Ponty, it is not the general philosophy implied by the argument that is important here, however, but rather the local, precise manner in which Beckett's most reduced prose marks an appeal to the somatic life of its own (impotent) characters, or narrations, or receivers. As already mentioned, the protagonists of these works are restricted and rendered impotent in different ways, whilst the voice they hear is also challenged by remaining unspecified or distant from the hearer. Yet, what the voice refers to is meaningful insofar as it is somatically received, whether it is resisted or not.

Throughout this thesis I have sought to emphasize the many ways in which Beckett restricts the body, challenges its totality or coherence, as well as its unity or integration with the mind. But his works, or at the very least those selected for discussion here, ultimately bring to the fore the degree to which bodily and mental impotence in Beckett's work is often not a straightforward means to represent diminution, restriction, disintegration or destruction. Instead, through his "literature of the unword" we are constantly reminded of the element which cannot be taken away because of the essential role it plays in all experience,

namely embodied subjectivity and the complex relation to “exteriority” that it implies. Here, I concur with Salisbury who states that

It certainly seems that the unwordly quality of the ‘unword’ comes from the peculiar agrammaticality of an ‘inclusive disjunction’ (in German as in English). For ‘un’ can be used as a prefix to negate verbs, adjectives or adverbs, but not nouns. The ‘un’ pushes the noun into disequilibrium, makes it do and describe an action of negation; it thus forms a nagging presence rather than announces nonword. The ‘un’ adds rather than subtracts; it adds action and quality, and takes something of the ‘ground’ of the material noise in a clearly intentional, singular fashion, back into the distorted shape of the figure.

(2010: 232)

While, in order to give myself the space required for the kind of close readings that my argument required, this thesis has focused on only nine of Beckett’s works, the theme of impotence can no doubt be traced in almost all of Beckett’s writings. Considering the objectives of the present thesis and specifically the areas each chapter focused on (the figure of the couple, the somatic structure of memory as well as the materiality of language and the necessity of embodied subjectivity in prose works), I think future research could address these themes in several other works of Beckett in light of the arguments that I have sought to develop here.

Certainly, the figure of the couple, for example, is found also in the play *Waiting for Godot* (1956) (in which, similarly to *Endgame*, two couples are presented; Vladimir/ Estragon and Pozzo/Lucky) as well as in Beckett’s early prose work *Mercier and Camier* (1946). Hence, reading the relationship between these characters in the light of my argument could provide a new, more complex reading of the representation of both impotence and the body-mind relationship in such works against their interpretation according to a strictly Cartesian frame, and thus supplementing the criticism that has decisively moved beyond that frame since the 1960s.

Likewise, the notion of dissociation, which was one of the issues discussed in Chapter 1, is also manifest in *Waiting for Godot* in ways similar to that in *Endgame*. For example, at the end of each of the scenes, the characters articulate their thought of action, and yet act in an opposite manner:

VLADIMIR: Well, shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

(They do not move.)

(Beckett, 2006: 52, 88)

This contradiction between the characters' utterances and their bodily performance is the same as the one that can be found in *Endgame*. Thus, instead of simply taking it to represent the split and dissociation of the self, a new reading regarding the role of this represented dissociation can emerge. Furthermore, the characters' wish to "go" in and their hesitation to do so, which again reminds us of the characters' strong wish to end despite their hesitation to do so in *Endgame*, can also be found in other works of Beckett. This is from, for instance, *Rough for Theatre I*:

B: Yes, all right, but why don't you let yourself die?

A: I have thought of it.

B: But you don't do it!

(ibid., p.229)

Moreover, the focus of Chapter 2, that is, the somatic structure of memory and the central role played by the body in the experience of the past, are themes that are depicted in a number of other works by Beckett. Specifically, the representation of memory as externalized, in the form of a voice narrating past events along with a protagonist listening to that voice is an image central to works such as *Eh Joe* (1967) and *Footfalls* (1976). Thus, reading these works whose setting suggests a split between the body and its voice of memory in a broadly phenomenological light (as was done for the works analyzed in Chapter 2) could be particularly revealing in so far as it illuminates the role the body plays in the experience of the past, and thus leads to a more complex reading of each works' depiction of forms of impotence.

Finally, the way Chapter 3 approached the role that embodied subjectivity plays in experience could also be applied to the readings of other prose works of Beckett. Generally, all of Beckett's works composed towards the end of his writing career are marked by an evident minimalism, or perhaps a range of

minimalisms; thus, similar attempts to read other late prose works such as, for example, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) and *Stirrings Still* (1989), could also demonstrate the significant role embodied subjectivity plays in these minimal settings, or test its reach further. My selection in this case has been made in order to investigate apparently hard cases for my argument, and to push it into generically distinct areas. Here, too, it was felt that the readings could offer distinctive contributions to existing viewpoints. In these ways, they thus seemed to allow for the development and expansion of arguments offered in earlier sections. Extending their interests and methods to other works should be possible, though, as in all these cases, they depend, or should depend, on close work with textual details. Such an extension is not here taken for granted, though I have tried to indicate some possible connections.

Equally, the approach or conceptual frame developed here could also be revealing if applied to Beckett's works for the radio since these do not require the physical presence of embodied characters, at least in the same way as a theatrical production does, while the broadcast voice gives the work a worldly instantiation that distinguishes it from non-dramatic prose. Radio works require the hearing of one's voice, which immediately makes it evidently physical. Yet, what is important, perhaps, is not which kind of literary work (including those produced for radio or television) is marked by more physicality, but rather just how distinct genres of works oblige or require the reader or the hearer to experience, imagine or think of concepts such as the body and mind, and of the relationship between them. Thus, examining the physicality which marks Beckett's radio works such as *Words and Music* (1962) and *Cascando* (1963), for instance, could well provide different ways of thinking about the prominence of embodied subjectivity in them.

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