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and, Shadows : a play (major creative work); and, Bank accounts :
a collage of monologues (minor creative work)**

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**Mind The Gap – An Examination of the Pause in Modern
Theatre;**
Shadows – A Play (Major Creative Work);
**Bank Accounts – A Collage of Monologues (Minor Creative
Work).**

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BA (UWA), MA (ECU)

This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Creative Writing)

Faculty of Education and Arts
Edith Cowan University

January 2012

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

Both as a student of theatre and, eventually, as a professional practitioner, it has long been apparent to me that there is a dearth of reference material on what has become one of the modern theatre's most important elements: the pause. Actors, directors and playwrights can only interpret the word 'pause' according to their own experience and its meaning remains nebulous, even after agreement has been reached in a specific context. The essay, *Mind The Gap*, examines the significance of the pause to these various practitioners.

It suggests, with examples, close analysis of the purpose of each pause, differentiation of the terms used to denote them and interrogation of various well-known playwrights' intentions with its use. *Mind The Gap* is offered as an initial investigation on which to base further, more detailed research from which students and professionals can reach agreement to find a common language to describe and define the unspoken.

In *Shadows*, the major creative work, I use the form of the English burlesque to satirise the increasing influence that television is having on modern family life. I have experimented with filling the pauses in one narrative, the life of the Agnew family, with a second narrative, the television programme, *Secret White Women's Business*.

Bank Accounts, the minor work, is another experiment where several brief histories are embedded in a common narrative set in a commonplace environment. The pauses central to *Bank Accounts* are filled with the unspoken relationships between strangers.

Both plays are intended to present women as equal players in the game of life rather than as victims of male chauvinism.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Use of Thesis	ii
Abstract	iii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
<u>PART ONE:</u>	
<u><i>Mind The Gap – An Examination of the Pause in Modern Theatre</i></u>	1
Introduction – The Pause in Practice	2
The Pause in Other Arts	13
Learning the Pause	33
Stage Directions	41
The Actor’s Pause	53
‘Charging’ The Pause	61
The Director’s Pause	67
The Playwright’s Pause	73
Harold Pinter and The Pause	85
Samuel Beckett and The Pause	97
Joanna Murray-Smith and The Pause	109
Daniel Keene and The Pause	119
Theatre in London, UK, 2011	127
Conclusion	135
References	140
Bibliography	146
<u>PART TWO:</u>	
Full Length Play: <i>Shadows</i>	153
<u>PART THREE:</u>	
Monologues: <i>Bank Accounts</i>	225

MIND THE GAP - The Art of the Pause

An Examination of the Pause in Modern Theatre

Introduction: The Pause in Practice

The simultaneous production in Melbourne in 2009 of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*¹ and Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*² was a fortuitous coincidence for students of the theatre. It not only provided the opportunity to see works by two of the major playwrights of the twentieth century, both acknowledged masters of the stage pause, but the two productions also provided excellent examples of how the execution of those pauses can cause a production either to succeed or to fail.

The director of *The Birthday Party* took the unusual step of responding to criticism of his direction, especially defending his casting of indigenous actors and relocating the play to Australia. He wrote that the negative criticism was an example of 'Australia's completely aphasic attitude to race'.³ The resulting controversy in the pages of *The Age*⁴, about the role and responsibilities of the critic, tended to divert attention away from the major faults of the production. In fact, these had little to do with race but everything to do with the director's understanding of Pinter's purposes and style. Pinter's plays, especially in performance, require a firm grasp on the way that he uses space – both topographical and temporal. Space is never empty for Pinter: his rooms are filled with invisible tensions and his pauses are filled with meaning.

In his introduction to *PLAYS: TWO*, as quoted in the programme for this production, Pinter wrote 'I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place...'⁵ This can only be true, however, if the other places and times are parallel to the circumstances of the original. While it may be easy to see how the plot could 'happen anywhere', the environment and the characters of *The*

Birthday Party are distinctly English, and adapting the play to a foreign culture means more than designing a set for that foreign country and having the foreign actors speak the same lines. If Pinter's plays are to be adapted to another location, it is not enough to transpose his original dialogue and hope that it will have the same power as it does in the original, without also transposing the culture to which it belongs.

Australia is not England. England is a small country with a large population. Australia is a large country with a small population. The difference is not only between the two cultures' concepts of distance and space – adjustments also have to be made in social interactions that reflect those different concepts. Most living spaces in England are much smaller than the average room in an Australian house. Therefore, two people in a room in many English houses can invade each other's personal space without taking a step. It is the sanctity of this space that is important to Pinter in so many of his plays. People rarely feel crowded in Australia and there is an innate awareness that if someone is threatening one's territory, it is easy for either person to move into another space to negate the threat. While space could be used on stage to magnify the attempt at threat by unwanted proximity, it would also magnify the victim's desire to stand up to the threat by not moving away. The introduction of higher density building in urban areas is changing the landscape in Australia but it will be a long time before it is comparable to the situation England has known for centuries.

The programme notes for this production also place the action, quite properly, in 'the snug little bolt-hole [Stanley] has found for himself in Meg's seaside boarding house'⁶. Stephen Curtis' set in the Fairfax Studio, however, was neither 'snug' nor 'little' and the vast expanse of stage immediately dissipated any sense of a claustrophobic atmosphere vital to the menace of the piece. The lack of any sense of entrapment or of limited

territory was further emphasized by Meg having to walk from one side of the wide stage, where she was ironing a series of tea-towels, to the pile of washing on the other side of the stage, a matter of some twenty or thirty metres. In the script, Meg is directed to darn socks at the table while Petey eats his breakfast, emphasizing both the domesticity and poverty, and the pressure inherent in Meg's proximity. Moreover, the standard-sized laminex kitchen table looked miniscule in this immense kitchen. When, in Act Two, Stanley was interrogated by Goldberg and McCann, there was too much room for it to have been acceptable that he would stay at the table and submit to such torture. Pinter's prescription of a confined physical space was deliberate and essential for the play to work as comedy of menace.

The presence of a large surf board in the front doorway may well have served to indicate to the audience that the boarding house was on the coast ('by the seaside') but, being a well-known symbol of youthful freedom, tended to undermine any idea of the place being a 'bolt-hole'. Who used the surf board? Surely, neither Meg nor Petey would have used it or it would have been mentioned in the script. If, then, the surf board was Stanley's, or by implication for Stanley's use, the 'bolt-hole' has become a place for a holiday rather than a place to hide. The English seaside is nothing like a coastal town in Australia and this 'prop' on the set only served to emphasize the difference between the two cultures and their relationship to their spaces.

The one concession in Curtis' set to creating a suitable atmosphere of impending threat was a large grey concrete box hanging over the acting area, obviously meant to be Stanley's room upstairs. Its similarity to a prison cell with no windows might have been appropriate to Stanley's situation but it was not appropriate to the intended realism of the rest of the set. Were there no other rooms on the floor above the kitchen? Where,

then, was Goldberg and McCann's room? Would it not have been more appropriate to leave the image of Stanley's room upstairs to the audience's imagination? Stanley says his room 'needs sweeping. It needs papering.'⁷ The dust, dirt, damp, and peeling wallpaper that Pinter's economic description of the room suggests is surely more vivid than this designer's concept. When Meg replies: 'Oh, Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons in that room'⁸, we are instantly aware of the gulf between the two characters – and the implication that Meg could well intend to invade Stanley's physical space as she has been doing over the breakfast table.

People in places, such as Australia, speak with different rhythms, use different idioms, have different customs and live in societies with different structures. Acceptable pauses in one culture can be offensive in another. The laconic Australian drover's intervals between his words might well be interpreted as insulting in the prescribed speech patterns and social obligations of English society, from the landed gentry to the humble taxi driver. The lack of those intervals in the Englishman's speech could well be thought inconsiderate by the listener in New South Wales, who is unused to the accent, let alone the idioms and syntax of, say, Sussex.

One would be hard pressed indeed to identify a character in Australia with the equivalent background of a Meg or a Petey. Pinter's characters occupy a distinct position in the English class-dominated society. As a deckchair attendant, Petey's place in England's social hierarchy is definitely fixed at the lower end of the scale. Australian society does not judge people by the same standard — people in Australia often take menial jobs because they are convenient rather than because that is all that is open to them. Meg's pride, shown by her repeated boasts that her boarding house is 'on the list'⁹, also implies that either there was a time

when it was not ‘on the list’ or that it only just made it onto the list. Either way, in England Meg would have difficulty being considered ‘middle class’ as she quite possibly would be in the same position in Australia. Also Australian boarding houses are more likely to house the mentally ill or socially inept and, without the long tradition of “digs”, as temporary furnished accommodation is called in England, they are not comparable to boarding houses in English seaside holiday locations.

There is no Australian equivalent to Goldberg, whose Hackney Jewish background colours his every line, whose vague and often contradictory history recalls the stereotype of the cockney Jew made famous by such actors as David Kossof in the films *A Kid for Two Farthings* and *The Bespoke Overcoat*. Goldberg here, though, is the quintessential bully, whose Jewish cultural background is more usually associated with the victims of persecution than with the perpetrators. Pinter himself was Jewish and his parents were immigrants, very possibly with the same accent as a Kossof character. It is probable that even a politically aware Australian audience would have failed to see the irony of Pinter’s choice of cultural background for this character. The shifting of the context to Australia has, in fact, disabled a proper value judgement of Pinter’s characters and the influence that locations have on those characters.

If the set for this production negated Pinter’s sub-textual intention, it was not helped by Louise McCarthy’s costumes. In the opening scene, the space was further emphasized by the constant clicking of Meg’s hard-heeled flat shoes on the linoleum as she walked across the stage. Even more detrimental to Pinter’s purpose, it filled in the awkward, ominous pauses essential to the expositional atmosphere. Had Meg stood over Petey in bedroom slippers as she waited for a reply to her banal questions about the quality of his corn-flakes, it would have made the audience aware that perhaps Petey was not leaving simply to get to work but

needed to escape and find some space for himself. As Pinter well knew, menace need not be limited to the threat of violence.

The first scene of *The Birthday Party* is almost an overture, subtly preparing the audience for the themes that will follow. The pauses are meant to make *us* feel uncomfortable, to make us wonder how we would react in the same situation. Instead this Meg was amiable and chatty, naïve and caring, and house-proud enough to iron her tea-towels. Pinter's Meg says the same words but is over-bearing and self-centred, covertly sexual, and neglectful of her role as house-keeper, as evidenced by Stanley's complaint quoted above. From her words to Stanley, it should be immediately apparent to the audience that Meg is a grotesque coquette, whose "mothering" of Stanley is mixed with a lot of what is now called "inappropriate touching". Her every action, from waking Stanley with a cup of tea and physically harassing him to get up, is a form of "grooming", whether Meg is aware of it or not. Her pauses carry far too much information for them to be filled with the filing of her nails or ironing of tea-towels, as happened in this production. Without Meg's smothering presence, Stanley's violent reaction to her in this scene is little short of cruel. The audience has seen no reason for his sudden anger towards a likeable innocent and Stanley has become threatening rather than the threatened. It also undermines the venting of his frustration at the end of Act One if it is released too early. An undercurrent of incipient violence is one of the hallmarks of Pinter's plays — in this production it was brought to the surface so swiftly that the all-important subtext disintegrated.

This particular Pinter play depends on his characters' proximity to being caricatures. They should be immediately recognizable as types but as types who gradually reveal that all is not as simple as their surface would indicate. Unfortunately, in this production, there was little beneath the

surface from the beginning, and Pinter's words were taken, for the most part, at their face value. That the underlying menace failed to make an impact was especially manifest when the director had to rely on an ominous musical accompaniment, the banging of a newspaper to punctuate the grilling of Stanley by McCann and Goldberg, and explosions and flashlights at the end of act one to fortify the violence. These are not the shortcomings of actors, be they indigenous or otherwise, but a failure of a director whose job it is to explain the genre to his cast and contributing designers.

If this director had paid more attention to the validity of his translocation of the play, had relied more fully on a script that has proven its worth without gimmicks in productions over the last fifty years and, most importantly, had analysed Pinter's uses of space and the pause - and helped his cast to invest them with meaning - he would not have needed to defend himself from the slings and arrows of constructive criticism.

On the other hand, Michael Kantor's production of Beckett's *Happy Days* at the Malthouse Theatre used the 150 pauses in the script with almost flawless perfection. In contrast to *The Birthday Party*, this production reflected the high standard that can be achieved by diligent adherence to the author's purposes, by an almost seamless knitting together of the creative team's efforts and, again, by careful analysis of the uses to which those 150 pauses can be put.

Perhaps Kantor and designer Anna Cordingley took even more liberties with Beckett's set by replacing the scripted 'Expanse of scorched grass rising centre to a low mound'¹⁰ with what looked like a pile of black quartz crystals in a music box, but the both practical and imaginative adaptation served to augment the script rather than detract from it. As well as emphasizing the sterility and barrenness of Winnie's environment, it added an extra irony to her words, 'What a blessing nothing grows,

imagine if all this stuff were to start growing.’¹¹ Quartz crystals do grow but at a pace unnoticeable to the human eye and the human lifespan is thereby rendered even more ephemeral, or Winnie’s imprisonment rendered the more inexorable. By the second act, when the quartz crystals have buried Winnie up to her neck, we are made even more conscious of the inevitability of Winnie’s fate and the valiant optimism with which she continues to face ‘another heavenly day’¹².

The lid of the music box, blazing with bright light bulbs, already doubling as the desiccating sun and the holy light to which Winnie aspires, took on the extra dimension of Hollywood glamour, of the Judy bulbs around the cinema marquee. More practically, they created enough heat for Winnie’s parasol to burst into flames on cue, as scripted. Beckett’s barren environments, his topographical spaces, reinforce the isolation of his characters and echo the emptiness of their lives.

In the Malthouse programme, *Dramaturge in Residence*, Maryanne Lynch, quotes the actress, Fiona Shaw, an earlier Winnie, where she observes that ‘each [pause] has no meaning unless it is filled with imagination, tension or thought’¹³ and it is apparent from the opening moments of the play that each pause in this production has been analysed, evaluated and balanced, like the minute notation of a musical score, just as, I am sure, Beckett would have wanted. His scripts are notorious for the meticulous precision of his stage directions, even to the point of stating how many seconds should be given to a change in lighting cues.¹⁴ The Malthouse production was testament to the wisdom of following those directions.

The jewel in the crown of the production, the ballerina atop the music box, was the actress Julie Forsyth as Winnie. The play is a virtual monologue for Winnie, momentarily interrupted occasionally by Willie, played with admirable restraint by Peter Carroll. In the first act, Winnie is

immobilized from the waist down by her ‘mound’ (quite possibly a ‘mons veneris’ — a symbol of the very womanhood that keeps her buoyant) for over an hour. Ms Forsyth had no trouble holding the audience transfixed, with no lapse of concentration even for a split second during speeches or pauses. In the second act, she was buried up to the neck — and with only her voice, eye movements, facial expressions and impeccable timing, this brilliant actress held her audience for a further thirty five minutes. In all this time she ranged from joy to despair, from serene stillness to brittle animation, from babbling loquacity to poignant silence.

When questioned about how she approached all the pauses in the role¹⁵, it was obvious that each one had been treated individually. There were the pauses where the character searched for a word; those where she searched her limited vocabulary for a precise word; the moments where she refines what she has said, simply changing from ‘can’t’ to ‘cannot’; the searches in her memory; the moments where she has run out of things to say; the moments where she reflects on what she has said; the moments when her mind is a blank; the double entendre; the silence that pulls focus on to what is being said; the pauses leaving space for her taciturn husband to reply to her questions; the silence which allowed for the audience’s imagination; and the silence that Julie said was for ‘either the actress or the audience to have a rest’¹⁶; the list was almost endless. The most telling description Julie gave, was not explained (except perhaps by the comparison of the set to the ‘shards of the World Trade Centre’¹⁷) It came when she talked of ‘the ground zero moment’.¹⁸ It is hard even to imagine what diligence had been applied to finding the moment in this play on which everything else depends.

When Winnie files her nails in a pause, it is not mere padding as it had been in *The Birthday Party*. It is scripted because it is part of Winnie’s daily ritual to ensure her days continue ‘happy’ and ‘heavenly’... ‘the

Sisyphian absurdity of her days ...heart-wrenchingly, grittily hypnotic ... providing [a crutch] against her sinking.’¹⁹. What was plain by the end of our conversation was that Julie and every member of the ensemble that staged *Happy Days* had investigated every aspect and level of Beckett’s script and finished with a production that was a model of integrity and theatrical flair.

Both plays provide evidence that the presence of the word ‘*pause*’ in the stage directions of a script should set off alarm bells that directors or actors ignore, or even treat casually, at their peril. The probability is that there is a lot more to the script than meets the eye. It is hoped that *Mind the Gap* will provide the reader with a map that can at least tell them where some of the mines that this simple word represents are laid.

My intention in *Mind the Gap* is to examine the nature of pauses as they exist in other arts, how they are learnt as a form of communication and how they are used by the main theatre practitioners: actors, directors and playwrights. My purpose is to provide the reader, especially students of the theatre practice and with an understanding of the variety meanings behind the pause in a language that the widest audience can understand. Throughout this essay, the word *silence* refers to an absence of sound and the word *pause* refers to a temporary cessation of dialogue and/or action.

At the time of writing, I have found no reference material that deals solely with the pause and its uses in the theatre. *Mind the Gap* is intended to provide at least a starting point for investigation of what has become such an important feature of the modern theatre.

The Pause in Other Arts

If The Creation happened as written in Genesis in the Bible, the first recorded pause happened on the first Saturday — the day that God rested after creating the universe (Gen.2.2). The only witnesses to the event, however, were Adam and God Himself (widely believed to be male), and it is told that God revealed the fact to Moses at a much later date — in or around the 15th century BC²⁰. If, on the other hand, one believes we are the result of tens of thousands of years of evolution, the first pauses definitely went unrecorded, but probably occurred aeons before the emergence of the hominids when communicating animals wanted to distinguish one grunt from another.

Either way, the pause is not a novel phenomenon. It can be discerned in one form or another in natural processes in every field of study. It is evident in the minute spaces between subatomic particles and in the vast expanses between galaxies; in the microseconds between a hummingbird's wing beats and in the hundreds and thousands of million years between geological eras. It is seen in the green belts surrounding cities and in parks in suburban streets. It is heard in the dripping of a tap and the ebb and flow of waves on a beach. It is used as an indicator of function in machinery and as an indicator of health in medicine. More recently, the development of the binary system for use in computer technology could be said to be based on the pause between positive signals. The pause has been used by humankind since the first records of its existence were daubed or scratched on cave walls.

In Art, the pause has helped in the dissemination of culture and the depiction of religious, mythological and historical narratives. It is easy to imagine the acolyte staring in rapt wonder at the images, drawn over 30 000 years ago on the walls of the Chauvet cave in France, as the tutor

stops momentarily to allow his student to absorb and understand the body language that each horse's head displays (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: detail from the Chauvet Cave drawing²¹

With time, such paintings become more sequential so that by the time of Ancient Egyptian and Greek civilisations, whole stories were being depicted on vases and amphorae, or in friezes around the walls of temples. Since literacy was limited to the very few, pictorial representations of important events were necessary for the maintenance of the specific culture. Often the only words used were those reporting the names of the people involved. Many centuries later, the history of England in the 11th Century A.D. is still being told in sequential scenes in the Bayeux tapestry (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: detail from *The Bayeux Tapestry*²²

This method of storytelling employing pauses between pictures is still evident in *The Stations of the Cross*, the story of Christ's crucifixion, that can be seen in Roman Catholic churches throughout the world today (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 *The Stations of the Cross*²³

The difference between the 32,000 year old drawings on the Chauvet cave wall and the modern comic book (see Figure 4) is the development of narrative assisted by the addition of words.



Figure 4 The cover and first page of Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* in Classic Comics²⁴

The pauses between scenes in these instances are, in many ways, the equivalent of the *lacunae* employed by novelists, or the ‘jump-cuts’ of film-makers. Having become accustomed to narration from before the time of Homer and therefore used to the inherent narrative conventions, the reader/viewer is left to provide the missing information in the gaps from their experience of this and other art forms.

In the twentieth century, however, the pause in Art was found to have other uses to that of abridgement or punctuation. The works of such Abstract painters as Mirò and Picasso and sculptors such as Henry Moore placed a new emphasis on what has become known as ‘negative space’:

The use of equal negative space, as a balance to positive space, in a composition is considered by many as good design. This basic and often overlooked principle of design gives the eye a ‘place to rest’, increasing the appeal of a composition through subtle means.²⁵ (See Figures 5 & 6)



Figure 5: Moore, Henry, *Oval with Points*, Kew Gardens, Surrey, UK²⁶

In *Oval with Points*, the eye is drawn to look through the figure and at the figure 8 that the space creates, the feminine form framing the phallic form of the window behind.

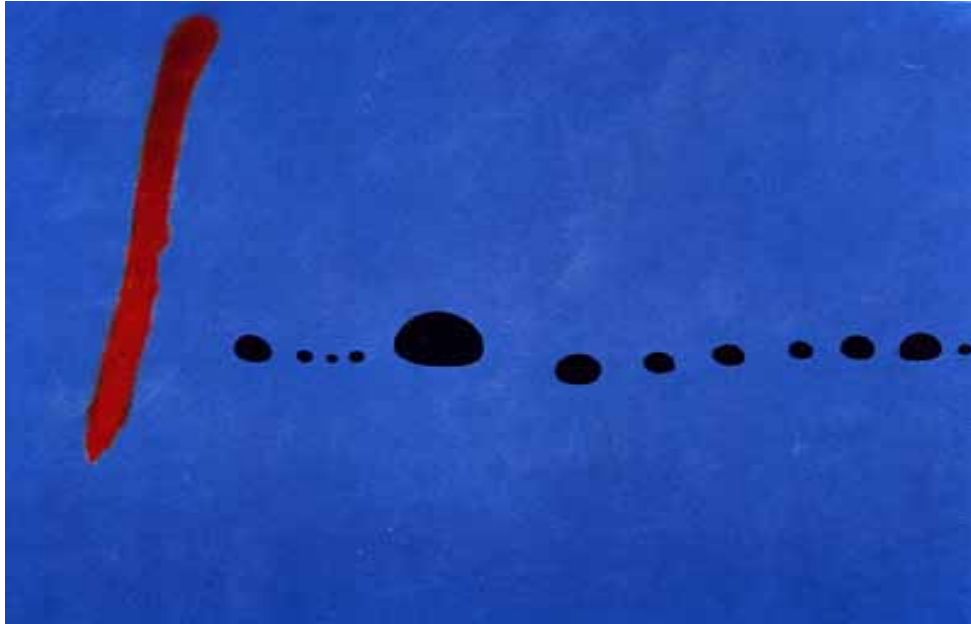


Figure 6. Mirò, Joan, *Blue II*, Galerie Maeght, Paris, France²⁷

The blue space in *Blue II* becomes as important as the red line it contains. The spaces between the black ‘blobs’ set up a rhythm by their regularity.

Kiatowska writes that visual silence is commonly encountered in everyday situations where ‘we do not see what we expect to see, and register this absence as a figure against the less important background.’²⁸ This form of silence in art is best demonstrated by Magritte’s painting *La Voix du Silence*²⁹ (see Figure 7) where the artist has created what Dr. Silvano Levy calls ‘potential space ... a potential container of objects’.³⁰ By allowing light from the figurative side of the painting to flow into the dark side, Magritte has created a gap similar to those in the narratives mentioned above. Here the viewer is left to speculate on what the darkness contains.



Figure 7: Magritte, René, *La Voix du Silence*,

In the painting *L'Homme Au Journal* (see Figure 8), painted a year earlier in 1927, Magritte's intention was plainer and the gap is filled with the absence of the man.

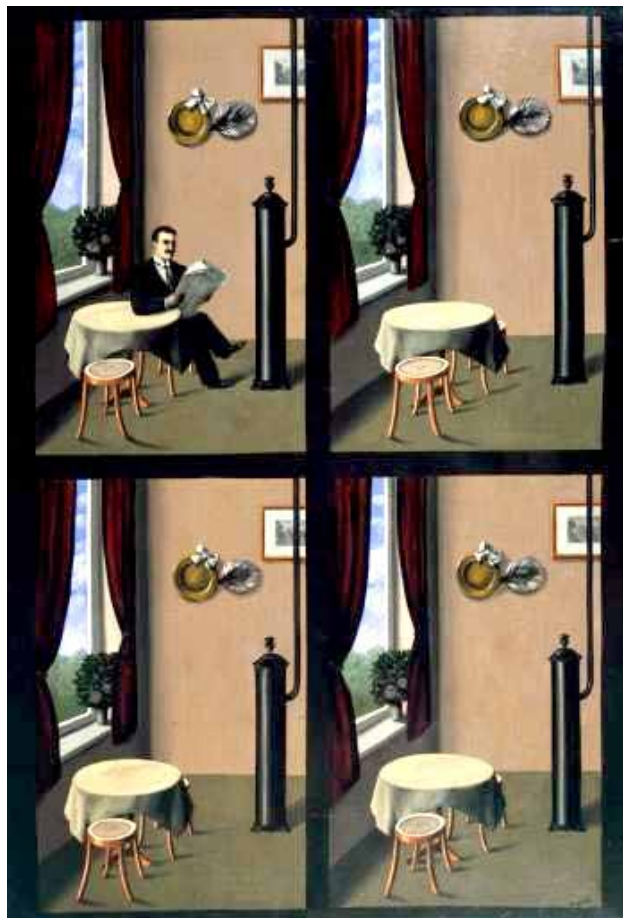


Figure 8: Magritte, René, *L'Homme au Journal*³¹


From the first frame, the viewer has developed expectations that are not fulfilled in the next three, a ‘visual silence’ that the viewer cannot help but want to fill. As Susan Sontag stated: ‘To look at something that is empty is still to be looking, still to be seeing something – if only the ghosts of one’s own expectations’.³² The artist, whether painter or playwright, frequently anticipates those expectations with the use of the pause.

In modern architecture, the advent of sky-scrapers and economic rationalism has amplified the use of the pause as a ‘place to rest’ in the form of a different colour, different texture or ‘step-back’ (the absence of any structure) after a certain number of floors. As well as the provision of stages for safe elevator construction, the change provides a visual pause and relieves the monotony of tens of storeys of the same design. The viewer’s expectations have been interrupted momentarily (see Figure 9) in a similar way to Magritte’s *L’Homme au Journal*.



Figure 9: Somala, *Singapore Skyscrapers*³³

Figure

In music theory, there are two types of pauses: ‘rests’ in which the musicians are directed by the composer to remain silent for a given length of time, notated in the score along with the notes; and ‘fermata’ which is indicated by  above a note, rest or bar line, and in which the player holds the note or rests until the conductor signals that the player should continue. In music practice, especially in improvisational jazz, a pause can be held for as long as the performer thinks necessary, and can take an equal part with musical notes in the patterning of a composition. I have also noticed that some musicians, especially acoustic guitarists, create their own pauses in live performance in order that the audience concentrate sufficiently to hear the harmonics of notes.

The most famous piece of silent music is John Cage’s ‘4’ 33”, in which the composer hoped the audience would begin to hear the ambient sounds around it as a form of music. Less well-known is his composition, *As Slow As Possible*, of which the first notes were played in 2003 but the piece will not be concluded until the year 2642.³⁴ There will, of course, be some very long pauses between the notes as they are played.

By contrast, music was used to fill the silence of films for the first thirty years of their existence, before a way was found to incorporate synchronised sound with the birth of “the talkies” in 1927. It is perhaps for this reason that few people question the use of music to fill pauses and augment the mood of ‘reality’ in the cinema today. It is no longer acceptable to see people bursting into song and dancing in the High Street but few people even notice the symphony orchestra that accompanies a screen kiss.

Silences, however brief, have almost become an anathema to the modern film-maker and it is a brave director who is willing to leave the screen devoid of both action and sound. Film is predominantly a visual medium and for the majority of film-makers the pause is filled with

narrative. If not with the use of a voice-over, it is often in the form of a close-up to illuminate character by showing what is being thought, or in the form of scenery either to show what the character is seeing or to demonstrate where the action is taking place.

Ingmar Bergman, one of the twentieth century's most renowned filmmakers, carried his early experience in theatre production into his cinematography by combining a novelistic description of the action with episodes of dialogue in his scripts, using the pause in much the same way as the playwright as a momentary stop in the action.

He becomes silent and continues to look calmly at the mesmerizer. Vogler's glance is absolutely fixed and almost expressionless.

VERGÉRIUS: It must be weak vessels! Weak vessels and weak souls. You are bursting yourself. Be careful and end your experiment. (*Pause*) You think that I hate you, but that's not true.

Ingmar Bergman, *The Magician*, Screenplay³⁵

He pointed out, however, that the cinema is full of pauses that the audience does not register:

I have worked it out that if I see a film which has a running time of one hour, I will sit through twenty seven minutes of complete darkness – the blankness between the frames.³⁶

Only the artists involved in the making of films are conscious of these pauses, just as, in many cases, only the painter is fully aware of

the black frames around the individual ‘frames’ of *L’Homme au Journal*.

A film that truly uses a pause in the sense of suspended cinematic action, is Luis Buñuel’s *Viridiana*, where the film is “freeze-framed” during a parody of Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* (see Figure 10). The action is suspended totally for a few seconds only, presumably to emphasise the comparison, but the unusual, jarring nature of the pause makes it appear much longer.



Figure 10: Still from VIRIDIANA³⁷

Buñuel has manipulated the expectations of the audience (that the film will run continuously), and forces the viewer out of passive acceptance of the narrative into active judgement of the theme. Those few seconds demonstrate the power of the pause: it can stretch time; it can stimulate thought; it can trigger memory and can initiate feelings; and can change, not the subject itself, but the mental perspective from which it is seen. With that momentary technique, Buñuel both ensured that the image is recorded in the viewer’s mental photo album and that the intellect is engaged when reacting to the film.

In the early days of television when programmes were often broadcast “live” and were therefore unpredictable in timing, the gaps between

programmes on non-commercial channels were filled with pictures of pastoral scenes or still photographs of Nature and periods of light music. These were called 'Interludes' and were welcomed as opportunities to rest the brain and perhaps prepare refreshments for the following programmes.

More recently, any such gap is taken as an opportunity to advertise the station's other programmes and audiences are not given the same consideration. When there is a sound gap on television now, it is usually an advertiser taking advantage of the silence to draw attention to the writing on the screen — because they know that the viewer will check to see if there is something wrong with their equipment. What was once the extension of the interval in the theatre, a brief suspension of the intensity of a drama or a structured rest in a comedy, has become the arena for a different type of intensity — the persuasion or coercion of the audience to watch other products of the channel or to buy an advertiser's product. Viewers are no longer considered as an audience to be entertained; they have become clients to whom a product or service can be promoted at every opportunity.

The saturation of drama in the medium of television by the commercial has led to an interesting development in the behaviour of audiences. Where once the commercial was regarded as an annoying interruption of a drama, it is now welcomed as a convenient opportunity to continue with the chores of everyday living without necessarily losing the tension of the surrounding programme. Indeed, audiences can easily become bored by being asked to follow a programme through to its conclusion without interruption. The theatre, too, has begun to accommodate this change by producing its narratives in a series of short scenes rather than a continually developing narrative in one 'action'. Whole generations have grown up with the television as the electronic baby-sitter with the result

that the television programmes which were initially used to fill the pauses in a family's life, have now become so much a part of those lives that the family's activities are now frequently being slotted into the pauses between programmes.

It is in writing, however, that the pause has had most influence and has acquired such a myriad of meanings. Ancient scripts were written in *scriptio continua* (See Figure 11) without spaces between words and without any form of punctuation.



Figure 11: *Scriptio Continua*³⁸

End of 2 Thessalonians (3:11-18, left column) & beginning of Hebrews (1:1-2:2 , center & left columns) in Codex Vaticanus. Public domain image courtesy of [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Vaticanus).

The merit of this was that ‘it presented a neutral text’³⁹ into which the reader could insert pauses relevant to his meaning and style.

In a period dominated by the ideal of the orator, the principal function of pauses, speaking or reading, was not just to take a breath but to phrase delivery to bring out meaning.⁴⁰

These pauses were initially marked by vertical lines between the words and then modified to become points (*punctus*, from which the word ‘punctuation’ derives) at various levels of the written line to indicate the length of the pause desired.

Although chapters and paragraphs to indicate major pauses can be traced back to the 2nd century BC⁴¹, spaces between words were not introduced until the late 7th century AD by Irish monks to facilitate the reading of Latin theological texts.⁴² They were helped in this by the fact that Latin was an inflected language, that is: that word endings helped make sense of what had been written. For example, the Latin word for a slave is ‘*servus*’ when it is the subject of a verb (nominative) but becomes ‘*serve*’ when the slave is spoken to (vocative). This is best rendered in English by the use of the archaic ‘O’ in front of the word to be used in the vocative in English, as in “Would you like to eat, O Jane?” Usage has rid us of the ‘O’ but not the comma (indicating a slight pause): “Would you like to eat, Jane?” This, of course, has a totally different meaning if one eliminates the pause represented by the comma. The question then becomes: “Would you like to eat Jane?”

Our current system of punctuation did not become uniform until long after the invention of the printing press and more widespread literacy demanded a common system that could be understood by all. This was

achieved more through agreement about usage between printers and compositors than through a meeting of august Grammarians such as *L'Academie Française* in France. The Rhetoricians, on the one hand, wanted punctuation to designate when pauses should be inserted, and the Grammarians, on the other, preferred it to serve to clarify the sense of what was written. It can, however, serve both services at once — best shown in ‘The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’, chapter eight of Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*:

At last, over the rim of the waiting earth the moon lifted with slow majesty till it swung clear of the horizon and rode off, free of moorings; and once more they began to see surfaces — meadows widespread, and quiet gardens, and the river itself from bank to bank, all softly disclosed, all washed clean of mystery and terror, all radiant again as by day, but with a difference that was tremendous.⁴³

It is possible, in fact, recommended when reading aloud, to insert more pauses in the first part of the sentence so that it reads: ‘At last, over the rim of the waiting earth // the moon lifted with slow majesty // till it swung clear of the horizon // and rode off, free of moorings’ in order for the audience to be given plenty of time to exercise its imagination and picture each development in the image in the sequential way that the author paints it. The whole episode of the lost baby otter in this chapter uses pauses cumulatively, purposely slowing the performing reader until the awe and reverence that Grahame feels his demigod deserves is contained in his prose. This cumulative power of the pause is harnessed even more noticeably in modern theatre.

With the growth of universal literacy and a preference for ‘silent’ reading, pauses indicated by punctuation have come to be designed to communicate the sense of the written word more than to indicate spoken pauses. For the modern orator, especially since his speeches are often written for him by others, a pause is more likely to be indicated by inserting a stage direction (pause) into his script.

Oratory and rhetoric no longer feature in the modern student’s curriculum but where it does (Public Speaking), the pause is categorised into just four types: the articulation pause; the reflective pause; the pause for emphasis; and the anticipatory pause.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, in the area of public speaking most important to people’s lives – in parliamentary debates, the pause has become merely the opportunity for interjection and heckling, and has lost any of the power that it retains in other arenas.

In poetry, where the patterns that can be created with words and syntax usually increase their potency, the pause is most often only inserted by the reader when the poem is performed for an audience. How much more evocative is Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* when a pause is inserted before the last three words of the first stanza:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o’er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness...and to me⁴⁵.

Where the pause appears in the concrete poetry of Eugen Gomringer, it echoes Magritte’s painting L’Homme au Journal :

silence silence silence
silence silence silence
silence silence
silence silence silence
silence silence silence

Gomringer, Eugen, *Silencio*⁴⁶

I have presumed to paraphrase the artist in order to demonstrate how the pause differs from the silence:

pause pause pause
pause pause pause
pause pause
pause pause pause
pause pause pause
silence

I have also presumed to alter Magritte's painting in the same way to demonstrate the pause by reversing the process of the four pictures. (See Figure 12)

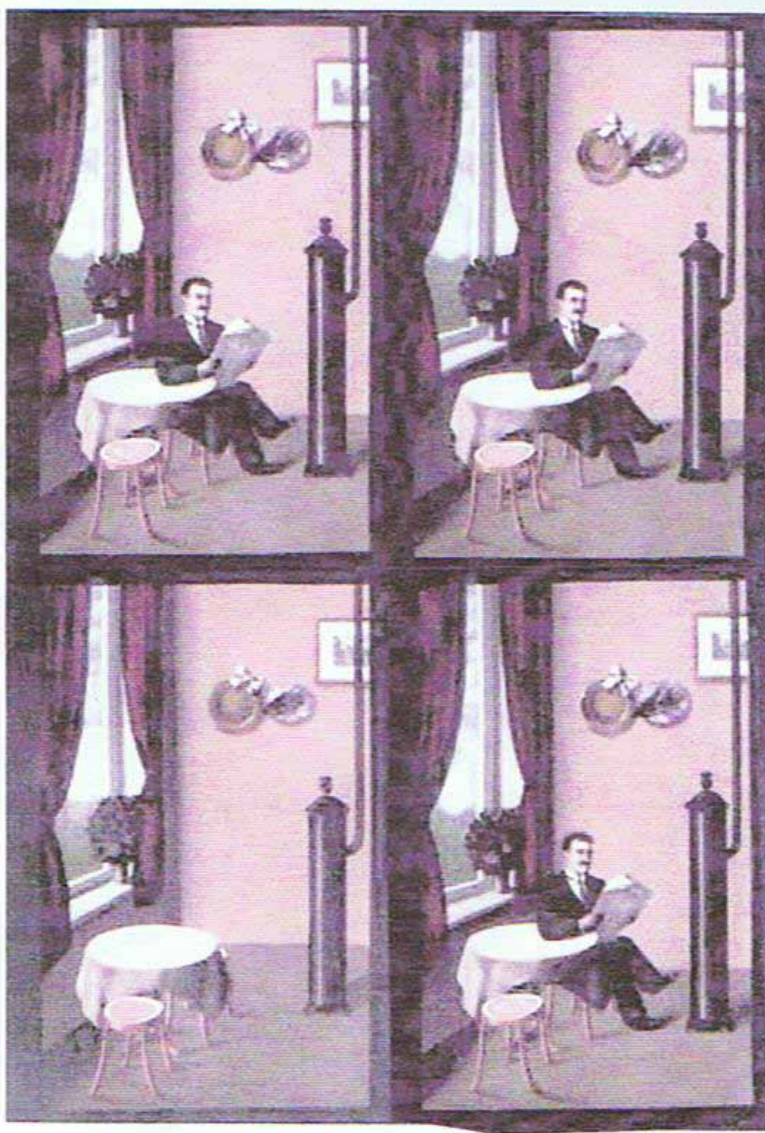


FIGURE 12: *L'Homme au Journal, doctored.*

The absence of the man is now only seen as temporary, so can be classed as a pause rather than the 'silence' of the original.

For most people a silence is quite simply the absence of sound, as it is defined in *The Macquarie Dictionary*⁴⁷, and a pause is a brief silence during a conversation. There is already a wealth of literature about silence, in most of which the pause is treated as one manifestation of silence among many. For sociolinguist Adam Jaworski, for example, silence is

a diverse concept ... an auditory signal (pause) in a linguistic theory ... a pragmatic and discursive strategy ... a realization of a taboo ... a tool of manipulation ... a part of a listener's work in interaction and ... an expression of artistic ideas.⁴⁸

The pause can be all these but the difference between the two concepts becomes apparent when examining the same dictionary for the word *pause* : **Pause -n 1.** A temporary stop or rest esp. in speech or action.⁴⁹ It is the use of the word 'temporary' that differentiates the two concepts.

A silence can endure for eternity but a pause is prescribed to endure for a limited time. A pause indicates to the listener or reader that the speech or action is going to continue after the hiatus, not necessarily from where it left off but it will continue. A silence holds no such promise. Indeed, the likelihood after a silence is that there will be a change of subject or that the action will continue in a completely different direction. Thus, novelists and other prose practitioners can write 'The pause became a silence,'⁵⁰ to indicate that the intention to continue has been dropped.

Perhaps this is why the critic, Birdboot, in Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* says 'You can't start [a play] with a pause'⁵¹, because there is no earlier action that has been interrupted. Playwrights often use the same technique when they write the stage direction: (*Pause. Silence*), leaving many young or inexperienced actors to wonder where the one stops and the other begins. For some playwrights the difference is only between the amounts of time given to the suspension of a speech or action. For reasons of clarity, then, this essay will be examining the use of 'temporary stops or rests' in modern English-speaking theatre.

The pause permeates our lives without us being aware of, or paying much attention to, either its presence or its function. This, however, is

more a matter of familiarity than ignorance. Pauses affect our lives much earlier than when we learn to use words in reading or writing.

Learning The Pause

Pauses and their meanings are learnt in much the same way as a native language is learnt: through association and familiarity created by repetition, and by the absorption of the way the words are structured into meaningful phrases and sentences. Whether this learning is achieved through the stimulus-response learning as promoted by John Watson and B.F. Skinner or through an instinct, as Chomsky and Pinker⁵² would have us believe, is not of prime importance here, since I would suggest the learning of language is a combination of both. Pinker tells us that the behaviourist theory of language as ‘a repertoire of responses’ is deficient, as has been demonstrated by Chomsky,⁵³ — but it would seem that Pinker’s conclusion that ‘the brain must contain a recipe or program (sic) that can build an unlimited set of sentences out of a finite list of words’,⁵⁴ is relatively fanciful. There is no reason or evidence to suggest that this ‘recipe’ is inherent rather than part of the phenomenal period of creative learning that takes place in a child’s early years.

Give a child some dirt and some water and, before very long, you will have mud pies — without there having to be an inbuilt ‘recipe’. Once the child has learnt that he or she can make a third substance from the first two, the recipe has been learnt for creative experimentation. It could be better argued that creativity rather than language is a human instinct since the formulation of ‘an unlimited set of sentences out of a finite list of words’ is the same continual creation as the blending of dirt and water but obviously of manifestly greater complexity because of the greater number of potential ingredients.

If, as research shows, our hearing organs are formed early in foetal development and are well developed by the third trimester, I believe that it is conceivable for babies to become used to certain rhythms, certain

syntaxes, in our language long before they are born. William O'Grady reports that newborns 'prefer the language of their parents over other languages'⁵⁵, because they have become accustomed to it in the womb. Obviously, they cannot learn meanings because they cannot see what is being referred to, but they can learn to associate intensities, moods and feelings with the rhythms and tones they are hearing.

One of the first interactions that a child has with adults when its vision matures is 'peek-a-boo' or 'I see you', in which the adult face disappears and the adult is silent for a short amount of time. That particular pause allows the child to think about what has happened, and is an example of the child learning the pause before it has learnt to speak. Dr Joan Pope also speaks of the importance of what she calls the 'working' pause for children, when they have to learn to swallow one mouthful before being offered the next spoonful of food.⁵⁶

The experiment by psychologist Karen Wynn that is quoted by Pinker as a demonstration that 'five month old babies can do a simple form of mental arithmetic' by placing or removing dolls behind a screen⁵⁷, also demonstrates the curiosity of the same babies when their expectations are not met. If the patterns to which they have become accustomed are suddenly not forthcoming, curiosity is raised as to why things are different. This demonstrates that, even at such an early age, it is human nature that we, as listeners, attempt to fill the gaps with what we expect could or should come next.

It is no coincidence that the human infant is dependent on others for movement during its first year or so: it has a lot to learn: where it is; what sounds make up its world; what colours and shapes are; what is safe and what is not; what methods of communication are employed by its kind; and that it differs from others. With so much to learn, surely it is sensible

to sit in the one place and absorb the colour and movement that was denied it in the womb.

One of the most exciting and interesting moments in watching a child grow, occurs when two or more pre-language children meet — they have little need of a spoken language and can ‘converse’ with their eyes. If they are at the same stage of development, they both seem to know exactly what the other is ‘up to’ and usually have an instant rapport. This is the same unspoken knowledge that identical twins continue through to adulthood, and is apparent in fraternal twins, close siblings and friends, and whole classes of boys and girls when they get a fit of the giggles.

During their 1968 trial for the murder of two small boys, the actions of Mary Bell, 11, and Norma Bell, 13, (no relation) were described by the author, Gitta Sereny:

In court, on innumerable occasions, their heads turned towards each other, their eyes locked, their faces suddenly bare of expression and curiously alike, they always seemed by some sort of silent and exclusive communion to reaffirm and strengthen their bond.⁵⁸

Gitta Sereny, The Case of Mary Bell.

Their ‘communion’ did not depend on any form of instinctual ‘mental grammar’ or ‘Standard Social Science Model’⁵⁹. It is simply based on a mutual understanding of what the other is thinking through their experiences with each other. This potential confluence of wavelengths is never lost totally, even in adults, and is easily exploited by those aware of the power of paralanguage, such as comedians, playwrights, mime artists and choreographers.

Most linguists agree, however, that in learning a spoken language a child predominantly learns nouns first. When a child sees a furry four-legged animal and hears the phonemes *k – a – t* in association with it often enough, the combination of those sounds becomes a label for the object and can be filed in the mind for future reference. A similar four-legged furry animal is associated with the phonemes *d-o-g* and the child must hear it often enough to work out the difference from what it has learnt is a *cat*. When these associations are confirmed by adults (i.e. mentors) and by similar associations in different environments, the child, according to Stephen Pinker, files the new word in what he calls the mental dictionary and begins to build a vocabulary. This process of association, sorting and filing is not conscious and continues well into adulthood. It is the formation and linking of words into sentences that make sense that Pinker thinks is an inherited ‘instinct’.

It is as if Pinker, while acknowledging the

grammar explosion, a period of several months in the third year of life during which children suddenly begin to speak in fluent sentences, respecting most of the fine points of their community’s spoken language,⁶⁰

is reluctant to attribute this ability to the earlier development in the human mind which has been conducted in silence. For Pinker it is an ‘explosion’, a ‘sudden’ *appearance* of ability. There is no recognition that it could well have been fermenting in all those years spent in a crib and a high chair. The child’s mind might *appear* to be unoccupied but has, in fact, been absorbing grammar and fluency almost by osmosis. It is now recognized that the areas in the cerebral cortex that are important in processing language, develop during the second year of a child’s life⁶¹,

so the apparent ‘explosion’ is now known to have been brewing for a long time before it happens.

Not many listeners or readers, child, adolescent or adult, will insist on immediate comprehension at their first encounter with a word. Its meaning, or at least an approximation of meaning, is most frequently learnt from repeated viewings or hearings of the word and the various contexts in which it can be found. It is only when there is a possible conflict of meaning that an agreed arbiter (in most cases, a dictionary) is consulted. It is through this agreement of meaning that communication is achieved and it is through building up a store of these agreed meanings that a language is created.

While the pause is also learnt through the same process of association and familiarity, there are major differences in both the sequence of learning and the collection and storage of data for future reference. The sequence in learning the spoken language for hearing people is:

Sense awareness of object (Viewing, Hearing, Touching, Tasting, Smelling)—Association with sound—Repetition—Filing in mental dictionary —Classification—Recall and use.

In learning an unspoken language (i.e. a pause, a gesture, a facial expression), since there is no sound, the sequence is:

Sense awareness—Association with person—Association with context—Repetition —Classification — Filing— Recall and use.

In the absence of sound, our learnt desire to associate the absence with something, an object or an action, is thwarted and we are forced to

associate it with the closest thing to it i.e. the person who created the pause, or the circumstance that caused it.

In a hypothetical situation, a child quickly learns that Granny always pauses before the noun in the sentence 'I have a ... present for you'. Uncle Ned, on the other hand, always pauses before the auxiliary verb 'I ... have a present for you'. The meaning of the sentence is the same, as is the result, but there is an extra lesson in the communication: that individuals have idiosyncratic means of communication. Repetition in this case reinforces the personality or character of the speaker, rather than what is spoken. It is only when the same pause is used by several different people that it can be classified and filed as a type of pause. The difficulty that arises is that all the different types of pauses in language are all filed under the one word 'Pause' in our mental dictionary.

The biggest hurdle in the learning of unspoken language, then, is the lack of a reference system other than experience. There is no dictionary in which to look up an absence of sound. When we hear a pause, we do not look up 'pause' in our mental dictionary and then choose which meaning is relevant as we would, say, when looking up a word like 'hot' or 'cup'. We have to wait to see the many complications of the context before we can be confident that we are interpreting this particular pause correctly. Nor is there any form of reference that interprets how long a certain pause can be held before it changes meaning. It is next to useless for an actor or director to know 'the effect of surrounding phrase lengths on pause duration'⁶² or any of the other learned treatises on the pause in Linguistic studies. Pauses are learnt through an accumulation of experiences and employed empirically, according to purpose, audience and genre.

When one person in everyday life asks another 'What were you thinking?' the reply, not infrequently, will be 'Oh, nothing'. It is very rarely true, of course. A better answer might be 'I wasn't conscious of

thinking anything'. Anyone who has tried yoga will know that it is very difficult initially to stop the mind from working, from what we call thinking. Mystics and yogi spend great amounts of time in the practices of *pranayama* (breath) and *drishti* (focus) in order to still the mind, so it is very doubtful that the person who has replied 'Nothing' is telling the truth.

Our thoughts follow from external and internal stimuli, whether they be visual or auditory (external), or from memory or association (internal). Thoughts follow on each other but are not necessarily consequential or even connective. It is the way in which an individual connects thoughts (or does not), however, that gives others clues to the person's character. The person whose thoughts manifestly jump from one subject to another is called 'scatterbrained' or is deemed to 'have the mind of a grasshopper'. The person who is able to demonstrate how one thought has led to another is called 'logical' and deemed to be more intelligent. Of course, this is only a superficial judgement, since the first person might well be wanting to appear 'scatterbrained' while, in fact, their mind is racing with logical thought. It is more difficult, however, to mask the 'grasshopper' mind by appearing logical.

When thoughts are linked, the result is often called 'a train' – as in, 'I've lost my train of thought'. We also talk of 'following the thread' of a person's argument and of 'thought patterns'. All these metaphors imply an order that can be easily detected by the listener or reader. Even when those thoughts emerge without the hindrance of grammar or a social conscience, they are still called 'a stream of consciousness', implying a continual connection for the speaker or writer that is indulged by the listener or reader, who frequently, by remembering what went before, will impose their own sense of order on what has been written or said.

When we read a book or watch a performance, our minds automatically look for that order, whether it is in the narrative, the language, the characterisation, the imagery or the theme. Our minds have been trained by our culture to expect sequence and relevance and, like the child learning the pause, when it is not forthcoming we look to the person with whom the unusual is associated. This can easily be attributed to the author in the case of written works but in the theatre (in its broadest sense), it could well also have been inserted by either the director or the actor or both.

The theatre is a milieu that needs to understand the broadest nature of pauses and their various uses, and actors and directors are forced to interpret the stage direction 'Pause' whenever it appears in a script. Sometimes this is a relatively simple matter because the pause used is almost instinctive, is easily recognised and needs no explanation. The pause in question has probably been experienced in the actor's life so often that the actor would have inserted one, even if the playwright had not called for one. Indeed, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that notice was given to the wishes of the playwright and his stage directions.

Stage Directions

The relationship between playwrights and other theatre practitioners is as dependent on conventions as the relationship between playwrights and their audiences. Innumerable books have been written about the content of plays and the style in which they are presented, in the context of the society for which they were written, or in the context of modern society. There have also been many books about the arts of acting and directing. Not as many books, however, have been written about plays in the context of the theatre itself, i.e. about the way in which the play moves from words on a page to words and actions on a stage. Yet just as the style and content, by which dramatists demonstrate their reactions to the world around them, are subject to change, so too is the manner in which they want their visions conveyed to the world.

Unlike in painting or sculpture where the artist's product is immediately accessible to the viewer, the playwright must first convey his idea in words to a group of intermediaries: the literary manager, who influences the choice of plays for a company, and the artistic director, who makes the decision as to which play is to be staged. It is then put before a director, some actors, a designer, the set construction team and the stagehands, all of whom contribute to taking the written words from the page to a four-dimensional 'reality'.

The playwright is more akin to the composer, whose work is subject to interpretation by musicians within the limits of an annotated score. Fortunately for composers, there has long been an agreement between musicians that what is written in the script is *de rigueur* and to play a middle C when the score calls for a bass E would be plain wrong. Playwrights, however, have not always had this luxury and their work has

often been mutilated by the, albeit well-intentioned, *réalisateurs*. Whole scenes can be cut, characters dropped, and speeches changed, bowdlerised or shortened without any reference to the playwright's wishes. Unless, in the contract between playwrights or their agents and the company applying for the rights to perform the work, it is specifically mentioned that the play must be produced *as writ*, there is little that the playwright can do about it.

For many centuries, the records of the relationship between the writer and these intermediaries were not considered important. Some scripts were written down during a performance on the stage which could well have contained an actor's ad-libs, and which might have been very different from one performance to the next. It could also have meant that moves made in one performance could also differ from the next. Stage directions for many centuries were mostly limited to the entrances and exits of characters, asides, or for specific pieces of 'business' vital to the forward movement of the plot, as in Shakespeare's Othello:

DESDEMONA: Let me but bind it hard, within this hour
It will be well.

OTHELLO: Your napkin is too little.
(She drops her handkerchief)
Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.

DESDEMONA: I am very sorry that you are not well.
(Exeunt OTHELLO and DESDEMONA)

Othello, Act III, Scene III ⁶³

There is certainly no indication from the playwright as to the manner in which a speech should be given, except perhaps in Hamlet's famous

direction to the Player King which, quite possibly, was also aimed at his own players:

HAMLET: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue ... Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus ... suit the action to the word, the word to the action ... And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down to them ...

*Hamlet, Act III, Scene II*⁶⁴

The eighteenth century in England succumbed to an introduction of pantomime and spectacle and, while stage directions for actors remained limited, for the stage technicians they must have been a nightmare. The end of Sheridan's *The Critic* would frighten the modern director, even with all the advances in technology that might render it more feasible:

[Flourish of drums—trumpets—cannon, &c. Scene changes to the sea—the fleets engage—the musick plays 'Britons strike home.'— Spanish fleet destroyed by fireships, &c.—English fleet advances—musick plays 'Rule Britannia.'—The procession of all the English rivers and their tributaries with their emblems, &c. Begins with Handel's water musick—ends with a chorus, to the march in Judas Maccabaeus.—During this scene, Puff directs and applauds everything—then:

PUFF: Well, pretty well—but not quite perfect—so ladies and gentlemen, if you please, we'll rehearse this piece again tomorrow.

Sheridan, R.B., *The Critic, Act III*⁶⁵

Although this is satire; it reflects what Sheridan thought was excessive in the theatre practices of his time.

The staging of a play by the end of the nineteenth century had, for the most part, become the responsibility of the actor/manager ‘who appeared in tailored versions of scripts “supported by inferior actors and superior stage and lighting technicians”’⁶⁶. The playwright’s work was consequently subject to many indignities according to the whims and eccentricities of these powerful figures.

Acting also succumbed to the questionable charms of the melodrama and playwrights began to direct how the actors should play their roles. This is the stage direction for the main actress at the climax of T.W. Robertson’s play *Caste*:

ESTHER: (*in an ecstasy*) Oh, my husband! Come to me!
For I know that you are near! Let me feel your arms clasp
round me!—Do not fear for me!—I can bear the sight of
you!—(*door opens showing SAM keeping GEORGE back*)—it
will not kill me!—George—love—husband—come oh, come
to me! (*George breaks away from SAM, and coming down
behind ESTHER places his hands over her eyes; she gives a
faint scream, and turning, falls in his arms...etc*).

Robertson, T.W., *Caste*.⁶⁷

It is likely that a modern playwright would dispense with this abundance of words, relying on the mood created by the dialogue to dictate the actions of the actress according to the intentions of the director. The modern axiom is that the words spoken should give all the clues necessary for an interpretation. Using the stage direction ‘pause’

gives the modern theatre practitioners a space for their own invention of emotion and gesture and, therefore, the opportunity for a greater contribution to the production. Unfortunately this is not yet universal and some literary managers can reject plays as being ‘not theatrical’ because they have not understood this as the playwright’s intention.

When George Bernard Shaw promoted the publication of play scripts at the end of the nineteenth century, his purpose was to ‘[give] scripts the material look and poetic weight of fiction and poetry’ and thereby to ‘define Drama as a reading as well as a performing canon’.⁶⁸ His stage directions, consequently, are excessively detailed in order to give the reader a picture of what he envisioned for his plays. On a more practical level, he also aimed ‘to reclaim from the actor/manager both legal ownership and primary authorship of the written script’.⁶⁹ The proliferation of publishing houses devoted almost entirely to the production of play scripts, Australia’s *Currency Press* and Perth’s *Prickly Pear Playscripts* among them, and the increasing number of writers throughout the world able to earn a living, however meagre for most, are testament to Shaw’s success in achieving these specific aims.

The passage of time in the century since, however, has revealed a third legacy – an archive of the relationship between the playwrights and the people who assist in producing what the authors would consider to be the ideal staging of their work. The lengthy and detailed stage directions of Shaw’s plays not only illuminate the struggle to maintain control over his creation but also reflect the influence of Ibsen and Strindberg on the English-speaking theatre. Both Shaw and Pinero at this time attempt to put ‘reality’ on the stage, both in the choice of ‘unpleasant’ or ‘social’ issues raised, and in replicating the cluttered décor of Victorian, albeit ‘upper-class’, homes in great detail. Unfortunately, this detail also carried

through to Shaw's directions for the actors, as seen in this brief extract from *The Philanderer*:

CRAVEN: At your service, Paramore: at your service.

Craven and Paramore go into the consulting room. Julia turns her head, and stares insolently at Charteris. His nerves play him false: he is completely out of countenance in a moment. She rises suddenly. He starts, and comes hastily forward between the table and the bookcase. She crosses to that side behind the table; and he crosses to the opposite side in front of it, dodging her.

CHARTERIS: [nervously] Don't, Julia.

Shaw, *The Philanderer*⁷⁰

In Shaw's eagerness to create 'reading scripts' as well as performance scripts, he adapts the novelist's techniques to paint his pictures. Is it any wonder that some modern directors tell their casts to 'ignore all stage directions' as they seek to put their own stamp onto works? While this is understandable in cases like the above, when used indiscriminately it could return the profession to the days of those 'egotistical actor-managers',⁷¹ only this time they will be called directors.

The convention of elaborate stage directions was to continue almost unchanged in the English-speaking theatre for the next fifty years. If stage directions became less detailed in that time, it was more due to the fact that a short-hand developed by which just a few words conveyed a wealth of information. The ubiquitous French windows on a stage set were indicative of the social milieu in which the drama was going to take

place. Even the advent of the ‘kitchen-sink’ dramas of Osborne and Wesker, while certainly heralding a change of sorts, had little impact on the method of staging or on the communication between the playwright and his *réalisateur*s.

While dramatists in England were learning to trust that their intentions would be understood, playwrights in the United States, such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, were still employing what Kenneth Tynan in his review of Peter Wood’s production of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh*, called ‘the hysterical punctuation and over-heated stage directions of which American playwrights are so fond’.⁷² In *The Iceman Cometh*:

([Rocky] sighs dejectedly. He seems grotesquely like a harried family man, henpecked and browbeaten by a nagging wife. Larry is deep in his own bitter preoccupation and hasn’t listened to him. Chuck enters ...He looks sleepy, hot, uncomfortable and grouchy.)

Eugene O’Neill, *The Iceman Cometh*⁷³

In Miller’s *A View from the Bridge*:

BEATRICE: You want somethin’ else, Eddie, and you can never have her!

CATHERINE: [*in horror*] B.!

EDDIE: [*shocked, horrified, his fists clenching*] Beatrice! ...

BEATRICE: [*crying out, weeping*] The truth is not as bad as blood, Eddie! ...

EDDIE: [*crying out in agony*] That's what you think of me – that I would have such thoughts? [*His fists clench his head as though it will burst.*]

Arthur Miller, *A View from the Bridge*⁷⁴

Tennessee Williams in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* even goes so far as to tell us in the stage directions what he is trying to achieve in his play:

Brick's detachment is at last broken through. His heart is accelerated; his forehead sweat-beaded; his breath becomes more rapid and his voice hoarse. The thing they're discussing, timidly and painfully on the side of Big Daddy, fiercely, violently on Brick's side, is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them...The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent—fiercely charged!—interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis.

Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*⁷⁵

Many people would charge, quite justifiably, that if it has to be put in a stage direction, then he has not achieved it. (I wonder if anyone dared say to Tennessee Williams 'Show, don't tell'). So much of all the above examples of stage directions would most likely be taken out of a modern script by dramaturgy.

At the same time as Shaw and Pinero were experimenting with the content of the 'well-made play', in which 'the effect depends on a

cleverly constructed plot rather than characterisation'⁷⁶, a change was fermenting on the European continent that was to affect the English-speaking theatre for at least a century, and the echoes of which are still being heard today.

Chekhov in Russia, with the luxury of six months' rehearsal and working in collaboration with the director Stanislavsky, was experimenting with 'naturalism' and the relationship of language to characterization. His characters' inability to express themselves became at least as important as the speeches that they were able to utter, creating a 'sub-text' that was to become even more eloquent than the structurally perfect declamations of the Realists. Silences were no longer simple reactions that leave a character 'aghast, amazed or terrified'⁷⁷ but become fraught with the possibilities of what could be said ... and it is with these silences as a foundation that a new theatre emerges – a theatre that is as dynamic in its possibilities as the theatre it gradually replaced was moribund in its actualities.

The breakdown of language as a means of communication that Chekhov utilised was explored further by the Dadaists, Tzara and Artaud, until the Absurdists, Ionesco, Arrabal and Beckett, began to dispense with logic and eventually plot altogether. If Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* reflected Realism exiting with a grand flourish of eloquent frustration, it made room for the Absurdist anguish of Beckett, N.F.Simpson and James Saunders. It was then simply a matter of marrying the inarticulate to the angry and the stage was set for Harold Pinter's *Comedy of Menace*.

Behind the scenes, however, with the simplification of stage directions (*after* Beckett, it must be said, whose stage directions include timing of what appear to be pauses to the second⁷⁸), the word 'pause' has since become a portmanteau that has a different significance for almost every

playwright that uses it. Instead of just momentary breaks in the action or the oratorical hesitations for dramatic effect, we now meet ‘lapse(s) into wordlessness’⁷⁹, scenic punctuation, exaggeration of naturalism, and purposeful refusals to continue the dialogue. Pauses where the playwright indicates what action he wants to be seen are the equivalent of the linguists’ ‘filled’ pauses’⁸⁰. Masters of the pause, like Pinter and Beckett, leave most of their pauses ‘unfilled’ i.e. they leave it up to the actors or directors to decide whether there is paralanguage or complete silence.

Harold Pinter, in his play *Betrayal*, has 133 stage directions requiring a *pause* and 17 requiring *silences*⁸¹. Nowhere in the play script is there any explanation of the difference between the two. Nor is there any indication in most scripts since by any author that explains the difference between the two. Beckett’s *Happy Days* is credited with having 150 *pauses*, each of which had to be analysed by the actress and director during rehearsals.

Since the 1960s, however, Realism and Naturalism have kept their hold on playwrights and the majority of plays in contemporary theatre still attempt to put a form of reality on the stage. The difference between these and earlier forms appears to result from film and television techniques: shorter scenes in episodic narratives that appear to have dispensed with the three unities of the classics altogether. In *Bank Accounts*, the series of monologues submitted as part of this doctorate, I am trying to utilise this modern convention at the same time as experimenting with interspersing the episodic scenes with other narratives i.e. ‘filling’ the pauses with an alternative narrative, and eliminating stage directions to a bare minimum to give the actors and directors as much creative input as possible.

With the play, *Shadows*, finding a balance between demonstrating the intrusion of television into people’s lives by the presence of a large screen and ensuring that a stage audience will not be distracted by either medium from what is going on in the other, was not an easy task. However,

evidence of the ability to switch attention between different stories without losing track of either, is displayed in every home with a television (or, more likely, with several televisions). This is achieved simply by being aware that one story is on ‘pause’ while another is being played out, and vice versa. Add channel-surfing and the regular rituals of family life and one can see that modern audiences are more than capable of ‘multi-tasking’ when it comes to their entertainment. Indeed, the proliferation of advertisements and programme promotions in the middle of even the tensest of dramas has conditioned modern audiences to accommodate these brief demands on their attention.

The stage directions for *Shadows*, with its television component, are consequently more complicated than in a purely theatrical presentation. They will be even more complicated in a stage manager’s copy, where the cues for lighting, sound, videotape — all the directions for the smooth and seamless combination of the contributing elements — are recorded. The stage direction ‘pause’ is only manifest on stage. The *pause* is seen or heard by the audience in the auditorium as a brief silence but backstage it could well be the cause of a flurry of activity as the crew prepare for what comes after the pause.

The Actor's Pause

'Plays are about the spaces in between the spoken word as much as about speech itself, about how people react as much as how they act'.⁸²

Richard Eyre & Nicholas Wright

The best acting is not just a matter of saying the right words at the right time or of having the right facial expressions. An audience also needs to know what a character is thinking and feeling, which may even be in direct opposition to the words spoken. The inner workings of the mind must be apparent, revealed most frequently through the language of the eyes, which is an art in itself.

When stage directions in play-scripts were prescriptive of a character's feelings (as demonstrated in the previous chapter), the thread of that character's thoughts and feelings were easy to follow. While no actor finds it easy to summon up 'a strangled cry' when such an action is not supported by the earlier text, at least the playwright has made his intention known. A difficulty in modern texts, however, has arisen because the simple word *pause* has often come to replace the description, meaning that the actor and director must discover the threads in the unspoken text. They must search the whole script for the context that leads the character to even momentary wordlessness and convey the discovered content through their body language.

Before every word that we speak, there has been a choice dependent either on what has been said before or on an action or circumstance that prompts speech and that choice involves the whole of a person's mental lexicon. When an actor confronts a *pause* in a script, it not only involves understanding the context surrounding the reason for the pause but also the motivation for the choice of words that come after it. 'For each correct pause,' Michael Chekhov tells us, 'has in it the power to stimulate

the spectator's attention and compel him to be more alert than he already is'.⁸³ The actor has to know in which direction that 'stimulated' attention will be drawn before he employs his *pause*.

In many ways, the more frequent use of the word *pause*, rather than being an abrogation of responsibility by the playwright, demonstrates the new trust that playwrights have accorded their *réalisateur*s. It is recognised by playwrights, perhaps as a result of more frequent co-operation between them and their directors and casts, that there is more than one thread that can lead from thought *a* to thought *b*, or from thought to speech. One actor's understanding of the thought process that leads from thought to words and an expression of angst or humour can be different from another's *but can be equally as valid in the context*. Australian playwright Daniel Keene's play, *Half & Half*⁸⁴, begins with an exchange of crossfire dialogue of short sentences between two brothers for three pages before:

- so how long do you intend staying?
- as long as you'll have me
- how long do you think that will be?
- I've no idea
- you haven't given this very much thought have you?
- none at all

- *Long Pause*

- where have you been for the past nine years?

Half and Half, Act One

There must have been a thought process for the character of Ned, who breaks the pause (Keene frequently does not signify who is speaking in his scripts), which will embrace his emotion on seeing his brother after such a long time. The actor playing Ned must decide whether he is moved to speak by resentment, anger, disappointment, just plain curiosity, or a blend of all four. One actor might choose any combination, while another actor can choose another path — the fact is that they both say the same line after the pause, and the length of the pause will depend on how much it has been intensified by the relationship that the two actors have built in the previous three pages.

It is the director who judges whether the pause is fulfilling what he believes to be the writer's purpose. If the director believes, as Shakespeare's Hamlet would have him believe, that 'the play's the thing' and he or she maintains a reverence for the text, the job is made easier by intense study of what those *pauses* are for. The work is only made harder, however, when a playwright, such as Pinter who was famous for his *pauses*, tells a director 'If it doesn't work, cut it out'.⁸⁵ It can only be presumed that he meant 'If it doesn't work *in the context of your production*'. Unfortunately, modern theatre companies are not given the luxury of The Moscow Arts Theatre with the six months rehearsal given to Chekhov's *The Seagull*. But Pinter must also have been aware that lesser directors could take this as *carte blanche* to eliminate his many *pauses* and reduce both the duration and the meaning behind and beneath his words.

It is as well that directors and actors have become accustomed to fathom the meaning behind the written and unwritten texts. That depth of study can now be applied to older texts, so that the 'hysterical' stage directions can be adapted to modern methods. Even the most naïve of amateur actors will now look at Tennessee Williams' '[Maggie] catches

*sight of him in the mirror, gasps slightly, wheels about to face him. Count ten.*⁸⁶, or ‘*Silence for five beats*’⁸⁷, knowing that it does not literally mean the actor must count the time indicated. The stage directions would now be written as *Long Pause* and *pause* respectively.

Pauses, then, are often used in the theatre to indicate to an audience that thought processes are in motion. This gives the audience the time necessary to ‘hear, digest, interpret (and) understand’, as George Burns put it.⁸⁸ *Pauses* assist audiences to see the inner workings of characters’ minds and modern playwrights benefit from the work which actors and audiences are now asked to do.

Some people in their everyday lives often employ a deliberate pause, usually brief, where the action is suspended completely, for emphasis or dramatic effect. Others, however, have a horror of pauses and silences, which leads them to try and fill them with words or actions that will keep the communication going at all costs, even if it means changing the subject. In the theatre, when the pause is filled with gestures, movements or facial expressions (paralanguage), the insights offered by the playwright can be limited at best and perverted at worst, as was seen with the actress playing Meg in Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* filing her nails (see Introduction).

Diligent actors know that, just because a person stops talking, it does not mean he or she has stopped thinking. It is the actor’s job to trace a line of thought between one utterance and the next. This does not necessarily mean that the pause must be filled in any visible way. If the author and actor have intensified the pause with previous context, the audience will fill the pause for them. All a well-primed audience needs is to know *that* a character is thinking, not *what* that character is thinking. Each member of an audience will also begin tracing the thread between one utterance and the next. It does not even need to be the same thread as

the actor's since the same consequence can be reached by different routes.

What does matter, however, is the length of time given to an audience to process the information. If the utterance or action after the pause is delivered relatively early, an audience will call themselves to attention and *follow* the action. If it is *too* brief, it can reduce the depth of insight into a character's inner workings, sometimes reducing the power of the unspoken in the play or leading to confusion. Comic actors often deliver a line quicker than the audience's process, for the value of the surprise at the character's process, which the audience may not have considered. If the same utterance or action is delivered after too lengthy a pause, however, the audience's mind is left free to wander outside the parameters of the content, and the context becomes the play in the theatre rather than the play in the mind. It lapses into a *longueur*, spoiling the illusion that so much effort has created and, sometimes, even leaving the audience to question whether an actor has forgotten his lines.

Often what is missing in these situations is an understanding of what else happens during the theatrical *pause*. In successful productions, the audience is frequently led to forget that they are watching a person portraying a character – they are asked to 'suspend their disbelief' and watch the character not the actor. But the actors who do this successfully are also thinking and feeling human beings who do not negate their own senses while simulating the senses of others. While the character is listening to the words of other characters (and reacting as if it is the first time he or she has heard them), the actor is also listening to his fellow actors and, perhaps more importantly, to the audience. It is in the *pauses*, even the briefest ones between words, that the actor listens to the audience to determine whether he has succeeded in captivating them. This is easily judged in a comedy by the frequency and volume of the

laughter that follows on a comic line or piece of action. It is more difficult in a drama or tragedy where the response hoped for is more frequently complete silence. It is in this 'inner listening' to his audience that an actor can judge how successfully he has intensified or 'charged' his pause – which is why and how the duration of a pause can change from performance to performance.

The most difficult aspect of the theatrical pause for actors is the art of timing. Actors and comedians often say that timing is innate, that one 'either has it or one has not'. Those actors, whose timing is admired, will say that it is intuitive and cannot be taught. There are some simple guidelines available to all actors, such as 'Never deliver the next line until after the audience's laughter has peaked', or 'Never talk through laughter, or dialogue can be lost', but there are enormous obstacles to the passing of a talent for timing from one individual to another, mostly to do with explaining how the actor knows *when* to deliver his line or perform an action rather than with the rhythm of that speech or action.

In fact, the *when* is not taught but it is learnt. It is learnt through experience of trial and error, through the observation of one's own mind and through the observation of the workings of the minds of others. The so-called 'talent' is more likely a propensity for the type of thinking that is interested in how people react in certain circumstances. While in psychiatry this knowledge is used to *understand* why individuals act the way they do, in the theatre it is used to *show* the individual to a much larger group of people (one facet of the 'mirror held up to society'). This involves the playwright, director or actor in understanding not only the individual but the congregation that watches the individual.

Much of the knowledge required of the successful student of the theatre is considered arcane and is not transmitted by words but by observation of the power of words and the power of the absence of words — by

evaluating the mental processes that either produces. Eventually the student begins to learn that some of these mental processes are common to many and can use this knowledge to begin to predict what an audience will think or feel. There is a point at which it is understood that many minds together can be treated as a single mind. The word ‘audience’ comes from the Latin verb *audire* – *to hear*, and an audience can be composed of just one hearer or many. Experience leads the student to stop distinguishing between the two – an audience is always singular, no matter how many people comprise it. If the actor in his ‘inner listening’ recognises that his audience is not one (by hearing coughing or chatter or heckling), he eventually also learns ways to make them one.

The famous and very experienced English actress, Dame Maggie Smith, when appearing in Alan Bennett’s *The Lady in the Van* in London⁸⁹, was faced with an unresponsive audience on the night I saw it. Since her character lived in the van of the title and therefore took her home with her wherever she went, the designer had dressed the character in several layers of clothing and a peaked khaki balaclava, giving Dame Maggie the appearance of an old tortoise. After several minutes with very little response to the comedy onstage, she made her exit suitably slowly but just before disappearing into the wings, she turned to face the audience and, as tortoises do, she poked her tongue out. Whether she was directed to do it or not, it was a way of telling the audience that they were watching a comedy (and could also be said to have expressed her feelings for the ‘cold’ audience). It ‘brought the house down’ and earned her loud applause. Her action was still ‘within character’ and enlivened the audience instantly—an excellent example of this actor’s ability to use a *pause* to the advantage of the whole show. I would not be surprised, had it not been part of the show before, if the Dame ‘kept it in’ as a piece of legitimate ‘business’ to stimulate later audience reactions.

'Charging' the Pause

The timing of a pause can depend on so many factors: the purpose of the speaker; the context of the conversation; the content of the conversation; the mental acuity of the listener; the physical ability or disability of the participants: and the physical environment, just to name a few. The more circumstances that have to be considered, even by the fastest mind, the longer the pause will be. When these circumstances are increased in complexity, especially during the pause itself, it becomes 'charged' with tension and the delay before resumption can consequently be extended even further.

It is this delay and 'charging' that is exploited by comedians and comic writers in such an entertaining way in their routines. One of the most famous such pauses was 'charged' over a matter of years by the American comedian, Jack Benny. Benny had built his public persona around being stingy and reluctant to part with his money. When, in his radio show, he was accosted by a mugger saying '...This is a stick-up! Your money or your life', the audience had been primed for the ensuing pause over the number of years that Benny had been performing. The eventual reply, after what was reputedly the longest silent pause on live radio and after the mugger had repeated his demand, was 'I'm thinking it over!'⁹⁰ – which was almost rendered unnecessary by the laughter indicating that the studio audience had already understood the joke.

Another comedian of the same era and nationality and Jack Benny's great friend, George Burns, was also famous for his pauses during which he puffed on his cigar. He explained 'In that time (while I puff on the cigar) the audience hears, digests, interprets, understands, and finally reacts to the joke'.⁹¹ Both men built their careers on the timing of their pauses and on the expectations that the audiences came to have of them.

It is well-known in show business that, just as a singer has a signature tune, a comedian does better if he can be recognised by a ‘hook’ or catchphrase. With Jack Benny, it was his stinginess. With George Burns, it was his cigar and his pauses. In Great Britain, there are numerous examples of these ‘hooks’: the comedienne, Hilda Baker, always found space to ask her silent and vacant-looking supporting character a question, then pause and say to the audience ‘She knows, you know’. Dawn Lake and Barry Humphries used the same method in Australia.

This catchphrase technique has also carried across to television comedy: in Australia recently it was Kath saying to Kim in *Kath and Kim*⁹² ‘Look at me. Kimmy, look at me’. In Great Britain, there is a long tradition of supplying characters with these hooks, culminating most recently with ‘Computer says no,’ among many others, in *Little Britain*⁹³. Once established, the pauses before these ‘hooks’ gets slightly longer and the audience’s anticipation charges the punch-lines even more. Australian stand-up comic, Tim Minchin explains ‘There is nothing more empowering than holding an audience before a joke breaks. This is why comedians do what they do’.⁹⁴

Many years ago, I had the pleasure of working with Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett during their 1978 stage tour of Australia. Here were two comedians of a similar status in England and Australia to Benny and Burns in America, who also used timing and pauses expertly. By witnessing their performances eight times a week for seventeen weeks, however, it became apparent that there were very basic differences in the way they worked.

Ronnie Corbett, an excellent raconteur, would tell the same story each night from the comfort of an armchair on stage. His relaxed appearance, though, was in complete contrast to the disciplined delivery of the same lines, the same apparent ‘ad-libs’, and the same pauses that he had

delivered the night before and almost every night for the previous year in England. As one actor in the show remarked, Corbett's performance was so regular that 'you could time an egg by it'.⁹⁵ Barker was the opposite, completely unpredictable in his timing. He appeared to work more from the temper of his audience, and adjusted his timing to fit.

During the season, I became aware of the methods being employed by these two masters of comic timing. From his experience as a stand-up comedian, Corbett *expected his audience* to laugh in certain places for a certain amount of time and he was rarely disappointed. After all, like Benny and Burns before him, through his television exposure he had built up a public persona that was easily side-tracked or who frequently interrupted himself to correct possibly misleading facts. He knew the formula for his success and probably could see no valid reason for changing it or varying it. Barker, on the other hand, also relying on experience but that of the comic actor, worked from the point of view of *what the audience expected of him*. They knew that what he was going to say would be funny but they weren't sure in what way. When Barker paused, it was like watching a cormorant diving for fish: it was easy to see where the bird had disappeared beneath the water but it was impossible to predict where it would surface again. The following night, although one might know *where* it would appear, there was no way of predicting *when*. Barker had let the audience know *that* he was thinking but had developed the art of hiding *what* he was thinking. Barker, who also wrote most of the scripts, had the intuitive feel for his audience that enabled him to 'work' them until he had got them on the same wavelength. Both men understood their audiences and both men caused constant laughter, but their use of the pause was very different.

One of the best ways to practise the art of the *pause* is through the arts of joke-telling and story-telling. If one looks carefully at the structure of

most jokes, they follow the same format as a play or story. They have an exposition, complication and a climax, most usually in the form of a 'punch-line'. The exposition and the complication 'charge' the pay-off and the successful joke-teller will pay as much attention to the build-up as is paid to the delivery of the tag line. Confidence grows with the positive responses received, usually in the form of laughter, and the joke-teller can learn to delay the punch line by embellishing the context with idiosyncratic flourishes. Since the majority of jokes depend on a surprise ending, experience also teaches the best duration for the pause before its delivery. The following is an excellent example:

Two duchesses are sitting, talking. (*exposition*)

"I say," says the first, "whatever happened to Sybil?"

"Sybil?" replies the other. "Didn't you know? She married a Ghurkha." (*complication*)

"A Ghurkha? But aren't they black?"

"Oh no, dear. Only the privates."

PAUSE

"How exotic!"

Characterisation is contained in the simple word 'duchesses' and the accent and tone in which the conversation is delivered. While the setting could be expanded, the economy allows the charge to be instant by getting straight into the conversation. The subject of the conversation turns very quickly towards the taboo with the mention of the word 'black' and then encapsulates an out-dated racism and class prejudice in the three words 'Only the privates'. The *pause* that follows should be just long enough for the listener to begin searching their own minds for a possible

answer before the surprise of the ‘naughty’ misinterpretation of the second duchess.

An actor, raconteur or writer does well to learn and develop the art of joke-telling. As well as teaching economy, opportunity, characterisation and structure, it is a foolproof way of learning context, aptness of language to character and the extent to which an audience will accept transgressions of boundaries. They also provide an excellent way of learning the value of a pause.

It was also interesting during *The Two Ronnies*⁹⁶ to conjecture the childhood and adolescence of these two men: the one remarkably smaller than average and probably teased and bullied in his school years and the other quite possibly the fat boy of the class and equally the subject of teasing and derision. Like so many intelligent children in a similar situation, they quite possibly earned acceptance by becoming the jester for the group, a role that required a lot of quick thinking to turn possibly threatening situations into the subject for humour. As well as having to understand how to diffuse the tension, they were also required to learn the meaning of pauses and the most advantageous timing for employing them.

Anyone who has been the victim of bullying knows the dreadful pause that follows ‘What are *you* looking at?’ And almost every child has been the object of the teacher’s or parent’s pause, after what is usually a rhetorical question — a pause calculated to drag the victim further into the mire as he or she endeavours to explain and fill the ominous silence with excuses. It is quite possible that the man who became famous for his pauses learnt the art as a young Jewish boy in the East End of London. Certainly the tenor and rhythms of Pinter’s plays, *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*, would suggest intimate familiarity with bullying, its methods and effects.

The Director's Pause

The director's role in the theatre is complex. He oversees the realisation of the author's script, possibly developing certain aspects that he wishes to highlight in his interpretation, and controls how the script is delivered. Most importantly, he looks at the production from the point of view of the audience. It is his task to see what is happening on the stage *as an audience will see it*. He directs where he wants the audience's attention to focus and has to ensure that there are no distractions from that centre of attention. He is in charge of the tempo of the production, its rhythms and tensions, its emphases and stresses, its moments of high excitement and its lulls. He has the difficult challenge of eliciting the best and most suitable performance from his actors and of balancing his ensemble so that the actors do not tip the production into a genre where it does not belong.

Since even subsidised theatres no longer contract many actors to work as a company, the modern director frequently has to work with people of varied experience, from the seasoned professional to the talented amateur, all individuals with individual sensibilities which the director must take into account. One actor will respond well to coaxing and gentle guidance while another in the same company might respond better to the martinet approach. It is up to the director to find which manner best suits the members of his cast and, at the same, time ensure that they can work well together as a company. Not many experienced actors, however, want their director to tell them how to deliver a line by giving them an example and asking them to follow it exactly.

The careful modern director is more likely to point out the feeling or thought that motivates the speech or suggest a circumstance that will add to what the actor is already doing. With *pauses*, however, there must be

an understanding that the director, in taking the absent audience's part, will be able to judge whether the actor's timing is distracting from the play's current centre of attention, or is obstructing the action of the play. 'The interpretation of the role is yours,' the renowned director Raymond Omodei said at a recent audition for Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, 'The pauses and the pace are mine'.⁹⁷ In claiming this ground, Omodei gives himself room to insert pauses and to charge the textual pauses as Stanislavsky did in the first production of *The Three Sisters* at the Moscow Arts Theatre:

Stanislavsky intensified the pause before the mass entry [in Act One] by having two servants, Efimiushka and Polia (merely mentioned by Varia in Chekhov's text), creeping across the stage then hiding and watching.⁹⁸

Some directors use the word 'beat' to indicate where the action or motivation in a scene changes, which can occur even in the middle of a line of dialogue. The division is arbitrary, often associated with the director's and actors' understanding of the section's objective. If the objective changes, a new 'beat' begins. When the playwright uses the same word to indicate a brief pause, obviously some confusion can occur. Actors are usually flexible enough to understand both meanings, even in the same script, but the dual purpose of the word is an unnecessary ambiguity. Either playwrights need to agree to surrender the word to directors or directors need another term to distinguish their divisions from the momentary pause.

While a director will usually have a very good idea of what he wants to achieve with his production, it is as well not to be too rigid in its application. Circumstances change: an actor might not be capable of

performing what is demanded of him; the final set cannot be constructed in the way it was envisaged; or costumes do not fit or are unmanageable in action. There are as many changeable elements between the script and the performance as there are seconds in the latter's duration. As Michael Chekhov notes 'A richness and flexibility of mind is indispensable to the artist as well as the artistic appreciator'.⁹⁹

What was the perfect length for a pause in one rehearsal, might have to be eliminated altogether if a change in a gesture or the tone has introduced new nuances that were not apparent earlier. At the same time, the director must ensure that experiments in timing do not interfere with the usual running of the show. In *Making Plays*, Richard Nelson talks of an evening performance of a play in front of an audience that ran fifteen minutes longer than the afternoon run-through as a result of actors' 'explorations' – which David Jones calls the 'pause disease'¹⁰⁰. Unfortunately, the only remedy is usually immediate, drastic (but judicious) surgery.

Michael Chekhov also encapsulates the knowledge of the *pause* that a director must convey to his cast through his experience and intuition:

A preceding pause prepares the audience to receive the forthcoming action, forecasts its content and sometimes even preconditions the effect which that action will have on the audience.

A following pause serves to summarize and deepen the impression which the audience received from the action just completed.

Michael Chekhov, *To the Director and Playwright*¹⁰¹

In both examples, Chekhov's concentration is on the effect the *pause* can have on an audience, of which the actor might not be aware in rehearsal. The director must be aware at all times that the chain from the first word or action of the production is consistently linked to the last word or action. He must see the thread that traces through everything that takes place both on and off the stage. If there are time lapses in the action during which a character has changed or developed, or an event has taken place offstage which affects the characters or plot, he has to be able to see or hear the effect of that development on stage. There is no moment in a play's production when the director can allow a lapse in concentration on that 'through thread', if he is to maintain the play's integrity. As Chekhov stresses: '... it is important to establish that a completely vacuous pause, a blank gap, an empty space in time, simply cannot and does not exist on stage'.¹⁰²

Though it may not be manifested by paralanguage, the 'unfilled' pause of the linguist does not exist in the theatre. Even the pauses set aside to 'give the audience a rest', as in the production of *Happy Days* mentioned in the Introduction, will be filled with thought and it is the task of the director to know what possible directions those thoughts could take. By recommencing the dialogue or the action after a given time, the director brings the audience back 'on track' so that the audience, as one, is following the same train of thought.

The theatre, moreover, does not only deal in thoughts — it can also manipulate an audience's emotions. Dialogue and action can arouse pity, sympathy, anger, even hatred for the characters portrayed. Actors have been verbally abused, spat upon, and even attacked physically by members of an audience when they have become too emotionally involved in the play they are watching. They have also been cheered and spurred on when the action is in accord with the audience's sympathies.

Yet the same dialogue, delivered at a different pace and with a different energy and with different pauses, can just as easily arouse derisive laughter or critical scorn. It is the director's vision that must foresee what emotions his production will engender.

It is also the director's task to ensure that the emotions aroused by the 'mood' of the play are in keeping with his or her intention in staging the play. Donald Rayfield asserted that, after the innovations of Anton Chekhov's plays, 'Drama has become so rich in mood and implied messages that an all-powerful director is needed to subordinate the actors to a single interpretation'¹⁰³, which will be, it is hoped, in keeping with the playwright's intention.

The Playwright's Pause

There is a multiplicity of reasons for people pausing in intercommunication and another multiplicity in the places in which to put those pauses. Together, they create an almost infinite complexity for linguists. Fortunately, there are relatively few ways for a playwright to insert a pause in a script, compared with the number of reasons for having them there.

Punctuation can mark the smaller pauses, from the comma, semicolon, colon, dashes and ellipses, to the full stop. The difference in these cases is usually that the playwright does not wish to distinguish these pauses from those used in everyday speech. A dash (—), as well as indicating a brief break, can also mean that the speaker is being interrupted:

ROGER: You and I — and Uncle Percy, of course — will
 dine in town.

DAPHNE: Roger!

ROGER: And then, after dinner we can —

DAPHNE: It's no use, Roger! I'm leaving you. Tonight.

An ellipsis usually means that the speech is unfinished, that the sentence trails off into the ether:

ROGER: You mean ... You mean...

The guide for the actor's inflexion is in the punctuation. The ellipsis can be followed by a question mark or an exclamation mark which will affect the delivery of the line:

ROGER: You mean...?

Or

ROGER: You mean...!

In a past era, either of these would have been a legitimate way for a playwright to expose his characters' backgrounds and motivations for their actions.

ROGER: You mean...? You mean...?

DAPHNE: Yes, Roger. It's over. I cannot pretend any longer. I have tried to be a good wife. I have provided you with an heir. Now, that Daddy's will has been read and I am independently wealthy, I'm off!

ROGER: But ... our vows? 'Till death do us part'!

Most experienced modern playwrights, learning from Chekhov and others, would hope to have made these clear in the subtext of his script:

POLINA: ... Dear, good Kostya, be a little kinder to my Mashenka!

MASHA: *(making the bed)* Leave him alone, Mama.

POLINA: *(to TREPLEV)* She's a good girl ... *(Pause)* A woman doesn't ask for much, Kostya, so long as you give her a kind look. I know from myself.

(TREPLEV gets up from the desk and goes out without speaking.)

*The Seagull, Anton Chekhov*¹⁰⁴

Chekhov is able to tell us in that *Pause* that Masha is attracted to Treplev; that Treplev is not interested in Masha; and, after it, that Polina has had an unhappy love-life or marriage herself.

A *pause* can also be indicated by leaving a space between lines, so that the actor knows the sentences do not run together, are not free-flowing:

DAPHNE: I can't love you, Roger.
 I love another.

This is very different from:

DAPHNE: I can't love you, Roger. I love another.

In the first of these examples, the playwright is using paragraphing to separate the thoughts. In the second speech, the thoughts flow quickly one on the other.

Playwrights often use the word *beat* to indicate a momentary pause.

ROGER: And is that other (*beat*) Thomas Howell-Catt?

The playwright can write the word *pause* either in the text:

ROGER: But I need you, Daphne. (*pause*) I need you to look
 after the horses.

Or in-between speeches:

ROGER: But I need you, Daphne.

PAUSE

I need you to look after the horses.

This second method usually indicates a longer pause than the first but examination of the text is necessary to ascertain the individual author's style and the genre of the piece in which it appears. In this case, it sounds like melodrama to the modern ear and would be taken as intentional comedy. This scene between Roger and Daphne could easily develop into a parody of Noel Coward's style of brittle comedy of manners, popular in the 1930s, which itself has echoes of Oscar Wilde's flippancy from a previous era:

ELYOT: ... we met in a house party in Norfolk.

AMANDA: Very flat, Norfolk.

ELYOT: There's no need to be unpleasant.

AMANDA: That was no reflection on her, unless of course she made it flatter.

Private Lives, Noël Coward¹⁰⁵

The subtext in this case is contained in the context that the two speakers have been married to each other before and are on their honeymoons with their respective new spouses. The scene shows the beginnings of a style that demonstrates how people can avoid saying what is really going on in their minds. In the hands of some actors, however, such language can develop a different subtext by inserting *pauses* into the otherwise straightforward script. Coward does not assert in his script how the lines are to be spoken, but was clever enough to realize that unless spoken glibly, without any *pauses*, it could well develop quite a nasty undertone. With *pauses* added, it can be seen to herald later developments in the British theatre, such as those developed by Harold Pinter, where the

pauses often convey more of what is not being said than a superficial reading of the text would indicate:

ELYOT: I met her on a houseboat in Norfolk.

PAUSE

AMANDA: Very flat, Norfolk.

ELYOT: There's no need to be unpleasant.

AMANDA: That was no reflection on her, (PAUSE) unless of course she made it flatter.

(Private Lives, Noel Coward)

Amanda, through that inserted *pause*, instead of merely searching for something to say, is now creating jibes at Elyot's new wife.

Public speaking denotes four types of pauses that are advantageous in making speeches: the articulation pause, to ensure that an audience is able to understand what is being said; the anticipatory pause, to build suspense and have an audience eager to hear the next words; the reflective pause, to allow the audience time to digest what has been said and, perhaps, ruminate on its implications; and the emphatic pause, that separates an idea to give it added weight.

While the playwright uses all of these at one time or another in creating a drama or comedy, naturalism and realism in the theatre have demanded that the dramatist also use pauses that can be identified by an audience as those moments of suspended action that are seen in the world around them. I have identified eighteen that can be included in the playwright's arsenal. This list is not exhaustive and I welcome the addition of any others that I may have missed. The four public speaking pauses are incorporated here, possibly under different headings.

1. REACTION: this pause allows time for both the characters in the play and the audience to react to what has gone before, be it with delight or despair, or to absorb, digest or interpret the words or action.
2. ANTICIPATION: to lead an audience to expect words or actions that will either confirm their assumptions or surprise them with something unexpected.
3. EFFECT: the separation of a word, sentence, passage or action to highlight its importance to characterisation, theme or plot.
4. HESITATION: often motivated by a fear of the consequences when approaching a difficult subject — which could be dangerous, risky, risqué or simply delicate.
5. FLOOR-SHARING: this is a deliberate cessation of one side of a conversation to allow the other side's point of view. It is so frequent in everyday communication that it is hardly noticed.
6. I'M THINKING: often used to show that a character is choosing their words carefully. Glenda Jackson often inserted this pause between the definite article and a noun. It too easily becomes a mannerism, however, that is associated with the actor rather than the character.
7. SOCIAL CUSTOM/GOOD MANNERS: Since this differs both for different cultures and within the social strata of the one culture, it is difficult to define. An example in Australian society could be after a person picks up the phone and says 'Hello' and the caller pauses momentarily to identify himself or herself before either asking for the person wanted or launching into the purpose of the call.
8. PATIENCE: usually exhibited when addressing children, the aged or the infirm. An exaggeration of this is useful for portraying a patronising character.

9. EMOTION: the emotive pause is often used to isolate and magnify the emotion the character is feeling, be it anger, love, sadness, pity etc. It is also useful to convey that the character is endeavouring to control the emotion.
10. REVERENCE: this is the silence accorded to places of worship. Often it is used in plays where speech could 'soil' the beauty of a moment (such as the death scene of *Romeo and Juliet*). It can either be real or feigned, the latter giving the audience further insight into the character that the other characters may or may not share.
11. AWE: similar to reverence but a silence induced by incredible beauty, majesty or horror.
12. DELAY: this pause is used overtly or covertly to slow the process of the action.
13. CONVENIENCE: a character may pause in order to 'gather their wits' before launching into the next phase of the action.
14. TRANSFIXION: these are those awkward moments (for some) when the mind is 'elsewhere'. Poor acting usually has the character shake the head to signal being back in the present. Really poor acting adds the line 'Where was I? Oh, yes...'
15. THE LIAR'S PAUSE: this is used to gain time to manufacture a plausible substitute for the truth. School children and poor actors put on a 'glazed' look or feign wide-eyed innocence suddenly when called upon to speak.
16. THE BULLY'S PAUSE: usually follows a rhetorical question like 'What are you looking at?' or 'Are you talking to me?' and is often accompanied by an aggressive stance and a threatening tone. A subtler version, THE HEADMASTER'S PAUSE, is used by figures of authority to make their subjects squirm and is accompanied by a sadistic smirk. Both are better left unanswered.

17. THE WAITING PAUSE: this is simply the silence while an action is completed.

18. SHOCK: this is true speechlessness induced by sudden revelations. Often portrayed in the modern theatre by an open mouth and wide eyes, it is a very common expression at the end of plays in the genre of Theatre of Confession. In earlier times it was accompanied by fainting or a 'fit of the vapours' that could only be cured by smelling salts or a whiff of burnt feather. A good actor will find refuge in the still centre of his character's being and react from there. It is also used by playwrights to allow an audience to absorb the shock of a revelation before continuing the action.

The playwright must consider beforehand both the purpose of the pause and its intended effect on the audience. Some pauses are put in place as a way of expanding time so that allusions and nuances have room to add to the meanings. Many authors forget that the suspension of disbelief also allows for a distortion of time — time can become elastic in the theatre and a minute of stage time can be filled with one slow action or twenty quick ones. If the audience is allowed to see both paces of action at once, as is done in many farces, it will accept it as plausible within its context.

If, however, the vast majority of the play has set up one time reality, it is a very clever author who can insert another successfully. Towards the end of Joanna Murray-Smith's play, *The Female of the Species*, having set up a stage time that is a close approximation to 'real' time, she has two characters leave the stage to find food, only to emerge ten short lines later carrying a tray with dips that they conveniently 'found in the fridge'.¹⁰⁶ Given the time pattern already set up by the rest of the play, it is hardly time for the two to find the fridge and open the door, let alone find the dips therein and the tray and biscuits that must accompany them.

The insertion of a few pauses in the ten lines onstage would have allowed the audience to maintain the suspension of their disbelief.

The pause is also used to follow a non-sequitur, so that the audience can try, usually in vain, to connect the dots. James Saunders, in his play *Next Time I'll Sing to You*, even manages to make fun of the playwright's pause with what appears like a non-sequitur:

MEFF: Dust, mate ...

DUST: What?

MEFF: How long could you make a pause?

DUST: A what?

MEFF: A pause, a silence. Nothing happening.

DUST: It depends on the upholstery.

MEFF: How?

DUST: The blood has to circulate doesn't it?

Pause

MEFF: Yes, but how long—?

Next Time I'll Sing to You, James Saunders¹⁰⁷

Dust goes on to explain that the pauses are there to allow the audience to 'shift their bottoms periodically' so that they remain unaware that what they are watching is an illusion for which they suspended their disbelief. He takes it even further a few pages later, after Dust has 'warmed up':

DUST: If there's a pause now I'm done for.¹⁰⁸

(ibid.)

While humorous in context and intent, there is a truth to the observation. A misplaced *pause* or *silence* can undo the tension or deflate

the action to such an extent that the mood of the play can be spoiled. The wise playwright has to be certain that the *pause* is justified and that that justification is apparent from reading the script or seeing the performance. Properly used, a pause can be the opportunity for the audience to make a contribution to the performance but it can come undone with modern audiences if it is felt that the contribution is demanded by the playwright rather than invited.

The biggest pause available for the playwright is the interval, usually fifteen or twenty minutes long between acts. It is an opportunity for the audience to rest awhile if the play is intense, if there is a lot of information to be absorbed before the plot progresses, and, if the playwright is lucky, to share their enthusiasm for the piece. There is a growing tendency for writers and directors to dispense with the interval altogether. While at times this is understandable to maintain the tension they have created, at other times it can look more as if the playwright is worried that, if he inserts an interval, there is the possibility that the audience will not return after it. The first hour or more of Andrew Bovell's play, *When The Rain Stops Falling*, has so many shifts in time between 1959 and 2039, and such an array of inter-related characters of different generations that the majority of the audience is likely to become so confused that I suspect that many of them would have given up and gone home had there been an interval.¹⁰⁹ Conversation with Bovell at a later date confirmed that this was the reason for eliminating the interval in this play¹¹⁰. The handing out of a family tree with the programme in a later touring production only went part of the way to solving the problem.

More recent pressure on the playwright has come from the increasing pace of technological advances and the intensity of experience now expected by the modern audience. Many playwrights feel that it is necessary to accommodate these changes by either the increased

employment of that technology, such as loud quadraphonic sound, swiftly-moving set changes and the use of laser lighting; or by switching between genres so quickly that the theatre has once more become the venue for spectacle rather than for subtlety of meaning. *Bank Accounts*, the series of monologues submitted as part of this doctoral study, is an attempt to restore some of the gentler, more muted colours to the palette of the theatre. History has shown that the pendulum swings from one extreme to another.

Leslie Kane noted in 1984 that :

Within the last eighty years several dramatists, merging form and content, have increasingly employed silence in the dramatic spectacle. The seeds for this altered vision of the drama are to be found in the shifting ground of the late nineteenth century — the nihilism, uncertainty, alienation, and despair which emanated from the world of scientific, political and social upheaval.¹¹¹

Perhaps it was the long pauses in normal proceedings as the world endured the horrors of the two World Wars, or the silences that accompanied the treatment of the Jews and others in the concentration camps, ‘these unspeakable events [which] quite literally exceed the boundaries of language’,¹¹² which contributed to the changes that had been happening in European theatre since the First World War and went on to produce the wordless despair of the Absurdists. England, with its tradition of a ‘stiff upper lip’, continued to ignore the devastation of the depression and two World Wars and it was to be twenty-six years after Coward’s *Private Lives* before any negativity was recognised. It exploded onto the British and the world’s stages in the form of Jimmy Porter’s rage in John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*. Even then, it was more an

atavistic cry against the constraints of an archaic Establishment than a demonstration of despair or a movement towards an expression of outrage at the meaninglessness of Life.

A year later, in 1957, Harold Pinter took Osborne's example of gritty realism and the absurdist attitude to 'moral order' one step further, especially with his second play, *The Birthday Party*. He began to 'hold the mirror up' to the seamier side of British life, especially by his use of what was not being said and his deft use of the *pause* in his plays.

Harold Pinter and the Pause.

Shaw made theatre of debate, Brecht of politics. Osborne shouted in the ear of a soporific society, while Beckett disturbed it with stillness and despair. Pinter conjured plays of silence, cruelty and nervous breakdown
...¹¹³

(*Changing Stages*, Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright)

In Pinter's first play, *The Room*, the first speech¹¹⁴ is a virtual monologue of five pages spoken by Rose, the main character. It is interspersed with prescribed actions and eleven *pauses*. The lack of a reply from Bert, her husband, causes the audience to ask itself why he does not respond to his wife's chatter. Through his ability to predict this simple, automatic reaction, Pinter has 'seduced' his audience into his reality. We are already concerned for his characters and want to learn more about them. Should we sympathise with the man whose ear is being bashed? Or with the woman who cannot get a response from her husband? We no longer question the set or the costumes, we are swept into these characters' lives and are eager to know them more and see them in relationships and in events. This first scene also immediately demonstrates the technique for which Pinter became famous — his *Pauses* and *Silences*.

There are two silences,' Pinter said. 'One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. ... The speech is an indication of that which we don't hear.'¹¹⁵

Harold Pinter

Bert is an example of the first silence. He does not speak perhaps because he thinks whatever he says will be of little consequence to Rose.

He does not speak because he has been sick and 'laid up'. He does not speak because he is worried about what his trip will be like. He does not speak because Pinter wanted to shock us with what he says when he does speak on his return. It makes perfect theatrical sense that Bert is not the character we thought we knew. Pinter suddenly presents us with an option for his character that had not occurred to us earlier, due to the warmth of the room, Rose's tender administrations and loquacity, and Bert's apparently passive silence. Bert's eventual speech and actions, coming from the depths of the unknown, move the play into a higher gear towards its shocking climax. It is this silence, quite possibly learnt in the alleys of Hackney — both as victim (Pinter's Jewish working class background) and as perpetrator (Pinter's position in his gang), that anyone who has witnessed bullying knows is the more frightening than any speech. Pinter understood the lingering dread that the bully's pause engenders and brought it to the stage.

Rose's speech, on the other hand, is an example of the second silence: not only a way of presenting the temporal and circumstantial exposition in her babbling brook of words, but also, in its pauses, presenting an immediate way of letting an audience know that a subtext already exists and is influencing the action. Why is Rose so concerned with the dingy basement, continually comparing it with the comfort of the room that she and Bert occupy? Why does she not know who lives in the same house? It is not a normal rental accommodation or boarding house, is it? Rose's pauses always precede her mention of the tenant of the basement, showing that the presence of a stranger preoccupies her, immediately displaying one form of the themes that were to invest so many of Pinter's early works: the fear of the unknown and the importance of territory, including psychological territory, to his characters.

The first *pause* after the entrance of Mr Kidd, the landlord, is followed by his assertion that the room of the title, which the Hudds now occupy, was once his bedroom. It immediately throws doubt on the permanence of the Hudds' territory – if Mr Kidd is the landlord, he could always ask for his room back. Within moments of Mr and Mrs Sands, who are looking for somewhere to rent, entering the room, Mrs Sands after a *pause*, says: 'You know, this is a room you can sit down and feel cosy in'.¹¹⁶ They later reveal, before a *pause*, that they were directed to number seven, the Hudds' room, as the vacant room in the house. Each pause has come before or immediately after a reference to Rose's territory and an escalation of the threat towards it. The *pauses* allow the undercurrent of fear and insecurity that pervades the play to resurface continually.

Though Pinter denied reading Ionesco or seeing Beckett's plays before writing *The Room*, he did acknowledge the influence of Beckett's novels, and the influence of Osborne, James Saunders and other contemporary British writers. The plot of *The Room* has echoes of their work as it evades even the tenuous logic that Pinter has set up earlier in the play. In the last five pages, Rose is called Sal by Riley, the blind black man who has come up from the basement. He says he is her father and wants her to 'come home'. When Bert returns from his road trip and talks for the first time in the play, he reveals himself to be a strange, violent man: 'There were no cars. One there was. He wouldn't move. I bumped him. I got my road. I had all my way'.¹¹⁷ We have had no forewarning of Bert's character or of the short shrift he gives Riley in striking him and kicking him, possibly to death, before walking away. There follows the only stage direction of a *silence* throughout the whole play:

Silence.

Rose stands clutching her eyes.

ROSE: Can't see. I can't see. I can't see.

Blackout

Curtain

Harold Pinter, *The Room*¹¹⁸

The *Silence* quoted above is not a *pause* because there is no action or speech *necessarily* consequent on Bert's actions. Rose's blindness happens. Whether it is symbolic of her earlier refusal to see, or is a transfer of Riley's condition is not explained. It just is. It leaves the audience with questions that will never be answered, a 'trick' that Pinter would continue to use throughout his career. It was a certain way of guaranteeing that his works could not be wrapped and tied with a neat bow and shelved as a mystery solved.

Pinter defended this abandonment of reason, of a traceable progression of logic, in his plays in his speech at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, 1962:

I suggest that there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things¹¹⁹.

Harold Pinter

It is hard to deny that the ending of *The Room* is theatrically clumsy. There are so many changes of tack and strange additions to what

appeared to be a relatively straightforward, if unusual, story. The arrival of the man from the basement, his being a ‘negro’ and blind, his calling Rose ‘Sal’ and wanting her to ‘come home’, Bert’s almost sexual description of his trip, his attack on the blind man and Rose’s blindness — all happen within the last few minutes of the play and are mysteries that Pinter refused to explain. Hollis points out, however, that this criticism ‘demand(s) rational behaviour in an irrational world’.¹²⁰

The irrational behaviour of the characters makes sense theatrically: once Pinter realized that he was the creator of the reality, he was free to do whatever he wished with it. ‘My responsibility is not to audiences, critics, producers, directors, actors or to my fellow men in general, but to the play in hand, simply’.¹²¹

I reached a similar conclusion in the writing of *Shadows*. Having set up a reality that audiences would recognise in the first act, the lounge room of a suburban house where the television dominates the characters’ interaction, (including eclipsing the return of the escaped slave from Plato’s Cave), the ‘play in hand’ demanded that I begin to stretch the audience’s suspended disbelief and move towards the improbable, if not the absurd, by having a speaking character who has been dead for several days. I followed Pinter’s lead in ignoring the dictates of current acceptability of logical development and used the spaces between speeches to create continual surprise while maintaining character integrity.

The almost ‘rational’ world of the first act of *Shadows* (rational in the sense that is recognisable to an audience) gives way to an irrational world in the second act. The on-screen character, Dulcie Walters, finds her way from the studio through a ‘wormhole’ into the theatre where the play is taking place. Gran, who is dead in the on-stage reality, is able to converse with the audience and is seen to have left the house to wait for a bus by

the end of the play. Unlike Pinter, however, my intention is more specific — I am asking the audience to question what they are currently accepting as reality, rather than simply presenting them with a different version of it. In this way, I hope I am fulfilling what James R. Hollis determined was the playwright's task: '... to find dramatically viable metaphors for the re-presentation and recovery of experience'.¹²²

Pinter's fusion of recognisable realism and dangerous mystery is more assured in his second play, *The Birthday Party*. It begins in much the same way as *The Room*: a garrulous woman, Meg, chatters inconsequentially to a taciturn husband as she serves food. The difference, however, is that Rose's monologue in *The Room* has become a tiresome series of questions that Petey, Meg's husband, is forced to answer. The *pauses* have become opportunities for Meg to ask more questions so that silence is avoided.

Silence is dangerous for Meg. Who knows what thoughts might run through her mind if she did not impose her present superficial thoughts on the world around her? In this instance, the audience is more likely to ask itself: 'Why does she ask such silly questions?' and 'How does Petey put up with it?', but, again, Pinter has seduced us into caring for his characters and accepting *his* reality. Initially, Meg is presented as an innocent to the sophisticated audience, and Petey as her loving and tolerant husband. In fact, the scene is a set-up for the exchange with Stanley when he eventually appears. The playful badinage quickly develops into a sexual approach from Meg:

MEG: ... Was it nice?

STANLEY: What?

MEG: The fried bread.

STANLEY: Succulent.

MEG: You shouldn't say that word.
STANLEY: What word?
MEG: That word you said.
STANLEY: What, succulent — ?
MEG: Don't say it!
STANLEY: What's the matter with it?
MEG: You shouldn't say that word to a married woman.

Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party*¹²³

If the older Meg is invading young Stanley's space and making coy overtures, the audience can understand and is sympathetic to Stanley's outburst a few moments later:

STANLEY: (*violently*). Look, why don't you get this place cleared up? It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room!

Ibid. p.13¹²⁴

More importantly, it primes the audience for the verbal violence that Goldberg and McCann will inflict on Stanley later in the play. It is interesting that the next *pause* does not appear until after Meg has mentioned 'the two gentlemen', which turns an innocent remark into something more ominous ... and Pinter has further alerted his audience to the fact that all is not what it seems.

What is most remarkable about *The Birthday Party* is, in fact, the dearth of *pauses* as the play develops. As the action gathers pace and menace, the language, though not necessarily logically sequential, hurtles the play towards its awful conclusion and there is little room for meaningful

silences. Instead we are presented with meaningless words atop meaningful actions — and sometimes even such meaningless (and repugnant) actions as Goldberg’s insistence that McCann ‘blow in his mouth’.¹²⁵ All are calculated by Pinter to make an audience feel uncomfortable.

The play has a much better structure than *The Room* and it is difficult to understand why only one critic, Harold Hobson, saw its value in its first production. In an interview for the fall issue of *The Paris Review*, 1966, Pinter said of that reception of *The Birthday Party* in London: ‘I was completely new to writing for the professional theatre and it was rather a shock when it happened. But I went on writing ...’¹²⁶

Pinter wrote *The Dumb Waiter* in the same year as the above two plays, a continuation of his themes of unknown threat and mysterious authority. Just as *The Birthday Party* developed on the pattern set up at the beginning of *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter* again begins with inconsequential conversation while one of the characters reads a paper, as in *The Birthday Party*. *A Slight Ache*, written a year later in 1958, begins in the same way. All these early plays also end in much the same way: Rose goes blind; a conforming Stanley is marched off; Gus turns out to be the intended victim; and Edward becomes the match-seller. Pinter had obviously found a structure that worked for him and allowed him to consolidate his technique with dialogue and his use of the *pause* and *silences*.

The playwright’s pause, as used by Pinter, is more of a hiatus while he waits for his inspiration for the next line. At every moment while writing (and re-writing) a script, the playwright has a choice in the direction he wants for his play. With Pinter, this choice is dominated by the characters he has chosen to portray in a given situation and the tone he wishes to

inject into his work, be it comedy or menace, keeping in mind what the audience will hear and see. As James Hollis expressed it:

The pauses force the audience as well as the characters to consider the possible responses available. The pauses, then, are not empty but are filled with expectations seeking to be engendered'.¹²⁷

Pinter's experience, gleaned from many of his formative years as a professional actor, also gave him his knowledge of timing, that innate sense of when the action either needed to change direction before the audience became too settled or of when the tone needed some relief before it became too much for an audience to bear.

In a speech he made in Hamburg, West Germany, on being awarded the 1970 German Shakespeare Prize, Pinter said:

I believe myself that when a writer looks at the blank of the word he has not yet written, or when actors and directors arrive at a given moment on a stage, there is only one proper thing that can take place at that moment, and that thing, that gesture, that word on the page, must alone be found, and once found, scrupulously protected. I think I am talking about necessary shape, both as regards a play and its production.¹²⁸

Many of Pinter's pauses are those moments in which he is searching for 'that word on the page'. It is no coincidence that Eyre and Wright thought that Pinter 'seemed to be making up the modern style as it went along'.¹²⁹ Other pauses exist, either where a character talks through these moments because he or she is afraid that, if they allowed room for the pause, the Truth might seep through and reveal an aspect of character that they

would prefer to keep hidden; or where a subject or theme is resumed after the failure of one of these diversions.

What Pinter was able to show in his theatre through his use of the pause, was that there was not just a conscious, a subconscious and an unconscious, there was also a deliberately suppressed conscious, a state where thoughts and feelings were born but not allowed expression. His plays employ an enhanced realism that does not depend on immediately understandable language, including paralanguage and silences, but on understandable situations viewed through the prism of his particular vision. Pinter's magic is not that he adds the excitement of menace to the absurd, or introduced uncertainty, but that he reveals levels of consciousness that had not previously been examined. His pauses were only a means to that end and he grew tired of the concentration given to them as if they were an end in themselves. "Use them if you want to," he said [to director David Jones]. "Neglect them if you want. I don't care any more about pauses. It's not the important thing in my work".¹³⁰

So many of Pinter's plays involve people in close proximity and the levels of consciousness that exist in the small gaps between utterances. Pinter was, however, hesitant in uncovering new ground, as a few words of advice in a letter from his friend and mentor, Samuel Beckett, about Pinter's play, *Exiles*, suggest :

I feel the clue to the production is apartness. As much stage as possible as often as possible between the actors... [The] Same principle to be applied vocally. Voices abnormally low and from a distance. All speaking and listening more to themselves than the others. Similarly for set. Elements isolated apart from one another.¹³¹

Pinter's pauses contain undercurrents that stir up the silt of past hurts, aggression, repressed anger and incipient violence.

Beckett's pauses were comparative chasms and dared to dig even deeper. Beckett confronted the void itself but, instead of despair, returned with new forms and a stark poetry that reverberates in the gaps his pauses create.

Samuel Beckett and The Pause

'The key word in my plays is "perhaps"',¹³².

Samuel Beckett, *Beckett by the Madeleine*

There has been so much written about Samuel Beckett already that David Pattie in his book on the man and his work has called it 'The Beckett Industry'.¹³³ Ironically, most of what has been written are attempts to explain his work (which Beckett refused to do) or to fossick out the influences on his philosophy. There are lists of these from Democritus, Dante and Descartes to Kafka, Joyce, and Sartre – all earnestly analysing 'the Beckettian Universe'¹³⁴, as if the man lived in a separate world from the rest of us. Yet no other author has been able to reduce the world we live in to its essence in the same way as Beckett.

His process was to discard, cut and reduce and then to discard, cut and reduce some more, eliminating specifics until he had distilled a human experience to the minimum number of words possible. This also meant abandoning many of the conventions associated with earlier theatrical presentations, including centuries of acting styles from declamation to naturalism. In the words of one of his favourite actresses, Billie Whitelaw:

I can still hear him saying "Too much colour, Billie, too much colour". That was his way of saying "Don't act". He wanted the essence of what was in you to come out.¹³⁵

The difficulty that this presented to his first actors and audiences was that they were not accustomed to this type of minimalism, and, in their desire to pigeon-hole and classify new works, led to Beckett being listed among the Absurdists, like Ionesco and Adamov. As his work

progressed, however, and people became more accustomed to his style, it became apparent that Beckett was presenting a work of art that embraced more than just theatre — his ‘plays’ were visual images, poetry, musical *études*, choreographed ballets, vaudeville routines and philosophical meditations, all rolled into one.

Like Pinter, Beckett stated that his interest was in the play, not in any potential audience for it.

I want neither to instruct nor to improve nor to keep people from getting bored. I want to bring poetry into drama, a poetry which has been through the void and makes a new start in a room-space. I think in new dimensions and basically am not very worried about whether I can be followed.¹³⁶

While this is obvious in his later plays after *Waiting for Godot*, the evidence in his first play, *Eleuthéria*, does not support it.

It was only through economic expediency for Roger Blin, Beckett’s first producer, that *Waiting for Godot* became Beckett’s theatrical debut. When presented with the choice of the two plays, Blin decided on the second (even though he did not understand it) because it would be cheaper to mount. *Eleuthéria* has a cast of seventeen characters and a complicated set involving two locations at once, the morning room of the Kraps’ home and Victor’s room in a boarding house. Not only could this mean using a revolving stage to show those locations ‘from another angle’ but Blin would have to work out how he could make it appear that one half of the set ‘[had been] swallowed up by the pit’!¹³⁷ *Waiting for Godot*, on the other hand, used only five actors and the one minimalist location: ‘A country road. A tree. A stone’.¹³⁸ The first play, by all accounts, has yet to be staged, and it was not until six years after Beckett’s death in 1989 that

the script was even published as a reading text. Yet it is by close examination of that script that we see the origins of Beckett's unique style and, *perhaps*, see the major influence of a writer who has been overlooked by the 'Beckett Industry' so far, who, *perhaps*, gave Beckett the key to the 'room-space' he needed: Denis Diderot.

Beckett's earlier efforts at writing for the stage had been a contribution to a parody of Corneille's *El Cid* while lecturing at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1931, and, in 1936, a brief opening exposition scene for his intended but abandoned psychological study of Dr Johnson in love, called *Human Wishes*. 'His first attempt at a complete dramatic work, *Eleuthéria*,' David Pattie tells us, 'was written quickly in early 1947...'¹³⁹. If we read *Eleuthéria*, then, not as the work of the master craftsman that Beckett was to become, but as the initial experiment of a novice playwright (albeit one of genius), both this and Beckett's later style gain a certain proportion that illuminates his thinking rather than diminishes his stature.

Eleuthéria is then revealed as both Beckett's version of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* which his friend, James Joyce, had published in 1917, and as Beckett's *Portrait of the Young Artist as a Man*. Like Treplev in Chekhov's *The Seagull*, this Beckett thinks 'the theatre of today is hidebound and conventional' and 'New forms are needed'.¹⁴⁰ Beckett, with *Eleuthéria*, which is the Greek word for *freedom*, is like a chick struggling to free itself of the shell in which it was imprisoned: it hammers and picks at the walls until they collapse around it and it is free – both free *from* the restrictions of the shell and free *to* move outside it, leaving the shell behind. Once Beckett has recognised the limitations of conventional theatre by writing *Eleuthéria*, he abandons them altogether and in his next play begins to create those 'new forms'.

McMillan and Fehsenfeld sum up *Eleuthéria* as follows: ‘Ostensibly the plot of *Eleuthéria* is the unsuccessful attempt of members of the Krap family to persuade Victor Krap to return to his former life’.¹⁴¹ It is easy to see the parallels with Beckett’s own life and his difficult relationship with his mother – and the psychological problems that Beckett sought treatment for in London. Beckett himself acknowledged in conversations with Lawrence E Harvey, Professor of French and Italian at Dartmouth College, in 1961-2 when talking about Beckett’s restlessness ‘By contrast, he [Beckett] mentioned a great desire just to lie down and not move,’ which is what Victor does as the last image in this play. ‘Later he said “Work doesn’t depend on experience; it is not a record of experience. But of course you must use it”’¹⁴², not exactly direct evidence for this ‘portrait of the artist’ but close enough to it.

What is most apparent from a first reading of *Eleuthéria* is how French the opening scene appears. Despite being sufficiently modern for telegrams to be mentioned¹⁴³, the bourgeois women and the servants in the morning room could have come straight from Molière; yet it does not immediately come across as parody. It is as if Beckett is conceding that that this is the way into a play with which the audience is familiar and which he feels it is incumbent on him to use, while the play he wants to write, the one concerning the anguish of Victor, is taking place in the marginal action on the other side of the stage.

Even as he follows convention, such as the long, relatively inconsequential exposition scene to allow the audience to settle and to reveal the supporting characters’ views of the young man around whom the play will revolve, Beckett flouts Aristotle’s unities of place and action by this use of ‘marginal action’. It is also in this first scene that we first meet Beckett’s flair with language. When Mme. Krap is asking Mme. Piouk about her new husband’s profession as a doctor, she asks ‘Where

does he perpetrate?’ rather than ‘Where is his practice?’¹⁴⁴. Within moments of his arrival on stage, M. Krap asserts ‘I’m the cow that, up against the bars of the slaughterhouse, understands the utter absurdity of pastures’¹⁴⁵, an arresting image out of keeping with the *drame bourgeois* that surrounds it, but very much in keeping with the play I would suggest that Beckett wants to write. Occasionally, he even allows his characters to comment on the action:

M. KRAP: Dramatically speaking, my wife’s absence serves no purpose¹⁴⁶.

(*Eleuthéria*, p.22)

M. KRAP: I’m wondering of what use you’re going to be in this farce¹⁴⁷.

(*Eleuthéria*, p.30)

While these appear as early instances of metatheatres¹⁴⁸, I would suggest they show that he is not totally engaged with his own work in the traditional way.

Beckett is quoted by McMillan and Fehsenfeld (p.16) from a conversation with Jean Pavey in Paris in 1962, as saying ‘When I write a play I put myself inside the characters, I am also the author supplying the words, and I put myself in the audience visualising what goes on stage’¹⁴⁹. In *Eleuthéria*, Beckett does not appear to have learnt the necessary separation of these roles, such that when he, as audience, thinks he, as writer, is allowing the play to sag, he jumps onto the stage in Act III in a Pirandellian attempt to rescue it. Unfortunately, he then discovers that he is still a member of an audience but with another character to consider and has only complicated his play further. This is not the reaction of a writer who is ‘not very worried if [he] can be followed’¹⁵⁰.

When Horst Bollman, who played Clov in the Schiller Theater production of *Endgame* in Berlin, 1967, asked Beckett: ‘What does it mean? What are we supposed to do during the pauses?’ Beckett replied:

Act as if you are in a boat with a hole in it and water is coming in and the boat is slowly sinking. You must think of things to do; then there is a pause; then you get the feeling you have to do something else and you work at it once more and the boat goes up again.¹⁵¹

In Act I of *Eleuthéria*, there are twelve *pauses* and forty-one *silences*. At first glance, they would appear to be the standard types of pause, brief rests that will give emphasis to the dialogue or that will allow a change or resumption of subject. When we remember, however, the lengthy stage directions for the marginal action taking place on the *larger* part of the stage that is occupied by Victor in his room, we begin to see the water that is seeping into the boat and that will eventually sweep the Krap household into ‘the pit’. While the Krap household actively live, (or at least ‘pretend to live’ as M. Krap asks Mlle Skunk to do ‘for his son’s sake ... so that he looks like he is living’¹⁵²), Victor’s unexplained torment, his refusal to accept their mode of living, casts a shadow over all their lives. The pauses and silences are speaking volumes and magnify our criticism of the Kraps’ lives which Victor is rejecting.

In Act II, the marginal action takes place in the Krap drawing room and the action in Victor’s room dominates. The fifty-seven *silences*, seventeen *pauses* and two *intervals* again serve their dual purpose but this time the shadow hanging over the main action is the ghost of M. Krap, Victor’s father who has died suddenly. His empty chair dominates the marginal action where the sad activity of his devoted servant provides the contrast

and is a constant reminder of a subtext. The death of Beckett's father in 1933 had such an effect on the young man that, like Victor, he was subject to frequent attacks of panic and depression.

There is no marginal action in Act III and it would appear that Beckett, as writer, is unsure how his strange play can finish. He introduces a character who represents what he thinks an audience will be thinking, who is as dissatisfied with the play as Beckett is himself. But even this character gets distracted in the play's action and Beckett introduces another character (Stage-box Voice) who calls out and asks the intruding Audience Member to 'cut to the chase!'¹⁵³ Beckett, the author, then notices that Beckett the audience member has lost his way and he brings on the prompter who has also 'had enough'. Beckett, the writer, then has Beckett, the audience member, list the possible reasons why he has stayed so long and it is interesting to note how fluent this character is, compared with the others, including M. Krap, a writer. I'm sure that Victor's ending with his back to the audience is a sign that Beckett knew that, in writing *Eleuthéria*, he had not solved his problem with finding a new form but, through the exercise, had come closer to knowing in which direction that form lay. Beckett had 'turned his back on' conventional theatre. Victor was, in fact, Beckett contemplating the void.

It is well-documented in Beckett's letters to Tom McGreevey that Beckett was an admirer of Denis Diderot: 'The reminiscences of Diderot interest me very much'¹⁵⁴ and it should come as no surprise that somewhere in his studies, or in his search for new forms, he would come across the following passage from *De La Poésie Dramatique*: '... il y a des scènes entières où il est infiniment plus naturel aux personnages de se mouvoir que de parler...'

(... there are whole scenes where it is infinitely more natural for the characters to move than to speak)

and Diderot illustrates:

Deux homes, incertains s'ils ont à être mécontents ou satisfaits l'un de l'autre en attendant un troisième qui les instruisse, que diront-ils jusqu'à ce que ce troisième soit arrivé? Rien. Ils iront, ils viendront, ils montreront de l'impatience; mais ils se tairont.¹⁵⁵

(Two men, uncertain whether they should be unhappy or satisfied with one another while waiting for a third one who teaches them, what will they say until this third one arrives? Nothing. They will go, they will come, they will show impatience; but they will keep quiet.)

(De la Poésie Dramatique, ,Denis Diderot)

Except for the keeping quiet, is this not the whole basis for the situation in *Waiting for Godot*? Add the image of Caspar David Friedrich's painting, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (see Figure 13), and the stage is set for Beckett's new forms.



Figure 13. David Caspar, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*

In fact, as Lawrence E Harvey reports, 'He aspires ... to eliminating form — not just breaking it down or working against it but eliminating it'.¹⁵⁶ He eliminates exposition, explanation, a history for his characters,

the traditional structure that builds to a climax and anything that could locate the characters in a time and space.

The very first words spoken in *Waiting for Godot* are ‘Nothing to be done’, Beckett’s preferred translation of ‘Rien à faire’.¹⁵⁷ There is an enormous difference between the active voice ‘Nothing to do’, the literal translation of the line, and the passive ‘Nothing to be done’ – the first implying free will and choice, the second implying a duty imposed from outside. (In the monologue *Opened in Error*, I chose to use both ‘Nothing to do, nothing to be done by them’ to reinforce the stillness of the mists hanging in the valley.) Beckett has announced from the very beginning of his new play that action will not be its mainstay.

There has been much discussion and supposition about the origin of the character of Godot, who never appears: from a character, Godeau, in a play by Balzac, to a famous cyclist of the same name, and from a French word for boot, *godillot*, to the supreme deity. Beckett emphatically denied the latter on several occasions, especially because the whole play ‘strove at all costs to avoid definition’.¹⁵⁸ The above association with Diderot, I would suggest, throws new light on the possibility that Godot does represent God but not the God that most people would understand by the use of the term (which is why he rejected the interpretation so vehemently). Diderot spent a lot of time and effort debunking the Christian image of the kindly, beneficent deity through applying reason to the beliefs that dominated France in the eighteenth century: ‘If reason is a gift from Heaven,’ Diderot wrote, ‘and the same can be said of faith, then Heaven has given us two incompatible and contradictory presents’.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps, the *-ot* on the end of the name of the white-bearded character for whom Estragon and Vladimir are waiting, is an allusion to the problematic God of Diderot, who could not be defined.

In *Godot*, Beckett achieves literality, that is: the words on the page are sufficient unto themselves and mean ‘exactly what they say, no more, no less’¹⁶⁰ and we are advised not to look for a subtext for the meaning¹⁶¹ but what Beckett has done is add the art of poetry – the meaning comes from the poetic images used and the echoes that surround his words. As with M. Krap’s cow in the slaughterhouse, the arresting image in *Waiting for Godot* is Pozzo’s ‘They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more’,¹⁶² which surely has enough resonance to count as subtext. Dotted throughout *Waiting for Godot* are other images that pull us up sharply to consider more than the words on the page:

VLADIMIR: But you can’t go barefoot!

ESTRAGON: Christ did.¹⁶³

(*Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett.)

The best way of approaching Beckett’s plays, from *Waiting for Godot* onwards, is not to look for meaning but to allow his images and words to flow over you. The pauses and silences elicit thoughts, memories, images, allusions and feelings from within that are not either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, they are what they are for each member of the audience and they are all equally as valid. I think this is what he meant by ‘*The key word in my plays is “perhaps”*’. When he was directing Billie Whitelaw in *Footfalls* and he kept saying ‘No colour, no colour’, it was *perhaps* to avoid an interpretation that would limit the choices of the audience in their reaction to the words.

When the old woman in the rocking chair in *Rockaby* begins with ‘More’, it could suggest first that she desires more time or is suggesting to herself that more effort is needed. When she comes to a halt and, after a pause, says ‘More’, there are many possible meanings that can be

gleaned from this one word: the recognition that she is not yet dead, that there is 'more' to come or to be done, and more poignantly, there is an echo of the child on a swing from many decades before. It is also one of the first words a child learns, which will also be one of this woman's last. To these allusions Beckett adds repetition, allowing further levels and associations to surface during a performance, if not while reading the texts.

In *Rockaby*, the repeated 'Whom else?', when referring to herself in the third person, encapsulates the old woman's isolation. The two words emphasise that there is no-one else there that she could be referring to. Each time that the character says 'Time she stopped', another meaning surfaces: '[It is] time she stopped' [stopped rocking; or stopped living], 'Time, she stopped' [Time personified], and 'she stopped Time'. If the actress intones the words 'with colour', many of these meanings could be lost.

Perhaps, instead of trying to place Beckett in the scheme of things, identifying and labelling the philosophical influences on his works, analysing his intentions and beliefs, classifying him as a nihilist or a Cartesian, we just took the time to listen to his words and silences and how they relate to each other, we would recognise the incredible compassion of a man who stripped the stage bare, stripped the language bare, stripped the human soul of all its trappings and still found beauty enough to 'bring poetry into drama, a poetry which has been through the void and makes a new start in a room-space'.¹⁶⁴ Much of that room-space is found in the heads of his characters, especially in the monologues, which are more like duologues with the self in many cases.

Beckett used the pause in the theatre for his music and his idiosyncratic rhythms, his painting of arresting images, his choreographed ballets, his vaudeville routines, and his rich poetry, carefully placing his pauses for

maximum effect. His contribution to the Art of The Pause was to demonstrate the wealth that could be harvested from silence.

Joanna Murray-Smith and the Pause

*'A character's personal revelation in combination with an explicit emotional display has long been the substance of realist drama'*¹⁶⁵.

(Joanna Murray-Smith)

Despite having written a drama that is its epitome (*Mosquito 1992*), I have long been dissatisfied with what I call 'Theatre of Confession', best exemplified by Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1882), where the action on stage or on screen revolves around a secret from the past which facilely 'explains' why the characters are the way they are. If it is not 'something nasty in the wood-shed'¹⁶⁶, it is the revelation that the characters' lives have been based on lies and/or misunderstandings that have altered the course of their destiny. I suspect that this form of drama is the residue both of melodrama and of a society that deemed appearances more important than the truth.

The plays of Joanna Murray-Smith tend to display that appearances are still a prime factor in presenting drama that is popular with audiences, if not with critics. Her main characters, almost without exception, are all 'handsome', 'beautiful' or 'attractive' who live in 'charming', 'elegant', 'tasteful' or 'stylish' surroundings. They are urbane, witty and eloquent, for the most part, and have little trouble expressing their feelings when the time for revelation comes. It is little wonder, therefore, that her work has been compared to that of Noel Coward and Terrence Rattigan¹⁶⁷, playwrights usually considered to be from an era long past and whose works are now enjoying a revival.

The question that the modern 'Theatre of Confession' invites, is whether confession is truly a theatrical 'action' or a retelling of a past action, the true repercussions of which can only be felt after the confession. This would make the events between the initial event and the

confession merely a 'filled pause' that has masqueraded as action. Obviously, the original intent of this type of play was to show that 'Truth will out' eventually and the continuing popularity of the genre would seem to indicate that, as a society, we have still not learned the lesson. Current events with the 'Wikileaks' scandal and members of parliament being continually exposed for their peccadilloes reinforce this conjecture.

Murray-Smith's *Love Child*, first produced in 1993, centres on a situation in which a mother and the child she gave up for adoption at birth are meeting for the first time when the daughter is twenty-five years old. It is a plot that is fraught with opportunities for wordlessness and, while there are many pauses and silences in the script, there is very little subtext. The characterisation of the mother, Anna, as self-possessed, self-aware, educated and articulate, ensures that most of the 'awkward' moments integral to the situation are quickly glossed over. Similarly, the self-confidence and aggression of Billie, the daughter, combined with her ulterior motive which is not revealed to the audience until late in the play, preclude a trustworthy revelation of any depth of feeling. As Sam Marlowe wrote in the first line of his review of the play in *The Times*: 'There's detail but surprisingly little depth in the new play by the Australian dramatist Joanna Murray-Smith'.¹⁶⁸

When Billie reveals at the end of the play that she is not, in fact, Anna's daughter but has stolen her true daughter's identity, instead of heading into a second act that would base the play on a real dramatic conflict full of loaded pauses, Murray-Smith settles for a maudlin image of the two women embracing, obviously content with substitutes to fill the empty spaces in their respective lives.

In the prologue scene of *Love Child*, Murray-Smith quite rightly uses a few *pauses* to allow the audience to adjust to the darkness and to digest the exposition of the play: for a short while we can hear the workings of

Billie's mind and understand that she is orchestrating (complete with music) her first meeting with her mother. The glib chatter with which the two characters attempt to cover their discomfort in the first twelve pages of the script is well-handled by Murray-Smith but the first *silence*, which bespeaks the awkwardness of the situation, reveals that Murray-Smith herself has not come to terms with the situation she has created:

ANNA: Well, listen, I mean we don't have to *approve* of each other. That's not what it's about.

BILLIE: What *is* it about?

[*A weird moment of silence*].¹⁶⁹

Love Child, Joanna Murray-Smith

Why is this a 'weird' moment of silence? Surely it is a moment of silence that could have been expected at any time, and the lack of silences before this is the weird part. This is the moment in the play where it could have led the audience into the murky depths of what is truly going on in the situation by capitalising on this silence.

Murray-Smith's next pauses, however, are more punctuational than portentous, be it to emphasise the speech that has gone before:

BILLIE: I'm not at all sure that I've done the right thing.

[*Pause*]¹⁷⁰;

to return the conversation to a previous topic:

BILLIE: Now I'm alone I forget that when I sleep there are other people on the planet awake and doing things.

[*Pause*]

Look, I didn't mean to snap at you. About Stuart, before¹⁷¹.

or to prepare the audience for a bon mot:

BILLIE: Oh, the sixties.

[*Pause*]

Sometimes I think you really ought to be dead before you're immortalised¹⁷².

Sometimes the *pauses* are a convenient step-ladder by which Murray-Smith can mount her soap-box, as is seen in the scene between Anna and Billie about women and babies that culminates with:

BILLIE: Sometimes I think — well, I think that one day women will look back at this time and see the madness. The way we do about slavery. That a time so hell-bent on fighting nature could be so convinced of its own credibility. Don't you sometimes think that? That the easiest thing would be to have a child suckling. And we could relax into something that isn't about choice or taking control, just about biological instinct. About being womanly. And all of us ... are trapped in some elaborate fight against instincts that would really free us? There's so much defensiveness, we've forgotten how to question ourselves — it's just automatic¹⁷³.

This speechifying reappears with growing frequency in later plays.

In *Honour*, first produced two years after *Love Child* in 1995, Honor, the main character, proclaims:

HONOR: Don't fucking *leave me!* [*Long beat. Shift in gear, gentle*] I always thought love hungered for history. That new love always felt unconvincing because it shared no past. That time fed love. That faith found us form as we were witnesses together, taking in the shifting globe, the distant revolutions that made us seem so permanent.¹⁷⁴

While it is revealed very early in the piece that Honor was once a poet, surely the techniques that she displays in the speech above are those of the rhetorician, the public speaker, rather than the poet.

It is interesting that, while *Love Child* has 59 *pauses*, 12 *silences*, and 3 “*she says nothing’s*”, *Honour* contains only 2 *pauses*, 12 *silences*, and 97 *beats*. The difference here is, not that they are interchangeable indications of the same thing like those of Pinter’s dots and dashes, but that a beat is a short pause that cannot be lengthened. It is illogical to write ‘a long beat’, as Murray-Smith does in *Honour*, in the same way as one writes ‘a long pause’ or ‘a very long pause’. To lengthen this break, a playwright must write ‘two beats’ or, as was seen with Tennessee Williams in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, ‘a count of five’.

While the marked change in style has been dismissed as the influence of fashion at the Royal Court Theatre in London, I would suggest that it also stems from the recognition that she has chosen to ‘write about what she knows’ and what she knows is eloquence and fluency. The celebrity that accompanies success for a playwright is a poisoned chalice: the world can become so limited that the only resource available for the next opus is the

world of writers. It happened to Tom Stoppard with *The Real Thing* in 1982, and to David Williamson with *Emerald City* in 1987. Writers writing about writers or writing is a sure sign that a playwright is losing touch with the world beyond the literati and glitterati.

Murray-Smith's facility with words, however, was a legacy of both nature and nurture. 'Her father, Stephen Murray-Smith, was an academic... her mother, a teacher ... They held court to an array of prominent intellectual and artistic friends'.¹⁷⁵ The world Murray-Smith knew from the beginning was already limited. Consequently, her characters in *Honour* are writers who can have no truck with inarticulacy or wordlessness. Even Sophie, the supposedly inarticulate daughter of Honor and George, is articulate in expression of her belief in her own inarticulacy:

SOPHIE: ... I — used to feel that way when I — was very small. That same feeling. Not a childish feeling — Well, maybe. As if I was choking on — As if life was coming down on me and I couldn't see my way through it. What does a child who has everything suffer from? Who could name it? I can't. I can't. [*Breaking*] But it — was a — sort of — I used to see it in my head as a jungle. Around me. Surrounding me. Some darkness growing, something — organic, alive — and the only thing that kept me — kept me — *here*— was the picture of Honor and George.¹⁷⁶

Compared with the average student of English whose language either imitates the American teenagers they see on television or is peppered with

expletives, I would say she is doing very well, even with the dash pauses that purport to show a search for words. Truly inarticulate people simply cannot find those words or images and, in their frustration, resort to either obscenities or violence, not poetic images of jungles. Perhaps it is in skipping so glibly from one important line of dialogue to the next with only a *beat* in-between that leads critics like Robert Brustein to call *Honour* ‘an essentially contrived and artificial play’¹⁷⁷.

It is a criticism that could equally be levelled at three of Murray-Smith’s later plays, *Redemption* (1997), *Nightfall* (1999), and *Rapture* (2002), all giving the appearance of having been manufactured by assembling ‘beautiful’ women, ‘attractive’ men, in ‘affluent’, ‘tasteful’ and ‘smart, sophisticated’ settings, to present a smooth dialectic on slightly risky subjects that the audience will have read about in the newspaper, so that, as the cynical character, Dust, says of the audience in James Saunders’ *Next Time I’ll Sing To You*:

DUST: Of course, they want to be able to say, *that’s* how it is (*It being Life*). I don’t know what they’ve been on about but it’s all so true. Then home they can go and drink their bedtime cocoa full of hope for Man’s tomorrow.¹⁷⁸

James Saunders, *Next Time I’ll Sing To You*

Murray-Smith’s plays allow an audience to think they have dealt with a difficult subject when they have just been given a superficial glance at it. The saving grace of *Rapture*, however, is that it shows Murray-Smith’s awareness of the power of the pause in life:

EVE: ...I’m half expecting the phone call that announces catastrophe. You know how it goes—an ordinary

sentence, a little joke interrupted by the ring, at first innocent, then growing more sinister at each insistent bell — and the knowledge that this pause between hearing and answering may very well be the divide between what was once and some brutal future.¹⁷⁹

Joanna Murray-Smith, *Rapture*

That ‘pause between listening and answering’ has been a mainstay of playwrights since Sophocles, eliciting tension to the point of horror when the dramatist has prepared the scene beforehand. One has only to read *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* to see this pause used dramatically to full advantage. Murray-Smith only narrates this pause rather than employs it.

Murray-Smith’s venture into comedy was meant to take the form of farce with *The Female of the Species* in 2006. Benedict Nightingale, however, in his review of the play in *The Times*, assessed it more correctly as ‘a sub-Shavian comedy’¹⁸⁰ — ‘sub’ presumably because he goes on to write that ‘the debate isn’t all that trenchant’. Again Murray-Smith uses her characters either to take part in a dialectic on feminism, interspersed with weak jokes and caricatures that ought to have brought more strident protests from the people these stereotypes supposedly represented: the mature feminist, the militant student, the fraught mother, the ‘snag’, the ‘superstud’ black male and the ‘dapper’ elderly homosexual.

The play was based on an incident in which the house of the renowned intellectual, Germaine Greer, was invaded by an unstable young female intruder, who bound and gagged her and called her ‘Mummy’. While this must have been traumatic enough for Ms Greer, it resulted in the younger woman having psychiatric treatment and it is immediately questionable

whether this really qualified her to be ‘turned ...into a broadly comic and ridiculous figure’, as Christopher Hart pointed out in his review of the play in London ¹⁸¹. This is not, however, the only example of Murray-Smith’s insensitivity in this play. She treats the sexual molestation of women and the trials of being lesbian equally as glibly, and has little at all to say in sympathy for the suicide of the younger character’s mother, making her death the subject of a weak pun: ‘The autodidact autodies’ ¹⁸².

Beside the problem of the play being ‘structurally ramshackle’¹⁸³ and having major problems in sustaining the suspension of disbelief through major time gaffes, the main quarrel with *The Female of the Species*, as with her earlier plays, is that Murray-Smith shoots at her target with a scattergun and wounds others in the process. In her introduction to the play, she writes: ‘I’ve long been interested in the personal impact of strident ideologies, the limitation of ideology when it comes up against unwieldy humanity ...’¹⁸⁴.

Unfortunately, Murray-Smith in this play does not appear to be attacking the ideologies but the people who propose them, in this case, Germaine Greer. The true drama in *The Female of the Species* is in the life and death of the poor girl’s mother who gave her child away and ended up throwing herself under the train. If we had been told that story, maybe we could have made up our own minds as to whether the second wave feminists were to blame.

In the play, *Shadows*, I also take aim at feminist ideology in the television programme that the Agnew family are watching on the stage: *Dulcie Walters in ‘Secret White Women’s Business’*, but my target is specifically the ages-old use of manipulation by women to achieve their goals. Ironically, this ‘attack’ has been taken personally by some of the women who have read it. I am fully aware of why it has been thought a necessary ploy for so long in a patriarchal society but I hope that the

‘celebration’ of it depicted in the television programme will bring this aspect of female behaviour onto the agenda for serious discussion. For true equality, both males and females need to examine and modify their behaviours, not just the males as predicated in *The Female Eunuch* and satirised in *The Female of the Species*.

In Joanna Murray-Smith’s plays, the pause is primarily used as a convention inherited from centuries of theatrical productions. It is learned and used proficiently for the most part but it adds nothing new to the value of the pause in contemporary play writing.

Daniel Keene and the Pause

'Daniel Keene is a dangerous playwright ... he works right on the moral edge'.¹⁸⁵

(Sydney Morning Herald)

Despite winning several Premier's Awards from three states in Australia, the Wal Cherry 'Play of the Year' and the Sumner Locke Elliott Prize in New York, there is a surprising dearth of secondary resource material about a playwright whom John McCallum, lecturer in theatre at the University of New South Wales, considers 'the most important Australian playwright in the transition between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries'¹⁸⁶.

Reviews of productions of his works tend to describe the situation or plot of his plays but avoid any in-depth analysis of the 'moral edge' at which he is said to work. Like Beckett, he chooses characters which can be said to have no life beyond the performance. They transcend notions of 'class' or 'type', are human animals surviving in a frequently inclement environment, and are poetic in their inarticulacy, 'The silence between words is what articulates their pain'.¹⁸⁷

Unlike Beckett's characters, however, they pull us into their world without the aid of traditional theatrical ploys — there are no vaudeville routines and little repetition in Keene's plays. In the poetry of his plays, he 'grounds' his audience with the compassion that he is able to elicit for his characters and, again like Beckett, he does this by his economy with words. He pares away any verbiage in what he calls 'narrative compression ... to the point of a single, undeniable reality'¹⁸⁸.

When the intellect and the emotions meet at the same point (when they collide) we are able to recognize a moment that is truthful, a moment that unites what we think and what we feel.¹⁸⁹

The power of Keene's plays comes from the distillation of human experience down to these moments of truthfulness which are awful in their nakedness. I have endeavoured to learn from his experience by using a similar economy of words in writing some of the monologues in *Bank Accounts*. The necessity for timing entrances and exits when *Shadows* moves into farce, however, can sometimes involve the addition of dialogue, demonstrating that this paring away of language is not necessarily advantageous to all genres of theatre.

Keene's plays embrace a wide range of subjects, including the normally taboo subjects of death and impending death, occupation in war, and paedophilia, and he tackles them head on, sparing nobody's sensibilities. Yet he still manages to convey a sense of hope, if not in a happy resolution, at least in the knowledge that someone has noticed their plight and is speaking for them. That hope presents us with another kind of pause in its relief from the bleakness of his characters' lives, best exemplified in his play, *All Souls*. Like Pinter, this is achieved as much by what his characters do not or cannot say as by the words they 'can drag up from their limited hoard of words'¹⁹⁰ and by his use of the pause. His stage directions at the beginning of his play, *Terminus*, give an indication of the almost Beckett-like precision with which he can choose to affect his audience:

On the outskirts of a large city. The time: the present day. Settings for individual scenes should be minimal. No 'decor'. Breaks between scenes should be as brief as possible. Where pauses are

*indicated: a pause should be no more than two beats, a Long Pause no more than five. Where a silence is indicated, its duration is open to the discretion of the director and his/her cast. If an interval is considered necessary, it should occur after scene fourteen.*¹⁹¹

Within just a few minutes containing several of these two-beat and five-beat pauses, the audience has witnessed an apparently motiveless murder and is swept into the following scene before it has had time to register its horror or moral outrage.

One of Keene's arts is to create sympathy for a character before he reveals him or her to be in some way morally reprehensible. In this first scene of *Terminus*, as well as showing the caring attitude that John displays towards the boy's imprisoned canary, Keene carefully plants the words 'Is there someone waiting for you?... There's no one waiting for me' and 'I'm going home. I haven't seen my home in a long time'.¹⁹² Before the audience has even had time to consider the circumstances of that 'long time' (which could have been spent in prison), the man for whom we have begun to feel sorry, has strangled the boy and taken possession of the boxed canary.

Keene has subtly begun to juggle with our sympathies and moral judgement, and in this way, it is not only our disbelief that has been suspended — we are left floundering between our emotions and our intellects, and we are willing to suspend both while we absorb the rest of the foreign world Keene is presenting to us. He has the remarkable knack of distancing his audiences at the same time as he involves them in his characters' lives.

The same art is developed more fully in his short play, *the eyes*, but in this play the timing of the pauses are not prescribed and perform an

altogether different function. It is unfortunate that John McCallum, who is also the Sydney theatre critic for *The Australian*, should dismiss this play as ‘a creepy encounter between two middle-aged men on a park bench, as the twilight fades, and one tells the other of his violation of a young girl’¹⁹³, especially when he has earlier praised Keene’s short plays as ‘classic works ... [which] distil great emotions and large social contexts into simple and profoundly moving pieces’¹⁹⁴.

Keene has taken great care to reveal the circumstances of this encounter very gradually with precisely placed pauses. In this way, he allows the audience time to ask themselves questions about what they are seeing and hearing from the first stage direction:

*Silence. Twilight (light fades throughout). Two men in late middle age. They are seated on a bench. The surrounding darkness suggests an open place. A park perhaps. The two men do not meet each other’s eyes at any point. Their voices are subdued throughout. After a lengthy pause.*¹⁹⁵

If, as I’m sure Keene would have wanted, we approach this (or any play) with an open mind i.e. ‘totally receptive — open to seeing without any editorial or censorial intervention or interference’¹⁹⁶, our experience will be totally different to that of the audience member who has read McCallum’s description of it. McCallum has prejudiced the reader and Keene’s audience before anything has happened on the stage.

Possible open-minded reactions to, and questions raised in, reading the above stage direction might be:

1. Keene is creating a pleasant, calm atmosphere with no apparent threats.

2. Why must the characters be middle aged? Why not elderly or young? What is special about middle-aged men? Do these men have families? Pets?
3. ‘An open place. A park *perhaps*.’ (my italics). What other places are like a park? Hospital grounds? A country estate? The bank of a river?
4. Why don’t they meet each other’s eyes? Do they know each other at all? Or are they members of some sort of secret society – two spies, perhaps? In what other circumstances do people avoid each other’s eyes? When you don’t want to see another’s pain? To hide your own pain? Guilt?
5. Why will their voices be ‘subdued throughout’? Is there someone else who might hear them? Are they conspiring? Or has there been a death? Perhaps one of them is ill, or needs careful handling.

Keene’s *lengthy pause* here sets the viewer’s mind in motion to start asking questions and he provides more such pauses every few lines. These questions are not answered but instead accumulate – why do the men mention ‘*the eyes*’ and ‘*the hands*’ rather than stating who they belong to? Is it the objective distance of doctors? Artists? Film-makers? One man appears to be more experienced than the other and is guiding him and advising him, like a counsellor with a client, or a mentor with a novice. His lack of any ‘superiority’ through his advanced knowledge in his dealings with the neophyte gains the audience’s respect.

Between *pauses* we are also thrown a red herring when one man, talking of music he has heard, says he has ‘not known from whence it came’. We then have to question, along with the second man, the use of the archaism ‘whence’ — is he questioning the language or the tautology (‘whence’ already contains the idea of ‘*from where*’)? It appears to be a common

technique of Keene's to insert archaic words and phrases that jar and influence our conceptions of his characters. A new question arises — does this play take place in the present or is Keene portraying an earlier era?

There is no suggestion of anything 'untoward' until halfway through this short play, when another archaic, or formal, term 'to apprehend' is used to hint that what has taken place is suspect. Modern terminology would be more likely to use the word 'arrest'. Even then, Keene immediately has the men using caring images: 'visiting her', 'talcum powder' and 'warm dry clothes' that have us questioning whether we have not misheard or misinterpreted. The sensational response given to paedophilia by contemporary media has, perhaps, led to an over-sensitivity and our reaction could be a result of this. Innocent relationships have become suspect through the resulting paranoia. Perhaps this is simply a child of a friend or sibling, or is an invalid relative that the man is looking after.

There is also an ambiguity in the novice's declaration

- I will be gone
- Yes
- only my memory will be

Pause

- tainted¹⁹⁷

Will he have fled or will he have died? Will it be his memory of something that will be 'tainted' or will it be others' memory of him?

Keene has deftly chosen his words to numb our moral equilibrium before, between a pause for effect and another to allow for the absorption of the shock, delivering the *coup de grace* that leaves us in no doubt that what we have been watching is horrifying and distasteful in the extreme:

- will you be naked?
- I hope to penetrate her.¹⁹⁸

The very civil and respectful tone that Keene has established serves both to make the conversation more horrendous, and has served to allow us to continue listening without protest. We have been seduced by the tempo and the mood of the piece almost to the point of being somewhat complicit in the crime. The pauses that bracket this brief exchange are masterful strokes of theatricality. By the end, we are not only shocked at what has taken place before us but also horrified at our own silence while we observed it. I am sure that this is what the playwright intended by the earlier ambiguities and the gradual revelation of the situation.

Revealing of the nature of the encounter beforehand reduces a very powerful piece of playwriting to a sordid exercise that the majority of theatre-goers would prefer to ignore or avoid (which is, perhaps, the point of the play) and so does them a disservice, because they will miss out on a small masterpiece. *the eyes* is a play of only six hundred words but it is an excellent example of Keene's theatrical craftsmanship, poetic sensibility and mastery of words.

In the initial stage directions of *the fire testament*, a monologue from a survivor of nuclear apocalypse, Keene asks for:

Suggestion of cavernous space. Dim pool of light; light falling from somewhere high above. All else in deep shadow. Source of light unseen. In the pool of light: a steel chair, burnt to bare metal. Distant, irregular sound of water dripping (continues throughout).

Long pause to establish image¹⁹⁹.

This demonstrates that he is fully aware of what his pauses are for. There is no evidence to suggest that this same awareness does not apply to *the eyes*. He wants his audience to register every detail and gives them plenty of time to do so.

The invented language of *the fire testament*, fractured and littered with obscenities and archaisms, reflects the harsh environment in which the man struggles to survive and keep the memory of what life was like in ‘th’ afore’. In the remainder of this play, Keene simply uses paragraphing to suggest places for the actor to pause. As Donald Rayfield noted, in discussing the ‘typically Chekhovian instruction *pause...*’: ‘Some non-verbal elements are licences to director and actor to improvise gesture and mood ... It also functions as tempo marking.’²⁰⁰

From close examination of *the eyes* and *the fire testament*, we can see that Keene also uses his *pauses* for this effect. Keene not only uses pauses to ‘articulate [the] pain’ of his characters, they are important markers for the orchestration of his work.

It is a shame that many Australians have not had the opportunity to see Keene’s plays in production, despite their being so popular overseas. His skilful use of words and the spaces between words creates a theatre that has immediate impact and resonates long after the viewing or reading. His theatre is vital and dynamic, disturbing and challenging, and yet strangely gentle in its treatment of audiences. There is no doubt that Keene ‘has a fire in his belly’ but, he is a playwright who is in control of his passions and uses all the tools of writing for the theatre, especially the pause, with consummate skill. Perhaps it is this dispassionate control that makes him so ‘dangerous’.

Theatre in London, U.K., 2011

To introduce *The Art of the Pause*, I began this essay with a review of two productions staged in Melbourne, Australia. The use and misuse of the pause made a significant contribution to the success or failure in the realization of what I thought to be the playwrights' intentions. My opinion was gleaned not only from the words on the page but, more pointedly, from the words that were not on the page: the dashes and ellipses, the unfinished sentences, the stage directions and, of course, the pauses. Having dissected the pause in the previous chapters, it is perhaps fitting that I end the essay in a similar way. To this end, I travelled to London to see modern theatre at one of the hubs of theatrical activity and influence.

Amid the almost prodigal bounty of theatrical fare available in London in August 2011, which included an abundance of live plays and a surfeit of musicals, two productions stood out as worthy of close scrutiny for their use of the pause. Both were presentations of The National Theatre, one of the most highly regarded production companies in the world, renowned for the consistently high quality of its productions. The advantage of this was that there was a commonality of production values.

British government subsidy of this organisation, along with corporate sponsorship that allows for cheap ticket pricing, means that all of its presentations are afforded only the best: magnificent sets and lavish costumes created by the best designers, and acting talent drawn from an enormous pool of trained and experienced performers. The National's comprehensive attention to detail in all aspects of production almost guarantees the full houses it deservedly enjoys. It provides an excellent testing ground for productions, such as *War Horse*²⁰¹, which has gone on to international commercial success. Three theatres within the building

complex on the south bank of the Thames, at least two of which run productions in repertory – each with a different cast, cater for a wide cross section of the community by providing a considerable variety of styles and genres at any given time, from the classics to the *avant-garde*.

This *embarras de richesses*, however, can also mask poor choices, faulty execution and intentional obfuscation when apparent ingenuity replaces artistic integrity and audiences are overwhelmed by splendour and spectacle, rather than being presented with the complex and multi-layered creations that the populace has a right to expect.

The classic, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, written in 1603 by Thomas Heywood and presented at the Lyttleton Theatre²⁰², directed by Katie Mitchell, was promoted in the programme as ‘one of the first tragedies ever to be written about ordinary people’²⁰³. While what constitutes a tragedy has long been the subject of academic debate, there can be little argument that the owners of grand houses who wager in the hundreds of pounds and can afford a whole regiment of servants can hardly be called ‘ordinary’ even in 2011, let alone in 1603 or 1919 when the events are meant to take place in this production.

It was the choice to transpose the play from the early seventeenth century to the very beginning of the interwar period that was at the heart of this production’s undoing. The final effect of the temporal transposition was to turn a Jacobean morality play contrasting an adulterous wife and a virtuous sister into a misogynistic Edwardian melodrama portraying women only as victims. It should be remembered that the original play was written closer to Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* than this interpretation was to Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* or to the plays of Caryl Churchill, and the staging of plays had undergone enormous changes of conventions in four hundred years. Elizabethan and Jacobean plays did not use sets. Scenes were distinguished by the

entrances and exits of the characters and the milieu was either contained in the dialogue:

DUNCAN: This castle has a pleasant seat.²⁰⁴

or signified by the livery of the servants, as in *Romeo and Juliet*. The action flowed from one scene to another with little hindrance. In giving in to the modern demand for realism and having a detailed recreation of two large, opulently-furnished houses on the stage at the one time, Mitchell created enormous obstacles to the flow of the action — unscripted pauses — as a platoon of servants changed the scenery for the next scene.

In what appeared as an effort to make these long pauses more acceptable, the servants even picked up the main characters and moved them about, as if they were puppets manipulated by downstairs reactions to the behaviour of their ‘betters’ upstairs, turning the social order on its head. At one point, the female protagonist of the sub-plot, Susan, was seen slowly descending the sweeping staircase in her brother’s mansion, only to ascend the same staircase moments later ... backwards! No amount of rationalisation could explain it, except that the timing of the action in her household needed to match the hive of activity required to change the furnishings in the other, thus filling the contrived pause with confusing action that had no real reference to the play itself.

Other questionable pauses of inordinate length in this production may well have served Mitchell’s feminist agenda but tilted the balance of the play into an area which was not integral to its theme. Still others appeared to be appealing to film and television conventions that had little to do with Heywood’s play. A protracted pause inserted after the wedding night, saw the no-longer-virginal Mrs Frankford slowly descend the staircase from the bridal chamber with obvious crippling pain in her

lower abdomen. If the audience could not guess that this was the result of her new husband's brutal coupling, the actress was made to collapse into the arms of a sympathetic servant with her back to the audience to reveal a bloodstain on her nightdress. This filled pause attested more to a desire to be sensational and 'modern' than to illumination of the text.

In the penultimate scene of the original script, the cuckolded husband, brought to his banished wife's death-bed, asks 'Is this the house?'²⁰⁵. In the Elizabethan/Jacobean theatre this would have signified the opening of a curtain to the inner stage where the invalid would be found, or from which a bed could be wheeled on, and led immediately into the final scene. At the Lyttleton, it was the cue for a hydraulic jack to lift a hospital ward the size and colour of a London tube station, which it resembled, from below the orchestra pit, the spectacle of which created a chasm of a pause that increased the scene's alienation from the earlier action. Instead of pitying the 'wronged' and remorseful woman, it gave the audience time to consider that her suffering was entirely self-inflicted, both in the commission of her sin and in her choice of starving herself to death as penitence. Mitchell's placing of the last line of the play in the mouth of Susan rather than the grieving husband, as in the original script, was an unfortunate perversion of Heywood's intention, turning the errant wife's death into an accusation aimed at all men, rather than a moral for his audience's edification.

Pauses, as we have seen, can provide a doorway into the sub-text and illuminate hidden meanings within a text. In this case, however, the inserted pauses only served to slow the action and fortify the added meanings imposed by the director. Certainly, they were inadequate to creating the 'fast-moving, frightening and erotic ...domestic thriller'²⁰⁶ the programme promised.

It may be surprising, then, to end with a pause that could well have been even longer than those required for scene changes in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. It was a pause that did everything it was meant to and more. It contained and exhibited a range of feelings that gave birth to thought, from boredom and *ennui* to sympathy and compassion. Moreover, it conveyed them in such a way that the audience shared them with the characters. It was an extraordinarily long pause and if it palled, it was meant to, and the very length of it added meaning after meaning. Its duration only served to emphasise what the characters suffered.

London Road in the Cottesloe Theatre at the National²⁰⁷ employed a relatively new genre, verbatim theatre. This new method of playwriting aims to build plays around the exact words spoken by participants in, and witnesses of, an actual event. In some instances, such as various presentations on stage, television and film of the trial of The Chicago Seven in 1968, the words used are taken directly, without adulteration, from the transcripts of a court case. Through the outrageous bias and outlandish behaviour of the judge in that particular case, the only effort needed to turn it into a theatrically viable script was in the selection of which sequence of words to use. The characters, the dialogue, the building tension and the climax were already created. Knowing that the events unfolding actually happened and that the victims of these crimes against humanity were still in prison, only served to amplify the horror of the injustice portrayed.

In another example of verbatim theatre, *The Modern International Dead* by Damien Millar²⁰⁸, the script was the result of distilling many hours of interviews with Australian soldiers as they told of their experiences in Rwanda and East Timor, and in the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As well as the exhaustive filtering of relevant words, Millar created composite characters to say those words and built a

narrative around the juxtaposition of the soldiers' experiences and their effects on their later lives. This play, too, had a cumulative effect as horror and injustice piled on ignorance and innocence.

London Road used the same techniques but chose characters who were mostly only incidentally involved in the events around which the play centred. It used the words of the truly ordinary people in Ipswich, near London, who discovered themselves to be the neighbours of a serial killer who murdered five prostitutes in 2006. The difference with Alecky Blythe's script for *London Road* was that first she took words, phrases and sentences from her interviews with those neighbours and then isolated them, fractured them, repeated them, incorporated the speaker's personal tics and local inflections and then had them set to music by Adam Cork. Seemingly impossible sentences, such as 'Everyone is very, very nervous and unsure of everything, basically', and 'You automatically think it could be him' are turned into the lyrics of songs, or a modern form of recitative. There is no hint of the indulgent sentimentalism that seems inherent in the musical genre, nor of the exploitative sensationalism that such a story could engender.

The play becomes the story of a group of individuals affected by an event over which they have no control but which finally helps them to cohere as a community. 'The working girls are excluded from the community song,' writes Andrzej Lukowski in his review of the production in *Time Out*, 'something underscored by the devastating moment where the score stops and three prostitutes simply stare at us in silence, abandoned'²⁰⁹. This wasn't just 'a moment'. Nor was it, in the words of another critic, 'what seems like an age'²¹⁰. It was simply a period of time, a pause, in which the audience was asked to do more work than it was accustomed to doing. And it was a stroke of genius.

For the first part of that pause, we sat waiting for one of the girls to speak or sing, to continue a pattern that had been set up for the previous hour or more. Then we realized that the girls were ‘working’, were waiting on the street for customers, and we waited with them. When one girl shifted her weight from one foot to another, we hoped it was a signal that the action would continue ... but it didn’t and we waited a little longer. After a short while, anticipation turned to frustration but the silence still continued. It was perhaps then that it dawned on the equally silent audience that we were being given a glimpse of what the girls must have endured hour after hour, night after cold night, in order to earn enough money to buy drugs to make the waiting more bearable.

Instead of judging them, or, at the least, keeping a safe distance from them, with that ‘devastating moment’ came the awareness that it was empathy not sympathy that we were feeling. The effect was also to change our view of all the characters in the play, to embrace the neighbours, too, as fallible humans whose human foibles we could pity or laugh at but remain aware that we also probably had characteristics that would be pitiable or laughable if they were to be portrayed on stage. ‘There, but for the grace of God, go I’²¹¹ hovered over the rest of this remarkable evening.

While pauses in musicals are most often proscribed by the score or in plays by the script with indicators such as ‘pause’ or ‘long pause’, in this instance credit must go to the director, Rufus Norris. It took wisdom and courage to extend this pause to such a length in the middle of an engaging and dynamic presentation. It also took confidence in his cast’s ability to hold an audience for so long without the coughing, shuffling and fidgeting that usually accompanies ‘awkward’ moments. This pause was a *coup de théâtre* of the first order. It was this director’s willingness to

take a risk that made this pause the part of the show that is best remembered.

In both productions, the pause was used creatively but in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, its use appeared to hide what would otherwise have been *longueurs*. In *London Road*, its innovative use only augmented an already brilliant evening in the theatre.

Conclusion

Mind The Gap has proved to be a very apt title for this essay. It was meant originally as both a kindly warning about the dangers inherent in such a stage direction and as an appeal for more attention to be paid to what is still a nebulous concept: the use of the pause in modern theatre. I fear, however, that the writer has, to use a theatrical reference, been hoisted by his own petard and has found the subject, through both the breadth and depth, was even more difficult to analyse within the limited word count required than was expected. It is easy to tell someone to be wary. It is even easy to explain why the gap is there. The theatrical pause, however, is a shape-shifter and is rarely the same in different productions or even on different nights of the same production. As soon as one thinks one has a grip on it, it changes and new circumstances have to be taken into account. As Socrates found, the more one tries to know, the more one becomes aware of what is not known. *Mind the Gap* is at best a naïve attempt to initiate research into one of the most important techniques of modern theatre, a way of approaching the gaps between words and/or actions without losing the audience's attention or being untrue to what is believed to be the dramatist's intention.

Investigating the pause has led to a brief examination of where and how it has an impact on our lives and a brief glimpse into its use in other arts. It is evident that it has been regarded as useful by the earliest of civilizations from cave art to classical rhetoric and beyond. The pause is learnt from early childhood as a form of paralanguage that reaches into the unspoken communication between animals and gives us a hint of the possibility of telecommunication that science fiction writers at present only ascribe to aliens.

In scrutinizing its use in theatre it was first necessary to define terms and differentiate the pause from the silence. Only then was it possible to discuss the particular relevance it has to the various theatrical practitioners: the comedian, the actor, the director and the playwright. Each has his own perspective that must be taken into account and each has his own contribution to make. The pause needs not only to be believable for an audience but it also needs to supplement the words of the text.

It is hoped that the main contribution *Mind The Gap* can make to current theatre practice, is to demonstrate that the pause can be learnt as an art, in much the same way that comedians learn their comic timing. It takes detailed observation of the self, analysing one's motives and reactions, knowing the thoughts that led from one speech or action to another. It then takes observation of others and analysing their thoughts, emotions and reactions. Comparison helps to discover what is common and what is different in individuals and types, and gives an understanding of a person's ways of thinking, their characteristics.

Learning the pause also requires intense listening, both to the thoughts in one's own head and to others. One has to ask one's self whether a reaction is caused by an individual's background or whether it is 'natural' i.e. a common reaction. Only after intense questioning of how and why those thoughts appear and remembering the sequence, can one begin to predict how others might react in given situations. Once it is understood that people, especially *en masse*, will usually react in a certain way to a given stimulus, one can begin to experiment with the timing of a pause.

It is important to note, however, that audiences, too, need education in the art of the pause, usually through increased exposure to it. Beckett's plays are enjoyed by a lot more people today than when they were first produced because people have become accustomed to the long silences

and are prepared to allow their minds the freedom from centuries old conventions that lead to certain expectations, As John Maynard Keynes noted: ‘The difficulty lies not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones’²¹².

Further research into the pause in modern theatre needs to be practical rather than theoretical and would best be undertaken by a funded company. I would suggest that such a company could conduct ‘workshops’ with actors and directors, using themselves first as an audience, much as Stanislavsky must have done with the Moscow Arts Theatre to produce *The Seagull* and Rex Cramphorne’s Performance Syndicate in Australia did with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. I am convinced that approaching a play like Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*. with the concentration more on the unspoken text than on the dialogue would reveal why Chekhov thought of it as a comedy rather than the melancholy quasi-tragedy of many western productions. Such an approach would highlight the characters’ self-absorption and the audience might see that the spoken conversations are, in fact, the pauses between the dominant silent interior monologues which most of them are conducting. It is a similar approach to that which produced Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Further research could also address the influence of the pause in establishing mood in plays. The current fear of silence or inactivity on stage in some quarters often leads to the necessary ‘temporary stops or rests’ being curtailed because actors feel they ‘have egg on their faces’ or are at a loss as to what to do in the hiatus. Such a company could work on distinguishing between the actor’s pause and the character’s pause, a distinction that *Mind The Gap* has perhaps glossed over in the chapter on ‘Charging the Pause’.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the colloquium entitled *The Pause On Stage* held by the European Association for Theatre Culture in Berlin in January 2010, hosted by Professor Jurij Alschitz. Nor could I attend his workshops in Venice and Graz in August of this year. But it is encouraging to know that the topic is beginning to attract the attention of academics and theatre practitioners throughout the world. Pauses are the spaces in our lives which, like the cavities in the lava after the eruption of Vesuvius in Pompeii, can reveal more than just words alone. They deserve to be considered as equal in their contribution to texts and there needs to be an exchange of ideas about their future use, especially in the light of recent advances in technology and the promotion of multi-skilling.

In *Shadows*, the major creative work of this doctorate submission, I have experimented with filling the pauses in one narrative, the life of the Agnew family, with a second narrative, the television programme, *Secret White Women's Business*, using the form of the English burlesque to satirise the increasing influence that television is having on modern family life and to parody 'reality television'. The interweaving of dialogue between the two areas of stage was achieved by writing the two scripts separately and then combining them, finding the natural momentary pauses in one script to insert dialogue from the other. It was necessary to rely on intuition and experience to estimate the time taken for action on the screen to 'plait' in the onstage dialogue with the screen dialogue and filling the pauses in one with dialogue or action from the other. If modern television audiences have become accustomed to narratives being interrupted by commercials, often with their own narratives, or can swap between programmes and keep up with two or more narratives at once, it is hoped that they will have no problems with

the experiment of simultaneous story lines and the frequent changes of genre of *Shadows*.

Bank Accounts, the minor work of this submission, is another experiment where several brief histories are embedded in a common narrative set in a commonplace environment. The vast majority of an audience will have experienced waiting in a queue in a public place, in this case a suburban branch of a bank, but few will recognise that such waiting is, in fact, a pause in their lives and a pause that can be filled with learning about other members of their community. It does not need the catalyst of a murderer in their midst to trigger sympathy and empathy; the opportunity is always with us to look into the smallest of spaces, even in conversations, to find extra meaning and enrich our lives.

The Art of the Pause is as much the domain of the observer as it is of the creative artist.

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- The Big Picture*, By Jennifer Compton, Dir. Jenny McNae, Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth, WA, 24 Mar 2009
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- The Birthday Party*. By Harold Pinter. Dir. Julian Meyrick. Melbourne Theatre Company, Faifax Studio, The Arts Centre, Melbourne, Vic, 11 Jul 2009.
- Happy Days*. By Samuel Beckett. Dir. Michael Kantor. Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne, Vic, 12 Jul 2009.
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