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Gabriella Ágnes Nagy

1 In December, 1997 I ventured to see a production entitled *Out of the Dark* staged by Katie Mitchell – the RSC has presented shorts by Beckett. It was an unplanned visit on my part, I just walked to the cashier and despite the already full house managed to purchase a ticket with surprising ease. First we watched the Auditor lifting his arms a few times, listened to the Mouth speak. Then we, the spectators were staged, seated around a few small tables with other spectators embarrassedly gazing at each other in a semi-dark area, listening to voices reciting the text of *Embers*. The third situation was the most shocking: we entered an almost completely dark area with no chairs in it, the space felt tight. We listened to voices again, had to stand on our feet feeling all the weight and movements of our bodies, listened to each other breathe and move. Throughout this last scene I was about to burst out of the room, wanted a refund for this unnervingly uneventful performance and forget this joke the Beckettian theatre played on me. I hardly knew anything about birth, apart from reading his plays I knew little about Beckett, and was not able to distinguish between the aesthetic experience and my own bodily reactions: the corporal dimension subverted, even overwrote the cognitive and the aesthetic. The liminality of my experience was the experience of radical bodily presence that made me aware of my own pain, panic and fears – whose memory lingered on for a long time.

2 In the following study I would like to sketch the history of Beckett’s psychoanalysis to show where and how his therapy was arrested. The analysis of a few dramatic works will highlight those aspects and images that are closely connected to pre-, and perinatal images. His approach to language also plays a significant role in my interpretation since what “lurks behind” the veil is the body, the pain, the memory – subverting the expressivity and workings of language. Beckett’s work is deeply visual, and musical in fact (more in the sense of rhythm), and always questions the body in space. The constant interplay between absence and presence, the visible and the invisible, the self and other,
fiction/dream and reality, speech and silence, movement and immobility, darkness that frames light etc., make these theatrical texts unique in their experiment with all the elements of theatrical performance – in fact, sometimes the collapse of these binaries are at work.

3 Samuel Beckett is famous for translating and directing his own work and for insisting on particular stage images – he considered theatrical performances as art works in their own right. The Beckettian darkened space is partly a rethinking of the theatrical situation Richard Wagner has inaugurated in Bayreuth in 1876. The darkened auditorium was separated by the orchestral pit – for a full effect it was sunk below the stage level as if to create a better stage illusion. Appia, disciple of Wagner in many ways, has reattached the playing area with the auditorium, used moving bodies and light to reanimate the space of performance – and wished for an active spectator who intellectually, visually and emotionally becomes close to the staged area. Instead of the incorporation of emotions conveyed by actor-characters the spectator himself was to create his own experiences. Beckett’s dark or, half lit, grey areas never strengthen the dramatic illusion – his images have an unreal, even spooky character, their constructedness is always obvious. Rather he attempts to invite the spectator into the adventure of experiencing him/herself, into his various states of minds, bodily feelings, or complete immobility and emotional distress. My argument will focus on the various stagings of the missing other in the darkness. Beckett notoriously wove birth imagery into his dramatic works but also images of intrauterine experiences that appear on the level of verbal references, visual imagery, the rhythmical structure and kinesics.

4 The psychoanalytic situation

A short investigation into Beckett’s life reveals his notorious and well-known interest in questions of birth and prenatal experiences – rooted in his personal involvement with psychoanalysis. His father to whom he was deeply attached died tragically when Beckett was in his mid twenties. This personal loss had a detrimental effect on his mental and physical health: he started to have night sweats, panic attacks, nervous symptoms – generally he was in a state of personal crisis. He was unable to sleep alone, his brother Frank had to stay with him in the same bed for the nights. Finally, the exhausted Beckett family sent Sam to London to analysis with Wilfred Bion. Beckett read widely on the subject of psychology and psychoanalysis. Bion even invited Beckett to the third lecture held by Jung at the Tavistock clinic, where he heard the reference to the girl who has not been born properly. After two years the therapy came to a sudden halt and Beckett never met Bion again. Both became world famous for their work later: Beckett in art, Bion in psychology. In a study Steven Connor analyzed in detail what type of relationship the two men had, and how the method of analysis affected the theme and the style of Beckett’s prose writing. “The distinctive turn in Beckett’s work which psychoanalysis may, through a process of Nachträglichkeit, have helped to effect is a discovery of himself through a turn to the other” (Connor 2008, 32). But these others are part of one’s self and the “battle of soliloquy, as Beckett described it, is a battle against these others, a speaking oneself via their speech” (Connor 2008, 33). Who may these others be? Imaginary others? Split off parts of the personality? A basis for developing schizoid states of mind – which of course was not at all alien to Beckett: many of his characters suffer from some mental disturbance.
As we know from James Knowlson’s biography during the therapeutic treatment based on reductive analysis Beckett had managed to regress into the intrauterine period of his own life:

I used to lie down on the couch and try to go back in my past. I think it probably did help. I think it helped me perhaps to control the panic. I certainly came up with some extraordinary memories of being in the womb. Intrauterine memories. I remember feeling trapped, of being imprisoned and unable to escape, of crying to be let out, no one could hear, no one was listening. I remember being in pain but being unable to do anything about it. (Knowlson 1996, 171.)

Beckett seems to have been able to peer behind the veil that separates the conscious and the cognitive from the unconscious, the emotional and the sensual. Mainstream psychoanalytic theories of the time had not really elaborated on the psycho-somatic aspect of the self but focused on the therapeutic effect of the talking cure, e.g. speech. However, two members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Otto Rank and Wilhelm Reich initiated the research of the mind-body relationship and of the intrauterine experiences. Reich and his disciple, Alexander Lowen is were working on the elaboration of possible connections between the body and psyche; both attributed great importance to the ability of deep breathing and free, rhythmical movements. However, they were silent about issues of birth or intrauterine experiences. It was Otto Rank who began his book by writing that “we are led to recognize the birth trauma the ultimate biological basis of the psychical” (Rank 1993, xxiii). He looked into the matter closer and made a few statements about the nature of his effective therapy sessions: “I noticed that in the end-phase of the analysis the healing process was quite regularly represented by the Unconscious in the typical birth symbolism” (Rank 1993, 3). “In the analytic situation the patient repeats, biologically, as it were, the period of pregnancy” (5). Rank’s book was published in German in 1924 and was almost instantly translated into English in 1929. Chances are, Beckett was familiar with the work and in his writing made attempts to complete the healing process beyond language.

Beckett has never reached the point in his therapeutic sessions where he was able to be reborn. Birth images were transposed onto the stage while images of the prenatal trauma of loosing a twin fetus also pervades his work. It might seem a coincidence that he experienced the same type of entrapment and inability to move on following the death of his father – as is usually experienced in prenatal traumas left to the wayside by psychoanalytic theories. Beckett’s intrauterine memories were reactivated by the loss of a close family member. During the therapy sessions, Bion has suggested that he should write in order to release the pain and the inner struggle. He probably helped Beckett to use the process of artistic creation as a possibility to restore his mental and physical well-being. (Knowlson 1996, 174) Consequently, in a way, writing became a therapeutic tool. By projecting his anxiety, fear of disintegration, periodic immobility to the stage, Beckett at least was able to control them. Didier Anzieu has famously emphasized that works of Beckett may be considered as a means to overcome the obstacles of psychoanalysis, a kind of self-therapy. (Baker 1997, 8) Though initially a prose author, Beckett may have preferred the medium of theatre for its emphasis on the performative, on the body and on sensuality. In one aspect, what psychoanalytic therapy and cognition was not able to resolve, Beckett put on the stage. Not only was he suffering from mental problems, but also from a variety of physical or psychosomatic ailment, including heart palpitation, cysts, depression and later from Dupuytren’s contracture that embittered his daily life.
What is there beyond psychoanalysis, beyond the talking cure? The details about his analysis suggest that whatever he was unable to face, process and make himself conscious about during the therapy sessions he fictionalized. Beckett’s dramatic text, *Not I* has been considered as a text about the trauma of birth. (Tonning 2005-2006) But it has also been analyzed from the point of view of the subject trying to constitute itself. When staging the text Beckett was hesitating whether the Auditor was needed or not. Despite his general reluctance to transpose a work he adapted *Not I* from the stage to television. He redesigned the work for Billie Whitelaw in 1973 omitting the figure of the Auditor. Eventually he even came to prefer the version that was specifically prepared for television. According to Slavoj Žižek in the text of *Not I* the possibility of dialogue between two speakers – the client talking and the therapist listening – is already undermined.

In the 1978 Paris production he did reinstate the character but from then on abandoned the image, concluding that it was perhaps ‘an error of the creative imagination’... From the Lacanian perspective, it is easy to locate the source of this trouble: the Auditor gives body to the big Other, the Third, the ideal Addressee-Witness, the place of Truth which receives and thereby authenticates the speaker’s message. The problem is how to visualize/materialize this structural place as a figure on the imaginary of the stage: while every play (or even speech) needs it, but every concrete figuration is by definition inadequate, i.e., it cannot ever ‘function effectively’ on stage. (Žižek)

Žižek goes on to explain that Beckett’s play starts where the analytic situation ends: the ideal addressee-witness, the place of truth is no longer in function. The Auditor keeps lifting his arms up and down except in the last case when he does not move. And that is where the subject has the chance to articulate herself. This is a critique of the psychoanalytic situation: Beckett shows how it is different from dialogue, how it is always impossible to understand and heal the other in this relationship – by speech and by cognition alone no fundamental healing takes place.

In a famous letter to Axel Kaun from 1937 – written not long after his stay in London – Beckett expressed his doubts concerning language:

> More and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. (…) To drill one whole after another into it until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through – I cannot imagine a higher goal for today’s writer. (Fehsenfeld 2009, 518)

Perhaps he would have liked to unveil all that language sought to conceal and colonize: the body, emotions, feelings, energies, breathing, movement, the tone of vocal sounds and visuality. And all those experiences that are inaccessible through language and images, experiences, memories that remain on the level of body tissue, on the level of cells. Transposing the metaphor from the symbolic back to the corporeal the veil as an anatomical tissue might also be the vehicle to (the tenor of) the membrane separating two fetuses – the one alive trying to get through to the other one who is either something (still there) or nothing (vanished).

**Writing for the void**

Those plays that were staged during Beckett’s lifetime that might be conceived of in terms of therapeutic writing (encouraged by Bion) continued. Undoubtedly the most powerful and most potential character in his first staged play was named after a painter,
Andreas Pozzo, a 17th century Jesuit painter famous for decorating church interiors and for writing a book on painting architectural perspectives and stage sets. Pozzo’s self-portrait from the 1690s depicts him sitting in a church interior with his right hand pointing towards the vaults that he usually painted with trompe d’oeil images. His index finger points to the possible vanishing points that was so emphatic in Pozzo’s frescoes – the vanishing point of the fresco in St Ignatius chapel for instance is where the clouds open up to make the sky visible behind – the viewer has the illusion of being able to take a glimpse behind the veil. However, the finger not only points behind the visible but also to the work, to the surface to be painted, to the art and craft of painting.

In the second staged play written by Beckett there is another missing character whose name guarantees her presence in the plot, although not listed under the dramatis personae embodied on stage. Nell, Hamm, Clov and Nagg all acquired their names from German, French or English words meaning hammer, nail or peg. Melamphy argues that Mother Pegg who “died of darkness” represents a fifth character never embodied, but inseparable, an être manqué, a non-persona, a non-character (Melamphy 2006). In the letter written to Axel Kaun and quoted above, Beckett stated his disbelief in the expressivity of language. “The knot of criss-cross of the sayable and the said double crosses the mystery” and the goal of the writer is to “show how this knot is nothing but a cleverly folded hole, a tightly encircled gap, a not at the heart of knot” (Melamphy 2006, 495). The texture that Beckett weaves while creating his images might just be centered around this void always referred to, this represented lack, this nothingness. Melamphy refers to an interview where Beckett spoke of his feelings and of an absent being : “a presence – embryonic, undeveloped – of a self that might have been but never got born : an être manqué” (qtd in Melamphy 492). He also quotes another passage about a being who might have been “assassinated before my birth”. Apparently Beckett was preoccupied in his mind with someone missing, someone dead prenatally, someone who belonged to him – Melamphy discusses the significance of this absent being on the level of philosophical theories. “Each particular being is, as such [...] a ‘transcendental’: a metaphysicality transcending the more fundamental being that is a being without being, an être manqué” (Melamphy 498.). But he fails to connect the issue of birth with this absence. Still, Beckett seems to look for and stage this disappearance and absence from various points of view all through his playwriting career.

In 1968 when Beckett hastily scratched a short playlet on a paper table cover of a café he simply condensed the two distant points of life. This 35 second piece was titled Breath for an obvious reason: the presence or absence of breathing signals life or death – this is how we enter the world and how we exit. According to Beckett “man is born – vagitus. Then he breaths for a few seconds, before the death rattle intervenes.” (quoted in Gontarski 2006, 432.) From a different perspective life and death are both the creation of God, the Hebrew word for breath, ruach also refers to the animating spirit of God. Understood in this wider, theological context the movement of air is the divine existence whether in life or in death. When Tynan staged Breath in 1969 as part of his revue called Oh, Calcutta, he added a few lines to the text to present three naked people. Beckett was appalled by this version but “his contract forbade immediate interference” (Gontarski 2006, 440-441.) Between 1998 and 2001 the Guimarães brothers staged Beckett’s works, among them Breath+. They have also felt the need to incorporate the one who breathes and staged a naked live actor in an embryonic sack. The installation included other scenes as well in which for instance actors were submerged in a fish tank. (Gontarski 2006, 446)
production was clearly referring to natal experiences through the images of the embryo, the membrane and the water dispersing the Beckettian single condensed image into various scenes.

15 *Breath* might not only be understood as a birth rite and death rite into this world or as a biblical reference, the symbolic representation and staging of the divine creation but also from the point of view of mythology. The contest between the Apollonic and the Dionysiac began with the figure of Marsyas – the prototype of the Dionysiac. Marsyas and Apollo took part in a music contest which was won by Apollo with his music over the fierce, ecstatic music of the satyre. “For Marsyas, music is wind, breath, *pneuma, ruach* – animating spirit, feeling made sound.” (Albright 2003, 138) However, Apollo did not contend himself with this victory alone but skinned the satyre, and hung his skin onto a pine tree with the inner organs exposed to the wind. According to Daniel Albright the murder of the satyre is not an unambiguous victory since “the right response to Apollo’s lyre is transcendental calm […] the right response to Marsyas’ *aulos* is to convulse in a dance-orgy, or in a spasm of pain.” (Albright 2003, 138) In a way Marsyas won the contest and paid the price for it since the fierce, sensual and even murderous reaction performed by Apollo laid bare the Dionysiac aspects of the Apollonian. “Apollo’s sadistic suppression of the sensuousness of expressive music is itself an expressive act”. The Apollonic aspect of breath, the calm, rhythmic sound veils the ecstatic body from which the breath emanates. Those first moments of birth consist of the experience of pain, flesh and blood. In a performance entitled *Oxitocin* the spectators were walking into a bathing area through the dressing rooms while viewing a few mini-performances, the very first of which was a man rhythmically massaging the dead and skinned body of a piglet: birth is the matter of blood, pain, flesh and rhythm.

16 As Beckett read Otto Rank’s works, he knew how closed spaces, rooms represent the embryonal sack, the membrane. His closed and dark places restage this experience of being enclosed inside the womb. As opposed to Rank who – due to the lack of precise and detailed information – thought that this prenatal experience was always a pleasurable (oceanic) state usually ended by the painful and traumatic experience of birth, Beckett never presents his half lit, dark, grey and closed spaces as pleasurable ones. Quite the contrary. While Rank could not have known that there might be a prenatal trauma occurring before birth and defining one’s birth and life Beckett repeatedly refers to the womb as an unpleasant, traumatic space with a void. Beckett’s birth itself took a long time, and as opposed to his brother, Frank, he cried a lot as a baby and in general was a sickly child (Cronin 1997, 2-3). The prenatal trauma caused the long birth, the crying, the grief and the sickness.

17 In a later play, *Rockaby* he staged a sleepless woman in a rocking chair – the narrative “summarizes its subject existence as a perpetual search for another […] like the self” (Mcmullan 1993, 105). The rocking movements of the chair repeat the rocking movements of the mother (mother rocker) but again there is another one, another being, another soul to whom the woman finally descends. According to the stage directions the rocking is slight, slow and controlled mechanically without assistance from W. The French title of the play *Berceuse* furthermore evokes the image of an infant cradled by her mother, the songs sang to lull her to sleep. The fading rhythm of the play is structured around the pauses, dividing the play into four sections. The main focus of the sections again follow a pattern: search, withdrawal to an internal space by the window, search again, and finally the last withdrawal – the image of the woman descending the stairs and the final words of
“fuck life/ stop her eyes/ rock her off/ rock her off” (Beckett 1986, 442). McMullan rightly points out that the rocker suggests both cradle and coffin, birth and death are intertwined, brought together again. The single image presented on stage incorporates and condenses images of mother and child, the circularity of life – the child taking the mother’s place in the chair, the entrance point of birth and the exit point of death, the self and the other, the rocking movement and the stasis, the living and the dead – all hierarchized relations going bankrupt in a process of descent into silence and immobility.

The rhythmic structure of Rockaby plays a crucial role in the interpretation of the image and the mise en scene. As in the 2009 production entitled Fragments, directed by Peter Brook, Rockaby was staged in a half lit area, with a woman sitting in a regular armchair, not rocking at all, but still beginning the performance with attempts of self-rocking. At the end of the third section she stood up from her chair and walked backwards to the bottom of the stage, then turned around, walked back to the chair to continue her speech about the death of the mother. While the version staged by the Hungarian Tünet Együttes, 2009 was based on the image of the rocking chair wildly, hysterically and aggressively shaken by another actor. The ferocious movement of the rocking chair made W very unstable, she had to forcefully hold onto the chair, her performance of this fierce struggle to stay inside pointed to the impossibility and unattainability of the protecting maternal womb. The rocking chair as symbolic womb ceased to be the shelter. In the performance Beckett has imagined the white face and the dark dress of W as rocking in and out of the area of light – she was rocking herself between life and death.

In one reading the theme of Rockaby is the theme of the lost twin. The search for the lost one in a chair - a symbolic space of the maternal womb – is an image of a fetus loosing the other one, searching for it in vain, and no longer able to respect life. When a fetus dies off, the heartbeat starts to slow down, stops at times, there might even be a fierce struggle from the part of the dying fetus. The other one senses the agony and has to stay together with a first dying then immobile corpse, a body frozen in death, a body beginning to decay and changing the chemicals, the taste of the water. It may finally get dissolved completely or parts of it merge with the body of the living fetus. The memory of this event might be reactivated later: to stop moving is to die that can only be overcome by the constraint to move on – the quintessence and motto of the Beckettian oeuvre. Typical symptoms of the lost twin are: difficulty to be born, difficulty getting up, cysts, lumps, dysfunction in human relationships (over attachment or no ability to be attached), difficulty sleeping, or staying asleep, doubling, fear of being touched, depression, loneliness, guilt, panic attacks, heart problems (Austermann 2006) – almost all of which was symptomatic in Beckett’s life. The title of Rockaby may be telling in this respect as well. It not just refers to the rhythmic movements and the lullaby sung for someone to be able to fall asleep – it also derives from the word rock: the hard and stiff tiny body of a fetus.

The image in Ohio Impromptu directly stages the twin situation and at the same time shows visible similarities with the image of the Romantic doppelgänger. The phenomenon of the split personality might be rooted in the inability of integrating aspects of the self: a part of ourselves due to traumatic events, some souls gone astray and then possessing someone alive as in Romantic fiction, but even the experience of being together with someone at the start of our lives. Beckett built the situation on the Romantic tradition as there are numerous Romantic novels in which the protagonist finds a book telling about his own life – just as the Reader reads about his life in a book to his double. This is a
Romantic framing technique that provides the character the chance of meeting his own self. “The moment the Romantic subject sees itself as being and containing the whole world – it has stepped out of the confines of its own selfhood into an unlimited, indefinite identity.” (Rossbach 2008, 477.) In the text of *The Disciples of Sais* (1802) the protagonist finally succeeds in lifting the veil of the goddess only to see his own self behind. Romantic writers preferred to write in the first person or from the character’s point of view to let the inner struggle and conflict develop more clearly. Doubling in Romantic fiction also became connected to intoxicated states of minds, madness induced by drugs or alcohol. That never appears in Beckett, characters are always high on their own personality disorders or they are in (futile) search for their own identity that is never single.

*Ohio Impromptu* being one of Beckett’s last plays, was specifically written for a Beckett conference held in 1981 in Columbus, Ohio. The audience consisted of scholars gathering specifically for the conference – therefore the text is replete with references and allusions to the academic world. For instance “white nights” meaning not just those sleepless nights the Reader had to experience but the geographical location of many Beckett manuscripts in Austin. However, from the manuscripts and of false starts of *Ohio Impromptu* it is also clear that his regular writing technique of gradual self-erasure what Adam Seelig has coined the “deranger” canceling out his authorial presence he hesitated about the person and number of the Reader’s voice: first he constructed an autobiographical monologue with the grammatical subject of “I”, then switched to “he” to finally finish the text as “they”. “Beckett deranges a single consciousness into several counteracting, self-negating voices, thereby making it impossible for any coherent voice to exist.” (Seelig 2000, 378.) When the missing other in the figure of the double is finally staged and made visible, the madness and the mentally disturbed character, whose image Beckett so often created and insisted on in the monologues, disappears from the scene. What is left is a dream and a clear and stable mirror image of the character, the identical figure found and looked at. The search for and the escape from the gaze has come to an end.

There is a contradiction, however, between the scenic and the verbal: the narrative of the text tells of a loved one lost, while the image shows the other one found. In the end “simultaneously they lower their hands to the table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless.” (Beckett 1986, 448.) From the writing of *Happy Days* in 1961 in many of his plays “Beckett has deliberately ‘decentered’ the image in terms of stage space.” (McMullan 1993, 115.) In *Ohio Impromptu* the table is mid-stage, with a mirror image of the two identical figures, hat on the table. “The pattern or rhythm of the visual elements therefore suggests a certain harmony and complementarity, rather than fragmentation and isolation.” (McMullan 1993, 115.) And the danger zone, the void around which the characters of *Quad II* so eagerly march seems to have disappeared for a moment. As McMullan has pointed out the integration of the two figures becomes the “culmination of the emotional articulation or reunion and comfort, transcending the different incarnations of self and other”. (McMullan 1993, 120.) As formulated by Beckett: “With never a word exchanged they grew to be as one.” (Beckett 1986, 447.) And again the final image of the play stages the two figures looking at each other petrified and without emotions, “expressionless”.

In *Ohio Impromptu* there is great tension between the words that reanimate the gesture of looking and the actual act of looking staged. The actual looking is a balanced, reciprocal, final acknowledgment of the other, a possible reconnection. “They sat on as though
turned to stone.” (Beckett 1986, 448.) reads the narrative and this is also the exact image
the play ends with. It is only the rhythmic knocking sound that structures the text,
everything else is frozen. The image of the one turned to stone is a clear allusion to those
who have faced the mythological figure of Medusa. There is great ambiguity whether it is
Medusa’s look that kills – a mortal/ fatal look – or the view is so terrifying that whoever
looks at her dies of horror; she is dangerous both by looking and being looked at. (Bal
1999, 136.) The image of the Reader and of the Listener is frozen before the moment of
horror would arise: the killing act by visual means does not happen. The figures finally
meet each others’ eyes, get through to each other in a state that is void of any feelings,
void of words or movements. This void is different from the hole in the texture of the veil,
since it is not hollow, it is not empty, not a cavity but an absence, an opening, a state of
being without. In the mutual act of looking the figures poke holes into the veil of
language to see the void that has been made empty and vacant. The void around which
Beckett likes to circulate is a space that was inhabited before, a space with which he has
to have a connection but the shock had been too great to be able to move on. Other
Beckett characters like Winnie for instance keep talking and doing as two means of
keeping going but to keep looking at and recognizing what is may be another possibility
to overcome the paralysis and poke holes into the linguistic, the visual and the
anatomical veil.

Depth of minds at the threshold of liminality

In investigating the role of psychotherapy and the role of the other in some of Beckett’s
plays I have constructed a narrative that attempts to disentangle the complex and at
times inextricable theatrical images. As the Reader reads from the book “What he had
done alone could not be undone. Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone.
By him alone.” (Beckett 1986, 446.) There are no images and words in Beckett that can be
unambiguously performed or finished – there is never a final understanding only aspects
of interpretation. Even the veil behind which he wishes to take a look, the veil he does
want to poke, to drill holes into, had been set into motion by the animating breath of the
divine spirit is only half transparent. Its various implications might refer to the symbolic
veil of language, to the philosophical veil as the threshold of the transcendent, or the
threshold between the visible and the invisible, the cognitive and the irrational, and to
the corporeal veil as membrane, a threshold that connects, “a space of possibilities,
empowerment and metamorphosis” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 205). Behind the veil is the
something that had turned into nothing – the oscillation between presence and absence is
contained in the same moment; their opposition had collapsed. The body that emerges
from behind the veil is both a personal corporeal memory and the body suppressed and
concealed by theory and language. Beckett pokes the veil, stages the body in extreme
pain and under extreme stress and also in search for an integrated corporeal existence.

Beckett assiduously kept his manuscripts, his notes to be handed over later to various
research collections. However, he has destroyed his notebooks written during his therapy
– there is no documentation that would help us understand the psychological depth of his
thoughts. It is only his dramatic texts, the interviews, letters, his fiction that allow
interpretations to emerge. Beckett has emphasized the visual aspect of theatre, his
images were born out of paintings (Knowlson 2003). The locus of looking, e.g. theatron
gained importance over the drama, the action. The stage became reduced to the visual
and to the verbal. But both speech and image had been reduced, destructed and deconstructed. In the production directed by Katie Mitchell spectators had the chance to experience the annihilation of their role as theatrical spectators. In the first scene they were watching a radiophonic metasituation: an Auditor listening to the other talk. In the second scene spectators were bound to watch each other. In the third scene of That Time we were mainly in the dark, the locus of looking has disappeared, while listening to the voice speak we could feel our own bodies reacting to it, to the situation and to our own reactions. The production turned the attention away from the stage towards the spectator, eliminated the separation of stage from auditorium, actor from spectator, processes of cognition from the emotions of the embodied audience. At that moment the work of art emerged as an event in itself, it became a liminal act that allowed a transformation: across the barely visible staged image there was no auditor to listen to, no spectator who watches but various states of consciousness to physically articulate sensations and meanings letting the corporeal memories reactivate themselves.

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NOTES
1. He read Adler, Freud, Jung, Ernest Jones, Otto Rank, books on gestalt therapy and behaviourism.
2. By listing them together I would not like to create the impression that Rank and Reich were especially close to each other. Rank was Freud’s favorite student and as a birthday present dedicated his famous book, The Trauma of Birth to Freud. The book was controversial and was forgotten for a long time. Reich himself was even a more controversial if not scandalous figure just as his theories were.
4. Act Without Words II can be considered as a very clear image of the twin situation: two sacks next to each other, each containing a person, a body.

ABSTRACTS
The dramatic works of Beckett frequently stage images of birth or intrauterine experiences. Beckett’s involvement and his failure in psychoanalysis is a key to understanding why he turned to writing and staging his strange, perplex and psychotic characters. His approach to language and his stage images can be understood as projections of pre- and perinatal traumas. Recent medical and psychological research helps in understanding much of what Beckett himself had to face without being able to properly name them. In this respect most of his works misfire, becoming purported but void acts.

Les textes dramatiques de Beckett mettent souvent en scène des images de la naissance et des expériences intra-utérines. Son attitude par rapport à la psychanalyse et l’échec de sa psychothérapie nous aident à comprendre les raisons pour lesquelles il a créé et mis en scène des personnages bizarres, perplexes et psychotiques. La conception du langage et les images scéniques de Beckett peuvent être également interprétées comme des projections de ses traumatismes prénatals ou péri-natals. Les apports des recherches médicales et psychologiques récentes nous mènent à comprendre certains phénomènes auxquels Beckett lui-même dut faire face sans toutefois avoir été capable de les définir. De ce point de vue, les œuvres de Beckett peuvent être considérées comme autant d’essais “ratés”, des actes voulus mais vains.
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