A Radical Knife: Collected Essays 2014 – 2023

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PREFACE (Heron, 2024)

Damn the knife, damn all the knifes, damn the devil who created knifes. (Garcia-Lorca; trans. Hughes, 1996)

There is a tension in this writing – some fifty thousand words written over ten years – between the *radical* and the *entangled*, from avant-garde, experimental theatre practice to the interdisciplinary study of entanglement (Barad 2007; Ingold, 2010). In the essays that follow there is an interwoven thread of performance practice within/across arts education, research methods and transdisciplinary pedagogy. This work has sometimes taken a paradoxical path from the roots of artistic experimentation to a 'branching-out' mode of transdisciplinary research, often in collaboration with others in communities of practice. From Baz Kershaw, I take the notion of paradox in performance (writing here about WSI):

> the paradoxes are the product of the company's increasingly determined attempt to mount a socio-politically critical practice in an ideologically hostile environment. They are the sharp edge of a *radical knife* that aims to cut through the hegemonic bindings of a pathological 'normality' (Kershaw, 1983, 200, *emphasis added*)

Some of these essays use that radical blade as method to address enduring problems of theatre and education, but many more discuss the writing of Samuel Beckett in particular, as it has been embodied and examined in theatre laboratories and university classrooms. While there are some digressions into the study of modernism and early-modern culture, there is a focus on contemporary practice throughout and this allows the writing to move freely between disciplines and methods. Taken together, the essays and interviews adopt an entangled approach to methodology itself, especially where the writing addresses issues of education, health and politics. A 'pedagogy of place' (Gruenwald, 2003) informs the writing where those interviewed emphasise the primacy of environment and community when describing their own experiences of making as failing, trying again, and failing again. Each experience is situated, and therefore embedded, in the complex meshwork of *place*:

> Every place is regarded as a knot tied from the strands of the movements of its many inhabitants, rather than as a hub in a static network of connectors. Life is a meshwork of successive foldings, not a network, in which the environment cannot be bounded and life is forged in the transformative process of moving around (Morris, 2004). Thus, things do not just follow one another. (Thrift, 2006, 142–3).

This collection attempts to describe each knot – each and every folding – as part of an entangled process of trying and failing to cut through to the root of each conundrum.

‘Aquí no estamos en el teatro: Impossible Plays, Queer Ghosts and Haunted Practices’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism in Contemporary Theatre* (Heron, 2023)

This chapter offers two examples from university arts education in which performance practice intervenes in, or interrupts, academic learning. Each example is carefully selected to demonstrate the various ways in which modernist theatre can be engaged within a cultural education to combine an interdisciplinary approach with ideas from queer studies. Ultimately, I argue that students benefit from a sustained creative engagement with modernism (and its variants) in order to develop a holistic approach to knowledge-making, academic literacy and queer studies. To reimagine an alternative future for the arts, I reach back to the queer past and invite the ghost of Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) to haunt the modern-day university campus. This essay is underpinned by two accounts of performance practice within a research-intensive university: a) a new version of *Play Without a Title* by David Johnston, produced by Fail Better Productions at the University of Warwick, transferring to the Belgrade Theatre Coventry (2008); and b) a workshop process exploring *After Lorca* by Jack Spicer at the same university, in consultation with Spicer scholar Daniel Katz, by the Warwick Student Ensemble (2012). Finally, there is reflection on ‘haunted practices’ in the interdisciplinary environment that emerged at Warwick Arts Centre (2014–9).[1] The essay itself will move between an academic and a *practitioner* voice – a disruption that will be marked by the use of *italics and the present tense for practice* – and each section makes creative use of a different translation of Lorca’s line from *Play without a Title*, ‘Aquí no estamos en el teatro’, as variously: ‘We’re not in the theatre here (Bauer, 1983), ‘We aren’t in the theatre here’ (Edwards, 1994) and ‘This is not the theatre’ (Johnston, 2008). These shifts in translation influence the form and content of each section and remind the reader of the multiple transmissions between literary modernism and live

[1] My own context as practitioner-researcher is unusual, having moved into higher education in 2007 as part of a major collaboration between the University of Warwick and the Royal Shakespeare Company; see Nick Monk et al, *Open-space Learning: A Study in Transdisciplinary* Pedagogy (London: Bloomsbury, 2011). From 2010, this centre for creativity and performance (CAPITAL Centre, 2005–10) merged with the Reinvention Centre to form a new Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning, where I am currently serving in a cross-faculty professorial role as Director. My departmental context is therefore highly interdisciplinary, drawing upon my theatre background in student engagement and curriculum development projects with science, engineering and medicine, as well as the social sciences and the arts. It is within that context that I argue for holistic and inclusive curricula that combine approaches from the arts and humanities with other disciplines, not simply so that students acquire additional methods and skills, but primarily to enhance their epistemic and cultural literacies to take on big problems through collaborative work. One mission for the university in this context, then, is to liberate, transform and repair society. This is informed by a body of critical pedagogy and a history of modernism, with reference to contemporary theatre practice, specifically work with Lorca’s texts as examples of queer modernism.

performance. The essay also makes playful and poetic use of the concepts of ghosting and haunting in theatre practice, as a way of thinking through the practitioner's methods of transmitting text through performance.

'We're not in the theatre here': Impossible Plays

We are not in the theatre here. We are back at university as resident artists. We are no longer producing theatre for paying audiences. We are working with a student ensemble. They have been offered this project as an extracurricular opportunity which merges practices from drama education and actor training through 'open-space learning'. The first project they are devising, as part of the Fail Better residency at the CAPITAL Centre is a new version (and world premiere) of Lorca's Comedia sin Titulo *which David Johnston has translated as* Play Without a Title*, and a much punchier delivery of the text than early translations. His script has the Director saying 'This is not the theatre' as opposed to the more passive 'We're not in theatre here'. We are working with Johnston and his assistant in rehearsal and we have replicated a full professional process for the ensemble, before their academic term begins. This is an immersive learning experience for them as actors, suspending their student identities, which requires a professionalism and poise that they seem to enjoy. It is predicted, but not expected, that these students will explore professional careers or formal training in theatre after they graduate from the university. The work is shown on campus in October 2008 for students and staff and the production is placed on the curriculum of five modules across at least three departments. The members of the production team freely give their time to attend lectures to promote an education programme around the project and return to prepare the ensemble for a transfer to the local Belgrade Theatre Coventry.*

The affective impact of the production explored the theatre of the 'impossible', a term coined by Lorca in relation to his later drama. For Maria Delgado, 'these "impossible" plays are positioned alongside *Poet in New York* as embodiments of the surrealist ethos in Spain, discernible also in Alberti's *Concerning the Angels* and Bunuel and Dali's *Un Chien andalou*'.[2] She continues, noting that

> the "impossible" works do provide alternative modes of dramatic composition that eschew the culminative effect of the three-act tragedy. *When Five Year Pass*, *The*

[2] Maria Delgado, *Federico García Lorca* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 122.

> *Public* and *Play without a Title* all signal an acknowledgement of the breathing, kinetic relationship between the moving living body and its performance environment.[3]

The Warwick production emphasised this relationship in its design by Nomi Everall, with scenography that took a cross-section of a theatre building as its starting point. By focusing on theatrical thresholds (backstage/wing, stage/proscenium, auditorium/box), the company created different moods using Laban efforts, so that each body moved according to different physical states in each section of the set. The audience itself was placed within a black-box drama studio, looking into this cross-section of a theatre which also featured an on-stage audience. Returning to Delgado:

> Overt theatricality becomes the prism through which both characters and audience are given a threshold of revelation. Rather than tell stories, all three prioritize the theatrical experience itself with its inherent reliance on audience reciprocity and reflection. It is perhaps not surprising that *The Public* and *Play without a Title* gravitate around situations in a theatre with the spectator as voyeur often positioned against the actor as agent … Lorca moves beyond a theatre of utility.[4]

These impossible plays also take on an expressionist quality, which Delgado notes, and an important aspect of their textual status is as unfinished works and dramatic fragments.[5] The 2008 production approached this text as a new play (in a new translation) and as an unfinished fragment of literary modernism. The 'ghost' of the author was ever-present in the rehearsal process, not only because Lorca stages an author/director/auteur character as the protagonist, but also because the character is shown to be cancelling a performance. When we compare these dramatic ideas with the biographical circumstances surrounding the play, we evoke multiple 'ghostings' in performance: Lorca's death and the search for his corpse, Lorca's 'impossible' plays that could not be staged in his lifetime, the queer characters that

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[3] Delgado, *Federico García Lorca*, 138. 'The dramaturgy that Lorca was to refer to as his 'real objective' (OCIII 631) remarkably filtered into the public domain only from the 1970s, beginning with *When Five Years Pass*, scheduled for production in late 1936 but not produced in Spain until 1978, forty years after its first print run. *The Public*, published in its extant incomplete form, did not appear until 1976, opening at Milan's Piccolo Theatre in Lluis Pasqual's premiere production ten years later. The single act of *PWAT*, now often known as *The Dream of Life*, was first published in 1976 and premiered, again by Pasqual, for Spain's Centro Dramatico Nacional, 1989'. See Delgado, *Federico García Lorca*, 121.

[4] Delgado, *Federico García Lorca*, 139.

[5] 'Unfinished at the time of Lorca's death … he conceived [*PWAT*] as a three-act venture with the first act set in Madrid's Español Theatre, the second in a morgue visited by the Actress and the Authors and the third in heaven populated by Andalusian angels, where the Author ends his Everyman-like journey'. See Delgado, *Federico García Lorca*, 165.

could not be performed but feature heavily in these plays (most notably in *The Public)*, and the Spanish revolutionaries from the 1930s that break into the theatre in this play. As Delgado reminds us: 'The theatre of politics appears not so distant from the politics of theatre …The Author distrusts performance but has chosen to work within it … For theatre, like the forest of *A Midsummer Nights' Dream*, is a transformative space'.[6] Lorca, within this context, is a queer modernist haunting the contemporary stage. Queer modernism, then, requires some unpacking here.

Ben De Witte argues 'that an unapologetically queer reading might shed new light on the play's reputation and self-declared status as an "impossible" drama or "poem to be booed at"'[7] in an article that positions *The Public* as an example of queer modernist theatre. Like *Play without a Title, The Public* 'undoes the safe distance between spectator and spectacle, blurring the lines between the action on stage and the spectator's fantasies and associations, such that audience members may feel so exposed and ashamed that they want to intervene' (2017, 27).[8] This central insight around undoing boundaries, whether spatial or cultural, has significant value to the 2008 production under discussion, the 2012 *After Lorca* workshops that followed, and the subsequent *Emerge* festivals between 2014 and 2019.[9]

'We aren't in the theatre here': Queer Ghosts

We aren't in the theatre here. The student ensemble is exploring a series of texts in the Humanities Studio through workshops that fall outside of their formal studies. The current context is student engagement and alumni development work for the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) which superseded CAPITAL in 2010. Two years on, we are applying the findings from the 'open-space learning' project and engaging students from all three faculties in an extracurricular programme that uses theatre practice to develop their creative skills to enhance their current studies and improve their cultural literacy as future graduates. The ensemble is composed of students from English and Theatre but also Economics and Maths, which develops an

[6] Delgado, *Federico García Lorca*, 166.
[7] Ben De Witte, 'Dramatizing Queer Visibility in *El público*: Federico García Lorca in Search of a Modern Theatre', *Modern Drama* 60, no. 1 (2017): 27.
[8] De Witte, 'Dramatizing Queer Visibility', 27. De Witte also recalls the work of queer scholar Heather Love, who 'links "the indeterminacy of *queer*" (as opposed to *gay* or *lesbian*) to the "indeterminacy, expansiveness, and drift of the literary – particularly the experimental, oblique version most closely associated with modernism textual production"' (28).

[9] The Emerge Festival ran from 2014 to 2019 at the Warwick Arts Centre in partnership with the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the 2020 festival was postponed and then relaunched in 2021.

interdisciplinary approach to student engagement. One of the devised projects this year is a workshop process on After Lorca *by Jack Spicer, with the guest academic Daniel Katz invited into the studio. The ensemble workshop Spicer's poetry with reference to Lorca's drama, drawing upon our previous experience of staging* Play without a Title.

The American poet Jack Spicer (1925–1965) was born in Los Angeles, attended the University of California at Berkeley where he engaged in the local political and literary scene. Subquentely dubbed the 'Berkeley Renaissance' (another kind of transmission here) his circle included fellow poets Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan. His literary output includes *After Lorca:*

> ostensibly composed of translations of Lorca's work, the faithfulness of which Lorca questions. There are also eleven original Spicer poems masquerading as translations, combined with six "programmatic" letters to Lorca in which Spicer articulates his poetics and his personal woes about poetry, love, and his contemporaries.[10]

Working with these poems through open-space workshops allowed the student ensemble to use performance practice as a research method to adapt and examine these texts as poetry and drama. By re-embodying the two characters of Lorca and Spicer, as implied by the text, they developed devising strategies for a performance piece based on the poetry. Fundamentally, this approach gave us an opportunity to hear the poems spoken, but also to embody the gaps between the Spicer poems and the Lorca letters, to reach into the space between translation and adaptation to find something performable. As Gizzi notes in his introduction:

> [Spicer] would write later that "The ghosts the poems were written for are the ghosts of poems. We have it second-hand. They cannot hear the noise they have been making." He's covering Lorca, not quite in the way a rock band covers a tune but in the way a bandage covers a fatal wound. Poetry cuts deep. Lorca may have been murdered, but he's alive in this book and now too is Spicer. At its root, poetry is a *haunted practice* calling to the dead, crossing boundaries again and again.[11]

Spicer's Lorca notes the following, about the whole creative endeavour: 'It seems to me the waste of a considerable talent on something which is not worth doing. The younger

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[10] Gizzi, Preface to *After Lorca*, 2021, xiii–xiv.
[11] Gizzi, Preface to *After Lorca*, 2021, xv, emphasis added.

generation of poets may view with pleasure Mr. Spicer's execution of what seems to me a difficult and unrewarding task'.[12] However, Katz argues for a higher valuation:

> *AL* is undoubtedly a central work in the venerable tradition of modernist translation outlined by Steven Yao. Finally, its figuration of itself as a homoerotic collaboration between "Lorca" and "Jack" and its outline of the dynamics of queer poetic transmission through the Whitman-Lorca-Spicer network it establishes, render it a crucial work of queer poetics.[13]

Katz's view of the impact of 'queer poetic genealogies' on Spicer particularly interested the ensemble that were devising a performance response to the text in 2012. Having Katz in the studio to respond directly to the work, as well as having access to both literary executors (Gizzi and Killian), leant a gravitas to process and a connection to California, the work of the San Francisco Poets Theatre in particular. Katz's work on correspondence[14] has been of particular value to the theatrical process, as it allowed the ensemble to understand the poetic nuance of queer letter writing in performance. The notion of letters passing between queer ghosts, then re-embodied in the university studio, transmits texts from Lorca to Spicer to contemporary bodies through the haunted practice of performance.

'This is not the theatre': Haunted Practices

This is not the theatre. This is the practitioner voice. This voice has queered this essay in the same way it queers the curriculum through cultural interventions. The voice is responsible for subverting curricula by inviting students to step away from their home disciplines to collaborate as a performance ensemble. Over time this group will become an alumni network which we are mapping out in 2014, as we prepare for our first graduate arts festival Emerge, in partnership with Warwick Arts Centre, our professional arts venue on campus. We look ahead to alumni artists coming back to work with students themselves, closing the gap between student and alumni identities as well as between presumed amateur and professional roles. We look ahead to five years of festivals and workshops where we facilitate learning between graduate companies and student artists, and support them to take their first steps towards professional practice through this network. We are opening up a space beyond campus to develop new possibilities, work experience opportunities and

[12] Spicer, *After Lorca*, 1957/2021, 3.
[13] Daniel Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 53.

[14] See Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, 2013.

direct access to the theatre practitioners. We are collaborating across the university through IATL, bringing students from the arts and sciences together.

In this final section I will take forward the thematic strands and relate them to university cultures that continue to 'haunt' the curriculum. When we teach the impossible plays of queer modernism, such as Lorca's *Play without a Title*, a reflexive dimension is introduced to the study of literary modernism – through marginal works and unpublished writing fragments – so queer ghosts are honoured, especially queer modernists who continue to 'haunt' university curricula. They have unfinished business, in the manner of a ghost story, but we also have unfinished business with them. I will return to the notion of 'haunted practices' in order to consider another transmission of the arts and humanities within an interdisciplinary curriculum, where the creative arts have an enduring value within higher education.

Firstly, it is worth restating that the study of literary modernism is greatly enhanced by performance practice, whether co-curricular or otherwise. Drama education co-evolved with literary studies, and all our disciplines remain provisional, whether we are located in faculties or departments of arts, culture, education, media or performance.[15] Secondly, we remember our queer ghosts every time we teach them, and the example of Lorca, via Spicer, has given us a rich seam of work that has been characterised as 'Lorca's afterlives' (Delgado, 2008) or **'**Apocryphal Lorca' (Mayhew, 2009). For the former:

> it is also evident in the lyrics of Marc Almond, the former Soft Cell frontman, for who homosexual affirmation has been indelibly bound up with the location of a sensibility that views both writers, like Wilde, Rimbaud and Cocteau, as enabling resources that allow for the articulation of 'other' voices.[16]

Thirdly, haunted practices are always already at play when we teach literary modernism, whether textual, theatrical or queer. Our pedagogical practices have much to gain from our creative practice and vice versa. Whenever we invite artists and alumni back to our campus, we summon new ghosts of performance to haunt our teaching and research. The notion of 'the haunted stage' (Carlson, 2003) has been extensively disseminated, but I am arguing here for a haunted *practice*, a contemporary mash-up of modernist memories and desires for a

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[15] See Gavin Bolton, *Acting in Classroom Drama: A Critical Analysis* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1998).

[16] Delgado, *Federico García Lorca*, 191.

queer future, whenever and wherever that is possible. As Spicer writes to Lorca: 'You are dead and the dead are very patient.'[17]

NOTE

The performance projects discussed above would not have been possible without the contributions of David Johnston (*Play without a Title)* and Daniel Katz (*After Lorca*). Furthermore, the practice itself was greatly enhanced by a succession of Warwick students and Fail Better collaborators between 2008 and 2014, but here I particularly want to acknowledge the major contribution of designer Nomi Everall. Finally, I would like to dedicate the essay to the memory of Kevin Killian of the San Francisco Poets Theatre, who freely gave of his time to talk about the queer ghosts of Spicer and Lorca and record a video message for the students during the process.

[17] Spicer, *After Lorca*, 10.

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‘Restriction gives freedom’ in *Samuel Beckett today/Aujourd’hui* (Heron & Messias, 2022)

Nando Messias[18] is a Brazilian artist based in London, who brings a ‘queer’ perspective to our understanding of Beckett’s drama and his wider aesthetics which can be characterised as *Beckettian-queer* (cf. Heron, 2021). Queer Studies is an expanding field that combines interdisciplinary methods from the social sciences with a sustained exploration of sexuality and gender informed by humanities scholarship (e.g. Bersani, 1995). More recently, queer theorists have further developed the field by using Beckettian texts as objects of study (e.g. Thomas, 2019) which is explored in more depth in the ‘Queer Studies’ essay of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Samuel Beckett* (TBC). This interview documents a queer performance artist who makes use of, and reference to, Beckett’s writing in their original creative practice. The dialogue therefore contributes to the field in a number of ways, enhancing our understanding of Beckett, gender and sexuality, as well as queer/trans-experience.

Messias positions themself as non-binary queer, in dynamic co-existence with all pronouns and none, and therefore using he/she/they in relation to context, situation and/or positionality. This is a queer creative strategy which has certain resonance in relation to Beckettian subjectivity, where the self is continually dislocated and dispersed through a series of encounters with the world. Anna McMullan has captured this phenomenological position as follows, where ‘the body’ in Beckett ‘is presented as both sign and site, engine or *matrix* of production (of stories, semblances, voice, footfalls or hiccups) and *fabric* to be composed and recomposed with limited materials’ (2010,125, *emphasis added*). Messias’ *matrix* is a body that can perform any gender, no gender, and all genders including their own; as a movement practitioner they also use the body in performance as raw material, like

[18] Nando Messias' work straddles performance art, dance and theatre. Their performances combine beautiful images with a fierce critique of gender, visibility and violence. Nando has performed at prestigious venues such as the Royal Court, The Gate, Hayward Gallery, V&A, Tate Britain, Roundhouse, Royal Vauxhall Tavern and ICA, among other spaces across the UK and internationally. As well as a practitioner, Nando is movement director for Theo Adams Company and a researcher of queer theory and performance. Nando’s publications include ‘Sissy that Walk: The Sissy’s Progress’ in *Queer Dramaturgies* (2016), ‘visibility: Performance and Activism’ in *Performing Interdisciplinarity* (2017), 'Injurious Acts: A Struggle With Sissy in Performance in *Choros International Dance Journal* (2018) and 'Bibi is a Sissy: Drag, Death by Silence and the Journey to Self-Determination from Brazil to Britain' in *Drag Histories, Herstories and Hairstories* (2020). Nando’s solo work has been curated by the Live Art Development Agency as part of the programme ‘Just Like a Woman,’ shown in the City of Women Festival in Ljubljana (2013), New York and London (2015). They were the recipient of 2019 Library of Performing Rights Commission for which they developed *The Pink Supper*. In 2015/16 Nando completed a national tour of *The Sissy’s Progress* to much acclaim and press interest, followed by a tour of *Shoot the Sissy* to prestigious LGBTQ festivals and venues across the UK in 2017. *Death and the Sissy*, the closing performance of their sissy series, was presented in 2017 in London. (LADA study guide to *Sissy* trilogy, 2018).

fabric, to compose and recompose through their practice. Messias has performed in London at several venues including the Royal Court, the Gate Theatre and the ICA, alongside international collaborations with the Theo Adams company, including the 2021 Brit Awards with Olly Alexander, Lavinia Co-op, and Elton John amongst others.

Messias is a 'queer optimist' (Greer, 2019), responding to incidents of transphobia by transforming them into performances of savage beauty but with a dancer's poise (Messias once auditioned for Pina Bausch, as the interview below attests). Greer describes the performance piece *The Sissy's Progress* (2015) in terms of 'optimism as vulnerability' (2019, 212) and 'such a process may be traced within a sequence of works by Messias… following a violent transphobic assault near their home in east London in 2005' (213). Queerness, for both Greer and Messias, is unfinished; like Beckett's protagonist in *Not I* (1972), the queer self is an erupting stream of words – not hers, not his, not theirs – unrecognizable (to the speaker) and unintelligible (to the listener):

> what? . . who?. . no! . . she! . . [Pause and movement 2.] . . . realized . . . words were coming . . . imagine! . . . words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognize at first so long since it had sounded . . . then finally had to admit . . . could be none other . . . than her own . . . certain vowel sounds . . . she had never heard . . . elsewhere . . . (Beckett, 1972)

Messias is also a queer researcher and performance scholar in their own right and this is evident from the dialogue that follows, where they reflect upon their own practice as well as the significant influence of Beckett upon their work.

<u>Interview</u>

JH: How would you describe yourself as an artist?
NM: My mode of performance is finding space in between categories, so the work lives somewhere between dance, theatre, performance art, installation. It's also in-between genders. As well as being in-between genres, my work is in-between genders. My work is very much about masculinity, femininity, male, female. It's about my personal experience, first and foremost, so it's autobiographical but it's also finding an in-between space between reality and fiction, so fictionalising, or romanticising, or theatricalising my real-life experience to be put onstage.

JH: And your performances happen internationally?
NM: Yes, my performances happen internationally. I've performed in Brazil, Japan, France, Germany, the US, other countries in Europe, a lot in London and the UK in general.

JH: My first question about Beckett is: How did you first encounter his work? Do you have a memory of how you encountered the work of Samuel Beckett?
NM: I went to drama school in Brazil. I had very classical training at drama school, very theatrical conservatory work. I felt, always, from the very beginning, in every single class I took in terms of voice, interpretation, that I never fit in. There was never a space for me. My voice was neither male nor female; it was queer. It was very effeminate. I tried to go down the route of trying to correct that and it didn't work. Until I realised that my power is in embracing failure, or embracing the mistake, and making that more a feature of who I am. Being who I am, rather than trying to be someone else. Even though that is what theatre is about sometimes – traditional, classical theatre is about playing the character. I realised the voice training, I couldn't fit in. In terms of interpretation classes, I could never fit in. I had to go through training in Chekhov, the more traditional Stanislavski techniques, and neither of that worked. I felt that in Beckett there was more leeway to be more myself.

JH: That's quite a European repertoire to be looking at in a Brazilian context. Is that because the conservatoire's curriculum was dominated by a European, modernist aesthetic?
NM: For sure. It's very much Stanislavskian method. You will find other ways of training but – for instance, my supervisor on the course trained with Eugenio Barba, so I also had that kind of influence. Also, Grotowski but, again, that's very European. It's all very European.

JH: And the Beckett you encountered at the school was primarily drama (i.e. plays)? You weren't aware of his prose or his poetry? Do you remember which plays you first discovered?
NM: I remember that we had to do Waiting for Godot. That was the first one I encountered. I found it fascinating because it was completely different to anything else. It was very queer in that it didn't fit in with anything else. I loved that; I really loved that. That was, for me, a source of hope. "There's something here that might be more interesting than the traditional roles which I don't fit in" – the 'Cherry Orchards' and all that which I had tried and failed.

JH: What was it that interested you about Godot? Did you play a particular character in Godot?

NM: We just read Godot. The other thing was Genet – I found Genet. That was with Biño [Sauitzvy] [19]; we went to drama school together. Biño was training to be a theatre director and I was training to be an actor. Biño was the one who, when we took an interpretation class together, everyone was doing Chekhov and the more traditional European plays and Biño suggested, "Why don't we do The Maids?" The Maids was – this is contested – but I think there was an interview where Genet says he wrote The Maids to be played by male actors. So, male actors pretend to be female, pretending to be another female. A mask on a mask. That's the first breakthrough for me, "Oh, theatre can be something that I can be in. There's a space for me to exist within theatre."

JH: Genet and Beckett are often read together. Although there may be something explicitly queer in the Genet, is there something that you find in Beckett that reminds you of Genet, or is there a certain resonance between the two?

NM: Yes. The queerness for sure.

JH: What do their plays allow you to do as a performer?

NM: There's a sense of pretend, but there's a sense of allowing yourself to come into the role. You're not a neutral body that's being someone else. You can allow your person to be. It's more like a performance than traditional theatre. My supervisor, and Biño's supervisor, who were our mentors throughout the course, had lived and trained in Paris as director and performer. They had seen a lot of Tadeusz Kantor – Kantor was one of their favourite theatre directors. That came into as well, our formation in theatre.

[19] Biño Sauitzvy is a Brazilian performer, actor, dancer, choreographer, director and researcher. He is a doctor of aesthetics, sciences and technologies of the arts - theater and dance specialty (Paris 8). His career began as an actor in 1994 in Brazil at the Group Oi Nois Aqui Traveiz. As a director in Porto Alegre, he headed the Sotão Group for five years. For this work he received the prize of best director of the city of Porto Alegre in 2001 and best dance performance in 2002. From 2003 in Paris, he created the Collectif des Yeux with whom he developed various performance projects, exhibitions, films and videos with others artists as Antony Hickling, Thomas Laroppe, Nando Messias, Lika Guillemot. Since 2011 he has collaborated with the group CocoRosie; with Bianca Casady (Coco), he performed in the exhibitions *Holy Ghost* in Moscow and *Daisy Chain* in New York, choreography and dance in *NightShift* shows, created in Germany and Austria, *Mother Hunting - A Miracle of Rose* and *The Angel Show* in Norway, and the multimedia project *Porno Thietor* by Bianca Casady & The CIA. He was a resident choreographer at Point Ephémère, Paris in 2009/10, at Micadanses, Paris in 2011 and has been an associate artist at Generator, Gentilly since 2014. Since 2010, he has been a teacher-lecturer in the Department of Theater at Paris 8 University. He also teaches as guest artist at NTA – Norwegian Theater Academy, Norway, and the circus school Académie Fratellini, Paris.

JH: Did you perform Beckett during that time, before you left Brazil? And how did that come about?
NM: Again, it was with Biño. It might be worth explaining that the way this happened was we were reaching the end of our course, so we had our final project. I did a version of Medea, again, with my supervisor. It's a very ancient tradition of male actors playing female characters, so I went back to Ancient Greece where it was an all-male cast. Then, the Elizabethan days, of course, Shakespearean. That was, for me, the first connection of, "There is a connection in theatre of this happening!" And then, Kabuki theatre, as well – there are male actors playing female roles, and it's an accepted convention. That was my entry point into accepting that I don't need to be male, cisgender. There's another door. Biño's final project was Beckett. He had made a reputation for himself for directing Beckett plays. He'd done a few compilations of Beckett's work, and his final project he called M. It was extracts from Waiting for Godot and other short plays. I was in one that was the first of the trilogy[20] which then became the name of the company. O Sótão was the name of the company and the name of that first play, which was using Rough for Theatre [sic.] and Not I (he had a female performer playing Mouth), and then he was invited to go on tour around Brazil with that play. The female actor dropped out and he said, "I'd like you to be part of this performance. Would you like to come in?" And I said, "On one condition: if I can play Not I. That's the one play I have always wanted to do." He said, "That's unusual. I wouldn't have thought of you doing that because it's a female voice. I think we should go with that because it's your desire, and I think it's important that that's the guiding force of our project. It's something you've always wanted to do – let's go with that." So, I went through this really interesting rehearsal process with Biño which was – Not I, as you know, is just a mouth. There's no movement. It was a very tight, light thing, where I had to look at the top of my nose. If the light hits the top of my nose, I'm out of place. It was very tight light spot.

JH: With make-up or a cloth (over the face)?
NM: What he did, and this is very controversial, you might find this horrifying in a way. It was Not I, most of the monologue. At the end of the monologue, the light opened, and I was Winnie. Then, I would open the paper umbrella and burnt it.

[20] *O Sótão ou A Catastrofe* (1998), *All that Fall* (1999) and *M* (2000), known collectively as *S.A.M.*

JH: Just as an image (tableaux)?
NM: Just as an image. So, I was dressed as Winnie, with the pink hat and pink umbrella.

JH: So you were both Mouth and Winnie? Was there also an Auditor?
NM: There was an Auditor onstage.

JH: What do you remember about the Auditor?
NM: They were wearing tights over their face, with an exaggerated headpiece to transform the head. The light was very low on the Auditor, in front of the audience – close to the audience. But Biño's rehearsal process was going around that, in the sense that we rehearsed very physically with the body in a way of giving the text nuance. Going very high up with my voice, and very low with my voice, the use of resonators, we did this physically. After I found the text physically in my body, there was the restriction of bringing it to the voice – all the physical feelings that I found.

That's fascinating because one of the things that Beckett performers often talk about is restriction or limitation. Some performers have suggested that the more they are restricted (in rehearsal), the more freedom they have (in performance). This seems to be a paradox, but it's an enabling one. Is there anything you could say about that? Is this something you continue to use as a performer, this restriction that releases?
I found those high notes and those low notes in my body, through my body. Every time I had to go there, it wasn't something rational or intellectual; it was something I could find in my body, even though I was restricted in that position where I couldn't move a millimetre. If I did, my mouth would move out of the light. I also find that, in creative processes, if I don't have lots of resources, the work flourishes because I have so many restrictions that I have to create the outcome from. If I have lots of resources, the work seems to be a shell, almost, because anything's possible.

JH: Is there a connection here between your earlier point about being in-between genders and the notion of gender as a restriction?
NM: Yes. I found the restriction of having a male body and having to be masculine and playing male roles, that was a restriction for me that I couldn't, wasn't willing to overcome. I didn't want to fit in. I didn't want to make myself look or sound or pass as male. That wasn't my interest, I wasn't there for that. All my training in ballet was, again, in trying to find a third space. Ballet is very gendered; male groups, female groups; male technique, female

technique. I always wanted to do the female technique – I wanted to learn pointe technique, the hand movements are all different as well. I wanted to break the thing of maleness and femaleness and find my own space. That worked in the Beckett – it allowed me that freedom.

JH: We'll come back to this idea of the 'third-space' later. How do we move the collaboration with Biño from Brazil to Paris? How and when did that happen?
NM: After that trilogy, Biño did a version of Our Lady of the Flowers (the Jean Genet novel). He was finding connections with Kazuo Ohno and [Tatsumi] Hijikata who themselves had done a version of Our Lady of the Flowers. I played Divine and that was our last collaboration in Brazil together. That's when we decided to move away from Brazil; he moved to Paris to do a PhD. I moved to London to do a PhD. Then, our collaboration continued but me from here and him from Paris. We haven't done any Beckett since – the Beckett we did was in Brazil, in that context. But there's always been the collaboration of moving away from traditional – we moved more and more into performance [art or live art] since.

JH: Could you say more about those subsequent collaborations, e.g. Le Générateur.
NM: This was a dance performance, a movement piece, that we did together. It was a long-term idea we had. It's called OH because it's O for Ohno and H for Hijikata. It's the two originators of Butoh. Kazuo Ohno is the one I've always identified with, who's seen as the body of Butoh, or the feminine in Butoh, and the light in Butoh. Hijikata was seen as the intellect of Butoh, the dark in Butoh and the male in Butoh. Those two creative forces that give a sense of yin-yang, of bringing two opposites together. They created this version of Our Lady of the Flowers together, and it's our homage to those two figures, the originators of Butoh. That's what this piece was all about.

JH: There seems to be, in your description, a lot of interest in exploration of movement and the body, and I noticed when looking at your Sissy projects and the LADA publication (Messias, 2018) the following phrase: 'My spiritual companions in the studio were Pina Bausch, Kazuo Ohno and Samuel Beckett'. Could you share more?
NM: The way that worked is that I had their photographs with me in the studio. I put out chairs for them, and I had them sitting in the studio with me as a representation of them being there. Kantor comes to mind – when he died, they put a chair onstage as a representation. They all have been – Bausch, Ohno and Beckett – have always been guides

to me in my artistic career, as a creative, as an artist. Ohno because the first time I saw this figure – he's queer in so many ways because he's older, and that in dance is very unique – to see an older body onstage. He became celebrated in his eighties and I think that's amazing. Playing a female role, so his memory of a Flamenco dancer, La Argentina. The story is that, apparently, he opened a book and a postcard fell out. He remembered seeing her performing Flamenco when he was in his early twenties. The whole choreography is him bringing her back from the dead, from memory. My supervisor, who was my mentor, always talked about seeing Ohno and the audience was in tears whenever they saw him performing. To me, that was always a spiritual guide of this male bodied performer in a female dress, being himself but being female at the same time. And Bausch was [about] autobiographical work, the first time that was really celebrated and accepted. Also breaking barriers between dance and theatre and creating this dance theatre where it's both dance and theatre but it's neither. Using techniques of theatre to create dance, and it's really rooted in the performer's history. For me, there was a sense of, "There's something there that I can create from my history."

This is something I don't think I've shared before, but I auditioned for Pina Bausch. I was in a dreamworld when I auditioned for Bausch because I knew a lot about where she is coming from. I've seen all the videos. So being in a rehearsal room, where I've seen all these 1970s documentaries of seminal work of Bausch being created, was like being in a dream. The audition was very traditional, a ballet class – I'm trained in ballet, so I felt very much in my space. But I knew there was no room for me in that company because Bausch is very… there's male dancers dressed in suits and female dancers dressed in ballgowns. Of course, I wanted to wear the ballgown and high heels and I knew there was not going to be space for me there. I was being watched by all the original company members, and that was, for me, a dream. I knew that I was not going to go any further, but it didn't matter. Still when I was told not to come back the next day, I was, of course, floored. It was like the end of a dream. I woke up in a hotel room not knowing where I was, almost. "Did that really happen? I'm so devastated…" I knew my dream was never going to happen. But what happens from now on is that I can make my dream come true in my work. So, what is it in Bausch that I really love? Can I bring that into my work? It was liberating. I think that's where Bausch was. What do I love about Bausch? It's the ballgowns, it's the high heels, the hair, the being myself. I can make that happen. Of course, it would never happen in her company because there's no space for that. But I can create that space in my work.

And Beckett… Someone said, when Kazuo Ohno died and then Pina Bausch died very close together, they said, "They are dancing in heaven together." I saw that Beckett was in that party as well, somehow. This sense of breaking boundaries, I don't think there's been any revolution since Beckett, in terms of theatre; breaking all the rules, breaking all the expectations, making something completely new, that makes us see theatre anew. In that sense, Bausch did that for dance, Kazuo Ohno did that for performance, and Beckett did that for theatre.

JH: One shared interest there seems to be experimentation with artistic form and all three 'companions' have broken aesthetic boundaries or represent the freedom or inspiration for others to do the same. Does it trouble you at all that we're talking about a white, straight, [Irish] man with Beckett? While his work is still seen radical by some, there is a branch of queer and feminist scholarship that would see Beckett as a little passé or 'old school' in some contexts. I'm interested in your take on that, as you have a place for him in your queer space *and* he's a well-known heterosexual male from a certain generation. Does that trouble you at all or do you discount it?

NM: All those things need to be seen within the context of where they were. I think it's easy for us to look back and say, "They did this, they did that." but we need an understanding of the context of where they lived. Whenever I read Beckett, I want to do it. The language, the way his written work really moves me physically and emotionally. I want to do this, I want to read more, and read it again and again. Every time I read it, I find something new. When I was memorising Not I, it was so complicated, because I knew that he wanted it to be exactly the way the words were written. Of course, each person has their own pattern of language. So, I wanted to adapt things. Biño was very strict, he said, "No, it has to be exactly how it's written." There's tiny variation from one sentence to the next.

JH: What language did you perform in?

NM: In Portuguese.

JH: This is worth reflecting on, because the rhythm will be different.

NM: The rhythm is what's interesting in the work. Once you find the rhythm, it's imprinted in your head. There's a reason why you have to learn the way it was written.

JH: And therefore, through rhythm, we are finding freedom within the restriction, again. This is something that Jess Thom talked about when she did her production with Touretteshero (2017-18). She was aware that there had been these other actors well-known for playing it, Billie Whitelaw being the obvious example. I was really struck by her vocal rhythm and the way in which she found the rhythm within the text. Her neurodiversity was, in a sense, her own way into the rhythm that she found. I wonder is there something from your experience of being a queer performer that would open-up Beckett plays to a new audience through your wider experience?
NM: Yes, the first thing that comes to mind is the way that we started the conversation. Before we started recording, you asked me what my pronouns are, and I said that I don't police my pronouns. He, She, They, all fit and [neither] fits. One of the things I see in Not I is the pronoun, the "She!"

JH: And the refusal of that?
NM: The refusal of that, exactly. I see that very much as one entry point into it. The other thing is that whenever I read Happy Days, I identify with Winnie. I feel like there's lots of things – the repetition of the life, the boredom, the things that are the same every single day that you just have to go through, and they are so boring, but you just have to do it. I really identify with Winnie and I've always wanted to do Winnie.

JH: Do you think of Winnie as a female character, then? Mouth is, as you've explained, ungendered in a sense, but Winnie is quite explicitly female. You would play that non-binary and/or female?
NM: I would play that in a way that the performer plays a role. So, I don't see gender as part of that at all, really. It's a role that I identify with, that I have the desire to experience. I've always wanted to play Winnie. It's something that's a light, a beacon that guides me. I want to get there. Getting there – the process is what's important for me, as well. How to get there, and what is relevant, or what is in that text that is of today.

JH: In recent productions reviewers have talked about the scenography. When the play was first staged, there was the resonance with a post-nuclear landscape. Nowadays, people often think about the play in terms of climate change. The Deborah Warner production very much had a stark landscape in an changing environmental context. The Natalie Abrahami version had the rock falling down and slowly burying Winnie alive. The Katie Mitchell production featured a flooded kitchen. The body in that play becomes a body at risk of their environment swallowing them alive. One could also imagine an Australian bushfire…

NM: … or a Brazilian Amazon fire.

JH: Given what you were saying about performing gender, is it relevant that we see her being buried? We don't ever see her full body, we see her waist-up and then neck-up. Is this something that interests you?

NM: Yes. This is a very specific statement about restriction of body, being in place and being put in one place. You can't move; there's no way. Maybe that's a way in to how I experience my life and myself in the world. I'm stuck in my body. I cannot be read as masculine or male, nor feminine or female. It's non-binary. Maybe that's it. The solution is in that restriction, and that place of being stuck. That's how I find freedom, in that position that might seem to be in one place, but *the restriction gives freedom*.

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The failures of Samuel Beckett are strangely successful. His own biographical failures, compassion for the failures of others, and his writerly craft of failure through manuscript revisions, abandoned works as well as production notebooks, have been well-documented (e.g. Knowlson, 1996; Beckett, 1999; Van Hulle, 2013). Beckett's own sense of the creative tension between failing and trying (*Worstward Ho*, 1983) is not the primary focus of this study, but we shall see that his earlier treatment of failure (*Three Dialogues*, 1949) establishes a trope within Beckettian aesthetics that has continued to inform critical and artistic readings. Indeed, that 'fidelity to failure', representing the author's own distrust of mastery (and expression itself), is only one way to re-assess the influence of his work over time and across cultures. Earlier still, we read the young man in 1935, writing to Thomas MacGreevy that 'Miss Costello said to me: "You haven't a good word to say for anyone but the failures". I thought that was quite the nicest thing anyone had said to me for a long time' (Beckett, 2009b, 275). This essay troubles the scholarly record of Beckett's treatment of failure by attending to the wider ethical implications of his 'fidelity to failure' and the affordances of the phrase 'fail better'. In doing so, it invites a fundamental reappraisal of the concept of *bettering* failure (for whom?) as much as the act of failing itself (by whom?). After establishing the uses – and misuses – of Beckett's failure, this essay considers: a) aesthetic failure in Beckett's creative practice through to his legacy in experimental theatre and popular culture; b) performance more broadly, including intersections with disability culture and queer studies; and c) performative interventions in public discourse, from Brexit in Europe to the 2016 US Presidential Election as well as social movements such as Black Lives Matter.

Try again.

Were a Beckett scholar so inclined to enter the term 'fail better' into a popular internet search engine, they would encounter c.791,000,000 results (Google, accessed 22 June 2020). Despite the reservations of scholars outlined below, the phrase has taken on a life of its own as a meme and a hashtag in its own right. Those images (not filtered by license) tend to feature the phrase written as motivational quotation against an appropriate digital background which one imagines can be installed on one's device for inspiration – close readers of *Worstward Ho* may be particular appalled by this – 'Pending worse still' (Beckett, 2009a, 89). Some of these tagged images cite the author, misquoting with abandon, and also

display Beckett's image (cf. Alba, 2019). Amongst this Beckettian cornucopia of failure, several examples link to cultural events, such as Poet in the City's *Fail Better* in London in 2020, discussed below, or the 2014 Dublin Science Gallery exhibition of the same name: 'the goal of FAIL BETTER is to open up a public conversation about failure, particularly the instructive role of failure, as it relates to a very different areas of human endeavour' (Gorman, 2014, 4). Even science communication, such as *Failure: Why Science is So Successful*, makes use of 'Advice from Samuel Beckett' (Firestein, 2016, 25) in terms of progressive narratives of collective success as a result of learning from experimental error. Across digital environments, from YouTube to Instagram, the hashtag '#failbetter' serves a number of contradictory functions: from health and fitness channels, to wealth and market speculation; from political struggles for nationhood, to books on overcoming personal crisis. It would seem that Beckett's words speak to a digital generation across popular culture, as much as those who first received his writing as literature in print. Considering this online phenomenon alongside academic reflections on the political and cultural efficacy of failure (e.g. Ridout, 2006; Bailes, 2011), we could conclude that Beckett's treatment of failure takes on a number of ambiguous and indeterminate roles within culture, many of which directly contradict each other or cancel themselves out. This, of course, is imbued with Beckett's own sense of creative failure as a writer who composed drafts across multiple manuscripts, generating texts that resisted simplistic interpretations and in turn encouraged theatre artists to 'vaguen' his writing in performance as a special condition of their embodiment (Pountney, 1988; McMullan, 2010).

Early in 2020, Eva Kenny published 'A Fetish for Failure' (*Dublin Review of Books*) and Emilie Morin contributed to *Fail Better* at Wilton's Music Hall (*Poet in the City*), two important critical commentaries with a number of overlapping resonances for this essay. These interventions build upon a body of recent literature that one might categorise as 'failure studies' of Beckett (e.g. Anderton, 2016 and Thomas, 2018), and culture (e.g. Bailes, 2011 and Halberstam, 2011). These scholars have recycled Beckett's failure for generative, critical, and affective purposes, in extended critiques of literature and performance. While this could be considered an act of homage, as a mode of translation or adaptation which warrants further study in its own right, this section will focus upon the phenomenon of failure within Beckettian aesthetic production and wider ethical implications surrounding the (mis)appropriations of 'fail better' in particular. In 'Samuel Beckett as Director: The Art of Mastering Failure', for example, Anna McMullan draws our attention to Beckett's 'use of the

most rigorous systems of theatrical and juridical authority in order to safeguard his carefully crafted patterns of failure' (1994, 206). Elsewhere, S. E. Gontarski has demonstrated the myriad ways in which Beckett's theatre has made use of apparent mishaps, false starts, and creative errors. Firstly, at the level of dramatic representation, through his characters who 'are invariably either committed to systems that fail, that must fail, or haunted by the failure of systems' (2012, 233) as much as they are motivated by 'the failure of love' (244). Furthermore, he documents such productions as the 1984 *Compagnie* in Paris, where Pierre Chabert (director) and Pierre Dux (actor) gave Beckett a private run-through shortly before opening, which was not well-received:

> He recovered, moves to the edge of the stage and stares at the floor. Silence. Finally, hesitantly: perhaps the narrative cannot be staged at all. Four weeks into rehearsals, opening night is a week away. It is my [Beckett's] fault for consenting to the adaptation. It is too complicated, too theatrical. (Gontarski, 2006, 256–7)

Gontarski's case study here is an exemplar of 'failing better' within a theatrical context, that messy place where the aesthetic and the ethical collide: 'Theatre, like politics is an art of compromise, but somehow Beckett has failed to make any and has succeeded none the less. He has somehow resisted the collaborative nature of theatrical production' (257). What follows, in Gontarski's account, is indeed a series of one-sided compromises, a total reworking of the production by the same team: 'in good spirits despite a substantial re-staging a week before opening, the cast and crew withdraw to the dining room for drinks. […] Everyone relaxes. At least they have a show! Beckett buys a second round and leaves' (257). As with other notable examples drawn from the archive (e.g. George Devine's 1964 *Play* at the Old Vic or Ian Rickson's 2006 *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Royal Court), Beckett's theatrical 'collaborators' serve an uncompromising aesthetic vision that makes creative use of failure within rehearsal, through a sustained embodiment of generative restrictions that 'repeat play' with a series of variations, that operate as repetition with a difference, rather than a departure.

McMullan's essay on Beckett's experience of theatre practice as an art of 'mastering failure' was written around the same time as *Arts of Impoverishment* by queer theorist Leo Bersani and his co-author Ulysee Dutoit, in which Beckett's writing is compared to the films of Renais and the paintings of Rothko. They write: 'Perhaps the most serious reproach we can make against Samuel Beckett is that he has failed to fail' (1993, 11). Maud Ellmann,

reviewing the book in an article entitled 'Failing to Fail', notes: 'This impossible edict ['to be an artist is to fail'] (impossible because to succeed in failing is to fail to fail) contradicts the long-standing tradition of our culture that the function of art is to redeem the failures of life' (1995, 84). In *Beckett's Creatures: Art of Failure after the Holocaust* (2016), Joseph Anderton writes: 'Beckett is keen to praise the extent to which artists turn away from pursuing the old achievements of expression and representation, in a gesture he calls the "grand refusal"' (41). By contrast, John Calder states in his essay 'The Failure of Art' that: 'Beckett is doing more than voicing his dissatisfaction of artists with their own limitations. Art for him is not part of life, a human activity, a means of earning a living, of self-expression. It is the act of creation itself' (2001, 83). For Calder, this conception of aesthetic failure is juxtaposed with a portrait of Beckett as a 'successful' master of his chosen form: 'Had he wished to be a painter, a composer, or like Breton, an *animateur* and leader of a school of artists as well as a writer, he would have been at least as successful. His talent was like a precious metal than can be shaped in many different ways' (75). Citing *Three Dialogues*, Calder seems to be arguing for the success of Beckett in transcending the failure of art, or creating nonetheless in spite of such failure.

It has also been argued that Beckett fails to fully engage in the socio-political efficacies of artistic practice in order produce an anti-art that either seeks to fail, or at least is indifferent about its inevitable failure. However, it is important to first address the recirculation of Beckett's rare aesthetic statements about failure as recently discussed by Kenny and Morin, each of whom carefully attend to the ethical problems with taking words out of context. For Kenny, 'the lines that appeared again and again, everywhere, as if in a nightmare, are: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Taken from the first page of Beckett's late prose work *Worstward Ho*, the phrase was, for a while, Silicon Valley's mantra' (Kenny, 2020). Morin, speaking at the Wilton's Music Hall *Fail Better* event in February 2020, noted that:

> Failure, in his work, is an obsessional motif. It also enabled him to craft a new and very distinctive rhetoric for describing artistic representation; some of his aphorisms on failure are well known. The line from *Worstward Ho* has attracted a great deal of attention over time: it has been emblazoned on mugs, phone covers, postcards, t-shirts, keyrings and tote bags. (Morin, 2020)

Both Kenny and Morin are keen to note the wilful misreading of the phrase in popular culture, and that is something this essay seeks to respond to, rethinking Beckett's creative failures and relocating Beckettian failure within political discourses. However, the phrase still 'means something', despite its comparative overuse in popular culture, in part due to its constant dislocation from its original literary context, where it has acquired a suspicious significance through constant citation and misappropriation. For Kenny: 'His first separately published work, a long poem about Descartes called *Whoroscope*, took its thesis statement from St Augustine: *fallor, ergo sum* […]. In *Three Dialogues*, failure takes the form of an inability to represent' (Kenny, 2020). Ultimately, for Morin: 'Failure remains Beckett's hallmark: indeed few writers have been quite as willing to speculate about the collapse of every sense and every faculty' (2020). She points us to his later works which 'present us with characters who fail to overcome the limitations imposed by their ailing bodies; who struggle to see, hear and speak; who arise dimly from a world in which the imagination falters and threatens to fail altogether'. This bodily failure is exposed most acutely in *What is the Word*, a text performed by Juliet Stevenson on stage at Wilton's: 'an ode to failure: with the tiniest, most delicate brushstrokes, it sketches out a failure to find the word, to see, to articulate, to express' (2020). In order to articulate a *better failure* for Beckett Studies, the next section uses examples from theatre and performance cultures (cf. McMullan and Saunders, 2018) to demonstrate how failure is a necessary part of the cultural practices that sustain his writing and develop new audiences with the passing of each generation.

Fail again.

This section details performative re-embodiments of Beckett's failure on and off stage, defining performance in its broadest sense. In particular, it examines the uses of Beckett's work to make cultural interventions in arts activism including, but not limited to, disability culture and queer studies. This argument is interdisciplinary, bridging between the study of theatre and performance to a wider consideration of social and political embodiments. Drawing upon the citation of Beckett by contemporary bodies, this use of Beckett's failure moves outside of the playhouse and into the public domain, either through performative language or, as we shall see from the first example, by connecting a wider performance issue to an urgent political cause. In the 2017 production of *Not I* by UK theatre company Touretteshero, there are a series of societal failures invoked in the words of performer Jess Thom:

> That idea of art and creativity as an act of resistance is something that is at the heart of our practice. How we draw attention to those invisible barriers that exist within our cultural spaces which prevent people accessing ideas… and that's no about making work less intense, it's not about making work cosy, it's about how you support people to access really interesting and different experiences… how you frame it, how your support it… that's what is really exciting about this, there are loads of different ways in which it feels really important and relevant, that is important for Beckett to be relevant going forwards and to be alive in people's minds and that spirit of experimentation, of rebellion, of resistance… (2017)

Thom's performance was variously described as radical, faithful, and playful in its reviews (Heron, 2018). According to Derval Tubridy: 'Thom, who plays Mouth in Beckett's play, has Tourette's Syndrome. She makes involuntary, repetitive movements and vocalisations that are sometimes coprolaliac. Thom's performance of *Not I* embraces her tics' (Tubridy, 2018). These ideas are explored further in an unpublished interview with Thom:

> Jess Thom: I understand myself as disabled within the social model of disability which is that I'm not disabled by my body, but by a failure to consider difference in how society is organised, and I am interested in creating a theatre space that… creates a theatre experience that is really difficult but that doesn't disable people, that doesn't disable the audience, that allows the audience to access that but in a way that is challenging… that speaks about being human, that breaks down some of those rules that aren't the things that prevent people from functioning.
>
> Jonathan Heron: So not just 'failing again' but failing *better*'…?
>
> JT: Yes, exactly.
>
> JH: … that idea of failing in a different way.
>
> JT: Exactly, and that idea of risk, of taking risks, and this feels like a risk, coming out of the other kinds of performance that we've made, but it feels like that risk of failure, but also that risk of opening-up new discourse, avenues, conversations, collections between different types of things… if you don't take those risks, if you don't risk failing, or being ready to fail, to fail better, to fail again, then you are disabling yourself, then you a limiting yourself, and preventing yourself from functioning as an artist, as a creative being, and as a human. (2017)

When reviewing the Touretteshero *Not I*, Tubridy makes particular reference to staging female embodiment through male writing for those playing Mouth (Tandy, Whitelaw, Dwan and so forth): 'The abject fetishization of the female body in productions of *Not I* has become the norm […]. Thom changes the terms of engagement, focusing on the image required by Beckett's play, while acknowledging the futility, and indeed perversity, of restraining a body that is wired to move' (Tubridy, 2018). Thom transcends this tradition through several innovations that change our understanding of Beckett's play (for example, the light being embedded in Mouth's costume): 'The actor retains agency over the obviation of her body. Thom is alert to the wider sociological implications of these directorial choices since "it says something more broadly that relates to disability and to difference, that is: to achieve the same things and to have equality of opportunity doesn't mean we have to do everything in the same way"' (Tubridy, 2018).

These politics of performance speak to a wider series of social movements at the time of production, from human rights within the social model of disability to the rise of a new feminism as a result of the 'Me Too' campaign. In these contexts, and in Thom's portrayal of Mouth, the play's performances of failure enable an emancipatory opportunity for change: 'at the heart of these debates lie issues of power and the dynamics of social inequality that cut across communities to include longstanding debates concerning gender and ethnicity' (Tubridy, 2018) as well as debates within disability culture (see Levin, 2018, which also makes a significant critical use of 'fail better') and queer studies (see Thomas, 2019: a recent essay that seeks to address Beckett's failure within LGBT/queer contexts).

Trans scholar Jack Halberstam cites Beckett alongside a diverse range of cultural sources from *Finding Nemo* to the Sex Pistols, in *The Queer Art of Failure*:

> Failure, of course, goes hand in hand with capitalism. A market economy must have winners and losers, gamblers and risk takers, con men and dupes; capitalism […] requires that everyone live in a system that equates success with profit and links failure to the inability to accumulate wealth even as profit for some means certain losses for others. (2011, 88)

However, Halberstam is telling 'a tale of anti-capitalist, queer struggle… a narrative about anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of becoming. This is a story of art without markets […]. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable' (88). Calvin Thomas has since re-read Beckett through

Halberstam in his essay 'Beckett's Queer Art of Failure' where: 'he was, so to speak, a non-breeder in more ways than one' (2018, 170). Imagining a future outside of reproductive time, which is a central feature of queer studies, one could argue that failing to reproduce the self remains a valid act of resistance to neo-liberal capital. Joe Parslow, writing in the recent collection *Beyond Failure: New Essays on the Cultural History of Failure in Theatre and Performance* suggests that: 'a queer project of hope is open to fail, and in that failure locate other ways of doing freedom […], other ways of being together and ultimate ways of surviving and, indeed, surviving well' (Fisher and Katsouraki, 2019, 90). In their Introduction to *Beyond Failure*, the editors cite Adorno's reading of Beckett in *Negative Dialectics*: 'the created world is radically evil, and its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet' (Adorno, 1973, 381). For multiple queer scholars, notably José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and those influenced by his work, re-valuing failure is a queer act because queerness itself is utopian, indeterminate and – perhaps – unachievable. Beckett's apparent queerness has been covered elsewhere, but its contingency upon queer failure warrants further study and exploration.

These re-embodiments of Beckett's failure, across disability culture and queer studies, carry some critical baggage with performance studies, as can be exemplified by the case made for the intrinsic value of failure by Tim Etchells and Matthew Goulish. Their performative experiment *Institute of Failure* (2001) sought to study and categorise the different modes of failures as follows (numbered 1–26): 'accident, mistake, weakness, inability, incorrect method, uselessness, incompatibility, embarrassment, confusion, redundancy, obsolescence, incoherence, unrecognizability, absurdity, invisibility, impermanence, decay, instability, forgettability, tardiness, disappearance, catastrophe, uncertainty, doubt, fear, distractibility' (Etchells and Goulish, 2002). They described their output as 'a diverse and growing collection of other materials which take us into a world of broken lifts, personal disasters, historical catastrophes, bridge collapses, absurdist documentation and philosophical arts projects'. Sara Jane Bailes, one of the contributing artist-scholars, went on to write the monograph *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* arguing, with reference to Beckett, that 'failure challenges the cultural dominance of instrumental rationality and the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagine and manufacture the world' (2011, 2). For Nicholas Ridout, 'it is precisely in theatre's failure, our discomfort with it, its embeddedness in capitalist leisure, its status as a bourgeois pastime that its political value is to be found. Theatre is a privileged place for the actual

experience of a failure to evade or transcend capital' (2006, 4). This branch of scholarship tends to read theatrical failure, including Beckett's dramaturgy, as an opportunity to rediscover the radical potential of performance. These interlinked understandings of failure therefore emerge as a cultural strategy, combining approaches from live performance, disability culture and queer studies, to examine the plethora of online failures that frequently – and often unknowingly – cite Beckett. As we cast a critical eye over Beckett's failure in digital communities and social movements, the act of 'failing better' increasingly characterises a broad spectrum of cultural activities from performances to protests.

Fail better.

This final section will now turn to political performances of bodies outside of the theatre; there are certain practices in the public domain that might be considered *performative* but that are not characterised as *performance* per se. These include, but are not limited to, rhetorical speech acts, ceremonial or collective rituals, memorialisation, civic actions, mass protest and political discourse (see Kershaw, 1992; Schechner, 2013). In relation to the latter, there were two curious uses of Beckett's phrase in the public domain in 2018: first, from Presidential candidate Hilary Clinton, during an academic ceremony at Trinity College Dublin; and secondly, from British MP Mary Creagh during the Brexit debates in the UK Houses of Parliament. I will consider these events as performative acts in the public domain, and therefore a re-politicisation of Beckett's failure, for better or worse.

In her ceremony speech, Clinton honours the Irish nation, and Trinity students in particular, before alighting upon the alumnus Beckett, 'who summed up his work this way: "Ever tried… Fail better." [Audience laughter] Believe me, those are words to live by, for anyone!' [Audience applause]. (Clinton, 2018). While it is not clear what the audience find so amusing and worthy of applause, there is a double sense of irony here, firstly in relation to Beckett himself being the poster boy of his alma mater, and secondly in relation to Clinton's very public failure to win the presidential race, albeit having secured the popular vote. She performs Beckett's memory in terms of 'the spirit embodied by one of your graduates', positioning those lines from a prose work as an auto-biographical statement which, while deeply flawed, is still somewhat resonant in this context. This raises questions about the relationship between writing and the publics that re-embody the writer's words as their own. This has subsequently gathered momentum both in relation to Brexit and

Black Lives Matter, two contiguous political movements with very different political resolutions.

Notably, in the UK Parliament the Labour Member of Parliament Mary Creagh described the then Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May's political progress as follows:

> The Prime Minister's negotiating strategy seems to be "*Fail again. Fail better.*" It is not going to revive her zombie Brexit deal. Whenever she decides to bring it back to the House – on Christmas eve, Christmas day or Boxing day – it will be voted down. She talks of the will of the people, but the will of the people cannot be undermined by a vote of the people. Is that not what she must now do? (Creagh, 2018)

Creagh invokes Beckett's words in terms of ineptitude and incompetence, which is quite different from Clinton's invocation of resilience and endurance. Returning to Clinton, speaking earlier that year in Dublin, a wider political context is defined: 'In light of new evidence law makers in the UK are investigating whether Russia influenced public opinion before the EU Referendum. We are in the midst of a global struggle between liberal democracy and a rising tide of illiberalism' (2018).

Without interrogating the legitimacy of Clinton's perspective here, it can be reasonably argued that the globe is undergoing multiple transformations at once: political, digital, and environmental. Speaking on a university campus, Clinton focuses the solution to these political problems on young people. She argues that the global youth must engage with politics, but she does not explain how they can access it. She addresses voting rights in the US and the representation of millennials in Congress; she explains how this generation are more likely to consider alternatives to democracy, such as 'strong leaders' and algorithms. She acknowledges: 'we are not making a good enough case for democracy' and she concludes: 'every citizen should vote in every election, even when our side loses; it is a matter of infinite faith […]. Be ready to lose some fights that are worth waging, we will need to *try again, fail again and fail better*, let's get to work!' (2018; my emphasis). Clinton's progressivist stance is worth nothing here, misappropriating Beckett's failure for her own cause: the 'democratisation' of all contemporary societies, and therefore, the world.

It was within this wider political context that *Poet in the City* chose to stage a series of public events in London, under the banner *Fail Better*: 'when is failure a good thing? Poet in the City's programme contemplates failure as a catalyst for change' (*Poet in the City*, 2020).

Their subsequent events focused on Che Guevara and James Baldwin, and within this revolutionary company, Beckett was positioned as a heroic failure (or failed hero) on a panel discussion in the very same venue where anti-fascist protesters had gathered before the Battle of Capel Street in 1936 (see Wilton's Music Hall website). Perhaps Beckett as anti-fascist is an easier case to make than Clinton's neo-liberal argument, but either way, the notion of Beckett as an apolitical author has now been widely debunked (Morin, 2017) and re-appraised in subsequent studies (Davies and Bailey, 2020).

Ros Maprayil, reviewing the *Fail Better* event, extends a wider sense of discomfort: '[Stevenson's] dramatic readings served to underline the fact that Beckett was not writing about failure as a sort of stepping-stone or mere stumbling block on the upward trajectory of success […]. Abrahami's presentation as a director of Beckett's work focused on the idea that failure was a necessary part of the creative process' (Maprayil, 2020). It is this central idea which has been discussed above, especially Beckett's own experiences of failure in rehearsal rooms and theatres, alongside his own struggle to 'vaguen' (Pountney, 1988) or 'undo' (Gontarski, 1985) literary texts. The theatrical studio or laboratory is a space of maximum and deliberate creative failure (Zarrilli, 2002; Heron and Johnson, 2014) within a structure that produces reiterative embodied practice, also discussed above. As Eva Kenny reminds us: '*Fail again. Fail better* is an encapsulation of a lifelong effort to show the tension between wanting to stop and not being able to, failing to stop but giving less to go on with' (2020; my emphasis). Speaking at the *Fail Better* event, Emilie Morin adds: 'There is something radical and something liberating about Beckett's conception of failure, about his idea of doing less with less, his idea of doing without' (2020). Morin's reading of Beckett is especially resonant for this essay, as we consider the political implications of 'doing without', which can be reconsidered in light of contemporary events.

In the very same month as *Fail Better* at Wilton's Music Hall, and shortly before every theatre in the world went 'dark' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Richard Schechner published the article 'Endgame Earth: Clinging to Optimism' referencing Beckett in relation to the ongoing eco-political crisis and climate emergency:

> There's a lot going on in Beckett's parable from *Endgame*. The world the tailor disparages, the world God made in six days then turned over to human beings, is polluted, its climate warming, deserts expanding, forests chopped down, mineral and liquid resources wantonly extracted, glaciers melting, seas acidifying and rising […].

> But Beckett speaks also of a second world, those trousers, a world we feel pinched in, needing many revisions, but perfectible. (2020, 11)

Schechner, an architect of performance studies, draws our attention to the textuality of Beckett's tailor who 'worked by stitching textiles – making texts – until he accomplished his perfected endgame pants, then let us wear these trousers to our dances and fiestas, our dramas, farces, and tragedies' (20). In this second world, making texts (or stitching textiles) is a political act, necessarily born out of failure, 'needing many revisions' which recalls another kind of social emergency that took the form of anti-racist uprisings for Black Lives Matter in the USA, and internationally, in May/June 2020.

Speaking on CNN in May 2020, Professor Emeritus Cornel West described the Black Lives Matter protests as a response to: 'Failure when it comes to delivering the needs; the Nation State: failure to protect; Criminal Justice System: failure to be fair, you see. And the only response we have is Samuel Beckett: "*Try again. Fail again. Fail better*." […], that's the blues line of our Irish brother' (West, 2020; my emphasis). While this essay has focused on Beckett's 'blues line' to recall the creative failures of those performing his work, and the political affordances of 'failing better', the wider implications of his sentence are only beginning to be known through performative re-embodiments and intermedial citations online, on stage, and, as we see with this final example from the USA, on television. Beckett, through the rendering of this 'blues line', recalled an artistic emergency towards the end of his own century which anticipated cultural emergencies at the beginning of the next. Following Schechner, it is now possible to see an alternative future for Beckett's writing beyond 'a world of [his] own conceiving, gestating, rehearsing, and performing' (2020, 11).

NOTE: The author would like to acknowledge his collaborators in two long-term projects: 'Fail Better Productions', an independent UK theatre company (c.2002–17), and 'A Different Kind of Failure', a PhD thesis at the University of Warwick (2008–15) on theatre and performance.

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‘Beckettian Pedagogies: Learning through Samuel Beckett’ in *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Heron & Johnson, 2020)

When reflecting on Beckett and pedagogy in the envisioning of the present special issue, we found that discussions of education in relation to Beckett had generally taken one of two forms: the biographical or the practical. Extending our vocabulary of ‘crossing out the “versus”’ (2014, 6) and turning to a performative approach to open new avenues, we propose here a third way, which might be called learning ‘through’ Beckett. Such a mode draws on the insights from both streams of existing scholarship, but also proposes some new language – derived from an interdisciplinary encounter with the scholarship of teaching and learning and the philosophy of education, especially ‘critical pedagogy’ – through which the possibility of ‘Beckettian pedagogies’ might be manifested.

The first ‘biographical’ pathway, rooted in the archive and in close readings of the work, focuses on Beckett in relation to his academic contexts. Mining for ore amid the traces of teaching and learning in his life and oeuvre, scholars have minted the coins of new insight.[1] By constructing an account of Beckett’s own educational references and procedures, both in formal education and those sustained by his lifelong autodidactic impulses, the main goal of such exploration is to extend the understanding of his work for the scholarly record. Such insights from Beckett’s educational past appear richly in *Damned to Fame* and *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, *The Last Modernist*, and other biographies, and this strand continues to form a core part of the ongoing legacy of Beckett in Foxrock (at Tullow Church), Enniskillen (at Portora Royal), and in Dublin (at Trinity College). Reviewing three somewhat incompatible accounts of Beckett as a teacher across three different biographies, Daniel Albright makes the point:

> [Lois] Gordon offers us a conscientious and charismatic instructor, full of enthusiasm for his recent readings in modern poetry, but too modest to continue teaching at his beloved alma mater without full command of French literature. [James] Knowlson offers us a nervous young whippersnapper, too high-strung and intelligent for the dull prose of academic life, but trying his best to convey his brilliant insights to his inadequate students. These two readings propose pictures of Beckett according to familiar academic types. But [Deirdre] Bair offers us a sort of teacher that most of us have never seen, straight out of the University of Hell … muttering cryptic and incomprehensible statements as rare punctuations of the silence, aphorisms sometimes uttered in a tongue the students do not know. (1997, 352)

Albright usefully exploits the different accounts of Beckett's teaching to note the antinomy inherent in biography between 'particularizing and familiarizing' (352), showing how Gordon's image of Beckett as a teacher humanizes him in aggregate, in comparison to Bair. Gordon's account of Beckett's 'courage and resilience' should therefore triumph over 'debilitation and impotence – too often taken as projections of Beckett's own mental state' (1996, 3). To us, this language of resilience and ability has complicated echoes in the social sciences and education research, where contemporary notions of psychological and organizational resilience sit uncomfortably with Beckett's own treatment of failure, which will be discussed in more detail below.[2]

The other strand, the 'practical,' appears in the form of teaching aids and books that target students specifically, but it is somewhat less represented in the scholarly record to date. Such work tends to take the form of explainers, compendia, encyclopedias, and guides (monographs are somewhat rarer).[3] In the current century, more of these are appearing online, covering a wide range of formality and expertise.[4] This type of work has a status in relation to the market in education, enabling students who are in tertiary or secondary education to place the challenging and complex world of Beckett into readily available frameworks such as modernism, postmodernism, Theatre of the Absurd, or more recently, the postdramatic, and so establish a ground for deeper investigations. Beryl and John Fletcher's 1978 (reprinted 1985) *Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett* is emblematic of the genre. Its introduction offers the student three subsections: 'The Context of Modernism and of the "Theatre of the Absurd"', 'Beckett's Dramatic Development' and 'Problems of Interpretation'. Though surely of value in starting conversations and helping students to position Beckett in relation to other 'great' dramatists, 'major' movements, and 'grand' narratives, such work nonetheless trades in the fiction that with sufficient elaboration of context, past scholarship, production history, and annotation, a student will 'crack' a given play or playwright. A latent agenda of moving steadily toward greater understanding as a result of the educational encounter is clearly assumed here, albeit with an interesting caveat at the end of the introduction, just before an enumeration of *Waiting for Godot*: 'In brief, this play can no more easily be reduced to a formula than can any other work of art worthy of the name' (41). Rosemary Pountney and Nicholas Zurbrugg, writing their student-focused *Waiting for Godot: York Notes* in the same period, resonate here: 'It would be possible to blame Beckett's play for failing to offer any answers, and for merely asking questions' (1981, 57). Again, we see such questioning, openness, and strategic void as the key exploitable loophole for a critical

pedagogy founded on the 'non-reducibility' and 'non-answering' of Beckett's literature. Recalling Bair's Beckett above, it is the work's fundamental *silence* that haunts most attempts to contain, explain, avoid or domesticate it.

Both the traditional models of reading Beckett pedagogically – the biographical and the practical – contain challenges for teachers as well as learners. Both pathways leave present-day academic practitioners with apparently limited options, and both risk shortchanging students of some of the radical potential locked within Beckett's living legacy. The biographical model can be a cul-de-sac that is either too scholastic (i.e. a hermetic dialogue between scholars about minutae), or too oriented toward the past. The second model has the opposite issue of simplification, and it too often replicates the 'banking' model of education (Freire, 1970, 3), perpetuating the notion that with enough categorization, positioning, and explanation of Beckett's writing, the 'meaning' will arrive and become available to students in the form of cultural capital, a good mark, and a good degree. Critical pedagogy suggests that there is, or should be, something more at stake.

After Critical Pedagogy

This essay proposes that a critical pedagogy of Beckett must be grounded in the concept of openness, especially in the notion that 'void' is a productive category, and in the embodiment of an evolving ecology of *praxis*. This alternative pathway not only reflects on the philosophy of education inherent within Beckett as an idea, but also plays with a tension rife in Beckett's prose and theatre between actions taking place in a 'closed space' and a pivot outward toward the implied audience. We use an expanded definition of pedagogy, combining its three primary forms, as a 'place of instruction', a 'means of guidance' and an 'art, occupation or practice of teaching'.[5] In so doing, this essay therefore engages with `Beckettian pedagogies' in an entangled sense of instruction, guidance *and* teaching with a particular focus on the latter in terms of 'the theory or principles of education'. This move does not require abandoning existing traditions, but rather integrating them under new light: by placing the biographical Beckett (1906–89) in juxtaposition with the praxis of Beckett (ongoing), we invoke the contemporaneous notion of 'critical pedagogy', as expounded by several scholars including Paulo Freire (1921–97). Like Beckett, Freire opposed dogma and was suspicious of 'closed' intellectual systems:

> According to Freire, an open system, as a reflection of environmental reality, is the definition of rational. In contrast, a closed system is irrational because there are no phenomenological referents in environmental reality. Therefore, a rational act is any act that is inherently evolutionary, progressive, dynamic, or generative. It follows that an irrational act is any act that is inherently deterministic, static, or neutral. (Steiner et al, 2000, xii)

We cite Freire to position Beckettian pedagogy as critical pedagogy, an open system of practice where Beckett *happens* in classrooms, on campuses and across communities. This enables a comparison between Beckett's politics of refusal and resistance, which Emilie Morin has sensitively shown to have 'subtle continuities' that are 'in dialogue with accounts of anti-colonial conflicts' (2017, 13), alongside Freire's explicit politics of liberation and revolution on a global scale:

> As many new groups – both reformist and revolutionary – enter the field of action for liberation, there must be a growing recognition of new forms of subjectivity and new strategies of emancipatory praxis which are derived from non-Western settings or beyond the borders of so-called developed nations. Narratives of refusal and struggle which will lead to new forms of political culture and structures of radical democracy are not only emerging from Eastern Europe but from struggles in Latin America. Narratives of liberation must not ignore the cultural particularism of their roots, yet at the same time they must not abandon the opportunity to co-ordinate themselves on a global basis. (Freire, 2004, xi)

Reading Beckett alongside this account of 'new forms of subjectivity' and 'narratives of refusal' would be particularly fruitful interdisciplinary study, but here we can surmise that Beckett's contemporaneous practice in post-war Europe sat on the same global fault-lines of resistance, struggle, resilience and – for the purpose of the next section – failure. Though often attributed to wartime experiences, there is evidence that such politics started early in Beckett's life, nurtured through his own transformational educational encounters. When his Trinity College mentor Thomas Rudmose-Brown was writing a letter of introduction for Beckett in 1929 to his friend Valery Larbaud, he was already describing Beckett as 'an enemy of imperialism, patriotism and all the Churches' (Le Juez, 2009, 13).

Given the scope of his literary, philosophical, and intermedial legacy, the study of Samuel Beckett can intervene in disciplinary educational contexts, thereby challenging the established boundaries of academic learning itself. For example, the emergent trend to use Beckett's texts in the teaching of medicine and the medical humanities (e.g. Barry, Maude & Salisbury, 2016), technology and digital humanities (e.g. McMullan & Saunders, 2018) or ecology and environmental humanities (e.g. Lavery & Finburgh, 2015) demonstrates just a few ways in which the literature is used to dismantle the apparent borders that police the field of study. As a result of this trend, when the university student first encounters Beckett, we can no longer assume that they will simply be a student of the arts and humanities.

At the same time as his writing is transcending disciplines, Beckettian praxis – the embodiment/enactment of Beckettian thoughts in modes or zones that combine both theory and practice in the same gesture – is no longer relegated only to departments of drama. When instructors de-emphasize their own power or expertise and invite students to reinterpret, respond, or react freely to Beckett, the learning environment is transformed. This was the case made in 'Critical Pedagogies and the Theatre Laboratory', where we stated that:

> The hopeful practice of laboratory exploration de-hierarchises a scholarly endeavour and recasts the student as co-creator of knowledge, rather than consumer of cultural capital. The values and practices of such a laboratory may open one avenue of participatory pedagogy that scaffolds risk and re-values failure. (2017, 282)

The theatrical/studio context holds many clues to how this revaluation might be extended. The claim made for the role of the arts within critical pedagogy is that through the indeterminate and creative acts of disruption and intervention that so frequently characterize artistic practice, subjects or makers are encouraged to be vulnerable and permitted to fail. Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson's recent writing on applied theatre makes a particular case for performance practice within social justice movements, and while this does not explicitly deal with Beckett's work, much of their argument can be applied to Beckettian practice:

> As an 'ecology of practices' applied theatre is continually shifting and developing, with the consequence that it has not one identity but many practical identities, differently and appropriately nuanced according to context. As part of its richness, applied theatre is associated with a body of experimental theatre-making rather than a set of toolkits, and in universities applied theatre is a field of teaching and research that can no longer be described as emergent. (Hughes & Nicholson, 2016, 4)

Ultimately, they argue that: 'Applied theatre is an ecology of practices made from encounters with borders, with those encounters characterised by openness and commitment to a process of making relations rather than staking out a secure or fixed position' (7). This rethinking of the applied arts within the histories and contexts of revolutionary praxis and social justice can encourage educators to think of all literature, not only drama, as embodied events and open possibilities. When we speak of 'applied Becketts', we evoke an ecological history of practices (Beckett in theatres, classrooms, prisons, hospitals, public spaces, protests) as much as the Beckettian performances that already exist in the broad spectrum of drama, dance, music, visual, and digital arts. The Beckett teacher, especially when working within an institutionalised curriculum, may not have the immediate affordances of these practices. However, we argue that these embodied practices – those which Diana Taylor has re-imagined as 'the repertoire' as opposed to 'the archive' (2003) – remain equally available to the educator as the textual histories published within the material record. We therefore understand Beckett's aesthetics of failure within a pedagogic repertoire that celebrates 'undoing' (Gontarski, 1985), facilitates 'vaguening' (Pountney, 1988), and encourages students to 'fail, as no other dare fail' (Beckett, 1984) and, ultimately to 'Fail better' (Beckett, 2009).[6]

To be a student is to fail

If we read 'Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit' (1949) for a pedagogy of failure, there is much to excite the critical pedagogue. Starting from the famous declarative 'to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living', Beckett advocates persistence: 'unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation' (Beckett, 1984, 103). Returning to Freire's open system, 'a rational act is any act that is inherently evolutionary, progressive, dynamic, or generative' (Steiner et al, 2004), and so critical pedagogy operates *subjunctively*, re-imagining the world through what Henry Giroux calls 'a language of possibility' (Freire, 2004, xii). Beckett's own language of 'impossibility' might be instructive here in revisioning a pedagogy of failure as a 'pedagogy of survival' (cf. Heron and Johnson, 2017). Using *Three Dialogues* as stimulus, this section will explore the pedagogical paradox of Beckett's 'fidelity to failure', applying his aesthetics to the realm of education.[7]

Let us imagine an open circle in an empty room. A theatre laboratory on Samuel Beckett is about to commence with students as an ensemble: the teaching collaborative, the learning undetermined. This is the kind of environment where we might encounter Beckettian

pedagogy, although it seems increasingly at odds with the political climates of the Anglosphere. Such apparently 'empty' work challenges the role of universities as simply providers of higher education and training. Within the UK context, universities responding to the Higher Education and Research Act of 2017 – leading to establishment of the Office for Students in 2018 – may no longer greatly value the non-instrumental learning of an arts and humanities education, or at minimum, it requests the re-articulation of such education as 'useful'. A critical pedagogy for Beckett Studies, especially one that re-values failure and encourages risk-taking, thus might seem perversely out of step with the reality of higher education policy. However, it is precisely this deep, embodied engagement with uncertainty and indeterminacy where real learning might be located: that which Henk Borgdorff names as 'the productive not-yet-knowing' of artistic research (2012, 194). Within the context of the neo-liberalisation of our universities and the marketisation of higher education as a brand, such *unlearning* might be considered a mode of resistance rather than an example of resilience. A fidelity to failure, a daring to fail and a *failing better* might seem to be dangerously progressive within the instrumentalization of education, where 'learning gain' (as defined by the Teaching Excellence Framework in 2014) describes education as 'a change in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development' (Office for Students, 2019). When teaching Beckett in the increasingly precarious spaces of the drama studio or the literature classroom, we recall his own rejection of academic learning for an artistic failure, and we should therefore distrust the notion of 'learning gain' within a constantly progressive 'banking' model of education. We might therefore develop a parallel concept of 'learning loss' by learning from (and through) failure, imagining the value of sitting with deep uncertainty for longer, acknowledging indeterminacy, and allowing students to become gradually more open to ambiguity and complexity.

While universities have changed their models of higher education since Beckett's rote-learning and textual cramming, there is still an enduring value in arts and humanities methods, and indeed in the use of Beckett's writing within literary studies of all shades and schools: from philosophy and literature programmes to cultural studies and the digital humanities, it would seem that his texts survive disciplinary evolutions and trends. In some ways, this might be in spite of his classical education, rather than through a direct application of it, given that his works seem to transcend disciplinary and methodological categories. His awareness since his school days that educational institutions discipline the body (cold showers at Portora after rugby) as much as delay students from their future (returning to Trinity College Dublin after École Normale Supérieure), does represent a somewhat reluctant or dismissive attitude to

formal education. However, his academic immersion during his years as a language scholar and young sportsperson also shaped whatever character was emerging within those student dwellings.

This approach to education marked his practice (especially learning by rote), whereas a contemporary university education seems to be prioritising an alternative pedagogy, within commercialised priorities that value 'employability' skills over slow academic learning. Within this climate, there seems be little room for learning from error, risk-taking pedagogy and education through failure, those very endeavours that research communities are using to develop knowledge in the first place. University praxis could be something else altogether: public engagement, community education, working with practitioners, social justice and reform. This particular strand of thinking involves 'undoing' the corporate university and instead remaking student identities, which sets up a series of challenges for teaching Beckett in open-ended experimental processes, outside the classroom.

One particular example of teaching through a Beckettian lens has been a pedagogy of performance practice that re-values failure. This can be located within a wider celebration of failure's effects across the disciplines, from the visual arts (Le Feuvre, 2010) and performance studies (Bailes, 2011) to education (Holt, 1964) and science (Firestein, 2012; 2016). Stuart Firestein, a neuroscientist, teaches a course on ignorance which 'invites working scientists to talk to students each week about what they don't know',[8] and in his latest book, *Failure*, he naturally writes about the most famous line in *Worstward Ho*. Firestein points out: 'I read [the] other pieces, mostly essays, out there that use this quote and realized that it was actually the perfect opportunity to illustrate how what virtually everyone else means by failure is different from what it means in science' (2016, 26). Beckett and Firestein are perhaps unlikely bedfellows, Beckett having mocked academics as follows: 'This is the progress of science, that professors can proceed with their errors!' on Adorno (Knowlson, 1996, 479), or his infamous statement on Darwin's *The Origin of the Species:* '4 August 1932: 'I bought the Origin of Species yesterday for 6d and *never read such badly written* catlap' (Knowlson, 1996, 161). However, somewhat fortuitously for Firestein, Beckett's views on experimental failure seem borne out by the scientific method and its reliance on trial and error: 'Fail better' (2009, 81). We might therefore argue that experimental artists, as much as research scientists, intend to fail and therefore develop robust processes and pedagogies for this as a central feature of a university education.

While Beckett chose to leave academic institutions to become an artist, artists today are more likely to be migrating the other way. For this reason, while we associate the biographical Beckett with the renunciation of academic authority, we also start to see the practical Beckett in increasingly academic settings, from artistic research and development to public engagement and community participation. A paradox arising from this is perhaps that Beckett is perceived as still belonging mainly to an academic context, and thus (because of the historical inaccessibility of academic spaces) as still exclusive. Leah Kenny, an Irish student who blogged about sharing *Waiting for Godot* with her grandfather, refers to this perception of Beckett as 'the literary version of Mount Everest'.[9] She noted in a public conversation in 2019 that openness was the key to transformation for both generations:

> It wasn't because I sat down and explained everything … I had been taught in my English degree. It was because I gave him the space to interpret the work on his own. To put his own spin on it. … I gave him the space to use his own mind. And I think that's what is missing when people enter Beckett: they don't allow themselves the opportunity to make their own decisions, and to come up with their own endings, or to put themselves into the work.[10]

This strand of how the public legacy of 'Beckett in the community' is transforming over time is worthy of its own study, undoubtedly, but it connects to how Beckettian pedagogy of openness and student agency can promote accessibility in relation to the work, even beyond the students themselves.

Twenty-first century innovations in digital humanities (like the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project), public-facing and multi-institutional research (like the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council *Staging Beckett* project), and practice-as-research (like the Beckett Laboratory) suggest the possibility of a more open future for Beckett Studies, one that encourages diverse and inclusive modes of knowledge creation and digital dissemination, returning us to the fundamental elements of the work itself: body, place and medium. In doing so, teaching Beckett in an embodied and student-centred way remains open to failure and risk-taking, while resisting the notions of mastery and authority at which Beckett also chafed. The teacher and student's hunger to make Beckett 'mean' something, like Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, is a dangerous game. By resisting the notion of 'learning gain', which risks the instrumentalization of higher education through the fetishization of the 'student experience' in the UK and Irish contexts, we suggest that the student *fails* almost as much as the writer, just as Beckett himself dared to fail through 'the most rigorous systems of theatrical and

juridical authority in order to safeguard his carefully crafted patterns of failure' (McMullan, 1994, 206). We might also look to Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit on Beckett as an artist of impoverishment:

> Perhaps the most serious reproach we can make against Samuel Beckett is that he has failed to fail … but when Beckett speaks of failure as the artist's vocation, as 'his world', he is not referring to the artist's subject matter; rather he is speaking of failure intrinsic to the very process of artistic production. (1993, 11, 14)

Failure too can be commodified, but this seems to happen only when its diversity – the granularity of what is meant by the notion of failure in a given case – is ignored, and it is reified into a stable or generic category. Acts of pedagogy entail a wide range of dynamic and ongoing failures: challenge, rigour, ability, expression, and capacity are all such arenas. Indeed, pedagogy perhaps redefines failure along the diverse lines discussed by Firestein: 'One must try to fail because it is the only strategy to avoid repeating the obvious. Failing better happens when we ask questions, when we doubt results, when we allow ourselves to be immersed in uncertainty' (2016, 27). This immersion in uncertainty is an important value within contemporary formal education, where policy-makers and governments are intent on forcing a market-led approach to students' experiences through the cold logic of metrics and measurements. Perhaps we might turn back to Freire (and Beckett) at this time, to show the tension in a politics of possibility, when failure and impossibility are part of the preconditions, but the community nonetheless seeks a:

> liberatory pedagogy: that is, the type of praxis required for people to become active participants in shaping the economic, social, cultural, and subjective formations that affect their lives and the lives of others. This means waging a cultural politics that seeks to make presently unassailable and impenetrable cultural borders indeterminate, that encourages new forms of political redress, a remapping of the boundaries of culture, and the creation of new self-formative practices and cultures of resistance that are capable of establishing new grounds of enfranchisement for all peoples (Freire, 2004, xii).

Learning to unlearn

The study of Beckett already unfolds across a variety of educational ecosystems, both formal/private (schools and universities) and informal/public (in the studio, the theatre, and in cultural institutions). The 'learners' may include people of all ages, all nationalities, all

professions, all genders, and they come with many distinct agendas. What unites them is an interest in the mysterious potential and force that is palpable in Beckett. Institutional histories and their barriers, such as entrenched misogynies and other power structures, can contribute to the general atmosphere of closure or enclosure. Critical pedagogy intervenes in the occupation of these spaces by defensive forms of expertise, fighting subversive skirmishes along the borders. The concept of 'emptiness' that can be productive in ultimately dismantling such occupations goes by a variety of names: it can be called 'unlearning', 'uncertainty', 'agnotology' or the more philosophical 'void'. There are interesting resonances between Samuel Beckett's mature aesthetic orientation toward minimalism and subtraction, his working process of stripping away and 'vaguening', and critical pedagogy as such. In the variety of settings where Beckett is explored at all, it is clear that there is a 'schooling' of practitioners underway in the notable demands of his dramatic canon, available to both professionals and amateurs who are fortunate enough to engage in the problems that his texts pose. This establishes a body of personally held, geographically distributed knowledge about Beckett along the philosophical lines of *Selbstbildung* and *paideia*, often self-taught and individually benefiting theatre artists.[11] How can this this knowledge base be leveraged to found communities formed around sharing and distributing such learning more widely, including with non-artists, literary Beckett scholars with no prior background in performance, or even members of the public? Lee Shulman might call such teaching activity, simply, 'good work': 'Professional education is not education for understanding alone; it is preparation for accomplished and responsible practice in the service of others' (2005, 53).

Beckett's artistry itself displays many of the characteristics associated with critical pedagogy, especially its agonistic character (Torres, 1996), its qualities of play (Breunig, 2005), and its sense of fallibility in the face of great ignorance, humility in the face of mystery (Kincheloe, 2008). It manifests the second-order phenomenon that Freire calls 'epistemological curiosity' (1971): not being content to merely learn about things, but also about what underlying frame makes them important worth knowing, or even knowable – in the first place. Subtraction, stillness, absence, and void are apt rebukes to a banking model of education. For Freire, the key to revolution was actual literacy: an educated workforce would gain the tools to create their own knowledge and challenge oppression. In the subsequent digital education revolution, students learning to code or engage with education online might allow them to avail of a more accessible, asynchronous archive.

Spaces like the Beckett Laboratory suggest that a 'return to the body' (or is it the 'revenge of embodiment'?) is underway after the long historical and institutional process by which education has become more and more technologically infused. Expandable digital spaces like the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project also suggest that technological processes can similarly wield expertise non-hierarchically, distributing gains in knowledge widely while leaving sufficient 'emptiness' for others to contribute in their own ways. Shulman, writing elsewhere on professional pedagogies, cites the value of ritual in scaffolding this 'pedagogy of uncertainty' (2005). Education in the arts is no stranger to this discourse; for example, Dennis Atkinson advances a pedagogy for visual art education 'without criteria' (2017), while Susan Stinson, writing from dance education, emphasises reflection in the midst of the embodied 'search for meaning' (2016). As Firestein and others show, even the sciences have developed a literature around agnotology or the study of ignorance as a *via negativa* toward a better future. While a positivist bent in much of this literature clearly values knowledge over ignorance, the preponderance of groupthink, the narrowness of prior assumptions, and the non-publication of negative results in the sciences are subjects of major concern that have adverse impact on validation, at a time when 'truth' is already precarious.[12] Jennifer Logue in particular, writing presciently in 2013 about the spread of ignorance, makes a claim for interdisciplinary research that motivates much of our approach:

> A pedagogy of epistemic vulnerability may be particularly important not just for the creation of new conceptual tools and theoretical lenses, new ways of seeing and being in the world, but also for educational theory and practice concerned with social justice. (60–1)

From a Beckettian perspective, one of the pitfalls in all teaching – critical pedagogy not excepted – is its quest for *more* knowledge. In the course of the critique of knowledge as being distorted by power, it can be appealing to think that the replacement of this knowledge with alternative knowledge – knowledge from the perspective of diversity and difference, from the oral/colonial traditions that are historically repressed but newly valorised – will pave the road to new wisdom. Perhaps presciently in light of an impending climate crisis, Joe Kincheloe even puts this in terms of human survival, requiring:

> the efforts of humans to move beyond the truncated insights of the present, to find new (and old) knowledges that inspire us and change the nature of our being, and to produce new wisdom in light of our understanding of the failures of the past and

present. (2008, 19)

Beckett, with a suspicion of all ideology appropriate to one who endured some of the worst of the European twentieth century, responds instead with the richness of silence. Removing dormant assumptions, habits of mind, and hierarchies that impede exploration is a move away from the curriculum, or toward a curriculum of unlearning and uncertainty. As the study of Beckett continues to unfold across a range of educational ecosystems, from the public to the private, the formal to the informal, the classroom to the theatre and the museum to the internet, practical steps can be taken to expand and sustain the openness of such encounters. If universities demand research-led teaching, this can be answered with teaching-led research, co-creating scholarly projects and generating new knowledge, with students always in an active role. Spreading agency, welcoming failure, and persisting nonetheless: this is one way to disrupt the entrenched powers that Beckett, in life and work, also saw fit to resist.

NOTES

1. The biographers of Beckett – among whom we number Deirdre Bair, Lois Gordon, James Knowlson, Anthony Cronin, and Andrew Gibson – include varied tales and anecdotes of Beckett as a learner and teacher, with different strengths and foci according to the contexts of which the biographers were most aware. The present issue contains an analysis of pedagogy based on Beckett's letters, written by Lois More Overbeck.

2. Both psychological and organizational modes of resilience have informed academic critiques of neo-liberalism in both educational and institutional settings. Within the social sciences, the study of behaviour in particular, there have been critical studies of resilience in fields as diverse as nurse education (Eaves and Payne, 2019; Taylor, 2019) and organizational change (Van Dick et al, 2018), where resilience training emerges as an imperfect or problematic mode of engagement. Within the arts and humanities, creative forms of resilience have sometimes been framed as part of a generative process of *becoming*, intersecting with forms of artistic and actor training (e.g. Hodge, 1999; Zarrilli, 2002) and interdisciplinary conceptions of creativity and flow (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1992). Ultimately, the study of resilience in the academy has struggled to articulate or evidence its long-term pedagogic value.

3. Works like the Grove/Faber *Companion* by C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski (2004/2006) establish an 'encyclopedic' structure of A–Z entries on plays, proper names associated with Beckett, and thematic topics, while the same word – *Companion* – is applied

to a range of scholarly essay collections, most notably from Cambridge University Press (Pilling, 1994; Van Hulle, 2014) and Blackwell/Wiley (Gontarski, 2010). Cambridge also published an *Introduction* to Beckett (MacDonald, 2007). A forthcoming *Handbook* from Oxford University Press raises yet another term, and perhaps targets a similar market.

4. Quality and tone varies widely in the online Beckett landscape, an area worthy of further scholarly investigation and infrastructural development. Immediate results from Wikipedia for the search term 'explain Samuel Beckett' refers to Theatre of the Absurd. Basic study guides like CliffsNotes are imitated widely online, and also feature prominently in searches, regardless of currency or accuracy. Hundreds of essays on *Waiting for Godot*, often using long outmoded sources, can be purchased from so-called 'essay mills' in the guise of 'study aids'. At the same time, there are also more rigorous and developed community spaces online, managed and led by scholars and thus operating with a degree of peer review, such as the Beckett Endpage, A Piece of Monologue, The Beckett Circle, and the Samuel Beckett Society.

5. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the etymological background of the word indicating a 'place of instruction' is the oldest, extending to both Greek and Latin origins. The dominant definition here, 'theory of education', arises in the seventeenth century and is the word's most frequently occurring meaning throughout the past century.

6. Studies of failure in Beckett's writing have included McMullan (1994), Calder (2001) and Bailes (2011), where the earlier aesthetics of failure in *Three Dialogues* (1949) and the later poetics of failure in *Worstward Ho* (1983) offer a scholarly lens through which to view Beckett's own creative process and collaborative practices in which he engaged, such as his late period as a stage director (a resonant example of his own 'failing better'). The most recent and pointed critique of how Beckett's 'failure' discourse has been co-opted appears in Kenny (2020).

7. The liminal status of *Three Dialogues* within Beckett's oeuvre is salient: 'both context and content of the "Dialogues" place them not as part of Beckett's dramatic oeuvre, but rather within a tradition of philosophical dialogues going back as far as Plato' (Johnson, 2013, 3). It is especially notable that they respond (in part) to the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* by George Berkeley (1713), a work Beckett studied in university.

8. This fact appears in the blurb for Firestein's book *Ignorance: How It Drives Science* (2012).

9. Part of a pilot project led by Julie Bates at Trinity College Dublin's School of English,

Kenny's blog appears as a public-facing element of Bates's course in which undergraduate students are invited to encounter Beckett's manuscripts and then blog about insights gained from the experience. See Kenny's entry, 'Samuel Beckett, Grandad and Me', at http://www.tcd.ie/library/manuscripts/blog/2018/02/samuel-beckett-grandad-and-me (accessed 11 September 2019).

10. Transcribed from comments recorded at 'In Conversation: Joe Caslin and Leah Kenny', 2 August 2019; the teaching-artist Joe Caslin created a large-scale sculpture of Samuel Beckett and Leah Kenny in connection with this narrative of discovery.

11. These terms, expanded on by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) and Werner Jaeger (1888–1961) respectively, are associated with the more individualistic drive of education, valuing education simply in order to become a more complete human (albeit within one's social context; *paideia* in particular is tied in with citizenship). Though the origin of the European tradition of higher education can be found in these terms, more recent models of pragmatism, utilitarianism and capitalist instrumentalism are currently ascendant.

12. For a discussion of agnotology in the sciences see Pinto (2017) and Proctor and Schiebinger (2008). A useful discussion of 'unknowing' in relation to teaching and learning can be found in Zembylas (2005). The only occurrence of 'agnotology' as a discourse within Beckett Studies has been the review essay by Rose (2018).

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Dossier: Pedagogies of Place (Heron & Johnson, 2020)

Introduction to *Experimental Beckett: Contemporary Performance Practices* (Johnson & Heron, 2020)

Positioning the 'Experimental' in Beckett

2019 marks the first thirty years of Samuel Beckett's posthumous legacy, and as the world's theatres, publishers, and universities regularly, variously, and vigorously display, his literature is not yet gathering dust. Beckett's writing continues to find new readers, reach new audiences, and cross into new media. The complexity of his archival, philosophical, intermedial, and theatrical legacy generates new scholarship at a rate that few authors can match. Yet a discomfort attends this enrolment of Beckett in the literary canon, one perhaps signalled in the title of James Knowlson's authorised biography, *Damned to Fame*: how can avant-garde artistic innovation be preserved, once it becomes universally recognised and widely available? When undeniably epochal artistic work has left its epoch of origin, does it still function as advertised, or must it adapt to new conditions? In the 2060s, will received interpretations from the 1960s continue to domesticate the radicality of Beckett's vision? 'Habit', as Vladimir warns, 'is a great deadener'. How, in the face of ubiquity, will Beckett's thought live?

The problem seems especially acute in the theatre, which trades in ephemeral events, as opposed to the novel, which historically has taken the form of an apparently more static object (though, as we will see, literary forms too are changing within digital culture, and stasis may have been an illusion all along). Any Beckett performance in the era of late capital entails a collision between elements of the culture industry sometimes working at cross-purposes. Four of these 'agents' in the world of the theatre can be ranked on a scale moving from greatest to least 'degrees of freedom':

> Artistic impulse (what artists, given varying experiences of Beckett, wish to do);
>
> Production exigency (what is feasible to achieve within time, space, and budget);
>
> Market forces (what programmers/reviewers assume audiences will want to see);
>
> Copyright (what the Estate and its representatives will willingly licence).

Especially given the hard power vested in the latter two, such a system seems destined to lead to repetition over variation, or tradition over innovation. This might seem to suggest that Beckett is insufficiently available to contemporary theatre artists, or at least that his work is

no longer a space of performative experimentation (if it ever was).[21] Compounding this perception is the reputation that Beckett (during his life) and his Estate (after his death) developed for reacting to controversial productions with legal action. Indeed, the partial list below implies a history of significant conflict between artistic impulse and copyright, with the 'calling card' of the conflict also listed:

JoAnne Akalaitis, *Endgame,* 1984 (setting)

De Haarlemse Toneelschuur, *Waiting for Godot*, 1988 (female)

George Tabori, all productions, 1980s-1990s (circus)

Gildas Bourdet, *Fin de Partie*, 1988 (pink)

Susan Sontag, *Waiting for Godot,* 1993 (Sarajevo)

Deborah Warner, *Footfalls*, 1994 (stage directions)

Robert Bacci, *Waiting for Godot*, 2006 (female)

Belying the prominence of these controversies in media reporting and thus in the public imagination, a far longer list could be made of work that did not meet with such restrictions, but proceeded nonetheless, despite falling outside of the theoretical boundaries. There is almost no prohibition that Beckett made in one case that was not transgressed in another, either with his permission or without his prevention. Partly on these grounds, this book challenges the discourse that Samuel Beckett's drama is not already a terrain for experimental practice. This view may have developed from the series of historical controversies relating to the plays in performance, leading to a perceived restriction in interpretation or to limited freedom to experiment with Beckett on stage, but it does not reflect the complex and protean nature of such restrictions.

This introduction seeks first, then, to reclaim the experimental tradition within Beckett's lifetime, recalling how he interacted with trends in performance in the second half of the twentieth century, as he drew on, revised, and contributed to strands of both aesthetic modernism and postmodern dramaturgy. Beckett's use of generic fluidity, technology, long-

[21] The tension between the avant-garde and the canonical Beckett was noted a decade ago, in the lead editorial of the special issue on Beckett in *Performance Research*: '[to] the considerable, obsessive machine of "Beckett Studies" Beckett seemed at one and the same time too difficult and too experimental, still, for the mainstream, but somehow too passé for explicit consideration by those at the "cutting-edge" of contemporary practices' (Laws 2007).

term development, iteration, and collaboration – modes that also define the 'experimental', a term we discuss in detail below – shows greater openness than is often assumed. Since his death, the range of practices happening at high-interchange locations and 'nodes' of Beckettian practice both continue and extend such innovations. The work of artists like Natalie Abrahami, Peter Brook, Katie Mitchell, and Robert Wilson, or of companies like Company SJ, Gare St Lazare Ireland, Pan Pan, and Touretteshero – among many others working in installation, festival, or university contexts – all reveal the increasingly interdisciplinary, international, and intermedial character of contemporary Beckettian praxis. Such experiments enable engagement beyond Beckett, within wider social challenges and transdisciplinary research problems.

What is at stake in considering experimental Beckett is more than simply an analysis of aesthetic choices or matters of taste in the theatre. This research is intended to open pathways where performance can be considered to illuminate contemporary culture. The multi-disciplinary artists discussed in this book as offering examples of 'contemporary performance practices' around Samuel Beckett, both through their statements or through their work itself, articulate alternative modes of engagement and emergent features of Beckett's oeuvre that reveal new affordances for experimental research, performance, and education via his texts. Though this introduction will identify some of the experimental heritage of Beckettian practice during his lifetime, our main examples will be drawn from the work of practitioners over the last ten years (since 2009), with attention to Irish and UK work that has demonstrated international impact.

We have in mind two audiences for this book. First, it is for scholars of Beckett whose expertise may (or may not) lie in contemporary performance, but for whom interpretation of Beckett's works in performance remains an area of enquiry; second, it is for artists, students, or educators who are seeking to update past models of Beckett in performance with attention to contemporary praxis. This intervention is not about staging plays, but rather about how twenty-first century practitioners operate and negotiate the dynamics of tradition and innovation across the works of Beckett, including many works not 'intended' for performance or works not performed 'as intended'. In seeking to take a long view of questions that pertain to the last ten years of Beckett in performance and consider how they are relevant to the next thirty years of Beckett's reception, this work will group experimental practices into three categories: embodiment, space, and technology. Before offering detailed case

studies, however, this introduction will propose a theoretical and historical framework for the 'experimental' in Beckett.

'Accursed progenitor': An Evolutionary Model

In describing the situation that pertains to Beckett in performance now, we have found it useful to consider Beckett's literature as a living thing to which he gave birth. The discourse of literature is increasingly laced with organic metaphors, and Beckett Studies is no different; indeed, Beckett scholarship is one of the driving forces in the wider field of 'genetic' criticism. The term 'epigenesis', invoked by Dirk van Hulle and others to refer to the post-publication/post-presentation alterations that individual texts continue to undergo, is useful in capturing the dynamics of change at stake here.[22] Biology uses the term 'phylogenesis' to discuss the evolutionary development and diversification of a species or group of organisms, helping us to group Beckett's texts as a phylum within literature that is undergoing collective change. We argue that Beckett's work today is 'evolving' – that is, his texts form a living system inherently connected to their origins, but also adapting to new conditions in a framework of multiplicity, according to a logic of survival.

There is also a paradox involved in thinking about Beckett giving birth to anything, given his narrators' intense anxieties around parturition, obsession with birth trauma, and broadly negative orientation toward children. A recurrent theme in *Endgame* is the denial of reproduction or regeneration of any kind, for any species, precisely to arrest the inevitable processes of evolution: 'But humanity might start from there all over again!', says Hamm of a flea (Beckett 2006, 108). Of his own parents, Nagg and Nell, Hamm has nothing but invective to offer: 'accursed progenitor!', he calls his father (96). This is a layered accusation with biblical echoes (see Genesis 9–10 in the King James Version), and because of the passively voiced 'accursed', the subject here is ambiguous: it could refer either to the speaker of the curse (Hamm) or a higher power. What is clear is that in a Beckettian universe, a primal curse attaches to the act of giving birth; in relating Beckett's writing to this act, it would follow that Beckett's writing is similarly cursed. These curses are as follows:

1) 'Born astride a grave': All writing is doomed to end; writers fade, works are extinguished, and the last reader who knows or embodies Beckett's work will someday die.

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[22] A detailed exploration of epigenetics begun in *Modernism/modernity* (Van Hulle 2011) is developed further in *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond* (Van Hulle, 2013).

2) 'A difficult birth': Writing is generally painful and difficult to create, for Beckett especially so. Doing justice to his writing, either editorially for publication or directorially for the theatre, is a challenge.
3) '*Optimum non nasci, aut cito mori*': To be born is to enter into suffering, because of the machinery of desire. Writing, if it is truly alive, is by its nature unruly, unwieldy, and difficult to control; writing that survives longer due to its own excellence is, at the same time, ever more open to abuse and compromise.

It may even be that Beckett's 'lineage' or 'family' of works is specifically cursed, condemned to more difficulty than usual, due to Beckett's unique combination of talents and interests. Beckett exhibited prolific creativity across multiple media, but he was saddled with an extreme care for detail, the stress of which is exacerbated the more prolific one is. His strategy of 'vaguening' and his judicious use of silence, even his recurrent unwillingness to comment on meaning, paradoxically leads to a profusion and proliferation of interpretations. Quoted endlessly about the need to keep genres distinct, Beckett collaborated repeatedly and fruitfully on intermedial translations of his work. Famously resistant to the trappings of fame, Beckett's insights have resonated to such an extent that he is viewed almost as a secular saint. The theoretically rigid rules around acceptable performance choices are unevenly enforced, with the result that festivals, programmers, and audiences can't seem to get their fill of re-mixing, re-staging, and re-thinking this work. In short, though prodigious effort was expended during and after Beckett's life to exert control over the work, containment of an oeuvre is always-already impossible. Writing has an agency all its own. It may stretch the metaphor to the breaking point, but perhaps Beckett was a bad parent: limited communication, uneven rule enforcement, and attempts at control, followed by sporadic flashes of intolerance of his writing's hard-won independence.

If the basic idea of an organic paradigm for Beckett's literature is accepted, then this carries both political and practical significance for those who work in the field, either as practitioners or scholars. Namely, our role becomes the construction and maintenance of a healthy ecology in which the work can flourish, expand, and continue to self-actualize, pushing the animating impulse of Beckett's work forward across boundaries and into new terrains. This is one of the motivations for establishing networks, conferences, research centres, and in our own case, the Samuel Beckett Laboratory, where spaces are designated and communities of practice are built that seek to address some of the questions that live within the work (Heron & Johnson 2017, Heron & Johnson et al. 2014). Such practice is conducted

not in a framework of commercial endeavour, with the pressures of the culture industry that this entails, but rather in terms of iterative, durational, and fundamental research and pedagogy.

Living Laboratories: An Experimental Model

In the first dossier of outcomes from the founding year of the Samuel Beckett Laboratory, we cited Philip Zarrilli (2002) in relation to the 'metaphysical studio' (Heron & Johnson *et al.* 2014, 73). At the start of this book, in which we apply the words 'experimental' and 'laboratory' in the context of public and professional performances of Beckett, we again find Zarrilli useful:

> We should always engage the open-ended dialogical question of how our knowledges 'about', 'for', and 'in' continuously inform each other, and are not simplistically dichotomized. Our problem is to keep this dynamic dialectic constantly 'alive', to have artists and scholars of performance join those scientists who are rigorously exploring the 'biological and phenomenological' and thereby building bridges 'between mind in science and mind in experience' [Varela 1991, xv]. (Zarrilli 2001, 44)

This helps to map a relatively porous borderland in which the practices on either side of the notional scholar/artist divide are intimately related, perhaps because they are subject to the same societal forces and epochal events transforming the culture industries and universities alike. The debates that have created binary divisions between arts/sciences faculties or qualitative/quantitative methodologies are called into question by the increasing priority on interdisciplinary research, social challenges, or transdisciplinary problems in which all are forced to engage. In the chapters that follow, we shall be exploring Beckettian embodiment as an 'experimental entanglement' (Fitzgerald & Callard 2015, 16–23), an interdisciplinary methodology that brings the humanities and social sciences together with neuroscientific research to 'explore how different ways of being *experimental* can open up new avenues through which to think and work collaboratively across distinct arenas of expertise' (9, emphasis added).

The term 'experimental' denotes that which is *experienced,* tested or observed, especially within the scientific context, where it is usually applied. Within the arts, the connotations of the term suggest the provisional, untested and emerging (especially in relation to the avant-garde, see Harding 2013). Indeed, there is an etymological slippage at the root of the word 'experiment'. From the mid-fourteenth century, there is the 'action of observing or

testing' alongside the 'piece of evidence or empirical proof', giving us the association with rigour and fact. However, there is a parallel trajectory for the word, from the Old French *esperment* ('practical knowledge, cunning; enchantment, magic spell; trial, proof, example; lesson, sign, indication') and the Latin *experimentum* ('trial, test, proof, experiment').[23]

This tension between the *enchanted/experimental* and the *tested/experimental* offers us a methodological opportunity, and not only for works by Samuel Beckett. It is tempting to associate the former with the arts and the latter with the sciences, but we suggest that experimental processes are considerably more nuanced and complex than a simple distinction between the affective arts and the objective sciences. In most scenarios, the burden of proof lies with the practitioner of the experiment, or with the practice that claims to be *experimental*, which will always-already be some form of trial (even when the artist puts their own practice on trial). The fact that some notorious Beckett productions have migrated from the playhouse to the courthouse is a further 'trial' resonance here that we seek to re-balance. As Anna McMullan has argued, Beckett put 'theatre on trial' (1993) in his own practice, and we show that his later collaborators continue to do so, in acts of *enchanting* that seek to *test* the value of the texts through performance. While these contemporary artists are engaged in acts of *testing* through experimental practice, their source material is the original 'tried-and-*tested*' dramatic literature where we first become *enchanted* with Beckett. With McMullan, we also place this work within an interdisciplinary and intercultural research field. She writes that Beckett's works in performance are 'laboratories for staging embodiment' (2010, 14) that produce knowledge *and/as* experience.

'Beckettian experiments' may enter the public sphere disguised simply as performances of his plays; often, however, they appear within a theatre laboratory constituted as such, or they may be participatory events that encourage an audience to put Beckett 'on trial' through performance. Either way, the source text is being extended into a practical encounter that will enchant, test, or prove an aesthetic hypothesis through an embodied, spatial, and temporary activity. In practice, this happens in numerous ways and within diverse environments: from studios in schools, colleges, and universities, through to art galleries and

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[23] 'Experiment' is in use from the mid-fourteenth century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The compendium *Online Etymology Dictionary* traces the origin in detail: 'action of observing or testing; an observation, test, or trial'; also 'piece of evidence or empirical proof; feat of magic or sorcery', from Old French *esperment* 'practical knowledge, cunning; enchantment, magic spell; trial, proof, example; lesson, sign, indication', from Latin *experimentum* 'a trial, test, proof, experiment', noun of action from *experiri* 'to try, test', from *ex-* 'out of' + *peritus* 'experienced, tested', from Proto-Indo-European root *per-*, meaning 'to try, risk', an extended sense from root *per-* 'forward', via the notion of 'to lead across, press forward'.

public spaces. Some of these contexts may be experimental in the avant-garde sense, without being experimental in the rigorous or scientific sense. However, as several scholars of scientific experimentation have shown (Latour & Woolgar 1979, Crease 1993, Knorr-Cetina 1999, Barad 2007), this objective rigour is equally susceptible to the practical or *enchanted* knowing as it is to proven or *tested* evidence.

Robert Crease demonstrates that experimentation functions as theatre in *The Play of Nature: Experimentation as Performance* (1993), where he considers the stagecraft of scientific experiments. The laboratory as 'theatron' literally performs 'something materially into being […] the laboratory itself is a space of action' and 'experimenters are in the role of producer-directors' (106). This interest in materiality of experiments is especially helpful for our study of contemporary performance practice on Beckett:

> Like artists, experimenters are restricted by the limits of their equipment and materials, they push these limits and must wait and see what works […] An artistic performance begins with a performative play-space that is not infinite […] A performer allows such things to function as organic parts of the performance as event […] apparently inessential details spelled the difference between success and failure. (110)

That laboratories are spaces of failure – given Beckett's interest in failure – is also a crucial concept here, and there are several interdisciplinary studies of failure starting to emerge, from science (Firestein 2015) to the arts (Le Fevre 2010). Experimental failure is therefore an important feature of the aesthetic risk and the ethical value of our cases studies. This work frequently happens within an avant-garde 'legacy' of failure ranging from Antonin Artaud to Pina Bausch, from Joseph Chaikin to Ariane Mnouchkine. Here creative failure is productive, generative and *necessary* within experimental processes. For Chaikin: 'All prepared systems fail. They fail when they are applied [...] Process is dynamic: it's the evolution that takes place during work. Systems are recorded as ground plans, not to be followed any more than rules of courtship can be followed' (1972, 21).

Staying with the historical example of Chaikin as an experimental Beckettian helps us to explore the practice of those selected below. His published writing documents experiments in the avant-garde sense, but his interest in failure within laboratory processes also starts to address the scientific problems with methodology and analysis. Recent performance-based studies (Ridout 2006, Bailes 2011, Halberstam 2011) have tended to foreground the hopeful

or radical potential of failure, which adopts an experimental strategy of *unknowing* to explore new terrain (see Heron & Kershaw 2018). Some of this work is underpinned the ecological thinking of Gregory Bateson, whose paradigm that 'an explorer can never know what [s]he is exploring until it has been explored' (2000, xxiv) may resonate with experimental artists like Chaikin. His own reflections on his work with the Living Theater, with Judith Malina and Julian Beck, and his own Open Theater ensemble, frequently use this language of exploration:

> Julian Beck said that an actor has to be like Columbus: he has to go out and discover something, and come back and report on what he discovers. Voyages have to be taken, but there has to be a place to come back to, and this place has to be different from the established theater. It is not likely to be a business place. (1972, 54)

The terms engaged here are reminiscent of Zarrilli's, when he called his studio 'a place of hypothesis, and therefore a place of possibility' (2002, 160). The question of whether the 'experimental' is the province of closed or open spaces – rehearsal rooms with fellow ensemble members and invited guests, or theatres filled with public audiences – is one of the tensions inherent in this strand of twentieth century practice. 'Failure' as a term, of course, has different valences depending on what is at stake in the artistic encounter, namely how public it is. And yet something productive emerged in the twentieth century avant-garde from the willingness to fail in front of others: as Chaikin notes, 'when the Open Theater started we were only a private laboratory. We did performances, occasionally, but basically we were a laboratory performing unfinished work' (1972, 104). He imagined in 1965 that 'one of the good things is that we're willing to *fail*; it helps us go beyond the safe limits and become adventurers' (56, emphasis added). This fundamental kind of failure is a special joy of laboratory experimentation in both the theatre and the sciences, recalling Crease's conclusion that 'the artistry of experimentation, like that of the theatre, is often accompanied by a feeling of joy and celebration' (1993, 120). If this outlines the affect associated with *enchanted* experiments rather than merely *tested* ones, what are the circumstances or contexts that might give rise to this enchantment?

We argue that the key step is the revaluation of failure, as this encourages and sustains our natural curiosity toward the unknown (or provisionally unknowable). Failures to achieve *expected* outcomes that nonetheless teach us something, a normative concept in the sciences, is obviously a part of 'closed' performance laboratory praxis as well. But due to the material burdens of being a working artist within late capital, it is more challenging for artists/audiences

to embrace failure in the 'open' public cultural sphere of art practice. This is also why the term 'experimental' is sometimes used as a pejorative in certain regional theatre cultures, or subsets of the theatre audience. Yet there is a fundamental association of failure with curiosity and creativity that seeks to reclaim the term. The performance laboratory is a place of iterative failure, where artistic research produces an *unknowing* or 'not-yet-knowing' (see Borgdorff 2012) and where the distinction between 'things we *want to know* (epistemic things) and […] objects *through which we know* (technical objects)' (190) emerges as a hermeneutic tool for experimental Beckett, especially regarding the tension between the enchanted and the tested indicated above. We understand this tension as methodologically valuable to the tradition of Beckettian performance, and an essential precursor to the emerging cultures of sustained/sustainable experimentation.

Performance Cultures: An Emerging Model

As the expansion of theatre texts and practices across national and cultural boundaries flourished in the twentieth century, especially in the related flows of 'globalization' and 'festivalization' toward the end of Beckett's life, a rethinking of what is meant now by 'performance cultures' is warranted. Since the 1990s, influential discussions in theatre studies began to identify the city (rather than the nation) as a key unit for such cultures,[24] and indeed it is visible how certain cities – London, Dublin, and New York – remain highly important 'nodes of practice' for Beckettian experiments. The examples selected for this book are predominantly focused around these high-interchange locations which both represent Beckett locally and distribute Beckett internationally. It is also noticeable that in all three cities, experimental works tend to emerge within a wider ecology of interested scholars, artists, and scholar-artists (and depend on the presence of a willing audience).

Our case studies, divided into experiments with 1) text and embodiment, 2) space and environment, and 3) media and technology, each have antecedents in the performance cultures of these cities, as well as among notable twentieth-century Beckett practitioners. Chaikin's practice, for example, is a clear example of experimentation with embodiment and text: in his *Texts*, a piece mainly based on *Texts for Nothing* but including the closing lines of *How It Is,* he performed (1981) and later directed Bill Irwin in the same adaptation (1992),

[24] See Kennedy (1993) for an early application of this model to Shakespeare; Fischer-Lichte (2009) and Pavis (2010) for a new discourse (and debate) around 'interweaving cultures' replacing 'interculturalism'; Harvie (2009) for a survey of theatre & the city, and Knowles (2017) for a recent survey of the whole literature in this arena.

drawing together the intensely physical work of clowning with textual material that does not easily yield drama.[25] In the same New York avant-garde ecosystem of the 1960s–1980s, another prose adaptation like David Warrilow's *The Lost Ones* (1975) is an example of how space, by revising audience proxemics within an alternative configuration, can be used experimentally to generate new experiences of Beckett. Indeed, the whole archive of Mabou Mines adaptations (1976–1986, including *Cascando*, *Mercier and Camier*, *Company*, and *Worstward Ho*) reveals a thriving experimental culture that precedes (and, we argue, also supersedes) the legal crisis around 1984's *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theatre (ART) involving JoAnne Akalaitis.[26] For the experimental approach to media and technology that fills out the final set of case studies, we need look no further than Beckett's own practice as a key precursor. Beckett repeatedly 'iterated' his work with/on/through media, generating alternative variations and foregrounding the technologies of distribution as well as philosophies of representation: Marin Karmitz's authorized film version of *Comédie* (1966) and Beckett's television versions of *Not I* (1977) and *What Where* (1985) all show an artist willing to reconsider his own admonition (written in correspondence in 1957) to 'leave genres more or less distinct' (Beckett 2014, 63).

Buttressed by the work of theatre historians and the substantial archive of performance scholarship within Beckett Studies, we argue that experimental Beckett is also an 'epistemic culture' (see Knorr-Cetina 1999), where knowledge is productively blurred in processes that refuse the binaries of theory/practice, thinking/doing, or archive/embodiment. Recent projects such as *Staging Beckett* (AHRC, 2015) have re-positioned Beckett's work within 'contemporary theatre and performance cultures' (McMullan & Saunders 2018). The case studies in this book extend and develop this work by investigating how Beckett is being embodied by twenty-first century practitioners within the present *performance culture*. Though our key examples reflect evidence from the past ten years, the vocabularies that we depend on to identify 'experimental Beckett' as such have been developed over decades by scholars, practitioners, and many who are both.[27] As Lois Oppenheim argues, directors of Beckett must grapple with 'a schism between the experiential and the aesthetic,' and yet theatre also entails

[25] Materials relating to Chaikin's 1981 performance and the Chaikin/Irwin 1992 production were consulted at the University of Reading, which holds extensive 'Stage Files' on prose adaptations.
[26] Even Akalaitis herself went on to direct *Beckett Shorts* in 2007, transgressing genre (*Eh Joe* on stage) and bending stage directions/contract restrictions (mainly by interpolating music) without incident. See Goodlander (2008) for a review of the production.
[27] Especially influential volumes have included Cohn (1980), Brater (1987), McMillan & Fehsenfeld (1988), Kalb (1989), and Worth (1999), in addition to those we mention in greater detail within the text.

'the metamorphosis of one into the other' (1997, 1). Thus, she goes on, the 'rendering of these texts in the theatre […] allows for an apprehension of the problem' raised by the 'intersubjectivity' of author, director, actor, character, and spectator (1). Over the course of this short book, we will address this tension head-on, by focusing our attention on contemporary practice that experiments *with/on/through* Beckett in performance. While we shall remain focused upon embodiment, space and technology, the practice under investigation will be international, interdisciplinary and intermedial, enabling a perspective that opens us the texts to post-dramatic or even anti-theatrical approaches. One need only consider the influence of live art practice upon the conventional theatre forms to understand how this might be generative and essential:

> Thinking about Beckett in the context of Performance Art enables us to reconsider elements vital to his theatre: the experience of the body in space in terms of duration and endurance; the role of repetition, reiteration and rehearsal; and the visceral interplay between language and the body. (Tubridy 2014, 49–50)

Without rehearsing the drama/theatre/performance spectrum here (see Shepherd & Wallis 2004), the experimental culture from which Beckett emerged is crucial to our study and has a highly significant legacy within the field: 'this spirit of open experimentation through performance is not a new movement or a fad; it is profoundly indebted to the work of many Beckett scholar-practitioners' (Heron & Johnson 2014, 8). One such scholar-practitioner was Rosemary Pountney who continued to experiment with Beckett from her 1970s doctoral research to her 2010s performances, including her revival of *Footfalls & Rockaby* (2012) in Bergen, and a digital-durational project entitled *End/Lessness* (2017) produced by Fail Better Productions, in memoriam, following her death in 2016.

Another such scholar-practitioner is S. E. Gontarski, who has noted that: 'working with Beckett forces one to rethink the whole nature of the genre. Where is the theatre work, anyway? Whose work is it? It is Beckett's text, but whose theatre work?' (in Knowlson & Knowlson 2006, 258). Gontarski's ongoing practice *with/on/through* Beckett has included several adaptations of the prose works as well as new intermedial projects. His general reflections upon these processes have a specific resonance here: 'when Beckett is done paring down his minimal texts, how much creative space remains for other artists: actors, designers, and director? Or is there only one single artist in Beckett's theatre?' (260). His interest in the

paradoxes of authority in the work brings forth an experimental opportunity that he contrasts with theatrical naturalism. He writes that Beckett:

> creates an ideological and aesthetic vacuum, which many a director and actor are all too willing to fill. It is a vacuum, however, that Beckett expects no one to fill, that, in fact, defines Beckettian performance, separates it from that of others. If actor or director fills that space, Beckett becomes Ibsen. (261)

To stay with that notion of vacuum, especially as it relates to experimental performance, we show in the chapters that follow how Beckett's texts produce a performative void, which still encourages aesthetic opportunities for artists working in any medium. For Fiona Shaw, writing at the time of her *Happy Days* but reflecting upon her *Footfalls*, 'Beckett had died only five years previously and I think there was still a great deal of sensitivity to any interpretative change. I remember the French co-producer saying with some panache, "Sometimes a vacuum is more important than a presence" – a generous theory given that their investment of £25,000 had just been lost' (Shaw 2007a). Within performance cultures, a vacuum or void offers a distinctive opportunity for practitioners working in the intersections between the arts and sciences, between embodied and digital forms, between 'pure' and 'applied' practice.

The hypothesis of an experimental method is that a body of evidence (sometimes theoretical) can predict an outcome in practice. Within the space of the laboratory, the experiment is given an epistemic location for the observation of phenomena (for the 'construction of scientific fact', see Latour & Woolgar 1979). The arts laboratory is sometimes a physical space, such as a studio, but primarily it signifies a process or event (Zarrilli 2002, Hunter & Riley 2009). In the chapters that follow, we make the case through evidence of both processes and events that the experimental impulse, already present in Beckett's own twentieth-century performance ecology, is alive and well – that is, mutating and failing and going on – in twenty-first century performance culture.

Not I, presented by Touretteshero, Battersea Arts Centre (Heron, 2018)

> I definitely feel that sense of release… and I don't know whether there's something that happens when my brain is so intensively focused on something… that *does* push tics into different bits of my body or into other spaces… it's an amazing physical experience… I know what it feels like to not be able to stop. (Thom, 2017a)

This is not only a pivotal production in the history of staging *Not I* (1972), this is a performance that articulates an alternative future for Beckett's theatrical aesthetics. As a community of scholars, we should celebrate and endorse the use of Beckett within the radical politics of neuro-diversity, where his 'helpless compassion' is adapted to the practice of Touretteshero, in an experimental piece that gives electrifying form to Mouth's 'buzzing in the brain'. The company, like the Auditor herself, reach out in a gesture of hopeful indeterminacy towards a performance beyond text and a theatre beyond Beckett. Jess Thom identifies Mouth 'as a neurodiverse character' (2017b) and Charmaine Wombwell expands Beckett's Auditor through her BSL-interpretation and the 'peripheral listening' that requires her to sign Mouth's words *and* Thom's tics. There are various elements to the performance, directed by Matthew Pountney, in an extended programme of up to an hour that contains *Not I* as part of the event, alongside a film and a discussion. Beckett's play remains intact, contrary to some inaccurate reviews in the mainstream media, while the company choose to prepare and debrief the audience in an inclusive approach that ensures the best possible environment for listening well and engaging completely with the text. In one glorious moment, we all collectively shout 'I', before the play proceeds: an encapsulation of the multiplicity of identity and an affirmative gesture towards the 'not I' of Mouth herself.[28]

There are six movements within the piece: welcoming the audience, which was informal and accompanied by music; formally introducing the project with the contextual details about the process; performing *Not I* with aerial work used to elevate Mouth; watching a documentary video about the creative collaborations and technical challenges; participating in a feedback session about the performance; and closing the show with a partially rehearsed final section. Within the play itself there is a bold interpretation of the

[28] This participatory gesture, and several of the invitations that follow, may not appeal to all, but they do serve to enhance our appreciation of the drama within. It is emphasised, with considerable care, that audience members need not participate and this event remains entirely accessible to those who would prefer simply to watch and listen.

pauses and *movements 1–4* that follow the refrain 'She'. Touretteshero evolve the gesture of 'helpless compassion' by considering what a 'pause' might constitute in a performance where there is a strong likelihood of verbal tics accompanying the textual score. Indeed, the decision for Mouth and Auditor to verbally tic on a loop, with a repeated and mechanized tic shared by them both, seems in keeping with the spirit of the text even though this does not take place in silence. This may distort the original text for some, but given the material circumstances of this production, it is an inspired and appropriate choice. This fusion of Mouth and Auditor, 'stuck' and stuttering like a record on repeat, opens up new textual and conceptual resonances.

The Auditor is more visible than Mouth throughout the play, and is not hooded throughout, as with earlier productions. Indeed, Mouth is hooded during the performance (demonstrating an original approach to lighting the central character and emphasising the jaw). The effect here is to read both Auditor and Mouth as a Beckettian 'pseudo-couple' bound together much like Didi and Gogo, Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell, Winnie and Willie et al. This production is unusual is giving the Auditor an inner life, as much as Mouth, and therefore revaluing the character as written and giving the role some agency (beyond the BSL-function) in stark contrast to so many versions that simply cut the Auditor all together. Beckett's oft-quoted suggestion that he wanted to 'work on the audience's nerves, not their intellect' has been re-purposed here, not simply for the neuro-diverse performer reclaiming the text, but in the way in which the event acknowledges the audience's experiences of panic, discomfort or anxiety. Touretteshero have constructed an environment that puts us at our ease, and they emphasise that we can come and go as we please, make noise, shout out, or move around (there was even a 'baby-friendly performance' during their recent London run).

What is most welcome in Thom's version is the attempt to give shape to difficulty, that which Beckett himself termed *mess* ('To find a form to accommodate the mess…'). There is something reparative and restorative here, a renewal through the acknowledgment of the world *as it is*, not as we wish it were. That is one reason that Thom could be closer to the role as written than several other celebrated or canonical performances of the play. Her Mouth is not so much about damage as it is about repair. This recalls the strong autobiographical associations that actors have had with the role: Whitelaw in Ben-Zvi : 'how it is that everything he writes seems to be about my life' (1992, 3); 'I have what is called "raging Beckettitus." I do actually have Beckettitus… some sort of physically or mentally

excruciating experience' (5). Lisa Dwan's decade-long association with the role, was also frequently associated with the physical duress involved in portraying Mouth on stage: 'She has bled on stages around the world, such were the physical demands of her blindfolded, harnessed version of Beckett's *Not I,* which she retired earlier this year' (McKeon, 2016).

Thom recovers the role not only for dis/abled bodies, but also for communal wellbeing and inclusion. She uses the play to address the lived experience of neuro-diverse people within the performing arts and cultural industries. What is most interesting for Beckett Studies, is that she should choose to do so with *Not I*. Her earlier writings are characterised by rich descriptions of her tics, before Beckett enters as a frame of reference: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Theatre-Katie-Mitchell-4x45/dp/1138600059 'I don't live with Tourettes as a theory' (38); 'Physical tics… deep inside my body' (43); 'Intense explosions of themed tics' (48); several of these meditations have a profound Beckettian association. While *Not I* had long been a private frame of reference for the company, this production moved it into the public sphere:

> The pushing away of the "I" is really interesting on an emotional and an intellectual level to me, not even thinking about that as language, but thinking about that in relation to my experience of Tourettes… It's incredibly difficult when you say words that you don't choose to say and particularly in different contexts…"biscuit" is a relatively regular tic, but my control of language and the way that my language interferes with my context sometimes and gives things away or says the worst thing in any given situation… as someone who lives with that lack of control of language and that fear of involuntary language… I feel there is a real resonance with the text… Mouth feels like a neuro-diverse voice. (Thom, 2017a)

There are some unfortunate prejudices entering into the journalistic responses to this production, as much as there are balanced accounts of the play as performed.[29] Some reviewers reveal a patronizing view of disability and diversity on stage, and this extends to

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[29]For example: 'Thom's *Not I* may not be exactly how Samuel Beckett envisioned the play. And what she's doing with it might upset a handful of Beckett purists' (published review, *The Independent* online, 2018); or ill-informed readers who presume, perhaps due to certain filmed versions available online, that Touretteshero have added the Auditor: 'The original only had a mouth appearing on stage. Nothing else. Very disconcerting and claustrophobic' (public comment, *The Guardian* online, 2017); by contrast [there is a more nuanced] impact in publications associated with diversity and inclusion: 'What this production does is cast Mouth as a disabled character, shunned, cast aside and violently oppressed by her community… It's heartening that the Beckett Estate, usually so strict in the restaging of plays, were willing to adapt, to become more accessible.' (*Disability Arts* online, 2017).

the issue of 'permissions' afforded to theatre artists when staging dramatic literature. Several published articles in this very journal have already grappled with the issue of the experimental legacy of Beckett in performance, and the increasing volume of licensed and fundamental experiments that the Estate is increasingly adept at developing. Edward Beckett's personal endorsement of this production is significant within this context, not simply in relation to Mouth's neuro-diversity, but especially the Auditor's BSL-interpretation. What is important to emphasise here is that Touretteshero have been particularly sensitive to a research-informed approach: they consulted with several Beckett scholars, including the late Rosemary Pountney and those who work on interdisciplinary and phenomenological aspects of the drama in performance.

NOTE

I attended a rehearsal in 2016, a preview performance in 2017 and a final performance in 2018. This review therefore has an ethnographic identity, as I was an associate within the production process, while maintaining a distance outside of the creative team.

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‘End/Lessness’ in *Contemporary Theatre Review: Interventions* (Heron, 2018)

All sides endlessness earth sky as one no sound no stir. (Beckett, 1970)

End/Lessness (2017) is a durational-digital performance that enacts every permutation of Beckett’s ‘sentence families’ from *Lessness* (1970) through recorded human voice. While no one could live long enough to hear the full sequence, or indeed survive until the final iteration, the performance is *endless* without being *infinite*. My own collaboration with Rosemary Pountney (1937–2016) led to a trilogy of works that concluded with *End/Lessness* (produced by Fail Better Productions) and this article will reflect upon these events as *interventions* within Beckett Studies specifically as well as Theatre & Performance Studies more broadly. This intergenerational pairing also raises some enduring questions about methodology and creative process.

Our first collaboration concerned the rehearsal and recording of *Lessness* (1970) as part of Fail Better’s residency at the University of Warwick (2010). This process marked the meeting of two traditions: Pountney drawing upon her extensive and embodied history of performing Beckett internationally, often in consultation with the author himself; whereas I brought an experimental approach to Beckett, combining methods from Laban alongside contemporary devising practices. We met each other through the text, and out of that simple process, we conceived of an endless *Lessness* online. We therefore also recorded the compete set of sixty sentences (six ‘families’ A-F of ten sentences, numbered 1-10 by the author) and edited them as separate sound files, until we were able to create the online environment. In the meantime, we were able to develop our collaborative practice when I served as Associate Director on her revival of *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* at Bergen and Dublin (2012).

The second project was an artistic commission for the ARHC-funded *Modernism, Medicine and the Embodied Mind* research programme, performed as *Rosemary* (2016) at the Wickham Theatre at the University of Bristol. This piece explored the ethics of collaboration through a deep engagement with aging, dying and bereavement. Sixty rosemary plants were especially grown for the performance (initially conceived to correspond with the ‘sentence families’ from *Lessness*), and used as a mnemonic system within the event. Ultimately, Pountney’s pre-recorded voice combined with my own movement in order to *re*-member earlier performances, incorporating gestures from *Not I* and *Footfalls*, as well as traces of the process itself, re-enacted posthumously.

The third and final project was conceptualised before 2011, when Pountney first obtained permission from Edward Beckett to co-create a prototype of *End/Lessness*, produced as a durational-digital 'after-life' for Pountney and Beckett intertwined. Pountney herself described the text as 'unique, since in no other has Beckett provided a mathematical "key" to demonstrate exactly how it was shaped' (1988: 15). *End/Lessness* therefore helps us to think about *Lessness* temporally as well as textually, as a thought experiment, extending the archival scholarship that Pountney had foreseen in her doctorial thesis (1970s) and the resulting monograph (1988). The new project develops our understanding of the text, through practice-as-research methods, and builds upon earlier interdisciplinary experiments between literature and computing (e.g. Haahr and Drew, 2000). JM Coetzee noted: '*Lessness* displays features not often encountered in connected discourse. The most notable is finiteness: whereas normal discourse draws upon a word-stock which in any theorizing must be treated as infinite, *Lessness* clearly signals that its word-stock is finite' (1973: 195). He goes on to note that, across one and half thousand words in two parts, that 'words 770-1538 of the text turn out to be nothing but words 1-1769 in a new order', something he refers to as both 'a mathematics of indeterminacy' (i.e. probability), but also 'combinatorial mathematics'. For Coetzee, the text is a 'linguistic game rather than linguistic expression' (ibid.).

In our collaboration with James Ball (creator of the 'disorder algorithm' and the website itself) we used the computational model of time to play every permutation of the sentences, without repetition, from 2017 until completion. Ball describes this process as follows: 'to be able to create an iteration is one thing, but to be able to be sure that it hasn't already happened is another… so the way of doing it is to make it pseudo-random… a pre-existing sequence that would carry on for a long time and would never repeat… so *time*' (unpublished interview). This focus on temporal permutation, rather than textual re-iteration, resonates with Coetzee's notion of the text as 'linguistic game' as well as other Beckettian permutations in performance (e.g. *JM Mime* or *Quad*). Unlike the later dramatic works, starting *Play* and concluding with *What Where*, the endless permutations here are digitally performed, and therefore not limited by theatrical production. In *End/Lessness,* the voice goes *on* and our listening endures (we could play along over several years): 'as if it was playing forever, it *is playing*… you have to be able to drop into something mid-way through, so that's when you have to start calculating the time… and because it's durational it seemed to make sense to use the time, there are other sequences that exist within the world you

could have used, but because it's inherently tied to *time*, it seemed to make sense to just use that pre-existing structure' (Ball, unpublished interview). I would therefore suggest that we have a created a *temporal game* to extend Beckett's 'linguistic game' into the future.

To return to Coetzee's formal analysis, where the prose finds its ludic function: 'this endless enterprise of splitting and recombining is language, and it offers not the promise of the charm, the ever-awaited magical combination that will bring wealth or salvation, but the solace of the game, the killing of time' (1973: 198). Our digital-durational project opens up the textual to the temporal so that endlessness becomes an event. This extends the experimental legacy of Beckett's work and reminds scholars that performance practice can intervene continuously in literary and archival research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

James Ball, Edward Beckett, Nomi Everall and Rosemary Pountney.

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'On PaR' in *Performance as Research: Knowledge, Methods, Impact* (Heron & Kershaw, 2018)

> This intergenerational 'dialogue' took place in Coventry on 18 June 2015 and is divided into two parts. Part I addresses Kershaw's 'Meadow Meanders' specifically as transdisciplinary PaR and 'ecconective' engagement (Kershaw, 2015) where the environment 'is performing you even as you perform it'. Part II concerns the PaR working group of the International Federation for Theatre Research, specifically their 'Participatory Laboratories' which Heron characterises as 'a place for new experiments with one's practice'. The unique reflexivity of this venue will be addressed alongside a consideration of what constitutes PaR 'results'. The dialogue concludes with web-links to digital documentation from the examples of practice. [This version of the interview is an earlier draft, which was later revised for publication in the final collection].

On 'Meadow Meanders' and Transdisciplinarity

JH: Yesterday we had an event (at the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning, University of Warwick) about the 'Meadow Meander' project and I wonder in what ways this represents how PaR transcends or transgresses forms of knowledge?

BK: First of all people need to understand that a Meadow Meander is a path in a field of meadowland (or other grasses and flowers) which is marked out with a grid of posts, and the grid represents the world. The path is modelled on a global ecological system and accurately follows the model. You can't see the path because the grass usually is quite long, so from ground level it looks like an untouched field. So you start with a lack of knowledge in approaching this particular outdoor artifact but also with the knowledge that perhaps it represents some ecological feature. Then the path is not meaningless, it's not random, although it does weave around and appears not to be going anywhere specific and ends up back where it started. So it's a meaningless path in one sense but in another sense it's saturated with meaning. Then anyone entering the path has a problem, but hopefully one that's been framed in a friendly way so that they could work out what it might represent if they'd like to.

Immediately the path is about becoming. Deliberately abandoning knowledge, purposefully leaving knowledge behind, is a major way of becoming which isn't just about thinking, about what we think we know or don't know, but also about an embodied experience through which something significant you are engaged with is undefinable,

inaccessible, mysterious and so on. That's a first step towards a transdisciplinary experience (performancefootprint.co.uk, consulted 2018).

JH: And from my own experience of meandering in the meadow, there is a sense that it privileges action/performance/movement over cognition…

BK: That's the aim. The aim is an immersive experience which puts the walker/traveller into a space which is comfortable because you're not going to get lost if you stay on the path, even though you might be lost as to where you are and what that means. But you're not going to get lost because the path takes you only in the direction where *it* needs to go. But at the same time you are surrounded by the Earth's environment, it is an outdoor situation after all; which can range from a field of commonplace agricultural grass, through a wildflower meadow in the countryside to an urban city square or a former graveyard or an ex-airport or any kind of place where an invisible or indistinct pathway can be made. So you're always surrounded again by other kinds of saturation experiences. Those environments always are more or less rich… and the meanders I've made tend to be placed deliberately in contextually dense places, such as an urban former graveyard of the nineteenth-century or a major ex-airport of a twentieth-century city. So you're surrounded by stuff that you might know something about, but you don't know why you're in this path and/or why it's shaped as it is. So the knowledge that you've got already is … well I like to think that it becomes a kind of free-for-all playground because you can shift your attention from one thing to another to anything that's around you while you're walking and you can think about that – nothing to stop you doing that, people have to do that to some extent – but also you can just forget about it all and just immerse yourself and enjoy the walking and the richness of the environment that you are a part of, particularly *for its own sake*. I am suggesting that's a transdisciplinary 'space' (or at least a quasi-transdisciplinary space).

JH: I would like to stay with that idea of transdisciplinary methods, as I am interested that practitioners in this area often use ludic activities. You've described this space as a playground – and in certain forms of play there is also a 'not-yet-knowing' (Borgdorff, 2012) – which I see this as an interplay between knowing (whether rhythm, ritual or rule-based patterns of behaviour) and a kind of wilful ignorance. So I wonder how this might relate to transdisciplinary research as an alternative form of knowing and why might we encourage play within a research process?

BK: I think you have to start by turning that question on its head in some way, because the kind of … unknowing that you enter into in a transdisciplinary space is radically different from the kind of unknowing or ignorance that any significant research question or hunch might provide for you. Because the implication of that point of departure … just before you start your research process proper, say … is that you've got a problem which you can't figure a question *from* … so therefore you're stepping into the unknown, *unless* you consider you know where you're stepping from. Not obviously a first step into a potential transdisciplinary space, because it's not the same as being totally in the transdisciplinary space, where you don't even have those reference points of questions and hunches that you don't know the answers to. So that's what I think is the radical difference. Because in the transdisciplinary space *nothing* is, as it were, known for sure. Therefore it's a very open, flexible, complex – but also very simple – kind of space to explore. Possibly that is the type of non-'thing' that you might encounter in some kinds of play and improvisation. An embodied, immersive experience where your attention has to be totally focussed outwards towards the environment, at least for a large amount of time, is going to be a place that's very hard or impossible to define because the point is you're trying to avoid defining 'things' in order to discover other 'things' that you might never encounter unless you entered that kind of non-space.

JH: There seems to be a very important distinction between interdisciplinarity (where disciplines still claim to *know* through an exchange between disciplines and sites of knowing), and transdisciplinarity, which you're describing in terms of practical or ludic knowledge, which is a completely different thing.

BK: It's some sort of un-knowledge, and that is a completely different kind of 'thing' to knowing because by definition you can't define it. That's once you're 'in' it. It's different if you're 'outside' it because there certainly will be different types of interdisciplinary space. But when you're in a transdisciplinary space … it can't be defined in any straightforward way … whereas an interdisciplinary space can be defined because you've always got coordinates – as part of the different disciplines – of an interactive nature. So there are boundaries, edges and territories … there are always comparative areas of knowledge. So let's go back to traditions of theatre to consider that. Then it's often very easy to say historically what different disciplines are engaged in a particular theatre production and/or building, because being involved in that kind of making you have contrasting knowledge domains which you can coordinate in relation to each other and that, possibly inevitably, creates knowledge. So

in the usual situation of theatre you're not escaping knowledge directly through interdisciplinarity, at least in ways that you can do in what I'm considering as a radically transdisciplinary space.

JH: And how does this model of transdisciplinarity represent a more 'sustainable' approach to knowledge (Frodeman, 2014)?

BK: Although you're in what I've been calling a 'space' – but other metaphors could serve just as well – although you're in a transdisciplinary domain and you don't know where you are, that transdisciplinary zone won't be vacuous. It's not a vacuum. It's not empty of 'things', it's full of 'things' because you're still presumably aware of becoming a part of what's around you and so on and so forth. It's simply that you don't know the reality or the unreality of what you're in, in the same way as generally one does in … let's call it 'everyday life.' Because you leave behind normative assumptions … because a transdisciplinary space encourages you or causes you to abandon assumptions that you make about the nature of what's around you. The difference is that it's 'nature' is there still. But you can't know what its 'nature' is without engaging with it interactively; or as I would prefer to say, 'econnectively' (Kershaw, 2015).

So that's where you leave knowing behind and enter an environment where you are freer to shift between thinking (cognition) and not thinking (ignorance, abandoning knowledge) … you're free to move in and out of those modes of becoming, and many others. That then gives you more latitude for how you engage with whatever is around you, and from many different kinds of angle than exist in normative, everyday situations where we're conventionally imbued by 'knowledge', constructed *from* knowledge. I think the difference is that you are entering into a relationship with your surroundings which potentially leaves you more open to what is happening in those surroundings and the forces, energies and so on and so forth that are circulating there. In such a way that it – your surroundings, the environment – is more likely to be performing you as much as you are performing it. So transdisciplinarity is a meta-interactive space or a meta-interactive experience where the nature of what's around you announces itself to you in ways that you haven't otherwise conceived of, or experienced, before. In other words the environment is 'in' you – or, maybe better, 'running through' you – and you become part of that environment in especially unpredictable ways: because it is performing you even as you perform it.

On ‘Participatory Laboratories’ and the Problem of Results

JH: I would like us to focus on the IFTR PaR working group and particularly the ‘participatory laboratory’ that takes place within each conference meeting. Of course you evolved this particular approach with support from Mark Fleischman and Anna Birch for the Lisbon 2009 conference and since then it’s had an annual outing (at Munich 2010, Osaka 2011, Santiago de Chile 2012, Barcelona 2013, Warwick 2014 and Hyderabad 2015) where hundreds of people have contributed through participation, documentation and practice. With regards to this, I wonder whether we could think about ways in which PaR enables specific or generic modes of *knowing* and how that might inform an understanding of inter/trans-cultural practice?

BK: The notion of ‘inter-cultural’ of course is pretty standard stuff now, you know you’ve got people from different countries together in supposedly an inter-cultural space… I’ll put this simply: each person coming into the PaR workshop is from a specific area of the globe but they’re also part, at least potentially a part, of an international community of particular kinds of knowledge. That difference between the location from which you are coming in terms of your lived experience in everyday life (you know, life stories, the whole variation that you get between different cultures, especially in a group like the PaR workshop members, which can constitute fabulous diversity) is one thing you know: let’s call it the affective world. Then another aspect of that is that people are also sharing knowledge of an interdisciplinary kind, and that knowledge can be more or less generalised according to what its source is and who’s put it together in the first place. So that type of knowledge is where the interdisciplinary problem begins because people are talking different languages *and* using the same words to create different meanings and so on. But that’s a useful domain because it generates difference and debate, though it doesn’t take you necessarily towards transdisciplinarity in PaR. However, what potentially *can* do that … is that if you’re working through the processes of a culture of knowing that you inhabit in your original location, then each person in the group will likely be coming from a very different kind of world. So the differences between the knowledge world and the affective world can be profound in their multiplicity. Then it is through the dynamics between those (and other) various ‘worlds’, and particularly within the affects of those worlds that people are bringing with them … which produces the borderlines, if you like, or the potentially absolute boundaries between an interdisciplinary space and a transdisciplinary space. Because if you work not primarily through language but through creative practice … in an open way in relation to each other

… then the differences between behaviour, the differences in attitude, the differences in feeling, all the differences in processes of cognition as well, come into play: then play again.

It's those qualities of the PaR working group that puts it in a position to experiment through transdisciplinarity. In transdisciplinarity you're not limited to, or dominated by, cognitive processes, as tends to be the case many in disciplines (logocentricity and all that), because any aspect of experience within the environment of the workshop itself can be brought into play: and play again.

JH: In that sense it creates a temporary playground but also a laboratory – as a reflexive space – and I think the reflexivity of this practice is one of its most important features.

BK: Yes, absolutely.

JH: What are the values of reiterating one's practice in that community, in that reflexive space and how do you conceive of that space as a laboratory (Heron, 2015) – specifically a place for new experiments with one's practice?

BK: The reflexivity can only appear through repetition of some kind or another. You have to have markers of what's happened in order to know where you are, in order to experiment in where you're going. So as long as the process of repetition and reiteration is done in a way that 'balances' between knowledge and not-knowledge, knowing and unknowing – or shuttlecocks between them – then you're likely going to open up ways of newly experiencing what's going on in the laboratory. This makes for a laboratory which is experimental in the sense that we don't know what's going to happen next, and we're not sure if this is going to 'mean' anything, but nonetheless let's have a go and see what happens and comes out of it. So as you immerse yourself in the process of creating work in that way you are … moving towards transdisciplinarity. But the reiteration and repetition always gives you the potential to ring back the changes, as it were, or to turn around in different ways, to further refract and reflect on where you've been or where other people have been. That can include moving through areas of cognition and thinking (logocentricity and all that), BUT the dynamics between that and especially the affective aspects of unknowing creativity can be very research rich, because you're not sure what kind of behaviour, not sure what kind of result will come out of a process that is so radically open ended.

JH: And with that, the idea of *result* comes out which I know is a particular concern of the working group at present. Previously, the group has addressed areas such as documentation,

repetition or stratification and the current call has been about democracy. I know that an emerging interest – perhaps anxiety of the group – is the need to produce 'results'.

BK: It's a matter of figuring what kinds of reflexivity you've created in the processes of the playful laboratory workshop, and for that you have to have ways of reflecting on and between the *different* components of its work. You know, whether it's the space you're in or whether it be the languages that are being used or whether it's been the aim to find the moment where nobody knows what's going on in order to find out what comes next, and so on. Often that's difficult because usually there are a large number of components circulating through the practice, so the important thing here is to develop methods for the group to identify "that's more important than this in what we've just done, let's pick that as one of the 'things' to focus on, plus two or three other 'things' to focus on". Then it should become manageable for the group to understand and judge degrees of importance between components, as a starting point for beginning to create forms of knowledge regarding that complexity. That can then be translated into results through which you invent and evolve new protocols for representing what has happened that you couldn't have predicted, because that was the point of doing the work in the first place. So the sequence, in very broad terms, has to be: go through the creative, playful/ludic process; consider how to find areas of 'inbetweenness' within that process which could unexpectedly produce connections across markedly different components of practice; then work out how best you can think and talk about them, or otherwise figure out how they can best be represented through forms other than those which necessarily appeared in the workshop process. If you then consider that you've found or discovered or otherwise come up with something quite important as a transdisciplinary performance as research-in-process experience or experiences, that's your 'result'.

JH: And I think of that 'result' as something to re-iterate through practice in future experiments, so I would like to conclude by directing readers towards digital documentation.

REFERENCES ONLINE

'Critical Pedagogies and the Theatre Laboratory' in *Research in Drama Education* (Heron & Johnson, 2017)

This dialogue contributes reflections on the 'theatre laboratory' to the scholarly debate surrounding methodologies of drama education and applied performance. The co-authors suggest that the experimental and ensemble-led approach of the Samuel Beckett Laboratory, founded at Trinity College Dublin in 2013 as a space for research into Beckett in performance, may offer one response to a question that Kathleen Gallagher proposes in the 20th Anniversary issue of *RiDE* (20.3), concerning 'how drama educators might incorporate such practices of hope into their pedagogy' (2015: 423). This work suggests that the hopeful practice of laboratory exploration de-hierarchizes a scholarly endeavour and recasts the student as co-creator of knowledge, rather than consumer of cultural capital. The values and practices of such a laboratory may open one avenue of participatory pedagogy that scaffolds risk and re-values failure. In the dialogue that follows, we draw on Selina Busby's 'pedagogy of utopia' and Gallagher's 'practices of hope' (ibid.) to develop our own interests in the *subjunctivity* of performance pedagogies in Beckettian contexts (Heron and Johnson et al, 2014).

Nicholas Johnson: We originally conceived the Samuel Beckett Laboratory as a space for 'fundamental research' through performance, thinking initially that this would mean, predominantly, research into Samuel Beckett's works. After three years, we can clearly see that it is also a space for fundamental research into pedagogy, especially pedagogies around notions of 'ensemble' and 'laboratory'. How do we facilitate academic learning for the amateur practitioner through the artisan knowledge of performance? Can an ensemble-led laboratory intervene productively in epistemic encampments that pervade academic communities?

Jonathan Heron: When we established the laboratory, we were informed by Phillip Zarrilli's notion of the 'metaphysical studio', which he describes as 'a place of erasure, of risk, of loss, and always, as anyone who steps on the stage knows, of potential failure' (2002, 161). Our approach tends toward a collective and constructivist mode of enactive pedagogy, drawing upon the theatrical tradition of the ensemble – a temporary community – which has a number of different competencies in relation to Beckett and the theatre. Therefore, this community has different kinds of authority in relation to the work (its members may be undergraduate students, postgraduate students, practitioners in their own right, academic

scholars or simply enthusiasts). So the binary between the amateur and the professional is at play in this ensemble, but so are methodological binaries around text and performance, or archive and theory. We have elsewhere explored this project in relation to performance practice-as-research (Heron and Johnson *et al*, 2014, 73–94) and within Beckett Studies.

NJ: The laboratory seems like a productive intersection where the events of scholarship will organically produce teaching events, and vice-versa. Is it your view that the pedagogical dimension is somehow secondary to research here, or are they productively entangled? In what sense can we view this type of practical research as 'applied theatre'?

JH: One definition of 'the applied' that is helpful for our Beckett Laboratory comes from Hughes & Nicholson's *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre*, where they state: 'Applied theatre emerges as a creative force that responds imaginatively to the ways in which the loci of power have become diffuse and fragmented in the twenty-first century, and to new questions about how increasingly nuanced ideas of authority can be harnessed for social change' (2016, 2). Indeed, there are fairly well-documented issues around power, performance and authority in Beckett (e.g. Pountney 1988, 2006; McMullan 1994, 2010) where there is a contested relationship between authority and failure in his writing, and we have been attuned to the networks of authority and power that circulate in performance of his work (see Heron & Johnson 2014). Those networks of authority and power begin to condition so-called 'legitimate' interpretations of the work, and license certain 'correct' readings of Beckett, both on stage and in particular literary contexts. One of the powerful aspects of the theatre laboratory is its capacity to trouble acknowledged authorities on staging Beckett, while problematising the idea of authorized interpreters of Beckett's work. One way of constituting this project as an applied art form stems through the idea of the theatrical ensemble in relation to Beckett in performance. I wondered how you would develop those ideas of troubling authority through the theatrical ensemble exploring Beckett in particular?

NJ: I think that there are two historical dimensions that this builds on within Beckett's work. First, ensemble work seeks to address the philosophical and political positioning of language and authority in his own writing. I see Beckett discovering and working through the problem of authority as constructed by language in his writing, especially as he gets more refined in his postwar prose. The model of identity that he constructs is troubled in ways that resonate with the malleability of the student or actor in an ensemble. In that sense, the

traditional theatrical structures in which he also participated as an authority figure – as a director, or a signatory to a rights and royalties contract, for instance – do not necessarily align with the radical ideas about identity that are explored within the texts. Dovetailing with that larger philosophical project is the rich practical history of Beckett in clearly 'applied' contexts. In November of 1957, fairly immediately after the creation of *Waiting for Godot*, it was performed in San Quentin prison, and there is a durable legacy from that point onward of Beckett in prisons. Also, in the Irish context more recently, we have more than one company engaging with hospitals, mental health, addiction treatment centres, and homeless shelters in the city. These are specific contexts where Beckett is being inserted either dramaturgically (i.e. through *mise-en-scene*) or through engagement with the people in those spaces. The challenge, I think, is that the type of experimental ensemble work with this figure who has now become a massive cultural authority is perhaps less pervasive in the public awareness, or is somehow less visible as part of the imagination of alternatives for how to read Beckett. So as we integrate those histories of what aspects of identity or authority he analysed and dealt with, as well as the contexts in which he has been used, I think the laboratory constitutes a kind of third space that somehow links strands from his writing together with an extended model of we would consider 'applied' to be, and seeks innovation in those techniques as well.

JH: An ecological model of 'the applied' that Hughes & Nicholson put forward is: 'an encounter with borders, with those encounters characterised by openness and commitment to a process of making *relations* rather than staking out of a secure or fixed position' (2016, 7; emphasis added). This very much speaks to your notion of territories that have already been mapped in relation to these canonical or modernist writers, and the claims that practitioners or participants might feel legitimated to make about the text. It seems to me that the processes that you have been describing make use of a methodological toolkit from drama education as well applied theatre-making and participatory performance practices. These methods enable and empower participants to engage in new textual interpretations while developing new social contexts for that literature to produce or re-make *relations*, rather than policing borders or securing positions.

NJ: I suspect that there is great value in the social context of the 'laboratory' for precisely those reasons. In reading the twentieth anniversary special issue of *RiDE*, we both noted the debate arising about 'imagined futures' in relation to methodologies of drama education, applied performance and experimental practice. We thought that the 'laboratory' was a

notable omission in that discussion. In the editorial, there is a reference toward 'drawing from the past towards possible futures in different ways whilst sharing an ethos of hope' (2015, 411–2). Later on, we noted Busby speaking about 'pedagogy of utopia', and Gallagher's 'practices of hope' (ibid.). And I wonder if those terms connect to what we've considered as the '*subjunctivity* of performance pedagogies in Beckettian contexts' in our past writing (see Heron and Johnson *et al*. 2014, 73–94)?

JH: This notion of hope, in relation to both Beckett and 'the ensemble', is of interest here; Gallagher's work on hope concerns both drama education and applied theatre in relation to the experience of global youth. Her collaborative deployment of these practices — comparable to our own — take place at different geopolitical sites that coalesce around the same project. Not only does this represent an inversion of our intercultural practice (our ensemble forms a temporary community in the city of Dublin), but also this model echoes Hughes & Nicholson on 'the dynamic between place and community' (2016, 3) that emerges in applied theatre practice. This enables us to think in a transcultural way about the staging of histories of Beckett in performance, as well as the lived experiences of the ensemble in their home contexts.

NJ: There are always introductory exercises in which we seek to connect students to the memory of their first encounter with Beckett's work, and each year the multiplicity of native languages, for example, brings different cultures to bear. There is an awareness of identities, flows of power, and agency in the contemporary.

JH: However, this is foregrounded through the idea of play, and in this act of playing together, and the constant re-negotiation of that ludic practice and improvisatory action, there is indeed a *subjunctivity* or radical possibility. The pedagogy of utopia – if we read this concept as social change through praxis – could therefore replace one's scholarly devotion to the interpretive act of historiography, with the troublesome, playful, and hopeful activity of drama education, where we imagine how things might be in the future. While we are still informed by the scholarly work of Beckett Studies, our focus with the ensemble becomes what we can do with this work today or tomorrow, not on what have others done with this work already. The work of others becomes helpful primarily as it informs the ensemble's decisions about what to do next.

NJ: Yes, the urgency and immediacy of 'what is to be done' becomes its own form of hope. One of the interesting features of this discourse is that Beckett, more than many other

writers, has a kind of allergy to hope. And there is a profound ethical paradox in how he behaves in relation to futures. One of the curious things about such a hopeful practice, or such a utopian possibility as the creation of a multidisciplinary and multicultural ensemble – all of these interpersonal and intertextual transactions that are being renegotiated across borders, within the practice of the laboratory – is the lack of a promise that it will deliver something, some final outcome. Perhaps it's actually the absence of that promise — the absence of an ends-focused discourse or a kind of final unity that it will reach — that enables this practice. So there is a complication, perhaps, of the idea of a pedagogy of hope, when hopelessness is an a priori condition of the material, if judged in certain frames. But it depends on how you read the question of hope, in the aftershock of modernism – is the only hope in Beckett to be found in the act of going on, with full consciousness of the lack of durability?

JH: I suppose it is pedagogy of survival (rather than hope or utopia).

NJ: So rather than trying to generate a 'happy end' for students or participants in an ensemble, we are trying to scaffold the negative, or scaffold negativity, or introduce the possibility of negativity, and equip for survival in that context.

JH: One of the things that I find very interesting about the theatrical ensemble as a model for pedagogy is that it is a temporary community, that chooses to dwell together in a collective, whether for a week of immersive practice or many years of theatre making. This community has to evolve a system for behaviour which includes creating of some kind, and those ensemble-based groups tend towards a 'collectivity' that resists individual expertise, solo performers or celebrity culture. I have always been driven by the adaptability of the ensemble, across drama education, applied theatre and performance-as-research contexts, and here, I think has a particular opportunity to explore the peculiarity of Beckett in performance, through reflexive behavior. We try and keep that as simple as possible and ask participants to think about three categories during the process: what they *expect*, what they *observe*, and what they *learn*. I think the category of observation is especially important, because it foregrounds the experimental aspect of the process within a laboratory environment. I am therefore wondering about your reflections on the kinds of observation our participants have noted, and how that informs our practice with the group.

NJ: Well, one of the things that has emerged in the practice over the years has been a dual attention to observation. So as we set up each workshop, we invariably suggest that

participants observe their internal states on the one hand, and take note of atmospheres or external states on the other. Scaffolded in the setup of exercises is the dual awareness of the self within a field. While that dualism starts us off, in some ways it's actually a core ingredient in getting people to transgress the borders that exist, to consider the place of the other. It's something that happens on a rolling basis, and sometimes is discussed openly in the room. Where this informal observation dovetails with laboratory practice is that there is also a qualitative survey sent as a follow-up, to help formally collect these data. At different intervals of the practice — at two days, at five days, and then a month later in reflection — we ask again for those observations, and in limited time and space, ask people to highlight what emerged for them. Because of the diversity of profile, in terms of who is in the room, who is participating, and what prior conceptions they bring to Beckett, those generate various interesting divergences and commonalities. I find that in particular years, pedagogy is something that will actually be mentioned, especially by those who are active in pedagogy in some way or are planning on becoming active. The mode of investigation in the room is frequently seen as a teaching tool or as a method that will be carried forward by participants in their own teaching. This suggests a methodological insight that is being produced here. Diversity of the ensemble is also often noted – the range of expertise – and similarly, there is frequent comment on the de-hierarchization of knowledge on the part of the facilitators. So even though you and I are, in the words of one respondent, 'transparent' in our research interests and construct the laboratory as a research space for our work, it is at the same time connecting to practices that are pedagogical in the moment. The pedagogies are, in fact, one of the more visible aspects of how the space is set up.

JH: I think there is something valuable there around the visibility of this practice, and this notion of 'the transparent'. A pedagogy of transparency enables us to think about our disciplinary methods in relation to systems of governance, noting how they create microcosms of social (in)justice that have the capacity to (dis)improve the condition of their communities.

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‘There’s the record, closed and final: *Rough for Theatre II* as Psychiatric Encounter’ in *Journal of Medical Humanities* (Broome & Heron, 2016)

> A: One has to consider the client’s temperament. To accumulate documents is not enough.
>
> B: *[Vexed, slapping on his papers]* Here, as far as I’m concerned, the client is here and nowhere else. (Beckett 1986, 246)

Introduction

This collaboration arose from two interdisciplinary events: *Shakespeare on the Brain* (Warwick Arts Centre 2009) and *Beckett and the Brain* (The CAPITAL Centre 2009). This partnership was further developed at Warwick Medical School and the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning through the *Psychiatry and Performance* project (which formed part of the *Open-space Learning in Real World Contexts* project, funded by the Higher Education Academy, 2009-2011) and the UK-government funded *Beckett and Brain Science* project (AHRC 2013). These projects drew upon traditions of Applied Theatre and Drama Education to develop clinical skills and public engagement with science in connection with other collaborative practices discussed in *Open-space Learning: a Study in Transdisciplinary Pedagogy* by Monk, Chillington-Rutter, Neelands and Heron (2011). At the first *Beckett and the Brain* event, the clinical and scientific material was employed as an interpretive, hermeneutic technique in Beckett Studies, and at the *Psychiatry and Performance* event, dramatic works themselves (*King Lear* and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, *Diary of a Madman* by Nikolai Gogol, and *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane) were interrogated to facilitate and deepen discussion around medical issues, such as the portrayal of mental illness, the importance of the ‘narrative arc’ in considering how symptoms develop in individuals over time, coping with treatment failure and clinical ambiguity as a health professional, and how art can be used in medical education. Beckett’s 1976 play *Rough for Theatre II* (hereafter RFTII), we suggest, serves as a case study for this work in that the bringing of clinical and scientific issues to the text can bring benefits to clinicians, medical students, and theatre practitioners alike. From the viewpoint of the Arts and Humanities researcher, this dialogue is also offered as an interdisciplinary contribution to Beckett Studies. It constitutes what Anna McMullan has called a “consideration of how Beckett’s drama is reconstituted in interdisciplinary and intercultural translation and embodiments”, the kind of activity that McMullan suggests will “transform our approach to Beckett in the twenty-first century” (2010, 144).

Dialogue

Jonathan Heron: As a theatre director I became interested in RFTII as part of a wider investigation into the plays of Samuel Beckett, and that text particularly interested me as it's rarely staged. It had been written or drafted in the 1950s, then abandoned and worked up for publication in 1976. The role of the static body of C at the window is central to an audience's understanding of the play, and we wanted to place the piece in conversation with Beckett's later play *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), which also contains a silent body. We were also considering placing it alongside his *Catastrophe* (1982), a late Beckett work which also has a protagonist who is not able to speak yet is at the core of the dramatic situation. So, the ambiguity of C's presence in the room interested us as theatre practitioners.

Matthew Broome: I had a long interest in some of Beckett's more famous works such as *Waiting for Godot* (1953), *Endgame* (1958), and the novel *Murphy* (1938). But when I came across this play I think it was the issue of making judgments about another individual based on written records, and the role of speech or the absence of speech in those judgments which I thought had a clear relevance to clinical practice and could be a useful teaching aide talking to students about the development of their clinical skills. Although the professional status of 'A' and 'B' is not clear in RFTII, the use of case records and testimonies parallels some clinical encounters in psychiatry where important judgments are made by doctors, yet the individual about whom those judgments is made is unable or unwilling to take part in the consultation.

JH: I think that our conversation on RFTII should initially focus on the tension that exists in the play between B's testimonies ('Here, as far as I'm concerned the client is here and nowhere else') and A's parallel concern with the 'client's temperament'. I think we can talk later in this dialogue about how that represents a wider philosophical tension between diagnosis and embodiment, but in relation to this play we are asking: what is the relationship between written records (which could be seen as case notes) and the mental disorder that is the psychological experience of this character C? How would you respond to the idea that there is a tension between the written records and C's experience?

MB: The interesting thing about the play for me is that in clinical practice you usually rely on two elements with a patient: you take a history, and then you can examine them. Psychiatry is very similar to the rest of medicine in this respect in that a large part of the information we gather is from the patient, so, as with other physicians, we also take a history and then

examine them. In psychiatry that includes a normal physical examination, and it also includes what we call a mental state examination. In this part of the assessment, we ask open and closed questions about certain experiences and mental states, as well as perform some tests of cognition. We also observe the body and how it interacts with the interviewer. I suppose the first element of the psychiatric assessment, the history, is where RFTII challenges the norm (and it's important to note that C is not referred to as a patient but rather a client), is the primacy of written records and testimony. The play challenges the idea that you rely on observation and history taking to make a judgment, and it relegates those activities and the testimonies become primary. So in psychiatry, routinely, after taking the history and the examination we take a collateral or corroborative history, which is when you may turn to the medical records or ask the relative or partner for advice or guidance about how patient has been. That's a supplement or an addendum in the patient's own account; in RFTII you have the reverse, whereby the history-taking and examination is absent, and the testimony of others, as well as the case notes, become primary and, as the opening quotation shows, for A and B that's where C belongs--in the case notes with the interviews.

JH: And that's a result of Beckett's dramatic imagination which doesn't show the gathering of those testimonies, even though they are using the testimonies of others (in addition to some of C's own letters that he has written), and we do not hear this character's voice during the play. The character is not allowed to comment upon any of the texts he has heard, and in a sense his selfhood is reduced to that which he says and does, or by contrast, that which he has said and done in the past. Those elements are the main sources of evidence for any judgment that can be made about his personal identity. Theatre practitioners also spend a lot of time observing bodies and, as you say, if one is observing the body, one can only really go on what the body says and does. I wonder if we could reflect on that before specifically dealing with C? What knowledges are possible as a result of simply focusing on human speech and human actions, and how does that sit within psychiatric practice or histories of psychiatry; are we simply that which we say and do?

MB: I think psychiatry, particularly the contemporary largely non-psychoanalytically informed psychiatry, would have a lot of sympathy with that: it sticks close to what is seen to be value neutral, clinical objective data, so all you can record or comment upon is what the person would say and how they would act. The problems you get are when patients do not say anything meaningful or are mute, which is not an uncommon situation, particularly with those with severe mental illnesses. For example, their speech may be so confused or

disordered that it is incoherent. Psychiatry has ways of describing this phenomenon; we call it 'formal thought disorder'. But patients can also be mute, and again this is not all that unusual, and we suggest you can still do a mental state examination. In this case, we can only access their mental state by observing behaviour rather than being able to elicit detailed answers to questions about their psychological experiences. Some of the findings of such an observation may be things like the person remaining in one place over a period time, levels of motor activity, as well as particular abnormal physical movements. In states of catatonia, for example, you may develop stereotyped behaviours or mannerisms. There is a literature in psychiatry of the body, of psychopathology, of bodily movements and there is a close connection historically with neurology, and this vocabulary dates from both disciplines' interest with disorders of motor activity or inactivity such as catatonia and hysteria. Hence a lot of the words we use are similar to those used by colleagues in neurology. So in the situation where patients won't or can't talk to you, the least psychiatry can do is describe in technical, psychopathological terms how the patient appears to them. This again is something we don't see in C, we just see his back, and little comment upon how he's acting until the very end of the play. So, for example, if I was in the not uncommon situation of being called out to see someone in a police cell whom the police may suspect of being mentally disordered, the individual may turn his back to me and refuse to leave the cell or communicate with me. But that itself, the refusal, the turned back, would itself be clinical data for psychiatry. The complete absenteeism of C in RFTII is not possible. This would also, in a different way, be true of a psychoanalytic approach: rather than viewing the absence of meaningful speech, or silence, as a clinical sign it would itself be further interpreted based upon the prior theory.

JH: Some of the testimonies that are used as evidence (for C having a reason to jump out of the window and, we presume, to commit suicide) are organized into the following categories: 'Work, family, third fatherland, cunt, finances, art and nature, heart and conscience, health, housing conditions, God and man, so many disasters' (Beckett 1986, 238); these very diverse categories for organizing a life are pseudo-scientific in the way they are presented, but what Beckett gives us in the testimonies are some extraordinarily bizarre characters who perhaps can't be trusted themselves and have a resolutely pessimistic view of his capacity to be happy. The testimonies, from the people who have known C, include one from 'the late Mrs. Darcy-Croker, woman of letters' (240), and this suggests a history of depression within the family. Then finally we get to the 'bits and scraps', fragments of

psychological opinions, reported by character B, including 'hope not dead of living to see the extermination of the species . . . literary aspirations incompletely stifled . . . bottom of a dairy woman in Waterloo lane . . . you see the kind of thing' (242). Is there anything here that would be of interest to a psychiatrist in relation to this character?

MB: The one thing that struck me which also resonates with comments we receive when we teach psychiatry is the seeming arbitrariness of how you order and marshal information. One of the problems we have in teaching medical students is that they find taking a full psychiatric history a huge leap from the briefer history-taking that they learn for medicine and surgery. They feel that the amount of information they are requested to take is almost endless, and further how they order it, divide it up and present it back to a consultant or an examiner as difficult not only due to time constraints in the relaying of information but also in the genuine heterogeneity in clinicians' models of mental illness, which in turn structures the clinical data. I certainly felt that Beckett pushes the thought of the arbitrariness of social and human sciences and related disciplines. What you don't see with Beckett is a theory of mental illness as the organizing principle of the raw clinical data, of how patients present with psychological difficulties.

JH: In that sense Beckett portrays disordered experience on stage.

MB: Yes, and some might argue that we have a theory of psychiatry, others may argue we don't have a theory or we have a false theory and that our ordering is as farcical as Beckett's. We like to think obviously that there's a reason why we collect certain facts and present them in a given way, and we try to instill that in our students, but you can see that without knowledge of that overriding theory it looks a bit peculiar and surreal. This list of psychological fragments, seemingly unstructured by theory, reminds me of a passage in *The Order of Things* where Foucault in turn recollects an idea from Borges (Foucault, 1966, xvi) where the latter shows the way in which lists of animals are organized in 'a certain Chinese encyclopedia'. What may look like some completely arbitrary taxonomy, in fact is 'the exotic charm of another system of thought' and hence highlights the limitations of our structures of thought.

JH: Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) has also been used by performance theorists to position theatrical production as a disciplinary mechanism; though Ulrika Maude has shown that 'the emphasis, rather than being on the body itself, lies on discourse' (2009, 3). With this in mind, we should turn to a specific body rather than a discursive body, so let us take

one more example from C. At one moment, ‘C’ mentions a ‘slim file’ under ‘confidences’ which includes a list of medical and psychological complaints:

> ‘. . . sick headaches . . . eye trouble . . . irrational fear of vipers . . . ear trouble . . .’ – nothing for us there- ‘. . . fibroid tumours . . . pathological horror of songbirds . . . throat trouble . . . the need of affection . . .’ -we’re coming to it- ‘. . . inner void . . . congenital timidity . . . nose trouble . . .’ –ah! Listen to this!- ‘. . . morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others . . .’ (Beckett 1986, 242)

Just as they are arriving at this discovery the desk lamp fails, which perhaps represents our over-reliance on material evidence. We’re dealing with a character who is known to be ‘morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others’ (and therefore it’s almost an act of torture to be reading these out in front of him); he is a character who has no agency, he is silent and static throughout the play, as we have said, but there’s this idea of morbid sensitivity, so I wondered how that might be dealt with in a psychiatric context? Beckett was interested in the idea from Bishop Berkeley that *esse est percipi* (‘to be is to be perceived’, hinted at by Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* with his ‘Essy-in-Possy’ [1986, 42] and directly quoted in Beckett’s *Film* [1986, 323]), that is the relationship between identity and perception, the extent to which the opinion of others, and one’s sensitivity to that, constitutes one’s own sense of self.

MB: Although the ‘pathological horror of songbirds’ sounds like an unusual phobia, the most clinically sounding phrase of that list is ‘morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others’ which is a concept in German psychopathology that has been viewed as a precursor state to other mental illnesses as well as being part of the characterization of personality disorders. It’s the idea that one is exquisitely sensitive to how you’re viewed to the stage where you think that even neutral events are directed towards you: it is captured in Kretschmer’s notion of *sensitive Beziehungswahn* from 1918 and utilized in Schneider’s writing in psychopathy in 1950. So, buried amongst constructs that seem irrelevant to much of contemporary psychiatry, this one stands out as one that remains relevant to how we think about personality disorders, paranoia, and psychotic illness.

JH: When they push through that long description and after they finish the business with the lamp, A and B eventually find a statement from C himself: ‘I was unfortunately incapable of retaining it…’ There is an absurd contradiction in the client’s mind between his morbid sensitivity, on one hand, and his inability to ‘retain it’, on the other. Therefore, he must have

a cognitive problem or memory loss, which is fairly typical of Beckett's characters, and it introduces the paradox where he forgets the criticisms that offend him.

MB: It feels less paradoxical to me because sometimes the emotional resonance of an event may remain without being able to link that event to the semantic, explicit content; hence, it the factual detail that may be closed off to memory when asked to recollect what had happened. So I think it's not uncommon for people to relate to you that they felt a comment or opinion was directed towards them but they couldn't tell what it was about it (or how or why). There can be a feeling of sensitivity without the knowledge about how or what happened, so this idea about emotional, non-cognitive, states is there which is important, I think.

JH: This contested inter-relationship between the emotional and the rational, for the character of C, enacts a philosophical problem, and there is evidence that Beckett, during his early period, worked through histories of psychology and philosophy, as documented by Matthew Feldman (2006). Indeed, Beckett's use of the philosopher Wilhelm Windelband in particular has been of interest to you as something that represents a wider tension in the philosophy of the social sciences.

MB: Windelband is a bit neglected as a philosopher, but Beckett seems to have drawn a large part of his knowledge of philosophy from reading *A History of Philosophy* (Windelband, 1893). In this book Windelband, although he does a fair and unbiased job, does bring in his own philosophy in towards the end. As a philosopher he is still thought of in psychiatry because of his distinction between the *idiographic* and the *nomothetic* (Broome 2008). So he gives us this distinction of ways of understanding people, one of which is idiographic where you see the person as an irreducible unique event, and one of which is nomothetic where you rely on general laws to understand them. In Windelband both are equally valid ways of doing psychology but both rely on different methods and tools. So Windelband has interest in that regard to clinicians as well as social scientists, and his attempt has been classed as neo-Kantian, an attempt to bring the rigour that Kant brought to the natural sciences to the social sciences, particularly history and sociology, and as such was part of body of wider work in German scholarship, including that of Nietzsche, Weber, Dilthey, and Heidegger.

JH: And that tension which Windelband gives us, between the event and general laws, in what way could that relate to what we have been saying so far about the client's (or patient's) temperament and the testimony of others?

MB: I'm thinking of ideal types or extremes, but Windelband says that one of the ways you know you may need an idiographic approach to understanding is when an affective response is elicited towards the material under consideration. That is, the encounter demonstrates some sort of value of importance to you. The kind of dispassionate way that A&B view the testimony is as if they are trying to close themselves off from that, to close an affective response and idiographic means of engagement with C. Following the same argument, you could suggest that looking at case notes and making judgments about causality, in terms of relating life events with the current situation, is again trying to invoke general rules to explain how C has got to where he is today. So you could argue that the approach that A&B exemplify is more of a nomothetic one, they close themselves down from idiographic understanding of C, as an individual. And part of that is due to the fact of not having appreciated him in terms of his speech or body. Viewing C as purely a collection of documents, rather than a concrete embodied individual, limits an affective response towards him. As mentioned above, in psychiatry it is good practice to review written records alongside the clinical encounter with an individual: in RFTII we see one mode of understanding as being prioritized at the total exclusion of another and a seeming bureaucratization of practice.

JH: This tension, between 'the testimony of others' and 'the client's temperament' seems central to our understanding of the encounter; might there be a synthetic third space that could emerge from being aware of these two modes of inquiry?

MB: Yes, and it relies on the German understanding of science as broader than as we understand it, as an organized body of knowledge, literally understanding the person is as [much] use potentially to psychology as a neuroscientific understanding of a person.

JH: So Windelband is not offering this as an either/or.

MB: No, he is trying to defend knowledge by showing that there are these two ways we can do social science, each with a method appropriate to the subject matter.

JH: This reminds me of tensions within the Humanities, and particularly in relation to the study of theatre, between a phenomenological stance and a semiotic stance, for example. Reducing the play in performance to a specific cultural event provides more opportunities for the study of human behaviour beyond the theatrical, such as the anthropological or the ecological. A contemporary Performance Studies researcher may detail a performance of

RFTII ideographically, as a unique event, constructed in part by Samuel Beckett, in part by the theatre company but also by the audience's nervous systems; the audience's physical presence helps to co-create the performance as a multi-dimensional cultural event. I wonder whether this phenomenology of performance is relevant to our dialogue, as another reading of the encounter, and perhaps we could think that through in relation to one final example from the text: 'A: So, agreed? Black future, unpardonable-/ B: As you wish. Let him jump.' (246) which immediately follows the first of two interruptions of the non-human variety (the cat and the birds). This medical (or legal) judgment has been made to let him jump then, like Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot*; they pass the time and one of the things that A says during this period of waiting may shed some light on the decision that has been made. This challenged us in rehearsal, where we also explored how long it takes before A and B acknowledge C's physical presence and their relationship to his body (whether there's a smile on his face, whether he is crying at the end), huge ambiguities that you often encounter in Beckett. This also was quite a rich statement, in which A may be referring to C (although he will go on to talk about Smith): 'How many unfortunates would still be so today if they had known in time to what extent they were so?' (247). For unanswered questions, unresolved cases and unbroken silences are examples not only of Beckett's stagecraft but also of a phenomenology, where ambiguity in the play-text, can lead to embodied knowledge in performance. What meanings does A's question raise for you?

MB: These issues were discussed at the 2009 *Beckett and the Brain* symposium, where this ending was seen to mirror contemporary concerns about euthanasia, assisted dying or some kind of institutionally authorized death, and without wanting to read too much into the play, perhaps Beckett brings out, and that line captures, the thought that if there is a realism about one's degree of suffering is it not more sensible to end one's life?

JH: Which is precisely what made us as a company think carefully about the suggestion of suicide: they say 'let him jump', but what the audience doesn't yet know (and will know by the end of the play) is that A and B's judgment, and therefore C's suicide, is interrupted because A sees something on C's face, perhaps tears, which may be the beginning of healing. Something changes which suggests that he might not jump, that the judgment is faulty and that his body has given some sort of meaning or new information that could not been known in the records. Perhaps he will live on because he will 'have known in time' just how unfortunate he is, which is a weird way of talking about it because it suggests that staring the nature of your suffering in the face, knowing the full extent of it, is the first stage of

recovery or the first step towards mental health. From a clinical point of view does this have any significance?

MB: Clinically it is a real issue. It is an important thing to manage in the sense that quite often in my clinical work I am seeing people with a psychotic illness, and one of the big challenges we have is once they come out of their first or second episode and awareness develops that they may have a potentially lifelong psychiatric illness that may recur. A challenge is in managing that profound grief of over what their future was going to be and what it now may be and balancing what we call 'psychoeducation', informing them about their condition to enable their decisions about treatment and development of insight with this degree of pessimism and the hopelessness of having a chronic illness. So it's a difficult one, for the reader of Beckett, whether C cries because he realizes the extent of his problems or it's a relief because he's been allowed to end his life. Quite commonly, sadly, one sees clinically that people who have arranged their suicide have become quite bright and animated when they have put the plan to end their life into place.

JH: So the decision to finally end one's life can be a release…

MB: Yes, quite often one would see people's spirits lift because they have a clear plan and a path for how to achieve it: their family is away for the weekend, they've arranged the method, and their suffering's due to end. The more non-clinical reading that perhaps you might see in Beckett scholarship would be Heidegger's view that only by facing one's own finitude and one's death, can one live authentically. That's quite a tough thing for people to aspire to in reality.

JH: Yes, and that does relate somewhat to Beckett's own biography including his own experience of depression and anxiety (see Knowlson 1996) *underpinning* his development as an artist by his accepting just how awful 'it all' is. By realizing that 'to be an artist is to fail' (Beckett and Duthuit 1965, 125) or writing to 'fail better' (Beckett*,* 1983, 7), one realizes that the general condition of being is not only a move towards death but also full of suffering, and that an awareness of this allows one to be more present and playful than one could have been if there was some greater meaning. This is a paradoxical reoccurrence across the works of Beckett.

MB: In thinking of Beckett, through his themes of failure, through his finitude, through this comic element, he tries to rescue nihilism in deflating the idea of a coherent meaningful life,

emphasizing the significance of the everyday, the routine and the mundane, where more romantic writers fail who may denigrate so many elements of normal routine life; it is very hard to be this very resolute authentic hero of romantic existentialism.

JH: There is almost no heroism in Beckett, and while his protagonists might be failing, they are at least attempting to 'fail better'. Indeed, the actor Jack MacGowran, when asked about playing these desperate roles, spoke of 'hope' when acting Beckett. Once we accept the awfully bleak situations in which we find the characters, we can also observe their hopeful perseverance: 'you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.' (*The Unnamable*, 1953; Beckett 2010, 134).

Conclusion

Our shared interest in a silent static body as a stimulus for both psychological and philosophical exploration has demonstrated how Beckett's theatrical conventions often stand in (pun intended) for problems of ontology, offering instead what McMullan has termed an 'ontological doubleness' (2010, 13) and 'a matrix of embodiments' (126) where the human body may once have seemed uncontestable. In this way, RFTII is just one of a series of aesthetic assaults on the authority of the human body, which frequently fails to fully represent itself in Beckett and simultaneously enacts a cultural failure of representation. The play's status as a 'rough for theatre', and its textual history of abandonment locates the play in the margins, rather than at the centre of a wider artistic project. In showing a performing body that refuses to do what you expect of it on stage (to be expressive, to face us, to speak, to communicate how it feels, to communicate its inner life), C's *inexpressiveness* is evocative of Beckett's conception of authority on 'a double model' as articulated by McMullan:

> on the one hand, it is repressive, rational, judgmental; on the other, it is productive and generative, a labour animated by the refusal of the subject not only to take up a place with the proper signifying order (a refusal to *own* a language or a body) but to stay silent. (125)

As we have shown above, *Rough for Theatre II* challenges notions of authority in relation to embodiment and diagnosis. Beckett offers us the example of 'A' and 'B' trying to make sense of a life (that of 'C', who although present with 'A' and 'B' does not speak and is not questioned), with 'A' looking for signs of hope for 'C' from the written records and aiming

to persuade 'B' not to let 'C' jump (presumably to his death), with 'B' insistent that 'the client' ('C') exists wholly amongst the papers. As such, Beckett challenges us with the notion that not only can the case notes serve as a means of idiographic, empathic and individualised understanding of another but further, the paradoxical notion that the case notes themselves obviate the need for the existent individual to attain such understanding.

As such, Beckett's provides a useful text for medical educators to examine the ways in which we assess, and try to understand, our patients, and the approach of 'A' and 'B' and also offers a limit-situation where the patient almost vanishes, replaced by records. Windelband's work as well as influencing Beckett was a great impetus and spur to his successors in philosophy and the social sciences, not least via Husserl, Heidegger, Weber, and Dilthey on the development of phenomenological psychiatry, an approach that encourages clinicians to put aside theory and attend to the experiences related by patients themselves (Broome et al. 2012), an approach that in RFTII is withheld from 'C'.

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'Beckett on the Wards: medical humanities pedagogy and compassionate care' in *Medical Humanities* (Heron with Barry, Duncan, Hawkins & Playdon, 2015)

To be 'compassionate' is to share the passion: etymologically, to suffer together. For the clinician, there is an understandable tension between this compassion (to *feel* pity) and the imperative of diagnosis (to *know* thoroughly). This tension became an explicit concern of the 2013 *Beckett on the Wards* medical humanities project (commissioned by Health Education Kent, Surrey and Sussex, hereafter HEKSS), and the 2012 'Beckett and Brain Science' interdisciplinary research project (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, hereafter AHRC). This educational case study exemplifies the medical humanities in a number of ways, but primarily through the direct collaboration between theatre practitioners and consultant psychiatrists. It will proceed in three parts: I) the academic context, II) the clinical context and III) the pedagogic practice, before a final reflection upon the use of Samuel Beckett's theatre within clinical settings. This work has now been expanded as part of the AHRC-funded 'Modernism, Medicine and the Embodied Mind' research project at the Universities of Bristol, Exeter and Warwick.

The Academic Context

Elizabeth Barry, Ulrika Maude and Laura Salisbury, scholars of Beckett and medicine, collaborated with performance practitioner Jonathan Heron and consultant psychiatrist Matthew Broome to investigate Beckett's interests in the sciences of the brain, the influence of these interests on his work, and the value of his writing to those studying and treating disorders of the brain and nervous system today. Heron's transdisciplinary workshops, involving scholars and practitioners in the arts and sciences, gave shape to the intuition of many clinicians that literature and theatre offer a means to understand challenging mental conditions. Through this work, Beckett's depiction of disordered experience offered a stimulating challenge to the categories and narratives used in medicine. These topics, approached in part through experiential learning in performance devised by Jonathan Heron, prompted Zoe Playdon (then HEKSS Head of Education) to commission Heron to run educational workshops with NHS clinicians. For a more detailed academic rationale for this project see the forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, to be published by Springer (Barry et al, forthcoming).

The Clinical Context

HEKSS had recognised that the region's elderly population was high, that elderly medicine was therefore a priority, and that intellectual impairment was a particular issue in this field. Clinical encounters with intellectually impaired patients can be challenging because the patient narrative, which lies at the heart of the consultation, may be fragmented, incomplete, and unconventionally structured. The roles of family and carers are particularly important in long-term care, and understanding their perspectives and challenges can be key to improving the patient experience. Playdon felt that if clinicians could improve their 'decoding' of these dislocated patient narratives, and gain deeper insights into the perspectives of carers, then they might be able to deliver more effective care more quickly. This improved efficiency could have a positive impact on the financial bottom line in a range of ways – a more rapid 'throughput', less repeat visits, for example – and would provide a clinical encounter that was more satisfying to clinicians and more effective for their patients.

Taking place locally in NHS Trusts, the project was designed to address issues specific to local patient populations, and attract no costs of travel or locum cover for its attendees. Transdisciplinary in nature, it was instinctively interprofessional, applicable to everyone who had direct patient contact, managers as well as clinicians. At the heart of it, too, lay the fundamental desire to 'widen the circle of compassion', to extend the depth and breadth of understanding between clinicians, managers, patients, carers and families, by entering imaginatively into a world which opened up different possibilities for communication.

The Pedagogic Practice

Elaine Hawkins (then HEKSS) and Francesca Duncan (theatre practitioner) supported Heron in the delivery of the three-hour workshops, which took place between May and July in 2013 at Guildford, Hastings, Rochester and Chichester. Multiprofessional teams engaged in practical tasks focused around the theatre of Samuel Beckett and its application to 'compassionate care', a particular concern of the 'Francis Report' (published on 6 February 2013 as the 'Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry'). Hawkins and Heron were also interested in how the workshops stimulated participants' reflection on their professional communications and the kinds of narrative that have shaped the performance of their professional identities.

The workshop practice therefore had to evolve into each new environment through a reflexive and experimental approach. Duncan and Heron adapted methods from theatrical rehearsal (including games, improvisation, voice and movement work) in order to promote

an inclusive and kinesthetic learning environment for clinical staff. A significant proportion of time was spent encouraging 'open-space learning' (see Monk et al, 2011) to maximize participation. Once participants in each group were willing to immerse themselves in the activities, the material from Beckett's *Not I* (1972) and *Footfalls* (1976) could be shared. Examples of tasks in this phase of the workshop included 'stream-of-consciousness' work via the role of 'Mouth' in *Not I* and a consideration of the Auditor's 'gesture of helpless compassion' (Beckett, 2006).

Our focus on compassion promoted a lively exchange between the clinicians (and senior administrators, including a Head of Security in one case) regarding the Francis Report and its bearing on the psychiatric treatment of dementia. The project team devised activities that some participants, in this case Guildford, found challenging:

> [I was] initially perplexed and fearful. I think it did allowed a breath of discussion beyond our usual experience.
>
> [This was] somewhat out of the usual type of educational sessions we participate in our weekly meetings. (Project evaluation, 2013)

While the inclusion of the workshop within a compulsory education programme had made the Guildford session difficult, even optional sessions, such as the Chichester event, still produced contradictory responses:

> I think this workshop needs to be offered as widely as possible – throughout the NHS, schools, prisons, care homes, etc. The list could go on forever. [It] made me think of importance of looking beyond what is said or disclosed.
>
> I guess it might have made me more aware of the need to think about my geriatric patient, but not much in the way of tangible outcomes. (Project evaluation, 2013)

The majority of written and oral reflections from participants in all four trusts were positive, but a small percentage noted the lack of 'tangible outcomes' in relation their clinical practice. The two examples above, the first from a retired Community Psychiatric Nurse and the latter from a working GP, represent an apparent rift between *intangible* pedagogy (e.g. open-space learning) and *tangible* outcomes (i.e. clinical education). One insists on the intrinsic value of the practice, imagining a wider dissemination to improve wellbeing and compassionate caregiving. The other respondent focuses upon the inability of the practice to communicate efficiently and immediately to his/her professional context, locating this

responsibility with the educator, rather that the clinician. The difference between: 'the need to think about my geriatric patient' and 'not much in the way of tangible outcomes' is particularly interesting as it responds to the *diagnostic/compassionate* tension.

Final Reflection: Beckettian Bodies and Medical Culture

The body in Beckett, for Anna McMullan, 'is presented as both sign and site, engine or matrix of production (of stories, semblances, voice, footfalls or hiccups) and fabric to be composed and recomposed with limited materials' (2010: 125). These Beckettian bodies indeed provide both an engine and a fabric for medical humanities, especially its emergent pedagogies, which are uniquely placed to respond to 'compassion fatigue' (see Figley, 1995). What will need to follow is an extended analysis of late modernism (Beckett's theatre in context) and medical culture (clinical education in context) in order to develop this practice. In the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, Blackie and Lamb (2013) argue that: 'texts matter, and what we do with texts in our classrooms matters', whereas our findings seem to imply that: *bodies* matter, and what we do with *bodies* in our classrooms matters.

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‘An Interview with Natalie Abrahami’ in *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Heron & Abrahami, 2015)

A score / a map

Jonathan Heron: I’d like to start by thinking about the intense detail that Beckett texts require from the theatre practitioner, in terms of your own research and preparation. For example, Rosemary Pountney’s early study of Beckett’s production notebooks for *Happy Days* noted: ‘the astonishingly detailed lists of the repetition, variation and interruption of both text and action. Beckett notes for example 31 smiles and 17 turns to the bag’ (*Theatre of Shadows,* 1988). Rosemary goes on to indicate that Beckett further subdivided these terms into three kinds of term. So my first line of questioning concerns how you prepared for that level of detail in rehearsal?

Natalie Abrahami: What I found so helpful about the production notebook transcript was that I would never have been able to read it if I’d only seen Beckett’s own handwriting (so it takes someone like Jim Knowlson to translate it) but also the fact that Beckett had written the play some 18 years before he then had to approach it as a director. He was essentially approaching it as a director – as a lay director – as I would (going “what does the playwright mean by all of these things?”). So he had to investigate what the subconscious had written. In order to do his analysis on the play that exists he had to make those lists and I think that’s a very particular approach to him that reveals his musical background, looking at all the variations and thematic repetitions in it. It was incredibly helpful to me as a director in terms of my preparation for the play to understand those patterns. Often, I put a text into something called a word-cloud, which gives you a larger font size according to the number of times a certain word repeats. I do those sort of things myself, but not in the forensic way that Beckett did on that text. It was very helpful having all of that information, and then transcribing it into the text that I prepared for rehearsals where I tried to make it more of a *score.* What I found difficult about the published text that is that the stage directions are interwoven into the body of the spoken text and I found that confusing to follow – I think even the one that Beckett rehearsed from was a more double-spaced one that is just a bit easier to absorb.

I typed out the script again so that the spoken text is blue and the stage directions are black and they are separated on different lines. In the spirit of a *score* I tried to put symbols such as ‘eyes’ for Beckett’s specified Act II eye movements in terms of images so I could just make it a bit more image-led, because I sort of get a bit ‘aphasic’ when I look at

the printed text in that sense because it's so, so dense. Then I inserted my own footnotes that I had taken from all of the different transcripts and drafts and texts that I'd read (because I got the Ohio manuscripts as well). But this wasn't the 'text'; this wasn't the version of the script that I gave the actors. I never kept it from the actors but they didn't want it in that sense. So what actually worked quite well in rehearsals was that I was a conduit for them to all of the marginalia. I created a version of the text that was like a libretto but took out all the stage directions. We found that quite hard to work with so I also created a version for that had stage directions too. They didn't like my symbols - they rejected the symbols of 'eyes right' (and I had lips for smile and glasses etc.). The actors didn't like that so they asked for a version that was just text – so I took the text back – and they just had the stage directions and the spoken text separated out on different lines and in different colours. Winnie's in blue, Willie's in green, stage directions in black.

So we worked from that and I would encourage the performers to discover their own motivations and then I would guide them through the work that I'd done on the transcript. It was often very pleasing that they would come up with those things instinctively. Beckett had to do that analysis in order to find out why he'd written it in that way but actually those instincts are very intuitive theatrically. I do imagine him, as you read about in the biography *Damned to Fame* [Knowlson, 1996], sitting at his desk with Suzanne's bag and trying to do all of the different gestures. So my understanding of the text – the written text – is that he transcribed it from his own actions and then what he's doing with his production notes is trying to understand how that came about.

JH: In terms of your research then, there seems to have been a huge amount of preparatory work you've done before entering rehearsal. What status does this object [the director's script] have for you? Is this your version of Winnie's bag? Is this the director's equivalent?

NA: Yes, this is totally like Winnie's bag and, actually, I was somewhere yesterday where I clapped it to me and didn't want to leave it in the cloakroom … it's completely worthless and yet to me completely vital.

JH: How did the actors feel about this object?

NA: I don't think that they felt that interested in it. They liked doing something that was completely intuitive and then me saying: "Juliet, do you know what? Your friend Sammy thought exactly the same thing!" That way she felt that she was in touch with the writer

even though he couldn't be present. We had various nicknames for him throughout the process. I think people have the perception of Beckett as quite fearful in that sense of the specificity of the text and I wanted to make the room feel like a very happy room, going: "this is one of our greatest playwrights, we will find our way into his work through our own exploration." Which is what we tried to achieve through lots of improvisation and lots of playing.

Every time Juliet found that she had instinctively created something Beckett had wanted she would do a little run around the room and feel so excited if she naturally tapped into a gesture or idea that Beckett had mentioned in the production notes. I also transcribed from the rehearsal notes when Martha Fehsenfeld had been in rehearsals for the production at the Royal Court. So we used the research that way, which is not different in that sense… that's the way I would approach any play. I always try and create the conditions in which the actors will discover ideas intuitively. When you don't have the living writer with you, you can't ask them so we felt that – through all of those notebooks and different drafts – we could get a sense of what Beckett wanted. To have that sense of, "oh yes, this is a choice that he wanted", gave us a lot of succour.

I don't think anyone felt ever oppressed by my script and sometimes those choices were not the ones that we made and we tried to convey the spirit of: "oh actually this happens at this moment." It felt that we had enough confirmation from all of the different drafts and all of Beckett's notes and the production histories to make choices that made sense for those two particular performers, because Beckett would have made those same choices. I always feel with a lot of the production research that I do and background research is that I'm just trying to get into the playwright's mind. If he was there, or she was there I would talk to them but I can't – or they would be in a rehearsal but they can't. I try and get enough information in my 'backpack' (so to speak), so that I can have them at my side. From reading enough of what he talked about, he was very responsive to what actors did and what Billie Whitelaw came up with and what various other performers discovered. So it was just about making sure that we could always make the best choices in the moment by having as much information as possible.

JH: Is that object [the director's script] a *score*?

NA: It's probably a *map* more than a *score*. It guides me… a score feels to me … too restrictive. I wanted to make the text feel like a score in terms of creating my rehearsal text

because I think Beckett really did conduct it. He really wanted the eyes to open at that point and to close at that point and on a beat, on a downbeat or to create a staccato motion or whatever. So musical elements were very important in the way that we talked about it and that we made the show. In that sense, I translated the printed play into a score rather than a text. Beckett says that this occurs at this tempo and the first act lasts 48 minutes and actually, you know, our play did last exactly as he said. I can't remember now but approximately 50 minutes and 30 minutes, which is generally what it is. Early on in previews I felt that the first half was a bit slow and I was encouraging us to go more swiftly with it and actually later on in the run it went over 50 – it went to 51 – which in earlier previews I'd been really fastidious that that was too slow. Juliet was saying: "what do you think about this?" and I said: "well actually, the space is found in a different way so it makes sense." We allowed it to have its own life.

JH: I like the idea of the script as a *map* or a cartography; a guide for a territory to be explored or discovered, rather than something strictly to be followed.

NA: Yes, what I like to do is to get as much information about the territory that we're going into from previous directors and writers so I know what they wanted to achieve. But then we're on the journey with those particular performers and you use that information to get you to where you need to go. But you also hope that you discover new lands, so to get to certain things we probably took slightly different routes and got the same effect, or the effect we wanted hopefully.

<u>A happy room / a dark place</u>

JH: Could you sketch out the circumstances that lead to directing Juliet Stevenson in this role; what order did things happen in?

NA: When you look back at things there seems to be an order to them but it's not linear when you're in it. When I won the James Menzies-Kitchin award in 2005 to direct *Play* and *Not I* at Battersea Arts Centre, I was obviously very terrified by this prospect and how to actually do it. As much time as I'd spent with the production notebooks and drafts I didn't feel that I knew anyone who'd directed a Beckett play or anyone who'd been in a Beckett play so I wrote to lots of different directors and performers who'd either directed, or been in either *Play* or *Not I*.

One of the people who got back to me was Juliet who had serendipitously been in Anthony Minghella's film of *Play* (2000) and who'd been in Katie Mitchell's production of *Not I* at the RSC at the Other Place (1997). She very kindly offered to meet with me and I went her house where she shared with me lots of her experiences in her memory of exercises that she did when working on *Not I* and some of Katie Mitchell's notes. Juliet was very, very generous with her time and her experience and advice. So I made those shows and I haven't directed any Beckett in between but *Happy Days* was a play that I've wanted to do for years. I'd spoken to David Lan, Artistic Director of the Young Vic, about it on several occasions and at the point where we said: "yes, lets do this", Juliet just felt like the perfect person. It felt like a continuation of the conversation and, she remembered that we'd met nearly a decade ago so that's sort of how it came about really. I feel very lucky to have had that amazing collaboration with her and the inimitable David Beames.

JH: I'm interested in how practitioners' experience of Beckett changes their subsequent work. So were you aware of what you were bringing from your previous experience of Beckett to this production, almost ten years later, and what did you notice Juliet bringing from her experience of Beckett at RSC; what was being carried over?

NA: I think that one of the things that I'd found really useful when I'd approached *Play* and *Not I* was going to the Reading Archive and looking at lots of the earlier drafts. I remember reading earlier versions of *Play* that were very colourful and that were kind of very bawdy and actually that really helped us in developing the characters in rehearsals. I remember the performers improvising around the events mentioned in *Play* in the style of Noel Coward. We did lots of drawings of the characters in boxes with the kind of brightly coloured blonde hair and the different blues and oranges Beckett mentioned in his earlier drafts. So we found a more playful way in – a quite sexualised way in – that actually allowed us, when we then stripped it back and made it very 'Giacometti-esque', these dripping urns with heads emerging, caked in the Jocelyn Herbert oatmeal makeup. Those early journeys towards the production were very useful. I remember we did a lot of our rehearsals outside in the park, in Battersea Park; it was very helpful to have the playful juxtaposition and then find yourself incarcerated in urns.

I thought: "Beckett is so good at paring ideas down that you really need to know what you need to appreciate fully in order to play that." So we did a lot of background work: gradually stalking, approaching the play, hunting it down. And with *Happy Days* we

explored claustrophobia and buried Juliet in Regent's Park in the leaf pit there. Partly I was just really worried that what Beckett asks you to do as a director is put yourself in the role of a torturer. The torturer that is the light in *Play* is the same person that is the bell in *Happy Days* (whether you personify that idea or not, it is inevitably a being that forces someone to be still in one place).

I really wanted the room to be a *happy room*. If you're making a dark piece of work (or a piece that goes to dark place) it is vital that the room itself is not a *dark place*. So I really wanted to make sure that I was very clear with Juliet from the first time I met her that it was going to be a production where I really wanted to explore the physical and emotional impact of Winnie being buried alive and therefore Juliet would have to experience an element of that. I really wanted to make sure that Winnie was really experiencing that degree of isolation, claustrophobia and potential pain and I wanted the audience to know that. I was very clear that this would be part of it and we both knew and understood what that meant. You have to declare those intentions really early on. I didn't want it to be a simulacrum I wanted it to be very, very real.

JH: There's a lot in your description that makes me think of intense physical restriction that a lot of Beckett practitioners talk about, where they combine being *disciplined* with being *playful*, before paring the work down, in a kind of distillation or 'emptying-out'. Indeed, the idea of physically restricting the body in order to liberate something within seems to me part of what is happening in the writing, which we need to then replicate in practice. How did these problems influence your decisions about production or design elements?

NA: I think that's absolutely true and you have to build up your stamina for Beckett both physically and mentally; we thought of it like training for a marathon. We gradually increased the amount of time spent in the constraint of the 'skirt' as we called it. We started with a lot of text work around the table – and then improvisations in domestic settings like the kitchen and bathroom – and then we would say: "shall we go in?" The decision to go to the Regent's Park leaf pit was to explore the claustrophobia and have it as a sense memory and also to create a more extreme situation to deal with so that then performance reality feels more achievable.

With the design element, designer Vicki Mortimer and I, started from a very, very simple perspective – a lone figure in space. We wanted to recreate Beckett's arresting image of a human being trapped in space and time. I would have loved to have been in the

audience in 1962 when the curtain first rose and revealed Winnie buried up to her waist – it must've been so arresting to see this figure suspended in space and so terrifying and shocking – I wanted to achieve the same thrill in 2014. That was one of the things that became an impetus, particularly at the Young Vic – where there is no proscenium – it would be perverse to create a proscenium in a theatre that doesn't have a proscenium. That seems inappropriate – so we wanted to find a new way.

We took the Young Vic 1:25 model box and we placed Winnie – in the exact centre of the space so that everyone could see her in the same way. We started creating our own landslide by pouring chinchilla dust onto the model figurine. Vicki's daughter has a chinchilla (they've got very fine fur and they need to roll around in it so they don't get mites) – so we used that, and it created a lovely fine dust which was proportional to the 1:25 figurine we had. Otherwise we'd be putting boulders on the set! So we did this initial exploration of how if you create a landslide what happens around a figure and as we evolved our design we very much followed the way the sand would come down around Winnie's waist and her hips and bury her – which is why we called it the 'skirt' as this was how it formed around Winnie. We used those striations that came naturally to create our mound.

We were really interested in the context of Beckett writing in the 1960s. There's a real sense of the nuclear apocalypse permeating the piece and real fear of that. It feels to me a very poignant play about climate change and where we are now in the early twenty-first century. I really wanted to explore the terror of extreme climatic events in the production. So we started from the idea of someone being buried, buried alive by a series of landslides and then gradually created the rock face that those landslides would have come through. The experience we wanted to create for the audience was that when they were to arrive at the Young Vic it would feel like they had arrived at somewhere like the British Museum and that you were viewing an installation where the last living humans had been found and they had been carved out of the rock and brought them and their environment back to be examined. That's why we had the light box suspended above the rock-face – we brought the sky with us as well. The light box 'pinged' on at the moment that the show started because that was when the installation came to life in a way.

JH: Your production did feel like an installation and it's sounds like a curatorial process that you're describing. I think you've said before that: "we just cut enough of that landscape out to place in the Young Vic"?

NA: Yes, that was the idea and in an earlier version it had been a much more monolithic design. What we realised was there was actually something very strong about narrowing it. There was a sliver of it cut out that represented the passing of time in Winnie's life – just like with concentric rings in a tree. We imagined that when she was first proposed to, she was still free. The way Winnie describes the best day of her life, when Willie proposed to her: "Winnie be mine", and then nothing from that day forth except the titbits from the Reynold's News. And then Winnie gradually becomes stuck – our nickname for her came from our Producer Daisy Heath's daughters who referred to her as Mrs Stucklady.

We explored the experience of becoming increasingly trapped via lots of 'back-history' improvisations, improvising all the events that Winnie mentions (like the proposal and the giving of the market bag and the umbrella). Then the skirt itself, which we thought of like Winnie's wedding dress as was a metaphor for Winnie becoming gradually more and more buried in the domesticity of their relationship and their life. We thought of their marriage day, as the sort of hemline, and Winnie's wedding day is this moment when she starts to get trapped by the series of emotional tremors - landslides. By the time we meet her in Act I it's years into their marriage and you meet Winnie at the waistline and then of course, in the final act you meet her at the neck – the neckline.

A literal metaphor/ a lens

JH: Do you have a sense of how much time elapses between Act I and II (because there was some visible ageing given to Juliet's face in the production)?

NA: Yes. We were working on two time-frames. We were thinking about quite a naturalistic weathering timeframe so the makeup was very much about being left out in the wilderness… of being exposed to the elements (not having enough water and the lips being chapped and the hat eroding), and also trauma (Winnie had bald patches from stress-related hair loss) . We did also think about it being a major time-lapse in terms of Winnie's memory, in that sense. So we thought of it as both the most amount of time you could survive without water and also a longer period of time in terms of a marriage. It was somewhere between 10-15 days and 10-15 years simultaneously in that sense.

JH: I'm looking at the first two lines of stage directions, which in Act I state: "expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound" and, in Act II read: "Scene as before… Winnie embedded up to neck, hat on head, eyes closed. Her head, which she can no longer turn,

nor bow, nor raise, faces front motionless throughout act. Movements of eyes as indicated" (*CDW,* 1986). I suppose this begs a question, which you're alluding to, of whether or not the head can no longer move because of what's happened to the body (which exhausted or trapped in some way), or whether that is a physical abstraction that should not be read realistically? So did you address why she can't move the head in Act II, and what strategies did you and the performers use in order to understand this? Is she simply trapped in the scree or is there another – more metaphorical – reason?

NA: We took the landslide to be time – that real call to arms that Winnie has through the voice of someone else – through the voice of the [Shower/Cookers]: "why doesn't he dig her out?" You know: "do something!" she says. My interpretation of the play is that you are the only person who can dig yourself out of a situation and Winnie doesn't realise that. She doesn't dig herself out. If Winnie is a mirror to us all, the reflexive question we must ask is: what are we stuck in? We took it as a *literal metaphor* – if that's not an oxymoron – in the sense that Beckett is a conceptual artist, and Winnie is being submerged, buried alive in the quicksand and detritus of life, in the mundanity of the quotidian and Winnie is not dealing with the situation she's in, or does not know how to deal with the situation she is in. Perhaps she is stymied by the morals of her time. We (and Winnie) are not able to do anything about that. So exactly the same things apply, but it's a physical, it's a visual manifestation of what she feels in terms of her society and her situation.

Beckett's inspired design concept of finding a way to animate all the dead metaphors "stuck in the mud", "up to my neck in it" to life to reveal the way people feel stuck in their own live. All of these ideas become really alive in *Happy Days*. The play's abstract element allows people to see it through their own lens and it reveals where they are in their own lives. I was talking to one woman who came to see the show had seen it about 15 years ago when she'd had three very young children (all under 5). When she'd seen it she had perceived it entirely about being a mother stuck at home, trapped in domesticity. Now her children are all grown-up, she's dealing with her ageing parents and she saw it differently, as a play about dementia and senility and losing one's mind.

So I think that's what one hopes to reveal with a play as profound as *Happy Days* – that the play becomes a *lens* for each audience member to interpret their own life.

Notes on the Production

This production of *Happy Days* by Samuel Beckett opened at the Young Vic Theatre (London, UK) in 2014 and returned in 2015.

Creative team and company

Direction Natalie Abrahami

Design Vicki Mortimer

Light Paule Constable

Sound Tom Gibbons

Movement Joseph Alford

Casting Julia Horan CDG

WINNIE Juliet Stevenson

WILLIE David Beames

‘The Samuel Beckett Laboratory’ in *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Heron & Johnson et al, 2014) [Extract]

2013 was the inaugural year of the Samuel Beckett Laboratory, a new venue for fundamental research into the texts of Samuel Beckett in performance. The experiments of the Laboratory took place from 11 to 16 August 2013 and were hosted by Trinity College Dublin at the Samuel Beckett Summer School, for which it served as the third annual ‘performance workshop’. This dossier represents the disseminated final report of the Laboratory, and includes contributions from all co-investigators and from two of the collaborators, in an effort to communicate to the wider community of scholars 1) what the Laboratory is, 2) what the 2013 experiments yielded, and 3) what some wider implications might be for Beckett Studies and its relationship to practice-based research. Drawing on several practices and vocabularies drawn from the sciences as well as performance studies, this dossier reflects an attempt to capture time-based experimentation in a form with which the wider community of scholars can engage.

The Samuel Beckett Laboratory is founded on the principle that by approaching Beckett’s texts through performance, deeper insight into the texts’ function or meaning can be gained. This function of performance as a methodology is taken as a truism for playscripts, where it is widely agreed that the kinaesthetic or practical knowledge achieved by the performer, director, designer, or technician is a valuable aspect of attaining a deep understanding of the work. The Laboratory applies this principle across genre to include prose, poetry, radio, television, film, correspondence, and manuscript/draft material. The Laboratory exists to cultivate a safe and facilitated environment where, for the purpose of both research and pedagogy, scholars can engage in an inclusive manner with all of Beckett’s writing as performance material.

A single text from the so-called ‘grey canon’ of Beckett was the focus of work in 2013, a focus narrow enough to be feasible in the available time. The text is the ‘Shakespeare/Bare Room’ fragment, which comprises two facing pages from the Super Conquérant Notebook (Beckett, 2011, 1v–3r) and available to researchers through the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP). With the two principal investigators creating a working environment that elevates the non-hierarchical and exploratory embodiment of the ‘ensemble’, a blend of academics, professional practitioners, undergraduates, postgraduates, and Beckett

enthusiasts from the wider public were invited to respond through performance of this text. Over the course of five days of engagement with the source text, the participants listed above reflected on potential elements of dramaturgy, design, acting, and directing of the selected fragment. The hypothesis was that this approach would generate a form of deep knowledge of the text's structure, cross-reference, and operation as a 'living thought' that could be embodied and communicated to a wider audience. Over time, the laboratory is intended to evolve as a standard venue and community where such experimentation in an academic context with a variety of Beckett's unpublished and unperformed texts can occur and be formally documented.

The use of performance as a tool of investigation has a long heritage in both practice-based research and in performance studies more broadly. As the 'practice turn' in the arts and humanities has trans-disciplinary implications, this section of the Dossier will provide specific examples of these practices and provide a rationale for blending performance events with scientific methods. In doing so, it will offer an example of a 'performance laboratory' and one possible application of this mode of practice within Beckett Studies. Doing so marks a transition from theoretical modes of engagement with texts and their manuscripts towards embodied processes of exploration more commonly associated with scientific method and artistic research. This approach will be framed in three interlinked categories: Methods (rationale for methodologies of practice-based research), Testimonies (the voices of co-investigators and laboratory participants), and Trajectories (review of research results, process and findings).

For Baz Kershaw, PaR 'became a well-established approach to using creative performance as a method of inquiry in universities in the UK, Australia, Canada, Scandinavia, South Africa and elsewhere' in the late 2000s (2010, 105). He asserts that such an approach constituted a 'paradigm shift, through which established ontologies and epistemologies of research in arts-related disciplines, potentially, could be radically undone' (105). Kershaw has subsequently written that 'PaR genealogies in the UK can be traced back to at least the 1960s' (2011, 63) and that in this methodology 'philosophy becomes action and the location of knowledge is temporarily entirely undone by performance' (2011, 84). The Beckett scholar will recognize these creative undoings in his or her study of the drama Samuel Beckett (as suggested in the introduction to this issue). It is fitting, therefore, that Beckett Studies uses the 'undoing', 'vaguening', 'emptying', and 'patterning' of the originating creative process within research

studies of the writer's practice. In this way, our scholarship becomes 'performance research', and a 'specific research paradigm' (Arlander, 2012).

Annette Arlander has argued that this paradigm of 'performative research' does not describe phenomena (as constative utterances do) but actually creates or shapes them' (2012, online). Here the notion of *research as action* is introduced, where new practices are brought into the world, specific environments and performance documentation creating new materials for analysis. Arlander cites the work of Brad Haseman (2006) and Barbara Bolt (2008), who compare quantitative and qualitative methods with the 'performative' (Figure 1).

Haseman's tabulation appears within 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', which notes that 'the "practice" in "practice-led research" is primary–it is not an optional extra; it is the necessary pre-condition of engagement in performative research' (2006, 6). He later concludes that 'In this evolving research dynamic we are witnessing a maturing of the conceptual architecture of performative research and sharper clarity about the actual research practices of practice-led research' (2006, 9). Bolt, by contrast, discusses the 'performative turn', seeking to test Haseman's concept alongside historical material. She states that 'before we make claims for a performative model for the creative arts, there are a number of urgent tasks that need to be addressed' (2008, 1). Her first task is the definition of terms 'in relation to the existing theories of performativity. Secondly, like the qualitative researchers before them, the creative arts need to carefully mark out the territory of a performative paradigm and differentiate it from the established research orthodoxies by refining its protocols and procedures' (1). In Bolt's conclusion, another tabulation appears (Figure 2), allowing a useful comparison with the Haseman table.

Bolt has 'gone back to the foundational work of [J. L.] Austin to define its concepts and demonstrate how procedures within the creative arts, like science, are based around repetition' (10). Indeed, Bolt is positioning *difference* as central to art-based research, as opposed to correspondence in the scientific method. In 2012, Mark Fleishman argued in 'The Difference of Performance as Research' that 'PaR is a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels *in search of a difference*' (30, emphasis added). Drawing upon Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, Fleishman suggests

that 'repetition is the apparatus by which we achieve this slowing down [i.e. PaR]. Repetition is an attempt to trip us up, to stop somehow the onward flow or at least to interrupt it, to slow it down so as to allow us to grasp it even if only fleetingly' (35). In this model, PaR methods emerge as toolkits for the diverse temporalities and complex materialities of performance.

Integrating these modes of knowledge across disciplines, this research asks two main questions: 1) What insights about Beckett's work emerge from treating this Beckett manuscript as a source for performance? 2) What insights about practice-based methodology emerge from work with Beckett's manuscripts specifically? The research was enacted first by forming an ensemble, which was comprised of co-organizer/facilitators, guest artist/facilitators, technical staff, volunteers, and different levels of student from the university and summer school contexts. These roles entail differing modes of attention and specializations, but the ethos of collaboration viewed these roles as conceptually and functionally equal. Participants were asked to consent formally to the methods of documentation, data collection, and statement of research ethics/outcomes, as is conventional in all university research involving human subjects. Qualitative response was then collected at intervals throughout the week, to be disseminated in the form of pure results/documentation on a password-protected webpage (for the benefit of the participants and future scholarship), and to be distilled into a report of results for publication (below).

It is hoped that the TCD laboratory, like Zarrilli's 'metaphysical studio' before it, maps out the Beckettian eco-system that little bit further into the realm of praxis, as defined by Paulo Freire (1974) and David Kolb (1984). The investigators' current affiliation to international networks of researching-practitioners beyond the Beckettian, such as the PSi Artists' Committee and the IFTR Performance-as-Research Working Group, allows the research group to re-imagine the scholarly landscapes for 'Beckett and performance' in the twenty-first century. Whether 'metaphysical studios' or 'participatory laboratories', these performative environments (including installations, exhibitions and happenings) generate intercultural and interdisciplinary knowledge that can only enrich textual and archival methodologies. As Shannon Rose Riley states, 'Labs and studios are distinct from academic research in the minds of many people, and have affiliations with a range of interdisciplinary meanings that obscure their political history. Unearthing these affiliations and meanings raises provoking questions about practice as research' (2009, 138). Riley suggests that the

public perception of lab is 'clean' while the studio is 'dirty', and that the studio indicates the solitary, while the lab emphasizes teamwork. Recalling the Bauhaus, Riley explores how 'traditional "studio" practices were modernized' and how 'the Bauhaus method is now the dominant mode of educating artists in the US' (139). And finally, she asks, 'why are labs and studios flexible in a way that doctoral program seminar rooms are not? What keeps us from speaking of the seminar studio, the discussion lab, the theory lab, or theory studio?' (140).

As the sample above demonstrates, the interpretative frame for this work may extend beyond theatre and performance studies. In fact, the interdisciplinary possibilities of the space between science and art may prove mutually sustaining. Beckett Studies has already proven a rich area for the digital humanities, interdisciplinary pedagogy, historiography, and the medical humanities.[1] Like the recent collaborative research projects in these areas, this research presents both a digital archive of findings and a series of embodied problems for future exploration. Each year, the digital documentation of the laboratory practice will be stored electronically and re-appraised discursively. A particularly interesting approach would be to work across the documentation of the first three to five years of practice, as one would a material archive, in order to respond to the questions and issues raised above. The future possibilities of this work can therefore be contained and maintained within the laboratory itself, through re- iterative processes of scholarly action. The research environment, that contested crossroads of knowledge and mess, thus becomes a space between the body and its environment, or as Beckett himself wrote in *Worstward Ho* (Beckett, 1983, 8): 'First the body. No. First the place. No. First both.'

FIGURES 1 & 2

REFERENCES ONLINE

'An Interview with Ian Rickson' in *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Heron & Rickson, 2014)

Jonathan Heron: I would like to focus on *Krapp's Last Tape* (*KLT*) at the Royal Court Theatre (2006) and would like you to outline the circumstances that led to you directing Harold Pinter in the role of Krapp.

Ian Rickson: I was curating the 50th anniversary celebrations at the Royal Court, and was thinking about the theatrical lineage from Joyce to Beckett, Beckett to Pinter, and then Pinter onwards, as influences and shapers of 20th century drama and art. I got to know Harold and had heard him talk about his friendship with Samuel Beckett. It felt fitting to fuse these two artists together in celebrating the Royal Court's anniversary by asking Harold to play *Krapp's Last Tape* – these two artists who have shaped so much. I rang him and said, 'I want you to think about this', and he said, 'I'll think about it', and within hours said 'meet me for lunch'. I met him for lunch and he said he'd love to do it.

That was approximately nine months before we actually did it, and unfortunately Harold, who had fought off cancer already and was in recovery then got a secondary, really difficult illness, which was very depleting, and it didn't always look like he would be able to physically be on stage. My role therefore was to be a reassuring, encouraging force, for example reminding Harold that we *would* do this thing and he *would* flourish, prosper and thrive. Privately, I was worrying that I was putting someone quite infirm through something too demanding. However, I also had the feeling it would be really rejuvenating and a great exercise for our talents.

So, we worked thoroughly and searchingly. We had 'spool lessons' where I realised that someone with such amazing talent coming through their fingertips was actually quite clumsy, and struggled to work out how to spool up a tape recorder. Later, he would practice every night as a mark of his rigour and discipline and never failed to complete the task. We had debates about the validity of bananas and whether Krapp in a wheelchair would be good, whether there should be two or three tape recorders, and hyper-scrutiny of every detail in the play.

Suddenly we were in rehearsal and we were doing the play. You want as many people as possible to have the experience of seeing him on stage, but where should the play artistically belong? The lovely attic space in the Theatre Upstairs, the site of so much innovation in the past, felt perfect, with a really simple set, lighting using beautiful old lanterns, and natural,

unostentatious sound. He was able to do ten performances, and we filmed it, so it happened – fortunately, because I feel so fortunate to have undergone it.

JH: How would you describe that rehearsal process?

IR: The old London transport café, which is in the alleyway of the Royal Court, had been requisitioned by the Royal Court as a rehearsal space. It was shrouded in a membrane of calico or muslin. All the rowdy school kids who were working with the young writers' programme were told to be quiet from 2:00, because someone important was coming in, but I remember that on her fag break the West Indian London transport worker would sing in the alleyway, which fortunately was melodic enough to be an accompaniment rather than intrusion.

I would wake up a 6:00, and my first thought would be 'Harold: how is he?' We would rehearse from 2:00 – 6:00 every day for four weeks, and it would be extremely focused and intense… It is intense anyway, as you know, when you do a monologue, because you don't have the relief of 'Oh, this afternoon those three twenty year olds are coming in and they're in Scene Three…' or 'There's that big scene when there's going to be a more extrovert energy in the room'. It's just you and that person in an endgame until the end of the process. You have to become deeply involved. I remember Stephen Daldry telling me that he pretty much fell in love with David Hare when he directed him in 'Via Dolorosa'. So it's the intensity of it, and the intimacy of it that I remember.

I have to say that we came from very different 'practice' places. If you read anything about Harold, and his directing, he would say things like 'I don't care what happens off-stage. I'm only interested in what's happening on stage.' Whereas, I'm much more Stanislavskian and I like being quite playful in the way I work, so there had to be a brokerage about the practice. I remember there was a bit of a tussle on one afternoon in the first week, which actually proved cathartic in its honesty, and from then on it was very collaborative. Of course, Beckett's play is such a strong score to work with, and although I am sometimes wary of how rigid the Estate has been in controlling the work, he is the primary artist; Beckett is the genius there, Harold and I are interpretative.

Sometimes you like cooking a recipe that says: 'one teaspoon of turmeric, stir four times, wait five minutes, then add one tablespoon…' and perhaps that's how I find directing Beckett – you have to obey the recipe. I think every director directs like they cook – I don't

really use recipe books, but I feel with Beckett you have to absolutely trust, for example, that the spool goes there and there's a pause and that precision gives you meaning.

JH: So you've mentioned rigidity, and this idea of the recipe, which is not as disciplined as the rigidity and inflexibility of the text, and the lack of your interpretative freedom; but a recipe suggests an openness, an improvisatory possibility that jazz musician may also understand…

IR: I think so.

JH: Did it make any difference that Pinter had a strong biographical connection to Beckett?

IR: Yes.

JH: Did that give you more or less freedom in the rehearsal room?

IR: I think it gave us something that allowed us to mine the emotional centre of the play deeply, because Harold deeply knew about the sensibility of Beckett. As we know, his work can sometimes feel rather arid in performance. I felt that Harold, in his late life, was channeling a lot of Sam. I realize I am only remembering the process now, as I talk to you, but we weren't entirely faithful to the recipe, because we did cut the slapstick bananas shtick. Harold playfully said: 'Well, I've talked to Sam and he said that's okay'. And I don't know that any other actor would have got away with that. You've got the recipe, and I'm getting into this metaphor that you've helped me with, I guess when you cook the main ingredient has such influence on the meal: I love John Hurt as Krapp, and I imagine Katherine Hunter or Maximilian Schell would also have their own particular qualities. Harold has such strong flavor, and that's fantastic! I think Sam liked those actors.

JH: Once you were into the performance run, did you feel that you'd lost anything by cutting the banana sequence?

IR: I didn't, because rightly or wrongly my feeling about the bananas was that they were a way of Sam smuggling in the modernist existentialism of the play, i.e. a bit of slapstick to relax an audience, so he can take them where they have to go. My feeling was that in 2006 we didn't need this, plus Harold was allergic to bananas (or at least he said he was!). I was always wary – and this might be my own 'style snobbishness' – of a clownish, white-booted, wan figure slipping on bananas. I had to make a Krapp hewn from the specificity of Harold, and removing the bananas was part of this.

JH:	Since then you've directed *The Hothouse*, *Betrayal* and *Old Times*, so you've come to directing Pinter, having worked with him on a Beckett play. Are you discovering any similarities or differences between Beckett and Pinter texts?

IR:	I think meaning embedded in form and rhythm is a great thing they share. You can do as much character work, improvisation, research and study as you like – and I like – but the clarity of thought and emotional intensity that each of them finds through the shapes and rhythms of their plays is a fantastic asset. Just by observing the cadences of their scores you learn so much. I love *KLT*, because for me, it's one of Beckett's most accessible plays. There's a generosity of spirit to it. It doesn't feel like a code you have to crack. It's interesting we're talking while *Old Times* is being prepared, which is probably Harold's least accessible play; its obtuse and mercurial, the audience has to work hard.

I remember Harold talking about his copy of *Murphy* and this sense of Beckett coming on to the horizon as a figure of great influence. I could really feel the tributary through Beckett into Pinter. Everything I learned on *KLT* has been a really good thing for my practice.

JH:	The way that Pinter spoke of Beckett was sometimes as a disciple, and Beckett in turn had a comparable relationship with Joyce. They share the 'content is form, form is? content' idea, which seems very resonant with what you were saying. You've worked a lot with new writing, with playwrights such as Caryl Churchill and Jez Butterworth, but you've also worked on Chekhov and Ibsen; I wonder how Beckett feels in relation to those writers?

IR:	I think there's something so austere and confident. There feels like less fat in his plays. If you're doing an Ibsen, for example, you might think, 'How do I dramatize the exposition?' With Chekhov you might think, 'Oh, there's that slightly eccentric bit, how do I animate that?' In Beckett there's something so reduced…

JH:	Which takes us back to the cooking…

IR:	Yes, I was trying to think… when you reduce the stock?

JH:	Distilled, [as in] distillation?

IR:	Yes, or like alchemy. Wasn't he – like Jung – really interested in alchemy? I think every director should do Beckett, and when students feel resistant to this I think it's good to push through the resistance, because it is so good for your craft. It develops your muscles.

The thing I found emotionally was that I got quite depressed. I found that really going deeply into the play, and reading biographies of Beckett, put me into quite a dark place.

JH: Do you think that was because of the play, or was it the material circumstances of working with [an ill performer]?

IR: No, I think it was the play. The process itself was rejuvenating. I think it was the feeling in the play.

NOTES

Krapp's Last Tape by Samuel Beckett, directed by Ian Rickson, performed by Harold Pinter, Royal Court Theatre London (2006)

Interview conducted and edited by Jonathan Heron on 6 April 2013

With special thanks to Tony Howard

'Shakespearean Laboratories and Performance-as-Research' in *Shakespeare on the University Stage*, ed. Andrew Hartley (Heron, 2014)

> Performance as research (PaR) is a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels, in search of a difference. (Fleishman 2012: 30)

This essay attempts to define new methodologies for Shakespearean performance in universities, and document specific events at the University of Warwick where theatre operated as a collaborative space for scientific discourse. As Mark Fleishman articulates in *Theatre Research International*, the temporal practices of embodied repetition can be viewed as research methods in themselves, and this essay will apply this principle to Shakespearean performance in a modern British university. Baz Kershaw's notion of PaR as 'transdisciplinary innovation in action' (Kershaw and Nicholson 2011) will inform the three core sections of the essay, which documents the role of theatre processes within knowledge production.

The experiments of twentieth-century 'theatre laboratories', such as the Royal Shakespeare Company's Experimental Group (1960s) and the Centre for International Theatre Research of Peter Brook (1970s), will be briefly recalled and then contrasted with contemporary performance practice in university settings, such as Fail Better Productions' *Discords (after Shakespeare)* and Ian Rickson's *Hamlet Laboratory*. Shakespearean text will therefore be explored alongside new definitions of *performance laboratory* (experimental 'trial and error' processes), *performance methodology* (how processes produce knowledge) and *performance chronology* (the temporality of these events).

Shakespeare and performance laboratories

This essay is rooted in the work of the University of Warwick's Student Ensemble between 2009 and 2013, which was created by Fail Better Productions[30] at the CAPITAL Centre.[31] *Discords* (pictured in *Figure 1*), an experimental adaptation of Shakespeare (in double-bill with Gogol's *Diary of a Madman)* re-launched the ensemble's interdisciplinary collaboration with both philosophers and psychiatrists at the university. Specifically, the

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[30] Fail Better Productions was launched in 2001 by Warwick students and, following a series of professional productions at the Edinburgh festival and on the London fringe, became 'Company in Residence' at the CAPITAL Centre between 2008 and 2010.

[31] Following the creation of a student ensemble at Warwick in 2008, the 'Open-space Learning in Real World Contexts' project (OSL) formally established the group in 2009, and based at the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) from 2010.

theatre practitioners were interested in exploring the uses of embodiment within philosophical enquiry, enactment in relation to academic study, and simulation within medical education. In the first two cases, the adaptation of Shakespeare was used to generate specific opportunities for humanities students to engage with local communities and cultural industries. In the case of the latter, the performance facilitated a creative engagement between two practice-based student groups: performers and medics.

The project's methods included drama workshops, theatrical rehearsal and performance laboratories. Firstly, the main body of the practice took place over weekly drama workshops, informed by dramaturgical research, archival study and previous experiments. The activities that constituted these workshops required the performers to operate as participants in the research process, not simply as 'subjects'. Practical tasks were shared with the group as 'performance problems', and sub-groups were formed to investigate these problems through embodied action. Additional group members were assigned the task of documenting this re-iterative process through digital media and notation systems. The embodied memory of this period of experimentation, informed by the materials of documentation, was positioned as central to the devising process that followed. In this sense, *Discords* was created in response to a research problem and made use of Shakespeare as raw material for further investigation. While public performances still took place, they were positioned as part of a research process, rather than output or endpoint. This strategy enabled the company to invite scholars from psychiatry and philosophy to engage with the performance as a stimulus for further research.

This led to three new interdisciplinary projects: a) the application of this creative knowledge to the teaching of psychiatry with the Medical School[32], b) new pedagogic opportunities for philosophical study via the texts of Gogol, Darwin and Nietzsche[33], and c) a series of experiments into the use of drama as a tool for the mathematical study of abstraction[34]. The transdisciplinary potential of Shakespearean performance became a focus of this project, as if the use of words from *Macbeth* and *King Lear* had temporarily suspended disciplinary boundaries and created opportunities to collaborate across and beyond the curriculum. The ensemble approached the event as an opportunity to consider the

[32] 'Psychiatry, Performance and Play' (OSL, with Dr Matthew Broome)
[33] 'New Interdisciplinary Spaces in Philosophy and Literature' (IATL, with Dr Eileen John)
[34] 'Teaching Abstraction in Open Spaces' (IATL, with Dr David Wood)

application of theatre to medical practice[35]. Later that term, members of the academic and medical communities were invited to a creative exchange where the theatrical production was re-worked in light of the hospital visit, by adapting the performance script into a participatory workshop featuring textual fragments from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear* (alongside Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*).

Complex Shakespearean roles with long performance histories underwent a process of distillation. *Figure 2* reveals the uncanny presence of 'floating' disembodied 'Beckettian' heads, here representing Regan, Goneril and Cordelia, constructing the theatrical body in neurological or evolutionary terms. In fact, *Discords* (and the wider experimental project) found itself in a space between Shakespeare, performance and science, where new disciplinary frontiers are being explored, from 'science in culture'[36] to 'interdisciplinary science'[37] and the 'genetic study of performance'[38].

As outlined above, theatrical production triggered learning events for students of Literature, Philosophy, Medicine and Mathematics. Performed at the Warwick Arts Centre, at the culmination of an artistic residency at the university, Fail Better had established a student ensemble to enhance transdisciplinary pedagogy: 'as normally stable discipline boundaries are suspended in the interaction of participants' subject knowledge' (Monk 2011: 5). The 'clinical skills laboratory', however, where student doctors could safely experiment with psychiatric diagnosis, became a new and unexpected parallel with the ensemble's 'laboratory', where student performers could experiment with new methods and techniques through embodied repetition. The process enabled psychiatrists to collaborate with theatre practitioners directly on the creation of new work for the stage as well as new publications on the use of arts-based methods to the study of mind and brain. Having a mutual interest in Shakespeare and the drama of Samuel Beckett, these researching-practitioners established a new space for practice-based research within the university. This route to new knowledge came straight through performance and created new conditions for cross-faculty

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[35] One ensemble member, an undergraduate of English and Theatre Studies, commented on his visit to the Clinical Skills Laboratory (at Coventry and Warwickshire University Hospital), that 'I found the entire experience absolutely fascinating and only came away wishing to know more about "the sims" [patients simulated by performers] and desiring to become one myself…' (OSL)

[36] See Barry, AHRC 'Science in Culture Exploratory Awards': http://www.sciculture.ac.uk/projects/exploratory-awards/exploratory-awards-project-1/

[37] See Shepherd-Barr and Bartleet, 'Interdisciplinary Science Reviews': http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/isr/2013/00000038/00000004

[38] See Feral, 'Towards a Genetic Study of Performance – Take 2', *Theatre Research International* 33, (2008: 223-233).

collaboration, including a series of medical humanities and interdisciplinary science projects at Warwick between 2011 and 2013. One of these will be explored in the case study that follows.

Case study: *Hamlet Laboratory* (Warwick, 2011)

The radical potential of performance *as* research has a history far preceding its current status in UK universities. Before further examples are given, the history of 'theatre laboratories' will be briefly explored here. According to the 1998 Oxford English Dictionary, the 'scientific' operates 'according to rules laid down in exact science for performing observations and testing the soundness of conclusions; systematic, accurate; assisted by expert knowledge'. The transference of this approach to post-war theatre practice can be associated with 1960s practitioners including Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and Joseph Chaikin, partly derived from the writings of the radical modernist Antonin Artaud. There is not room enough here to adequately record this history, though Peter Brook's early experiments at the RSC (especially his 1962 *King Lear* and his *Theatre of Cruelty* experiments 1963-4) and his collaborations with Jan Kott and Charles Marowitz are worth particular emphasis. They represent moments in performance history when theatrical production was suspended in order to experiment under controlled conditions, and often without an audience. The OED definition of the word 'laboratory' is also of interest as, 'a room or building … for scientific experiments, research, teaching…' and therefore a *place* for experiments. Despite this, the 1960s theatre practitioners often presented their laboratories as processes across multiple sites, or spaces of *displacement*. This apparent paradox is especially interesting in the case of the *Theatre of Cruelty* in its various embodiments by the RSC Experimental Group[39].

However, the theoretical problems that have emerged in the fifty-year gap between Brook's 'scientific research' in London and the PaR laboratories at Warwick are the primary concern for this essay, which will now turn to the question of dislocation. Brook's own laboratory moved to Paris, via multiple international journeys, and his CIRT/CICT at the 'Theatre des Bouffes du Nord' has become a lasting space for experimental theatre. However, it should also be recognized that experimentation in performance is now far

[39] See David Williams (1988, 2000) and Michael Kustow (2005) for more details.

more likely to happen outside of playhouses, as live art traditions and body-based practices have kept the 'laboratory' on the move.[40]

The contemporary PaR projects also demonstrate ways in which the arts and humanities can enrich science and philosophy through creative practice. For Baz Kershaw, 'PaR methodologies in the UK can be traced back to at least the 1960s' (2011: 63). A consequence of such methodologies is that 'philosophy becomes action and the location of knowledge is temporarily entirely undone by performance (84)'. In the examples above, the 'trial and error' methods of the 'performance laboratory' produced knowledge that was stimulated by Shakespeare, but applicable across university departments[41]. The imperative of *embodiment* within philosophical enquiry, the value of *enactment* in relation to academic study, and the urgency of *simulation* within professional education, became uses *for* Shakespeare in laboratories beyond the theatre.

The individual identity of each theatre practitioner should, of course, be a consideration when making claims about knowledge produced through theatrical performance. In order to deal with this problem explicitly, the essay will now consider the work of an external practitioner (i.e. from outside the academy), but within the same context of the examples given above (i.e. taking place within the academy). In this case, the identity of the practitioner on campus is highly significant and fairly remarkable. Ian Rickson, former Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre, was preparing to direct Michael Sheen as *Hamlet* at the Young Vic in London, when he chose to work with university students as part of his process, at the invitation of Tony Howard, the 2011 *Hamlet Laboratory.*

> I spent a week with students at Warwick… I was due to direct *Hamlet* that autumn, and this setting allowed me to mine the play deeply, and then to practically explore lots of thoughts I had about the production. We also had some excellent invited guests from the University who came to give talks. As the students witnessed when they saw the show, lots of what came out of that dynamic week went directly into the production. The bridge between professional theatre and academic practice can be of such mutual value. The collective minds of the students, under Tony's phenomenal tutorship, really stimulated my directorial searching. I would do this again at the drop of a hat. (Ian Rickson, 2013)

[40] See RoseLee Goldberg (1979, 2000) and James Harding (2011, 2013)
[41] See http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/activities/projects/osl-final/studentensemble/

Exploring this case study will extend the scope of this essay to examine other ways of experimenting with Shakespeare in university settings; the 'lab notes' provide specific details of the project and will offer another example of the productive displacement of knowledge through theatrical embodiment in laboratory processes.

> We auditioned/interviewed a number of students to arrive at a group from several disciplines; all were asked to keep a journal or portfolio of some sort to the end of the workshop period. These varied from diaries to a continuing audio project processing each day's activities in terms of sound. The structure for each day was: a) warm-up, b) exploring the text, c) expert input and d) afternoon studio work. (Tony Howard, 2013)

To take one of these daily routines as an example, 'exploring the text' which took the form of 'group close reading' of one act a day:

> This was a dramaturgical process in that Rickson encouraged everyone to approach Hamlet as an untested new play – i.e. the effectiveness of its structure and rhetorical detail was never to be taken for granted. Rickson pointed to practical problems; Howard stood in for the author, demonstrating (usually) that the text contains its own solutions; the students tried out possibilities, with fine precision and broad-brush freedom. *Hamlet* was seen as a text in development: the three texts Q1, Q2 and F1 were constant reference points, indicating how Shakespeare's own company cut and altered the play's language, plot details and dynamics. (*Ibid*.)

Howard provides examples where the PaR activities at Warwick were influencing the artistic process for the later London production. For example, 'studio work on Q1 opened up rich structural possibilities (e.g. the placing of Hamlet's soliloquies), and suggested an unusually confrontational role for Ophelia. Meanwhile, Rickson asked the group to think through and share very varied ways of presenting Ophelia's distress.' (*Ibid*.)

The impact of the interdisciplinary contributions were also strongly evidenced, especially relating to 'Rickson's special interest in the psychological conditions explored in *Hamlet.* Two were from Medicine (an academic clinician and an experimental brain scientist); one came from the History Department (discussing religious and secular thought at Wittenberg University).' For example, 'the workshop explored Burton's *Anatomy of*

Melancholy, especially its iconic *Hamlet*-like frontispiece imagery which establishes the human condition as a state of mental instability' (*Ibid*.).

However, the testimonies of the participants themselves are crucial in assessing this impact and substantiating these claims. In the student evaluation of the university laboratory, participants specifically focused upon the impact of the three guest experts who contributed to the process: the psychiatrist, the neurologist and the historian. 'They were the highlight of the week,' said one student-participant, 'they allowed us to look at Shakespeare in an interdisciplinary way'. Howard noted that the students were experiencing two things that they may not have yet encountered as students: interdisciplinarity (in terms of collaboration) and intensity (in terms of duration). Another participant, an undergraduate of History, pointed out that he saw 'Hamlet as a person, rather than a character' through this process, which made him see the play from a psychological perspective. His colleague observed that he had only read the play for the first time the day before the laboratory commenced, 'but by the end of the week you were talking more eloquently about *Hamlet* than anyone else in the room because you had engaged with it so intensely' (IATL 2011).

The students documented the process through music, poetry and reflective journals and they described the need to adopt different temporalities of notation when capturing the learning process:

> I started by going home and writing it, but it wasn't enough, so I ended up writing down everything I could in the breaks, and I was looking back the other day; it's incredible how much we fitted in to that week, we were acting and discussing *Hamlet*, getting other views on the play, and ultimately helping Ian make his production.

Another added that, when they went to see the performance at the Young Vic, 'we jokingly said we should score points for everything we put into it' but they soon realized that even 'better ideas had led on from our ideas'. Elements of the production that had been explored at Warwick, such as the differentiation of minor roles, playing Horatio female, and Ophelia's musicality, were carried forward into the piece itself. The ways that the student contributions developed the research of established professionals was a radical reversal of traditional campus hierarchies, and a further example of how PaR dislocates knowledge and subverts authority.

However, the pedagogic context surrounding this laboratory project meant that there was also a lasting impact on campus. The academic facilitators for the *Hamlet Laboratory* had deliberately cast a combination of finalists (for their knowledge of Shakespeare and confidence in performance) and first years (to develop new ensemble members and opportunities for future workshops on the Shakespeare module in English). The ways in which this performance project impacted upon both the professional theatre, the general public, and research communities at Warwick, is reflected upon by Howard, writing one year later, 'Seen from this distance, the *Hamlet Laboratory* stands out as a highlight of my teaching career - concentrated, creative, democratic." (*Ibid*.) The laboratory represented a site of theatrical experimentation and a careful consideration of how external practitioners can work productively with students. Like *Discords*, in the same year and at the same university, this laboratory offered students the opportunity to experiment with Shakespeare while learning the craft of the theatre. The opportunity for the ensemble to engage with professional performance at both Warwick Arts Centre and the Young Vic Theatre had emerged through detailed laboratory work. The methodological complexity of public/private experimentation will be considered in the section that follows, on performance methodology.

Informing this analysis will be evidence from both 2011 laboratory processes at Warwick and the wider implications of performance within research contexts. Before Rickson's project is left behind, his final reflection upon the process is offered here.

> To be able to form a dynamic bridge between the study environment of a university, with all its academic and experimental assets, with a professional theatre exploration, feels of real value. Spending time at Warwick gave me the reflection, contemplation and playfulness to open up my practice for a major Shakespeare revival (Email to the author, 2013).

For the purpose of this chapter, this reflection identifies a central idea: that the 'academic and experimental' are inseparable modes of university knowledge, interwoven processes of becoming that foreground transformation and collaboration.

Matthew Broome, the psychiatrist who worked on the projects detailed above, reflected that the work 'facilitated novel ways of communicating the complexity of mental disorder, both in terms of its science but also in its clinical reality where traditional medical narratives are challenged, the illness has both causes and impacts that extend beyond the

individual, and elements of treatment can be controversial' (Email to the author, 2013). His engagement with all three projects (*Shakespeare on the Brain, Discords* and *Hamlet*) enabled a medical perspective to emerge within the performances, but also enhanced his own practice: 'the collaboration has been very useful in that has helped me develop skills I can take back to my clinical work in offering ways for this complexity to be communicated to patients and their families' (*Ibid*.).

If this section has explored the transformation of Shakespeare through university-based performance laboratories, then the next section will take a wider perspective to consider the displacement of Shakespeare through methodology itself.

Shakespeare and performance methodologies

The section will attempt to pursue these 'displacements of knowledge', through 'performance-as-research' processes, and more clearly articulate the value of the PaR methodology. It is defined by Kershaw as 'the uses of practical creativity as reflexive enquiry into significant research concerns (usually conducted by "artist/scholars" in universities)'; he states that '*dis-location* of knowledge becomes critical to [PaR's] nature' and notes that it 'will present both highly specific and very broadly applicable results' (in Riley and Hunter 2009: 4). He continues that 'it will generate procedures and protocols relevant to research in many disciplinary fields. Thus *performance practice **as** research* more precisely defines itself as method and methodology in search of results across disciplines: a collection of *transdisciplinary* research "tools".' (2009: 5)

Returning to Mark Fleishman, writing in *Theatre Research International*, PaR 'is a process of creative evolution… It expresses itself through a repeated, though flexible and open-ended, process of ontogenesis' (2012: 34) Fleishman's definition of PaR interconnects with the praxis of 'Open-space Learning' projects at CAPITAL ('Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning') where the 'socio-phenomenological, transdisciplinary approach that forms the philosophy of OSL' (Monk 2011: 132) emphasizes process over production. In other ways, this academic position is a local response to the 'Shakespeare *and* performance' landscape, as mapped out by Barbara Hodgdon and W.B. Worthen (2005: 6). The student ensemble, and the performance methods used in projects such as Fail Better's *Discords*, can be considered ways of re-thinking the radical potential of experimental Shakespeare, placing a particular emphasis on 'performance' as a transdisciplinary process.

Within the academy, the move towards phenomenological theories of embodiment, and experimental practices of performance, involves a temporary suspension of traditional campus hierarchies, simultaneously enhancing scholarship through collaboration across disciplines. A pedagogic imperative often strongly shapes the performance of early-modern drama by late modernist bodies, as has been recently reappraised by a diversity of studies.[42] However, by recalling theatre histories alongside contemporary methods, this chapter celebrates the hybridity of campus Shakespeares and the urgency of the 'pedagogic now'.[43] There is no need to rehearse here the detailed work of colleagues, such as Andrew Hartley in *The Shakespearean Dramaturg,* on the 'in-betweenness' of those who move between literary studies and theatre practice (2005: 1), or Carol Chillington-Rutter, in "Maverick Shakespeares" (in Hodgdon and Worthen 2005), on 'the radical future' of companies such as Cheek by Jowl and Northern Broadsides who have 'from the margins… re-sited the centre' (2005: 357). These displacements – whether in-between or from the margins – recall a history of performance scholarship that emphasizes practice. As Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Bridget Escolme state in their introduction to *Shakespeare and the Making of Theatre*,

> Entering and exiting, beginning and ending, pausing, fighting, wearing clothes, picking up, using and putting down props, making noise, addressing or ignoring the audience, producing visual patterns and effects: these are the things actors must do…(2012: xi).

In fact, this list of practices covers most of the activity that took place during the student ensemble projects. However, re-positioning this activity as research demands a rigorous system of documentation and carefully planned experimentation. While the theatrical imperative requires that actors must *do* these things, the university PaR projects require researchers (and students) to *undo* Shakespeare in performance, through the very same mechanisms. This 'lively action' emerges as a process of displacement, reiterative cycles of *doing* and *undoing*, where the body itself becomes a laboratory for Shakespeare.

The three digital images within this chapter (*Figures 1-3)* re-perform 'liveness' and documentation itself becomes an essential component of PaR projects. As many scholar-practitioners have shown (Riley and Hunter 2009, Freeman 2010, Kershaw and Nicholson

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[42] For example, *Teaching Shakespeare: Passing it On* (Shand 2009) and *Beginning Shakespeare 4-11* (Winston and Tandy 2012)

[43] Heron, Prescott and Monk in *Performing Early Modern Drama Today* (Aesbisher and Prince 2012)

2011, Arlander 2012), documentation is especially significant in PaR processes, and the images printed here stand-in for embodied repetitions in time, as well as phenomenological meanings in performance. These visual objects 're-perform' the experience of the process, rather than 're-present' the performance of Shakespeare itself. *Figures 1 & 2,* from *Discords,* document the disembodied heads in dress rehearsal, speaking fragmented verse from *Macbeth* ('weird sisters') and *King Lear* ('Lear's daughters') respectively. They show the culmination of a long research and development process leading to a professional theatre production, and therefore 're-perform' the experiments of the laboratory, as much as 're-present' the experience of spectating in the dark playhouse. *Figure 3*, however, shows the inter-linked hands of the ensemble, playing a game over fragments of text, and drawing attention to subjectivity of the photographer's gaze. Furthermore, the use of these images in this chapter both documents and subverts the original performance event. The capacity of digital documentation to further displace the research material is another important attribute of the methodology under investigation. The methodology itself has emerged as an academic practice on Shakespeare, not simply about him. As this section has shown, a research journey through theatre practice, that is also open to new performance methodologies, is an imperative for twenty-first century Shakespeare studies. In order to explore this claim further, the next section will briefly examine the temporality of PaR.

Shakespeare and performance chronologies

The temporality of theatrical process is especially evocative when thinking about knowledge production. The reiterative qualities of rehearsal, the embodied repetition of practice and the scientific experiments of 'laboratory' all provide good examples of ways in which learning passes through several stages of becoming. Like the first scene of a Shakespeare play, researchers and students take a step into the unknown together. In the case of Act One, Scene One of *Macbeth*, time is fraught with uncertainty. 'When shall we three meet again… When the hurly-burly's done… That will be ere the set of sun… Anon.' Playing Shakespeare on the university stage also occupies this liminal space between now and then, between the past and the present, between 'the archive and the repertoire'. In Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire*, there is a distinction 'between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)' (2003:19). Her thesis implies that we might consider Shakespeare somewhere between these polarities, and this final section will consider the ways in which the temporal,

as well as the spatial, might enable us to think through the *difference* of university Shakespeares.

Returning to the contemporary PaR events from the archival examples above, gives the researching-practitioner a perspective not possible during the repertory processes of performance. The first event (*Shakespeare on the Brain)* created a tension, where the Shakespearean body was shown in juxtaposition with scientific material. In the examples from both the Fail Better laboratory (*Discords)* and the Ian Rickson laboratory *(Hamlet),* there was paradoxical relationship between Shakespearean knowledge (i.e. what the text contains, the instructions for performance and the choices of previous productions) and experimental process (i.e. ensemble-based approaches to devised performance, radical adaptation and transdisciplinarity). In the examples of *performance methodology,* new Shakespearean embodiments (i.e. new ways of being human with Shakespeare) brought about a blurring of epistemology and ontology for pedagogic purposes. In this final example of *performance chronology*, there will be an analysis of the temporal interconnections between PaR and its archive, as shown in *Table 1*.

PaR	*Laboratory*	*Methodology*	*Chronology*	*Documentation*
Shakespeare on the Brain March 2009	Ensemble perform extracts from Shakespeare	Scientists relate these scenes to medical research and neurology	Tension between spoken thought and brain activity	Video documentation at warwick.ac.uk
Fail Better Laboratory November 2009	Ensemble discard text and play games as final experiment	Scientific method adapted to theatre research	Outcome of laboratory is the ensemble itself, not production	Video documentation at warwick.ac.uk
Discords January 2011	Ensemble revive laboratory work, selecting lines from Shakespeare	Quasi-scientific documentation during process of revival	Three-year experiment: initial lab 2009, shows in 2010, and revival 2011	Video documentation at warwick.ac.uk
Hamlet Laboratory June 2011	Ensemble engage with text through intensive daily activities	Scientists contribute directly to the laboratory process	London production shaped by university research	Written documentation, private correspondence and online resources at youngvic.org

Table 1: A chronological analysis of the 2009-11 PaR projects at Warwick

After so much displacement, the *replacing* of the archival fragments into their original chronological sequence is a final statement of sorts; however, it is also an instructive thought experiment in itself. The *Shakespeare on the Brain* event had never been imagined as a prelude to this level of engagement with scientific method. While it was something of a fringe event at the time, in between a Lorca revival and a New Work Festival, the collaborative opportunities brought about by that process could not have been fully known until a later period of reflection. By contrast, the laboratory process that lasted three years, including two separate versions of *Discords,* was self-consciously experimental and PaR-

fuelled. Ian Rickson and Tony Howard's *Hamlet Laboratory* was a completely separate project involving some of the same students, who went on to participate in new PaR experiments entitled *Endlessness* (2011-13). Ian Rickson's bold Young Vic *Hamlet* received some extraordinary reviews (e.g. Michael Billington in The Guardian, 9 November 2011) and London audiences are still eagerly awaiting his second Shakespearean production, beyond his established profile as an international director of contemporary plays.

The answer to the weird question 'when shall we three meet again?' is the suitably weird response 'in thunder, lighting or in rain?' This essay has attempted to argue that Shakespeare should be met again in *laboratory*, *methodology* and *chronology*, so that future generations can playfully displace him through new embodiments and 'strange mutations'. Across these projects, Shakespeare has stimulated, interrupted and re-articulated experimental performance in a research-intensive British university. It is no accident that some of the great experiments of twentieth-century theatre also used Shakespeare as a site for radical experimentation, and university Shakespeares making use of PaR methods could create a *different* future for Shakespeare. In order to achieve this, as opposed to simply 'passing it on', emerging artists (and their educators) should *co-labour* in Shakespearean laboratories and make use of new performance methodologies.

These new Shakespearean collaborators are not limited as actors or scholars; the endless variety of the PaR workforce includes the creativity of makers and producers; the imagination of dramaturges and designers; the expertise of technicians and teachers; and now, the participation of spectators and students.

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ENDNOTE

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My work is dedicated to the students and alumni who have shaped my thinking as much as I have tried to shape theirs. Finally, I want to offer the readers of this collection free and fair use of these essays and interviews as an open-access resource for education and research.

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The references for each essay are cited at the end of each section, unless the work is freely available online, and the referencing styles may vary according to editorial requirements.

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Factum est