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# Nothing To Be Done: The Active Function of Samuel Beckett's Text

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Nothing To Be Done: The Active Function of  
Samuel Beckett's Text

Deleah Vaye Emery Waters Silva

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Nothing To Be Done: The Active Function of Samuel Beckett's Text

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Fintan O'Toole states: "Plays survive not by being carefully preserved, not by being exhibited from time to time in theatrical museums, but by being tried and tested, taken apart and reassembled" (*Game Without End*).

One of the great misconceptions and critiques of Samuel Beckett is of his presumed unrelenting control over his works. Artists, hoping to creatively collaborate with Beckett as they move his texts to performance, feel limited by his strict enforcement of that which he has written in his texts. Traditional relationships and functions allow directors to interpret an author's text. Not so with Beckett. Beckett demands that directors follow his authorial intentions as stated by his "direct expression," the indissoluble link between form (the text's physical nature) and content (the ideas expressed) within his texts.

Beckett's control of his "direct expression" is not a method of forcing meanings and interpretations upon his collaborators and his audience members. Rather, his purpose in protecting his "direct expression" throughout the production process is to ensure the text's "lack" of meaning and to preserve its ambiguities in performance.

In this thesis I will analyze and argue that by preserving this "direct expression" in Beckett's texts, the active relationships between author and reader (audience members) will be preserved throughout the production process and ultimately in the performance. Through this relationship, the viewer of the performance has the opportunity to become what Jacques Ranciere refers to as a more "active participant," composing their own poem with elements of the poem before them (Ranciere 13).

Keywords: Samuel Beckett, theatre

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## INTRODUCTION

While completing my Bachelor's degree, I had the opportunity to direct a scene from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The scene was part of act 2, in which Vladimir and Estragon "abuse each other" (Beckett 269). I had wonderfully talented actors who were able to utilize the mechanisms of their bodies and voices to imaginatively bring life to this scene. The already ridiculous dialogue was made even more comical by my actors' deep commitment and engagement with the scene and its directions.

In rehearsal, as we transitioned between the text and its performance we realized that the process was filled with possible questions and opportunities for interrogation, the answers to which would determine the nature of this particular performance experience. The most pressing of these questions, the one on which every other seemed to wait upon was: how faithfully would we follow Beckett's direction? Would we follow his direction to the letter or would we create another context to place the scene within? Or, would we blend the two, altering the scene's direction to effectively communicate what we assumed Beckett's original intention to be? With the weight of this inquiry upon us, I wondered whether we were giving these questions adequate consideration. Each decision seemed to lead to another question, with many opportunities for assumption that we were careful not to indulge.

We decided to follow the directions of the scene closely, obeying strictly the blocking cues and silences, and even the set was just "a tree." Within those boundaries laid out by Beckett, we played; played with movement and enunciation, among other things. Great creativity grew out of that playful activity and somehow, within our rigid

commitment to Beckett's written directions, we experienced great freedom. We discovered many ambiguities that we didn't feel pressed to explain or specify as our first priority was simply obedience to the script, not the explaining of it.

This experience impressed me greatly and I wanted to learn more about his work. I looked at Beckett the person and the artist. As I began to read into the history of his work however, I read of productions closing and directors walking out because Beckett didn't agree with or approve of the creative choices they had made that opposed the physical specifics of his script, which created for him a sort of tyrannical reputation. Apparently the freedom that the rigid directions had offered my actors and me, others found confining and controlling.

In his review of SE Gontarski's *Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, critic Fintan O'Toole states:

This state of affairs forces those of us who remain enthralled by Beckett's plays to ask an awkward question. The moral integrity and artistic authority of Beckett's response to the terror of his times makes him arguably the playwright of the twentieth century. But will he hold the stage in the twenty-first? Plays survive not by being carefully preserved, not by being exhibited from time to time in theatrical museums, but by being tried and tested, taken apart and reassembled. The living playwright may have the right to insist that the play be presented with as much faithfulness to the original intention as the conditions of a collaborative art will allow. But if the dead dramatist continues to claim these rights from beyond the grave, then the play, too, will die. (*Game Without End*)

O'Toole is accurate in identifying and defending the collaborative nature of theatre; the world of a performance is created and communicated through various personal and collective contributions. I am an advocate of this creative freedom. However, I feel it is extreme to question the enduring integrity of Beckett's plays because certain boundaries are placed upon those contributions. While many find these boundaries confining, they have a purpose, they protect the unique structure of Beckett's plays. Beckett himself explains his structure:

Here is direct expression – pages and pages of it. And if you don't understand it, *Ladies and Gentleman*, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one without bothering to read the other. This rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation. The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfill no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quarterly conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension. (Esslin, 31)

Within Beckett's rather fiercely relayed description is what specifically sets his work apart from many others, and explains why the approach that O'Toole is suggesting would not be effective. He identifies the entities of *form* and *content* and discusses their binding connection. Form has been described as the "physical nature" of a piece and content, the "ideas expressed" (Kirby 53), or the metaphysical space. Often, there is a



separation between the two. The physical nature of a work exists as a means of communicating the ideas of a work, therefore they are in service of one another; however, when they can be individually identified, a separation between the two has occurred, and they exist as “independent phenomena.” Therefore, by O’Toole’s declaration that a work be “taken apart and reassembled” in order to survive suggests a division between a play’s form and its content.

In many works, this division already exists and therefore it is appropriate to adapt one entity to facilitate more effective communication and representation of the other. These alterations are often necessary particularly when dealing with works of the past and have aided in securing their relevance to contemporary audiences. While separate from form, the content of some of these works are invaluable and timeless. Robert Scanlan, former literary director for the American Repertory Theater (ART), explains the state of Shakespeare’s plays in connection with such structure:

The plays of Shakespeare have been given provocative new stagings by innovative directors intent on deconstructing old conventions and a received “language” in the theater that has traditionally signaled that one is doing Shakespeare. The results have been spectacular and illuminating. (Scanlan 149)

Scanlan continues to explain how Beckett’s work differs from that of Shakespeare, and how the same approach cannot be used for explanations of Beckett’s work.

... Shakespeare’s plays have a different form, which is not automatically jeopardized by certain transpositions of style and setting. The plays are made of traditional scenic interplays of character and story, and their

internal actions can remain intact in a wide range of languages and settings. Beckett's plays, and especially his late work for the stage, cannot survive analogous formal manipulations, because these disrupt the central action of the play...(149)

The difference in the form of Shakespeare's work as opposed to Beckett's is its state. In Shakespeare's work, it is an "independent phenomena," whereas in Beckett's work, it is indissolubly connected to the play's content. In Beckett's work, there is no separation between form and content; it is "direct expression." Because "*what* is said is indissolubly linked with the *manner* in which it is said," its meaning is directly expressed; "the work of art as a whole *is* its meaning" (Esslin 44). Therefore, to change one is to change the other. If either the physical nature or the ideas expressed of a piece are altered, it is no longer Beckett's work because the fullness of his work has been ruptured. Even if similarities between the original work and the altered work exist, the latter is more accurately described as a work *inspired by* Beckett as opposed to one created by him.

It is for this reason that O'Toole's experimental approach would not be an effective means of preserving Beckett's work. In actuality, his work would be better preserved "by being exhibited from time to time in theatrical museums," because at least in this case, form and content would be protected and would remain Beckett's work.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In service to developing the argument of fidelity to the text versus complete creative freedom, I am using Samuel Beckett as a case study as he is one of the most blatant and indiscrete examples that I am aware of. Others include Bob Fosse and David Auburn; however for the purposes of this particular study, I will restrict my examinations to Beckett's work specifically.

Certainly, Beckett's abrasive nature affects the perception of his work. His seeming unwillingness to collaborate is viewed as controlling and tyrannical as artists feel as though their very important roles are threatened and unnecessary. Beckett's perceived insensitivity to other collaborative roles causes those who come in contact with his work to assume a defensive position against him, hence the hostility I sensed when learning of his past interactions. However, looking past his offensive means of communication, what is found is someone that is refreshingly straightforward. There is no extra effort needed to read between the lines of Beckett's communication, he means what he says. Much like his work, it is "direct expression." In this sense, understanding Beckett the person will lead to a better understanding of his work.

Beckett's protection of the expression of his texts does not mean that no opportunity for collaboration or artistry exists for those who produce them. Again, I myself experienced great freedom and creativity within the boundaries of his direction. By having limits placed upon my possibilities for the scene, I was able to spend my creative energies more fully exploring the opportunities that I did have. The actors and I did this together and somehow, by having the scale of our creative opportunities narrowed, greater opportunities were opened for our audience. Almost as though the endless possibilities that we denied ourselves, translated to greater possibilities for our viewers, allowing what they perceived to be limitless. Because they were unable to specifically locate the time or place or even the meaning of our piece through our portrayal, they were able to decide for themselves, using their own creative faculties. In other words, by being nothing definite to us, the scene could be anything for them, and they were able to impose any sensed impulse of their own creation freely onto our work.

This thesis analyzes Beckett's "direct expression," the indissoluble connection between form and content, and its affect on the process of production of his work and what its results are. I will argue that by preserving the connection between form and content in Beckett's texts, the active relationship that the reader of his texts has will be preserved through the production process and ultimately bestowed upon the audience through their "reading" of it, providing them with the opportunity of personally determining the texts' meaning as it personally applies to and ultimately fulfills themselves.<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter 1, I will discuss how direct expression is present in the text and affects the reader's relationship to it. By examining the 1984 American Repertory Theatre production of *Endgame*, directed by Joanne Akalaitis, I will show how the united display of form and content informs the reader's experience and why its preservation is important through the transition to performance.

Chapter 2 will discuss the director's role as it relates to the preservation of form and content through this transition. By examining the disappointment of Gildas Bourdet, director of the Comédie Française production of *Fin de Partie*, the traditional expectations of the contemporary director will come to be understood, but how preserving the form and content of Beckett's work alters that assumed function.

Chapter 3 discusses the ultimate result of preserving form and content; while Beckett's perceived tyrannical control has preserved his texts' direct expression, it

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<sup>2</sup> What is missing here is a discussion of production values. This reader's "space" is only effective if it is what is considered to be "good theatre" which understanding is dependent upon the manner in which the success of a production is gauged. This is not an issue that will be treated in this thesis.

ultimately reaches a part in the production process over which he has no control: the audience's reception. By a director submitting to their altered function and preserving the text's form and content, the viewer of its production is now able to have the direct "readerly" experience with the text described in Chapter 1. When the audience has this experience, they are more "active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs" (Ranciere, 4). This chapter follows the specific example of Rick Cluchey, inmate of the San Quentin penitentiary where the San Francisco Actor's Workshop performed *Waiting for Godot* in 1957 and his experience as an active participant.

One of the main influences for Chapter 3 is Jacob Adams' *The Impossible Itself*, a documentary covering the San Quentin production. The film includes interviews with the director, designers, a few of the actors and audience members who discuss the circumstances that surrounded the production as well as some of its effects on many of the inmates. Because the documentary helps to relay the audience's enthusiastic and active reception of the production, the example it provides, particularly the activity of the San Quentin audience, offers the same opportunity to others; by one audience witnessing the successful interaction of another, they will see that personal activity with a production is possible and vicariously receive a sense of permission to take the same liberties themselves.

Similarly, my hope for this project is that it will create a greater understanding of Beckett the author and the possibilities that his texts provide and the way in which they be permitted to achieve their fullest opportunity for expression.

In the conclusion, I will discuss my future research agenda on Beckett and his texts, and identify specific goals I plan to accomplish. I will recognize and identify areas

for future scholarship. There are a number of issues that are prime for interrogation, and I hope to contribute to those conversations. Researching Samuel Beckett's texts and performance theories are both complex and rewarding. This tension is what attracted me to the topic in the first place. I hope to continue investigating the intersections among Ranciere, Beckett, and others, researching, writing and maybe even producing a bit about and in the "ordered space," the "comforting area," where audience members become even more active participants in the production, engaged with an "ignorant schoolmaster" in their quest for knowledge and understanding of the human condition.

## CHAPTER 1: THE TEXT

In 1984 JoAnne Akalaitis staged a version of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theatre (ART) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Even though Akalaitis had experience directing Beckett's work previously, an altercation occurred surrounding this particular production between Beckett and the ART as Akalaitis had taken some fairly significant directorial liberties with his text. Beckett's original set description for *Endgame* reads:

*Bare interior.*

*Grey light.*

*Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn.*

*Front right, a door. Hanging near a door, its face to a wall, a picture.*

*Front left, touching each other, covered with an old sheet, two ashbins.*

*Centre, in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet, HAMM*

Rather than honoring what Beckett had specifically indicated, she planned to stage the production in a "post-apocalyptic subway station with dark puddles, an abandoned train car, and a sign indicating that the space had once been a fallout shelter." She also hired two black actors and wanted to add a musical overture composed by ex-husband Philip Glass. Based on Akalaitis' choices, Barney Rossett (Beckett's publisher) informed Beckett that the play was addressing "the plight of the homeless." A telegram was sent by his licensing firm refusing permission for the production to proceed. Litigation ensued and despite Beckett's protestations, the ART received word, just moments before curtain, of the court's ruling that the production could proceed. Upon agreement between Beckett and the ART, an insert was attached to the program that read:

Any production of "Endgame" which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. The American Repertory Theatre production, which dismisses my directions, is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this. (Kalb 277)

As is often the case, Beckett's acerbic manner affects the reader's ability to fully recognize what the issue with Akalaitis' performance was. It calls more attention to his own dissatisfaction as opposed to the true offense, which was to the work itself, not Beckett. Akalaitis' addition of the subway station, the train car, etc. were alterations to the play's physical nature, alterations to its form. Because Beckett's plays are expressed directly, changing form in turn changes content. Therefore the product created was one that was not Beckett's.

In an interview with Lois Oppenheim, JoAnne Akalaitis explains why she made the choices she did and what made her feel as though she could, despite the playwright's objections. She explains:

I think when a playwright licenses a work, especially if it's not the premiere of the play, it is licensed to a director, and in a sense it is given over. It's gone. You buy the Samuel French edition of some play in which Noel Coward says, for example, "A blond woman walks in and sits in a purple chair." Are you violating Noel Coward's play by casting a brunette who sits in a maroon chair? So, Beckett says, "Gray room, two windows." It simply never occurred to me that one would actually do it in a gray room with two windows. I



mean, what do we do as directors and designers? We don't just buy the Samuel French edition and say, "Here is the prop list; here is what the set should look like. (Oppenheim 137)

What Akalaitis failed to recognize was that there is a distinct difference between Beckett's work and Coward's: the notion of direct expression. In Coward's plays, form and content exist as independent phenomena, in Beckett's, they are indissolubly linked and changing one directly changes the other.

Another element that distinguishes Beckett's works is the vast ambiguities present in his texts. While the script's directions are painstakingly specific they are also incredibly simple. That simplicity can also come across as incomplete. A grey room with a bare interior feels just that way: bare, and bare suggests incomplete. Viewers are accustomed to an amount of certainty and resolution from a production. Therefore, when ambiguities are present, the missing elements that would then complete a scene and provide its fullness and meaning are desired. This is particularly apparent in Beckett's work as it is loaded with ambiguities that are so tempting to resolve.

The following is a portion of a scene from *Endgame*:

HAMM: Give me the dog.

CLOV (looking): Quiet.

HAMM (angrily): Give me the dog!

(Clow drops the telescope, clasps his hands to his head. Pause. He gets down precipitately, looks for the dog, sees it, picks it up,

hastens towards Hamm and strikes him violently on the head with the dog.)

CLOV:                    There's your dog for you!

(The dog falls to the ground. Pause.)

HAMM:                  He hit me!

CLOV:                  You drive me mad, I'm mad!

HAMM:                  If you must hit me, hit me with the axe.

(Pause.)

Or with the gaff, hit me with the gaff. Not with the dog. With the gaff. Or with the axe.

(Clav picks up the dog and gives it to Hamm who takes it in his arms.

CLOV (imploringly): Let's stop playing!

HAMM:                  Never!

(Pause.)

Put me in my coffin.

CLOV:                  There are no more coffins.

HAMM:                  Then let it end!

Even within this short scene, there are many opportunities to complete and specify because there is no definitive location or purpose or reason to the dialogue, or the objects; why a coffin? Does it have any relation to the "end" that Hamm is requesting? What kind of dog does Clav strike Hamm with? Is it a toy dog? Or a live dog? Or perhaps a dead dog? There are implications to either choice, none of which are specified

by the text. The state of the dog could contribute to or retract from the discussion of the coffin if the dog were to serve as an additional symbol of death, or even juxtaposing it as a symbol of life. And so on. What color is the dog? Is it gray like the walls or a contrasting, vibrant orange? None of these details are specified by the script, but they are choices that will be deliberately made in order facilitate their physicalization which, in turn, create the reader's metaphysical space.

Fintan O'Toole's explains further, "where theater artists think of themselves as interpreters, any interpretation of a Beckett play is necessarily a reduction" (*Game without End*). Any interpretation of a Beckett play then physically realized in its performance is a reduction because any answer or specification provided that does not exist in the text removes an ambiguity. By identifying what something is also says what it is not. Akalaitis' expectation as director to specify what is left ambiguous is understandable because so much of Beckett's texts appear to desperately crave it.

What exactly then, is the experience that the written text offers? In his article, *Disciplines of the Text: Sites of Performance*, WB Worthen explains that there are currently three interlaced ways we think of "text" (11-12). Their combination is what informs the experience that text offers. The different ways are:

Text 1= Material object

Text 2= Canonical Vehicle of authorial intention

Text 3= Intertext

The explanation of these three notions of text is found in Roland Barthes discussion of textuality. Worthen first identifies Barthes notion of work, which Worthen has separated into two sub-categories as the first two explanations of text: (Text 1) text as the material

object (Worthen 11) "that fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example)" (*Image, Music, Text*, 156-7) and (Text 2) text as a canonical vehicle of authorial intention; the vehicle for authorized cultural reproduction or the "author's intention" (Worthen 11). While all three notions of text are intertwined, the first 2 are pointed at the author and what his writing creates. Barthes describes this writing as a "horizon... a frontier, to overstep which alone might lead to the linguistically supernatural," it is the "comforting area of an ordered space" (Zero 31). The author orders a space, which allows for the "linguistically supernatural;" however he does not fill it. His role is to create "the horizon; the frontier; the possibility." The metaphysical area ordered by the author is his vehicle of intention (Text 2). This ordering or 'intention' is what creates the material object (Text 1), as it is the physical evidence of this organization.

The space within the ordered area is left vacant and is what provides for the possibility of the third meaning of text: (Text 3) as an intertext, the field of textuality (Worthen 11). This is the space that is activated once a reader steps into it. Just as an author has a "personal and secret mythology" (Zero 32) a reader does as well, which, guided by the author's intention, fills the empty space. A trace of the author still remains, but only so far as he has left a boundary, within which, the reader steps into and experiences. It is for this reason that Barthes says that text is experienced only in an activity of production (157).

Because of their close relationship, much of the description of text closely resembles a discussion of performance. (Worthen 14) What separates dramatic texts from others (even those of Samuel Beckett) is that they are created with the intention of remaining incomplete until realized; they are the "inscription of action," which still

remains to be brought about (11). For example, a script, the material object (Text 1), contains an indication for action scripted by a playwright (Text 2). This indication of action stems from the playwright's intention and is then encountered by a director (Text 3). The director then experiences the space left by the playwright and collaborates with other designers to translate their readerly experiences into action. In this sense, performance is materialized evidence of that activity experienced by a reader. While Barthes explains that a work "discloses a secret, ultimate, something to be sought out" (158), performance texts are especially accessible to the intertextual experience of the reader as this step is the end to which they are created. "Production is, in a sense, the final cause for the writing of plays, which gain their fullest, their essential meaning only in the circumstances for which they were intended: theatrical performance" (12).

Performance resolves the openness of original text through the creation of a new text with the director (and other designers) serving as author. Where the script was the material object (Text 1) which represents the playwright's intentions (Text 2) and the director (supported by the other designers) was the reader to complete it (Text 3), in performance, the process shifts and the production becomes the material object (Text 1A), which relays the director's intentions as he has resolved the original text (Text 2A) and the audience is the reader that interacts and completes the process (Text 3A).

Worthen explains that "what Barthes means by text is in some sense more like what we usually mean by performance: a production of a specific state of the text in which a variety of intertextual possibilities are realized. In this sense, performance has the same relation to the material text (the printed text, the text on the page) that the text has to the authorial work: the performance signifies an absence..." (Worthen 14). This

absence is the intertextual space left vacant, now with the synthesized intentions of director and playwright (Text 2A); it is the space that the audience steps into and experiences (Text 3A). An extremely simplified performance model would be:

Text 1= Material object

Text 2= Canonical Vehicle of authorial intention

Text 3= Intertext of the director/designers

Text 1A=Performance (as it resolves Text 1 & 2  
and integrates Text 3)

Text 2A=Director's Intention (as it resolves Text 2)

Text 3A=Intertext of the audience

In theory, Text 1 and Text 1A should offer the same readerly opportunities, only that Text 1 is created with the intention of welcoming those opportunities to create its closure, while Text 1A is a display of that closure, which therefore alters the space made available to the 'reader'. In regards to Beckett however, the readerly opportunities offered by Text 1 are not presented with the intention of being resolved by the creation of another text (Text 1A). Its performance then, needs to retain the same qualities that Text 1 holds; text 1A needs to be the same ordered space as Text 1, allowing for a viewer to have the same opportunity to step into it and resolve it the way a reader of the written text would.

According to Beckett's form, performance is not to be a completion of the text but a materialization of it; performance is purely the physical representation of the written text (*Image, Music, Text*, 163). Beckett has made this objective attainable as he has written the entire theatrical experience, including the details of lighting and timing. In

other words, Beckett's intention for the written text (Text 2) would be the performance; the actual physical performance rather than any sort of meaning or interpretation of the written text driving it.

In contrast to the traditional textual model, the "Beckettian" performance model would therefore be:

Text 1= Material object

Text 2= Beckett's intention/performance

Text 3= Text 3A

Text 1A=Physicalization of Text 1

Text 2A=Text 2

Text 3A=Intertext of the audience

The vast ambiguities of Beckett's written texts create a great space for the reader to step into. Commonly, the "authorial intention" is what forms the written work, the way interpretation of the written work then forms the performance. Beckett's authorial intentions are the performance as it is "direct expression" and therefore no other authorial intention is necessary. Because the physical aspects of his texts are so diligently specific, the text is able to be faithfully realized without an origin provided outside of the text itself; there is no content outside of the text's form. By preserving the connection between form and content through performance, the same vacancies from Text 2 are carried over into Text 2A and reader of the performance is able to step into the same metaphysical space that the reader of his text would.

In the case of Akalaitis' *Endgame*, it is just that: Akalaitis' *Endgame*, not Beckett's. She stepped in and reordered the space that then replaced Beckett's textual intention (2A). Beckett appropriately identified the production as a parody as it did not "observe the spirit and text of Mr. Beckett's great play," which was Robert Brustein's (ART's artistic director) response to Beckett's note attached to the program. Brustein's note was a means to defend the production, particularly as he emphasized that all theatrical productions "depend on the collective contributions of directors, actors and designers to realize them effectively..." (Holmberg, Geidt, and Kasper, 55). Creative choices are required to physically realize what is indicated by the text, however the "spirit" that was portrayed by the ART's production was one that Akalaitis experienced as reader, and by her application of her own experience with the material object (Text 1) to the creation of the performance (Text 1A), she altered the comforting area of the space that Beckett had ordered. It ultimately existed under a different organization and therefore, both the physical nature and the ideas expressed were different and the "reader" of the performance text did not step into the same space that Akalaitis did when she encountered the original material object. Inevitably, she would have had her own experience as reader of the text (Text 3); however, Beckett's form requires that this experience have no influence on the creation of the performance (Text 1A), otherwise a separation of form and content would occur.

The ART did not produce Beckett's work again until 1994 with *Waiting for Godot*. They did not attempt *Endgame* however, for another 25 years with their 2009 production directed by Marcus Stern. Mark Favermann reported that "unlike most of its other shows, the current production of the American Repertory Theatre [was] highly



prescribed” (*Beckett’s Elusive Endgame*). It is interesting to note that the review of this particular production references more of the details and ambiguities present in Beckett’s text which are then represented in the performance. Rather than specifically defining many of the ambiguities in the manner that Akalaitis did, Stern’s production preserves them through his more faithful approach. Rather than identifying specific answers to Beckett’s text, Favermann, a reader of the performance, was able to identify the questions unanswered:

“The brilliance of *Endgame* and much of Beckett's other work is found in the ambiguity and layered meanings of his words as spoken as well as what is not, the designated silences and pauses. There is so much to ponder here. Who are these characters? Are they parts of the same person? Is Clov the son, the servant or the mirror reflection of Hamm? What did the parents do to Hamm? Is man always flawed? Here, the entertainment is in our personal acknowledgment of our shared humanity, our misunderstanding of it, and our attempts to clarify what is unclear.  
*(Beckett’s Elusive Endgame)*

Beckett does not control the empty space (Text 3), but defines its boundaries through his intention (Text 2). The empty space belongs to the reader whereas its boundaries, in a sense, belong to Beckett. Therefore, a change to form means a change to content which results in a reorganization of the reader’s space. It is the preservation of that space and its boundaries that allows the audience to encounter performance the way a reader encounters the written text; that which is expressed directly through the text is likewise directly expressed through its performance. Even though the ART was permitted

to proceed in 1984, the scandal spoke as loudly as the performance did; attached to that particular production's history will always be Samuel Beckett's words: "It's ahl wrahng!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This is Schneider's attempt to mimic Beckett's Irish accent in print. See *Entrances: An American Director's Journey* (Viking, 1986), p. 225.

## CHAPTER 2: THE PERFORMANCE

When Gildas Bourdet directed Beckett's play at the Comédie Française in 1988, he justified the directorial liberties he had taken when he said, "Beckett does not specify the color to be used for the set of *Fin de Partie*; at the very most he indicates that the light is gray" (*Fizzle* 154). What Bourdet considered to be left ambiguous, as far as he was concerned, was an opportunity to employ his directorial interpretation and make specific. While use of the color gray for the set had been common in staging Beckett's work, he felt that this was merely an imposition of "Beckettian tradition;" and that to do the same was nothing more than a convenient convention that produced a "superficial faithfulness." To him, what held more importance was going back and discovering the original emotion that the gray once inspired, and making decisions that would restore that result. Bourdet felt that where once the gray produced within the spectator feelings of anguish and grief, which was what he considered to be the result of Samuel Beckett's true intention, the essence had been lost. Bourdet felt that it was his ethical obligation as director to be true to the spirit of the play, Beckett's intention, and make directorial choices accordingly, even if it meant deviating from the letter of the script. Where the absence of color was no longer disturbing, Bourdet would apply the opposite in order to recreate the original effect: painting the set pink and red "to the point of nausea." He chose this based on the correspondence between "Beckett's universe" and paintings by the Irish artist, Francis Bacon whose abundant use of the colors in the background of his canvases caused certain beings to "melt away," much the way he felt that many of Beckett's characters did (156).

While Bourdet felt that he was honoring the text, his fidelity was based in his interpretation of the script as opposed to Beckett's details. Bourdet believed that "it is not the author who speaks in his text but, rather, something within him of which he is not necessarily aware" (*Fizzle* 158); it is the author who is communicating something through his text and this is the object to which a director should be faithful. According to Bourdet, the purpose of the text is to covertly communicate that true intent, and it is the director's role to discover and represent it through performance, even if it means deviating from that which the script specifically indicates. In this sense, the text is "merely a signifier... an enabling accident of the performance, as its details are disposable once the author's intent has been revealed" (Worthen 13); it is through performance, rather than the text, where the intention of the author gains its fullest expression.

Bourdet's assumption that the author speaks through their texts is slightly inaccurate as it implies that there exists a hidden intention outside of the script that only the author can validate. Roland Barthes explains the origin of our contemporary perception of the author; he explains that he is a modern figure, whose prestige emerged as a product of the capitalist ideology of the Middle Ages. This focus on the 'person' of the author now imposes itself onto the experience of the reader. Instead of writing being a "gesture of pure inscription (rather than expression)," it is supposed that the author holds the 'secret' of the text. "The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us" (Barthes 143).

Barthes continues to explain however, “as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin and the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (*Image, Music, Text*, 142). Once the author physically pens the words that represent his intentions, the connection between them is broken. The words stand on their own until activated once again by a reader, who then connects them to their own textuality making their own experience. Any intention of the author not captured by his writing does not transfer to the reader, unless the reader themselves puts it there. Therefore, what Bourdet assumed to be Beckett’s true intentions, were actually products of his own experience as reader that he then imposed on Beckett and his text. Nowhere in the text does it state or imply that the reader is to experience the “anguish and grief” that Bourdet sensed, and nowhere in the text does it indicate any use of pink or red. Bourdet justified the application of his own interpretation by asserting that they were in some way related to what Beckett had originally intended.

Bourdet’s interpretation of Beckett’s text, which he then imposed onto its meaning, or intent, was another violation of the connection between form and content and a disregard of the text’s direct expression. Where Akalaitis altered the content through her manipulation of the play’s form, Bourdet did the opposite; he altered the form through his manipulation of the play’s content by assuming that they were “independent phenomena” which were to be dealt with separately. Both instances produced the same result: the creation of a product that disrupted the central action of the play and that was not Beckett’s.

Similar to Akalaitis' violation, Bourdet's offense was based on an assumption of his relationship to Beckett's text and how it informed his role as director. Unfortunately, this assumption led to the same response by Beckett but with an even more unfortunate outcome; his actions led Beckett to believe that Bourdet was less concerned with the script and more so with himself and his own ideas and interpretations. As a result, Beckett's publisher, Jerome Lindon, intervened at Beckett's request and as Bourdet stated: "the author's copyright legally triumphed" (159); the production was forced to either remove the alterations, or to close. Bourdet felt "obliged to retreat," as though Beckett's unrelenting presence left no place for him. As it was, "the Commedie Francais managed to look sulky and petulant in its compliance...the set was conspicuously draped in unbleached muslin, and props and costumes were allowed to clash rather obviously with the lamely corrected setting" (Scanlan 146). Bourdet and his collaborators had their names withdrawn from the programs while what remained of the production "hobbled along, displaying its sense of injury" (146). Bourdet walked away, "burned from the experience, careful to not dare stage any other of [Beckett's] texts" (*Fizzle* 158).

Bourdet's expectation for directorial interpretation is justified considering the commodity that it has become in contemporary theatre. Louis Oppenheim asserts that the "director's taste is the ultimate determination of the play's merit" (Oppenheim 7). Traditionally, the director has some sort of authorial role in the production process with their interpretation of the text, or assumption of authorial intent, serving as the primary focus and the details of the text as the secondary. However, because of the specific

manner in which Beckett regards his texts, the traditionally assumed directorial function changes. The direct expression of the text holds the highest importance with the director's interpretation following. Because of this exclusive importance of the text and Beckett's demand of fidelity to it, Bourdet considered his unrelenting presence threatening to what he considered to be his role as director. Jonathon Kalb explains the basis of his offense:

The autocratic tradition of the director has been with us for over a hundred years and is much more entrenched than even some directors perceive. Like the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, producing ecstatic republican tragedies as if unaware that its dominant social position was already long secured, directors in the late twentieth century still rail against the tyranny of the author as if more than a handful of contemporary playwrights posed as much as a passing threat to them. The sloganizing one hears about "servitude to the text" (Herbert Blau), "the stranglehold of the writer" (Charles Marowitz) and "textual imperialism" (Patrice Pavis) has a pallid, unconvincing air to it, especially the latter phrase, which sounds like fanatic shouting outside some beleaguered foreign embassy. In fact, the slogans are a form of projection, since those who shout them are really asserting the imperialism of the director, simply a different ordered aristocracy. (Kalb 149)

Because Beckett's texts are directly expressed, granting a director autonomy over them merely replaces one authoritative role with another and by so doing also runs the risk of compromising the connection between form and content. In this case, Bourdet's assumption that Beckett's dominance is a means of enforcing faithfulness to an original

intention is slightly inaccurate as it implies that meaning exists not directly communicated through the script. If there is an explanation for the work that the work itself does not express, then it is not direct expression and form is divorced from content. Therefore, Beckett's authorial intention is communicated sufficiently through the text.

This lack of need for directorial interpretation does not mean that he is not dependant on some directorial function. Beckett himself even preferred others to direct his texts. His texts do not call for the interpretive role that the director traditionally serves; however, they still require the function to give them physicality and active life. Alan Schneider, Beckett's most recognized US director, gives his opinion:

For what a director does, basically, is to take the playwright's bare words, together with his stage directions (which may range from Shaw's page length essays on social conditions through Beckett's well-known array of specific instructions and varied-length pauses to Pinter's even more elliptical dots-and dashes) and try to clothe them in flesh and blood reality. (Oppenheim 6)

Just as the ideas are sufficiently represented through the text, the physical nature is as well; however, with an emphasis on represented because as Clifford Geertz indicates, text is "the inscription of action," which remains to be brought about. While both form and content are expressed, their physical reality is still lacking, which remains to be brought about by the text's performance, enabled by its director (Worthen, 11).

While no further interpretation of form separated from content is required or even permitted, both elements gain their full expression through the actualization of the other. In other words, content is fully expressed through the physical actualization of its form.



WB Worthen explains that the “meaning and so the authority of performance is a function of how fully it expresses the meanings, gestures, themes, located ineffably in the structures of the work” (Worthen, p 16). Therefore, particularly with Beckett’s works, the more stringently the form is physically actualized, the more effectively the content will be expressed as well. A director (and other designers) give the form indicated in the text its physical reality, and by so doing, sufficiently express its content as well.

While the director’s role consists of physically actualizing the plays form and content, Lois Oppenheim raises the following question for the creative director of Beckett’s work:

“Beckett's instructions being what they are, one wonders where exactly the director's creativity and imagination come into the picture (pun intended). How, when the playwright has given every possible indication for the production of a given play –“If 0=dark and 10=bright, light should move from about 3 to 6 and back" (Breath) and "Thirty seconds before end of speech lamplight begins to fail" (A Piece of Monologue) are typical - does the director distinguish himself?" (Oppenheim 7)

With all the emphasis on strict allegiance to the direction indicated, is there opportunity for a director to creatively contribute to one of his texts? Bourdet felt that there wasn’t. I assert, however, that there is, and that it can be as fulfilling as the direction of any other text. It is in physically actualizing the connection of form and content. While Beckett has specified many details in his texts, there is still a degree of obscurity between what he indicates and its realization. Just as the text creates a boundary for an ordered space that its reader steps into, it creates boundary for the physical space as well. The director is the

owner of this physical space and is free to explore as long as it does not alter the readers metaphysical space. As long as the text's indication of physical boundaries are adhered to, the stipulations of form and content will be protected and the play's direct expression will not be affected.

In attempts to explain the way in which Beckett's plays functioned, Schneider likened them to music, explaining that they represent "a kind of theatrical chamber music." That "in them, sounds and silences, cadences and rhythms, are selected, arranged, pointed and counter-pointed..." (Harmon, p xvi). Maurice Harmon explains that "the actors are asked to function almost as musical instruments on which Beckett's special brand of auditory and visual music may be played. The director conducts" (Harmon p xvi). Similarly, musicians and conductors have opportunities for their own expression, within the bounds of the music written which they are performing. If they choose to play different notes, it is different music and this is the same standard to which Beckett holds his work. Where the text calls for gray walls actual gray walls would need to be utilized. However, there are many shades of gray and one would need to be selected, with the stipulation that the selection would fall under the overarching requirement that it be some shade of gray, not pink or raspberry. Utilizing something other than an actual shade of gray would be to use a color that gray is not and therefore would be to deviate from that which the text specified. Where the "playwright's words" call for gray, gray must be present. The shade however, is an interpretive choice left to the freedom of the director. As long as *gray* is present, the form indicated by the text is honored, which in turn preserves its content. Therefore the same order of metaphysical space exists for the "reader" of the performance.

These aesthetic choices are not the only opportunities for directorial artistry. Others include casting, voice, and movement. The following is an excerpt from *Waiting for Godot*, Act II:

VLADIMIR: Finish your phrase, I tell you!

ESTRAGON: Finish your own!

(Silence. They draw closer, halt.)

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

(They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.)

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: Vermin!

VLADIMIR: Abortion!

ESTRAGON: Morpion!

VLADIMIR: Sewer-rat!

ESTRAGON: Curate!

VLADIMIR: Cretin!

ESTRAGON: (with finality) Crritic!

VLADIMIR: Oh!

(He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.)

ESTRAGON: Now let's make it up.

VLADIMIR: Gogo!

ESTRAGON: Didi!

VLADIMIR: Your hand!

ESTRAGON:           Take it!  
VLADIMIR:           Come to my arms!  
ESTRAGON:           Yours arms?  
VLADIMIR:           My breast!  
ESTRAGON:           Off we go!

(They embrace.)

When I had the opportunity to direct this scene (of which this example is a portion), the actors and I recognized an opportunity to play with physical activity. While Beckett specifies that Vladimir and Estragon draw closer or turn away or face each other we decided that the specific manner in which these actions were performed were left to our artistic discretion. We had Vladimir's movements very controlled and regimented; every move he made was sharp and controlled. We imagined that every movement was made through a solid grid consisting of perpendicular and parallel lines intersecting at 90°. Estragon's were the exact opposite; everything he did was very fluid and curvilinear. Rather than 90° angles, his pattern of movement was more circular. Their movements opposed each other, distinguishing the characters and providing a much more complex visual element to our scene. This is one example of the many creative opportunities that we found and acted on. Another was vocal intonation. Just as a shade of grey is to be chosen, shades of vocal projection and articulation were utilized as well. However, nothing we did disrupted the central action of the play, nor did it interfere or override any of Beckett's specifications. Instead, we played within the creative space that was created by the text's boundaries. The result allowed us to creatively express ourselves, while still faithfully honoring the comforting space ordered for our viewers.

Bourdet's production occurred 4 years later and in a different country and language than Akalaitis', however they are often included in the same conversations as examples of controversial productions of Beckett's work. While Bourdet's was forced to conform to Beckett's intentions and Akalaitis' was permitted to proceed as it was, they both continue to carry with them the same stigma as offenders of textual fidelity. At the same time however, they are also what allow for further discussion and examination of traditional roles not only as they apply to Beckett's work, but to performance in general.

Despite assumptions formed after Bourdet's and Akalaitis' productions, there is room to interpret and create within the boundaries of Beckett's direction. They are, however, not the same opportunities that directors are traditionally accustomed to. Alan Schneider was one of Beckett's most preferred director's because he did not "intrude upon the work but submitted himself attentively to it" (Harmon, p xv), as doing otherwise would be to "muffle the play's integrity and purity" (p xvi). However, echoing Schnieder's view, the director is a reader of the text, but their interpretive role is of secondary importance with the details of the text preempting. It is this sort of fidelity to Beckett's boundaries that Schneider observed and for this reason he held much of Beckett's trust.

### CHAPTER 3: THE SPECTATOR

Preserving the ordered space indicated by Beckett's text gives its reader vast opportunity to actively explore. Beckett protects these boundaries of the ordered space that he creates, however not the reader's experience within them. This exploration done by the reader is a phenomenon over which Beckett has no control. Therefore, when that space is faithfully preserved through production, viewers of his texts are free to actively engage and determine what they will.

This opportunity is offered not only by Beckett's stern demand of fidelity to the unique nature of his texts, but also largely by productions who honor that shift in traditional function. Fintan O'Toole explains: "Where most plays invite the active participation of actors, directors and designers in determining the meaning of the work, Beckett's work demands that the meaning remains indeterminate" (*Game Without End*). If directors and even writers were to completely determine the meaning of a text, what function would the audience serve, albeit appreciatively, but to passively view their creations. Specifically in Beckett's work, if the ambiguities of the text were to be removed through the divorcement of form and content, the ordered space for the viewer would be significantly reduced and their role converted to one of passivity.

Among the accusations made of theatre is that it creates the passive spectator and transmits ignorance. To explain this formulation, Ranciere identifies the critique that he refers to as the "paradox of the spectator;" while most theatre requires a spectator, the actual role of *spectator* has a negative connotation for 2 reasons:

1. Viewing is the opposite of knowing –The spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance to the process of production and the reality it conceals.
2. Viewing is the opposite of acting – The spectator remains immobile in their seat; passive. (Ranciere, 2)

According to this accusation, because spectators do not physically act, but rather view that which is placed in front of them, they are inherently passive, receiving only what has been prepared and intended to give them. “What the spectator *must see* is what the director *makes her see*” (Ranciere, 14). Ranciere explains that while the spectator is, by nature of their viewing activity alone, active in some manner, the degree of their ignorance to the specified objective for the performance by its creators determines the level and intensity of that activity. The production lies at one end of the experience, the spectator at the other, subject to where the production and its creators will take them.

To further illustrate the positions and distance between the spectator, or viewer, and the performance, Ranciere likens the roles to those of the schoolmaster and his pupil, the ignoramus. Between the two roles exists a distance that is created by the knowledge that the schoolmaster has, and that which the pupil lacks, the pupil’s ignorance. In this sense, knowledge and ignorance are created by their opposition, defining one another. The ignorance of the pupil is dissipated however, as they absorb the knowledge that the schoolmaster bestows upon them, which reduces the distance between the roles.

As the pupil adopts the schoolmaster’s knowledge, the distance between their roles diminishes. Therefore, in order for their roles to persist, the schoolmaster must constantly remain a step ahead of his pupil, inventing and obtaining knowledge that the

pupil lacks and perpetuating their distance. With the transfer of knowledge at mercy of their mercy, the schoolmaster is in a dominant position over their pupil.

Ranciere explains that though some claim that theatre is no longer a means of dictating a lesson or conveying a message, artists are however, “still looking to produce a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy of action” (Ranciere 14). Artists still look to have some sort of specific effect on an audience, produce a certain feeling or experience within them. If this is the case and the director has this sort of intention for the viewer, the distance of schoolmaster and pupil exists. The viewer is at the mercy of the production, following in ignorance. Bourdet had this desire for his production by wanting his audience feel the same anguish and grief that he experienced upon reading *Fin de Partie*. By so doing he played schoolmaster and therefore perpetuating their ignorance. If he had achieved his objective, the audience would have had little option but to passively receive his “anguish and grief” and nothing else; their option for an independent experience would have been greatly reduced.

In response to these critiques of passivity, Ranciere declares that a new type of theatre is needed, “one where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs (Ranciere 4). The schoolmaster may try to perpetuate the pupil’s ignorance in order to define himself; however, if the pupil actively pursues knowledge he does not remain dormant in ignorance. Rather, he becomes his own schoolmaster to his past pupil as he attains more and more knowledge. Therefore, his knowledge becomes defined against his own past ignorance. He may remain pupil to the first schoolmaster, however his own individual state has changed. He has evolved and this because he has actively pursued



knowledge. Ranciere refers to this as the *ignorant schoolmaster*. Ignorant because he has renounced the “knowledge of ignorance... he does not teach his pupils *his* knowledge, but orders them to venture into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think they have seen.” The ignorant schoolmaster allows and enables the pupil to locate and attain their own knowledge (Ranciere 10). Fidelity to the connection between the form and content of Beckett’s texts offer this opportunity by preserving their indeterminate meaning. The production isn’t trying to teach its viewer anything specific, but instead presents them with an experience and by so doing, the spectator is introduced to their own ignorance and allowed space to step into the “metaphysical space” created by Beckett’s boundaries.

On November 19, 1957, Director Herbert Blau along with a group of actors from the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop performed *Waiting For Godot* for an audience of inmates held at the San Quentin penitentiary. Because of the lively reception by its audience, the San Quentin performance is a remarkable example of the new type of theatre that Ranciere is requesting. The production was well received and had a great impact on the lives of many of the inmates as they were engaged and active throughout the production. Referring to this activity, Eugene Roche (Vladimir) related: “The places where they would laugh, the places where they would respond were, in my opinion, accurately on.” They truly were “roused from the stupefaction of spectators enthralled by appearances and [were] won over by the empathy that [made] them identify with the characters on the stage” (Ranciere 4).

Initially, the audience was introduced to their own ignorance as they were unaware of the spectacle that would be before them. The San Quentin audience consisted

of fourteen hundred convicts, (Esslin i) many of whom had “never been in a theatre, not even to rob one” (*Gadflyonline*). However, they actively pursued the attainment of their own knowledge (of some sort) through the guidance of the ignorant schoolmaster and like the pupil, they moved themselves out of their own individual positions of ignorance.

The trio of muscle-men, biceps overflowing ... parked all 642 lbs on the aisle and waited for the girls and funny stuff. When this didn't appear they audibly fumed and audibly decided to wait until the house lights dimmed before escaping. They made one error. They listed and looked two minutes too long – and stayed Left at the end. All shook ... (Esslin ii)

The success of their experience, as with others where knowledge is acquired of an ignorant schoolmaster, consists of the elements of opportunity and choice. The opportunity comes by way of the production. For a production to nurture the active pupil in attaining knowledge it cannot serve as the first schoolmaster, dictating the experience that the audience should have. Rather, the production must serve as the ignorant schoolmaster, providing the opportunity for the attaining of knowledge defined by the pupil's own ignorance. In the case of the San Quentin performance, Herbert Blau gave the *opportunity* by allowing the audience the freedom to decide what the production would be to them. As he introduced the play he likened it to the “crazy jazz music” being played by the prison band and invited the inmates to make of it what they could (*The Impossible Itself*). By inviting them to make what they could as opposed to telling them what they should be getting, the production did not look to produce any specific affect on the audience. Rather, the responsibility of creating the production's ultimate outcome was handed over, inviting activity as opposed to passivity.

The spectator may have the opportunity to attain their own knowledge; however, its actualization is still dependant on their choice. The opportunity is of no value if the spectator does not then choose to pursue it. Generally, the spectator does not consciously make the choice to leave their ignorance, rather they choose to actively engage with the journey presented to them, as they appropriate the opportunity to themselves. A number of elements contributed to the inmates choosing engage with the production, equality being one of them. Where an assumed motivation of the performance grants its creators a sense of the schoolmaster, the San Quentin performers denied themselves that role of dominance. They were further brought to an equal level to that of the audience by physically bringing themselves into the space of the inmates. Eugene Roche explains how it felt as the gates shut behind them upon entering the prison and of having to dress in the prison garb as they prepared for the performance. The artists were locked up with the others, temporarily subject to their same sense of confinement, even wearing the same prison garb. Ranciere explains that theatre is a community site; it is a body in action comprised of individuals sharing space and time (Ranciere 14). This communal engagement offered a sense of protection. They were “all in this together” (Schechner 63). Not only was the audience of inmates all in it together, but the performers as well. There was a blurring of the boundary “between those who look[ed] and those who act[ed].” Ranciere further explains that our performances do not verify “participation embodied in the community.” Rather, what they do offer is the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. Equality is necessary as it then offers those involved an equal opportunity to “plot their own path” (Ranciere 17).

Because every spectator is different and possesses different levels of previous knowledge, their collective ignorance is variable, therefore the attainment of knowledge must be a personal experience. If spectators are to leave their own ignorance, they must build upon their own personal knowledge, and the community is a way into that individual experience. Ranciere explains: “this shared power of the equality of intelligence links individuals, makes them exchange their intellectual adventures, in so far as it keeps them separate from one another, equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot their own path” (Ranciere 17). Each person possesses their own individual histories and experiences coupled with their own personal power to link them. As they collectively venture through Beckett’s ordered space, the ambiguities preserved from the text are filled by pieces of themselves, creating knowledge that is then tailored specifically to each individual person. “Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story” (17).

One individual in the audience for the SFAW performance was Rick Cluchey. Through a series of unfortunate events, Cluchey was imprisoned in San Quentin for life without chance of parole. “My life should have been over” (*GadflyOnline*). Within such impossible circumstances, Cluchey was able to “see [himself] up on that stage, amid the two tramps commenting, and the baronial character hauling another guy with the rope around his neck.” Even after the performance, Cluchey struggled through a bleak existence totaling twenty-two years in a “system designed to keep you.”

In *Waiting for Godot*, the audience views the physical action of Vladimir and Estragon waiting, however they don’t know why. They are aware that they are waiting for Godot but without the knowledge of who he is or why he is important. Collectively,

the audience of inmates knew what it was “to wait;” they waited for pardon or waited for parole. On an individual level, Rick Cluchey knew what it was to wait as well. Aside from the waiting of the inmates collectively, he waited to hear of the deaths of both his father and his son. Cluchey also knew the helplessness that he sensed from the play. Instead of the chaplain privately delivering the news that his four-year-old son had been struck and killed by a car, the guard showed up and read his opened telegram, violating protocol, and Cluchey could do nothing. Because he had this experience he was able to then link what he was seeing to what he “had seen” (Ranciere 17), thus developing his own previous knowledge.

The production itself did not offer Cluchey the helplessness and monotony of waiting that he sensed. By denying their own satisfaction of determining the meaning of the text, the SFAW carefully ordered a space for Cluchey and the other inmates to step into and like the “crazy jazz music,” get out of it what they could. Such is the experience of the active spectator, offered the opportunity by a director willing to carefully, yet creatively, work within the boundaries that Beckett himself has created and preserved.

After the experience of the San Quentin performance “it was though a light had gone on, and Rick suddenly found the key to open the door to his life,” reports Alan Mandell, Lucky in the San Quentin performance, former manager of the Lincoln Center and consulting director at the Los Angeles Theater Center. While the details of his journey are impossible to document because they are personal to him, evidence of it is apparent. Cluchey made prison life interesting as a prison boxer, training as a dental technician and ultimately receiving permission to start a theatre troupe one year after the SFAW performance. Cluchey began the San Quentin Drama Workshop (SQDW) with

Alan Mandell, who continued to mentor Cluchey, visiting him weekly for more than 6 years to collaborate. Theatre gave Cluchey “hope among the bleakness” (*GadflyOnline*) which helped him endure prison realities while he was still there.

Cluchey went from a sentence of life without parole to a full pardon and ultimately meeting and working with Beckett himself. My point here is not to say that it was because of the San Quentin performance that his life and situation were so drastically changed; however, Cluchey’s story does demonstrate the viewer’s ability of turning passivity to activity; ignorance to knowledge. Perhaps the outcome would have been different if in that moment, Cluchey was once more told what to see think and feel; perhaps his ignorance would have only been perpetuated. Fortunately, the San Quentin performance offered him the opportunity to learn from being an active participant.

Where those, like O’Toole, feel that fidelity to Beckett’s work eliminates the possibility of creatively exploring Beckett’s texts, perhaps fidelity to the author’s ‘direct expression’ actually provides the possibility of greater freedom and opportunity for the collaborators. Through trusting his texts and relying on them, directors of his work actualize Beckett’s ordered space for their viewers to actively engage with. Through engaging with the obscurities of Beckett’s space and applying pieces of their own histories, they are able to determine their own meaning as it relates to themselves.

Like researchers, artists construct the stages where the manifestations of their skills are exhibited, rendered uncertain in the terms of the new idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure. The effect of the new idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the

‘story’ and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators. (Ranciere 22)

Fidelity to the form and content in Beckett’s work creates that “emancipated community” and the “intellectual adventure” it provides permits viewers to make their own stories rather than having one made for them. Such was the case of Rick Cluchey whose appropriation of Beckett’s text led him to understand more of his own situation and empowered him to act upon it. It is stories and experiences like these that allow us to understand how “words and images, stories and performances, can help change something of the world we live in” (Ranciere 23).

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explored Beckett's authorial relationship with directors, the "comforting area" created by strict adherence to his "direct expression," and the intersection between Beckett's ideas about form and content in his plays and Ranciere's theories of the "ignorant schoolmaster." Through my research I have attempted to answer foundational questions about Beckett's theatrical texts and the ways in which to approach them in order to satisfy Beckett, the creator of the texts, and those who creatively interpret them. However, while I had originally hoped to find one answer that would create a common ground between both entities, I have discovered that it is the lack of that definite answer that allows for a continued search for the source of meaning and validation of Beckett's texts, if it's meaning is to be found through strict adherence to the text or the open interpretation of it. Most likely, the solution is a non-definite point located between the two extremes. In other words, rather than meaning being found through fidelity or through interpretation, it is actually found through neither, since neither are entirely possible, but through different permutations of elements of both, a phenomenon that Jacques Derrida refers to as "freeplay" (*Structure, Sign and Play*, 278). By continuing this search, the argument between "artistic integrity" (*Dramatists Guild*) and "creative intervention" (*Game Without End*) is being further developed and the "coherence of the system" is being further organized and oriented permitting exploration within it (279). At this point, I am not entirely sure what precise formula would grant the most authentic source of meaning for Beckett's texts, or any text for that matter, or if there even is a precise formula. However, the assumption that there is in fact a precise



formula then allows for the rupturing of that assumption and a continued exploration of the possibilities.

A small fraction of the research I have conducted has found its way into this thesis. Similarly, that research has uncovered more questions than answers; there is great opportunity for further investigation of Beckett's work and the special experience it can offer if better understood. Instead of a sense of limitation by Beckett's enforcement of fidelity, one can see how it provides new opportunities and areas for creativity, ultimately affecting the personal activity of its viewer.

It has felt appropriate to me however, to scale back and articulate my research clearly and simply (represented by this project) in order to ensure a solid and basic fundamental understanding before I develop more work. As I continue to cultivate and build on what I have articulated here, many questions and areas will be explored further.

Structure as it relates to the connection between form and content is another area that I would like to explore. Michael Kirby explains that the structure of a piece is held together and comprised of three different types of units. They are: perceptual, physical and psychological. The supreme action of the play exists on a psychophysical level and because it cannot be entirely presented and therefore does not lie completely within the play, parts of this action are assumed and are what hold the structure of the performance together. When this overarching context is identified separately from the direct action described within the play, a separation of form and content has occurred, which then alters the ordered space that Beckett has created. However artists and audiences are traditionally accustomed to this separation. Therefore, because form and content cannot be individually identified in Beckett's texts, a structural principle appears to be missing,

specifically, the psychological unit. This is why there is an assumed need for the addition of it. I would like to research further these structural principles and how they support or negate the idea of “direct expression,” the idea that a play’s meaning can be completely communicated through the text alone.

WB Worthen’s idea of “text as a material object that houses the work of the author” (Worthen 13) is another area begging further development. I mentioned in chapter one that content in Beckett’s work is directly expressed in the play’s form, that his work is lacking intention as it pertains to the meaning of the text. He does have an overall intention for the work but it is that his text remains unchanged. I would like to develop further the notion of *intention* and distinguish the difference between the intention that is communicated through the script and the intention that keeps it intact. I would like to look at the various ways in which the author’s *intention* creates and influences a work.

Fidelity to the text as it creates an archive of the performance is another area for further study. In his discussion of the written language, Jacques Derrida describes the graphic as a tool to link ‘content to expression’, because ‘language represents the original mental experience and writing represents language, writing is an indirect form of representing an original mental experience.

Based on this notion, Samuel Beckett’s own original, mental experiences are preserved in the form of his plays, which serve as archives. These texts are heavily protected by copyright laws and resist alteration, even in performance. Therefore, what is performed of Samuel Beckett’s texts are as close to his own original thought as can be achieved and are not influenced by another collaborator’s interpretation or understanding

of them. The way in which his works are presented may change; however, his copyright laws preserve not only the author's authority, but his truthful mental experience as well.

However, Worthen explains that all production betrays the text, and all texts betray the work as they each require alteration in order to accommodate the changing of its form. Perhaps in the transition of form where those who accomplish the transition experience and employ their creativity. I want to look at those transitions as necessary forms of betrayal in order to accomplish their purposes of changing the form of the text. Perhaps those who transition the text to performance have to betray Beckett's intentions to a certain degree in order physically actualize them.

These are just a few possible directions for future research and exploration. Some of them are not very developed and even contradict each other. However, Foucault explains that the history of a concept is not made through progressive refinement nor continuously increasing rationality. It is created through various fields of constitution and validity, through its successive rules of use and the many theoretical contexts in which it develops and matures. Concepts are not created by lasting foundations, but of rebuilding foundations (Foucault 6).

This work is a foundational piece to uncovering new questions as my knowledge about Beckett and the nature of his work grows. "What one is seeing, then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions, some of which are already familiar, by which this new form of history is trying to develop its own theory" (Foucault 6). Those who study and write about Beckett must build upon one another's work as we collaboratively contribute to this developing discourse.

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