Mis-Movements: The Aesthetics of Gesture in Samuel Beckett’s Drama

Charlotta Palmstierna Einarsson
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To my beloved family
I remember
but not so well—
time knows
but cannot tell.

Gabriella Palmstierna Einarsson
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Abbreviations

*CDW*  Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*
*TN I*  James Knowlson, ed. *Theatrical Notebooks Vol. I*
*TN II*  S.E Gontarski, ed. *Theatrical Notebooks Vol. II*
*TN IV*  S.E Gontarski, ed. *Theatrical Notebooks Vol. IV*
Ultimately, what I find so wholly absorbing in Beckett’s dramatic work is that it has the capacity to transform my perception of the world. Perceiving the “world” through Beckett’s lens, I find that human beings are ‘non-caner’s and ‘non-knewer’s, too firmly set in context to have any kind of freedom, and too limited by their perceptions ever to be certain of anything. Yet, it is precisely in the act of perceiving their limitations, i.e. in undergoing the experience of perceiving that perception is perspectival, that we find the route to self-transformation. This experience has poignantly been defined by Mark Johnson as “the undeserved experience of transformative growth even in spite of [our] communal failures to do what would make things better” (Meaning 281). Although Beckett claims that his work is not didactic, there emanates from his plays a soothing acceptance of human helplessness that, nevertheless, teaches me that it is through having faith in my fellow human beings’ capacity to transcend their limitations, that my own capacity to do the same will grow.
Acknowledgements

Writing a thesis is by no means and individual achievement and I would here like to acknowledge the debt I owe, at least to some of all the very, very many people whose generous help has contributed to my completing this project. I must begin by directing a heartfelt ‘thank you’ to Ingrid Westin and Claudia Egerer at the Department of English for their enduring administrative, logistic and personal support throughout my doctoral studies, and especially in times of need. Their help has been invaluable to me and I appreciate it enormously!

For direct financial support, I am especially grateful to the Wallenberg Foundation, whose stipend made it possible for me to start on this project and to the House of Nobility’s Scholarship Fund, who generously have supported my applications for financial reinforcements. I would also like to acknowledge the role of the Department of English for investing in my education. I have very much enjoyed being a doctoral student and owe a special thanks to those responsible for allowing me the privilege.

To my main supervisor, Ishrat Lindblad, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for her unremitting encouragement and belief in my ‘ideas’. Without her experienced guidance I can readily vouch, none of these ideas would ever have been explored. Ishrat taught me to “trust in the authenticity of my own voice”, and her erudite and instructive comments, clear directions and advice, and not least, her kind-hearted concern for the well-being of me and my family, have throughout this project provided an invaluable foundation for my explorations. I would also like to express my gratitude to my second supervisor, Matthew Feldman for his generous support and scholarly advice, and to Åsa Unander-Scharin, who for a period acted in the role as second supervisor and whose contribution to my work at that point was instrumental. Thanks also to Bo Ekelund, my first ‘second’ supervisor, for taking an interest in my work and for supporting me in the initial phase of my project, and to Harald Fawkner for introducing me to the theoretical framework of phenomenology. Last, but not least, I am deeply indebted to Richard Begam for his sensitive and enormously generous support in the final phase of the project. He is an outstanding pedagogue and it has been a true privilege to be his student! Words cannot fully convey my appreciation but I am deeply grateful to him; his vast knowledge and expertise has helped improve my work tremendously—needless to say, the remaining flaws are entirely my own.
I am also indebted to the literary staff for all the feedback provided by them at the higher seminars, especially to Claudia Egerer, Bo G. Ekelund, Harald Fawkner, Irina Rasmussen Goloubeva, Stefan Helgesson, Marina Ludwigs, Adnan Mahmutovic, Paul Schreiber and Marion Helfner Wajngot. I would also like to direct a very special thanks to my fellow doctoral students, Spela, Somaje, Marta, Jessica, Gül, Roy, Jonas and Sigi for cheering me on—I wish you all the very best of luck! Thanks also to Jan, Joakim, Ulrika, Zacharia and all former doctoral students whose support and friendship I cherished. There are also many other friends and colleagues whose presence has been invaluable to me, not least Beyza Björkman, Elisabet Dellming, Raffaella Negretti, Malin Sigvardson and Annelie Adel. Thanks also to the linguists for always being so encouraging, among them Christina Alm-Arvius, Dave Minugh, Gunnel Melchers, Philip Shaw and especially Nils-Lennart Johannesson who helped me proofread the manuscript—it goes without saying that he did an excellent job and that the remaining typographical errors are entirely due to my own compulsive need to continue changing and reworking the text up until the very last minute. I would also like to recognise the debt I owe to all the administrative staff at the department. Thank you especially Ingrid Westin, Helena Engler, and Anja Nyström for always having a kind word in store, and thank you Ingela Carlsson and Susanne Franke, both now retired, for all you previous help.

I am also thankful to Willmar Sauter and Lena Hammargren at the Department of Music and Theatre for allowing me to be part of their warm and generous crowd, and to Ingrid Redbark Wallander for kindly introducing me. I have greatly benefitted from your generous support.

Thank you also Per Sörberg at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts for allowing me to see your work with the theatrical masques, Lennart Ring for reading and insightfully commenting on my work, and Håkan Larsson for taking the wonderful photos to illustrate my study.

The debt I owe to my friends outside the department is beyond recognition, Pernilla Dahlstrand, Lena Haag, Karin Jameson, Anne Olsson, Susanne Palmcrantz, Morgan and Sylvie Gehin Karlsson, Iskra Ring, Tina Sandvik, Guiditta Sunnemark—and many more—thank you All!

As for my wonderful family—I owe it all to you! To my sister Cilla, who has been with me literally every single step of the way, I could really never have done this without you! To Gustaf, Cilla’s husband, to my mother Gia and her Mats, to my in-laws Mona and Örjan, to my brother Magnus and his Sanna, to my brother Mattias and his Mia, to my brothers-in-law Olov and Erik and their wives Lena and Jennie, to all children in their families, Johan, David, Clara, Melker, Love, Liv, David, Adam, Emmy, Axel och Elin—thank you All for your unremitting support in times when I really needed it! Finally, to my wonderful children Rebecca, Isak and Gabriella, whom I love above all, and to my husband Magnus, who is my everything—thank you so much for your patience—it’s over!!
This study explores Beckett’s use of physical movements in his plays as part of a strategy to escape the confines of ‘meaning’ in language, and as an instrument of artistic expression. In a sense, the use of physical movements constitutes a phenomenological, heuristic ‘solution’ to the problem of presentation and representation that Beckett explicitly addresses already in the early 1930s. The manifestation of idiosyncratic physical movements that the characters perform, as well as their frequent inability to move, and the combination of movement patterns into recurring ‘themes’, constitute a system of presentations that should be taken as a whole, and there is a high level of integration between the different parts that make up this whole.

It is Beckett’s frustration with language that underlies his preoccupation with signification and meaning. “All his life”, writes John Calder, “Beckett struggled with language, dissatisfied with its inability to express exactly the meaning that always just eluded him” (94). Words, for Beckett, are not entirely adequate to express what lies behind or beyond. “Words” as Beckett wrote in the “German Letter”, seem “like a veil that must be torn” (Disjecta 171). Essentially words pre-empt any originary perception of the world since by naming things we begin to create narratives to project meaning onto different realms of experience, and in this process of signification we lose track of what we perceive.

Underlying Beckett’s use of movement, therefore, we find the acutely sensed predicament of expression inherent in the problem of presentation and representation. For Beckett, this predicament is, however, not only linguistic but also perceptual, i.e. it stems not only from the incongruity between sign and signifier but also from the subjective perceptuality’s encounter with the opacity of the world. The problem with linguistic or semiotic approaches is precisely that they separate the sign from the signifier, the presentation from the representation and subject from object, and so disregard the extent to which perception is immanently experienced as meaningful although not necessarily in any way related to understanding. Consequently, the problem finds a kind of solution in paying attention to the moment of appearance and to perception itself.

Drawing on the work of phenomenological thinkers like Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Robert Sokolowski and Martin Seel to name a few, and Beckett scholars like Lois Oppenheim, Anna McMullan and Ulrika Maude, Richard Begam and Steven Connor, this study aims to
discuss the significance of physical movements in Beckett’s work as poetic manifestations and expressions *sui generis*. The significance of physical movement in Beckett’s plays operates on a sub-liminal level of experience before it touches the horizon of verbal communication. Thus, as the adjective ‘heuristic’ suggests, the ‘solution’ to the problem of presentation and representation is experience-based and physical movements, as part of the aesthetic experience of the play, are the means through which this ‘solution’ is achieved, albeit inconclusively.

The body is always an important part of any theatrical performance involving actors, but Beckett’s exploration of dramatic presentation involves the realisation that even what appears to be the most insignificant part of the body and of its movements has relevance on the stage. The actor and director Pierre Chabert affirms that the body in Beckett’s theatre is “considered with minute attention” (23). Beckett works the body, both as author and director: “[h]e approaches it—just as he approaches space, objects, light and language—as a genuine raw material which may be modified, sculpted, shaped and distorted for the stage” (Chabert 23). The notion that the body is “raw material” should therefore be taken quite literally in equal measure to “the raw materials of the painter or sculptor” (Chabert 23). However, Beckett’s ‘minute attention’ to the performance of movement and to the combination and organisation of movement as well as the consideration he gives to details such as the duration and quality of movement, is also reminiscent of the concerns of a choreographer, to whom the body is the raw material *par excellence*. In working with theatre, Beckett found “the opportunity to develop his text visually […] to work directly with form, as a plastic visual artist” (Gontarski, *TN II* ix).

### Mis-Movements

The body in Beckett’s theatre is relentlessly made to break down habitual ways of perceiving. For example, the characters move about in ways that challenge our notion of moving so that precisely executed movements in Beckett’s plays consistently fall short of any kind of realistic (re)presentation of what would normally be expected. Krapp’s “laborious walk” (*TN III* 3:14) and Clov’s excessive, “stiff and staggering walk” (*TN II* 3), are examples of a kind of walking that draws attention to its execution and I have chosen to label this phenomenon ‘mis-movement’. By that term I seek to describe the

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1 Marie-Claude Hubert also notes that the body is “absolutely central to the interpretation of Beckett” (55), and Katherine M. Gray asserts that Beckett troubles the body “out of its presumed conventional unity into a radicalized multiplicity” (1).


function of physical movements in Beckett’s plays, both as a means to foreground the body, but also as a means to problematise the concepts of perception and meaning-making and, finally, even as a way to resist comprehension — i.e. as sensuous rather than intelligible manifestations of Beckett’s poetic theatre.

Beckett’s use of mis-movements might be compared with the technique of ‘ostranenie’, or ‘defamiliarisation’, to borrow an expression coined by the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky. According to Shklovsky, everyday perception is ‘automatised’. By using the technique of defamiliarisation we can ‘make the familiar strange’ and so begin to see things in a new and different light. The notion of defamiliarisation has also been associated with Berthold Brecht’s term Verfremdungseffekt as a means to create an emotional distance between the audience and the drama. Whereas both Shklovsky’s Ostranenie and Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt are strategies to make present the extent to which perception is automatised — i.e. makes unfamiliar in order to enhance perception of the familiar — Beckett’s use of mis-movement is entirely different. Beckett’s theatre does not aspire to the epic technique Brecht proposed, nor is the emphasis on mis-movements a device to discourage the audience from identifying with the characters. Rather than being a distancing operation Beckett’s foregrounding of mis-movements draws the spectator into their appearing, as a losing of oneself in the immensity of perceiving. Mis-movements in Beckett’s plays, therefore, are designed to draw the spectator into the aesthetic experience of the play.

In the letter to his German friend Axel Kaun, Beckett voices his unease with words and his wish to find a way to dissolve the materiality of the word as it is hiding the sensuous:

At first it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can present this mocking attitude towards the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All.

(Disjecta 172)

The emphasis on mis-movements, this study will suggest, constitutes precisely what Beckett sought to find; a method to explore this ‘dissonance’ between ‘the means and their use’.

As anomalies, mis-movements draw attention to themselves, and the significance of mis-movements, in this sense, rests on the comparison with ‘ordinary’ movements. As mentioned above, the many instances of peculiar

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3 The term ostranenie or ‘defamiliarisation’ was coined by Victor Shklovsky to denote the artistic technique of presenting old and familiar things in a new way. It first appeared in his essay “Art as Technique”, (1917). This essay has been reprinted in several anthologies, see for example, “Art as Technique”, in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan ed., Literary Theory. An Anthology, Malden, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998.
ways of walking that the characters display in Beckett’s plays are examples of such mis-movements. However, mis-movements also highlight the fact that we ‘habitually’ fail to perceive movements. Frequently, when we perceive a dramatic character on stage, our perceptions are determined by a process of selection in which certain perceptions, such as for example the shape and form of the body, are suppressed or blocked out, and others, such as for example language, are given precedence. In Beckett’s stage presentations the characters’ mis-movement ensures that the artificiality of the dramatic persona and of his/her gestures is made noticeable.

Mis-movements are also a means to complicate, contradict, undermine, qualify and redefine semantic meaning. For example at the end of Waiting for Godot, the ‘mis-movements’, specified in the stage directions contradict Vladimir and Estragon’s words:

(Silence. [They look at each other, then face front.])
ESTRAGON: [(Looking down)] Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: [(Looking up)] Yes, let’s go.
(Long silence.)
They do not move. 
Curtain.)

(TN I 50:1550–64)

The fact that the two characters state that they will leave yet remain immobile, effectively foregrounds their ‘mis-moving’, and the dramatic impact is drawn from the dissonance between form and content that appears in the gap between telling and showing. The mis-moving effectively undermines the two characters’ statements, but it also foregrounds their immobility and inspires the spectator to remain attentive to the moment as a presentation that challenges the intelligible. The result is that the spectator is detained in the realm of formal experience presented through the characters’ immobile bodies; a realm that appears through the emphasis on mis-movement. Importantly, this does not mean that there is no semantic content, but only that the formal presentation of mis-movements undermines and qualifies the semantic content to set up a range of possible responses that foreground the sensuous over the intelligible. Through the characters’ mis-movements, i.e their immobility, the experience of waiting, the inertia and stasis, but importantly also the continuity inherent in waiting, appears to be co-experienced by the audience. Rather than seeing mis-movements only as ‘representations’ of an anti-realist stance, therefore, it is my claim that mis-movements are also presentational. The dialectic between stasis and continuity, appearing through the characters’ mis-moving, involves the audience in the act of waiting. In the ‘dissonance between the means and their use’ something appears to be perceived that resists habitual appropriation of meaning and which cannot be determined in its fullness. Rather, the sensation resonates with previous presentations of dramatic impasses in the play to focus the specta-
tors’ attention on the moment of presentation. The result is a reversal in the figure-ground structure of perception so that, through the emphasis on mis-
movement, the background of perception is foregrounded, as background.1

Through foregrounding physical movements, Beckett manages to undermine the meaning of words, while simultaneously detaining the spectator in the realm of the sensuous. This is akin to the composer Arnold Schoenberg’s aesthetic innovation the twelve-tone technique, which he developed in the 1920s, and which brought about a change in the perception of atonality and dissonance. In musical terminology, the term ‘dissonance’ refers to a harmony, chord or interval that is considered instable, temporary or transitional—i.e a chord, interval that tends toward resolvement in a harmonious chord or interval.2 By contrast, the concept of consonance refers to a harmony, chord or interval that is considered stable and solid. However, this is not to say that dissonance should be considered unpleasing as opposed to consonance. Although traditionally, the division between dissonance and consonance has rested upon such aesthetic judgements3, Schoenberg’s manner of formalising the composing method by manipulating the ordered structure of the twelve notes in the chromatic scale, altered traditional perceptions of what was harmonious and thus beautiful music. In “Problems of Harmony” (1934), Schoenberg later writes that “[d]issonances, even the simplest, are more difficult to comprehend than consonances […] The criterion for the acceptance or rejection of dissonance is not that of their beauty, but rather only their perceptibility” (qtd in Tenney 2). This statement resonates well with Beckett’s use of mis-movements as perceptual phenomena. The statement also seems to suggest that the concept of consonance is fraught with conceptual and aesthetic notions of what can be aesthetically appreciated as beautiful or not, notions that Schoenberg, with his emphasis on atonality and dissonance, seeks to elude. Schoenberg claims to have ‘emancipated’ dissonance through his emphasis on atonality (Tenney 2). By analogy, Beckett’s presentation of mis-movements explores the dissonance between form and

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1 In Aesthetics of Appearing, Martin Seel uses John Cage’s composition 4:33 to illustrate the concept of artistic resonating where “what otherwise forms the vague background of perception comes to the fore, without however being released out of its vagueness. The background of listening is pushed to the foreground as background” (148). See fn 93 on p.104.

2 “CONSONANCE … agreement of sounds; pleasing combination of sounds […] DISSONANCE… an inharmonious or harsh sound or combination of sounds” [The Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. II, p. 866 and Vol. III, p. 515] […] CONSONANCE … a combination of musical tones felt as satisfying or restful […] DISSONANCE … an unresolved musical note or chord” [Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, pp, 484 and 657]” (Tenney 1).

3 The first chapter of James Tenney’s A History of ‘Consonance’ and ‘Dissonance’, gives an account of the complex transformations and redefinitions of the “consonance/dissonance-concept”, as it has been “deduced from the 3rd century B.C. through the 19th and early 20th centuries” (3–4). However, for the purpose of this study, the significance of these concepts has been limited to the aesthetic conviction of Arnold Schoenberg.
content, subject and object, through manipulating the structure of formal presentation.

The presentations of mis-movements in Beckett’s dramatic work are manifestations designed to be experientially undergone rather than merely understood by the spectator. Seeing Not I, a monologue written in 1972, the spectator must struggle to make intelligible the stream of utterances coming from the diminutive appearance on stage, namely a mouth, poised “upstage right, about 8 feet above stage level, faintly lit from close-up and below, rest of face in shadow” (CDW 376). As a result: “we are drawn to […] considerations of plot only secondarily. It is the visual impact of performance, not the priorities of theme and variation, which commands our attention” (Brater 23). Beckett’s own statements confirm this assumption: “I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility”, he informed the actress Jessica Tandy, as she was struggling to understand the role of MOUTH, and complained that the mere speed of the text made the work unintelligible: “I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect”, was Beckett’s short and concise answer (Beckett qtd in Ackerley and Gontarski, The Grove Companion 411). As Daniel Albright notes in Beckett and Aesthetics, “Beckett’s work is a calling-into-question of the medium in which the work appears” (5). Significantly, mis-movements are thus also part of a shift towards a meta-theatrical or indeed metaphysical theatre, such as promulgated by Artaud, in which the very structures of subjectivity and meaning-making are challenged.

Clearly, mis-movements have a methodological function in Beckett’s plays. As phenomena singled out to be perceived, the idiosyncratic movements seem designed to attract the attention of the audience, i.e. appear as anomalies that the spectator/reader cannot but notice. However, the extraordinary focus on specific movements in Beckett’s plays also serves to foreground the movements so that they can be given significance within the context of the performance. Progressively, however, mis-movements develop into a concept in their own right, expressing a higher level of abstraction and emphasising the formal aspect of the presentation; they become presentations sui generis. The initial thrust of this presentation, may be seen to constitute a ‘glitch in the matrix’ that could perhaps mean nothing, yet when repeated they will immediately be recognised as occurrences of something. In this final category characterised by a higher level of abstraction, mis-movements in Beckett’s plays emerge to be aesthetically perceived by the spectator. The concept of mis-movement, therefore, breaks down into three functional categories overlapping and reinforcing, and ultimately, if not excluding then at least suspending, the significance of the ‘intelligible’ in Beckett’s dramatic presentations. Importantly, also, there is a progression in Beckett’s plays towards the function of mis-movements as objects of aesthetic perception, and spectators are encouraged to lose themselves in the
immanence of their appearing. The foregrounding of mis-movements in the plays thus constitutes a way of guiding spectators to perceive differently.

My references to mis-movements primarily concern their appearing in performance and not their textual representation. Although the dramatic texts’ written descriptions of mis-movement could be seen to represent rather than present them, I want to emphasise the fact that for Beckett, the performance was the final text. Not only are mis-movements ’written’ in the dramatic text, they are also ‘written’ into the space-time of the performance. Thus, although the idea that Beckett is choreographing may imply a binary structure of movement and sign, i.e. that the movements are first written in the dramatic text and then represented onstage, I suggest that in performance the dramatic text is created anew with every instantiation. Beckett’s choreographic presentations are therefore, not about something but “that something itself” since they find their realisation only in performance (Disjecta 27). The fact that my references to instances in the plays are taken from the dramatic texts and not from specific performances, therefore, does not exclude the recognition that the text is written to be performed, and that any reading of the text therefore entails creatively visualising the performance as taking place in space.

The emphasis on precise execution of movement inevitably means that actors must work hard to reduce their physical expression on stage. In fact Beckett did not seem to want actors to act at all. Instead he effectively reduced actors’ representations of characters and foregrounded the physical activities on stage, possibly in order to discourage psychological interpretations. He therefore required great exactitude of physical movement, even to the point where the actor can no longer make use of physical action to sustain or give emphasis to the dialogue. As a result, the actor cannot penetrate deep into the character’s fictional ‘mind’ to find the ‘right’ movements to accompany the words and responses to the character’s situation but rather has to focus on enacting precisely what the stage directions specify.

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7 I use the term ‘text’ as an all-embracing concept, as used by semioticians to describe any sign that can be interpreted or ‘read’ whether in written, spoken or gestural form. Nevertheless, my focus on physical movement will take off from the dramatic text and only refer to particular performances for the sake of exemplification.

8 In one sense, even writing a text involves moving, whether with the hand that holds the pen or with the fingers that type on the keyboard, or if you lack hands, by means of any other limb transmitting the text onto paper. Moreover, the reading of a text also involves movements; of the eyes that follow the lines of text, of the head poised at a good reading distance from the text, which is supported by hands and body that adjust to the location of the text, etc.

9 Even a reader of the dramatic text encounters the movements as presentations founded in the imaginative act of reading. The assertion that physical movements in a ‘text’ should be made noticeable so that they can be recognised by an ‘audience’ indicates that a reader of a text is equally compelled to notice physical movements as they are described as is a spectator sitting in an audience.
The detailed descriptions of the characters’ physical movements ensure that the phenomenon of ‘articulation’ comes into view. To articulate means to join together separate units, and in choreographic pieces, precise articulation of the separate units of steps that make up the dance is essential since it is here that the ephemeral ‘in-between’ that is the dance appears to be perceived by the spectator. Each step taken separately does not make up a ‘dance’, but when ‘joined’ together, the steps combine to make a kind of dancing. Essentially, articulation is what conveys the pathos\(^\text{10}\) of the movements. The quality of a given ‘articulation’ is therefore an important aspect of the appearing of a movement phrase. When Vladimir and Estragon do not move at the end of each act in *Godot*, or when Clov does not leave in *Endgame*, their immobility constitutes precisely such articulation. It is in between the steps, i.e. in the immobility, that the tension is built up. In perceiving these articulations aesthetically, we find that pauses and other rhythmic features may be more important than what is actually said in Beckett’s plays.

The plays are carefully structured in terms of juxtaposing words and gestures, sound and silence, mobility and immobility. Examples abound, but a few might include the repetitive falling in *Godot*, together with the scene where all characters come to lie on the ground; the interpolation of speech with the walking and turning that the character May performs in *Footfalls*, and not least, the carefully planned physical action in *Endgame*\(^\text{11}\), which combine to present a play “full of echoes” that “all answer each other”, as Beckett told his German cast in the 1967 Schiller-Theater production of *Endgame* (Gontarski, *TN II* xxii)\(^\text{12}\).

Clearly, as Gontarski states in the preface to *The Theatrical Notebooks: Vol. II, Endgame*:

Pattern is as crucial to Beckett’s eye as to his ear, and that patterning dominates his theatrical notes: motion is repeated to echo other motion, posture to echo other posture, gestures to echo other gestures, sounds to echo other sounds.

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\(^{10}\) I use the term ‘pathos’ in the sense defined by Michel Henry, whose use of the term pathos is derived from the Greek concept of pathos, “which can refer to a feeling, a passion, or broadly, to anything that is undergone”, and should not be taken to mean the arousing of sympathy or pity in its conventional English sense (ref).

\(^{11}\) Jonathan Kalb notes that “Beckett has said he prefers *Endgame* to *Godot* because of the greater exactitude with which its physical activity is planned” (39).

\(^{12}\) In *Endgame*, the juxtaposition of immobility and mobility, as well as the foregrounding of the physical body and of movements, elicit an interpretative response from the spectator or the reader of the play. For example, “Clov’s mobility is foregrounded by the immobility of the other characters, and conversely, their immobility stands out against his mobility […] Although we never see Clov leave, the fact that he can move means that there is always a possibility of this becoming a reality. Clov’s mobility therefore constitutes a threat to Hamm’s authority” (Palmstierna Einarsson 107–108).
Significantly, patterns as well as movements appear to be aesthetically perceived.

In Directing Beckett, the American director and playwright Edward Albee, points out the necessity of adhering to the dramatic text as it is recorded:

We have to remember that the playwright is the creative artist. The director and the actors are the interpretative artists. Interpretation does not involve distortion. Would anybody tolerate a pianist getting on a stage to perform a Beethoven piano sonata and rewriting it or playing it on a saxophone? Nobody would tolerate that. Why should anybody tolerate it in a play? These things are intolerable because they are destructive.

(qtd in Oppenheim 82)

Directing a Beckett play is akin to conducting a musical piece; “You conduct the work. It is like music. The rhythms, the sounds, the durations of the silences, the pauses are all so specific” (Oppenheim, Directing 86). Beckett’s dramas have frequently been compared to musical scores and the parallel Albee draws between music and drama is highly evocative since very few people would claim that the musical score is the ‘actual’ music. James Knowlson confirms that Beckett wanted the movements to “achieve a musicality of gesture as striking as that of the voice” (Damned 517–18). For Beckett, the performance was also the ‘actual’ text in a manner similar to the way in which the concert is the actual music.

Formal aspects of composition and organisation are at the centre of both music and choreography and Beckett’s writing in this sense constitutes compositions of similar purport. Among Beckett’s primary concerns when he started to direct were the balance between language and action, and in the Schiller-Theater production (1967), which also constituted the first occurrence where Beckett took full control of the staging of a play, he instructed his actors to maintain a separation between physical movement and speech: “[n]ever let your changes in position and voice come together. First comes (a) the altered bodily stance; after it, following a slight pause, comes (b) the corresponding utterance” (Gontarski, TN II xix). Horst Bollman, the actor playing Clov, “summed up Beckett’s directing in musical terms: ‘what is important to him is the rhythm, choreography and the shape of the whole production’”(Knowlson, Damned 489; emphasis mine).

13 Gontarski also asserts that Beckett was “something of a ‘generic purist’” because the insistence on keeping the different “systems of theatrical communication” separate, for example music and motion, language and action, was enforced by an “almost Manichean reluctance to mingle opposites” (TN II xix). Theoretically, Gontarski suggests, “such separation maintains balance on action and language, on the theatrical and the linguistic” (TN II xix), and Beckett’s positing on “the relationship of language to action is [thus] unique among modern dramatists” (TN II xix).
Also in his rehearsal notes, the director Walter Asmus describes how Beckett in working with staging Godot stressed the “element of ballet”:

Beckett walks on the stage, his eyes fixed on the ground, and shows the movements as he speaks Estragon’s lines; “You had something to say to me? … you’re angry? … Forgive me … Come, Didi. Give me your hand …” With each sentence Beckett makes a step towards the imaginary partner. Always a step then the line. Beckett calls this step–by–step approach a physical theme; it comes up five, six or seven times, and has got to be done very exactly. This is the element of ballet.

(qtd in Kalb 33)

These ‘physical themes’ are to be performed in silence because of the “rule about separation of speech and movement” (Kalb 33). However, they are also part of a visual symmetry that inevitably renders the significance of the themes within the system of images of which they are a part. Other examples of physical themes in Godot are Pozzo’s and Lucky’s interactions, where Lucky’s obeying every command from Pozzo takes on a routine-like and highly stylized performance:

(Enter Lucky backwards)
Stop!
(Lucky stops.)
Turn!
(Lucky turns.)

(TN I 23: 528–32)

Similarly, in Endgame, Clov’s entrances acquire the same character. In the Schiller-Theater production Beckett emphasised that whenever Hamm called Clov from out of his kitchen, he “should always come in the same way, like a musical phrase coming from the same instrument” (Gontarski, TN II xxi). Clearly, the physical themes are an important part of the systematic patterning that Beckett stages and so Beckett, like a choreographer “comes to things very much in a choreographic way” (Klaus Herm qtd in Kalb 198).

Particularly the dramas, but essentially everything Beckett wrote, signal his sensitivity to shape and sound. This has been especially noted in reading his texts aloud and as Mary Bryden in the introduction to Samuel Beckett and Music notes, “many actors, when directed by Beckett, have reported feeling like musical instruments or channels of resonance” (1). Mary Bryden also points out that “all of Beckett’s texts, whether they be prose, poetry or drama, are the product of one who, by his own account, heard them in advance of writing them” (Beckett and Music 1). It is not improbable to conceive that not only the words, but also the quality of these utterances must have been heard by Beckett. This is not to say, however, that Beckett was merely a recipient, or passive receptor for the works, but only to confirm the
significance of the ‘sound-scapes’ that constitute his texts. Despite the emphasis on ambiguities and the ‘perhaps’ that permeate Beckett’s plays, the astounding precision of expression in Beckett’s work reveals Beckett’s keen and musical ear.

Beckett’s interest in music invokes a concept of meaning as something appearing outside the rigid system of verbal communication that is relevant also to the exploration of physical movement in his plays. The American-born pianist and dance accompanist Harriet Cavalli writes in her book, Dance and Music, about kinaesthetic phrasing and points out that movement, like music, has punctuation: “just like language. (Actually, movement is a form of language, as is music). There are commas at the ends of short phrases, periods at the end of combinations” (139). Movement phrases, similarly, are ‘conversational’ in structure. With the addition of dynamics and nuances, and expressed through duration and level of energy or effort involved, movement phrases become what Cavalli terms “a vital, living, human experience” (139). We already know this from the way that poetry read aloud takes on significances beyond the mere structural organisation of language. It is therefore important to recognise that although movement phrases are not verbal phrases, they resemble language in the sense that they are dynamically structured in much the same way. The means and material of expression may therefore be similar, even if the medium is different.

That physical movements are noticeable in all of Beckett’s plays has already been acknowledged by critics and scholars, yet the how of how ‘meaning’ inheres in the enactment of movements has not yet been fully investigated in relation to Beckett’s work. The task of addressing the body and physical movements in Beckett’s work is, however, fraught with difficulties since the body’s meaning and significance tends to proliferate and multiply with every new perspective. Indeed, as Jonathan Kalb confirms, “as soon as one attempts any explanation of the physical situation, its various levels of significance interconnect ironically and lead to a multiplicity of meanings” (49). For this reason I have chosen initially to refrain from explanations in favour of a descriptive approach. Yet eventually I move on to suggest that Beckett’s emphasis on movement has a methodological significance.

Performance as Text

Although the focus on movement is significant already in Waiting for Godot, the importance of physical movement becomes more noticeable when Beckett starts to direct his own work in the mid 1960s, an undertaking which results in significant changes to the manuscripts in terms of stage directions. Beckett’s directing practice created a proliferation of detailed descriptions of physical movement, and the numerous notations of stage directions from the different productions he directed have been collected and edited by S.E Gontarski and James Knowlson, and subsequently printed in five separate vol-
umes as *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Vol. I–IV*, and *Happy Days: Samuel Beckett’s Production Notebook*.\(^{14}\) Notably, the “Regiebücher for all his productions contain hundreds of detailed notes for systematic activities” (Kalb 34).

The *Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* reveal that Beckett’s “directorital decisions were inevitably determined by variable circumstances — the kind of actor he was working with, the limitations of the stage set and so on” (*TN IV* vii). James Knowlson notes that there is a “remarkable consistency in Beckett’s changes” (*TN IV* vii). And, he concludes, “the revisions seem to represent a further dynamic stage in the writer’s own encounter with his texts and are of considerable interest for that very reason” (vii).

Beckett had a clear vision regarding how his plays should be staged. The conversion occurred as Beckett “explored the implications of performance fully in the mid 1950s, [and] began to understand its necessity to his theatrical creative process” (Gontarski, “Beckett and Performance”, *Palgrave* 199). On 11 May 1959, Beckett “referred to the staging of *Krapp’s Last Tape* as its ‘creation’” (200), and later on Beckett would, on a number of occasions, halt the publication of his dramatic texts in order to work on the texts in rehearsals before they could be completed and published. However, the Schiller-Theater production of *Endgame* in 1967 was the first production for which Beckett kept and wrote a production notebook (Gontarski, *TN II* xv). The notebook revealed Beckett’s strong concern with textual simplicity and with the nature of physical movement. Staging *Endgame* allowed Beckett fully to engage in working with other parameters of expression than words.

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\(^{14}\) However, although a substantial amount of Beckett’s changes have been recorded, a great many of the changes he made have never been made available to the public. For example, *Krapp’s ‘Purple nose’, which was part of the original script of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, was, according to Gontarski, deleted by Beckett already for the 1958 London production of the play and subsequently “systematically eliminated in private copies to anyone discussing the play with him”, yet it has remained part of most published editions of the play, whether in French or in English, with the exception of the third volume of *The Theatrical Notebooks* (Gontarski 202). Also Vladimir’s comment to Estragon, “I’ll carry you. (*Pause.*) If necessary”, was cut from the 1975 Schiller-Theater production of *Waiting for Godot*, but remained in the published German text (Bud Thorpe *qtd* in Duckworth, “Beckett’s New Godot”: Acheson, *Later Fiction* 1987), and is also in Faber’s 1986 collection of Beckett dramatic works *The Complete Dramatic Works*.

\(^{15}\) This notion is supported by, for example, Les Essif, who in *Empty Figure on an empty Stage: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and his Generation*, suggests that a “focused study of stage directions as well as spoken text tells us that there is something about the material image of the character, its formal presentation as corporeal spectacle, which theatre scholars have not adequately broached from either a theatrical, formal or spatial point of view” (3); P.J. Murphy, in *Critique of Beckett Criticism*, also suggests that there is an “ever-increasing emphasis in studies on Beckett’s drama on certain ‘actualities’ obviously not available to criticism of the prose: namely, staging, performances, commentaries by actors and directors, Beckett’s own production notebooks and, above all, the plays’ interaction with their various audiences” (40).
Accepting full responsibility for the staging of *Endgame* allowed him to get it “right” for the first time (Gontarski, *TN* II xiii–xxii). By incorporating precise descriptions of movement, and of their precise enactment, into the dramatic text, Beckett also expands the notion of text to the point where the performance is the final text.

Beckett’s commitment to performance has produced a situation where critics have felt unsure about the authority of his texts since the proliferation of texts makes the notion of an original or definitive text problematic. The view that the performance is the final text means that the concept of a text becomes rather a fluid and amorphous one, and some critics, like Colin Duckworth, have explicitly discarded the notion that a performance could be a text on account of their notion that a performance–‘text’ is only a practical solution depending on the exigencies of staging a play, and therefore in a sense an adaption of the original text. In Duckworth’s view, accepting the notion of performance as a final text inevitably means that, for example, the final text of *Godot* would be the last performance that Beckett ever directed, namely the one performed by the San Quentin Company at the Adelaide Festival in 1984. In this performance Beckett took away all that seemed superfluous or too much of a stage gimmick but he also wanted to reduce “the philosophical content – not to make it obscure, but to give it a silence, to give it deeper silences, to disallow the puppetry of the characters, the vaudevillian aspect of the play, the clown and the Chaplin routines, and to grow into the focus of the human condition in 1984” (Cluchey qtd in Duckworth 180). For Colin Duckworth, this is a prospect which makes him “wonder whether authors should be let loose on their plays thirty-odd years later” (191):

The possibility of a definitive production of the play, analogous to the definitive version of a text that every scholarly editor wants to bring out, seems vitiated by two factors: first, the frame of mind of the writer-director during any given set of rehearsals; and secondly, the fact that Beckett was having to work with and through the temperaments of actors whom he had not hand-picked (as he had in the Schiller-Theatre production [of *Waiting for Godot* in 1975]).

(178)

The ten-day period of working with the company in the Adelaide production may have felt inadequate even for the author-director himself: “What can I do in ten days?” (Beckett qtd in Duckworth 175), but the production nevertheless remains the last version of *Godot* that Beckett in his double capacity as writer-director ever produced and since, at least for Beckett, the performance is part of the creative process, this version remains “the last text authorised during the author’s lifetime” (Duckworth 190). Thus, the Adelaide production could indeed be termed the ‘final’ text of *Godot*. This production, as one would expect, revealed some of the changes that Beckett’s vision of the world had undergone in the thirty-five years that separate the ‘original’
Godot from its ‘final’ version. It is not unlikely that Beckett’s reworking of the play as an eighty-year old would be very different from the version he wrote when he was in his fifties. However, although the notion of final, by its very meaning, cannot be every new production, this does not exclude the possibility of considering every instance of performance as a ‘final’ text. As Gontarski notes: “In an age of postmodern textuality and performance [Duckworth’s] neo-Romantic yearning for definitive productions or even definitive texts seems as best anachronistic” (“Beckett and Performance”, Palgrave 203). And he goes on to assert that critics like Duckworth and Michael Worton defend the notion of an ‘original’ text but seemingly fail to recognise the extent to which “Beckett continued to ‘create’ his theatre works on the stage” (Gontarski, “Beckett and Performance”, Palgrave 204). Gontarski points out that although Duckworth does note that “Beckett’s revisions of his work were ‘an incomparable barometer of the evolution of the Beckettian world view over thirty years’, he still fails to recognise that this evolution “is the creative process in the theatre” (Gontarski, “Beckett in Performance”, Palgrave 204). What I am most interested in, however, is perhaps less whether or not a particular performance directed by Beckett should be considered the final text or not, but rather whether any performance of a Beckett text, could not be considered an authentic text. The Adelaide Festival production was only one opportunity for Beckett to create the text anew. In so doing he emphasised aspects that were already in the text in order to articulate more clearly his vision of the text. This is precisely what every director does, and every production of any Beckett play is in this sense an authentic text since every performance is a unique enactment of the dramatic text and so constitutes the creation of that unique text.

In Beckett in Performance, Jonathan Kalb suggests that “[p]erhaps the greatest confusion about Beckett’s theatre has always been the taxonomical one – what kind of animal is it?” (37). Admittedly, Beckett’s plays are difficult to describe, and it is therefore more fruitful to ask: in what medium does Beckett work and with what material does he create? Indeed, can we even assert that Beckett’s dramas are plays or are they really more akin to poems, since even the notion of dramatic text is under question in Beckett’s theatre? Whatever may be the case, this study is not primarily concerned with taxonomical issues because my guiding principle is that what appears is conditioned by how it appears and to whom it appears.

Phenomenology

Methodologically, phenomenology with its focus on appearances provides a fruitful method for the project of describing physical movements. The phenomenological method initially seeks to focus on how phenomena appear to be perceived by an experiencing subject and one of the tenets of phenomenology is therefore to avoid precedential or preconceived ‘knowledge’.
However, phenomenology is by no means an uncontroversial term or a simple method. Rather, as Paul Ricoeur suggests, “la phenomenologie au sense large est la somme des variations de l’oeuvre husserlienne et des hérésies issues de Husserl” [in the broad sense phenomenology is both the sum of Husserl’s work and the heresies issuing from it] (qtd and transl in Watkin 3).

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Husserlian phenomenology has been developed by a number of contemporary, second and third generation phenomenologists. Among the philosophers whose work might be classified as phenomenological we find, for example, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Michel Henry. However, later generations of philosophers, such as Deleuze, Lacan, Foucault and not least Derrida, have fruitfully explored Husserl’s work, and, significantly, studying phenomenology is not infrequently a means to the end of understanding the works of these philosophers. Despite the temporal hierarchy sketched out between generations in this brief list of phenomenological philosophers, I concur with Watkin’s assertion that phenomenology and deconstruction cannot “be plotted in relation to each other on some putative philosophical topography” (4). Rather, as Watkin suggests: “[g]iven that Derrida’s disagreements with Husserl are made in the name of phenomenology, it is by no means clear that ‘phenomenology and deconstruction’ is not a tautology” (5). Indeed, it is evident that “the phenomenological holds an abiding interest for many, not least in its relation to deconstructive thought” (Watkin 2).

Among the central tenets of phenomenology are the distinctions between the so-called ‘natural attitude’ as opposed to the ‘phenomenological attitude’. These terms relate to the philosophical study of human experience that phenomenologists seek to explicate. The term ‘natural attitude’ refers to the way in which we attend to the world, i.e. the way in which we, as human beings, are involved with the world as meaningful. The world is the context within which we perceive, or ‘intend’ things, and the term ‘intentionality’ denotes the way in which “the mind and the world are correlated with one another”, i.e. intentionality is the structure within which the world appears as meaningful to us in certain ways (Sokolowski 12). The natural attitude, thus, is the “default perspective, the one we start off from, the one we are in originally” (Sokolowski 42). This is is precisely the perspective that Beckett seeks to get away from in his creative work.

By contrast, the ‘phenomenological attitude’ entails a suspension of belief in the natural attitude, i.e. our everyday perception. Thus, the phenomenological attitude “is the focus we have when we reflect upon the natural attitude and all the intentionalities that occur within it” (Sokolowski 42).  

16 Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty claim that reduction is meant to “prevent ‘the tendency to psychologise the eidetic’” (Moran 146). Perceiving, Merleau-Ponty explains, we frequently fall prey to “the experience error”, which entails taking for granted that “what we know to be
phenomenological attitude entails that the phenomenon is contemplated from a ‘neutral’ standpoint. Even though this may be an impossible stance to take, the suspension of belief, if nothing else, entails a shift from “conviction to doubt” (Sokolowski 48). It is not that we need to change the way we perceive, but we “contemplate the involvements we have with the world and with things in it” (Sokolowski 48). This shift of attitude is in phenomenological terms called “phenomenological reduction”, signifying a stepping back from the natural attitude (Sokolowski 49). We are thus seeking to uncover those structures of consciousness that allow the world to open up to us. In Beckett’s plays, mis-movements perform this function as they appear as anomalies designed to detain spectators in the realm of the sensuous. Through presenting characters whose physical movements escape ‘natural’ or ‘habitual’ appropriation of meaning, Beckett persuades spectators to step back from the ‘natural attitude’ in order to contemplate the relation between stage sign and signifier, meaning and experiencing, content and form as well as the relationship between the artist and his occasion.

In the introduction to Experimental Phenomenology, Don Idhe uses the Indian fable of the blind men and the elephant to exemplify the difference between a phenomenological investigation of phenomena, and what he terms an “axiomatic-constructive” investigation, such as, for example, is frequently used within the fields of mathematics, theoretical sciences and logic (31). The fable of the blind men and the elephant aptly illustrates how perceptions condition our meaning-making. The fable tells the story of six blind men all given the task of defining what an elephant ‘really’ is. One man gets hold of the tail, another of the ear, yet another feels the leg of the elephant etc.. Each of them comes to an entirely different conclusion based upon his sensory perceptions of what in fact are only parts of a much larger whole. Importantly all of the men fail to perceive the full elephant-phenomenon. Obviously, the blind men’s misconceptions arise out of their assuming that they can conceive of a totality from only limited perceptions of parts, and so their conclusions about what it was that they ‘really’ felt are clearly mistaken. How we perceive something thus, to a certain extent, determines what we perceive and since: “[t]he sensual eye is just like the palm of the hand [and] the palm has not the means of covering the whole of the beast” (Rümi), the men were all unable to perceive the totality.

While acknowledging that both the phenomenological method as well as any other method involves setting up conditions for the investigation that

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17 This Indian fable was the basis for a poem by the Persian poet Jalâl ud-Din Rûmî (d 1273), titled “Ellephant in the Dark”. For Rûmî the fable illustrates how we fail to realise the spiritual dimension of life and in this sense the story is also part of the Islamic as well as the Buddhist and Jain traditions. Don Idhe uses the fable to illustrate a more profane point but for the sake of the present argument, I believe this difference does not invalidate his claims.
will affect the investigation, I would like to make a case for phenomenology because it is observational and in this sense open to the possibility of what appears. Axiomatic methods, as Idhe states, are by comparison closed systems which “begin with a series of definitions and formal relations prior to investigation” (Experimental 31). This stance leaves out, and so risks missing, phenomena that do not immediately fall within the frame of the investigation preset by the definitions. The phenomenological investigation, however, “begins with a kind of empirical observation directed at the whole field of possible experiential phenomena” (Idhe, Experimental 31). Although the radical empiricist beginnings of phenomenology entail that clear definitions “if arrived at at all, come late” (Idhe, Experimental 31), this method nevertheless creates an ‘opening’ which allows for original and new ways for phenomena and their meanings to appear to perception. As Idhe explains, the men in the fable leap to conclusions about the significance of their perceptions because they “do not examine even the limited experience they have with sufficient precision or depth” (Experimental 30), and so their descriptions are based on axiomatic beliefs and explanations. As a result, they may end up producing similes and metaphors that recycle old concepts, which in fact serve to cover the elephant-phenomenon, rather than reveal it. By contrast, the phenomenological method seeks to open up to a variety of meaning-constituting perceptions.

Clearly, there is nothing to suggest that a theory describing the conditions under which perception is conceived could teach us anything about what it means to experience a work of art, or what it is that we experience. Central to the function of mis-movements in Beckett’s plays is the notion that the ‘meaningfulness’ of what is perceived and conditioned by how and to whom it appears to be perceived. Yet, while the concept of perception is central to mis-movements in Beckett’s plays, the primary aim of this study is not to explicate the meaning of mis-movements, but rather to show how mis-movements contribute to produce a certain effect in the audience, i.e. an attentiveness to what is presented on stage.

Phenomenology and Art

According to Idhe, “there is a deep relationship between artistic possibility exploration and possibility exploration in phenomenology which reveals the kinship between phenomenology and art” (Experimental 148). The playfulness that phenomenology and the arts have in common, he asserts, the way they exercise fantasy variations, makes “it possible to see the practice of the artist as latently phenomenological from the outset” (148). Moreover, “[i]t is out of possibility that the undiscovered is found and created” (148) and the function and meaning of phenomenology in this way seems akin to the function and meaning of art. Indeed, phenomenology and art both function as explorations of the possible and “the freedom of essential research in phe-
nomenology requires necessarily ‘operating in fantasy’” (Elliott 60). However, whereas phenomenology, by means of the phenomenological reduction, aims to describe noematic and noetic aspects of the structure of intentionalty — i.e. the object and the process of perception — artistic explorations of the possible “exercise intentionality itself as variational” (Idhe, Experimental 148).

In aesthetic perception, we are “free from the compulsion to determine ourselves and our world” (Seel 4). Whatever we perceive aesthetically, we perceive by “foregoing the theoretical or practical treatment of the world” (Seel 140). Philosophers like Nietzche, Kant and Scopenhauer all characterise the aesthetic attitude as a form of rupture of the ‘natural attitude’. Whereas the rational perception inherent in the natural attitude is a ‘form of knowledge’, the ‘phenomenological attitude’ inherent in aesthetic perception “enables a form of distance both to conceptual knowledge and to teleological action” (Seel 7).

Husserl’s notion of the phenomenological reduction draws on the Latin reducere which means ‘to draw back’ and the process of reduction constitutes a series of stages leading back to “the domain of the transcendental ego which must be kept distinct from the psychological domain of the empirical self” (Moran 148). The notion of epoché, derived from the ancient Greek Sceptics’ recommendation to “practice abstention from judgement”, is part of the process of reduction (Moran 146–47). Thus, the phenomenological reduction processes through a series of withdrawals to consciously suspend any belief in the natural objective world of empirical experience. As Husserl explains:

We are no longer doing psychology, a positive science that takes its objects to be transcendent. We are not making an investigation of psychological phenomena, of certain occurrences in the so-called reality (whose existence remains in question throughout), nor do we speak of them. Rather we are investigating what remains and remains valid whether anything like objective reality exists or not, whether the positing of such transcendence is justified or not.

(Husserl, Idea of Phenomenology 34).

Seeking to distinguish between the “quasi-givenness of transcendent objects and the absolute givenness of the phenomenon itself” is, for Husserl, a means to uncover those structures of consciousness that allow the world to open up to us. The world cannot be grasped as something “out there” anymore than consciousness can be said to constitute the world, but consciousness allows the world to open up as it provides the “conditions for the possibility of knowledge” (Moran 144). Coleridge’s suggestion that the experience of art is a wilful suspension of disbelief seems more similar to Husserl’s later conception of reduction, as put forward in Cartesian Meditations § 11. There are, however, no clear boundaries between these different definitions of reduction nor is Husserl consistent in the way he defines his concept: In Crisis alone, as many as “eight different forms of reductions have been catalogued” (Moran 147). Nevertheless, Husserl always considered “the formulations of the reductions as the real discovery of his philosophy and as necessary in order to reveal non-psychologically the essence of intentional consciousness and of subjectivity as such” (Moran 147). Most of all, the reduction provides access to “the infinite subjective domain of inner experience” (Moran 147). Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty also seem to share a belief that reduction is meant to “prevent ‘the tendency to psychologise the eidetic’” (Moran 146).
As a phenomenological description of physical movements in Beckett’s plays reveals, Beckett’s use of movements leads to deep reversals in the perception of conceptual and non-conceptual meanings in his work. The process of revealing these meanings, however, must proceed through careful descriptions of the movements to see how they appear to be perceived. We must attend to them as they occur within perception before we proceed to ascribe significance to them. Essentially, Edmund Husserl’s call for a return to “the things themselves” (Cartesian Meditations 12–13) suggests a point of departure for my investigation as the phenomenological method suggests a beginning that “precedes classification and systematization” (Idhe, Experimental 32). In order to appreciate Beckett’s strategic use of movements, we must first attend to the manifest phenomena and suspend hypothesising about significances or explanations. Such an attitude will then allow for the opportunity to establish “variations and possibilities within perceptions” (Idhe, Experimental 151).

Describing the physical movements in Beckett’s plays, as they appear to perception and withholding explanations that ascribe specific meanings to them, is therefore a way to open up possible meanings that already dwell in Beckett’s choreographic writing. Physical movements are, in part, the means by which Beckett’s poetry of the theatre appears. As scholars, critics and audiences, we need to acknowledge these manifestations as poetical manifestations, and we need to acknowledge the movements’ presentational aspects, yet we also need to acknowledge that they are the means whereby Beckett has guided spectator-perception. Through this method of observation, I hope to reveal a field of possibilities in the event that is the play. Within this field we find that mis-movements, but also repetition, are the means by which spectators’ perception is guided. On the pre-linguistic level, where the spectator ‘undergoes’ movements, movements are multi-dimensional experiences that can yield a variety of metaphorical meanings. Phenomenological analysis however begins with what appears, before proceeding to consider how it appears, and to whom it appears. In phenomenology, the subjective perceiver, the one to whom something appears, is arrived at “reflexively” (Idhe, Experimental 50). It is thus only in the last instance of the analysis that we arrive at the phenomenon as culturally, historically or linguistically determined.

Initially, the what of mis-movements is only their appearing as anomalies, seemingly devoid of meaning. The notion that mis-movements are anomalies, however, is already an interpretation that determines their meaningful-

19 In Images of Beckett, James Knowlson traces the origin of this expression to Jean Cocteau who is supposed to have written it as early as 1922 (107). It subsequently reappeared in Theatre, vol. 1, preface to Les Mariées de la Tour Eiffel (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p.45. (Knowlson, Images 153 n).
ness’, albeit possibly perceived as meaningless. Through being repeated, mis-movements then begin to project a whole new context for their ‘coming to givenness’ that inevitably draws the spectator into their appearing as meaningful. Thus, their what is temporally conditioned by their how of appearing, i.e. by their appearing as something that is perspectively undergone by the spectator. The meaning of mis-movements is therefore not that they refer to anything particular, but rather, it is the particularity of their appearing that is meaningful. Through perceiving mis-movements as something, whether or not this something is ‘meaningful’, we also enter into a process of meaning-making that is continuous through the space-time of the play. Ultimately, it is this situation that Beckett, through his emphasis on patterns and his use of mis-movements, explores in his dramatic work, and it is also this process that the phenomenological method seeks to unveil.

Critical Context

As a Nobel Prize winner, Samuel Beckett has an acknowledged status as one of the twentieth century’s most important literary artists. His creative productions include drama, prose and poetry, and he also wrote for radio and television and film, as well as a substantial number of critical essays and reviews on art and literature. Beckett’s body of work was pivotal for the evolution of literature and performance in the latter part of the twentieth century. According to Oppenheim, Beckett was “arguably, the twentieth century’s most important playwright” (Palgrave 1). Needless to say, the works of Samuel Beckett have elicited an enormous response, and it would be impossible to try to present an exhaustive survey of the great variety of criticism that exists. Indeed, the field of Beckett studies, which has been expanding since the 1960s and which is “still finding new directions today[,] can be overwhelming” (Oppenheim, Palgrave 3).

Critical interest in Beckett’s work, David Pattie suggests in The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett, has coincided with “a wider re-evaluation of the nature of literary criticism itself” (103). While admitting that this is a simplification, Pattie nevertheless proposes that Beckett’s work “has been a battleground on which literary critics have contested their various positions” (103). Notably, Beckett’s work, permeated as it is with ambiguity and vagueness, existential doubt and philosophical conundrums, and with its precise and articulate use of language, readily lends itself to a variety of readings, and the multitude of critical orientations in Beckett studies might be said to reflect this situation. Among the critical exegeses of Beckett’s work we therefore find, for example, narrative theory, intertextual, religious and philosophical studies as well as studies in “structural linguistics, anthropology, feminism, and psychoanalysis”, to name but a few (Oppenheim, Palgrave 3). Clearly, as Pattie notes, different perspectives will pro-
reduce different questions, depending on the particular position of the critic and the tradition within which he or she writes (103).

Chronologically, “Beckett criticism has gone roughly through four stages” (Pattie 103). In the initial stage, many parameters of latter-day conflicts were initiated. This stage covers more or less “the period between the first publication of the trilogy and the awarding of the Nobel prize in 1969” (103). In this early stage of criticism, scholars noted the influence of Schopenhauer, Descartes, Berkeley, Bergson, the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus, and not least Dante in Beckett’s writing. Pivotal figures of this period of criticism are, for example, Ruby Cohn who, in *The Comic Gamut* (1962) uses the theories of Bergson to discuss the significance of laughter in Beckett’s work; Hugh Kenner, who “argued strongly that a developing Cartesian split between mind and body was central to the development of Beckett’s work” (Pattie 113); and Martin Esslin, who in *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), first launched the idea that Beckettian drama was “absurd”, taking the term from Albert Camus’ writings (Pattie 114). The absurdist notion of the world is “akin to the existentialists” (Esslin qtd in Pattie 114). Notably, however, Esslin does not equate Beckett’s drama with existentialist philosophy:

> While these parallels may be illuminating, we must not go too far in trying to identify Beckett’s vision with any school of philosophy. It is the peculiar richness of a play like *Waiting for Godot* that it opens vistas on so many different perspectives. It is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem on time, evanescence, and the mysteriousness of existence, the paradox of change, and stability, necessity, and absurdity. (Esslin 61–62)

Nevertheless, in noting that Beckett’s drama is poetic, and in claiming that *Waiting for Godot*, is a theatrical event, that “does not require an external justification for its meaning, but […] creates its effects, as a poem does, by the careful use of the form itself”, Esslin foreshadows the discussion of meta-theatricality in Beckett criticism (Pattie 115).

The second stage continues up to around the 1980s, focusing more on specific aspects of Beckett’s work (Pattie 103). For example, the notion that Beckett, although he uses philosophy in his work, is not tied to a specific system of beliefs, spurs the production of attempts to describe “Beckett’s art through a set of dialectical oppositions” (Pattie 148). Vivian Mercier and David Hesla are two critics who seek to broaden the philosophical discussion of Beckett’s work in this sense. In addition studies focusing on language, structure and the formal elements of his work emerge, as well as studies

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20 In order to provide an account of the chronological development of Beckett criticism, I rely on Pattie’s study.
focusing on physiological, historical or biographical aspects. The essay collection, *Beckett the Shape Changer* (1975), edited by Katherine Worth, is “concerned with Beckett the formal innovator” (Pattie 132). During this phase, critics also began to “pay an increasing amount of attention to Beckett’s theatrical work” (Pattie 139). John Fletcher’s and John Spurling’s *Beckett: A Study of his Plays* (1972), emphasising “the Beckettian demonstration [as] a thoroughly dramatic one” (15), explores the relationship between Beckett and his audience, claiming that “Beckett’s theatre is neither human nor friendly, for the simple reason that it is addressed to himself” (37). Also Eugene Webb’s *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (1972) also belongs to the early stages of this period.

By the end of the 1970s, Beckett’s “work had been exhaustively mined for its philosophical and literary import” and “something of a general critical consensus had emerged” (Pattie 152). It was considered, that Beckett examined “human existence on a fundamental level”, and it was also assumed that this conclusion pre-empted any other critical standpoint (Pattie 152). However, in the third period covering the 1980s and 90s, Beckett’s work “became one of the sites of battle between more traditional literary critics and those whose work sought to establish new paradigms, not simply for the study of Beckett but for the study of literature generally” (Pattie 153). This meant that the exegesis of Beckett’s work was caught up in a wider discussion of significances, ranging from structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, psychoanalytic criticism, to name but a few — i.e. a panoply of criticisms, all contained under “the general term Theory” (Pattie 153).

The impact of theory on literature studies is reflected in the proliferation of deconstructive and post-structuralist readings of Beckett’s work. Among them, Angela Moorjani’s *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett* (1982), Thomas Trezise’s *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature*, and Steven Connor’s *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (1988) are especially noteworthy. Beckett’s postmodernist strategies have also been explored to suggest that Beckett exhausts language to deconstruct notions of literary representation. Leslie Kane in *The Language of Silence* (1984), writes that “Beckett’s drama is characterized by a retreat from the word; physical, emotional and linguistic entrapment; stasis as dramatic structure; evocation of evanescence; the motif of waiting; and the centrality of time” (108). Richard Begam’s *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (1996) places “the theoretical argument over Beckett’s status in modernity and post-modernity in context” (Pattie 195), and Carla Locatelli’s *Unwording the Word: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works After the Nobel Prize* (1990), describes Beckett’s work as having transformed, from “a gnosological quest into a modern epistemological analysis, based on a critical, self-reflective use of language” (Locatelli 2).

Finally, in the fourth period, beginning in the mid 1990s and continuing up to the publication of Pattie’s critical guide, biographical readings and
archival material have become increasingly important and influential, although Deirdre Bair’s biography *Samuel Beckett* (1978), was published much earlier. James Knowlson’s *Damned to Fame* (1996) and the publication of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett Vol. I* (2009), and *Vol. II* (2011) testify to this development.

Despite the exhaustiveness of Pattie’s *Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett*, in the decade that has elapsed since its publication (2000), a progressive proliferation of Beckett criticism has taken place. In view of my own concern with mis-movement, I find that the more recent development in Beckett criticism that focuses on the importance of the body in Beckett’s work is especially relevant. The significance of Beckett’s focus on physical action has within the past few years become the subject of a number of interesting books, for example, Anna McMullan’s *Performing Embodiment* (2010), and Ulrika Maude’s *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009). Earlier, yet highly perceptive contributions to Beckett criticism, emphasising the importance of Beckett’s dramatic practice, are Jonathan Kalb’s *Beckett in Performance* (1989), which covers both the theoretical and the practical implications of Beckett’s theatre practice, and Rosemary Pountney’s *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett’s Drama 1956–76* (1988), which seeks to explore Beckett’s evolution as a playwright through focusing on Beckett’s structuring and patterning of the plays as a director. Tribute must also be paid to Lois Oppenheim’s seminal work, *Directing Beckett* (1994), in which a selection of highly distinguished Beckett directors have contributed with records of their experiences. Clearly, this proliferation of critical writing focusing on Beckett’s drama will continue to inspire others to probe into this hitherto relatively unexplored, but rich field.

Despite this increase in critical interest in the body in Beckett’s work, Ulrika Maude asserts, “the persistence with which Beckett explores the very basics of bodily experience, those conditions that are already in swing before culture lays its mark on embodied identity” has still not been fully recognised (*Technology* 2). Frequently, critics who have commented on the metaphorical aspects of movement in Beckett’s drama have overlooked the significance of fully embodied experience that inheres in Beckett’s poetic manifestations of movement. According to Maude, Beckett’s emphasis on the body is a literary effort to “cast light on embodied experience” that “can be read as one of the most serious inquires […] in literature”, comparable to Merleau-Ponty’s effort to do the same in philosophy (*Technology* 5, 137).

Admittedly, Beckett’s presentation of the body evokes metaphoric meanings. As Sandra Wynands points out, “[m]ost of Beckett’s work, and especially his late work for the stage, remains utterly unintelligible unless read metaphorically to signify a fundamental problematic of the human condition” (84–85). Also, Ruby Cohn, in *Back to Beckett* (1974), notes that: “*Acte sans paroles I* and *All that Fall* both use falling as a metaphor for the “human condition […] Each play adheres to its genre and exploits that genre to
make a metaphysical implication” (158). The problem with such interpretations is, however, as Maude rightly points out, that “the discursively produced body takes precedence over, if not eclipses, the flesh” (Technology 2).

Yet, notwithstanding the validity of Maude’s effort to address the manifestation of embodiment in Beckett’s writing, as well as her claim that Beckett’s literary effort is akin to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological exploration of embodiment as ‘involvement’, perceiving the world *through the body*, her particular approach to embodiment does not address Beckett’s presentation of mis-movements as objects for aesthetic perception. Nor does it explore the way in which mis-movements appear as anomalies that effectively underwrite the problem of expression as growing out of the problem of presentation and representation. Significantly, my study comprehends Beckett’s emphasis on the body and on physical movement as a methodological, essentially literary practice, rather than a metaphysical exploration. Mis-movements are, in this sense, part of Beckett’s effort to challenge the “restrictions of traditional narrative structures” (Dearlove 4). Thus, rather than making the nature of all embodiment in Beckett the subject of investigation, this study aims to explore how Beckett uses mis-movement strategically, as a way to ‘assault’ language, and as an instrument of artistic expression aimed at ‘effing the ineffable’.21

Clearly, Beckett’s exploration of mis-movements grows out of his preoccupation with the visual paradigm, and with the ‘aesthetics of appearing’22. However, perception in this sense does not entail transcending the limits of ‘self’ in an act of knowledge, but rather becomes an *experiencing of the very ‘limits’ that determine perception*. The emphasis on physical movements, in Beckett’s plays, as Maude rightly asserts, foregrounds the characters as animated bodies whose individuality is founded on their ability to move, as well as on the movements they perform (Technology 136). Yet, embodied experience is a **moment to the mind**, and although founded in the body, it should not be separated from its temporal dimension. The physical movements we find in Beckett’s plays, are **moments to the play** founded upon the performance of the play, and it is important that we do not make the mistake of reducing these parts to entities that could exist and have meaning independently of the whole to which they belong.23 In contrast to Maude’s emphasis on the body as an effort to ‘cast light on embodied experience’, therefore, this study claims that Beckett’s work does not seek to express, illum-

21 Indeed, “what we we know partakes in now small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail” (Beckett, Watt 62).

22 *Aesthetics of Appearing* is the title of Martin Seel’s book.

23 Robert Sokolowski in *Introduction to Phenomenology*, suggests that “[t]here is a necessity in the way moments, nonindependent parts, are arranged into a whole. Certain moments mediate for others, which join the whole only through the former […]. To lay out such an array of moments provides an understanding for the whole in question” (Sokolowski 26–27).
nate or ‘cast light on’, any particular perspective, creed or ‘Truth’. Indeed, what appears in Beckett’s presentations of mis-movements is not ‘knowledge’, but ‘ignorance’.

In *Accomodating the Chaos*, Judith Dearlove points out that Beckett repeatedly “describes his own tasks and capability in comparable terms of uncertainty and fluidity” (6). According to Dearlove, Beckett’s work is “nonrelational”, founded on the conviction that “the artist cannot assume his works exhibit any connection, much less a mimetic one, to an external system” (3). What interests Beckett, is “finding a literary shape for the proposition that perhaps no relationship exists between or among the artist, his art, and an external reality” (Dearlove 3). In Beckett’s own phrasing, quoted from an interview with Harold Hobson in *International Theatre Annual*, (1956, 1: 153):

> I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. ‘Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.’ That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.

(qtd in Dearlove 1)²⁴

The task of the artist, then, is not to explicate the validity of ideas, certainty or meaning, (or even the nature of embodiment), but to find a way to express that which cannot be expressed. However, it is not enough to “assert that there may be no relation between the artist and his occasion”, since “[t]he intelligibility of words belies their proposition: language cannot be unrelational; the artist must inevitably fail” (Dearlove 5). Thus, the situation must be shown, and here is where Beckett’s use of mis-movement becomes an instrument of artistic expression by means of which the finitude of human experience and perception, implicit also in the performance situation, may be presented.

Inherent in this dilemma is the “redefinition of the artist’s task and capabilities” (Dearlove 5). For Beckett, the accomplishment of Joyce’s “Apollonian”²⁵ writing became increasingly alien to him as he continued to develop his own manner of presentation founded on poverty and failure. The expansion of knowledge inevitably also entails the revelation of vast domains of ignorance, which the artist obsessed with articulating knowledge, finality or

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²⁴ Reference in Dearlove, p. 153n.
²⁵ Judith Dearlove asserts that Beckett implicitly refers to Joyce as an Apollonian artist, quoting Beckett from an interview with Israel Shenker, “Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling *Waiting for Godot.*” *New York Times*, 6 May 1956, Section 2, p 3 (6). However, referring to Deirdre Bair’s biography, Dearlove also points out that it is in fact difficult to assert whether the words were actually Beckett’s, or whether Shenker had paraphrased Beckett in the process of rendering the interview in a more literary style (153).
perfection, tending toward “omniscience and omnipotence” and the notion that “expression is achievement”, inevitably fails to perceive (Beckett qtd in Dearlove 6)26. By contrast, Beckett emphasises that the artist must “work with ignorance and impotence” (Dearlove 7).

Significantly, also, the body in Beckett’s plays is presented in ways that defy traditional metaphors of the body. Robert Zaner, in his exegesis of Gabriel Marcel’s theory of the body, asserts that we need to break “once and for all with the metaphors which represent consciousness as a luminous circle around which there would be only shadows. It is, to the contrary, the shadow which is at the centre” (Marcel qtd in The Problem of Embodiment 21). Moreover, Zaner continues, since the shadow is “my body”, there is at the centre of consciousness “a fundamental night, an opacity which is not transparent to itself” (21). In other words, the body or subjectivity as experienced, is not at the centre of experience, but appears as an ‘identity in the manifold’, adumbrated through experience. This phenomenological description of consciousness certainly brings Beckett’s characters to mind. Their notion of self is only vaguely sketched in the situations they experience. In Rough for Radio II, this is morbidly and surrealistically reflected as a man on the brink of committing suicide has his character evaluated by two ‘bureaucrats’, Bertrand and Morvan, whose judgement apparently may determine whether or not he should jump. Their task is to put together a “record” of the man’s life through the bits and pieces given in the testimonies of friends, acquaintances, old loves, as well as from the man’s own statements, collected under the label ‘confidences’:

B: [reading] ‘… sick headaches … eye trouble … irrational fear of vipers … ear trouble …’—nothing for us there—‘ … fibroid tumours … pathological horror of singbirds … throat trouble … 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…’ [Looks up.] What did I tell you?
[...]
B: [Hurriedly.] ‘… morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others at the time, I mean as often and for as long as they entered my awareness — What kind of Chinese is that?
A: [Nervously.] Keep going, keep going!
B: ‘… for as long as they entered my awareness, and that in either case, I mean whether such on the one hand as to give me pleasure or on the contrary on the other to cause me pain, and truth to tell’ Shit! Where’s the verb?
A: What verb?
B: The main!
A: I give up.

(CDW 242–43)

26 From the interview with Shenker, see above footnote 24, p. 25.
Indeed, the role of consciousness for the formulation of self is under scrutiny here, as are the very metaphors commonly used to ‘assume’ self. The play, through the ‘metaphorical’ rummaging of documents that nevertheless fail to represent the man’s life, is indicative of the incommensurability of self and perception. The ‘record’ is later summed up in terms of “black future, inpardonable past—so far as he can remember, inducements to linger on all equally preposterous and the best advice dead letter […] Let him jump.” (CDW 246).

Clearly, to be is not always to be aware of, or to be conscious of, as the man’s own testimony seems to verify. Indeed, two inspectors are needed to evaluate his life, going through a selection of testimonies and descriptions of the man provided by others, as well as his own confused statements about himself, only to arrive at their conclusion ‘Let him jump’. Emblematically, the man whose life is being evaluated, throughout the play stands motionless with his back to the audience, a shadow of a man; his identity or self never clearly perceived. Rather than being a lucid centre of experience, then, it would appear that the body and consciousness here dwell in the twilight zone of experience.

In Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image (2006), Anthony Uhlmann argues that “Beckett has developed the idea of the image more fully than any other writer”, and distinguishes between four different conceptual images that are important in Beckett’s plays, among them the “image of being or the embodied being” (147). Uhlmann also suggests that Beckett has borrowed from various philosophers’ images that encompass precisely such philosophical concerns that have to do with perception and representation of thoughts, ideas and concepts in art (147). The images in this respect respond to certain ‘ontological positions’ of which they are symbolical or metaphorical. However, although I agree with Uhlmann about the importance of images in Beckett’s plays, I believe that images are part of a complex and dynamic system of meanings, in which the metaphorical aspect is but one, albeit important, level of meaningfulness, and at that, one which is intricately connected to other levels and achieves its full signification only upon the completion of the play as a performance. Rather than seeing mis-movements as metaphors, therefore, they must be considered as parts of the greater whole that is the performance, and in this sense, their function remains to be explored.

In Samuel Beckett’s Self-Referential Drama (1998), Shimon Levy explores “theatre, as a chaos system”, to suggest that “Beckett’s drama is an inevitable mode of self-organization in the midst of chaos […] Since there is no external ‘organizer’ (God?) or any other absolute objective system of values (to which and in which classical plays were performed), consciousness itself creates dramatically existential patterns that maintain and hold each other” (5). Notably, physical movement, according to this study, is part of the technical devices Beckett uses to create his self-referential drama:
In a universe ruled by entropy, drawing inexorably toward greater and greater disorder, how does disorder arise? The Beckettian solution to Gleick’s somewhat rhetorical question is funny, courageous, and sophisticated, but quite tentative. It can be found in his dramatic structures (“find a form to accommodate the mess”), strongly enhanced by self-referential use of light, sets, movement and so on, as well as using their absence, namely the “being” (of) offstage.

(Levy 5)

Although Beckett’s theatrical method seems to undo the laws of coherence and meaningfulness in communication, there is, in effect, a structure that imposes order upon what might appear to be chaos. Seeking a form to ‘accommodate the chaos’, Beckett introduces dramatic practices and technical devices to make the reader/spectator engage with the work. Clearly, however, Beckett does not ‘really’ stage the failure of language, but rather, his examining “the shape rather than the soundness of an idea—becomes a profound quest to explore and expand the boundaries of human perception” (Dearlove 4). The involvement of the audience is implicitly part of the manifestation of ‘the mess’, as they struggle to make sense of the seemingly meaningless presentations that appear onstage. However, Dearlove points out, although Beckett’s self-referential drama may not succeed in “eliminating correspondences, even his ‘failures’, celebrate our imagination, which irrepressibly fashions orders, meanings and totalities where perhaps none exist” (4). Significantly, also, Beckett’s “canon, in fact, moves from angry denunciation of relationships to acceptance, if not affirmation, of the impossibility of either disproving their existence or displaying their absence” (Dearlove 4).

Beckett’s intense focus on physical movements foregrounds an intrinsic co-constitution between linguistic and physical expressions. The movements of the body articulate connections, rhythms, phrases, the more precise and exact they are — the more clearly we perceive them. To a certain extent, text and movement are placed on an equal footing and the equivalency of text and movement is evident in, for example, Footfalls and Not I. In Act Without Words I, Act Without Words II and in Quad the movements that the characters perform constitute the totality of ‘communication’ in the plays. Beckett’s first and foremost concern seems to be with the problem that language inevitably transforms and shapes ideas rather than serves as a medium for their presentation. Language imposes form and inevitably it is this form that materialises. In Beckett Remembering Beckett, Lawrence E. Harvey asserts that Beckett “thinks in the antinomy ‘being–form’”, where “[b]eing is chaotic – the opposite of ordered form”, and he is “aware of the paradox of trying to eliminate form when language itself is form” (134). Furthermore, Harvey maintains, it is this viewpoint that “lies behind his [Beckett’s] breaking down of the traditional forms of language” (134). According to Harvey, Beckett aspires “to what he recognizes is the impossible task of eliminating that form…if form is considered to be order” (133).
Critics, who have commented on Beckett’s apparent frustration with words and the implications of this in his work, have often suggested that the inadequacy of language in the plays represents the meaninglessness of language. Yet, the idea that the absurdity of the situation that the characters inhabit, the fragmented disrupted dialogue, the iterations of seemingly meaningless non-sensical thoughts and ideas, all serve simply to indicate the inadequacy of language, seems itself reductive, notwithstanding the enormous exegetical difficulties facing the interpreter of Beckett’s plays. Beckett himself always refused to extrapolate any kind of ‘meaning’ from his work, and was heard to respond to different interpretations by saying, “quite alien to me but you’re welcome” (O’Hara 22).27 By contrast, Richard Begam in “How to Do Nothing with Words”, claims that while Beckett challenges the notion of text and meaning, he is in fact “dedicated to rethinking boundaries between words and deeds […] art and life” (160). This struggle with words, Daniel Albright confirms in Beckett and Aesthetics, is further reflected in Beckett’s uneasiness with technology, and is also indicative of a methodological practice. “Beckett’s way with every medium he worked in: [is] to foreground the medium, to thrust it in the spectator’s face, by showing its inadequacy, its refusal to be wrenched to any good artistic purpose” (Albright 1).28 Like Albright, Begam perceives Beckett’s artistic project as an intelligent experiment with the artistic medium itself. In “Games Modernists Play: Performativity in Beckett’s Endgame”, Begam claims that Beckett’s dramatic work “participates in a modernist reconceptualisation of the hermeneutic project, one that radically alters our notion of text and meaning” (129). Importantly, Beckett’s dramatic presentations of mis-movement are part of this project to challenge spectators’ habitual appropriation of artistic expression, significance and meaning. Although Begam focuses on the performative aspect of words rather than on physical movements in Endgame, his assertion that Beckett challenges the very processes of interpretative understanding that spectators engage in, is highly relevant to an understanding of mis-movements in Beckett’s plays. Clearly, mis-movements are part of a process, to transform “our very understanding of interpretative understanding” (Begam, “Games” 129). By analogy, this study claims, mis-movements are in part the means by which Beckett is able to present “an alternative to the hermeneutic model of exegesis” (Begam, “Games” 129).

Obviously, the manifestation of physical expressions in the plays is also a critique of the rationalist notion that perception entails understanding. The

28 As Albright points out, “[o]f course, Beckett being Beckett was less interested in what a medium could do than in what it couldn’t do—its areas of muteness, incompetence, non-feasance of transmisson” (2).
notion of language (*logos*) and the ‘I think’ (*cogito*) as defining human perception, understanding and meaning appears to be refuted by many of the characters in Beckett’s plays, who struggle to ‘understand’ the situation they inhabit. Certainly, the question of meaning is frequently raised in Beckett’s work:

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HAMM: What’s happening?
CLOV: Something is taking its course.
(Pause.)
HAMM: Clov!
CLOV: [Impatiently.] What is it?
HAMM: We’re not beginning to ...to...mean something?
CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [Brief laugh.] Ah that’s a good one!
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(TN II 586–93)

In *Endgame* Clov meets Hamm’s question with ridicule, thus indicating that the very possibility of being meaningful would be ludicrous. To the audience, however, the two characters are inevitably meaningful. When Hamm speculates about what an observer (such as the audience) would make of the situation, the audience obviously cannot but recognise in themselves the figure of an awareness: "I wonder...Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn’t he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough" (*CDW* 108). The audience, possibly being precisely such ‘rational beings’, may certainly have ‘ideas’ about the meaning of the two characters, their situation and their dialogue, as they struggle to make sense out of what is taking place on stage. Clearly, although Hamm and Clov doubt that they are meaningful, their very situation bestows meaning both upon their actions and their words. Although Hamm and Clov are undermining their significance they nevertheless remain meaningful to the audience since, as Eric Levy writes, “we construe the project of understanding to include the achievement of meaning” (2). However, it could be argued that it is not meaning but meaninglessness that is unattainable, since even stating that one is meaningless is, paradoxically, to bestow meaning on oneself. Even meaninglessness is essentially inaccessible to anyone who can speak and so is part of a cultural, historical context always mediating significance. Thus, meaninglessness inverts into the significantly meaningful, and so becomes part of a ‘dialectical’ structure of meaningfulness and meaninglessness that continually develops through the play, in the dialogue but also in the combination of movement and mis-movement that the characters perform.

In “Beckett and Postfoundationalism, or, How fundamental are those Fundamental Sounds” Begam explicates this ‘fugal’ style of composition in relation to the dialectic of speech and writing in *Company*, to suggest that

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“we can know neither the self nor the world in a prelinguistic state, these forms of knowledge are always culturally mediated, which is to say available to us as forms of ‘writing’ rather than ‘speech’” (17). It was probably, Mauthner’s ‘Sprachkritik’, Begam points out, that provided Beckett with the rationale of the collapse of cognitive thought altogether (17). According to Mauthner, language cannot grasp reality as the very notion of ‘reality’ is itself a word. Since all thinking takes place in language, “thinking dissolves into itself when the nebulous nature of words has become clear to us” (Mauthner qtd in Tonning 41). Mauthner’s “negative approach to logic”, as well as his “learned ignorance” and his “method of using language against itself” (Feldman, Beckett and Phenomenology 29–30), all sustain Beckett’s vision of a “literature of the unword” (Disjecta173). In a letter to his German friend Axel Kaun where Beckett makes a programmatic declaration that suggests an artistic method yet to be explored:

As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole in it after another in it, until what lurks behind it — be it something or nothing — begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.

(Disjecta 172)

This conviction, according to Matthew Feldman, was initially played out in the post-war novel Watt, where the descriptions of Watt’s ‘reality’ constitute precisely what Beckett set out to find, namely a methodological solution within which to accommodate the chaotic and highly ambiguous and inexplicable aspects of being (Beckett and Phenomenology 27). Essentially, it is also this conviction that underlies Beckett’s presentation of meaning and meaninglessness, as it is borne out not only in the dialectic between speech and writing, but also in the presentation of mis-movements.

In Samuel Beckett’s Abstract Drama, Eric Tonning links Beckett’s reading of Mauthner to his readings of Schopenhauer to suggest that “it is a short step from the notion of an essential ‘antinomy’ between the noumenon and the concept of knowledge to a fundamental criticism of all means of expression – including all forms of language – as inherently inadequate, imprisoning subjects in the phenomenal realm” (40). By analogy, Schopenhauer’s notion of aesthetic contemplation, as a way to escape the limits of perception through transcending egocentric willing, sustains Beckett’s search for a manner of presenting the ‘rupture’ of subject and object. Every attempt to describe our ‘reality’ or ‘situation’, then, must inevitably fail and what we are left with is merely ‘feeling’. In the aftermath of the failure of language, human beings are left with the ‘suffering of being’ as feeling, and it is towards the presentation of this ‘feeling’ that Beckett’s artistic expressions are geared.
For Beckett, intellectual understanding, seemingly, cannot coincide with the immersion which conditions perception, nor can artistic expression aspire to reveal some kind of conceptual ‘truth’. In Disjecta he writes: “[t]he time is perhaps not altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear” (94). Rather than using a coherent aesthetic vehicle to elucidate a conceptual idea, therefore, there is an anaesthetic impulse in Beckett’s work, constituted by a phenomenological, descriptive but yet “nonconceptual approach to art” (Oppenheim, Painted 93). According to Oppenheim, the need for a definition of the ‘nonconceptual’ approach to art was comparable to “Duchamp’s remark that ‘there is no solution because there is no problem’” although in Beckett’s work it reads “[t]here is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication” (Painted 93). Marcel Duchamp’s famous aphorism relates to the problem of judgment in art and dogma as the insipid source of good taste and convention. The desire to approach art without judgment, i.e. with ‘indifference’, is reflected in his choice of ‘readymades’ as a ‘visually neutral’ means to challenge audience expectations as well as the conventional concept of taste.30 Similarly, to Beckett, the perceptive ability of the human mind is a creative resource, which the artist can and perhaps even must explore.31 The perceptual realm is far more inclusive than the linguistic one and every attempt to give words to experience by necessity reduces or even obscures this experience. In the dramatic context, at least, Beckett’s phenomenological renderings of experience are thus more aimed at presenting than explaining.

The present study builds on critics who have emphasised Beckett as a nonrelational artist: Judith Dearlove, Daniel Albright, Lois Oppenheim and Richard Begam. I will focus in particular on the aesthetic design and structure of Beckett’s drama to suggest that mis-movements are the means through which the incommensurability between the artist and his occasion appears for aesthetic perception. The emphasis on embodiment in Beckett’s plays, although highly relevant to my study, primarily does not allow “the

31 As Lois Oppenheim has shown in her seminal work The Painted Word, “the unifying force of Beckett’s work lies in a visual as opposed to conceptual thinking” (123). This assertion she claims “is substantiated by the number of perceptual models apparent throughout his work” (123). Although Oppenheim’s aim is to rethink Beckett’s place on the twentieth century cultural horizon—and although she does not specifically focus on movements—her exploration of Beckett’s visual approach has guided my investigation. Clearly, Beckett’s use of mis-movements grows out of his commitment to perception. In Beckett’s view, music and art were more apt than were words to render “things being appearance” rather than stable phenomena (Feldman, Beckett and Phenomenology 44). Beckett’s critical writings also testify to his projection of a visual paradigm in which the world is, simultaneously, a phenomenon of disclosure and resistance.
body to exceed itself” as Maude suggests (Technology 135), but rather foregrounds the extent to which perception is limited to the opposite, namely the finitude of human experience.

Method and Structure

Although I do not wish to interpret Beckett’s focus on physical movement as a quest to explain ‘perception’, I explore the significance of the body and physical movement in Beckett’s work through addressing perception, cognition and expression as embodied, rather than conceptual phenomena. In the first chapter of this study, “The Artist and His world”, I survey the context in which Beckett’s writing took place to provide a background for my discussion of the importance of the role of perception in relating to the body and physical movements in Beckett’s plays. It also draws out the parallels between Beckett’s ‘heuristic’ method of presentation and the phenomenological method of investigation.

In my second chapter I explore the notion that movements operate at a pre-linguistic level of cognition, where different possibilities for conceptualisations appear. The spectator who perceives the enactment of the movements engages in meaning-making processes and so takes an active part in making the work of art meaningful. Ultimately, meaning is purely contextual and arises out of the act of perception as a sense-catching. In Beckett’s plays, mis-movements are not reducible to the linguistic framework, yet appear as meaningful in their meaninglessness—i.e we bestow meaning on them since in perceiving an object or event, we “cannot not retain the gesture of mastery, taking-and-maintaining-in-the-present, comprehending and grasping the thing as an object” (Derrida 224).

The third chapter centres on the implications of the propositional indeterminacy of mis-movements in Beckett’s plays. Mis-movements appear to the spectator in Beckett’s plays as anomalies that seemingly lack meaning. The ‘as-perception’ thus appears as a “disengagement with reality” (Seel 146), that is reminiscent of the Brechtian notion of an alienation-effect. However, whereas Brecht’s concept of alienation was directly aimed at severing the emotional from the intellectual realm of experience to provoke ‘thinking’ in the audience, Beckett’s disengagement with reality is entirely different in that Beckett’s dramatic emphasis is always on the moment of emergence, foregrounding the sensuous over the intelligible.

The fourth and final chapter of the study will apply the concept of mis-movements to a discussion of three of Beckett’s plays, namely Waiting for Godot, Come and Go and Quad. The analyses of the plays will centre on three different aspects of the aesthetic presentation of mis-movements, namely their purpose, their structure/shape and their manner of appearing, to show how Beckett’s aesthetic presentation of mis-movement is part of his effort to “assault words in the name of beauty” (Disjecta 173). The beautiful
should, however, not be taken in the sense of the aesthetically pleasing or harmonious, but is an effect of its performative aspect. Among the assumptions underlying this study, is the idea that mis-movements in Beckett’s drama are instrumental in Beckett’s project to discredit language. The concept of beauty should in this sense be understood as that which escapes reduction to a concept, namely the sensuous. Significantly, the ephemeral quality of mis-movements makes them highly suitable ‘stage-vehicles’ of ambiguity and fluidity, and so they provide a useful means through which Beckett may effectively accentuate the shape of ideas over their intellectual content.

32 In “Games Modernists Play: Performativity in Beckett’s Endgame”, Begam points out that “Beckett’s text is best read […] as a game whose performative significance is actualized by playing out the permutations and variations available within a set of limiting conditions” (129). By analogy, the manifestation of idiosyncratic movements in Beckett’s plays, and the repetition of such movements into recurring movement themes, constitute presentations whose performative function is to undermine, and ultimately to transform, our very understanding of meaning in the plays.
1. The Artist and his World

The first chapter of this study will draw out the affinities between Beckett’s ‘heuristic’ solution to the predicament of expression, and the phenomenological method of investigation. As early as in his 1929 homage to Joyce’s *Work in Progress* (“Dante...Vico..Bruno.Joyce”, *Disjecta* 21), Beckett expresses his interest in the problem of presentation and representation. Joyce’s writing, according to Beckett, “is not about something; it is that something itself” (*Disjecta* 27):

Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. (Beckett, *Disjecta* 27)

In effect, Beckett’s veering away from the linguistic paradigm towards a more direct encounter with sensuous perception is a phenomenological response to the predicament of the ‘old’ subject-object relation which has not been given enough consideration. Matthew Feldman confirms that Beckett’s “phenomenological rendering of intellection; translated into artistic terms” has been largely overlooked by Beckett scholars (26).

The role of perception in Beckett’s creative work, as Matthew Feldman suggests, is influenced by Beckett’s interest in phenomenology and was probably mediated through his study of the philosophical overviews of Jules de Gaultier, *From Kant to Nietzsche*, and Wilhelm Windelband’s *A History of Philosophy*, which he read in the beginning of the 1930s (*Beckett and Phenomenology* 24). Beckett was also aware of the work of contemporary phenomenological scholars such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In May 1938, Beckett wrote to his friend, Thomas McGreevy, that he had read “Sartre’s *Nausea* & found it extraordinarily good” (Feshenfeld et al., *Letters* 626). According to Feldman, the “basis for this praise [...] was over the treatment of the subject-object relation, rendered as a ‘no-man’s-land’ in the 1934 ‘Recent Irish Poetry’ [...]—one also central to Edmund Husserl’s construction of phenomenology—that Beckett had been engaging with from the very outset of his writing career” (*Beckett and Phenomenology* 23).

Beckett’s emphasis on the body is also reminiscent of the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty’s exposition of perception as embodiment. The idea that perception coincides with meaning is explored by Merleau-Ponty who com-
pares the body to a work of art in order to exemplify that the ‘thing’ is inseparable from the perceiver, and terms both the body and the work of art, “a nexus of lived meanings” (Merleau-Ponty qtd in Oppenheim, *Painted* 106). Although there is no evidence that Beckett actually knew Merleau-Ponty’s work, Lois Oppenheim claims that Beckett and Merleau-Ponty shared a common interest in “resituating the perception beyond the conceptual, on the horizon of bodily sensation” (100). It is therefore worth noticing that “Beckett’s own positing of consciousness, in both his creative and critical work, as a distinctly sensorial, and specifically visual, corporeality”, is remarkably reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s efforts to do the same (Oppenheim, *Painted* 100). Phenomenological theories regarding the nature of perception, then, may have provided Beckett with a ‘way out’ from the predicament of expression. Instead of writing *about* something, he could communicate the breakdown of the subject-object relation through *showing* this breakdown in his dramatic work.

Indeed, there is a noetic shift to be found in Beckett’s artistic work in which the linguistic realm, so frequently given precedence over the purely experiential, is displaced. This shift, however, is not a simple turning of the dichotomy subject-object up-side-down, but the shift pertains to the realisation of the role of perception for meaning-making, and consequently, to the manner of artistic presentation. Although I believe that the relevance of perception is important to many aspects of Beckett’s drama, it is with respect to Beckett’s essentially phenomenological understanding of the role of perception that this chapter will be most concerned.

**Beckett’s Criticism**

Beckett’s critical writings on art and literature have often inspired scholars, who have probed these for evidence of an aesthetic creed that would be applicable to his creative *oeuvre*. To seek authorial sanction in this way may seem fallacious and notably goes against Matthew Arnold’s famous directive, “it is the business of the critical power […] ‘to see the object as in itself it really is’”, that has been guiding modern criticism ever since its emergence in the early twentieth century (Leitch et al., *Norton* 809). However, as Mary Bryden suggests, “Beckett’s early essays on, and reviews of, the writing of others do provide privileged insights into the evolving viewpoints which were to underlie some of his later fictional writing” (*Idea of God* 5), as well as, one might add, his dramatic works.

I believe, with Bryden, that the selection involved even in the act of writing criticism speaks “(more voluminously than volumes) of the seer, in equal measure to the seen” (*Idea of God* 5). I therefore find it reasonable to assume that Beckett’s criticism should not be ignored as one explores his creative

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33 Cf fn 64, pp. 63–64.
work. Rather, his critical texts are highly relevant as they point to the attitudinal shift that underlies Beckett’s ‘phenomenological turn’. Notwithstanding the fact that it might be problematic to use the author as an authority on his own work, I still believe that Beckett’s comments about his own or other artists’ work, or his letters to friends in which he discusses his own work, are relevant, as they address issues about art and literature in general. I would also argue that since he directed his own work, it is possible to regard Beckett as an interpreter of his own texts, and therefore it is justified to quote him as one among many Beckett critics.

Nevertheless, while these texts certainly are fruitful to read, it must be acknowledged that Beckett’s critical writings are also imbued with a creed that goes against this very activity. Beckett ultimately stops engaging in critical writing altogether, and while it may be assumed that this is partly due to a more stable financial situation, it is also plausible that his attitude to the analytic task of criticism grows increasingly negative and that he stops writing criticism himself because he considers this task to be an ‘offence’ against the work of art as an aesthetic phenomenon. In Waiting for Godot, this notion playfully resurfaces as Didi and Gogo, in their effort to pass time, abuse each other and Gogo ‘wins’ by throwing the word “Critic” at Didi who speechless “wilts, vanquished, and turns away” (TN I 69: 2267). Lois Oppenheim suggests that Beckett in his capacity as critic is unconcerned with issues pertaining to the nature of art or with producing explanations, but that rather, his writings on art and literature show that it is “a defence against the rational apprehension of the aesthetic that impels his investigations” (Painted 66). Therefore, she continues, “[a]n honest appreciation of his critical efforts […] necessarily impedes the reductive application of them to his own creative endeavours” (Oppenheim, Painted 66). While I recognise the validity of her claim, I still believe that Beckett’s critical writings are revealing, both of his commitment to perception and of his awareness of the structures of consciousness as that which renders the work of art present for perception, and for that reason I have chosen to use them to elucidate my exploration of the affinities between Beckett’s creative work and phenomenology.

34 In Disjecta Ruby Cohn gives a comprehensive overview of Beckett’s critical writings covering roughly the years between 1928, when Beckett left Dublin for Paris and two years of exchange studies, to the mid-1950s, at which time Beckett had more or less stopped writing critical texts. The mid-50s also marks the point from which Beckett was able to live on the income from his royalties. In later years Beckett downplayed the importance of his critical texts, suggesting these were the result of on the one hand financial need, and on the other, a wish to promote his poor painter friends. Such claims, however, are difficult to accept at face value.
The space between the Subject and the Object

As early as in the 1930s Beckett’s interest was captured by something ‘new’ in literature. While in London, the Williamsons, two brothers who edited *The Bookman*, commissioned Beckett to write an article about “Recent Irish Poetry”, which he did and published under the pseudonym “Andrew Belis” in 1934 (Knowlson, *Damned 180*). The essay initially appears to be praising his Irish friends, seemingly a form of ‘poetic nepotism’, but then it moves on seriously to attempt to identify those features by means of which one may distinguish between the ‘antiquarians’ and those who represented the ‘new’ in Ireland namely ‘the others’, incidentally all friends of Beckett’s. The ‘new’ for Beckett was the “rupture between the subject and the object” (*Disjecta* 70), i.e. the space that intervenes between the artist and the world of objects which he had already begun to identify in his essay on *Proust* (1931). Beckett’s interest in this breakdown between subject and object inspires him to stake out a whole new territory for artistic creativity:

> The artist who is aware of this may state the space that intervenes between him and the world of objects; he may state it as no-man’s land, Hellespont or vacuum, according as he happens to be feeling resentful, nostalgic or merely depressed. A picture by Mr Jack Yeats, Mr Eliot’s “Wasteland”, are notable statements of this kind. *(Disjecta* 70)*

Principally, what Beckett in “Recent Irish Poetry” criticized the ‘antiquarians’ for, was the flight from self-awareness that their ‘habitual perception’ of the object entailed. His main objection thus concerned their failure to confront the ‘new’ thing that had happened, i.e. the breakdown of the object, because of their habitual acceptance of the ‘old’ mythical and historical notion of the artistic ‘object’ as something produced by a creative subject. By contrast, the ‘new’ thing in literature that interested the young Beckett was precisely this ‘rupture in the lines of communication’ defined as “the space that intervenes between the artist and the world of objects” (*Disjecta* 70).

The emphasis on a rupture between the artist and his world frequently re-surfaces in Beckett’s critical writings, together with the notion of a non-relational art and the immediacy of apprehension, which are stated, for ex-

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35 This article is reprinted in *Disjecta*.
36 In his essay on *Proust*, Beckett explicates Proust’s writing to unveil the scaffolding that supports the structure of his writing, most notably time and space, but Beckett also addresses the protective function of habit to preclude perception, the significance of memory to jolt perception and the notion that Proust’s characters are victims of, or subject to the laws and the conditions and circumstances of these constituents of life. Ultimately, man suffers from these conditions. “There is no great difference, says Proust, between the memory of a dream and the memory of reality” (Beckett, *Proust* 33).
ample, in *Three Dialogues* (1949) and in “Homage to Jack B. Yeats”37 (1954). These texts are revelatory of Beckett’s concern with the notion of representation and signal what Matthew Feldman has termed Beckett’s “phenomenological turn” (14). It is important, however, not to take the word ‘rupture’ literally. It does not mean a break that defines the conceptual ‘whole’ of the work of art as a bipartite structure, i.e. as the subjective representation of an objective world. Rather, the notion of rupture signifies a ‘new’ way of looking at this ‘whole’. Indeed as we shall move on to discuss, it is a change in attitude, and a shift of perspectives similar to that of a phenomenological reduction.38

The ‘rupture’ between the subject and object, in this sense, corresponds more to what in Michel Henry’s exposition of the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky’s work is described as the “failure of the object, its inability to define the content of the work any longer” (16). According to Henry, the work of art does not give its content as an object of knowledge, but rather it “accomplishes a discovery, an extraordinary rediscovery: it places before our wondering eyes an unexplored domain of new phenomena that have been forgotten, if not hidden or denied” (20). The work of art, rather than being expressive of subjective ideas about the world, constitutes an experience that is undergone by the spectator, and it is this experience which brings about the revelation of its content. The space between the artist and his world, then, is this unexplored domain, the realm within which the experience of the work of art is undergone.

The Predicament of Expression

The breakdown of the subject-object relation is central to Beckett’s artistic effort to ‘solve’ the predicament of expression. In a famous statement, Beckett claims that he prefers “[t]he expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, together with the obligation to express” over the pretence of ade-

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38 In order to describe the phenomena experienced, phenomenology calls for a radical shift of attitude and the term “phenomenological reduction” pertains to a set of “rules” by means of which this radical shift of attitude is to be obtained. These “rules” include: “(a) attend to phenomena as and how they show themselves, (b) describe (don’t explain) phenomena and (c) horizontalise all phenomena initially” (Idhe, *Experimental* 38). To “horizontalise is to abstain from assuming a hierarchy of ‘realities’ or rather to suspend belief in what is ‘real’ or ‘most real’ until there is enough ‘evidence’ to support a claim” (Idhe 36). This does not mean that belief in reality as such is suspended, only that “looking precedes judgment and that judgment [...] be suspended until all the evidence [...] is in” (Idhe, *Experimental* 36).
quate expression (*Disjecta* 103). In Beckett’s view, the artist, obsessed with expressing, consistently faces the paradox of trying to express what cannot be expressed:

The history of painting, […] is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism towards a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature.  

(*Disjecta* 145)

The predicament seemingly cannot be overcome, yet, in the realisation that every artistic attempt to ‘express’ in effect must fail, and in the admission of this failure, there is at least an approximation of authenticity. For Beckett, then, the “contradiction inherent in creative expression—the visible rendering of what cannot be seen—stems not from a conflict of semiotic origin (the incongruity of sign and what it signifies) but the transparency and opacity of the world itself” (Oppenheim, *Painted* 77).

Ultimately, Beckett’s notion of man is that of a “non-knower” and a “non-caner”, and since there is no knowledge, no skill, no freedom and, if you will, no ‘truth’ to be expressed, the only ‘authentic’ approach is to acknowledge failure as the inevitable outcome of any artistic endeavour (Knowlson, *Damned* 320). For Beckett, any attempt to shrink away from the notion of failure is “desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living”, all of which he seems to disdain and all of which epitomize a kind of spurious adequacy that Beckett strongly doubts (*Disjecta* 125). Bram van Velde is, according to Beckett, the only one of the three artists discussed in the Dialogues, whose “hands had never been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act” (121). Consequently, Beckett champions van Velde as “the first to desist from [the] estheticised automatism”, inherent in the artistic pursuit of occasion and maintains that van Velde is “the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail” (*Disjecta* 144).

The insistence on failure should not be taken to mean that there is a particular Beckettian aesthetics of failure that can be teased out in his work. Rather, it is “a defence against a rational apprehension of the aesthetic that impels his investigations” and this is evidenced in both his critical as well as

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39 The statement derives from Beckett’s conversations with Georges Duthuit, with whom he was discussing the nature of contemporary art with specific reference to the abstract expressionism of Pierre Tal Coat, along with the works of André Masson and Bram van Velde, the latter a personal friend of Beckett’s. Notably, although this much quoted statement is not about Beckett’s own work, it is nevertheless frequently taken to reflect his own struggle with the problem of artistic expression.
his creative writings (Oppenheim, *Painted* 65–66). Oppenheim warns against seeing in the literary strategies of indeterminacy, failure or “the literature of the unword”, to borrow Beckett’s phrase (*Disjecta* 173), any kind of aesthetic, whether visual or literary, since the very notion of enclosure, framing or definition that underlies such an approach goes against the grain of Beckett’s creative effort “impelled precisely by the lack of resolution or closure such terms imply” (*Painted* 3). However, as this study hopes to reveal, there is an ‘aesthetic shift’ in Beckett’s artistic presentations that, while tending to demote the habitual appropriation of meaning, i.e., the ‘rational apprehension of the aesthetic’, nevertheless insists that we take seriously even such artistic presentations that escape reduction to a concept. Indeed, even the quest for a nonrelational art may, in itself, be described as an aesthetic conviction.

Focusing on the correlation between subject (artist) and object (world) is a far cry from focusing on the moment of the emergence of the unprecedented. As Oppenheim notes, “Beckett’s effort, then, is to articulate van Velde’s achievement outside systems of relations assumed to requisite philosophical understanding, on the one hand, and to creative function, on the other” (*Painted* 107), the notion that the work of art constitutes the “emergence, unveiling [and] the disclosure of the unseen as seen” (Beckett qtd in Oppenheim, *Painted* 105), for which Beckett praised Bram van Velde, has nothing to do with the modernist reworking of pictorial representation. Rather, the innovativeness of van Velde is, according to Beckett, precisely his “refusal of relation in any imaginable form” (Oppenheim, *Painted* 107). The emphasis on a nonrelational art is therefore part of Beckett’s larger project to redefine the role of the artist; his interest in the shape rather than the validity of ideas; and, not least, a growing concern for the ‘aesthetics of appearing’.41

Quoting from an interview with Beckett, James Knowlson describes how Beckett came to realise the need for reduction in his work: “I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away” (*Damned* 319).42
subsequently rejected the “Joycean principle that knowing more was a way of creatively understanding the world and controlling it” (319). He also abandoned the writing techniques founded on the principle of adequate expressions and proceeded to focus on man as a “non-knower” and “non-cancer” (320). The process of reduction or subtraction, however, appears to have been gradual, beginning with a frustration with language that eventually led to a questioning of the notion of reality, and subsequently, as he came to direct his own plays in the 1960s, starting to involve more and more elements of performance, not least, then, the body and physical movements.

In the early 1960s Beckett explained to a group of sixth-form pupils in a bookshop in Bielefeld, that his theatre was poetic rather than didactic:

> For me, the theatre is not a moral institution in Schiller’s sense. I want neither to instruct nor to keep people from getting bored. I want to bring poetry into drama, a poetry which has been through the void and makes a new start in a new room-space. I think in new dimensions and basically am not very worried about whether I can be followed. I couldn’t give the answers, which were hoped for. There are no easy solutions.

(qtd in Knowlson, Damned 427)

The modernist concern with breaking away from tradition seems reflected in this statement. As an artist who proposes to think in ‘new ways’ Beckett is not worried about whether he can be followed and boldly states that his work cannot be explained. The notion of ‘newness’ bears the stamp of modernism although, importantly, Beckett does not share the modernist belief in art “as a kind of aesthetic heroism, which in the face of the chaos of the modern world (very much a ‘fallen’ world) sees art as the only dependable reality and as an ordering principle” (Eysteinsson 9). Although the modernists abandon traditional aesthetics and conventional techniques of writing, they still believe that art is ‘expressive’ and invent new conventions and regulations for this conviction to be successfully expressed. By contrast, Beckett favours the notion of ‘failure’ and shies away from the idea that anything can be clearly and confidently stated or shown. The artist, faced with the impossibility of clearly stating his ideas “in the presence of unavailable terms”, nevertheless must strive to express precisely that which escapes expression

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43 This statement was a marked exception to his usual refusal to comment on his work and according to James Knowlson, “[s]ome of his comments on this occasion were probably taken down in shorthand, as they appeared later, first in the Mykenae Theaterkorrespondenz, then in the theatre magazine Spectaculum” [in footnotes: vol. 6, 1963, p. 319 (709)] (Damned 427).
(Beckett, *Proust* 125). In this sense, Beckett’s artistic project, his insistence on a self-sufficient artwork, his anti-realistic stance and his claim to ‘newness’ can be read as an attempt to define art’s immanence against the backdrop of the transcendence of society.

Yet given that, as Adorno claims, art is always “implicitly a fait social” there also seem to be political overtones in Beckett’s call for authenticity (296). The “double character of art—something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society’s functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society’s functional context—is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena”, which renders works of art the status of being both “aesthetic and faits sociaux” (Adorno 328). Not only is art social because of its modes of production, but more importantly, “art becomes social in its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art” (Adorno 296). However, the notion of failure in Beckett’s work seems more philosophically than politically oriented. In his best-known critique of art, “Three Dialogues” Beckett asserts: “[t]he realisation that art has always been bourgeois, though it may dull our pain before the achievement of the socially progressive, is finally of scant interest” (*Disjecta* 144). Thus, although I recognise the validity of Adorno’s argument, I will not primarily analyse Beckett’s plays in terms of their status as social phenomena. Rather, it is the dialectic between form and function that they present that is the focus of this study. More specifically, I am interested in the encounter with the particular that Beckett’s foregrounding of physical movements entails, and with the notion that this encounter, “has its meaning in itself” (Seel 18).

What is all-important in the perception of artworks is not “what they are, nor what they seem to be, but rather how they appear to us” (Seel 139). The artistic expression that *is* the work of art, (or as we shall discuss later, the aesthetic object), therefore does not express anything, i.e. is not about anything, but is a ‘showing’. This ‘showing’ emerges as a presence to be experienced by the spectator: “[i]ts entire being is based on its appearing” (Seel 139). The predicament of expression is therefore, somewhat paradoxically, more related to perception than to understanding. Essentially the expression can only be defined as an appearing.

This definition of art seems analogous to Beckett’s insistence on a nonrelational art in which the notion of expression can been redefined, from being about something, to being that something itself, i.e. an experience, a presentation or an appearing. However, before moving on to formulate any claims about the significance of such an appearing, we need to broaden the context of our discussion by looking a little more closely at the assumptions underlying the phenomenological method of investigation.
The Phenomenological Method

According to Anna McMullan, “[p]henomenology aims to reflect on and articulate […] pre-reflective immersion in the world, asking ‘what the world is before it is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations’” (Performing 11). In this sense, the phenomenological investigation constitutes a breaking away from the usual way of seeing; a radical shift of attitude that is similar to that which appears in artistic presentation. In both instances, something ‘new’ will appear for perception, an actualisation of perceptual possibilities, already in the world, as it were, but hidden from perception on account of the ‘natural’ attitude’s habitual appropriation of everyday perception—as opposed to the ‘phenomenological’ attitude’s suspension of belief therein. Phenomenologically, things come to ‘givenness’ by way of presentation, meaning they appear to the experiencing consciousness in a certain way, and as Martin Seel explains, “[t]he appearance of an object is what can be known in it by way of an ascertaining perception” (45). Following this train of thought, the ‘reality’ of an object can be discerned in various ways, and this means that the “phenomenal reality of objects is located in their appearance” (Seel 45).

Contrary to this view stands the analysis of art as a mimetic or an authentic activity, created by an autonomous subject directed towards a world (object). The work of art, in this sense is founded on the principle that there is a relation between the artist an his world. However, in the ‘presence of unavailable terms’ Beckett asserts that “the analysis of the relation between the artist and his occasion, a relation always regarded as indispensible” is no longer of interest since “if the occasion appears as an unstable term of relation, the artist, who is the other term, is hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes” (Disjecta 144). Rather, what we should concern ourselves with, Beckett’s maintains, is the unstable and “acute anxiety of the relation itself” (Disjecta 145), i.e. the anxiety inherent in the problem of presentation/representation, the ‘Pythagorean terror’ implicated in failure itself. In a letter to Georges Duthuit, Beckett gives voice to this anxiety;

> Whatever I say, I will appear to be enclosing him again in relation. If I say that he paints the impossibility of painting, the denial of relation, of object, of subject, I appear to be putting him in relation to this impossibility, this denial, in front of it. He is within, is this the same thing? He is them, rather, and they are him, in a full way, and can there be relations within the indivisible? Full? Indivisible? Obviously not.

(SB qtd in Oppenheim, Painted 108)

The predicament outlined here, the notion of a relation between perceiver and perceived, grows out of a dualistic notion of the division between subject and object. The idea of the subject perceiving, situated in front of the
object perceived, two autonomous entities situated in a spatial relationship, may seem inescapable. However, such spatial metaphors—the notion of being in front of and the notion of being within—may also be used to highlight the experiential difference between the ‘natural’ and the ‘phenomenological’ attitudes.

Phenomenologically, the act of perception involves both the perceiver and the perceived since that which is given (or perceived) already entails someone for whom it is given. Moreover, what is given for perception, is given immediately, and apodictically, in the sense that, “that which is present, is present in such a way that it shows itself as certainly present” (Idhe, Experimental 33). Essentially, perception, as it occurs within the natural attitude, i.e. the kind of perception that the phenomenological attitude seeks to describe, entails no interval. However, in reflection upon the work of art, we perceive not only the phenomenon of the work of art but also the manner in which it is perceived. Described in phenomenological terms, we perceive both that which is experienced precisely as experienced, i.e. the noema, and its mode of appearing, i.e. its noesis or noetic correlate. This “correlation of the experienced with its manner of being experienced”, is what Husserl describes as intentionality (Idhe, Experimental 42).

Intentionality is thus the direction of experience within its correlation, and it has a limit and a shape; “[r]eflection is the means of bringing forth the specifics of that direction and shape” (Idhe, Experimental 47). Notably, reflection upon the work of art depends on the straightforward experience of the same, since “all experience is experience [of something]” (Husserl qtd in Idhe, Experimental 42). The phenomenological attitude is, in this sense, “parasitic on the natural attitude and all the achievements thereof” (Sokolowski 63). Phenomenologically speaking, “the natural intentionalities are valid and true”, and philosophy can only “help clarify what they are after, but it never replaces them” (63). Thus, in reflection it is this very experience that is thematised. The phenomenological reduction therefore reveals that intentionality is essentially relational, and here is possibly where the ‘terror of representation’ enters. The how something appears is revealed reflectively by way of the what, and the ego that perceives is also reflectively constituted within this field of experience.

By analogy, the aesthetic experience of a work of art can be likened to a phenomenological reduction. In straightforward perception, I am immersed in the aesthetic experience, I coincide with it, I am within it. The within that Beckett tries to stake out is therefore the condition for the possibility of aesthetic experience, i.e. the co-incidence of the perceiving with the perceived that occurs in a straightforward experience of a work of art. Yet, whenever I try to speak of it, I enter into a mode of reflection in which I thematize the experience. Reflectively, I arrive at the ‘I’ that is immersed, i.e. I enclose the perceived in a relation to the perceiver. Similarly, in phenomenological reduction, ‘the ego’, the one to whom something appears, is arrived at reflec-
tively, through that which appears. In other words, from the attending to what appears, by way of the manner in which it appears, we arrive at seeing for whom this something appears. Indivisible? No ... and yes! Full? No... and yes! Ambiguous? Certainly! But as Matthew Feldman suggests, this 'perhaps', more than anything, is what is revealed in the phenomenological investigation: “[i]n short, every Husserlian phenomenological statement has PERHAPS lingering somewhere in the background” (Beckett and Phenomenology 17). Notably, it is this ambiguity, i.e. the opening towards possible meanings that constitutes also the aesthetic experience.

The work of art, then, is not an object for experience, but is a continuous unveiling and disclosing of the world as experience, such that the “thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence [...] a coition, so to speak, of our body with things” (Merleau-Ponty qtd in Oppenheim, Painted 106). The emergence of the work of art is, therefore, not an event in which an autonomous object appears before an equally autonomous perceiving subjective consciousness, but, rather, is an endless unveiling of the ambiguous interdependence of consciousness and world, an intertwining of subject and object, in which the dichotomy no longer holds. It is therefore a concern with the very conditions of perception, i.e. how the world appears to the experiencing consciousness that underlies the predicament of expression in the first place. What appears to perception in van Velde’s “inexpressive” painting is therefore a bringing to light of “the issueless predicament of existence” (Disjecta 97), and the ‘acute anxiety of the relation’ grows out of the fact that it is in the act of reflecting on this very ‘showing’ that the presentation is vitiated; herein lies the dilemma.

Yet, the work of art in Beckett’s view does also bring light, because it “reduces the dark where there might have been, mathematically at least, a door” (Disjecta 97). Essentially, this bringing of light takes place in the work of art’s appearing as an opening onto possibilities, which, aesthetically perceived, “enrich the possibilities of human perception” (Seel 18). Although we cannot finally determine what it is that emerges—aesthetic perception does not provide a ‘solution’, hence Beckett’s assertion that the door out of the dilemma is only a theoretical possibility—this encounter with the particular has its ‘meaning’ in itself, and herein lies its capacity to ‘reduce the dark’. Importantly, therefore, art, like phenomenology, opens up fields of possibility rather than encloses in determination, and so reveals the ‘multi-dimensionality’ of perception.

Movements as Poetic Manifestations

Physical movements in Beckett’s drama become poetic images that break down the dichotomy of presentation and representation. It has been pointed out that Caspar David Friedrich’s “Two Men Contemplating the Moon” as-
sumed significance for Beckett as he wrote Godot (Knowlson, Damned 236), and that the visual source of “The Decollation of St. John” reverberates in Not I (Oppenheim, Painted 59). With regard to Footfalls Beckett himself said: “[t]he walking up and down is the central image… [t]he text, the words were only built up around this picture”. Also Jonathan Kalb compares Clov’s clearly articulated movements—“he shuffles rhythmically on tiptoe in a very practiced movement that manages to convey the idea of pain without resembling any familiar type of limp”—to “a danced abstraction of cripplehood”, which “appears simultaneously presentational and representational” (42). As enactments of physical effort, movements are inherently ephemeral, yet through the strategic use of repetition, these manifestations gradually transform into patterns of significations, thereby metamorphosing into poetic images that appear within the continuum of the dramatic work. The dramatic action in Beckett’s plays hinges on the enactment of movements and sounds, which combine to form visual images, rather than on thoughts or ideas finding expression in linguistic statements. Thus, physical movement can best be understood as a continuum. By continuum should be understood on the one hand the temporal flow of experience, and on the other, those stratifications of meaning that allow the manifestation of movement to appear as multidimensional phenomena. The idea of a continuum excludes on the one hand “complete rupture” and on the other a “mere repetition of identities” (Johnson 10). Meaning, in this sense, is relational and appears reflectively. As Beckett once commented on Godot, “it’s all symbiosis, Peter; it’s all symbiosis” (Peter Woodthorpe qtd in Knowlson, Damned 376). Beckett’s plays are full of echoes and repetition: of movements and gestures, and of sounds. According to James Knowlson, Beckett’s theatrical notebooks elucidate how Beckett in producing Godot is trying to do two things simultaneously:

First, to embody some of the fundamental aspects of his vision in the organization, arrangement and manipulation of figures in the theatrical space. And, second, by his manipulation of those figures, to create an aesthetically satisfying pattern of shapes, movements and sounds.

(TN I xxiii)

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45 For a discussion of the presentational and representational aspect of movements, see p. 41.

46 The assertion that movements are meaningful should not be taken to mean that Beckett has invented some kind of body language, or that there are specific meanings that adhere to specific gestures in the play. This is not to deny that there are many situations of communication where gestures have been standardised to convey specific meanings. For example, in sign language, specific meanings accompany specific gestures, and in different social situations, different groups share a common understanding of what a certain posture or physical response, such as nodding or shaking one’s head, may mean.
This is similar to the way in which each part of a piece of music is complementary to the others and equally necessary to the totality forming the musical score. Without hearing all the notes forming the different parts of the musical score we would not experience the complexity of the music. Drama, then, is not about poetry, it is poetry just as the performing of the notes in a score is music or the performing of movement phrases is dance. The repetitions of sound and gesture find their fulfilment as expressions only in the moment of presentation. Waiting for Godot, constitutes precisely such an effort to “bring poetry into drama” (Knowlson, Damned 230).

Godot radically transformed and altered audience expectations of what could be put onstage. Producing “near riots among a good many highly sophisticated audiences in Western Europe” (Esslin, Absurd 19), the play presented nothing to be recognised, no readily identifiable ‘tragic’ heroes and no psychologically invested plot. As the literary critic Vivian Mercier famously wrote:

As far as I know, Mr Beckett may never have been back-stage in his life until “Godot” was first performed. Yet this first play shows consummate stagecraft. Its author has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps the audiences glued to their seats. What’s more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice.

(29)

Notably, Beckett’s audiences have frequently had to find out that they are not there to understand but to participate in the poetic manifestation that the drama constitutes. All of Beckett’s performance scripts highlight the interrelationship between the dialogue and the physical movement, the costumes, lighting and props.47 Beckett’s dramatic works in this sense are lyrical pieces that, as already stated, resemble the form of a musical composition like an opera in that “both work primarily through sensation, then emotion, then

47 The impulse to concentrate and restrict the expressive elements of the theatrical space is noticeable already in Godot but becomes more effectively realised in Beckett’s later drama where visual aspects of performance predominate in minimalistic, highly abstract theatrical pieces, such as Nacht und Träume, written and produced for Süddeutscher Rundfunk (1982). The reductive strategy includes, for example, a lessening of props; a diminishing and restricting of the lighting (faint), as well as the colour code of the production (grey); a diminishing of the playing area; a tuning down of the pitch of voice to have actors speak as “colourlessly” as possible; a fragmentation and elision of dialogue, even to the point of omitting dialogue altogether in plays like “Act Without Words I” (1956), “Act Without Words II” (1959), and Quad (1982); and, not least, a progressive emphasis on the precise execution of physical movements.
The poetic manifestations emerge in the fulfilment of the physical movements on stage. They appear only as they are performed and they do not refer to anything outside of this context. These poetic manifestations are therefore not representations of intellectual concepts or philosophical ideas but emerge through the strategic use of repetition. The significance of the movements, in this sense, is inextricably fused with the manner of presentation. In other words, form and content cannot be separated but appear as two sides of the same paper. In the characters’ physical exigencies, the hierarchical structure of the dichotomy of sign and signifier, speech and writing or writing and speech, where the first category stands over and above the second, is displaced to allow for a synthesis of co-constitution. In fact, its form is unique to its content as form and content are fused in the manifestation of the characters’ movements.

Beckett’s strategic use of physical movements may therefore be seen as constituting a solution to the predicament of expression, albeit the notion of ‘solution’ is perhaps imbued with a sense of finality that ill befits Beckett’s creative effort. Nevertheless, the solution to the predicament of expression, even if neither ‘solution’ nor ‘expression’ may be the right words, unfolds in Beckett’s plays through his use of movements. Physical movements, I suggest, initially resist ‘conceptual’ appropriation and, because of this, they pave the way for a different perceptive attitude which is primordially ‘non-conceptual’ or ‘non-propositional’. As poetic manifestations, movements do not point to anything outside the context in which they appear, but find their fulfilment only in their moment of coming to ‘givenness’, in the phenomenological sense of appearing for perception and in terms of being experienced. Like choreographed pieces of dance, Beckett’s dramas present their audiences with poetry made up of sounds and gestures and, significantly, physical movements are at the core of these poetical presentations. Through using physical movements, phenomena that primordially lack linguistic reference, the spectator may be persuaded to abide in the pre-linguistic realm of perception and stay attentive to the moment of emergence, where phenomena appear before they enter into a system of signification that is necessary to any interpretation of a work of art.

Gaston Bachelard’s explanation serves well to describe the significance of the poetic manifestation:

A philosopher who has evolved his entire thinking from the fundamental themes of the philosophy of science...must forget his learning and break with all his habits of philosophical research, if he wants to study the problems posed by the poetic imagination. For here the cultural past doesn’t count. The long day–in, day–out effort of putting together and constructing his thoughts

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48 Beckett’s desire to create ‘a poetry of the theatre’, thus approximates Wagner’s forecasting symbolic vision of drama, although there are of course importance differences, not least apparent in Beckett’s insistence on failure and Wagner’s assertions of supremacy.
is ineffectual. One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears.

(Poetics of Space xv)

I am not suggesting that Beckett is a philosopher, although, by the time he compiled the *Dialogues* (1949)<sup>49</sup> he was well aware of phenomenology, but rather that his creative effort is an artistic response to a philosophical problem. Although not a philosopher and although his dramas are not dramatisations of philosophical conundrums, in them Beckett *enacts* philosophy.<sup>50</sup> The significance of the ‘simple picture’, i.e. the poetic manifestation, is primarily founded on the interdependence of perceiver and perceived, and importantly, the ambiguous contour of Beckett’s artistic project evolves precisely around the notion that artistic expression is an embodiment of perception, “in which the visual work of art comes to be revealed not as an object or thing, but *agent* of both artist’s and spectator’s seeing” (Oppenheim, *Painted* 100). Interestingly, this also draws the notion of a perceiver into the discussion of the significance of movements.

A Mediated Presentation of Reality

A theatrical performance is a *mediated presentation* of reality in which, by means of *unmediated experience*, an *aesthetic object*, namely the play, appears to be perceived by a spectator. In the foreword to Mikel Dufrenne’s *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Edward S. Casey likens the performance situation to an unprompted phenomenological reduction, when he writes: “in experiencing works of art, particularly those of a dramatic character, the spectator spontaneously withholds credence in the content of this experience as actually present or taking place” (xvii–xviii).<sup>51</sup> As already suggested, the phenomenological reduction entails a shift of attitude that leads back to “the infinite subjective domain of inner experience” (Moran

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<sup>49</sup> The *Three Dialogues* were first published in *transition* 49, and represent part of the conversation between Beckett and his friend, the editor Georges Duthuit, on the work of Pierre Tal Coat, André Masson and Bram van Velde (Knolwson, *Damned* 336).

<sup>50</sup> This is not to say that “the primacy of perception renders the fictive and the dramatic texts parables of the philosophical postulates” (Oppenheim, *Painted* 95), although this aspect has been fruitfully and expertly explored by, for example, Eugene Kaelin, *The Unhappy Consciousness: The Poetic Plight of Samuel Beckett*, and Antony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*.

<sup>51</sup> In a footnote Edward S. Casey notes that “Sartre and Merleau-Ponty disagree with Husserl as to the nature of phenomenological reduction […] for both consider reduction to be a spontaneous affair and not the result of laborious mental exertion” (xviii). However, “contrary to first impressions” Casey continues, this situation offers in fact, “only further confirmation of the parallelism in question”, since the Husserlian phenomenological reduction is attuned to appearances, and so is essentially a passive attitude in a manner similar to the theatre-goer’s (xviii).
In this sense, any belief in the authenticity of the characters’ actions or dialogue is suspended. The suspension of belief allows the spectator access to the ‘appearing’, in the phenomenological sense of ‘coming to givenness’, of the phenomenon that is the work of art. The phenomenological reduction can therefore be termed a ‘leading back’ to the structures of subjectivity and the aesthetic phenomenon is thus something that is immanently and subjectively experienced. However, although it is perfectly obvious to the audience that what is happening on stage is not ‘real’, the theatrical experience is nevertheless felt to be a ‘real’ experience of ‘real’ events. Therefore, what is suspended in the experience of art is not only belief in the ‘real’, but also the notion of art as something unreal—“in brief, there is, as Coleridge famously suggested, a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’” (Casey, Aesthetic Experience xviii).

The “collapsed distinction between the imaginary representation of reality and reality itself—the ‘theaterreality’—[…] became increasingly important in Beckett’s middle and late dramatic works” (Oppenheim, Painted 68). Oppenheim’s emphasis on the theatricality of the texts aims to explore the role of the director for the creative exegesis of staging the drama yet her comments also highlight the fact that Beckett’s dramatic work is truly “existing off the printed page and in the theatre” (Painted 2). The pun embedded in the title of Ruby Cohn’s book Just Play, refers precisely to the tension between the mediated and the unmediated ‘reality’ that Beckett in his role as author-director so fruitfully explored. “Beckett’s plays”, writes Cohn, “are just play for precise performance. They are play as opposed to unmediated reality, but play is its own mode of reality” (3). Drawing upon Cohn’s observation, Lois Oppenheim confirms that “performance, by its very nature, is, […] a mediated presentation of unmediated experience”, the unmediated experience necessarily belonging to the audience (Directing 1). Thus, Beckett’s drama, “draws on a phenomenological understanding of both being and performance” (McMullan, Performing 10).

Despite the fact that the plays are real events for experience, the dramatic reality of Beckett’s plays is unusually far from any claim to verisimilitude or ‘vraisemblance’. In fact it is simply a ‘space’, not least where stage setting is concerned; a stage barely lit and a couple of trashcans may be all there is in terms of scenography and lighting to suggest a context for the characters. Through foregrounding physical movements, however, Beckett creates a situation where the reader/spectator becomes attentive to the presentation of the phenomenon singled out for aesthetic perception. It is precisely these ‘presentations’ that come into view most succinctly in the perception of mis-movements in the plays.

On stage, language is just one of the many significant elements of the drama and Beckett’s emphasis on movement can therefore be seen to displace the primacy of verbal expression. Martin Esslin confirms that Beckett’s “use of the dramatic medium shows that he has tried to find means of
expression beyond language” (Absurd 85). Already in an early play like Waiting for Godot, we find that “action and gesture create” what Knowlson calls “their own kind of intricate balletic choreography” (Damned 230). However, as John Calder also notes with reference to Godot, the spoken language and the symbolic language of movement “work together to create a kind of attention that otherwise only music, especially opera in its higher reaches, can command” (89). Thus, ‘mis-movements’, as well as other non-verbal presentations such as, for example sounds, are equally significant to the formation of meaning in the plays.

The actions that the characters perform may be interpreted in (at least) two different ways; either “as a performance or as a ‘real’ event in the characters’ fictional lives” (Kalb 35). As ‘performance’, the movements and gestures represent the artificiality involved in theatre so that, for example, the enactment of non-naturalistic actions highlights the spectator’s awareness of the theatricality of the event. Seen thus, Beckett’s emphasis on physical movements is a strategy to break with the conventions of realism. However, movements and gestures in Beckett’s dramas are also presentations. On the one hand, because the characters’ performances of physical movements are actually ‘real events’ that present certain movement patterns to be experienced by the spectator, even if the spectator is not consciously experiencing these as meaningful; and, on the other hand, because in the enactment of physical movements, certain effort qualities appear to be perceived, and these qualities are meaningful to an audience, not as representations of something else, but as manifestations or presentations in their own right.

Dufrenne’s distinction between the work of art as an object in the world, constituted by ‘material’ or visible phenomena, and the work of art as aesthetically perceived, and as such an immaterial object which is conjured up in the act of aesthetic perception, may therefore be a useful tool to highlight the significance of physical movements in Beckett’s work. To Mikel Dufrenne, Casey suggests, a work of art is “whatever is recognised and held up as such for our approval” (Aesthetic Experience lvi). Viewed thus, a performance is “an occasion for the work to manifest itself” before the perceiv-

52 I understand Knowlson’s notion of ‘balletic’ in the broad sense as referring to the generic meaning of ‘dancing’ movements, and that the term ‘balletic’ here does not specifically refer to the genre of classical ballet, with its specific movement vocabulary.
53 This statement aims only to elucidate Beckett’s veering away from the linguistic paradigm towards a more direct encounter with sensory impressions. It does not take issue with Beckett’s preferences regarding other forms of theatrical performances.
54 For a definition of the term ‘mis-movements’ see pp. 2–11.
55 In Laban Movement Analyses (LMA), “every human movement is indissolubly linked with an effort, which is[…], its origin and aspect” (Mastery of Movement 21). Cf. chapter four, pp. 136–7.
The work of art, as an object in the world, when animated by a consciousness becomes transformed into an *aesthetic object*. By analogy, the meticulously executed gestures and movements in Beckett’s theatre, *when perceived aesthetically*, become poetic manifestations which appear as the focal point of the spectators’ perception. Essentially, “[t]he aesthetic object is an object in the process of its appearing; aesthetic perception is attentiveness to this appearing” (Seel 4). In this way the physical movements in Beckett’s work are radically *abstract* phenomena albeit not in the sense that they are abstractions or distortions of linguistic expressions.

### Aesthetic Experience

The phenomenological descriptions of aesthetic experience offered to us in the writings of Mikel Dufrenne, Michel Henry and Martin Seel provide us with a useful terminology complete with lucid and clear definitions for the purpose of analysing the aesthetic objects that physical movements in Beckett’s plays constitute. They also, by setting examples, propose an escape from the dangers of psychologising. Both Henry and Dufrenne take the spectators’ perspective as their point of reference and concern themselves with the way in which a work of art, aesthetically experienced, makes manifest the invisible realm of *Being* that is the source of art. This source is neither a historical point in time nor the creative genius of the author, but the regenerative force of the presentation as subjectively experienced by the members of the audience. Henry and Dufrenne’s definitions of aesthetic experience coalesce with Merleau-Ponty and Sartre’s in that they too emphasise the sensory, lived and felt aspects of this experience. Also Martin Seel concerns himself with what is given in aesthetic experience and points out that “to apprehend things and events in respect to how they appear momentarily and simultaneously to our senses represents a genuine way for human beings to

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56 There are many possible ways in which a performance can be made manifest or visible but at present, our concern is not with the potential actualisations of Beckett’s performances, which may be numerous, but with their status as works of art. As we, in the case of this present study, are concerned with Beckett’s plays, the work of art here refers to something clearly written for performance. However, the distinction between the work of art as an object independent of actualisation, and the work of art as an aesthetic object wholly made manifest through the temporal event of performance where the notion of performance is taken in its widest sense, is valid in relation to any other work of art. For example, the work of art that is the book comes into being through the act of reading, the musical score through being played, the dance through being danced, and even paintings or statues ‘perform’ before the attentive spectator’s gaze. Cf p. 64.

57 The view of the work of art as an *abstract phenomenon* is also highly significant to my understanding of Beckett’s notion of the theatrical performance as a moment of creation in which, with every unique performance, the dramatic text is created anew to appear before an audience. Cf section ‘performance as text’, pp. 11–14.
encounter the world” (xi). From this follows that “attentiveness to what is appearing is therefore at the same time attentiveness to ourselves” (Seel xi).58

According to Casey’s explication of Dufrenne’s work, in “perceiving the work aesthetically we are no longer concerned with its matter per se, but with what Dufrenne calls ‘the sensuous’ [le sensible]” (Aesthetic Experience xxiv). The delineation of the sensuous is important as it refers to what the work of art becomes when aesthetically perceived (Aesthetic Experience xxiv). For Dufrenne, sensuous experience is what constitutes the matter or content of the aesthetic object, which is not necessarily the same as the object qua object in a material sense:

At first glance, nothing is simpler than to say what the work of art is: it is this statue, picture or opera … But just a moment! Can we point to an opera by Wagner as we point to a statue by Rodin, that is, locate it somewhere in the realm of things and thus assign it an undeniable reality? We may say that it was created not to be seen but to be heard, whereby we imply that the aim of a work is aesthetic perception. But, having been created, it surely has the being of a thing. And what was created? Wagner wrote a libretto and a score. Is the work reducible to certain signs on paper that the printer reproduces? Yes and no. When Wagner set down the last chord in his manuscript, he could say that his work was completed. But when the composer’s job is done, the performer’s begins. The work has been finished, but it has not yet been made manifest and present. I may even possess the score of Tristan and Isolde, but am I then in the presence of the work? Certainly not, if I do not know how to read music. I am faced by a veritable mist of signs on paper and am as far removed from the work—I dare not say farther, because there are no degrees in the infinite distance between presence and absence—as if I were faced with a summary of the libretto or a commentary on the work. If, on the other hand, these signs do have a meaning for me—a musical meaning, of course—then they usher me into the presence of the work, and I can study it as does, for example, the critic who analyses it or the orchestra leader who prepares to conduct it. But how do these signs acquire a meaning, if not by evoking […] the music itself, that is, a virtual performance, past or future? Consequently, the musical work is itself only when performed: thus is it present.

(Dufrenne, Aesthetic Experience 4, emphasis mine)

This rather lengthy quotation aptly describes the way in which the aesthetic object depends on presencing for its coming to givenness. Also, the distinction made here, is a distinction between the work of art as an object in the world and the work of art as an aesthetic object accessible only through aesthetic experience. Importantly, this position is virtually identical with Beckett’s attitude to performance as a presentational event. For Beckett no play was ever fully created until it was staged in performance and “[o]nce Beckett began directing himself in 1967, staging became a full extension of his creative process” (Gontarski, “Beckett in Performance”, Palgrave 201). Increa-

58 The significance of aesthetic perception and the delineation of different modes of perception will be dealt with in more detail in relation to physical movements in chapter three.
ingly Beckett veered toward a more complex visual paradigm where every aspect of staging—direction, scenography, lighting—is written into the dramatic text. By incorporating precise descriptions pertaining to the execution of movements into the dramatic text, Beckett expands the notion of text to the point where the performance is the final text. Although, as Gontarski has suggested, Beckett’s emphasis on the creative process of performance has not been subject to much investigation (“Beckett in Performance”, Palgrave 204), it seems clear that Beckett’s directing practice had a profound impact on his writing as Beckett came to realise the extent to which a text changes in the process of becoming a performance.

As a director, Samuel Beckett emphasised more and more the precise execution of physical movements and the stage directions in the dramatic text contain very specific instructions describing precisely how the characters should move. Consider the instructions in the stage directions of *Footfalls*:

MAY (M), dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing […] Strip: downstage, parallel with front, length {nine} steps, width one metre, a little off centre audience right […] Pacing: starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L), with left foot (l) from L to R. Turn: rightabout at L, leftabout at R. Steps: clearly audible rhythmic tread.

*(TN IV 275: 1–7)*

In answer to the German actress Hildegard Schmaal’s probing questions into the psychology of the character, May, whom she was to act, Beckett insisted: “The position of the body will help you find the right voice” (Kalb 64). The task of the actor in a Beckett play is to perform the words and gestures without conceptualising them, whether contextually, historically or socially, i.e. without adding their particular perception of meaning to them. Rather, as another actress, Billie Whitelaw, who performed in many of Beckett’s plays, explains, the physical movements determine the expression: “I feel that the shape my body makes is just as important as the sound that comes out of my mouth” (qtd in Kalb 236). Quoting Beckett’s famous words on Joyce, Whitelaw asserts that Beckett does not write about something, he writes the thing itself, and importantly, “something weird and extraordinary does happen, as long as you the actor don’t get in the way” (qtd in Kalb 238). Although, as Jonathan Kalb asserts, “it is the live actor, the fact of life in the actor that finally animates Beckett’s stage picture” (66), there still remains the fact that this ‘animation’

gains expression only through the most highly calculated sounds and movements. And every bit of psychological characterization, every hint of complex non-fictional life extending beyond the simple picture, weakens the effect of that sense of pure existence.

*(Kalb 66)*
The outer form, thus, constitutes an element which is meaningful on a pre-
conceptual level of cognition. This element evokes an inner response, which
is simultaneous with the presentation.

Perceiving meaning in Samuel Beckett’s creative work is therefore not a
straightforward process of mapping signifier onto signified, presentations
onto representations. Rather, as Anna McMullan concludes, one should be
wary of “anchoring meaning in ‘Samuel Beckett’ as any kind of stable signi-
fi er, coherent identity or origin” (Performing 3). Notably, any claim to
meaningfulness in the plays is characterised by allusions to non-
meaningfulness, ambivalence and ambiguity. Meaning is only arrived at in a
roundabout way, namely through the renunciation of any kind of signifi-
cation, and Beckett’s characters are frequently aware of the triviality of their
actions:

VLADIMIR: This is becoming really insignificant.
ESTRAGON: Not enough.

(TN I 1996–7)

Indeed, what is made manifest in dialogue, and in the situations the charac-
ters inhabit, is the ‘perhaps’ that lingers between the something and the noth-
ing, between meaning and non-meaning. The notion of “Nothingness with a
capital N”, which Ackerley and Gontarski claim is central to Beckett’s ex-
ploration of expression, seems to underlie this predicament as the aporia
or paradox of signification (Grove 410) On the Beckettian stage, ‘nothing is
more real than nothing’, and the significance of this is reflected in every
single instance of expression, as well as human presence or absence, on-
stage.59 However, the ‘perhaps’, appearing only in and through perception,
while not a ‘object’ in the world, is nevertheless instantly and apodictically
grasped as something. John Calder confirms that the audience “should find
its initial fascination with this new non-naturalistic, sometimes balletic and
mimetic drama, gradually turning into curiosity and the desire to know more,
as it begins to realise the symbolic quality of the play” (91).

As poetical manifestations, the plays build on many different layers of
meanings that combine to create a dramatic vocabulary where everything
that is presented is significant. Complex structures combine to form what
could be termed poetic manifestations: carefully orchestrated scores where
each level of signification is part of the logic of continuity that pervades the
performance situation. In a sense, watching or reading a Beckett play is like
watching a picture being drawn in front of you. First one line appears, then

59 The sentiment that nothing is more real than nothing is attributed to Democritus who “as-
serted that not-being (the Void) had an equal right with Being to be existent” (Ackerley and
Gontarski, Grove 410).
another and yet another and only finally, and through moments of suspension, does the whole image appear to be perceived. In this way, the play is the sum total of its different parts, all equally important to the whole and in this continuum of significances, meaning appears to be perceived at different levels of manifestation. The movements’ singularity of significance is nearly always ephemeral and ambiguous in character. Ironically, therefore, “it is the quality of being perpetually momentary that leaves the importance of physical movements […] largely unnoticed in spite of the fact that they are so conspicuously foregrounded” in the plays (Einarsson 120–21).

In a meeting with Charles Krance, Beckett described his “lifelong commitment to writing less” and “to write things out, rather than in” (Beckett Remembering 263). Notably, the ‘writing things out’ specifically draws attention to the things that are left ‘in’. It is therefore feasible that the unusually meticulous movement directions in Beckett’s plays are part of a strategy to divest language of the saturation of meaning, or even a post-modern progressive deferral of signification, a self-conscious repetition of images that unveil the indeterminacy of meaning as such. However, it is equally feasible, and this is the assumption on which my own argument rests, that the diminishing of expressive elements constitutes a showing of the invisible dimension of perception that leads back to the ambiguous relation between that which is perceived and perceiving, and that it is this dimension that emerges and is dramatised in the plays.

As Lois Oppenheim has shown in her seminal work The Painted Word, “the unifying force of Beckett’s work lies in a visual as opposed to conceptual thinking” (123). This assertion she claims “is substantiated by the number of perceptual models apparent throughout his work” (123). Although Oppenheim’s aim is to rethink Beckett’s place on the twentieth century cultural horizon—and although she does not specifically focus on movements—her exploration of Beckett’s visual approach has guided the discussion of perception in this chapter. Clearly, Beckett’s use of mis-movements grows out of his commitment to perception. In Beckett’s view, music and art were more apt than were words to render “things being appearance” rather than stable phenomena (Feldman, Beckett and Phenomenology 44). By analogy, the meaning of movements in Beckett’s plays operates both on the level of presentation and on the level of representation and so the physical ‘expressions’ blend “into a consistent atmosphere of ambiguity” (Kalb 35). On the one hand, meaning is immediately available to us through our visceral connections with the world, but on the other hand meaning is the result of an act of interpretation in which perception is correlated with that which is perceived. Essentially perception is characterised by this interrelatedness. Clearly, Beckett’s plays are occurrences where ‘new’ meanings might appear to be perceived by the audience. Specifically, also, the strategic use of unusual movement and the way the images in Beckett’s plays build up in a continuum, inevitably invite his audience to engage in meaning-making processes.
Thus, as Beckett’s critical writings also testify, in the projection of a visual paradigm, the Beckettian world is simultaneously a phenomenon of disclosure and resistance, and it is this essentially phenomenological understanding of the role of perception that has been discussed in this chapter.
2. “What’s it meant to mean?”: The Staging of Perception in Beckett’s Plays

In the previous chapter I suggested that Beckett’s dramatic presentations of mis-movements, i.e. the use physical movements as a means to present images for perception that, as it were, frame the appearance in its manner of appearing, is an essentially phenomenological practice. This discussion was not specifically directed at revealing the conditions of cognition, but rather to suggest that Beckett is aware of the conditions that limit perception, and that this awareness underlies both his staging of mis-movements and inertia, as well as his locating meaning in the perception of the work of art rather than in some underlying meaning that the artwork expresses. In this chapter my aim is to explore the concept of meaning further, to discuss the role of perception for meaning-making, both in phenomenological terms and in relation to the significance of physical movements in Beckett’s plays. As Erica Fischer-Lichte points out, “[p]erformance is a transformative event in which the ordinary becomes conspicuous” (180), and this is especially noticeable in Beckett’s plays. The notion of what appears, thus, depends to a certain extent on how it is perceived, and herein lies a crucial point of reference for the present investigation, both in terms of seeking to avoid a limited definition of the nature of Beckett’s creative work and in terms of discussing the significance of his mis-movements. Essentially, Beckett’s staging of perception is designed to produce, in the spectator, a particular attentiveness towards the manifestation of his poetic drama.

Meaning

Human beings have always been involved in meaning-making activities.60 Societies and cultures, social and religious beliefs and practices, scientific research and, not least, the arts seem to grow out of a need for meaning. Essentially, our desire for meaning entails that we make our experiences intelligible and valuable and so we keep on interpreting and ascribing significance to the phenomena we encounter. Indeed, “[e]verything which humans

60The concept of meaning in this study is based upon on Mark Johnson’s relatively broad definition of ‘meaning’ in The Meaning of the Body. Meaning here grows from our visceral connections to life and the bodily conditions of life, and is “not just a matter of concepts and propositions” (xi).
produce is ‘significant’ for themselves and each other, because humans in principle live “in a signifying world” (Fischer-Lichte 1). Everything we as human beings say or do therefore means; ‘being’ itself means, although it may be experienced as meaningless, something that Hamm and Clov’s comments in *Endgame* imply:

HAMM: We’re not beginning to … to… mean something?
CLOV: Mean something! You and I mean something! [Brief laugh.] Ah that’s a good one!

*(TN II 591–3)*

The inability to mean something metaphysically, here juxtaposed with the impossibility of *not* being meaningful contextually, shows how even the disavowal of meaning inevitably means. Everything people do, then, is potentially meaningful, whether consciously or unconsciously performed, or perceived. Clearly, the connotations of meaning are wide-ranging and multi-dimensional and the word ‘meaning’ may be applied to virtually everything from general notions about “the meaning of life” to the specific meanings of symbols or signs (Johnson ix). The concept of meaning is therefore extremely diffuse.

In *The Meaning of the Body*, Mark Johnson points out that the need to “make sense of our experience and to inquire into its overall meaning and significance […] has kept philosophy alive since the dawn of reflective thinking in our species” (ix). 61 Not infrequently, however, meaning is associated with interpretation and understanding, i.e. the concept of meaning is related to language. Meaning in this respect stems from the act of accumulating ‘knowledge’ through the combined effort of perceiving and thinking, which produce sense-making. The knowledge we gain through interpreting our perceptions may subsequently be relocated and reformulated in linguistic propositions that we can share with others of our meaning-seeking species. In this disembodied view of meaning, only sentences or utterances are meaningful and “get their meaning by expressing propositions, which are the basic units of meaning and thought” (Johnson 8, emphasis mine).

However, as our use of metaphors shows, for example “the MOVING TIME metaphor” and “the MOVING OBSERVER metaphor”, our experi-

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61 Indeed, throughout history, philosophy has been devoted to describing and explaining the relation man-world in epistemological, metaphysical, empirical, rational, realist and idealist terms.

62 “Because spatial motions are one of the principal ways in which time ‘moves’ or ‘passes’ for us”, the MOVING TIME metaphor builds on the recognition that when “a particular time ‘passes’ you (the observer), is conceptualized as located where you are” (Johnson 29–30). Metaphorical expressions include, for example “Times flies when you’re having fun”, or “Tuesday went by in a flash” (Johnson 30). By contrast the “MOVING OBSERVER” metaphor is “based on the moving of our bodies through space […] and the motion and speed of the moving observer determine the character of temporal change” (Johnson 30). Thus, we
ential correlations, in this case between time and movement, are founded on our lived experience as animated organisms (Johnson 30). The “spatialisation of time is based on the moving of our bodies through space”, and correspondingly, we use our knowledge of moving objects to construct a metaphorical understanding of the ‘passage’ of time (30). According to Johnson, the metaphor is conceptual, but crucially, it is not “merely a linguistic entity—a collection of words only” (31). The fact that time ‘moves past us at various speeds’, and has ‘various length’, is not based “on any supposed after-the-fact similarities between spatial motion and temporal change”, but, rather, the mapping of experience to ‘meaning’ is “based on experienced correlations of motion and temporal flow” (Johnson 31). Importantly, therefore, “propositions are not the basic units of human meaning and thought”, but rather, “[m]eaning traffics in patterns, images, qualities, feelings, and eventually concepts and propositions” (Johnson 9). Thus, the notion that meaning is founded in propositional structures is problematic as it “excludes (or at least hides) most of what goes into the ways we make sense of our experience” (Johnson 9).

Opposed to the conceptual-propositional theory of meaning, therefore, stands the view, supported by “a substantial body of evidence from the cognitive sciences”, that “meaning is shaped by the nature of our bodies, especially our sensorimotor capacities” (Johnson 9). Our bodies, brains and environments together, “generate a vastly meaningful milieu out of which all significance emerges for creatures with bodies like ours” (Johnson 31). This pervasive “nonconscious dimension” of embodied kinetic meaning “at the corporeal levels of our experience”, Johnson terms immanent—or non-propositional meaning—as opposed to propositional or disembodied meaning, and it is the continuity between these modes of experience that is the subject of his investigation (31).

By analogy, part of the function of mis-movements in Beckett’s plays is precisely to challenge spectators’ perception of propositional, semantic meaning. For example, in Endgame, thinking is concrete and physical:

CLOV: Ah good. (He starts pacing to and fro, his eyes fixed on the ground, his hands behind his back. He halts.) The pain in my legs! It’s unbelievable! Soon I won’t be able to think anymore. (TN II 850–52)

Sensory impressions and physical movements are presented as experientially meaningful and the idea of the Cartesian cogito is challenged in this situation as meaning is no longer linked to thinking but to doing (notwithstanding the

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speak of “getting closer to Thanksgiving” (Johnson 31), passing the deadline, or leaving something or someone far behind.
fact that thinking might also be considered an action). Meaning in this sense is not disembodied but firmly embodied:

experience of meaning is based, first, on our sensorimotor experience, our feelings, and our visceral connections to our world; and second, on various imaginative capacities for using sensorimotor processes to understand abstract concepts. (Johnson 12)

Meaning, thought and language do not pre-exist and define experiences, but grow out of our visceral connections with the world and thus arise from experience itself. 63 Importantly our higher abstract conceptualisations “are grounded in this embodied meaning-making” (Johnson 31). We therefore must recognise “the continuity that exists between our mostly nonconscious experience of embodied meaning and our seemingly disembodied acts of thinking and reasoning” (Johnson 31).

The continuity between ‘immanent’ and ‘propositional’ meaning, described by Johnson as part of the process of conceptualisation, evokes the problem of presentation and representation so acutely sensed by Beckett, and it also brings to mind that the phenomenological project is aimed at revealing these structures. According to Robert Sokolowski, “one of phenomenology’s greatest contributions is to have broken out of the egocentric predicament, to have checkmated the Cartesian doctrine” (12). The aim of phenomenology, and indeed its philosophical foundation, is to describe the structure of intentionality as the foundation of all possible experience, i.e. to describe structures that “make possible the way in which phenomena can and do appear” (Idhe, *Experimental* 41). Phenomenologically speaking, perception of ‘meaning’ is necessarily contingent.

Also, the Kantian notion that we understand the world on account of having pre-existing mental categories through which every experience is processed, and from which our understanding of our experiences arises, has greatly influenced the philosophical discussion of meaning, and especially the notion of aesthetic meaning and artistic creeds. Of particular significance has been Kant’s effort to “demote the physical appeal of the aesthetic”, an effort resulting in an understanding of disinterestedness as an aesthetic ideal. This view also found its advocates in for example artists like Oscar Wilde and Théophile Gautier, proponents of the nineteenth century aestheticism that is associated with the slogan *l’art pour l’art* (art for art’s sake). The elevation of form over matter also produced a separation between form and

63 In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson admit that “we don’t know very much about the experiential bases of metaphors” (19), and in *The Meaning of the Body*, Johnson continues to explore the notion that “meaning is not just a matter of concepts and propositions, but also reaches down into the images, sensorimotor schemas, feelings, qualities and emotions that constitute our meaningful encounter with our world” (xi).
content, a division between subject-object that resurfaces in “various modernist versions of ‘abstract’ and ‘nonrepresentational’ art” (Leitch et al., Norton 501). Kant’s effort to delineate a “subjective universality” of the judgement that something is “beautiful” or “sublime”, i.e. a judgement free from personal tastes, finds expression in the famous formula “purposiveness without purpose” (Norton 501), and his “general account of the aesthetic as formal, free, nonutilitarian, disinterested and nonsensory was the prevailing orthodoxy for almost two centuries” (Norton 502). Essentially, aesthetic perception, in the Kantian sense, distinguishes itself in that it is “not an acquisition of knowledge” (Seel 5). Although all the powers of knowledge are involved, they are not required for knowledge, but “the subject of aesthetic intuition suspends determining epistemically” (Seel 3). Instead “the object is perceived solely in the presence of its appearing” (Seel 3).

However, Johnson asserts, “art is not a distinct type of disinterested, non-practical experience that requires unique forms of judgement and evaluation” (xii-xiii). Instead, “various arts make use of the very same structures and processes that operate in ordinary, everyday meaning-making, including images, image schemas, metaphors, qualities, feelings, and emotions” (xii). Rather than delineating a separate form of experience and judgment, art entices us to use the very same resources of meaning-making that we do in our everyday lives and so “provides heightened intensified and highly integrated experiences of meaning, using all of our resources for meaning-making” (xiii). Drawing on the Greek meaning of aesthesis or sense experience, this definition of art is entirely different from the Kantian view of art, and seemingly more closely aligned with the Beckettian manner of presentation. However, the Kantian definition of art as ‘disinterested’ does not exclude that perception can be firmly embodied, just as the notion that perception is embodied does not exclude that we may perceive aesthetically, or that whatever is given for perception is given apodictically. Moreover, since mis-movements in Beckett’s plays are designed to resist sense-catching in order to detain spectators from making habitual appropriations of meaning, i.e. are primarily functional, they oscillate between being immediately sensed as meaningful and being fundamentally incomprehensible. Thus, the complex structure of mis-movements entails that they are simultaneously both meaningful and meaningless.

The existentialist phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, affirms “the rootedness of the perceiving mind in the body and in the world” (Watkin 19), and presupposes a bodily involvement with the projects performed, that occludes any distancing from this involvement. Thus, the role Merleau-Ponty gives to the body in perception excludes “reduction to meaning” (Watkin 22).64 According to Watkin, the body in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is “both in the world and that which gives access to things in the world” (20). The role Merleau-Ponty thus gives to the body is not a simple unity; that is subsumed under a ‘law’, rather, although there is “im-
mitten, the body as a “nexus of lived meanings” cannot be reduced to a ‘fact’ or a ‘meaning’ any more than can the work of art (Merleau-Ponty qtd in Oppenheim, Painted 106). However, Idhe explains, “the existential version of the reflective turn” does not necessarily exclude the “I” or “Ego” that reflects; rather, it gives it a different determination. The “I” “remains “constantly involved with its projects, except that in reflection upon experience, the involvement is with a previous or different element within overall experience” (Idhe, Experimental 52). Thus, while to perceive is to render oneself present to the world, in the sense that we become one with what we perceive, this does not mean that we cannot reflect on this experience, or even oscillate between these positions. Indeed, among the most enjoyable parts of having a wonderful experience is the sharing of it with others, and incidentally, this is also what the work of art inspires us to do.

The insistence upon the body’s role in perception is important in so far as my argument is based on the assumption that physical movements appear to be perceived by a perceiver, whose meaning-making processes are firmly embodied and thus limited. Through persevering in affirming the significance of the body for perception, both Merleau-Ponty and Johnson, each in his own way, can be seen as representatives of thinkers who recognise the “need to see embodiment as an important aspect of all knowledge gaining and constructing activities” (Idhe, Post Phenomenology 7). This kind of phenomenological hermeneutical tradition is based more on praxis than the theoretical approaches of its counter-movements, among which may be noted the structural, post-structural or deconstructive traditions. Indeed, proponents of the latter theories seek to ‘textualise’ the world, first by virtue of “a focus upon language as a system of signifier/signified, thus displacing the speaker/speech from a presumed privilege, and secondly in the move to see the ‘subject’ itself as a kind of literary/historical construction” (Idhe, Post Phenomenology 4). According to Idhe, “[i]n the process of establishing its differences from the phenomenological-hermeneutic traditions, proponents [of text-based definitions of meaning]—including Derrida—often wildly exaggerated a presumed ‘absence’ of such elements from phenomenology” (Idhe, Post Phenomenology 4). Although Idhe names Derrida as perhaps the most radical of these texts-proponents, he also mentions Ricoeur, Gadamer and even the later Heidegger as philosophers that to a degree, speak “of a world of the text” (Idhe, Post Phenomenology 4).

minence (with an ‘I’) of touched and touching, the circle never closes in self-presence” (Watkin 21). The famous example Merleau-Ponty uses is the difference between touching and being touched, which can never coincide. Essentially, Merleau-Ponty’s body is not an object given for perception, but “a mutuality of the biological and the historical, as much as a human creation as a natural artifact” (Watkin 22). It is therefore “not to a physical object that the body is to be compared, but to a work of art” (Watkin 22).
Although my interest in perception and embodiment, seemingly, places me more on the side of phenomenology as a practice-oriented method, i.e. aimed at "describing the structural relativities between the knower and the world" (Idhe, *Post Phenomenology* 5), I do acknowledge the importance of the text-oriented focus of the post-modern tradition. Like Idhe, I believe that the ‘textism’ of contemporary Euro-American philosophy and literary theory, which has produced a plurality of perspectives revolving around “the fashionable metaphor of the text” (4), is revealing of the significance of interpretation. Much in the same way that the “scientifically constituted world is in many ways richer than its prescientific predecessors” (Idhe, *Post Phenomenology* 5), so the literary constituted world, with its proliferation of perspectives, clearly opens up a world of possibilities. Therefore, rather than seeing phenomenology as foundational in essence I believe, with Idhe, that “to acknowledge perspectivalism has always been a phenomenological conviction” (*Post Phenomenology* 7). Most importantly, although “[p]art of postmodern pluralism consists in the proliferation of new perspectives” (Idhe *Post Phenomenology* 7), these perspectives are nevertheless always perspectival, i.e. they reveal how something appears to be perceived from a certain perspective. We might therefore delineate a perspective without excluding the possibility of other perspectives. As Idhe explains, “perception can be both ‘microperceptual’, as in our sensory bodies, and ‘macroperceptual’, as in the cultural perceptions of our sedimented fields of lifeworld acquisition” (*Post Phenomenology* 7). Notably, Idhe’s discussion centres on his analysis of perception as relating to “the bodily polymorphy which gets displayed in what [he calls] uniquely postphenomenology, a nonfoundational and non-transcendental phenomenology which makes variational theory its most important methodological strategy” (*Post Phenomenology* 7).

65 Interestingly, Idhe asserts that “perception taken in a certain way, is contemporaneous with science”, indeed that the concept of perception was invented by the modern era (*Post Phenomenology* 5). By that I take it that he means, not only that the notion of perception produced in the modern era coincides with the technological inventions such as, for example, the camera and cinematography, but also that the scientific discoveries, which notably were well under way long before literature or literary criticism had begun to contribute to the project of forming perspectives, were instrumental in constructing paradigms on which assumptions about perception and perspectives were firmly based.

66 I do not take Idhe’s use of the term “postphenomenological” to delineate some kind of ‘post’ in a temporal sense. Rather, the ‘post’ is “just another way of characterizing it as different from; but owning; to its ancestry” (Idhe, *Experimental* 1). Similarly, Watkin points out, in discussing the relation between phenomenology and deconstruction, it would be a mistake to relate “phenomenology and deconstruction in terms of an arbitrary historical progression” (5). The tendency to posit Derrida as an example of a second generation of French philosophers who could be termed “postphenomenological” is therefore misleading since it assumes precisely a chronological development. Even if, Watkin asserts, “the term ‘post-phenomenological’ may be used here about Derrida, we search for the term in vain in his own writing” (5). In fact, Derrida’s deconstruction of phenomenology, “claims neither to add nor
analysis of mis-movements in Beckett’s plays does not fall neatly within the parameters of any particular phenomenological position, I have found especially useful the definition of postphenomenology that Idhe provides precisely because it acknowledges the significance of ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ perspectives.

Metaphorical Meaning

The philosopher and critic Stanley Cavell has suggested that Beckett uses a “strategy of literalization”, meaning, “you say only what your words say” (128), to show how frequently words are no longer conceived of literally but figuratively. In a sense, physical movements function as a kind of ‘crystallising process’ by means of which the experiential base of the metaphorical dimension is brought to givenness. The characters are ‘literally’ constituted by their physical appearance in the plays, limited and restricted to being in this precise way. When Nell and Nagg in Endgame try to kiss it is impossible; it is not as though it is impossible; rather, it is impossible because they are confined to existence in garbage cans. In Footfalls when May is pacing the floor, turning every ninth step (or seventh depending on the production), her mother asks “Will you never have done? ... revolving it all? [...] in your poor mind” (TN IV 277: 84–6; emphasis mine). What we see is not a mind revolving but, May literally walking and turning. According to Cavell, Beckett stages figurative clichés by letting the words actually “mean what they say” (128). The processes of meaning-making I refer to however, seemingly take place at a deeper level of cognition.

The experiential base for cognition is far greater than the linguistic structure within which this experience is given. Movements are the non-conceptual and foundational structure of our being-in-the-world and because of this, animation is the organising structure of experience. Indeed, one might argue that in Beckett’s plays, the crystallising process is even reversed so that rather than literalising figurative clichés, Beckett is in fact ‘metaphorising’ the literal, as physical movements metamorphose into ‘signs’ or symbols that epitomise the plays. Whether or not physical movements in Beckett’s plays are representations or presentations might therefore remain an

to take away from Husserl’s own thought” (Watkin 3), and drawing too sharp a line between phenomenology and deconstruction is therefore as misguided as trying to posit it within phenomenology. By analogy, Idhe’s definition of “postphenomenology” is not ‘after phenomenology’, but is, as already mentioned in the quotation above, a recognition of what is already at work in phenomenology. The suffix, thus, refers to the continuity in the phenomenological method.

For example, in the Erotic Bird, Maurice Natanson suggests that Waiting for Godot “is a study of balance. At some time or other during the two acts of Waiting for Godot, all the central characters in the play are on the ground. They fall” (Natanson 64). The falling, then, may be seen to epitomise the ‘meaning’ of the play.

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open question. Propositional meaning admittedly is as ‘real’ as embodied, non-propositional meaning. Neither is mutually exclusive or conclusive; both perceptive comprehensions “take in the object in its phenomenal reality, but each in their own way” (Seel 48).

Nevertheless, Steven Connor’s assertion that the physical body in Beckett’s drama, regardless of the extent with which it “may seem to affirm a pre-linguistic immediacy of physical presence”, still remains a “scene of writing”, is highly pertinent in relation to the discussion of metaphorical meaning in Beckett’s plays (Repetition 184). To a certain extent, both the medium of language, as well as the choreographic structuring of mis-movements, allow for the act of reflection in abstracto on the presentation. Reflecting, for example on a movement, entails thinking and/or speaking about it as a part separated from the whole to which it belongs. In the Introduction to Phenomenology, Sokolowski explains that the relationship of part to whole is an important structural form in phenomenology as indeed it has been to many other philosophical orientations (22). According to Sokolowski “[w]holes can be analyzed into two different parts: pieces and moments. Pieces are parts that can subsist and be presented apart from the whole; they can be detached from their wholes” (22–23). Whereas “[m]oments are parts that cannot subsist or be presented apart from the whole to which they belong” (Sokolowki 23). Only pieces, which can exist independently, can be called ‘concreta’, because moments “when they exist and are experienced […] drag along other moments with them; they exist only as blended with other moments” (24). Beckett’s description of, for example, Clov’s “[s]tiff, staggering walk” in Endgame, is in this sense an abstraction and not a concretum since walking is a moment to the body; it cannot be separated from the body that performs it. Although we can reflect upon the walking and speak about the walking, it can never exist as an independent part of the body performing it. When we think and speak about moments, then, we consider them in abstractum. The danger, Sokolowski continues, arises if we start thinking about the moment as a part away from the whole to which it belongs, in other words if we begin to mistake the moment for a piece, a concretum, “something that can exist and present itself and be experienced as an individual” (24).

Beckett’s dramatic presentations of physical movements could in this sense be seen as abstractions manifested both in the characters’ physical expressions and in their dialogue. In Footfalls, May’s walking back and forth across a strip on the stage, referred to above, exemplifies such an abstraction. Rather than revolving something in her ‘mind’, May’s walking is a moment to her body, each step a blend of space and time, something in between, a continuum of experience in which there is no separating the body from the mind, past from present, loss of space from gain of space, or absence from presence. This does not mean that we should start perceiving the walking as independent of the body, or of the whole to which it belongs—the perfor-
mance—or for that matter, that this abstraction has a meaning outside of the context in which it occurs, i.e. in the extra-theatrical reality.

Still, the foregrounding of May’s walking is, as Connor points out, an effect of “metonymic intensification” (Repetition 178). The movement of walking across a faintly lit, narrow strip on the stage may be seen figuratively to be replacing her missing body. Clearly, however, the conventional metaphor of wanting to be ‘elsewhere’ that we attribute to a walking like May’s, (which is similar to that of a ‘caged animal’ or to the conventional image of a prisoner pacing the cell), does not apply here. May is perhaps trapped in her habit of walking, or it may be that she verifies her existence through the movements. Yet, she can never arrive at actually ‘being there’ since walking is a movement that per definition takes a person somewhere. By analogy, Connor links the walking to the concept of repetition showing how May’s walking can never “complete itself […] never succeed in producing that full sense of being which she seems to seek” (179). Clearly, therefore, while May’s walking is evocative of meanings, we should not make the mistake of reducing her walking to merely one of its metaphoric significances, or, of ignoring in the process our sensory experience of the action itself.

No doubt, the presentation of the body in Beckett’s drama as something lacking stability, the fragmentation of the body (the mouth in Not I), its parts experienced as dissociated from its whole (May’s need to verify existence through hearing her feet in Footfalls), or as an absence evoking a presence and a presence evoking an absence (the woman in Happy Days slowly disappearing in the mound), has led to a proliferation of metaphorical readings. Essentially, these readings present the body as something that cannot be known or felt in its totality. Such notions, combined with Beckett’s well known emphasis on failure and on man a “non-knower” and a “non-can-er”, has led to simple binary models of opposition, where presence is the opposite of absence, the fragmented body is the opposite of the whole of the body. Moreover, the lack of stability of the body is assumed to correspond to the lack of subjectivity and identity of the characters. However, as Connor points out, we should be aware of how misleading these types of metaphors and representations of the body are. Rather than affirming metaphorical readings, we need to consider how “Beckett’s texts, his practice as director and the constitution of these in and by criticism, exist in a complicated inter-involvement which prohibits a simple oppositional relationship of the object and critical knowledge of it” (Repetition 186). Critics who are “content to reproduce these metaphors and representations” tend to be “misrepresenting the intensity of Beckett’s challenge to conventional placings of the body and self, and the projection of this in the theatre” (Repetition 185–6). Connor’s astute conclusion is that Beckett’s presentations actually resist such readings.
In writing about Beckett’s work, thus, we run the risk of reiterating, and so reproducing, the very same structures that lie hidden in their presentation.

However, this is not to say that we should deny the validity of the metaphorical dimension of movements in Beckett’s plays, only that physical movements are not merely metaphors for conceptual ideas, but also presentations. Arguably, these presentations may be perceived as metaphorical, but significantly, it is not what appears that is most important in Beckett’s plays, but how it appears. The meaning of movement in Beckett’s plays appears reflectively, in abstracto, through the manner in which the movements appear, notwithstanding the apodictic status of ‘being given’. Exploring the meaning of mis-movements, therefore, entails considering the different strata of meanings that inhere in performance, as well as realising the role of perception in meaning-making. Notably, it is how the mis-movements come to givenness that ultimately determines their ‘meaning’ in Beckett’s plays, not the movements themselves. I will return to discuss this claim in chapters three and four.

Perception

The focus on the work of art as an emerging phenomenon implicitly introduces a spectator for whom this aesthetic object appears and for whom it has meaning. However, perception is intrinsically limited and incomplete. Guided by habit and memory, and even at times determined by physical or neurological conditions that we simply cannot control, perception is by no means objective or ‘true’, although that which appears, does appear with certainty. Because we always perceive an object in a certain way or from a certain perspective, we cannot grasp an object in its totality and so the object always transcends the perception. There is always a specific “absence-within-presence” in that which appears for perception (Idhe Experimental 63). Phenomenologically, what is ‘seeable’, or visible at any given moment “exceeds what I may see […] and this meaning is co-present with my fulfilled seeing” (Idhe, Experimental 63). Objects appear to subjective consciousness by being presented in a certain way: “[w]hen directed at a material object, the act is always only a partial view of the object; nevertheless, it has the sense of grasping the object as it is” (Moran 118). The manifest seeing, therefore, i.e. what I see within the field of my visual perceptions is always “co-present with the genuine transcendence of the world in its presence and its absence-in-presence” (Idhe Experimental 64). The apodictic ‘meaning’ of thing and

More specifically, Connor explains, the ‘inter-involvement’ of metaphorical readings centres on the structure of power-relations in Beckett’s work, as presented in ways that both affirm and challenge many conventional metaphors of the body, and which are enacted in the repetition and reproduction in criticism (Repetition 220–21).
world, i.e. the way my perception is immediately meaningful to me, depends on this correlation between the visible and the invisible. Thus, my “perception is constantly, invariably, perspectival” (Idhe, Experimental 64) and the position I occupy vis-à-vis that which I perceive, “the ratio of manifest profile to latent, but specific, sense” reveals, by way of how things are seen, that perception constitutes meaning (Idhe, Experimental 64).

Etymologically the word perception is associated with the reception of knowledge and impressions and I use the word ‘perception’ in the widest sense of the word, referring not only to seeing but also to hearing or any other mode of sensory impression, as well as to imagining. Perception in this sense is severed from its connection with awareness and understanding implicit in the metaphorical use of verb phrases like, for example, ‘I see’. Interestingly, Erwin Straus points out that:

the numerous expressions used for optical perceptual experiences—like “seeing”, “looking”, “peering”, “gazing”, “being aware of”, and “observing”—are etymologically related to or identical with words for certain movements. The German word sehen (to see) has the same root as the Latin sequi (to follow); the verb blicken (to glance) is synonymous with strahlen (to beam), which is related to the Old High German Strahla (arrow).

Straus’ definition of perception re-introduces a sense of spatial relationship between perceiving and perceived since the idea that seeing entails ‘following’ with one’s eyes, suggests a moving object and a centre, or zero point from whence perception emanates, and also the notion of ‘beaming’ is suggestive of a spatial articulation of perception. Vision is thus attached to movement and here again we find a case which seems indicative of “meaning and concepts being grounded in the qualities and structures of bodily experience” (Johnson 31). Moreover, Straus’ description of optical perception supports the notion that perception is selective because in Straus’ terminology perception is active: “In seeing”, he writes, “we are behaving actively” (15). Even more interestingly, this statement seemingly contradicts the notion of perception explored in phenomenological terminology of appearances, where something appears to be perceived, i.e. where appearing takes place before a passive beholder. However, Straus’ description of visual perception, rather than contradicting the passive stance implied in the phenomenological description of ‘appearing’ essentially only confirms what the phenomenological reduction reveals, i.e. that how I perceive something reflectively points to the position I occupy vis-à-vis that which I perceive. Furthermore, already the notion that intentionality entails a correlation of something with something else implicitly introduces two poles of experience. In order to differentiate descriptively between these two poles we move from embodied meaning to abstract thought and in so doing we make use of conceptual image schemas founded on sensorimotor experience.
There is no contradiction in acknowledging that things do appear to be perceived and stating that perception is selective, it just entails looking at different poles of the experience of perception.

Perception is selective but that which we perceive must still, as it were, be part of the phenomenon of perception. We cannot see what is not there, i.e. we cannot see that which does not show itself or appear to perception, although admittedly, we sometimes do not see all the things that actually do appear. Significantly, we also frequently perceive more than we are aware of, but what complicates things even further is the fact that meaning is perceptually determined or, rather, that meaning is already part of our perceptions so that we perceive meaning with the same certainty as we perceive any other phenomenon. The emphasis on mis-movements in Beckett’s dramatic work highlights precisely the extent to which perception is both selective, both discriminating and inclusive.

Perceiving Meaning

The theatrical stage explicitly reflects the situation that perception is guided by a selective personal vision. Everything that happens onstage has been selected, by the playwright, (and subsequently by a director, scenographer and by the actors etc), to be part of an expression which the spectator makes sense of, through perceptive acts. Hélène Weigel, Berthold Brecht’s widow, the famous actress who originally played Mother Courage, has suggested that “creation is about making decisions, and making decisions is the reflection of a personal vision” (qtd in Howard 111). Beckett’s enthusiasm for the ‘new’ in art also addresses the issue of selection by referring to the artist who is “aware of this space” (Knowlson, Damned 181). As Oppenheim confirms, the dramatic “texts of Beckett’s plays are profoundly theatrical” and “more than those of a number of playwrights, they are written with a view to what precisely was to be seen and heard” (Directing 1).

However, although Beckett’s plays are constructions of an artistic mind, the artist’s selection of certain phenomena cannot be expected to reveal artistic intention any more than subjective perception can be expected to unveil objective ‘truth’. Ultimately we arrive at perceiving movements as meaningful in the plays, but that does not mean that we can reverse the process to find out what the artist intended the movements to mean. Rather than being revelatory of the artist’s intentions we need to acknowledge that our perceptions are meaningful to us, and that the rupture between the artist and his world, i.e. the space in which the work of art appears, is also the site where perception and meaning-making occurs. That which is experienced by the

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69 Even if we are just imagining something, that which appears in imagination is also a showing which appears to be perceived, hence we frequently get the sense that we ‘receive’ something, such as an idea or an image that just ‘came to us’.
spectator, i.e. the aesthetic object made manifest in perception, therefore can, but need not, coincide with the aesthetic object made manifest in artistic creation. The work of art creates new openings onto meanings, but since whatever is read from the work of art is read reflectively, the spectator, looking for authorial intention, will only ever come up against himself, and here-in lies the paradox of perception.

Nevertheless, the manner of presentation in Beckett’s plays shows that the spectator’s perception is taken into account. For example, the presentation of seemingly simple images effectuates situations where the ‘problem’ builds up in perception and the work of art as a ‘structure’ is also the work of art as a ‘problem’ and a ‘challenge’ to the spectator. Indeed, as Eric Levy suggests, “the Beckettian texts often challenge—or perhaps even taunt—the reader or audience regarding the task of interpretation” (1), and there are many examples of this throughout his oeuvre: What Where: “Make sense who may” (CDW 476); Play: “There is no sense in this… either, none whatsoever” (CDW 314); Happy Days: “What’s the idea? […] What’s it meant to mean?” (CDW 156); Molloy: “Here’s my beginning. It must mean something, or they wouldn’t keep it. Here it is.” (8). Thus, the Beckettian work engages the spectator/reader in meaning-making activities.70 Beckett’s drama in this sense corresponds to what Donald Winnicott in Playing and Reality describes as the imaginative realm of reality known as ‘playing’; “in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult if free to be creative” (71). Winnicott locates playing “in the potential space between the individual and environment” (138).71 Playing, thus, is the condition of possibility for the appearing of “transitional phenomena” (2, 70), i.e. phenomena or objects by means of which children take possession of their lived experiences, i.e. to designate “the intermediate area of experience” (2). While playing, the child is perfectly aware that s/he is playing, but the play is nevertheless real to her/him, and within this realm of reality, anything is possible. In playing the child may transcend the limits of knowledge. By analogy, aesthetic perception is the condition of possibility for the appearing of the aesthetic object and in aesthetic perception, we are free from the limits of determination, i.e. free from ‘reality’, and so we may transcend the limits of what we already know about the world. The spectators, who are perfectly aware that the play is not real, nevertheless through the imaginative act of ‘making sense’ are

70 It is my contention that imagination resembles the phenomenological reduction much in the same way as does the work of art. See my discussion on the relationship between phenomenology and art in the introduction p. 17.

71 Also Kant’s description of aesthetic perception as a play of shapes seemingly bears an affinity with Winnicott’s definition of playing as a creative activity by means of which our world can expand.
able to create ‘new’ possible meanings, and in so doing, may transcend their own limitations.\textsuperscript{72}

Limited Perception

The Beckettian stage is remarkably desolate and bleak, to say the least, but nevertheless, it is immediately recognisable: a space barely lit, a tree (?) and possibly a pair of shoes suffice to manifest its presence. This world is seemingly a stable and unchanging desolate place and precisely for that reason, it is very difficult to orient oneself in it. Wherever the characters go, or wherever they look, they encounter the same, which is disorienting and confusing. Vladimir and Estragon are not even sure whether they are waiting for Godot in the right place or not:

\begin{quote}
ESTRAGON: ...You’re sure it was here?

...VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. \textit{[They look at the tree.]} Do you see any others?

ESTRAGON: What is it?

VLADIMIR: I don’t know. A willow.

...

ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.

VLAIMIR: A shrub.

ESTRAGON: A bush.

VLADIMIR: A—. What are you insinuating? That we’ve come to the wrong place?

[...]

ESTRAGON: We came here yesterday.

VLADIMIR: Ah no, there you’re mistaken.

ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?

[...]

VLADIMIR: WHY... \textit{[Angrily.]} Nothing is certain when you’re about.

ESTRAON: In my opinion we were here.

VLADIMIR: \textit{[Looking around.]} You recognize the place?

ESTRAGON: I didn’t say that.

VLADIMIR: Well?

ESTRAGON: That makes no difference.

VLADIMIR: All the same...that tree...\textit{[Turning towards the auditorium]}...that bog.

\textit{(CDW 16)}\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{72} The role of imagination in phenomenology has been explored by, for example, Brian Elliott in \textit{Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger}, and by Edward S Casey in \textit{Imagining: A Phenomenological Study}.

\textsuperscript{73} Indeed even audiences may appear to be the same every evening, the same responses and the same quagmire of ‘appearances’ out there in the dark.
The sameness of the world around them makes it impossible to distinguish one place from another and to separate one moment from another. Time and place merge to render apprehension of time or place problematic. The Beckettian character can neither escape time nor can he ever catch “up with himself, either in space or time” (Hale 25). For Molloy, a character in one of Beckett’s novels, this means that he always encounters the same:

I never escaped, and even the limits of my region were unknown to me...but however far I went, and no matter in what direction, it was always the same sky, always the same earth, precisely, day after day, night after night.  

(Molloy 65)

Yet, the characters in Beckett’s plays are never “the same from one moment to another” (Hale 25). Incidentally, this is also analogous to the paradox of “whether or not parts can ever add up to a whole” (Gontarski, Theatrical Notebooks II 47), that we find in Clov’s opening soliloquy in Endgame:

CLOV: [Fixed gaze, tonelessly.] Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.  

(CDW 93)

It is in inspecting the room that Clov “senses the almost imperceptible change, the single extra grain ‘needed to make up the heap—the last straw’ according to Beckett, and it is that sense of change which provides the impetus for Clov’s speech” (Gontarski, Theatrical Notebooks II 47-48). 74 Change, thus, is imperceptibly going on all the time as also Winnie in Happy Days observes:

Then...now...what difficulties here, for the mind. [Pause.] To have been always what I am—and so changed from what I was. [Pause.] I am the one, I say the one, then the other. [Pause.] Now the one, then the other.  

(CDW 161)

The sameness of the world, therefore, is paradoxically illusory and subjectively perceived. The body is an absolute here from which there is no escape and which is also delineating space and time. Winnie seems to recognise this

74 As I suggested in “The Significance of Mis-Movements in Samuel Beckett’s Endgame”, “movement and immobility, beginning and end, life and death and absence and presence are shown to be intrinsically intertwined” in Endgame. Even the significance of Clov’s immobility changes during the play so that by its end, “immobility is pregnant with a meaning and significance that it initially did not have and which now casts new light also on the opening tableau. […]. Change may be slow but is inevitable. Change happens even if we do not wish for it to happen and no one is to blame. Performing routines helps the characters feel that nothing is changing but these very routines entail a sequence that effectuates change.” (119–20).
constant becoming of meaning: “I used to think there was no difference between one fraction of a second and the next” *(CDW* 164). Although she does not follow this assertion up, the very fact that she uses the past tense, “*used to think*”, is indicative of a change.

Beckett’s staging of firmly embodied characters, whose perceptions are determined by or limited to, physiological, neurological, social, cultural or historical conditions, also reveals how the characters’ ‘freedom’, in terms of the existentialist notion of individual freedom and responsibility is illusory. For example, Beckett’s thematisation of immobility is rooted in the notion of man as a “non-can-er” and a “non-know-er”, i.e. from the notion that man is essentially helpless and that any knowledge he might achieve is only partial and limited to the body and the situation within which he finds himself. In this sense, we are not free, and a subjectivity seeking an escape from these limitations will only make them appear all the more clearly since the very structure which makes consciousness appear is the also the structure *within* which it appears. The refutation of the spatialisation metaphor of knowledge, i.e. ‘life as a journey’, is central to this presentation. Discussing the significance of Murphy’s tying himself up in a chair, Beckett asserts:

> the heroic, the *nosce te ipsum*, [know thyself] that [the] Germans see as a journey, is merely a different attitude to the thongs and chair, a setting of will and muscle and fingers against them, a slow creation of the desire and power to stand up and walk away, a life consecrated to the possibility of escape […] Murphy has no freedom of choice, i.e. he is not free to act *against* his inclination.

*(qtd in Knowlson, *Damned* 230)*

Freedom in this sense is unattainable. Sensory impressions form the basis for cognition as the characters struggle to understand the situations they encounter, and what appears is an image of man as essentially alienated from himself, and thus incapable of knowing himself. In essence, “*how can one travel to that from which one cannot move away? Das notwendige Bleiben* [‘the necessary staying put’] is more like it” (Beckett qtd in Knowlson, *Damned* 230). Notably, therefore, the focus on embodiment is also suggestive of how suffering arises from the desire for, but failure to achieve, knowledge.76

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75 According to Beckett, “the *nosce te ipsum* is no more mobile than the *carpe te ipsum* [gather thyself] of Murphy. The difference is that in the one motionless there is the seed of motion and in the other not” (qtd in Knowlson, *Damned* 230).

76 Beckett’s concern with the predicament of artistic expression must also be a concern with the artistic pursuit of occasion, since the artist is not only faced with the impossibility of expression, but also with the somehow uncanny ‘obligation to express’ that possibly grows out of a need to understand. Notably, however, Beckett is not primarily concerned with the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ through art. Nevertheless, Oppenheim suggests, it is precisely in the need for knowledge that we might localise the ‘obligation to express’ and this points to the
Suffering

According to Knowlson, Schopenhauer’s philosophical writings provided Beckett with “a justification for his view that suffering is the norm in human life [...] and that real consciousness lies beyond human understanding” (Damned 248–49). Suffering, according to Schopenhauer, “always springs from an incongruity between our desires and the course of the world”, none of which it is within our power to control (Vol.II 158). In Godot, Vladimir’s words seem to confirm that the affective life is beyond control:

VLADIMIR: One isn’t master of one’s moods.

(CDW 55)

Schopenhauer’s idea that the understanding of one’s actions is secondary or perhaps not even accessible to human consciousness, corresponds well to Beckett’s emphasis on man as a “non-knower” (Knowlson, Damned 320), and clearly informs the bleak notion of man’s alienation from himself described by Beckett in Proust: “We are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known” (66). Significantly, in Godot, Beckett evokes the theme of expulsion, with a set of characters who are both literally and metaphorically fallen and expelled, to present the notion that suffering is “the norm in human life” (Knowlson, Damned 248).77

In Proust Beckett links tragedy to the sin of being born and argues that the root of tragedy is to be found in the situation that mankind is fallen rather than in matters related to individual choices or cause and effect:

Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of local arrangement, organized by the knaves and the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his ‘socii malorum’, the sin of having been born.

(67)

In effect, it is Schopenhauer’s definition of tragedy as the purgation of original sin, which Beckett adopts in Proust. According to Schopenhauer, “[t]he true sense of the tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his own particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence” (World as Will: Vol.I : 254).79 Moreover, Schopenhauer’s view also

situation that essentially “art is the product of need” [and] [i]nsofar as the need to know and the need to need impel the artist to create, art as a fundamental interrogative pursuit, is not after beauty but knowledge” (Oppenheim, Painted 80).

77 For a discussion of the Lapsarian notion of ‘fallenness’ see pp. 77, 115; for a discussion of the significance of ‘falling’ in relation to the theme of stasis in Godot, see pp. 115–116.

78 In this passage, Schopenhauer also refers to a poem by the Spanish poet Calderón [La Vida es Sueño]: “Pues el delito mayor/ Del hombre es haber nacido/ (“For man’s greatest offence/ Is that he has been born” (World as Will: Vol. I: 254). Clearly, these words resonate
places the desiring before the knowing. The nature of the understanding entails that the intellect is “originally quite foreign to the decisions of the will. It furnishes the will with motives; but only subsequently and wholly a posteriori, does it learn how these have acted” (Schopenhauer, World as Will: Vol II 209). Schopenhauer’s distinction between desire and intellect proposes an order of knowledge, which seems to correspond to the nature of human perception. In this way, Schopenhauer’s conception of tragedy as expiation presents striking similarities with Lapsarian epistemology with its emphasis on original sin and the need for salvation. Beckett’s staging of for example the falling in Godot can therefore be read in terms of Schopenhauer’s conception of tragedy as an act of atonement which poignantly highlights the idea of suffering as evolving out of the desire for knowledge.

In Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity, Richard Begam points out that “Lapsarian epistemology is of crucial significance to Beckett”, although this aspect of his writing has been relatively ignored due to a post-structural bias in Beckett criticism that has pre-empted the notion of “origins” and “beginnings” (10). Beckett’s characters appear to be ‘fallen’ in terms of being trapped in self-consciousness and irrational reasoning. Notably, the idiomatic expression of being-fallen, derived from the story of the Fall of man, is often associated with the state of being punished by God and rejected, as the expression ‘fallen from grace’ indicates. While I do not question this well-established connection, my use of the term does not primarily accentuate the idea of punishment, or place the notion of being-fallen as the origin of human suffering. Rather, I would like to suggest that that ‘fallenness’ in Beckett’s plays can be defined as an experience, a transitional state caused by the incommensurability of pre-reflective and reflective knowledge. For example in Godot, it is the characters’ desire to reflectively cognise the incomprehensible pre-reflectively dynamic structure of life—waiting for Godot—accessible only through pre-cognitive experience—beeing in need of salvation—which causes them to suffer unduly. It was indeed the desire for knowledge that led to Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, as it is the ‘being in need of salvation’ that expels the characters of Godot from the pre-reflective immediacy of life. Consistently trying to understand the intrinsic incomprehensibility of life, they find themselves always-in-falling—a state of affairs that becomes materially real in the expressivity of body-events on the stage floor.

At the core of Beckett’s presentation of movements, and also implicit in the notion of repetition, is the temporal flow of experience. As has already been mentioned above, there is a process of signification going on in Beckett’s plays, so that the movements can be said to be poetic manifestations, which initially do not seem to ‘mean’ anything, yet which take on signifi-

with Beckett’s definition of tragedy suggesting the possibility of its evolving out of his reading of Schopenhauer’s work.
cance as the play evolves. This process is initiated by the seemingly *formless* but particular appearing of movements that are foregrounded to be noticed, yet do not ‘make sense’ as it were. For example, the situation in which we encounter Winnie, the female protagonist in *Happy Days*, awakens perception and initiates meaning-making responses in a spectator/reader. Reflections that are also voiced by Winnie herself in her recapitulation of her meeting with Mr Cooker (or Shower):

WINNIE:—What’s she doing? he says—stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground—coarse fellow—What does it mean? he says—What’s it meant to mean?—and so on—lot more stuff like that—usual drivel.  

( *CDW* 156)

Indeed, Mr. Cooker may even be voicing the audience’s concern about Winnie’s situation. What in the world is she doing there? What is the *meaning* of it all? Is it symbolic? Is it a provocation or is she trying to make a statement? And Winnie’s own aside, ‘coarse fellow’ might wittily reflect her attitude to such compulsive meaning-seeking or, alternatively, be read as a creator’s self-conscious comment on the act of creation, as Ruby Cohn suggests Beckett does time and again: “No modern writer—not Proust or Gide or Joyce or Mann—has integrated the act of creation so consistently and ironically into his own creation” ( *Comic Gamut* 296). As meaning-constructing creatures we are attracted to phenomena that elude meaning, or are suggestive of patterns. Winnie in her mound of earth intrigues us. Her position resonates with human experience of place, but there are also numerous other possibilities that may be equally thought-provoking. Depending on which position or perspective we take, we may interpret Winnie either as “the stronger personality […] the concept of Earth-Mother—Erda in German mythology” influenced by Wagner (Calder 57); or she can be seen as representing the insulated introspective mind as “[e]ngulfed by a barren mound of dirt, she ‘in-habits’ an extremely focused spatial field” (Essif 68). Yet, when we describe Winnie in this way we are not primarily attuned to what appears for perception, but are already interpreting what we see, giving it an explanation that ultimately depends on what we *already* know about the world, and so we formulate this meaning propositionally.

Notably, Winnie in her mound also presents for perception, phenomena that are only graspable as appearances. The rhythmic structure of her gestures, the consistent separation of speech and action, and not least, the fact that she is buried to her waist (Act one), and neck (Act two), and so slowly disappears before our eyes, in this sense also constitutes manifestations of indeterminate signification. They are not merely representations of ideas or concepts but are also genuinely original and exceptional presentations.

Importantly, therefore, we must acknowledge that Winnie is also mis-moving, partly because of her immobility, but also because her words are
consistently undermined by the fact that she is stuck in the ground. The particularity of her situation, then, overlaps with the dissonance between her situation and her words: “[a]nother heavenly day […] What a curse, mobility!” (CDW 138, 158). The conflict between showing and telling as acted out through her situation inspires the spectator to stay attentive to the moment of presentation that the play constitutes. The image of Winnie in the mound appears as an occurrence of something not readily understandable and, because of this, spectators are detained in the realm of the sensuous presentation. Perceiving that which cannot be grasped entails sharpening the focus towards the presentation and since Beckett was well aware of the function of habit and the way in which perception ‘adjusts’ to the unusual, the second act of Happy Days is an intensification of the first so that Winnie’s situation becomes even more peculiar. What appears is a temporal flow of experience in which no resolution occurs. It is in this sense that mis-movements in Beckett’s plays appear to draw spectators into the aesthetic experience of the play.

Thus, I would like to stay attentive to the process of appearing itself, and to the significance of aesthetic appearing in particular, rather than try to formulate an interpretation of what the movement really means. While I do not deny the validity of interpretation, I agree with Lois Oppenheim’s assertion that “[t]he problem for Beckett lies neither with the mind in its limited capacities nor even with aesthetic experience itself, but with the objectification that thetic thinking necessarily imposes” (Painted 71).

‘Habit is a great deadener’

As Beckett was well aware, there is “no perception which is not full of memories” (Bergson 24).79 Pure perception therefore does not exist as “memories supplant our actual perceptions, of which we retain only a few ‘hints’, thus using them merely as ‘signs’ that recall to us former images” (Bergson 24). Frequently we ‘see’ only what we expect to see, i.e. previously conceived meanings, which may or may not be valid. Indeed, as Vladimir comments in Godot, “habit is a great deadener” (CDW 84). And for all the certainty of our perceptions, what truth do they really hold?

VLADIMIR: Was I sleeping while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake up, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?

(CDW 84)

79 In Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image, Anthony Uhlmann argues that Beckett was well aware of Henri Bergson’s theories about perception as interpretation.
The phenomenon of memory and habit, thus, pre-empts and distorts perception but according to Beckett, habit also dutifully performs the “continual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions of its worlds” (*Proust* 28). Habit prevents the human being from perceiving or experiencing ‘life’, as it were, but importantly the function of habit is also to safeguard against the: “[s]uffering [which] represents the omission of that duty” (*Proust* 28). The phenomenon of habit therefore offers momentary relief from the suffering that perception would otherwise bring. Quoting Proust, Beckett writes: “If there were no such thing as Habit, Life would of necessity appear delicious to all those whom Death would threaten at every moment, that is to say, to all Mankind” (*Proust* 29). As a result, living oscillates between the two terms ‘boredom’ and ‘suffering’, in which the one represents the habitual sense-less perception of the world that constitutes every perception guided by habit, and the other the momentary disruption of perception in which the human being stands stupefied before the sensation of the appearing that is inherent in the sensuous perception of ‘reality’. It is the latter that Beckett associates with suffering and, not least, with the perception of the artist. According to Beckett, it is “[s]uffering—that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience” (*Proust* 28). In George Eliot’s poignant phrasing:

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we would die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.  

(*Middlemarch* 171)

Indeed, “habit is a great deadener”, but it also protects us from the suffering that perception of ‘reality’ brings.

As human beings, our perceptions, although firmly embodied, are therefore frequently guided by what we already know about the world. For example, we perceive weight in certain objects that ‘look’ heavy, or that we have previously experienced to be heavy, and should we be asked to move an object that we ‘think’ is heavy, but in matter of fact is not, our body would be prepared for lifting weight and our effort to lift it would throw us backwards when the full thrust of our force would be wasted. If we were able to encounter a ‘heavy’ phenomenon without preconceived notions about weight it would be weightless to perception, but that is not possible in a world where gravity is essential. We therefore perceive the phenomenon as such and such, based on what we already ‘know’ about the world and about the phenomenon in question, although this way of systematizing and categorizing in fact pre-empts discernment. Yet aesthetic perception proposes a way out of this determinative position of the perceiver vis-à-vis the perceived.
Staging Perception

Anna McMullan, quoting Merleau-Ponty, explains that the incarnate consciousness at the same time constitutes the world and is constituted by it so that:

The world is constituted for the subject through perception and is already permeated by the inherited perceptions of others: ‘Each landscape of my life ... a segment of the durable flesh of the world ... is qua visible, pregnant with many other visions besides my own ... a visibility older than my own operations on my acts’.

(11)

The artistic genius of Beckett makes use of this situation, not to confirm or sustain philosophical ideas, but to stage the perceptive act of his audience. Not only are the movements foregrounded to be noticed, but even the perceptive act itself is staged.

Discussing Beckett’s concern with physical movement, Ruby Cohn notes how Beckett once told Charles Marowitz:

Producers don’t seem to have any sense of form in movement, the kind of form one finds in music, for instance, where themes keep recurring. When, in a text, actions are repeated, they ought to be made unusual the first time, so that when they happen again—in exactly the same way—an audience will recognize them from before.

(Cohn, Back to Beckett 188)

Notably, there is no necessary connection between, for example, the shape and form of a movement and a specific meaning since movements do not represent concepts in the sense that words do. The execution of a certain movement is therefore non-propositional. Yet, the repetition of movement patterns will inevitably begin to acquire meaning and so the spectator is drawn into the performance, as part of the movements’ ‘meaningfulness’ is drawn from the act of recognition.

Thus, as Stanton B. Garner in Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama, argues:

The locus of Beckett’s theatre of the image remains the audience, that individual/collective ‘third body’ (along with the character and actor) of the stage’s intercorporeal field. For Beckett stages his spectator as deliberately as he does his characters, consciously manipulating the experiential orientations of audience to stage.

(81)

According to McMullan, Garner “foregrounds an important aspect of theatre phenomenology: it focuses on the perceptual and corporeal experience of the actor/personae but also on the spectator” (13). Clearly, Beckett’s experiential
dramaturgy foregrounds physical movements as the pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual realm of experience such that the “audience are not detached observers, but rather are positioned as an inherent part of the performance, though individual spectators may resist or redefine that role in particular productions” (Performing 13):

The ways in which Beckett’s drama presents embodiment as site and condition of subjectivity, and as performativ[e], is constituted through an intercorporeal network of perception and interpretation, of interchanges between selves and others, including between stage, screen or radio broadcast and the spectator/listener.

(13)

McMullan’s notion of experiential dramaturgy as a ‘site’, and her focus on the performative aspect of language in the characters’ descriptions of their sensory impressions, is indeed thought-provoking. Clearly, the body can be seen as the ‘site’ of experience for the characters; crippled and frequently condemned to stasis, Beckett’s characters’ comment on their situation and their narratives can be seen to yield metaphysical explanations to their experiences of embodiment. Expelled from the world of the past and framed within the limits of the present, the characters seem to have lost their freedom of choice. Estragon and Vladimir cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot. Hamm and Clov cannot end but only wish for the end to come: “CLOV: Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished” (CDW 93). Their situation parallels that of the performance, which is similarly framed within its own context and not part of the world outside. Beckett’s plays in this way ‘bracket’ the world. However, the ‘site’ is not a ‘space’ in my reading of movements, but an ‘experience’ and as such it is temporally constituted. Furthermore, whereas McMullan discusses embodiment in relation to the metaphorical aspects of the characters’ ‘physical situation’, I prefer to stay attentive to the process of signification that physical movements stage in Beckett’s plays. This means that while I do not deny that movements in Beckett’s plays accrue metaphorical status, I choose to primarily focus on their significance as part of Beckett’s methodological solution to predicament of expression rather than interpret them metaphorically.

Although the plays do not display a concern with body language in a semiotic sense, the consistent emphasis on movement, the foregrounding of

80 McMullan’s definition of “performativ[e]” builds on Judith Butler’s appropriation of Austin’s “illocutionary acts” as acts that are ‘really’ performed in saying something, although to Butler, these acts are always “a reiteration of convention […] though this reiteration of convention is disguised as intentional action” (qtd in McMullan 147). According to McMullan, Butler constitutes identity “through the process of performing, or failing to perform (abjection) regulatory norms which define ‘a viable subject’ (232)”. [Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of Sex].
non-conceptual presentations, are the means by which a different spectator attitude might be evoked. According to Seel, Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* discusses how the disappearance of cognitive forms of appearance causes the spectator to “lose his way” when meaning seems unattainable (Seel 140). There is also a “lurking threat to human autonomy” in this kind of aesthetic presentation, i.e. in “the experience of ‘dread’ that arises in the loss of the determinacy of reality” (Seel 140). Yet, while such encounters possibly escape being transformed into a pleasurable experience, such as Kant envisions for the sublime, they nevertheless elicit different modes of response from the spectator. Faced with the appearance of what cannot be easily reconciled with ‘reality’, the spectator encounters what may be described as the abstract in Beckett’s work. Significantly, however, these manifestations not only resist rational perception, but also present an opportunity for aesthetic perception.

Clearly, therefore, perceiving meaning is not a straightforward activity of the mind mapping significance onto phenomena. Rather, our perceptive acts take place in a time-space from which we cannot free ourselves and pure perception, in this sense, can exist only in theory; there is always a selective process going on in perception. Beckett was well aware of the situation that as human beings we are immersed in the world and our perception of meaning is intrinsically linked to our status as animated beings. Physical movements are, therefore, more important to the formation of meaning in Beckett’s plays than what has previously been acknowledged. Through exploring the continuity between perception and meaning-making, we begin to realise that physical movements in Beckett’s plays are phenomena whose meaningfulness can be perceived on different levels. As mis-movements, they are foregrounded in performance to present certain qualities to be noticed by the audience, even if initially this is non-conscious. The field or background against which the movements stand out is, however, not the performance but the extra-theatrical ‘world’. Thus, the physical movements appear at the core of the perceptual field within the performance, but their significance, i.e. their status as mis-movements, appears against the background of the ‘real’ world. Through the strategy of repetition, the qualities that the movements present subsequently begin to acquire meaning within the context of a play, i.e. within the continuum of the play. A spectator who overemphasises the linguistic discourse in Beckett’s plays, for whatever reason, will miss out on the significance of physical movements for the appearing of what Beckett’s calls his *poetry of the theatre*. 
3. Nothing to Express

So far, I have termed the idiosyncratic actions that the characters perform in Beckett’s plays mis-movements, and suggested that these are anomalies that, precisely because they are foregrounded, appear as aesthetic objects. Ultimately, what this study will be most concerned with is how mis-movements, as aesthetic objects, encounter our senses. Notably, the aesthetic object “does not have to interest us solely in this respect (no work of art interests solely our senses), but the possibility is ruled out that it does not interest us in this respect” (Seel 139). The staging of physical movement in Beckett’s plays also suggests that there is a distinction to be made between the function of mis-movements and their potential meanings. Perceiving the incommensurable appearance of a particular artistic expression no doubt entails entering into a process of meaning-making, which in itself is an act of transcendence aspiring precisely to the ‘mastery’ of understanding that Beckett found so spurious and inadequate. Clearly, the spectator may perceive mis-movements as representations of linguistic concepts or as metaphorical ‘subliminal images’ (Kalb 34), yet these images are not symbolical in the traditional sense, i.e. they do not represent something outside of their moment of presentation. Any description of movements in Beckett’s plays focusing on them as metaphors that represent conceptual thinking or linguistic ideas, therefore, runs the risk of falling short of the richness of these presentations. Notably, the most significant aspect of the characters’ mis-movements is not that they symbolize or represent anything, but precisely that they do not, and herein lies a clue to their function.

In order to illustrate this idea I would like to turn to an analogy with music. In listening to music, we do not expect to perceive the separate notes and cadences that make up a piece of music as ‘signs’ that we try to interpret, but rather, we are attuned to the way in which the music comes to givenness, although we of course also notice the thematic occurrences and the combination of dynamic structures and notes that make up the music. Formal aspects of composition and organization are at the centre of both musical compositions and Beckett’s drama, and Beckett’s plays may therefore be seen as ‘musical scores’ rather than dramatic scripts. The sounds and shape of the body in Beckett’s plays fall short of readily cognisable forms, which means that the movements are not mimetic in character. Rather, as poetical and musical structures, Beckett’s plays are built up around, and made manifest through the characters’ juxtapositions of speech and movement, movement
and immobility, form and content. The function of mis-movements, which builds up through the repetition of movements within the time-space of the performance, is to call attention to the moment of presentation of themselves as poetic manifestations.

In this chapter, I aim to show that the cognitive indeterminacy of mis-movements provides an important moment of freedom from determination that is vital to Beckett’s artistic expression. Ultimately, the objective status of art itself, its capacity to yield meaning or Truth as it were, is under question in Beckett’s work.

Contextual Meaning

The implications of Beckett’s interest in perception are reflected in the way the body in Beckett’s theatre is “in the service of a systematic exploration of all possible relationships between the body and movement, the body and space, the body and light and the body and words” (Chabert 23). According to Knowlson, Beckett treated the plays as purely dramatically structured material and avoided discussing the philosophical resonances, ambiguities or possible interpretations of his work (Images 103).

Initially, mis-movements appear as anomalies compared to what would normally be expected in terms of human movement schemas, i.e. they appear as significant in relation to, or against the background of, the extra-theatrical context that is the ‘world’. However, through being repeated within the context of the play, mis-movements accumulate and build up their own background, not as illustrations of conceptual ideas but as formal presentations that elude sense-catching, yet are immediately recognised as occurrences of something. For example, the spectator’s perception of May in Footfalls will take in the temporal aspect of her appearance as she starts to slowly walk her strip of lighted floor while the light gradually fades up to reveal her whole body (CDW 399). The propositional indeterminacy of meaning in the gradual appearance of her figure and her movements, however, will not exclude its being recognized as an appearance of potential significance. Spectators cannot but notice her mis-moving as it is designed to draw attention to its presentation. Similarly, in Play, the more or less identical second part of the play was originally to be followed as a repeat immediately after the first, but in rehearsing the play, Beckett realised that

it would be dramatically more effective to have [the da capo] express a slight weakening, both of question and of response, by means of less and perhaps slower light and correspondingly less volume and speed of voice.

(Beckett qtd in TN IV xxii). 81

81 Subsequently, the complex changes of the whole second section were published in a letter by the English publisher of Beckett’s fiction, John Calder and appeared in Times Literary Supplement, April 23 1964:
The repetition of movements or word phrases performed with alteration of speed, as well as the changes of order of the actors’ lines, thus, was designed to shift the perspective of the audience and allow for precisely a momentary play of interrelated perspectives to appear. Although these aspect changes may not be exhausted conceptually, since their momentariness pre-empts determination, they may nevertheless be perceived. By analogy, Beckett maintained that movements, “even if they go unnoticed consciously by the audience, are […] perceived on the subconscious level through repetition, like subliminal images in a film” (qtd in TN II, 50–51).82

The mis-movements that the characters perform in Beckett’s plays are both original and ephemeral and herein lies the basis for their presentational aspect. Thus, they do not only appear “as” mis-movements against the backdrop of reality, they also emerge as something thoroughly unique and ‘new’, primarily because of Beckett’s recognition that the object of aesthetic perception need have no equivalent in the ‘world’, as it were, but also because the poetic manifestations within the play present non-representational and non-conceptual ‘abstractions’ that eschew fixed determination. Although Beckett’s artistic presentations do not display a specific aesthetics, the attentiveness to the phenomenal presence of the object, combined with recognition of the particularity of aesthetic perception underwrites his poetic manifestations of mis-movements. Through creating presentations that seemingly lack referentiality, i.e. through creating poetic manifestations that lack a referent in the extra-theatrical world, Beckett therefore seeks to unsettle spectator-perception, both in order to avoid habitual appropriation of meaning, but also to keep spectators attuned to the temporal flow of presentation that is the play. The work of art, thus, is something undergone rather than understood.

Appearing As

The poetic manifestation of mis-movements as occurrences of cognitively indeterminate phenomena builds on the recognition that we perceive and make sense of much more in the theatrical presentation than words enable us to access. Simply put, writes Martin Seel, there are “three dimensions of perception” (25):

Since although the present editions of Beckett’s play Play state ‘repeat play exactly’ your readers might be interested to hear that during the London rehearsals Beckett made a number of changes in the order of the cues so that although each actor has his lines in the same order as the light interrogates him, the light interrogates in a different order. This makes it impossible for the actors to take cues from each other but only from the light and lets us assume that on a third round many things might be different. (TN IV xxii)

82 In Images of Beckett, James Knowlson deals at greater length with Beckett’s interest in the silent screen.
Every living being who can perceive possesses the capacity for the perceiving of something, only beings who can know conceptually have the capacity for perceiving that, which is present only in connection with the capacity for perceiving us.

(Seel 25)

Although human beings have the capacity for the perceiving of, as well as the conceptualising perceiving that, importantly their perception is characterised by their capacity to “disengage themselves from any theoretically or practically determined directive as to what their perception is a perception of” (Seel 25).

According to Seel, however, works of art are different from ‘mere’ presentations or ‘aesthetic’ presentations because they are “constellational presentations”, i.e. “their meaning is tied to a nonsubstitutable rendering of their material—nonsubstitutable in the sense of not being replaceable by any other combination of elements” (Seel 95). Essentially, “works of art are objects that need to be understood in their performative intent” (96). This understanding “generally unfolds in the context of an interpretative, an imaginative, and occasionally a reflective disclosure of artistic objects” (Seel 96). By contrast, I may aesthetically contemplate the sunset or deem the measured highly technical skills of an athlete’s performance aesthetic. Notably, even such objects appear in a certain atmospheric ‘sense-catching’, i.e. they may appear to be intuited in their “existential significance to the perceivers” (92). However, works of art “produce a special presence and present a special presence”, because they are aesthetic constellations, and it is only “through attentiveness to the constellations of this presentation that we can participate in the constellations presented by the artistic work” (Seel 97).

By analogy, the aspect changes that open up through the focus on mis-movement do so only when the carefully structured dramas are performed in a certain way; hence Beckett’s insistence that the stage directions be followed and his frequent allusions to the performance as text. It must also be noted that these aspect changes are not mutually exclusive but occur in a continuum, in which repetition amounts to a kind of looping of words and movements, and where these presentations, through repetition, become something of a different order in a manner similar to how the sound emanating from the needle at the end of an LP-record that just continues to go on slowly accrues a significance of its own; or the soft touch of a caress that slowly repeated may grow to be unendurable; or the meaningless ‘noise’ that slowly grows to be significant only to fall back into obtrusiveness again, or the significance of imperceptible change.

Perceiving aesthetically is, therefore, not just a matter of ‘seeing’, but rather, entails paying attention to “a feature diversity of objects that cannot be exhausted conceptually” (Seel 27). In perceiving mis-movements aesthetically, we are attentive to the “phenomenal presence” and individuality of
these phenomena in their momentariness (Seel 25–26). Qualitative differences in the performance of mis-movements in this sense appear for perception as non-conceptual or non-cognitive phenomena. It is not that these qualities or nuances, of, for example, effort or duration, cannot be distinguished, but in perceiving them aesthetically, we focus on the aspect changes of the phenomena to take in “[e]verything together” (Seel 27). Thus, encountering mis-movements in Beckett’s plays, we perceive the interplay between conceptually inaccessible nuances and qualities as they appear in each ‘here and now’, i.e. in this light, from this perspective or from this change of perspective.

In a sense, Beckett’s mis-movements challenge the disembodied view of meaning that places meaning and understanding solely in thoughts and language, and so constitutes a momentary sovereign domain of experience. By analogy, Kant believed that aesthetic perception constituted “an important moment of freedom, virtually a proof of freedom” (Seel 140). In perceiving aesthetically, we may attend to the particular without having to understand it. Thus we may forego “the theoretical and practical treatment of the world” (Seel 140). The liberation arising from these insights includes the freedom from convention that Beckett hopes to have achieved. In an interview with John Gruen published in Vogue December 1969, Beckett claimed to ‘perhaps’ have freed himself from the dilemma of formal concepts:

I think perhaps I have freed myself from certain formal concepts. Perhaps, like the composer Schoenberg or the painter Kandinsky, I have turned toward an abstract language. Unlike them, however, I have tried not to concretize the abstraction—not to give it yet another formal context.

(qtd in Oppenheim, Painted 126)

In Beckett’s plays, the abstract is foregrounded, not as an abstraction of the concrete, but as a shapeless and inexplicable presentation that blends with the concreteness and directedness of shape and form. The incomprehensible presentation of an illuminated mouth hovering mid-air in Not I, the visually arresting image of the three incarcerated heads in Play, or the strictly choreographed, repetitive entrances and exists of the four players in Quad, may serve as examples of this. In James Knowlson’s words, “Beckett’s talent consisted of breaking reality and placing it in abstraction” (Images 95). Kandinsky’s definition of the abstract posits the abstract, not in opposition to something visible, but within the affective realm of radical subjectivity and Beckett’s abstract presentations approach Kandinsky’s notion of abstraction in that they seek to distil the emotional content of the images. However, already the notion of presentation seems to “set up a tension between abstraction and iconography” (Oppenheim, Painted 126). Therefore, in order not to concretise these abstractions, as he thought Kandinsky and Schoenberg did, Beckett emphasised ambiguity and vagueness.
According to Michel Henry, the dominante view of art has linked painting to *mimesis* and to the act of copying the visible, external world. The term abstract, however, traditionally refers to conceptual or theoretical structures of cognition derived from perception of the visible concrete world (Henry 12). Thus, the abstract, for example in the sense of a geometrical concept of a circle, takes its departure from the world as it is derived from a sensible and tangible form, i.e. a round thing. The abstract geometrical concept of the circle therefore maintains the visible exteriority of the world and only seemingly does it sever the connection between the concrete and the abstract. For example, “Mondrian’s or Malevich’s pure abstraction is precisely a geometrical abstraction, an abstraction which comes from the world and gets its nature from the world while at the same time seeking to formulate its essence” (Henry 14). In Michel Henry’s explication of Kandinsky’s work, the notion ‘abstract’ is markedly different from the traditional definition of the term. According to Henry, “the abstraction that releases the creative genius of Kandinsky has nothing to do with the type of abstraction that has dominated the history of artistic creation starting from the second decade of the twentieth century and periodically returns under various guises” (14). Rather, Kandinsky’s use of the term reveals that for him “the connection between the painting, the eye, and the visible is undone” (x). Thus, Kandinsky’s paintings, Henry claims, are really ‘abstract’, which is to say “freed from any adherence to the external, visible world” (ix). Abstraction, both to Kandinsky and to Beckett, makes manifest what essentially has no equivalent in the objective world of “actual” phenomena and so provides a way out of the dilemma of mimetic representation. Yet, as Beckett’s qualifying remark about Schoenberg’s and Kandinsky’s abstractions shows, the notion of abstraction in Beckett’s work only partially coalesces with the latter’s. While Beckett sympathises with Kandinsky’s project, he is also highly critical of its subjectivist stance. As Eric Tonning confirms “the problem with Kandinsky’s art for Beckett lies in what he sees as the painter’s incipient attempt to transcend the ‘rupture of the lines of communication’ between subject and object altogether, leading him to a plane of fantasy” (67). Despite the fact that abstraction in Beckett’s work bears an affinity to the notion of the abstract in Kandinsky’s work—both realize the role of perception in aesthetic experience and both emphasize the breakdown of the object—Beckett’s notion of abstraction does not sustain a belief in some kind of “Truth”.83

In his theoretical writings on art, Kandinsky carefully describes the ‘meanings’ of, for example, colours, points and lines, and perhaps, one of the reasons why Beckett seems to deem Kandinsky’s notion of abstraction too concrete, can be found in this effort to explain. Kandinsky also extends the

83 In “Beckett and Abstraction” I also explore Beckett’s use of ‘abstraction’ as evolving out of the recognition of the role of perception in aesthetic experience (“Beckett and Abstraction”; in V.1 [special issue, Beckett/Philosophy] (2011): 251–264).
same analysis to graphic forms, “a form—such as a point or a line—is not primarily the outline of an external body” but “the expression of a specific type of force” (Henry xi). In either case, the ‘external’ aspect of these expressions disappears from perception allowing the ‘invisible’ aspect to appear. Since the link between mimetic representations and the world appears to be broken, it cannot be the visible external aspect of the phenomenon that is appearing, but its invisible counterpart. One therefore must not assume that the medium used necessarily highlights itself *qua medium*. Rather, just as the body, as the means by which human beings access the world, recedes from perception in perception, i.e. is concealed in the act of perceiving (Leder 11), so does the very medium by means of which the art presents.\(^{84}\) Therefore, since what appears to be perceived depends on the *how* of its appearing, one may begin to understand why Beckett was so exacting about his dramatic presentations. Given that, as Matthew Feldman has suggested, Beckett had a ‘phenomenological turn’, the consequences of perception for artistic presentation must have had a profound effect on his perception of art (14). Tellingly, Beckett’s own productions “do bring into full actuality ideas about staging that he had while writing yet left unsaid in the published plays” (Kalb 37).

### Choreographic Concerns

Whereas frequently in the theatre, the body is an unobtrusive ‘given’ which does not deliberately vary in performance (Chabert 23), the body and its movements in Beckett’s theatre is conspicuously foregrounded in order to be noticed. In traditional drama, the body is “only a mediator, something that wore a costume and provided a voice”, yet in the fifties the body becomes the “actual subject of many plays” (Hubert 55). However, writes Katherine M. Gray, “the exploration of a unified subject whose motivations for action are accessible through some brand of psychology is not what Beckett presents—indeed, it is part of what he challenges” (1). Beckett “eschewed naturalism” (Knowlson, *Images* 108), and his emphasis on the body in performance has partly been recognized as an “effort to do away with the familiar personality-driven, desiring character of Aristotelian theatre” (Gray 1).\(^{85}\) Naturalistic movements were avoided and instead Beckett emphasised that the characters were to perform their movements in a “machine-like manner”, focusing more on the rhythmical features of the expression and the toneless-

\(^{84}\) Notably, there are also works of art that endeavour to highlight precisely their means of expression and, for example, one might claim that this is what the symbolist movement did, which is one of the reasons why it is difficult to label Beckett a symbolist. See discussion below pp. 93–98.

\(^{85}\) Katherine M. Gray uses Judith Butler’s tripartite categorisation of the body to distinguish between three distinct identity functions of the body in Beckett’s theatre, i.e. as “factic”, “performative” and “material” body (3).
ness of the voice: “[m]any actors and directors who worked with Beckett spoke of his tendency to dehumanise the actors in his plays” (Knowlson Images 109). Through mis-moving, and through repeatedly enacted carefully choreographed movement phrases, i.e. physical themes, Beckett found a means to prevent spectators from “successfully following through with [their] usual habits of objectifying the human body, of giving it the stable historical and psychological identity that makes coherent character” (Gray 1).

Beckett’s theatre, therefore, does not represent ‘real’ human beings having ‘real’ psychological motivations and desires. For example, in a production at the Schiller-Theater in 1971, when Beckett directed Happy Days for the first time, he concentrated on the precision, rhythm and timing of the actress Eva-Katharina Schultz’ movements, emphasising that “precision and economy would produce the maximum of grace” (Knowlson, Damned 517). By accentuating highly stylised and ‘artificial’ movement patterns Beckett manages to eschew traditional ‘realism’ and allow his own super-realist and highly ambiguous presentations to emerge in which “[t]he liberation of the actor from the concept of character is [...] complete” (Albright 25).

What I have chosen to term Beckett’s mis-movements was in part inspired by Heinrich von Kleist’s essay “Über das Marionettentheater”, a text by which Beckett was very impressed. James Knowlson has pointed out that “Kleist’s essay expressed some of SB’s deepest aesthetic aspirations” (Gontarski, Grove 470). According to Knowlson, Beckett was fascinated by the idea that the “puppets possess a mobility, symmetry, harmony, and grace greater than any human dancer (or a fortiori any actor) can possibly achieve, because they lack the self-consciousness that puts human beings permanently off-balance” (Knowlson, Damned 558). Kleist’s essay describes a young man who suddenly becomes aware that his movements are beautiful and harmonious, and from that point on he no longer moves with the same grace since self-consciousness affects his movements.

Kleist’s notion about lack of self-awareness breaks the link to the realist drama’s psychologically motivated acting. Clearly, that a character should have to feign psychological motivation may seem naïve since on stage, “values have not to be possessed to be pictured” as “this is done by selection and formulation of appropriate effort qualities” (Laban 9). In Happy Days we may nevertheless perceive Winnie’s remark about the umbrella as an instance of the psychological need to act:

WINNIE: Holding up wears the arm. [...] I am weary holding it up, and I cannot put it down. [Pause.] [...] Reason says, Put it down, Winnie, it is not

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86 I describe them as ‘super-realist’ because they lack the self-conscious ‘coating’ that the ‘acting’ approach would render them. Thus, these manifestations are ‘more real’ than psychologically feigned actions that actors produce.
helping you, put the thing down and get on with something else. [Pause.] I cannot. [Pause.] I cannot move. [Pause.] No, something must happen, in the world, take place, some change, I cannot, if I am to move again. (CDW 153)

Yet, in Beckett’s theatre, and especially in the late plays, any “psychological condition develops from the physical one” rather than the other way around (Kalb 148). The emphasis on the precise execution of physical movements demands the full attention of the actor who is thereby, more or less, required to ‘give up acting’ and just ‘perform’ the text. According to Billie Whitelaw, “Beckett doesn’t write about something—about an emotion, about some old lady rocking herself to possible death in her chair—he actually writes it, he writes the thing itself” (Kalb 238). By analogy, David Warrilow, relating his experience of performing in Ohio Impromptu confesses:

When I’m being totally honest I have to tell audiences that I do not understand what it is I am doing. I don’t understand the writing. I’m not a stupid person, but if somebody were to say to me, “What is Ohio Impromptu about?” I either cannot give a true answer or I don’t want to. I don’t know quite which it is. I think it really is, I can’t. I don’t know. […]My experience of that piece is that there are questions but no answers to any of them, that is on a level of mysteriousness which defies entry except on a soul level. The questions I have, the sort of academic questions—Who is this person? What is this book? What is this story? What is taking place? How many times has it taken place?—none of them is answered. There are no answers to those things. One can make assumptions, but those are only assumptions, that’s all. It’s just like opinion. (Kalb 59)

According to Jonathan Kalb, both Warrilow’s concern with the “theatrical effectiveness”, honed through attention to the musical structure of the text rather than to the story, and Whitelaw’s assertion that “something weird and extraordinary does happen, as long as you the actor don’t get in the way”, are examples of how “a certain kind of acting significantly affects and effects meaning in these works” (Kalb 238). By contrast, Alvin Epstein insists that, “the mind becomes engaged in the play’s uncertainties, despite other’s claim to the contrary” (Kalb 59). According to Esptein, actors need to identify with the character and consequently he rejects the idea that actors performing in Beckett’s should not need to “retain at least the fundamental framework of the Stanislavsky system” (Kalb 59).

David Warrilow and Billie Whitelaw’s approach to acting could in a sense be seen as examples of a process working from the ‘outside-in’ and Epstein’s as an approach working from the ‘inside-out’. Warrilow and Whitelaw’s focus is not primarily the text but the structure and musicality of its appearing in performance. Whereas actors such as Epstein, “work on the basis of their text analyses, and thus have difficulty freeing themselves of its natural consequence: psychological motivation”, actors such as Warrilow
and Whitelaw, “forego” intellectual analysis, or “rather use it passively” to found their interpretation on the shape of the idea (Kalb 61–2).

Movements, in this sense, are not mediators that symbolise or represent character status, but the “physical predicament is the figure’s complete ontological position” (Kalb 148). Clearly, in Beckett’s plays:

[It is the live actor, the fact of life in the actor that finally animates Beckett’s stage pictures…even though that animation gains expression only through the most highly calculated sounds and movements. And every bit of psychological characterization, every hint of complex non-fictional life extending beyond the simple picture, weakens the effect of that sense of pure existence.]

(Kalb 66)

Thus, the actors’ search for inner motivation is pre-empted by the emphasis on gestural form because form is already content. Acting must proceed from ‘without’ rather than from ‘within’ precisely because the movement is not representational. It does not refer to anything beyond the context but the effort involved in performing a specific movement is bound up with certain qualities that constitute its sole content. Since the enactment of mis-movements requires precisely that the actor let go of self-awareness, it is quite possible that the emphasis on mis-movements is a link to Kleist’s ideas about economy and precision that inspired Beckett to “instruct actors in the art of gesture” (Grove 470).

Beckett’s focus on movements was also a way to sharpen dramatic tension through constructing a specific spatial and temporal framework for the characters. For example, the conflict between Hamm and Clov in Endgame is in Beckett’s own Schiller-Theater production (1967) sharpened by alterations in the characters’ movement patterns:

Instead of standing beside the chair, for example, Clov is poised midway between Hamm and the doorway, midway between obligation and relief, the point called ‘O’ in the Schiller notebook and ‘A’ in the Riverside notebook (TN II xviii). Notably, Beckett respects ‘the real tensions, desires and frustrations present in the ways people interrelate’.

(David Bradby qtd in Knowlson, Images 108)

It is, however, worth noticing that Beckett comes to these psychologically underpinned dramatic situations through focusing on the characters’ movements and not through probing into the psychology of the characters and finding in these personas ‘emotions’ or ‘attitudes’ that had to be given a physical representation. The tension between characters that underwrites the dramatic situation is therefore not arrived at through psychological analysis, but through movements. The emphasis on formal aspects of movement, the ‘balletic element’, is therefore both a means to get away from the mimetic representation of reality, i.e. the ‘adequacy’ that Beckett found so spurious,
and a presentation of the ‘real tensions’ that emerge whenever human beings interact. Importantly, therefore, there is also a distinction to be made between the use of physical movements as choreographed in order to appear as phenomena singled out for aesthetic perception, and physical movements used as a ‘technique’ to instruct actors how to build up their stage persona. Notably, Beckett’s exploration of movement on stage involves both perspectives.

Beckett’s directing practices are in stark contrast to the more psychologically rooted character interpretations suggested by, for example, Chekhov and Stanislavsky, who both maintained that movements and gestures must be motivated by the inner state of mind, whether this inner state is created by means of experience or imagination. Beckett, on the other hand, stressed the importance of precise execution of movement, and refused to give psychological cues to his actors. However, if the inner impulse from which the movement originates, defined as the effort involved in performing the movement, determines the form of the movement, then the enactment of a specific effort quality entails reactivating a certain impulse or attitude towards the motion factor involved. It is thus not the case that one has to psychologise character movements, but rather performing the movement is regenerative of that impulse. In this way, the situations that the characters ‘inhabit’ are presented in ways that are kinetically meaningful to the spectator.

Symbols

In a sense, Beckett’s approach to movement is reminiscent of the symbolist movement, which, with its focus on modes of perception promulgated the expressiveness of the body already in the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, the French-Swiss artist Adolphe Appia (1862–1928), insisted that the acting should be “the human equivalent of music” (Styan, *Modern Drama 2* 12). The actor, “placed in three-dimensional space”, should be “accentuated like a sculpture, and his rhythmic movement and gesture would be depersonalized as in the dance” (Styan *Modern Drama 2* 12). In the symbolist breaking with realism Beckett possibly found inspiration for his choreographic presentations.

The theatre director Peter Brook interestingly defines Beckett’s plays as symbols in their own right and maintains that their symbolic value lies precisely in their resistance to determination:

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87 I refer to the symbolists only in order to juxtapose some of their basic tenets, for example representation, with Beckett’s dramatic tension. I do not wish to deny that the concept of symbolism is wide and complex and that “symbolism in the theatre can […] exist alongside realism, or it can eliminate realistic illusion entirely” (Styan, *Modern Drama 2* 1).
Beckett’s plays are symbols in an exact sense of the word. A false symbol is soft and vague: a true symbol is hard and clear. When we say symbolic we often mean something drearily obscure: a true symbol is specific, it is the only form a certain truth can take. The two men waiting by a stunted tree, the man recording himself on tape, the two men marooned in a tower, the woman buried to her waist in sand, the parents in the dustbins, the three heads in urns: these are pure inventions, fresh images sharply defined—and they stand on the stage as objects. They are theatre machines. People smile at them, but they hold their ground: they are critic proof. We get nowhere if we expect to be told what they mean, yet each one has a relation with us we can’t deny. If we accept this, the symbol opens in us a great and wondering O. (Empty Space 65)

However, although the presentation of mis-movements in Beckett’s plays highlights the sense-catching aspect of perception, the notion that the symbol is impenetrable must be juxtaposed with the notion that symbols are culturally, historically and socially determined. The Renaissance notion of the circle was that “human events resemble celestial events” (Foster 109). The symbolic value of the concept of circularity as a transcendent sphere of infinity was thus very different from the existentialist notion of the circle as something which is ongoing but yet finite in its notion of entrapment as can be seen for example in Camus’ The Myth of Sisyphus. There we find that the symbolic value of the circle has changed from positive to negative, despite the fact that Camus claimed that we must imagine Sisyphus as a “happy man” (xx).

However, neither the Renaissance nor the existentialist notion of the circle exhausts the significance of circular patterns of movements in Beckett’s plays. The character MAY in Footfalls repeatedly walks the stage from side to side, approximating the circular in the sense that she is not getting anywhere, but importantly her walking is also regenerative, a ceaseless arriving to self, and it is in walking she exists. Simultaneously a transcending of the limit of existence, and an instance of meaninglessness her action serves to consolidate her sense of being. Beckett stages the attributes of human relationships as movement and, thus, through the actors’ fulfilling the sequences of mis-movements, the continuous re-creative process of the human being emerges in a manner that is both symbolic, and at the same time non-symbolic, to present conceptually vague, yet clearly perceptible movements.

The suggestion that vagueness precludes the truthfulness of the symbolic might therefore be refuted. Despite Peter Brooks’ elegant phrasing above, it cannot be established that the element of vagueness eliminates the possibility of something being a symbol. Clearly, Beckett’s scenic presentations of movements seemingly coalesce with the symbol’s power to “extend itself and multiply its references” (Styan Modern Drama 2 3–4). The strategy of repetition, thus, inevitably takes on symbolic meaning but only within the context of the play.
For example, in *Happy Days*, the manifold allusions to hands could be seen to metaphorically transform into a symbol of love. Already from the beginning of the play, hands are foregrounded to be noticed, yet the gradual profusion of allusions to hands and to acts that hands can fulfil, begin to transform the notion of the ‘ordinary’ meaning of hands as something with which you can grasp things into a symbol of the intention underlying the action.

In the beginning and end of Act one, Winnie clasps hands to pray and all through the play Winnie is consistently filing her nails, looking at her hands, picking up things, putting them down, gathering and spreading out the items in her bag. Winnie’s gestures are sometimes described in the stage directions as ‘apostrophic’, as when she “raises hands and holds them open before her eyes. Apostrophic.” *(CDW 155)*. The gesture of raising hands and looking at them is then immediately followed by the exclamation “Do something!” , thereby prefiguring the function of hands. That hands are tools to perform actions is further alluded to as Winnie tells the story of “a Mr Shower and perhaps a Mrs Shower” who pass by her mound, “holding hands” like “some loved one” *(154)*. The way ‘hands’ are echoed in the lines contributes to ‘vaguely’ suggest the significance of hands doing things such as holding and loving, and a little later also digging, as an act of love and friendship. Winnie continues her narrative of Mr and Mrs Shower by relating how Mr Shower tells Mrs Shower that if he had been Willie, he would have dug Winnie out:

> [WINNIE:] Dig her out, he says, dig her out, no sense in her like that – Dig her out with what? she says – I’d dig her out with my bare hands, he says. *(CDW 157)*

The consistent emphasis on hands, as suggestive of action is at the very end of the play, juxtaposed with Winnie’s lack of agency when she is buried up to her neck in the mound. Her words poignantly highlight the fact that she can no longer help Willie and that she can no longer do for him what she seems to have been doing all their time together; ‘give him a hand’:

> There was a time when I could have given you a hand. [Pause.] And then a time before that again when I did give you a hand. [Pause.] You were always in dire need of a hand, Willie. *(CDW 167)*

The lyrics of the musical box-tune that end the play, the one Winnie has been alluding to throughout the play as ‘her song’ also finally contribute to suggest the symbolic value of the touch of hands: “Every touch of fingers/Tells me what I know/ Says for you/ It’s true, it’s true/ You love me so” *(CDW 168)*. Thus, the significance of hands in the play is vaguely sugges-
tive. Although the particularity of the hand as a symbol of love is never made explicit, words and gestures nevertheless complement each other.

Although the very notion underwriting symbolist drama, i.e. the notion that the ‘symbol’ represents or symbolises something and that this something is to be clearly presented, contradicts Beckett’s dramatic vision with its emphasis on presentation, and despite my contention that physical movements in Beckett’s are not primarily symbolic, there are nevertheless interesting parallels to be drawn between Beckett’s use of movement and the symbolist notion of expression.

Symbolism

One important symbolist, who might have influenced Beckett in the use of physical movements onstage, was Edward Gordon Craig. Although, “there is no real evidence to prove that Beckett read Edward Gordon Craig’s The Art of Theatre […] [t]here is much in Craig’s writings on theatre that finds either an echo or a parallel in Beckett’s own practice as director” (Knowlson, Images 106). James Knowlson’s comments also confirm that “Beckett’s (privately stated) attitudes towards the actor also have much in common with Craig’s related views on the über-marionette” (Images 109). In a manner similar to Gordon Craig’s, Knowlson writes, Beckett insisted that the actors should perform without self-consciousness and sought to “dehumanise the actors in his plays” (Images 109). Thus, Craig’s emphasis that the “actor must cease to express himself and begin to express something else”, alongside the notion that the actor should “no longer imitate, he must indicate”, seemingly have much in common with Beckett’s directing practices as growing out of his wish to dehumanise the actor (qtd in Knowlson, Images 109).88

However, although there is much to sustain the notion that Beckett both read and was influenced by Craig, for example the notion that “the relation of the stage-director to the actor is precisely the same as that of the conductor to his orchestra” (Craig 147) or the idea that movements should not be ‘natural’, I do not support the conclusion that the aim was to dehumanise the actor. From the idea that acting should be impersonal and artificial does not necessarily follow that it is ‘dehumanised’. Rather, I believe that what interested Beckett was how the actor should use his body to present onstage.

According to Craig, the “father of the dramatist was the dancer” (140), and the material he uses to create is “ACTION” in terms of “gesture and dancing, the poetry and prose of action”; “SCENE” meaning “everything

88 Also Craig’s notion of the “Über-marionette was particularly in conflict with the psychological detail of realistic acting sought by naturalistic directors like Stanislavsky” (Styan Modern Drama Vol II 20).
that comes before the eye, such as lighting, costume as well as scenery”; and “VOICE” referring to “the spoken word or the word which is sung, in contradiction to the word which is read, for the word written to be spoken and the word written to be read are two entirely different things” (Craig 181). Moreover, Craig’s notion about artificiality as the only ‘true’ means of expression, for example the notion that the ‘mask’ can more truthfully present human emotions than can the actor trying to mimic them, was most likely also an inspiration to Beckett’s choreographic approach to movement. Craig maintains that the human face, when used as a mask, has the capacity to convey human emotion more effectively because of the artificiality of expression and, for example, the stage directions that specify Winnie’s eye movements bring Craig’s notion of the face mask to mind. Still, it is in the aspiration towards a ‘poetry of the theatre’ that Beckett’s affinities with Craig are most visible, and physical movements constitute significant elements of this poetry. Thus, while proposing that Beckett is not a symbolist—and I claim this for reasons that I hope have become evident—I nevertheless admit that his dramatic presentations approach the abstract in a manner akin to the symbolists.

By the same token, Antonin Artaud’s ideas about the physical aspect of a theatre serve to indicate the context from which Beckett’s theatre came into being. According to Artaud, “we must first break with the theatre’s subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a kind of unique language somewhere in between gesture and thought” (Artaud 68). Possibly inspired by Artaud’s The Theatre and its Double, Beckett sought to create a total theatre within the stage space of the theatre, and he carefully structured his dramatic material to work at the senses of the spectator. Just like Artaud, Beckett resists referentiality and seeks to escape the restrictions of linguistic meaning. According to Les Essif, Artaud’s phenomenological vision of theatre is “an approach to transcending the visual world, the material body, the psychoanalyzable mind, and especially the border between the body and the mind” (174). For Artaud, “artistic meaning is life itself; organically produced by the body-mind’s symbiotic relationship with the primal world, it is not so much meaning as a vital awareness” (Essif 174). Beckett’s and Artaud’s theatre is thus in complete contrast to Brecht’s Marxist theatre, which in a sense denounces the possibility and validity of “truly individual thought processes’ and defines meaning as socially constituted (Essif 175). Both Beckett’s and Artaud’s plays explore extra-linguistic realms of experience through re-staging and pushing “the envelope of the dramatic character” (Essif 175). Clearly, Artaud’s notion of the theatre-as-theatre prepared the way for twentieth-century meta-drama, and clearly, also, Beckett’s highly stylised characters could be seen to be part of a movement, which replaced

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89 According to Knowlson, Beckett admits to having read Artaud “for the occasional blaze” as he put it. (Beckett qtd in Knowlson, Images 107).
“the human subject/being” with a “theatro-human subject/ icon” (Essif 176). Yet, as Les Essif concludes in Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: “If Beckett has ‘fragmented’ anything in his theatre it is the social agency of the body; his (ab)use of the body epitomizes the culminating modernist shift away from the patently social aspect” (177). The result, Essif claims is that Beckett’s exploration of “the material meaningfulness of the human figure set in emptiness” (Essif 1), constitutes a challenge to the structures of subjectivity. Instead of communicating the referential, the “live marionette-like character onstage co-operates with silence” to sustain “our intense focus … on emptiness” (192). In concurrence with Essif’s notion that “the emptiness surrounding the figure […] determines our perceptions of the figure itself” (Essif 2), this study has tried to explore the function of mis-movements as they emerge in that emptiness.

Abstract and Concrete Movements
The choreographed movement is not performed in order to achieve a specific purpose but to stand out for perception as something in its own kind. It may consist of an everyday movement such as walking or reaching, and in that respect be what in Merleau-Ponty’s terminology is defined as a ‘concrete’ movement. In Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between “concrete” and “abstract” movements to describe differences in human beings’ modes of attending to their own body (126–28). Thus, ‘concrete’ movements are those movements by means of which I access the world. For example when I reach out to grasp a glass of water and bring it towards my mouth and drink from it, my attention is not on the movements of my fingers, exacting the right pressure in order not to lose grip, nor do I have to focus on co-ordinating the movements of my hand with my lower and upper arm, i.e. I do not have to synchronize my movements reflectively in order to perform the task of drinking water from a glass but my gestures have a purpose to which my movements are oriented. Without my being even ‘aware’ of it, I adjust my fingers, my hand and the different parts of my arm as well as my body to the weight of the glass, and I calculate the dis-

90 Notably, there are interesting implications of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the abstract movement that might be fruitful to study in another context. For example, the notion that abstract movements may be perceived to happen independently of the patient’s desire to move is strikingly evocative of the notion of Cartesian dualism as implicitly part of Geulincx’s occasionalism, which in turn reflects the notion of a prime mover. The abstract movements are “the result of a situation, of the sequence of the events themselves; myself and my movements are, so to speak, merely a link in the whole process and I am scarcely aware of a voluntary initiative … It all happens independently of me” (PoP 120). Cf Hugh Kenner’s suggestion that the entrée to the “strange detachment with which Beckett’s people regard the things their hands and feet do” lies in the “Quod nescis quomodo fiat, id non facis [Because you do not know how it was done, you did not do it]” (84).
tance to my mouth to secure that the glass reaches my lips with precision in order to drink from the glass without dropping it or spilling from it. As Merleau-Ponty explains: “From the outset the grasping movement is magically at its completion; it can begin only by anticipating its end, since to disallow taking hold is sufficient to inhibit the action” (119). Concrete movements are therefore movements that project the body’s “potentiality of this or that part of the world” (121) and their background is “the world as given” (127).

By contrast, Merleau-Ponty explains, “abstract” movements are such movements that “are not relevant to any actual situation” (118). The patient with a neurological disorder may no longer be in possession of an undivided ‘body image’ as this positional consciousness vis-à-vis the world is no longer operative. Normally, every movement has a background, a context that constitutes “moments of unique totality” (127). The background is “immanent in the movement inspiring and sustaining it at every moment” (127). However, for the patient in Merleau-Ponty’s examples, the body is “an amorphous mass into which actual movement alone introduces divisions and links” (126). He “neither seeks nor finds movements, but moves his body until the movement comes” (126). The order to move might not be meaningless to him, but if it has “intellectual significance for him and not a motor one, it does not communicate anything to him as a mobile subject” (126). Thus the “background to abstract movement is built up” and “[t]he plunge into action is, from the subject’s point of view, an original way of relating himself to the object, and is on the same footing as perception” (127).

Although Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’ movements is held in relation to the healthy body’s mode of relating to the world as opposed to the neurologically injured body’s disorder of sensation, I find that the distinction between ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’ movements may be used to illustrate the significance of Beckett’s exploration of physical movements.

Whereas ‘normally’ human beings’ move in order to achieve a goal, the movements that Beckett’s characters perform frequently seem to fall short of purpose and of actual relevance, as it were. There is, therefore, an overwhelming prevalence of ‘abstract’ movements in his plays. In a sense, one could almost say that every gesture the characters enact is ‘abstract’. The walking in Endgame and Footfalls, falling in Godot, the carefully choreographed movement schemas performed in Happy Days by Winnie in her mound, the rocking in Rockaby, the calculated and contrasted movement of player A and B in Act Without Words II, the sorties and re-enterings of the three women in Come and Go to name but a few, are all examples of movements that occur, as it were, without context, i.e. not in response to some actual situation. The focus on visual aspects of presentation means that movements are not spontaneously executed, and also that the movements do not seem to sustain what is said nor to fulfil some kind of purpose. Normally, in performing the movements required to fulfil this purpose, the body
withdraws from the perceptual field allowing for the purpose of the movement to be foregrounded. In walking, our movements display direction which is associated with attention, and in pointing, or reaching the object of attention. However, in Beckett’s plays, the performance of the movements foregrounds the quality of the movements so that the sounds the body makes, the effort involved in performing a certain movement, the duration of the movements, and the rhythmic structure of the movement, appear to be perceived.

In the enactment of the mis-movements, a deep reversal of the figure-ground structure thus emerges as the body and its movements, which ‘normally’ constitute the background against which the significance of words appears, now appear ‘as’ something in its own kind. By analogy, the abstract movement, according to Merleau-Ponty, “throws out its own background” and so constitutes a reversal of the figure-ground structure of the Gestalt (128). In Merleau-Ponty’s influential work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, abstract movements are described as phenomena that “carve out within that plenum of the world in which concrete movements took place a zone of reflection and subjectivity” (128). This ‘zone’ emerges in Beckett’s work through the emphasis on mis-movements, although the notion of ‘subjectivity’ is perhaps slightly inappropriate. Nevertheless, I find that mis-movement, just like the ‘abstract’ movement described by Merleau-Ponty, “superimposes upon physical space a virtual or human space” (128). Notably, this projection also entails a reversal of the figure-ground structure in which “the natural relationship in which the body stands to its environment” is reversed (Merleau-Ponty 129).

Paradoxically, human self-awareness or self-consciousness, in acting, dancing or any other kind of performance, contrary to what one might presume, enters with the performing of concrete movements and not with the abstract movements. The abstract movements and gestures require that you focus on the performance of these movements and in this way they pre-empt self-consciousness. Focus needs to be on the movement since its performance requires full attention to every moment of its enactment.

**Acting**

Performing a movement with strong attention to detail effectively reduces the actor’s possibility of psychologically ‘colouring’ the presentation of the characters. Gestures, when performed with great attention to detail, also force the actor to shift attention away from psychological motivation and towards the movements’ qualities, shapes and duration. In a sense this approach enables “a total liberation from the expression of self” (Barrault qtd in Lecoq 56), and notably, Beckett’s plays require that the actor “forego all intellectual volition to begin with” (Kalb 148).
With respect to Beckett’s attention to physical movement, Jonathan Kalb has pointed out that “a surprising number of excellent performances develop, as it were, backwards–beginning with external physical techniques and working inward toward psychological centers–in the manner of Meyerhold’s Biomechanics” (39).\footnote{Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) was a Russian theatre director, producer and actor who, in search of theatrical innovation was among the symbolists of his time. In contrast to Stanislavsky’s method to analyze the psychological motives of the character in order to create a ‘realistic’ persona onstage, Meyerhold maintained that all acting should be ‘plastic’ and that the characters’ “gestures were to be stylized, made up of poses and glances” (Styan Modern Drama 2 34).} Actors working with Meyerhold were trained according to his system of ‘biomechanics’ to perform in an intensely physical and non-representational style. Meyerhold’s anti-realist experiments produced highly stylised abstractions that seem to have been “typical of symbolist productions” (Styan Modern Drama 2 34). By analogy, Beckett’s directing practices fashioned an increasingly physical drama, in which the significance of the movements parallel, counterpoint or even at times outweigh the significance of the words.

For an actor approaching the task of performing in a Beckett play the whole notion of what is a play, and what the actors are supposed to do may therefore open up new perspectives on acting. The specific instructions about movements, rhythmic patterns, tone of voice etc., may also appear demanding. The choreographed movement is not spontaneous, but is a predetermined, carefully structured articulation of time and space foregrounded to be perceived. The ‘choreographic’ way of getting into character therefore poses different demands on the actor. Billie Whitelaw, famously known as “Beckett’s chosen actress” (Kalb 234), records that after performing in Rockaby, a play where the female protagonist has to sit completely still in a rocking chair and keep her eyes wide open for continuous moments listening to a voice recorded on a tape, she would feel depressed and “emotionally drained” just from the enormous physical and emotional strain of “sitting in a chair and doing nothing” (Kalb 234). However, the ‘doing nothing’ was of course not gotten at just by slumping into a chair, ‘pretending’ to listen to a voice on tape. It was not even a ‘nothing’ but a ‘something’, nor was it a ‘pretending’. It was the result of many hours of repeated rocking and coordinating of the tone of voice with the movements, the listening to the rhythm of words, the uttering of words and the opening and closing of eyes, until all combined to form a tightly knit pattern of movements and words, that only when performed in a certain way began to emanate a specific radiance. Thus, movements and gestures performed in a certain way ‘give breath’ to Beckett’s poetic vision. Just as “verse is breathed or one doesn’t hear it, one doesn’t understand it”, so gestures are “breathed or there is no gesture” (Barrault qtd in Lecoq 56). The specific ‘light’ in which the gesture appears to be
perceived is thus intrinsic to its precise performance. The actor in search of a ‘subtext’, therefore, will inevitably only discover that there is “no encoded information, no authentic source of truth that the actor is responsible for making available to spectators, except whatever is contained in his or her corporeal state itself” (Kalb 148–9). With no psychological motivation to unveil, the actor must learn to probe the detailed stage directions in search of the musicality and the rhythmic patterns of words and gestures that will eventually release Beckett’s poetry of the theatre. In other words, Beckett’s theatre is very text-centred and the actor must learn to trust the text.

Clearly, the creative process of staging his works had a profound impact on Beckett’s writing as he began to put significantly more emphasis on other elements of the drama than just the words that make up the dialogue. Commencing with the Schiller-Theater production of *Endgame* in 1967, there seems to be a progression to be traced in Beckett’s writing that shows physical movements becoming more and more significant over the years. The use of movement also changes over the years. For example, in early plays, such as *Godot* or *Endgame*, Beckett’s use of movement accentuates the artificial and centres on presenting symmetrical and visual patterns. However, progressively, elements of slapstick are diminished in favour of a more abstract presentation of movement, which juxtaposed with the spoken dialogue combine to a ‘new’ expressive form. Rather than working towards a more precise and explicit way of expressing his ideas, Beckett’s presentations are marked by an increasingly higher level of abstraction. As Eric Tonning suggests, Beckett’s pursuit of an abstract language produces “a continuous dialectic between an emphasis on formal schematisation and the reduction of a realist background, and efforts to compensate for the resulting losses of expressive force by utilising new technical possibilities” (15). It is the contention of this study that such ‘technical’ possibilities entail the use of physical movement to constitute one way in which the formal schematisation finds expressive intensity. As Beckett started to direct his work, the changes he effected seemed specifically designed to bring out these formal structures to be perceived more clearly. Beckett’s later drama is also marked by a more abstract use of movement in which the movement presentations seemingly escape the traditional sense-catching that patterning and cohesion may provide. This can be seen in plays like *What Where*, or *Nacht und Träume*, where the level of abstraction in the movement is considerably higher than in the earlier plays. Although there are still patterns, the emphasis is not so much on the patterns that appear through enacting the movements, but on the quality of the movements coming to givenness as momentary manifestations lacking external reference. The ‘anaesthetic’ impulse in Beckett’s work, referred to in chapter one, could therefore refer both to the lack of a systematic aesthetic creed in his work, but also to a sense of ‘bracketing’ in a phenomenological sense because the focalization and concentration on the emergence of mo-
mentary non-determined manifestations leads back to a mode of perceiving that precedes the gesture of narrative mastery.

Concealing as Revealing

In perceiving a work of art, we attend to the particularity of what is appearing but that does not mean that we attend to that which is present. Martin Seel explains that “[i]t may seem as if modern art had repeatedly taken flight from appearing” (xi). Indeed, there are examples of twentieth century art, for example Marcel Duchamp’s work *In Advance of the Broken Arm*92, or John Cage’s piece *4.33*93 that seem to escape sensuous appearing. Furthermore, as Seel notes with specific reference to these works of art, the consequence of this type of approach entails that art no longer depends on sensuous appearing (xii). However, he also explains, this consequence may be avoided if one considers that “[i]n the context of art, disappearing itself can be a source of appearing” (xii). Revealing, thus, may at the same time be a concealing. Thus, the particularity of art, writes Seel, finds expression mainly “in art’s aesthetic particularity”, i.e. in how it appears to be perceived (Seel xii). As discussed above, human perception is not obliged to only perceive *some*thing, but can also perceive *that* this something occurs whether or not we care to carry the perception towards a determination. Essentially, when Kant holds that the “aesthetic object is pleasing ‘without concept’” he, according to Seel, elucidates precisely the particular mode of perceiving that characterizes aesthetic perception.

In relation to the discussion of concealing we must also take into consideration that the focus on the body in Beckett’s plays will not necessarily highlight the body *per se*, nor will the emphasis on movements necessarily show movements. By analogy we find that in (modern) dance—expectedly a medium of the body—there is also a tradition to conceal the body. For example, the American dancer Loïe Fuller’s94 compositions were built on the effect of light: “[t]he spectacular effect of Fuller’s dance resulted from her use of colored theatrical lighting playing on and through the voluminous folds of silk that were her costume” (*Vision of Dance* 11). At the time Fuller was performing in Paris, “[i]mpressionist painters such as Monet and Pissaro and music composers, notably Claude Debussy, were [also] attempting to capture light in refraction in their works” (*Vision of Dance* 11). Even before

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92 Duchamp was not interested in art that was visual but believed that the idea always came before the visual ‘representation’ of the same.
93 John Cage’s most famous work is the ‘silent’ composition *4.33*, first performed by the German pianist David Tudor. The piece consists of the pianist sitting by the piano without playing a single note for four minutes and thirty-three seconds.
94 Loïe Fuller was born in Fullersberg, Illinois, and was one of the precursors of modern dance. Like other pioneers, e.g. Isadora Duncan, “she found a more receptive atmosphere in Europe than in her native country” (*Vision of Dance* 11).
Fuller, in one of the earliest court ballets, the “Ballet Comique de la Reine” (1581), the body was hidden, as dancers dressed in long dresses were arranged into allegorical patterns on the floor to be viewed from above (Copeland, What Is Dance 104). The concealment of the body and focus on geometrical shape and form can also be seen in Beckett’s play Quad, where four players draped in hooded robes moving along restricted courses in specific patterns, highlight not the body, but geometrical space. What appears to be perceived by means of their motion is not specifically the body, but the geometrical pattern the players create through their steps. In their trace the supposed danger zone “E” appears to be perceived (CDW 453). Translated into conceptual ideas, this zone may of course be seen to represent something: the ineffable expression, the notion that “nothing is more real than nothing” or the beauty and harmony of the sublime. Still in allowing these possibilities to multiply and proliferate we are already approaching the creative faculty of imagination which is the realm within which the work of art must be experienced.95

Transcendence

In a sense, the complexity of poetic manifestations, the sounds and silences, instances of movement and mobility, shapeless and fragmented body images that occur in Beckett’s plays may be better explicated by Martin Seel’s concept of “resonating” as a play of appearances (143). Something appears but we do not ‘know’ what it is. In such presentations, the principium individuationis, i.e. “the principle of spatiotemporal and shapelike distinguishability of the given” is no longer at work (Seel 140). Schopenhauer defines the principium individuationis as “the form of the phenomenon” (Vol. I 372), and frequently in Beckett’s plays, we are presented with a multitude of appearances that resist habitual appropriation. Manifestations such as the three ‘urned’ characters of Play, or the character Mouth in Not I, which we initially may fail to ‘explain’, might therefore make us “lose our way”, not on account of appearance, but on account of the lack of cognitive appearance. Moreover, when the ‘cognitive forms’ get suspended, a ‘dread’ arises, that in Schopenhauer’s work is associated with ‘seeing through the veil of Maya’ but also with ‘suffering’.96 According to Martin Seel, Friedrich Nietzsche bases his distinction between the nature of “Apollonian” and “Dionysiac” art precisely on this “shattering of the semblance of fundamental cultural orientation” (Seel 140).97 Importantly, the sense catching-order of non-cognitive perceptions entails that:

95 For a discussion of the function of mis-movements in Quad, see pp. 139–41.
96 See my discussion of suffering pp. 75–79.
97 The “Apollonian” and the “Dionysiac” relate to each other in an almost deconstructive fashion as “the “Apollonian” construction contains an invitation to destruction” (Seel 140).
What is appearing aesthetically is transformed into a radical process of appearing. Its perception pushes abstention with regard to determination, which Kant established, way beyond the limits he set; its perception becomes an experiencing of the limits of the determinacy of ourselves and our world.

(Seel 141)

Resonating in this sense constitutes the possibility for the transcendence of habitual appropriation of the world. The work of art, therefore, does not aspire to represent Truth, either in the shape of a radical subjectivity or in the shape of objectivity, but rather, provides a site of possibilities; hence the work of art is in Beckett’s own words a “composite of perceiver and perceived, not a datum, an experience” (Disjecta 138, emphasis mine). Notably, it is within this experience that the human horizon, in the phenomenological sense of being the ‘limit’, is both revealed and transcended. The notion of transcendence, however, should not be taken to mean a radical freedom from the world, or of subjectivity, but is rather a “modest freedom to contribute to […] self-transformations” (Johnson 280). In Beckett’s plays, the exploration of repetition and the emphasis on physical movements, as well as on the ambiguous relationship between presentation and representation, point to a definition of art as something co-constituted by the spectator and the work of art alike, residing, as it were, within the experience of perception. Essentially, “[a]esthetic pleasure is a pleasure of finite existence in finite existence”, although “in this finiteness aesthetic intuition discovers the opportunity to make present infinite possibilities that cannot be experienced from the theoretical and practical perspective” (Seel 137). The modest freedom attained in aesthetic perception is thus the ‘freedom’ to perceive the ‘world’ in different ways. Significantly, it is through experiencing this transformation of perception that our world may expand and grow.

Immanence

However, the notion of transcendence implicit in the process of resonating should not be understood as “going beyond the world of appearance but rather as losing oneself in this world” (Seel 141). This dimension is perhaps best elucidated through “the value [it] can have in aesthetic practice outside art” (Seel 143). Martin Seel’s examples of “extra-artistic resonating” draw from a selection of situations in which perception plays a formative role in determining the appearance. For example, “the rustling of the trees in a wood, the roaring of a mountain stream, the rumbling of a big city, static in the airwaves, the foaming or flickering of a sea, the shimmering of a desert, 98

98 According to Seel, it was Nietzsche who ‘bequeathed’ the notion ‘resonating’ through his discussion of the dread that arises in the presence of non-cognitive forms of appearance (143).
the flickering of a monitor, or the flurry of a heavy snowfall” (Seel 143). All
these examples describe instances where something appears but the ambigu-
yty of its appearing entails that we cannot with certainty determine what it is
or whence it originates. However, not even knowledge of the source can help
us ‘understand’ it. For example, the realisation that the roaring of the sea
happens on account of countless masses of water being shifted around by
waves, or that the rustling of the trees is a multitude of sounds originating
from a multitude of leaves and twigs, does not help us trace the multiple
sounds back to their multiple sources. Nor does the glittering of the sea when
explained as the reflection of light on water help us determine its fullness.
We simply cannot compensate for the “powerlessness of apprehension be-
cause this is the powerlessness of the simultaneous sensuous reception of a
highly complex occurrence” (Seel 143).

By analogy, the whole of a Beckett play is precisely such a resonating.
Although there seems to be nothing that occurs in the dramatic impasses that
Beckett creates, there is something that occurs. Because these dramatic im-
passes are subject to change we are able to distinguish something “as occur-
rning” in the numerous movement patterns and visual and auditive echoes that
permeate the play (Seel 144). Thus, only from attending to the manner in
which this something occurs, can we follow through to distinguish “what is
occurring” (Seel 144). Phenomenologically speaking, resonating is a phe-
nomenon “of the radical immanence of appearing” (Seel 142). It is a process
of the part of the aesthetic object and “[l]ike every other aesthetic phenom-
non, resonating must be understood in terms of its perceptibility” (Seel 142).
We may now begin to understand Beckett’s appreciation of works of art that
present a certain quality of transition and lightness, and which indicate the
significance of the moment of emergence and the importance of the actual.
Beckett’s admiration for van Velde’s artistic effort, seemingly, is founded on
the conviction that his (van Velde’s) work is essentially ‘inexpressive’ and
“bereft, rid if you prefer, of occasion in every shape and form, ideal as well
as material” (Disjecta 143): “[f]or what is this coloured plane, that was not
there before. I don’t know what it is, having never seen anything like it be-
fore. It seems to have nothing to do with art, in any case, if my memories are
correct” (Disjecta 145). Significantly, it is only when we lose ourselves in
the radical immanence of its appearing that we may perceive the work of art.
Thus, only in perceiving without knowing, or without ‘naming’, can we ar-
rive at perceiving that which cannot be expressed.99

99 Rohit Metha, explicating the ideas of the Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, claims
that the desire to understand is a powerful motive for perception, but understanding is not
necessarily an intellectual activity if we consider that “understanding, […], is not of the mind”
(Metha 142). According to Metha, Krishnamurti’s notion about understanding demands “per-
ception without naming” (142), but also perception without memory. As Krishnamurti ex-
plains, “the naming process of any feeling, in any observation, prevents you from looking (qtd
in Metha 160). “Naming as an instrument of communication has validity only after communi-
In this chapter, I have explored physical movements in Beckett’s plays as phenomena singled out to be aesthetically perceived. That which is aesthetically perceived need not be reduced to an intellectual concept. Ultimately, I have argued that we must approach Beckett’s mis-movements as meaningful, not in the sense that they are showings in which perception coincides with meaning, but rather as abstract presentations of ‘nameless experiences’. Clearly, Beckett’s plays are designed to be experiences undergone rather than understood by an audience.

Although Beckett carefully described every movement and gesture in the stage directions, he was well aware of the ‘limits’ of perception. Through enhancing the artificiality of the characters’ movements, Beckett found a way to ‘transport’ the spectator (or reader) out of habitual perception to perceive anew, and also to notice the implications of his/her perceptive acts. Beckett’s use of physical movements in theatre, therefore, not only makes manifest his ‘poetry of the theatre’ as a process of resonating, but, it also presents the ineffability of human experience as it sheds light on the infinitesimal stirrings of subliminal meaning-making that continuously shape and recreate the world in perception. Thus the meaning-making processes that the spectator inadvertently engages in, indeed cannot but engage in, as well as the notion of meaning as a “gesture of mastery” is perpetually undermined and as it were, “under erasure”¹⁰⁰, in Beckett’s plays, even though the ideal of an inexpressive work of art must forever remain a dream that can never come true.

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¹⁰⁰ “Sous rature” (under erasure) is a conceptual model originally developed by Heidegger to challenge the nature of linguistic definitions. Heidegger problematises the notion of Being precisely through putting it under erasure: “We do not know what ‘Being’ means […] [w]e do not know even the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. But this vague average understanding of Being is still a fact” (Being and Time 25). For want of a better word, then, the word ‘Being’ is retained although its meaning is put ‘under erasure’. Subsequently Derrida has practiced the technique extensively in his writing, and it is frequently associated with deconstructive literary theory.
4. “An assault against words in the name of beauty”

The final chapter of this study will discuss the concept of mis-movements in three of Beckett’s plays: Waiting for Godot (1949), Come and Go (1965) and Quad (1981). These plays have been selected because they fall into different periods in Beckett’s dramatic production, and so are broadly representative of the aesthetic shift that takes place in his artistic development. Waiting for Godot is Beckett’s best known and most influential play, and is here chosen to represent the early phase of Beckett’s drama. The different periods of Beckett’s artistic development I have roughly divided into three stages: early (1953–1962), middle (1962–1975), and late (1975–1983). The early period, is marked by a tendency to complicate and undermine the semantic content in the plays, whereas the middle period, here represented by Come and Go, tends more towards minimalism, fragmentation of action and paling down of text. Finally, in the final stage, here represented by Quad, the emphasis on action is increased, while the repetition of the earlier elimination of the text is taken to its extreme.

The discussions of the plays will centre on three different aspects of Beckett’s aesthetic presentation of mis-movements: their purpose, structure/shape and manner of appearing. Among the assumptions underlying this study is the idea that mis-movements are instrumental in Beckett’s larger project of questioning language, and that the aesthetic presentation of mis-movement in the dramatic context is part of this project as an ‘assault against words in the name of beauty’. Beauty, however, should not be taken in the sense of the merely pleasing or harmonious (albeit there is a carefully balanced and structured symmetry to Beckett’s work) but should rather be understood, in the Kantian sense, as that which escapes reduction to a concept. Ultimately, Beckett is looking for a method by means of which he

101 (Beckett, Disjecta 173.)
102 Beckett’s dramatic development may, of course, be divided differently, for example into two phases, one early and one late. However, since change happens progressively I have found it useful to select three plays from the beginning, middle and end of Beckett’s dramatic career, i.e. as being representative of his artistic development as a consistent occupation with the predicament of expression.
can represent his “mocking attitude towards the words” \( (\textit{Disjecta} 172) \). The presentation of mis-movements should therefore be seen as part of the heuristic solution to the predicament of representation and expression. By means of mis-movement, Beckett is able to show that meaning, although frequently aligned with cognition as something mediated through language, essentially transcends the linguistic framework to which it is traditionally confined.

The ephemeral quality of mis-movements, seemingly, makes them highly suitable ‘stage-vehicles’ of ambiguity and fluidity, and so they provide a useful means with which Beckett may effectively accentuate the aesthetic dimension of perception.\(^{104}\) However, in order to understand the full significance of mis-movements, we need to explore how the aesthetics of gesture, made manifest through the organisation and structuring of dramatic elements in the plays, functions in performance.

While initially mis-movements are part of Beckett’s ‘solution’ to challenge the ‘gesture of mastery’ so habitually retained in perception, the progression of Beckett’s aesthetic project involves not only a process of ‘making vague’, but also an increased emphasis on the performative aspect of the aesthetic presentation:

> The shift in his aesthetic theories from identity (‘form is content’) to adaption, adjustment, and reconciliation (‘find a form to accommodate the mess’) enables Beckett to impart a greater flexibility and ambiguity to his works. Instead of absolutes, Beckett presents possible shapes and ideas. Instead of embodying a formal concept and making an abstraction concrete, Beckett accommodates fluidity and uncertainty […] His quest is to find a form for the possibility of nonrelationship.

\(^{(\text{Dearlove 12–13})}\)

Finding a ‘form’ for this aesthetic conviction entails exposing the performative structures of meaning-making, and in \textit{Waiting for Godot}, this is accomplished through the juxtaposition of words and mis-movement, i.e. through presenting mis-movements as anomalies that undermine, complicate or qualify the linguistic expression. Essentially, this kind of ‘abstraction’ constitutes a methodological effort to overcome the problem of expression evolving out of the awareness of the role of perception in experience. Given the ‘rupture’ between subject and object, it follows that the mind’s grasp of reality is necessarily contingent, and so the very concept of meaning becomes prob-

\(^{104}\) In \textit{Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett’s Drama 1956–1976}, Rosemary Pountney points out that Beckett “customarily moves from a concrete approach to a subject in the early drafts of a play, towards a more abstract and ambiguous expression” (xi). As Pountney shows, the process of ‘vaguening’ in Beckett’s work is carefully structured. Although Pountney’s discussion of Beckett’s manuscripts centre on the middle period of Beckett’s dramatic writing (1956–76), and although her study initially considers Beckett’s return to writing in English, I believe that the process of ‘vaguening’ she describes is highly relevant to a discussion of mis-movements as they appear already in Beckett’s first staged play, \textit{Waiting for Godot}.  

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lematic. What is thematised in Beckett’s early plays, then, is “not ‘reality’ but “irreality”’ 105, that is, not the ‘truth’ about reality represented in language, but the extent to which reality, as we perceive it, is frequently unintelligible, vague or unclear.

However, as Beckett starts to direct his plays, the emphasis on words declines in favour of a stronger focus on the shape and structure of the presentation. As a result, the perspectives and ‘meanings’ multiply and proliferate, but this paradoxically has the effect of reaffirming, not only the contingency of perception but also its inescapability. In view of Beckett’s progressive artistic development, therefore, we must acknowledge that the manifestation of mis-movements in Beckett’s later drama, rather than “teaching us that the cogito is an ‘illusion’”, requires that we take the presentations of mis-movements seriously as phenomenological problems (Begam, End of Modernity 9). Beckett’s ‘assault against words’, then, signals the importance given to aesthetic perception in his work. Clearly, Beckett is well aware of the conditions that limit perception, and this awareness underlies both his staging of mis-movements and his locating meaning in the perception of the work of art, rather than in some underlying meaning that the artwork expresses. However, mis-movements in Beckett’s drama also require that we surrender ourselves to listening and perceiving, without attempting to determine or assign meaning. In this sense they are authentic expressions that reveal themselves in appearing and so contribute to making it “possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All” (Diṣjecta 172).

Significantly, and most pertinent to the explication of mis-movements in Beckett’s drama, the theatrical performance should be seen as an event that is the precondition for any experience of the ‘beautiful’. According to Willmar Sauter, the theatrical event is an encounter between performer and spectator within the here-and-now of performance, and “it is the eventness of the encounter between performer and spectator that characterizes a performance” (1).106 Thus, the concept of “eventness” builds on the “the performer’s and the spectator’s experience of the theatrical situation” (1). Crucially, 105 The concept of “irreality” is phenomenological, and refers to the way in which meaning is immediately ‘grasped’ in the “natural attitude”. What presents itself to consciousness, Maurice Natanson explains in The Erotic Bird: Phenomenology in Literature, does so “within what Husserl calls the ‘irreality’ of the world: the fictive universe of intentional consciousness, the world as meant” (20).

106 Admittedly, my use of Sauter’s concept is limited and restricted to the aesthetic perception and performativity. It does not negotiate the cultural context in which the performance takes place, or the theatrical context. Sauter’s explication of eventness is all-embracing, i.e. applicable to any event that may be perceived as theatrical, whereas my discussion of the event primarily relates to the performance situation in the theatre. Clearly, Sauter’s definition of the theatrical situation is more complex than my use of his concept shows, but the conceptual amalgam of spectator and performer as an encounter, and the emphasis on theatrical playing as a performative event, are highly relevant to the exploration of mis-movements.
“playing rather than signification marks the performing art when seen as theatrical events” (1). However, Sauter explains, in this ‘game’, spectators have an advantage over the ‘players’: “since playing is directed toward the audience, only the spectators—rather than the players—are capable of experiencing the wholeness of playing and to understand its overall meaning” (15). Essentially, it is the performative aspect of Beckett’s aesthetic presentations as an encounter with the dramatic event that is the focus of this chapter.

I: Waiting for Godot

Meaning as an ‘identity in the manifold’

Beckett’s first published play, Waiting for Godot, was written “between October 1948 and January 1949” (Knowlson, Damned 342). The dramatic situation involves two men, Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for someone called Godot, who they believe will save them, but who never arrives. While waiting, the two friends ceaselessly talk, eat, sleep, gaze into the distance, invent games and quarrel, i.e. do everything they can to relieve the pressure of waiting. Of the two tramps, Estragon is the ‘lucky’ one since he is able to forget, at least momentarily, that they are waiting for Godot. Estragon is associated with the ground and with the body. Seemingly oblivious to their situation, he often sits on the ground occupied with his feet, or else he craves something to eat, and as soon as there is an opportunity he falls asleep. Vladimir, by contrast, “never sits” (Knowlson, TN I xiv), and he never fails to remember the fact that they are waiting. His gestures with his hat may be seen to indicate this ‘fact’, as they serve to emphasise the region of the mind as the origin of thoughts. At rehearsal, writes Knowlson, “Beckett himself referred to this contrast in highly suggestive terms: ‘Estragon is on the ground; he belongs to the stone. Vladimir is light; he is oriented to the sky’” (Knowlson, TN I xiv).

In the very first scene, Estragon, failing to take off his boot and ultimately ‘giving up’ the project, concludes that there is “nothing to be done” (9: 8), and as will be revealed there really is ‘nothing to be done’ about the fact that the two tramps are waiting, and will have to continue waiting, for Godot.108

107 Beckett’s first full-length play, Eleutheria, written in 1947, was never published or staged during his lifetime (Knowlson, Damned 328).
108 All examples of mis-movements in Waiting for Godot are from The Theatrical Notebooks: WAITING FOR GODOT, Vol.1. According to the standards of this edition, the following typographical notes signify that “[t]ext between square brackets [ ] has been added to the original English text. Text between pointed brackets { } has been revised. A pair of angle brackets < > indicates that a section of text has been cut from the original English text”
Estragon’s futile effort to take off his boot thus seemingly underscores the sense of impotence conveyed in his words. (Of course, a few lines down: “ESTRAGON with a supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his [left] boot.” (10: 63).)

In both acts, two other men, Pozzo and Lucky, stop by and their arrival and departure serve as a welcome diversion to the two friends. There is also at the end of each act, a Boy who comes to tell the two tramps that Godot will not come: an anti-climax that epitomises the futility of the situation. Although the two friends are determined to leave at nightfall, in both acts, when the moon finally rises they remain motionless on stage until the curtain.

Structurally, the second act is a repetition of the first, and the characters’ movement patterns, their entries and exists, Estragon’s preoccupation with his boots and Vladimir’s preoccupation with his hat, as well as their orientation towards the stone (Estragon), and tree (Vladimir), consistently parallel, echo and overlap each other to the effect that the audience may find in these repetitions, the “pleasure or surprise in a half-remembered recollection or a piece of incremental repetition” (Knowlson, TN I xiv).

In 1975, when Beckett directed the play at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin, he carefully modified the action, resulting in “many hundreds of changes and revisions” (Knowlson, TN I xiii). For example, as Knowlson points out, he radically changed the opening of the play in order to introduce the “element of symmetrical balance with variation into the structure of the opening of both acts” (Knowlson, TN I xxiii). In the earlier script, the stage directions describe Estragon to be “sitting on a low mound, trying to take off his boot”, but in Beckett’s revised version, “Estragon is seated motionless on a stone, audience left, with his head bowed down and with Vladimir (offstage, of course, in the published text) standing in half-shadow near to the tree up-stage right” (Knowlson TN I, xxiii). This change is also repeated in the opening of the second act, “where it is Estragon who observes Vladimir as

(Knowlson, TN I 6): i.e. [ ] – additions, { } –revisions, < > – cuts. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to highlight the examples of mis-movements that I discuss in red.

109 “Beckett identified the large sections of each act as ‘before’, ‘with’, and ‘after’ Pozzo and Lucky. He made calculations and cuts so that the pattern of the length of the sections of Act II represented a slightly shorter version of Act I. In order to establish the many echoes between the acts and for rehearsal purposes also, he designated six smaller divisions in Act I (A1–6) and five in Act II (B1–5). These divisions reveal the parallel structure of the play. A1 and B1 are expository, defining and re-establishing the appointment and the situation. A2 and B2 depict the more active search for ways to pass the time. A3 introduces Pozzo and Lucky; Act II has no such corresponding division. A4 focuses on Pozzo as he attempts to entertain Vladimir and Estragon with his discourse. B3 is a reversal of A4; this time Vladimir dominates the scene with his rhetoric while it is Pozzo who begs for help. A5 focuses on Lucky’s dance and ‘think’. B5 presents a diminished Lucky who is kicked in order to make him resume his burdens and is no longer able to dance, recite or sing. A6 and B5 contain the exchanges with the Boy and the concluding moonlit dialogue at the stone and the tree” (Knowlson, TN I 88).
he sings the ‘dog song’” (Knowlson, TN 1, xxiii): “ESTRAGON is standing midstage left at edge of shadow, bowed.” (Knowlson, TN 1, 50: 1575).

Beckett’s alterations to the beginning of each act effectively introduced the motif of waiting. The fact that the two tramps are together on stage when the curtain is drawn establishes “a still, waiting tableau, identified as ‘W1’ in the notebooks or (as it was called by Beckett) a first Wartestelle, literally a ‘waiting point”’ (Knowlson, TN 1 xxiii). These “waiting points” are further on repeated “at twelve strategically chosen points throughout the play” (Knowlson, TN 1 xxiii). Significantly, these ‘tableaux’ produce an atmosphere in which the silence and stillness leak into the performance to enfold spectators and characters alike. The spectators are meant to undergo the event of the “pressing reality of the silence”, which according to Beckett, “is pouring into the play like water into a sinking ship” (Knowlson, TN 1 xxiv).

Clearly, such changes aim to foreground the sensuous over the intellectual in the play. The audience, forced to share in the experience of waiting, only eventually get the opportunity to translate this experience into conceptual propositions. The effort to ‘grasp’ intellectually the meaning of the play in this way builds on the ability to engage in the ‘here and now’ of the presentation. Meaning in this sense is relational, but its relation is intrinsic to the process of appearing.

The impasses that the characters endure, their physical immobility and their fragmented arguments are, as Knowlson points out, important elements of the play, and have frequently been interpreted as metaphors for “circularity” in the sense of stasis in the play (Knowlson, TN I xxii). Admittedly, stillness or immobility is overwhelmingly present in Godot, and the explicit symbolism inherent in this physical and ‘mental’ deadlock has been duly acknowledged:

Estragon and Vladimir are certainly non-knowers and non-can-ers. They try to hang themselves; but they cannot. They try to leave the spot; but they cannot, detained as they are by their hope that eventually Godot will arrive. Even at the end of the play, they do not leave the stage, although the Boy has told them that Godot will not be coming that night: ‘They do not move’.

(Knowlson, TN I xix)

However, as Pierre Chabert has pointed out, even immobility holds the seed of motion:

Just as there is an intrinsic tension between silence and words, so there is an intrinsic tension between immobility and movement. Words emanate from silence and return to it; movement emanates from immobility and returns to it. All movements, all gestures move, so to speak, within immobility, are a victo-

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110 Michael Worton explains that “Beckett originally thought of calling his play En attendant (without Godot) in order to deflect the attention of readers and spectators away from this ‘non-character’ onto the act of waiting” (qtd in Pilling 71).
ry over immobility and have a value in the tension they maintain in relationship to immobility.

(qtd. in Kalb 39-40)

Thus, although the characters’ manifestations of immobility in the play may be seen to represent the theme of stasis, we must acknowledge that they also present the counterpoint of stasis, namely change.111

Equally visible in the play is the emphasis on the characters’ awareness of their helplessness as the psychological explanation of their situation. The characters appear to be ‘fallen’ in terms of being trapped in self-consciousness and irrational reasoning.112 The frequency with which the characters fall combines with allusions to Christian imagery to evoke the notion of ‘fallen humanity’, although this specific expression is never used in the play. Didi and Gogo are essentially helpless. Although they know what they do (they wait for Godot), and why they have to continue doing this (they need to be saved), they cannot give up waiting since they cannot decide to stop being in need of salvation any more than they can stop being aware of this fact, or stop hoping for salvation to come in the shape of the unknown Godot. Yet, they are clearly aware of their situation. Had they been blissfully ignorant of Godot and their need to be saved, they would not have been condemned to this spot, but would have been free to leave. The very same situation, therefore, can be interpreted either as inertia since — they cannot leave (i.e. they have no agency)—or continuity, they decide to continue to wait for Godot (they have agency).

The themes of inertia and continuity may therefore be seen to problematise the notion of agency. Clearly, Didi and Gogo do not wait for Godot because they choose to need salvation; they choose to wait for Godot because they need salvation. Their waiting, however, can be perceived either as inertia

111 Similarly, in Endgame, “movement and immobility, beginning and end, life and death and absence and presence are shown to be intrinsically intertwined. The audience as well as the characters arrive at the moment the action ambiguously slows down seemingly to end. At this point in the play, both characters and spectators alike are struck by the fact that something has already taken place. The play, of course, has taken place, but there is also a change to be noticed among the characters. The final tableau of the play, where Clov, is standing ‘im passive and motionless, his eyes fixed on HAMM till the end’ (CDW 133), echoes the opening tableau, where Clov stands ‘[m]otionless by the door, his eyes fixed on HAMM’ (92). The significance of Clov’s immobility [therefore] changes during the play so that by its end, immobility is pregnant with a meaning and significance that it initially did not have and which now also casts new light also on the opening tableau […] Something has taken its course, and change has suddenly appeared to be noticed” (Einarsson 119–120).

112 The dis-empowered status of man consistent with the Calvinist doctrine of the fall thus provides a rationale for the characters actions. A rationale, however, not based on agency since the characters’ ability to engage in their situation is determined on the basis of who they ‘essentially’ are, and not on what they choose to do. In Godot, therefore, existence does not precede essence but essence, here spelled ‘being in need of salvation’, precedes existence. Essentially Didi and Gogo wait for salvation, and while waiting, they exist.
or as continuity. Since waiting, for whatever reason, perpetually reinforces the moment of ‘here and now’, inertia and continuity converge in ‘stillness’, an equilibrium that combines the sense of immobility and enduring presence.

The physical movement of falling, particularly foregrounded in Waiting for Godot, may also be used to exemplify how mis-movements in the play are tentatively suggestive of meanings. For example, the concept of losing control in falling implies that falling is negative. However, falling, as the expression “falling in love” shows, can also be seen as a yielding that is essentially positive. Falling, therefore, can be experienced both as negative and positive, as it can be conditioned either by resistance or by non-resistance. In Waiting for Godot, falling may represent failure or loss of control, but might just as well be understood as the expression of the characters’ being oriented towards the ground as “limit itself; the hereness, or present condition that underwrites every elsewhere, the actual of every possible” (Connor, “Shifting Ground” 80)\textsuperscript{13}. As Vladimir and Estragon accept their situation and stay where they are, they acknowledge the fact that waiting is the prerequisite for meeting Godot, an event that would amount to being saved. The frequency with which the characters fall, then, accentuates the significance of falling as an expression of ‘hereness’, i.e. as something essentially positive, since remaining ‘here’ entails the only possibility of salvation. However, it may also be seen to emphasise the inherent helplessness of the characters, expressing the idea that man in his ‘fallen’ state is powerless and cannot choose to save himself.

The aesthetics of gesture in Beckett’s dramatic work draws on this perceptual suggestiveness. This is to say, it is to the widening of possible interpretations that mis-movements contribute. As Knowlson explains, it is important to stress that “as a director, as much as a writer, Beckett worked through suggestion rather than statement, creating images that appeal to and reverberate in the imagination” (Knowlson, TN 1 xxii–xxiii). Meaning, in this sense, does not belong to a specific perspective, but rather “belongs to a different dimension from that of the manifold of expressions and utterances through which it is given” (Sokolowski 28). Phenomenologically speaking, meaning is an “identity that is within and yet behind all of its expressions” (Sokolowski 28). The notion also appears in Beckett’s dialogue with Georges Duthuit, where Beckett claims, “[t]here are so many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to say” (Disjecta 144). Clearly, as Beckett was well aware, one and the same ‘meaning’ can also be expressed through a manifold of languages, signs, gesture or images. The ‘thing’, thus, “can always be presented in more ways than we already know; the thing will always hold more appearances in reserve” (Sokolowski

\textsuperscript{13} From the “English version of an essay published in German as ‘Auf schwankendem Boden’, in the catalogue of the exhibition Samuel Beckett, Bruce Nauman (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2000), pp. 80-87” (URL: http://www.stevenconnor.com/beckettnauman/).
28). In the Schiller-Theater production of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett renders this essentially phenomenological conviction in aesthetic form.

‘An uneventful event’

In a review entitled “The Uneventful Event”; *Waiting for Godot*, Vivian Mercier famously epitomised Beckett’s drama as “a play in which nothing happens twice” (29)\(^\text{144}\). Notably, however, the event of waiting is not ‘uneventful’ because, as was discussed above, rather than being ‘empty’ it is filled with the most pressing sense of ‘hereness’. In waiting, the passing away of time is painfully slow and time divides itself into sections that multiply and double back on each other until there is no telling one moment from the next. The experience of stasis inherent in waiting is expressed by Estragon, who after one of the many silences that permeate the play exclaims: “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful!” (38: 1093). However, the persistence with which the characters continue to wait at the same time underscores the sense of continuity of the situation that enfolds spectators and characters alike.\(^\text{115}\)

Clearly, for such an ‘uneventful event’, there is an enormous amount of activity going on. The two tramps endlessly engage in different activities in order to invent new ways of passing time: for example, they pull off or put on boots and hats, and they do their ‘yoga’ exercises:

[*(They converge on the boots. VLADIMIR stoops to pick up boot. ESTRAGON pulls him up.)*]

ESTRAGON: We don’t manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?
[…]

[*(VLADIMIR stoops and up as before.)*]

ESTRAGON: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

VLADIMIR: Yes yes, we’re magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. *(He picks up {the left} boot.)* Come on, give me your foot.

(62: 2012–2021)

ESTRAGON: What do we do now?
[…]

VLADIMIR: We could do our exercises.
[…]

*(VLADIMIR hops from one foot to the other. ESTRAGON imitates him.)*


\(^\text{115}\) In this sense, the manifestation of waiting in *Godot* is ‘real’, although it is “a realism to be attained through splintering, through calculated disharmony of means, through deliberate renunciation of ‘any rendering of the immediate outward aspect of the object’ […] the sort of realism [that] Apollinaire here calls a sur-realism” (Albright 9).
While, as Esslin points out, “it has become a commonplace in discussing Waiting for Godot that it is a play in which ‘nothing happens’” (“The Universal Image” 172), what appears, in fact does so, “through the articulation of time” implicit in the many many futile activities that the characters perform (174). By “breaking up of the ultimately actionless action into segments of actions that mutually cancel each other out” (173–74), Beckett manages to give the impression that what we have seen is not so much ‘nothing’, but “a fragment of a process that may be repeated over an endless series of days of waiting” (174). As Vladimir and Estragon continue taking off boots and hats, inspecting the inside of these items or putting them on, we also begin to notice the uneventfulness as significant, i.e. we begin to take an ‘interest in its presence’ without actually being able to state its significance.

The characters’ manner of paying attention to insignificant objects, as well as their failing to accomplish their tasks, soon creates a situation that is essentially unsurveyable such that although nothing really happens, there is so much happening all the time that we simply cannot notice it all, let alone evaluate its meaning. Examples abound, but include such instances as Estragon’s failing to take off his boot (9: 6–7), the gestural indication of place that undermines his words “ESTRAGON: (Without gesture.) Over there” (9: 22); the reminiscing of half-remembered sentences and events: “ESTRAGON: The same? I don’t know” (9: 26), “The last moment … Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?” (10: 54–55); the presenting of scraps of details that in turn become new details: “VLADIMIR: Sometimes I feel it coming all the same, Then I go all queer” (10: 57); the characters’ commenting on each others’ statements, “Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!” (10: 45); their attitude “Feebly. […] Angrily […] Musingly.” (10: 43, 46, 54); their appearance, “staring sightlessly before him” (10: 65); and finally, but not least, the many instances of silence and stillness in the play, i.e. “the waiting motif” (Knowlson, TN I xiii). In other words, the plethora of trifling details functions in such a way that they cannot be fully grasped as individually meaningful structures or shapes, but rather blend into a play of shapeless occurrences, seemingly insignificant events that nevertheless absorb our full attention.
A Shift of Attitude

According to Beckett, the supreme task for the artist is “to find a form that accommodates the mess” (1961), i.e. the nature of existence, intrinsic to everyday perception and communication (Beckett qtd in Driver 219). Paradoxically, Beckett explains in an interview with Charles Juliet, “it is through form that the artist may find some kind of a way out. By giving form to formlessness.”

Seeking this form, Beckett’s exploration of the performance-text entails breaking down every relationship between means and expression in order to show rather than tell this aesthetic conviction, and mis-movements provide a useful vehicle for conveying this aesthetic. Beckett’s own writing in the production notebook for Waiting for Godot at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin (1975) confirms his preoccupation with the shape of expression. As he came to direct the play, Beckett described his “purpose […] to ‘Der Konfusion Gestalt geben’ (‘To give shape to the confusion’)—[…) not only of existence but of a play that Beckett described (exaggeratedly, of course) to Walter Asmus as ‘a mess’ (Knowlson, TN I xi).

In the dramatic context of Godot, the ‘confusion’ is shown through a consistent undermining of the process of understanding on behalf of the spectator (or reader). Virtually every statement of the characters is subsequently ‘cancelled out’ by a contradictory statement. The effect is that the propositional meanings of words are consistently, destabilised, and the dissonance between text and action contributes to the ‘assault’ on words. This can be seen in the many instances when ‘actions speaks louder than words’, i.e. when the characters engage in mis-movements:

ESTRAGON: I’m going. [He does not move.] (12: 112)

VLADIMIR: I’ll give it to him. (He does not move.) (38: 1100–01)

VLADIMIR: [(Looking up)] Well? Shall we go?
ESTRAGON: [(Looking down)] Yes, let’s go. (They do not move. [Silence.]) (85: 2899–2901)

Clearly, the characters’ words are inadequate to express their intentions, and in this process, the relation between what the characters say and do, so frequently taken for granted in everyday perception, is undermined. What Beckett stages in his drama are ‘milieux’ in which non-propositional meanings undermine, or even at times, take precedence over, propositional mean-

ings. Essentially, Beckett is doing two things at the same time: he both gives us a text and breaks that text down, undercutting its very meaning and structure. The juxtaposition of words and actions, thus, is an effort to challenge the habitual appropriation of meaning inherent in the ‘natural attitude’: our everyday perception of reality. In the presentation of mis-movement, and in the characters’ undermining of their own statements, the propositional dominance of semantic content is broken and the ‘identity’ and clarity of expression begins to dissolve in favour of a proliferation of possible significations.

The effect is undoubtedly comical. Audiences laugh at Vladimir and Estragon’s obsession with hats and boots, at their falling, at the way they contradict their intentions and resolutions. Indeed, *Waiting for Godot* is subtitled *A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, and Knowlson confirms that the play “blended comic and serious elements very successfully” (*TN I vi*). Yet, even the comical in Beckett’s plays seems directed at slipping out of the realm of signification and meaning. Beckett’s emphasis on man as ‘non-knower’ and a ‘non-can-er’, thus, prevails even in the emphasis on laughter. According to Bataille, what is being laughed at has the power to “cancel out knowledge” (203):

> It’s really the object of the laughter, or the object of tears that suppresses thought, that takes all knowledge away from us. The laughter or the tears break out in the vacuum of thought created by the object in the mind. But these moments, like deeply rhythmed movements of poetry, of music, of love, of dance, have the power to capture and endlessly recapture the moment that counts, the moment of rupture, of fissure.

(Bataille 203)

Bataille’s emphasis on the function of laughter as the prerequisite for sovereignty, seem analogous to Beckett’s emphasis on the ‘assault against words in the name of beauty’. To Bataille, “the sovereign (or the sovereign life) begins when, with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit” (198). Although Bataille is discussing sovereignty in relation to the “consumption of wealth as against labour and servitude” (198), the emphasis on “life beyond utility” as the realm of sovereignty is reminiscent both of Kant’s “Analytic of the Beautiful”, and of Beckett’s call for beauty as the realm of authenticity; the function of both is to open up for a proliferation of potential meanings, rather than closing into determinate significations. To Bataille, “what is sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time” (199). By analogy, Beckett’s emphasis on mis-movement set the stage for a perception that draws its energy from the present. Both the authentic and the sovereign in

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117 Also the Kantian notion of aesthetic pleasure as disinterested relies on the moment when the object is being “perceived solely in the presence of its appearing” (Seel 3). For Kant’s discussion of “disinterestedness,” see *Critique of Judgment*, pp. 37–45.
this sense question knowledge as the basis for its coming to givenness, and rely on the moment when consciousness dissolves into unknowing.\textsuperscript{118}

However, the clownish and the slapstick elements invoking laughter are consistently diminished through Beckett’s directorial decisions, and ultimately disappear in his later dramas in favour of a stronger emphasis on the formal structure of mis-movements. Implicit in the perception of mis-movements is a shift of perceptual attitude from the habitual appropriation of meaning to the phenomenological reflecting on the structure of the presentation. The ‘stepping back’ from the natural attitude in order to reflect on the manner of presentation is, at some level, analogous to Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt. Admittedly, mis-movements in may be seen to distance the spectator from the presentation. However, whereas Brecht’s notion of an ‘epic drama’ constitutes the dramatic situation as an event of the past, Beckett’s drama is wholly dedicated to the present, and to enfolding the spectator in event of the play.

Perhaps rather than phenomenological, therefore, the shift of attitude is performative as it has the capacity to transport audiences away from the disembodied, propositional sphere of knowledge and rational thinking, into the firmly embodied realm of perception. Notably, this is also where the possibility for ‘new meanings’ appear, since it is precisely this shift of attitude that allows us to perceive the aspect changes of meaning that open up through the play of shapes intrinsic to aesthetic perception. Importantly, the Kantian freedom from concepts defines aesthetic experience precisely as a paying attention to a phenomenon in the repleteness of its appearing, without necessarily having to reduce it to ‘this’ or ‘that’. Considering “how aesthetic perception relates to conceptually articulated perception” (Seel 25), therefore, we may be able to reconcile the function of mis-movements with their manner of appearing.

‘A poetry of the theatre’

\textit{Waiting for Godot} was Beckett’s first effort to create ‘a poetry of the theatre’ rather than ‘a poetry in the theatre’ (Knowlson, \textit{Damned} 230). Realising that “words obscure the action and are obscured by it”, Beckett sought to create a theatre where the rhythmic structures of words and action would “take their vitality not from poetic forms of metaphor but from the music hall and circus, and action and gesture to create their own kind of intricate balletic choreography” (230). The notion is confirmed by Ruby Cohn, who concludes that:\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{118} I am indebted to Paul Schreiber at the Department of English, Stockholm University, for pointing me in the direction of Bataille’s discussion of laughter.

Beckett’s notebooks amplify his texts with many diagrams of the movements of his characters. This is not only traditional blocking but also a concern with who faces where at every moment of time, with each actor’s moment-by-moment victory over stillness, with the counterpoint of word and gesture, with visual echoes, symmetries and oppositions.

As Knowlson points out, “it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the directions set out in the Schiller notebook resemble a choreography performed to the ‘music’ of the text” (TN I xii). In a similar vein, Martin Esslin suggests that Waiting for Godot is a play where the “analogy with music goes deep” (Esslin, “Universal” 174).

The practical aim of Beckett’s directorial alterations was to present “a poetic structure built on echo, balance and rhythm”, in a way similar to many of his texts, but involving the “arrangements of form in space or the movements of living actors to create a striking form of visual poetry” (Knowlson, TN I xviii). For example, the visual patterns that Beckett called “approach by stages”, in which the characters “advance towards each other in a series of starts and stops”, are frequently repeated in order to lend a “vitality to what could otherwise be a relatively static scene” (xvii). Estragon’s “calendar stops”, a little later paralleled by Vladimir’s approaching by stages when Estragon has fallen asleep, primarily draw attention to their own appearing rather than to some underlying signification and so begin to appear for aesthetic perception (xviii):

ESTRAGON: But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? [Advances towards VLADIMIR.] […] (Pause. [Advances further.]) […]
(Pause. [Advances further.]) […]
VLADIMIR: (Looking about him wildly, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape) It’s not possible!
[…]
ESTRAGON: [(He returns to the stone.)] If he came yesterday […]
[(Sits.)]

(14: 202–09)

(< >) ESTRAGON falls asleep. [VLADIMIR goes upstage extreme left, gazes into distance off left with his hands shielding his eyes, turns and goes extreme right, gazes into distance off.] {turns and approaches ESTRAGON. Halts.} Gogo! [(Approaches. Halts.)] Gogo!
[(Approaches and halts behind ESTRAGON, shakes him gently awake.)] GOGO!
(ESTRAGON wakes with a start.)

(14: 214–219)

This ‘manner of approaching’ is further on repeated after the two tramps have had an altercation resulting in Vladimir exiting the stage:
Enter VLADIMIR. \textit{He passes in front of ESTRAGON, crosses the stage, halts left with his back to ESTRAGON. } ESTRAGON takes a step towards him, halts.)

ESTRAGON: You wanted to speak to me? (Silence. ESTRAGON takes a step forward.)

[...] (Silence. Another step forward.)

Didi...

VLADIMIR: (Without turning) I’ve nothing to say to you.

ESTRAGON: (Step forward.) You’re angry?

(Silence. Step forward.) Forgive me.

(Silence. Step forward. < >)

Come Didi.

(Silence.)

(15–16: 249–63)

The patternings of movement are meant to produce a “co-ordinated visual effect”, designed to be “neither markedly tragic or comic”, and with “no specific cause or predictable resolution” (Knowlson, \textit{TN I} 130). Yet, through this process, the body and its movements, nominally the ‘background’, or the ‘context’ against which words are projected, come to the fore as background. The structured patterns of physical movements do not supplant words—what the characters say still has relevance—but the context in which these words are uttered is thrown into relief.

Beckett’s minute attention to movement patterns also involves structuring the entrances and exits of the characters so that they balance and counterpoint each other:

[ESTRAGON: I’m going.]

(VLADIMIR writhes. Exit ESTRAGON left, precipitately.)

VLADIMIR: I can’t. (He looks up, misses ESTRAGON.) Gogo! (Exit right to look for him. Re-enters.} Enter ESTRAGON left, panting. He hastens towards VLADIMIR, [Meets him in the centre].)

(66: 2171–78)

ESTRAGON: [(Moving away left)] That wasn’t such a bad little canter.

VLADIMIR: [(Moving away right)] Yes, but now we’ll have to find something else.

[(They take off their hats, concentrate)]

ESTRAGON: [(Advancing towards centre)] Let me see. [Let me see.] < >

VLADIMIR: [(Advancing towards centre)] Let me see. [Let me see. (They turn just before collision.)] < >

ESTRAGON: [(Moving away left)] Let me see. Let me see.

VLADIMIR: [(Moving away right)] Let me see. Let me see. (They halt and put on their hats.)

(58: 1858–67)
VLADIMIR: Let’s go and meet him!

(He drags ESTRAGON towards the wings, [left]. ESTRAGON resists, pulls himself free, exit right.)

Gogo! Come back!

( {VLADIMIR runs and exit left. Enter ESTRAGON right, VLADIMIR left. They hasten towards each other and meet in the centre.})

The countrapuntal form indicates that while the two characters move separately and independently of each other, their individual movements are in fact perfectly harmonious, i.e. they do not get into each other’s way, collide or interrupt each other. The careful ‘spacing’ of the characters’ movements is thus designed to appear for perception as a symbiotic relationship, albeit this is only vaguely suggestive through their manner of moving.

The patterns of the characters’ movements are also designed to be expressive of their “basic orientations” (Knowlson, TN I xiv). In the notebooks, “Estragon’s attachment to the stone is specifically contrasted by Vladimir’s gravitation towards the tree” (Knowlson TN I xiv). This ‘theme’ is presented already from the very beginning but continues throughout the play:

[VLADIMIR: stands upstage right by the tree, half in shadow, listening.] ESTRAGON {is seated on a stone} [downstage left, still, bowed. Long silence.]

(9: 4–7)

In the Schiller-Theater production of Godot, Beckett consistently stressed the contrast between Estragon and Vladimir’s movements as founded on this orientation towards ground and sky. According to Knowlson:

The two central human figures are linked by Beckett’s directorial decisions with what might be termed an elemental or cosmological set of contrasts: earth, sky; mineral, vegetable; material, immaterial; horizontal, vertical; aspiration up, impulsion down.

(Knowlson, TN I xiv)

The suggestive presentation of the “contrasting natures of the two central protagonists” brings to the play a “vision of human existence that is expressed not so much in terms of specific concepts but of dominant and often clashing impulses that may be sensed rather than directly discerned behind the words” (Knowlson, TN I xiv). The characters’ converging on hats and boots is therefore an important part of the visual structuring in the play. Vladimir’s preoccupation with his hat (sky/aspiration up) mirrors Estragon’s preoccupation with his boot (earth/impulsion down), and the manner in which they inspect and attend to these objects present visual echoes of their respective orientations.
VLADIMIR: Sometimes [...] [He takes off his hat, peers in it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.] How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time ... [He searches for the word.] ... appalled. [With emphasis:] APPALLED <> Funny. (He [takes off his hat again, peers inside it, turns it upside down,] knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into again, puts it on again.) Nothing to be done.

(ESTRAGON with supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his [left] boot. He looks into it <> turns it upside down, {taps on it}, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, <> staring sightlessly before him. (10: 57–65)

These actions are repeated throughout the play, with permutational variations on the theme, so that at times it is Vladimir who inspects Estragon’s boots, and Estragon who inspects either his own hat, or Vladimir’s, or both of them busy themselves with each others’ headgear, with the extra addition of Lucky’s in the ‘hat scene’, where the excessive and speedy shifting and inspecting of hats is carried to its extreme:

VLADIMIR: Lucky’s hat. (He goes towards it [downstage right].) I’ve been here an hour and never saw it. {(He picks it up.) Very pleased} Fine! [...]

VLADIMIR: Hold that.

(ESTRAGON takes Vladimir’s hat [with his right hand]. VLADIMIR adjusts Lucky’s hat on his head. [It is roughly the same size as his.] ESTRAGON puts on Vladimir’s hat [with his right hand] in place of his own, which he hands to VLADIMIR [with his left hand]. VLADIMIR takes Estragon’s hat. ESTRAGON adjusts Vladimir’s hat on his head. [There is a great disparity of size. The effect is grotesque.] VLADIMIR puts on Estragon’s hat in place of Lucky’s which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes Lucky’s hat. VLADIMIR adjusts Estragon’s hat on his head. [Grotesque disparity.] ESTRAGON puts on Lucky’s hat in place of Vladimir’s which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR takes his hat. ESTRAGON adjusts his hat on his head. VLADIMIR puts on Lucky’s hat in place of Vladimir’s which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes Vladimir’s hat. VLADIMIR adjusts Lucky’s hat on his head. ESTRAGON hands Vladimir’s hat back to VLADIMIR who takes it and hands it back to ESTRAGON who takes it and hands it back to VLADIMIR who throws it down. [The whole exchange is rapid and uninterrupted.]

(65–66: 2109–49)

The scene also effectively underscores the affinities with music that prevail in Beckett’s work as the contrapuntal structure introduced in Vladimir’s preoccupation with his hat is here developed into a fuge-like structure in which the flow of movements is successivley repeated. The permutations and variations of the hat-theme now attain a poetic dimension as they serve to defamiliarise the dramatic situation. Rhythmic and visual echoes, as well as the patterns of movement, in this way accumulate and build up balanced thematic variations that produce a perception that is purely aesthetic.
Clearly, “visual echoes extend widely throughout the play and their power of allusion often stretches from an early section to a later one” (Knowlson, *TN I* xviii). We need only to see a few minutes of the play, or read a few lines, to begin to ‘notice’ the mis-movements that constitute these poetic patterns, although it will perhaps not be until the end of the play that we realise the extent to which this symmetrical patterning has been structured. Yet, whether mis-movements appear as abundance or scarcity—i.e. whether they are presented through highly stylised, frequently iterated movements, or whether they appear through absence of movement or stasis—mis-movements are meant to elude ‘rational’ perception in favour of an aesthetic contemplation of shape, form and gesture.

Essentially, the perceptual suggestiveness of mis-movements makes them highly suitable to render Beckett’s vision of man as a ‘non-knower’ and a ‘non-can-er’ in aesthetic form. However, the directorial changes Beckett made to the 1975 production of *Godot* also served to expose the ‘fictions’ of everyday perception of meaning: “The danger”, Beckett writes, “is in the neatness of identification” (*Disjecta* 19). This is not to say that there is no meaning, but only that the function of mis-movements is to complicate and qualify the linguistic content of the play. The effect is that the context in which meaning is grasped is thrown into relief causing any habitual meaning of words and actions to liquify and dissolve: the uneventful becomes eventful, the tragic becomes comic and the potentially insignificant suddenly seems fraught with meaning. In this sense, mis-movements constitute an initial step in the project to ‘assault words’.

**II: Come and Go**

Reversing the Figure-Ground Structure in Aesthetic Perception

In Beckett’s ‘late plays’, i.e. the plays written after *Play* (1963), the juxtaposition of words and action, so frequent in *Godot*, successively diminishes in favour of a stronger emphasis on physical movements not as anomalies related to words, but as the very material of expression. S.E. Gontarski confirms that in Beckett’s ‘late style’, the visual aspect of the presentation is vital: “without the full visual counterpart”, i.e. unless staged, “the works are denuded, skeletal, finally unreadable—in any traditional sense, that is, if by unreadable we mean to suggest that their primary effect is extra-linguistic” (Gontarski, *TN IV* xvi). Thus, the ‘late style’ of Beckett’s theatre is characterised by Beckett’s “moving theatre to a new aesthetic plane” (Gontarski, *TN IV* xvi). Of course, this shift had not yet taken place when Beckett first wrote *Godot*. Although Beckett in the 1975 Schiller-Theater production of *Godot* takes the opportunity to ‘realise’ his play fully, the changes he makes
are still founded on the dramatic text he wrote in 1949. Therefore, while the
directorial decisions may reflect Beckett’s ‘late style’, the dramatic text still
bears the traits of Beckett’s earlier position vis-à-vis drama. In this sense, the
emphasis on mis-movements as anomalies, i.e. the foregrounding of idiosyncratic
movements, can be seen to constitute an initial step in the project to
‘assault words’, while still lacking a sense of ‘beauty’.

In the early 1960s, however, Beckett’s writing had “changed profoundly
as he increased his direct advisory role” (Gontarski, TN IV xvi). For example,
“the nature of the theatrical ‘character’ itself [...], was being redefined,
dispersed” (Gontarski, TN IV xvi). It is also at this point that Beckett begins to
emphasise ‘unintelligibility’ in his plays.120 From Play onwards, the “dramatic ammunition” of Beckett’s plays is therefore less the struggle with
words, and more the rhythmic structures of sights and sounds, for example the acoustic staccato of a monologue in which the number of words spoken in one breath is carefully timed (Not I, 1972); the visual patterns created by stasis and movement (Play, Footfalls 1976); and the emphasis on a circumscribed playing space in which the principle ‘less is more’ is allowed performative effect (Come and Go, Quad, That Time 1976). In other words, the shape of the presentation begins to take priority over the semiotic content of the text.

Significantly, this does not mean that there is no semantic content in
Beckett’s plays—there obviously as the proliferation of scholarly and literary analyses indicates. However, we also need to acknowledge that with every play Beckett is essentially giving us two texts: one on the ‘page’ and one on the ‘stage’.121 On the page, the semantic content is clearly there, whereas on the stage, the directorial actions may be seen to to ‘desophisticate’ words and semantic meanings in order to refocus our attention to form. The idea of ‘desophistication’—and of a more direct expression—Beckett absorbed from Joyce, whom he helped with research for Work in Progress, subsequently published as Finnegans Wake (1939) (Knowlson, Damned 106). In “Dante … Bruno .. Vico . Joyce”, Beckett praises Joyce’s fusion of form and content and claims that “the Beauty of Work in Progress is not presented in space alone, since its adequate apprehension depends as much on its visibility as on its audibility. There is a temporal as well as spatial unity to be apprehended” (Disjecta 28). According to Beckett, the novel was “an heroic attempt to make literature accomplish what belongs to music” (Beckett qtd in Knowlson, Damned 240). By analogy, Beckett’s emphasis as

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120 Gontarski relates how the production of Play generated a conflict between producers and actors who “understood and accepted Beckett’s aesthetic shift and those who could not” (TN IV xvii). Actors were complaining over how Beckett’s directorial advice about the speed of the dialogue rendered the whole play unintelligible. Beckett, however, “undeterred by such charges, […] went on to write yet another ‘unintelligible’ play, Not I (Gontarski, TN IV xvii).

121 I am indebted to Richard Begam for pointing out the amalgamation of ‘page’ and ‘stage’ in Beckett’s plays.
a director on the shape of the dramatic presentation could be seen as an effort to present the stage events in an “inordinately formal” way (Molloy 50). Mis-movements are but one of the vehicles used to produce such visual and auditory formal effects.

According to Dearlove, “Beckett’s interest in the shape as opposed to the validity of ideas pervades and informs his entire canon” (3). In “Something is Taking its Course”, Harry White also points out that there is a consistency to Beckett’s emphasis on shape and structure that permeates his entire oeuvre:

The idea of movement through formal strategy, of dramatic advancement by means of an unfolding structure, would appear to inhere in Beckett’s writing almost from the beginning, so that the distillation of this idea in the later plays enjoys a clear precedent not only in Godot and Endgame, but in early (prose) works such as Murphy. The sense that ‘something is taking its course’ abides in Beckett and underpins the surface collapse of narrative structure.

(170) 122

In his early narratives, Beckett mocks the very structures on which they depend, but it is “not until Murphy that he finds the first of his shapes for dealing with uncertainty and fluidity. There he expands and distorts the assumptions beneath relational art until they explode into intentional ambiguity” (Dearlove 13–14). 123

The ‘possibility of nonrelationship’ entails opening up for the aspect changes of the phenomenon appearing for perception, namely to the play of shapes inherent in aesthetic perception. In Beckett’s early plays, the juxtaposition of words and movements exposes words as ‘fictional’ constructs, but as my analysis of mis-movements in Come and Go and Quad will reveal, the main trajectory of Beckett’s artistic development and his desire to present a ‘poetry of the theatre’ is founded on a new aesthetic conviction: “the shift in aesthetics was towards a radical simplification, a disencumberment, a further de-theatricalisation of theatre” (Gontarski, TN IV xxiii). Seeking a form to present this conviction, Beckett explores the limits of signification and meaning.

Significantly, however, the meaning of patterns is not that they are structures per se. Simply stating that patterns are poetic structures will not help us understand their significance. Rather, the manifestation of carefully organised mis-movements, visual echoes and patterns, is designed to make the audience notice mis-movements precisely as mis-movements. The ‘noema’ of perception in Beckett’s presentation of mis-movements, then, are mis-movements as experienced, i.e. the dramatic presentation enfolds the specta-

123 By analogy, Begam suggests that “Beckett is engaged not so much in the hermeneutics of falsehood, as in the aesthetics of play” (End of Modernity 9).
tor in the experience of experiencing aesthetically.\textsuperscript{124} Mis-movements, considered precisely as mis-movements, are thus the noema of aesthetic perception in Beckett’s plays; not the concept of mis-movements, not a vehicle by means of which consciousness becomes referred to a particular thing, nor the specific meaning of this or that mis-movement, but mis-movements considered from the phenomenological perspective as they appear for aesthetic perception.

Importantly, therefore, the implications of Beckett’s ‘paradigmatic shift’ from the propositional to the non-propositional are more far-reaching than just ‘assaulting words’; rather there is a deep reversal of the figure-ground aspect involved in the shift from meaning to experiencing, from content to form.\textsuperscript{125} While the visual echoes, patterns and parallels continue to proliferate, the juxtaposition of word and action is more or less dispersed in the choreographic presentation of physical movement in Beckett’s late style. In the beginning of his writing for theatre, Beckett is ‘confined’ to language, a fact that he apparently senses as limiting his power to ‘express the inexpressible’; hence his desire to “eliminate language” (Dijecta 172). In the German letter, Beckett rhetorically asks: “Is there something paralysingly holy in the vicious nature of the word that is not found in the elements of other art?” (172). Comparing literature to music or painting he expresses a wish to dissolve that “terrible materiality of the word surface […] so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence” (Dijecta 172). However, as Beckett began to direct his plays, he came to discover not only how profoundly the dramatic text would change in the staging process, but also how he could develop a fuller means of expression by employing all the different elements of the stage, i.e. how the lighting, costumes and not least the characters’ movements could effectively contribute to the presentation of his nonrepresentational dramas.

The spectator, in perceiving this highly abstract drama, is asked to lose the radical freedom of individual perception in favour of a ‘communal’ experience. In his unpublished German diaries, dating from 1936, Beckett claims that “the authentic poem or picture was a prayer […] The art (picture) that is a prayer sets up a prayer, releases the onlooker, i.e. Priest: Lord have mercy upon us. People. Christ have mercy upon us” (qtd in Knowlson, Damned 222). The analogy with the prayer highlights the situation in which audiences will find themselves in Beckett’s theatre, and gives a sense of the interac-

\textsuperscript{124} As Sokolowski explains, “[t]he term ‘noema’ refers to the objective correlates of intentionalities […] precisely as being looked at from the transcendental [phenomenological] attitude” (59).

\textsuperscript{125} Thomas Kuhn employed the concept “paradigm shift” in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), to explain how the accumulation of anomalies, i.e. facts and data that do not readily fit into the core concepts of a given ‘paradigm’, eventually accumulate and bring about a whole new ‘paradigm’. For example, the Copernican Revolution is an example of this.
tion between the work of art and its spectators that leads them back to the significance of aesthetic experience. It is through participation that the prayer is released and it is by engaging with the work of art that its “meaning” emerges. Expressed thus, Beckett also bears an affinity with Kandinsky’s artistic project with its emphasis on a kind of ‘truth’. However, whereas Kandinsky, according to Henry, defines the artistic presentation of art as the revelation of a radical spiritual domain of subjectivity, it is my contention that Beckett’s artistic efforts are revelatory of a quite different attitude—namely that while materially ‘true’, our acts of perceiving, understanding, and reasoning are firmly embodied, and therefore contingent.

‘Less is more’

The mutual irreducibility of self and world, while certainly confirming the finite determination of human perception, nevertheless fails to distinguish between different kinds of perception. Drawing on Kant’s theory of aesthetic appearing, Seel highlights “a minimal concept of aesthetic perception”, and “a minimal concept of the aesthetic object”, concluding that the “aesthetic object is an object in the process of its appearing; aesthetic perception is attentiveness to this appearing” (Seel 4). This is not to say that “aesthetic consciousness is nothing but attentiveness to what is appearing” (Seel 35). Clearly, aesthetic perception pays attention to more than what appears in the present, i.e. has the potential to elicit interpretative perception and to make the past and the future present, “be it recollection, anticipation or simulation” (Seel 35). Significantly, aesthetic perception “can be widely open to acquaintance with knowledge, interpretation and meaning. But it can just as easily refrain from this reach” (Seel 36). Yet, what distinguishes aesthetic perception from extra-aesthetic perception is its capacity to “draw its crucial energies from concentration on the present” (Seel 35–36). Presence, in this sense, is an open “horizon of encounter with what is there” (Seel 32). This encounter need not be aesthetic, but rather, the aesthetic mode of attentiveness “represents a mode of this encounter” (Seel 32). As a consequence, “the object of aesthetic perception cannot be separated from that of its appearances”, but is “a play of its appearances […] Its three components are at the center of attention: the object, its appearances, and their play” (Seel 37). Notably, the whole concept of ‘appearing’ builds on our ability to “allow the object of perception to have effect without restricting ourselves to specific

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126 There seems to be an affinity between Beckett and Kandinsky, not only in their mutual insistence on the rupture between the subject and object, but also in their affirmation of perceptual ‘truth’.  
127 According to Henry, Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art “offers a programme of revitalization” insisting as it does against naturalism that “the true dimension of art is the ‘spiritual’” (19).
aspects of its constitution or its function” (Seel 47). Appearing, thus, “does not come to perception until we encounter the sensuous presence of an object for the sake of its sensuous presence” (Seel 47). In aesthetically perceiving an object we are thus attentive to the temporal flow of appearances it produces. In other words, the audience need not be conscious of the mis-movements that the characters perform in Beckett’s plays. Indeed, if we reconstruct their significance in terms of what ‘makes sense’, we have decided against perceiving mis-movements aesthetically. Yet, Beckett’s minute attention to movements and gestures and his careful structuring of the characters’ actions, contributes to their appearing as phenomena that resist rational conceptualisation. The audience, failing to determine their function, is guided towards perceiving their momentary and fleeting appearances, and through this process of appearing, to encounter mis-movements aesthetically.

The aesthetic conviction underlying Beckett’s late theatre, then, seems explicated in terms of its performative function. Clearly, mis-movements ensure that we pay attention to what appears, as well as stay attentive to the play of appearances during any performance. This attentiveness to the present requires that we open up to the richness and the particularity of non-propositional presentations. The prerequisite for aesthetic experience, then, is precisely that we forego “the theoretical practical treatment of the world”, i.e. that the “processing play of shapes on the side of the aesthetic object correlates with a free play of the perception and distinction faculty on the side of the aesthetic subject” (Seel 140). This activity requires a liberation from the cultural, social, and historical determination of phenomena. Beckett’s presentation of mis-movements in this sense ideally constitutes an “encounter with formless reality”, designed to transport spectators away from the natural attitude. Thus, Beckett’s redefinition of his theatre entails “increasing the significance of the performative and ruthlessly rejecting anything dispensable” (Gontarski, TN IV xxvii). The result is a minimalistic drama in which the visual and aural expressions appear in a carefully balanced structure based on the principle “less is more” (TN IV xxv).

‘Mathematically desirable, logically impossible’

In Come and Go, the principle of ‘impossible shape’ is rigorously carried out. The play, or dramaticule, is a highly minimalist drama, all in all consist-

128 Starting with his taking full directorial responsibility for Endgame in 1967, Beckett’s artistic development consistently moved towards formal simplicity and minimalism.
129 In the editorial comments to Beckett notes to Come and Go, “Beckett seems to have considered a second round to his play of repeated confidences, so that, at the end of the second loop, the characters would be restored to their original places […] but Beckett noted shortly thereafter, ‘Mathematically desirable [but] logically impossible’” (TN IV 236).
of 71 lines: “about 25 pages to arrive at that!” Of these 71 lines, 37 constitute dialogue, and the rest are stage directions describing precisely how the three characters FLO, VI and RU should sit, turn towards each other, turn from each other, exit and return from and to the playing area, and finally, how they hold hands in an intricate pattern (TN IV 208: 61–4). Their movements are carefully structured so that each woman makes a single exit and entrance, “moving silently into the surrounding darkness before returning once more into light” (Knowlson, Damned 473). During the absence of each woman in turn, one of the two remaining women, according to a carefully described pattern, shifts closer to the other in order to whisper something in her ear. The ‘secret’ evokes horrified responses: “oh! […] Does she not realize?”, “Has she not been told?”, “Does she not know?”, to which the replies “God grant not.”, “God forbid.”, and “Please God not.”, are given (TN IV 207). The exact communication is never stated, but as Beckett wrote to Jacoba van Velde: “They are ‘condemned’ all three” (qtd in Knowlson, Damned 473).

In “Beckett and Holliger”, Philippe Albèra comments that “the language relinquishes much of its denotative function by concealing from us the very subject of discourse: it remains secret, or unnamable” (87). Rather than relying on poetic forms of metaphor, therefore, the poetic ‘language’ of the play is rendered as aesthetic shape in performance through the shifting of places and the holding of hands, so meticulously worked out in the stage directions. The precision with which this is done, the structure based on the principle of variation, is also similar to the fugue or rondo form in music. Clearly, Come and Go can “be affiliated with [the] musical score, in which everything is noted with the greatest precision […] but which at the same time requires a performance and an interpretation” (Albèra 87). As White notes, “the permutations of a single exchange between Vi, Ru, and Flo engage a ceremony of posture, appearance, decorum, and patterned movement, all of which is prescribed with a […] level of detail that aspires to the

130 All examples of mis-movements in Come and Go are from The Theatrical Notebooks:, Vol. IV, The Shorter Plays. According to the standards of this edition, the following typographical notes signify that, “[t]ext between square brackets [ ] has been added to the original English text. Text between pointed brackets { } has been revised. A pair of angle brackets < > indicates that a section of text has been cut from the original English text” (204); i.e. [ ] – additions, { } – revisions, < > – cuts. For the sake of clarity, the examples of mis-movements have been highlighted in red.


133 The musicality of its structure has enticed composers to set it to music (Knowlson, Damned 577).

134 In the chapter “Beckett and Holliger”, Albèra is not only referring to Come and Go but also to What Where. Notably, the precision with which Beckett structures many, if not all, of his late plays shares an affinity with musical scores rather than textual manuscripts.
precision of music.” (168). The opening lines of the play present a structure to be consistently developed in the performance. Thematically these lines “not only establish characters’ names, but they create a motif which is echoed in the first two lines following each characters’ departure and in the addition to FLO’s final speech” (Gontarski, TN IV 212).

Notably, the thematic structure is also echoed in the sequences of movements that the characters perform. Successively, as the woman in the middle seat exits she leaves a space between the two remaining women, a void soon to be filled by the woman shifting to this centre position, i.e. the one who will leave next. As VI exits, “FLO moves to centre seat, whispers in RU’s ear” (Gontarski, TN IV 207). The same procedure is repeated when FLO exits, “RU moves to centre seat, whispers in VI’s ear.” (208), and finally RU exits and “VI moves to centre seat, whispers in FLO’s ear” (208). This formal structure, then, propels and determines not only the continuity of the theme, but also the consistent passing on of the ‘secret’, as well as the successive passing on of the ‘curse’. As Gontarski observes in the editorial comments to Come and Go, “Beckett seems to have considered a second round to his play of repeated confidences so that, at the end of the second loop, the characters would be restored to their original places […] but Beckett noted shortly thereafter, ‘Mathematically desirable [but] logically impossible’” (TN IV 236). Indeed, in this continuously transforming reality there can, of course, be no closures.

135 In January 1965 Beckett wrote: “Feel obliged to authorize Heinz Holliger and his publisher Schott Mainz to use texts of Not I and Come and Go for his musical settings of these works” (Knowlson, Damned 473). According to Knowlson, Beckett’s “attitude to musicians who wanted to adapt his work was much freer than it was to stage or film directors wishing to do the same thing” (577).
136 “These opening lines were not part of the first edition of Come and Go: A Dramaticule (Calder and Boyars, London 1967), p. 7, but they were part of the first American edition, Cascando and Other Short Dramatic Pieces, (Grove Press, New York 1968), p. 67, and all translations particularly the French and the German” (Gontarski, TN IV 212).
137 According to Gontarski, numerous critics have pointed to the opening line’s “allusion to […] the opening query of the three witches of Macbeth” (Gontarski, TN IV 212).
Encountering the Universal

The three women, then, all share the same fate, and this state of affairs is suggested not only through the emphasis on the ‘nondescript’ and plain in the play, but also in the way in which the stage presentation underscores the similarity rather than the individuality of the women. Interestingly, in *Come and Go*, the particular seems diminished in favour of the universal. The characters’ voices are instructed to be as “low as compatible with audibility. Colourless except for three ‘ohs’ and two lines following” (Gontarski, *TN IV* 211); their costumes, “[f]ull-length coats, buttoned high, dull violet (RU), dull red (VI), dull yellow (FLO), with “drab nondescrip” hats” that shade their faces, are designed to appear “as like as possible” (210); the bench they sit on is “just long enough to accommodate three figures almost touching. As little visible as possible” (210); the three women should not be “seen to go offstage. They should disappear a few steps from lit area. If dark not sufficient to allow this, recourse should be had to screens or drapes as little visible as possible. Exits and entrances slow, without sound of feet”, i.e. they all move in the same, restricted manner, making no distinctive sound as they leave (210). In the directorial notes we find that Beckett, in an effort to stress the similarity between the characters, considered using cushions to ensure that the heads were on the same level. These cushions were to “be taken with her or or moved by confider to future place. Same colour as dress” (233). Significantly, as all the elements of the drama underwrite a sense of vagueness, and as the aggregate of characteristics that distinguish one individual from another is diminished, the communal, shared and collective aspect of the human condition appears.  

Mis-movements in this context, i.e. the manner in which the characters exit and return, shift places and hold hands, can be seen to emerge as an expression of the human condition as communal. The careful manifestations of slowness in the women’s exits and entrances seen thus, constitute an articulation of a certain pathos, consistent with the human condition as collective. The characters’ movements do not determine the situation, but are determined by it, i.e. they are not free because they are all condemned, because they all undergo this experience, and the shape and structure of the presentation of mis-movements are suggestive of the human condition as something shared. The suffering emanating from this condition is likewise shared, as can be seen in the repetition of ‘ohs’ following on the whispered

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138 The editorial notes reveal that the cushions “were used in the production but they were not carried off by the exiting character. Instead Beckett’s alternate solution was adopted, ‘moved by confider to future place’” (Gontarski, *TN IV* 234).  
139 Notably, in Beckett’s late style, the prefix, ‘mis’, no longer negates words, but constitute expressions *sui generis*.  
140 *Pathos* here denotes a particular feeling or passion as experienced, i.e. is not referring to “pathetic” in its conventional English sense. For a definition of this sense of *pathos*, see p. 21.
confidences. The ‘fall’ from blissful ignorance to horrified knowledge, presented through the whispering, again reflects Beckett’s attention to human suffering and serves to establish a link to tragedy also evoked in VI’s opening line, “When did we three last meet?” (Gontarski, *TN IV* 207: 8). In *Come and Go*, as in *Godot*, suffering grows out of the desire for knowledge. Even the lighting, “soft, from above only and concentrated on playing area. Rest of stage as dark as possible”, can be seen to accentuate metaphorically the gap between knowledge and suffering. Consciousness, rather than residing in the luminous centre of stage, dwells in the darkness surrounding it, or more specifically in the audience. Notably, however, the desire for knowledge also encompasses the audience, who, like the women exiting cannot hear the whispered words, but who nevertheless arrive to fill in the gaps—the secret of course being that we are all condemned.

**Encountering the Particular**

Contrary to the emphasis on the collective aspect of the human condition, however, the presentation of mis-movements in *Come and Go* also constitutes an encounter with the particular. The emphasis on visual imagery predominating the scene in *Come and Go* in this sense is reminiscent of dance defined as “patterned, rhythmic movement in time and space” (Copeland 1). In dance, movements are determined by rules and to perform the movements entails following a given form, i.e. we “conduct ourselves in accordance with a scheme set beforehand” (Straus 149). To follow this ‘given form’, moreover, is an endeavour that makes the shape stand out for perception.

The three women’s highly stylised and controlled manner of walking draws attention to the quality of their movements. The tautness and rigidity of their bodies should in this sense be seen as articulations, not of underlying psychological tension, but as presenting the particular quality of tension, which in itself is expressive, i.e. the content of the expression equals the energy of the manifestation. Also the slowness of the women’s movements is foregrounded to be perceived in the same way. However, slowness not only appears for perception as something of its own kind, but also allows the

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141 Notably, this broad definition does not distinguish between human and non-human motion, but more specifically, it allows us to focus on the shape of the presentation. By analogy, the emphasis Becket places on on “severe restraint and economy of movement and gesture both in his writing and in his directing” in this sense is “extremely close to Kleist’s marionette essay” (Knowlson, *Frescoes of the Skull* 282).

142 This is analogous to how in the game of chess, the pieces all have to be moved according to specific rules that restrict their field of action, and how the different moves of the chess pieces determine the outcome of the game.

143 By analogy, for example the musical terms forte or piano serves to indicate a dynamic aspect of the execution, coexistent with the expression.
‘fourth’ dimension of time to be ‘visualised’. The enduring slowness of the women’s gradual disappearance and appearing bestows a lingering ‘presence’ to their absence, a feel of endlessness to their situation, which is further sustained by the whispering of the two remaining women to the extent that the primary ground for finding the character’s expression is “physical not psychical” (Kalb 64).

Notably, we may of course analyse *Come and Go* in terms of its content, to notice how the dramatic presentation seems to suggest that the three women are all condemned, how the emphasis on suffering as growing out of this knowledge is reinforced in the dialogue, and how the thematic structure seems to underwrite the similarity of the characters. However, such content analysis necessarily draws on the dramatic text as it appears on the page. Moreover, this does not exclude the fact that Beckett’s exploration of the formal structures of performance also serves to redirect spectators’ attention towards the sensuous realm of perception. Clearly, the meticulous patterning of the characters’ rhythmically structured exits and entrances, the stylised manner in which they walk, and the radical simplification of the stage space seems to indicate Beckett’s aesthetic shift towards a de-theatricalisation of the theatre. Words and actions no longer contradict each other but combine with the costumes, the lighting and the sound of the characters’ bodies as they move, to present a play of shapes that essentially resists determination of meaning.

A Special Presence

Rudolf Laban, a central European dance artist, theorist and founder of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), developed a system to investigate the parameters of physical movements with the specific goal of facilitating and reforming our understanding of the importance of movement for human expression and communication. In *Laban Movement Analyses (LMA)*, the concept of effort divides into the four motion factors of Weight, Space, Time and Flow, each with two sub-categories of effort oppositions between which a continuum of gradual efforts can be noted. The motion factor of Weight is associated with intention and has the polarities strong/light, the motion factor of Space is connected with attention and holds the polarities direct/indirect, and the motion factor of Time relates to decision and the polarities of quick/sustained movement. The last motion factor, Flow, presents the polarities of “free” and “bound” movement and “is controlled by nerve centres reacting to external and internal stimuli” (19). Flow is therefore intrinsically part of every continuous action and so occupies a slightly different position in the LMA categories.

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tained that movement always has a purpose, which he termed effort, and that “[e]very human movement is indissolubly linked with an effort, which is, indeed, its origin and inner aspect” (21). In the vocabulary of LMA, the effort element ‘sustained’ consists of “slow speed and of a movement sensation of a long span of time, or a feel of endlessness” (73). The execution of the movement ‘slow’ therefore enacts the idea of ‘slowness’, which will always be meaningful to human beings because of their shared physical experience, albeit this experience may be subliminal. Perceiving slow movements, the audience will inevitably tap into the physiological, non-propositional experience of ‘slow’.

To a certain extent, therefore, the three women in *Come and Go* resemble a chorus in a Greek tragedy in the way their ceremonially repeated, slow and tense movements may be seen, not only to support the tension of their whispered confidences, but also as something felt by the audience. While Beckett’s drama may not aspire to the social or religious effect of Greek tragedy, there is nevertheless an affinity in the desire to provoke an emotional response in the audience. The strong emphasis on the formal aspect of the presentation underscores the sense that what is presented has a special presence, and that we need to pay attention to the particularity of this presentation. This is similar to the way in which the formal patterns in Greek tragedy serve to “mark the difference between theatrical and ordinary discourse, reminding the spectator that they are at *theatai* at a special event with its own established conventions and its own kind of artifice” (Easterling 158).

Beckett’s use of mis-movement in *Come and Go* is in this sense a technique to produce a special presence on stage.

Encountering the special presence of mis-movements, the audience will have to stay attentive to the moment of *bringing to appearing* that unfolds in performance. Significantly, what is brought to appearing lacks stable forms, i.e. the *principium individuationis* is no longer at work since appearing con-

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145 By contrast, the effort element ‘sudden’ consists of “quick speed and of a movement sensation, of a short span of time, or a feel of momentariness” (Laban 73).

146 In *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, P. E. Easterling, quoting Albert Heinrich, explains that choruses were enormously important in Greek tragedy, arguing that when choruses comment self-referentially on their own performance as dancers […] they do so not only in their capacity as characters in the drama but also as performers: while emphasising their choral identity, they temporarily expand their role as dramatic characters. In fact they acquire a more complex dramatic identity as they perceive their choral dance as an emotional reaction to the event onstage and assume a ritual posture which functions as a link between the cultic reality of the city of Dionysia and the imaginary religious world of the tragedies.

147 The archetypal ritual involves sounds and gesture. “Repetitious movement and repeated syllables provide the means by which a celebrant can propel him or herself out of ‘this time’ into a more mythical ‘that time’, *in illo tempore’* (Burkman 74). The audience participation is therefore a necessary part of the ritual of the drama.
stitutes the emergence of “something that is appearing but that cannot be grasped as a relation of appearances” (Seel 141). Importantly, therefore, the identity of this special presence must not be reduced either to its universal or its particular aspect. Neither the shadow encapsulating the women like a brooding awareness discussed above, or their highly stylised and formal movements, nor the slowness with which they move, are expressions of an underlying meaning brought to light through its manifestation. As Seel explains, the work of art “brings nothing to light, it brings to appearing […] the forces operating on or in the work of art are its forces—produced by the construction of the work, operative in the dynamics of its appearing” (152). Yet, in this process of appearing, the distance between subject and object, so firmly upheld by language, becomes fluid. The tautness and slowness in the three women’s manner of walking, and the sound of their whispering voices, etc., bring the kinetic energy of its own unfolding to appearing. The effect of this ‘assault against words’ is that spectators begin to feel the ‘beauty’ of the presentation, i.e. the tension, the enduring presence, and the silence. Thus, there is a shift in Beckett’s aesthetic conviction from the mode of perception that grasps the identity of an object, phenomenon or concept as having specific meaning, via a mode of perception that reflects on the manner of the presentation of phenomena in the play, to a presentation where the play as a phenomenon (work of art) appears to be undergone and felt by the audience.

Rather than perceiving the presentations of mis-movements as independent ‘parts’ that ‘make up the play’, we should therefore consider them as ‘moments’ in the play that acquire form through performance. Considered by themselves these moments are “abstracta”, i.e. “they are being thought of abstractly”, and significantly it is language that allows us to do this (Sokolowski 24). However, although language makes it possible for us to speak about moments as parts, we should not make the mistake of taking these parts for a whole, i.e. begin to believe that a moment can “exist by itself that it can become a concretum” (Sokolowski 24). Essentially, this is the difficulty in analysing mis-movements in Beckett’s drama. Mis-movements, as poetic manifestations, are moments arranged into the whole that is the play. Discussing them, we lay out the array of moments that constitute the play to see how they are joined into a whole, i.e. we reflect on their presentation; indeed this is the task of the analytic process. However, in so doing we must be careful not to “let the abstractness of our speech mislead us into thinking that the thing we talk about could present itself concretely to us” (Sokolowski 26). Mis-movements in Beckett’s drama, their quality or their structure, are but different ways in which the identity of the play is given.

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III: Quad

Resonating phenomena

The performative aspect of perception constitutes an important moment of freedom from determination. In order to contemplate what appears without having to carry the appearance to its determination, we need to enter the aesthetic state of mind and lose ourselves in the moment of perception. Essentially, what is given in Beckett’s aesthetic presentations is a play of appearances, such as we encounter in music or dance. As Knowlson and Pilling note in Frescoes of the Skull, written in 1979:

In Beckett’s recent writing for the theatre and for television, minimal movements and slow, graceful gestures figure not as the residue of a wider repertory of gestures, as has often been supposed, nor simply as ways of achieving stark dramatic effects. They appear rather as intimations (though necessarily imperfect ones) of a state of grace, harmony, economy and beauty akin to that discovered by Kleist’s speaker in the movements of the marionette and glimpsed perhaps most clearly by Beckett in music itself. If one thing is clear about Beckett’s recent work as a playwright and as a director in the theatre, it is that he conceives movements as ‘visible music’ and choreographs an entire production so as to blend sound and silence, movement and stillness into a tight musical structure.

(283)

In Quad⁴⁹, the presentation of movement patterns is so meticulously structured that the word choreography might be ascribed to it. Indeed, the entire dramatic argument is an unbroken series of permutations of the walking patterns of four figures. Clearly, as Gontarski points out, “without its visual counterpart”, the play is essentially “unreadable” (TN IV xvi). The performance is now an event to be perceived and listened to rather than intellectually comprehended, and mis-movements appear as highly abstract, non-conceptual phenomena.

The play presents four figures, pacing “a given area, each following his particular course” (CDW 451):

Course 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA
Course 2: BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB
Course 3: CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC
Course 4: DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD

(CDW 451)

⁴⁹ All references to Quad are from Samuel Beckett, Complete Dramatic Works, London: Faber, 2006.
These courses, in turn, comprise four permutational series:

1\textsuperscript{st} series (as above): 1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 42
2\textsuperscript{nd} series 2, 21, 214, 2143, 143, 43
3\textsuperscript{rd} series 3, 32, 321, 3214, 214, 14
4\textsuperscript{th} series 4, 43, 432, 4321, 321, 21

(CDW 451)

Pacing the given course will make manifest an imaginary quadrate on the stage floor (E), appearing for perception through their movements from corner A, B, C, D respectively:

![Figure 1 CDW 453]

Mis-movements, then, although initially a means to foreground the body and problematise the concepts of perception and meaning-making, finally appear to resist comprehension. Clearly, the event of the play requires that we give ourselves over to listenting and perceiving. Significantly, however, this appearing does not come to us until we “encounter the sensuous presence of an object for the sake of its sensuous presence” (Seel 47).

The aesthetic design of Beckett’s late drama, therefore, entices spectators to pay attention to what appears without judgement. This phenomenon, as Seel points out, can also be seen in, for example Pina Bausch’s dance theatre, where “there are situations of unsurveyable stage occurrence, states of sparseness and uneventfulness that dramatically undertax structure-forming perception” (149). What appears in Beckett’s drama as well as in Bausch’s dance theatre, is the opportunity for sensuous perception. Thus, the stage presentation is designed to offer the possibility of giving oneself over to a kind of aesthetic resonance, although, obviously, from this does not follow that everyone will. Yet, “[t]o perceive an optical or acoustic occurrence as resonating—and not simply as noise or silence, fullness or emptiness—presupposes a perception that turns to the phenomena in question for their own sake, precisely because there is not really anything to perceive in them”
(Seel 142). The description of aesthetic resonance, thus, “must also be a description of interest in its presence” (Seel 142). The restricted, highly economised formal structures of movement presented in Quad, should in this sense be seen to produce an opportunity for aesthetic perception, that also sets the stage for the possibility to encounter resonating phenomena.

The purpose of mis-movement in Quad, then, is to contribute to the carefully structured manifestation of acoustical and visual phenomena that cannot be intellectually grasped as ‘meaningful’ in terms of having extra-theatrical reference but which will inevitably acquire meaning through the experiencing of the play. The perception of mis-movements is, in this sense, a performative act, as it is only through the act of engaging in the presentation that spectators may experience any ‘meaning’ of mis-movements, a meaning that will necessarily be subjectively experienced. Accumulated perceptions of ambiguous yet consistent patterns of mis-movements, however, need not be consciously perceived as either meaningful or meaningless in order eventually to bring about a change in perception allowing for ‘new’ meanings to appear.

Therefore, while this study has argued that Beckett’s use of mis-movements is part of the quest to find a form with which to express the aesthetic conviction that no relationship exists between the artist and the world, or between aesthetic expression and meaning, it also maintains that part of the uniqueness of Beckett’s dramatic work is precisely that it allows for new meanings to appear. Thus, while the objective status of art itself, its capacity to yield meaning or ‘truth’ as it were, is under question in Beckett’s work, the beauty of Beckett’s artistic work lies in its emphasis on the artworks’ and on the human being’s capacity to create new, authentic perspectives. Clearly, our understanding of Waiting for Godot, Come and Go and Quad changes with every performance, and with every analysis, and although we should carefully avoid reducing any of the plays to only one of its aspects, we should also acknowledge that the special accomplishment of art is precisely its capacity to allow us to see the world differently.

Mis-movements, then, rather than simply showing ‘the mess’, in fact open up for the perception of ‘meaning’ as a creative, performative act. Because of the freedom from determination, Beckett’s plays are infinitely richer. Moreover, every instance of performance contributes to this proliferation of perspectives. The increase in richness of meanings does not exclude interpretation or scholarly analysis; however, we need to acknowledge that rather than explicating Beckett’s dramas, we are only contributing to the fullness of the plays, since with every analysis, the plays’ identities will increase and intensify. It is this essentially phenomenological attitude underlying Beckett’s use of mis-movements that this chapter has sought to reveal.
Conclusion

This study has examined the parallels between Beckett’s dramatic writing and phenomenology in order to establish the role of perception in the creative task Beckett set himself, namely the realisation of a new form of expression. While Beckett’s careful structuring of movement patterns has been remarked before, the philosophical consequences of his ‘assault against words’ have not been fully appreciated. According to Seel, Immanuel Kant’s definition of aesthetic perception entails a “free play of cognitive powers that triggers a ‘play of shapes’ on the side of the object” (4). The cognitive indeterminacy of the object is founded on the freedom from the constraints of conceptual ‘knowing’. By analogy, Beckett uses mis-movements not only to ‘deshenticate’ words, but also to expose the means by which the effect of aesthetic perception is produced. This is not to say that mis-movements can be reduced to a set of clear significations—according to Kant “there is no formula that can produce the beautiful”—but to suggest that Beckett uses mis-movements to refocus the audience’s attention on the realm of sensuous perception.\(^\text{150}\)

It is my claim that Beckett’s interest in phenomenology influenced his manner of writing, as well as the craftsmanship with which he staged his plays. As a playwright and director, Beckett urged his actors to work not with intellectual analysis of character motivation, but with the plastic and physical, three-dimensional presentation of the dramatic form sculpted into the movements—or even the stillness—of bodies on stage. The characters’ manifestation of what is ‘ill-seen’ and ‘ill-said’, combined with their ‘ill-performed’ gestures, effectively contributes to the presentation of Beckett’s dramatic vision of a “co-ordinated visual effect”, designed “to foreground the fluidity, ambiguity and continuity of performance” (Knowlson, \textit{TN, Vol.1} 130). Notably, however, “it is not the grandiose gestures which have attracted Beckett—there are hardly any which would qualify for that epithet in the whole of Beckett’s theatre—but restraint, economy, grace and musicality of gesture and movement” (Knowlson, \textit{Damned} 282–83). Such restrained, highly economised movements, this study has termed mis-movements, suggesting that they constitute a liberation from the confines of conceptual thinking and semantic meaning. Through engaging in the presentation of

\(^{150}\) For Kant there is no “regulative” conception of beauty; see \textit{Critique of Judgement} p. 68.
mis-movements without attempting to determine their meaning, spectators may surrender themselves to the work of art as a form of ‘appearing’.

Aesthetic experience, within the framework of this study, has primarily been concerned with a particular way of perceiving phenomena and with the sensuous response to the object coming to aesthetic perception. The potential inherent in the aesthetic object has been identified with its capacity to appear, and correspondingly, the meaning of aesthetic perception has been identified as a paying attention to this appearing. In Seel’s words, when we perceive aesthetically, we may “experience our determinacy as being determined by us, without having to carry this determinacy to the point of determining a restrictive position” (Seel 140). In other words, in perceiving mis-movements, we engage in the free-play of the senses and the mind as they apprehend a work of art.

Importantly, for Beckett, the aesthetic object “can reveal only its own revelatory process and not a reality behind it” (Oppenheim, Painted 67). Perceiving a work of art, therefore, does not merely yield ‘meaning’ as a reality underlying its coming to givenness. The work of art is an appearance of a special kind that directs its beholder “to explore and discover, understand and interpret, marvel at and follow the construction of its appearance” (Seel 151). This is not to say that there is no semantic content in the dramatic text or performance, but only that a content-heavy theatre is paralleled in Beckett’s drama by an emphasis on the formal elements of the play, inviting spectators to look at and listen to the dramatic presentation rather than theorise its meaning. Mis-movements are in this context vehicles to produce formal effects.

Beckett’s use of movement, this study claims, is a heuristic, phenomenological ‘solution’ to the predicament of artistic expression, and Beckett’s awareness of the ‘problem’ of presentation and representation made him receptive to some of the central tenets of phenomenology that involve “consciousness, sensory perception and embodied experience” (Maude and Feldman 1), all of which receive ample attention in Beckett’s work, as well as in his own critical writings, where the structure of consciousness is frequently addressed.

In a letter to Thomas McGreevy in September 1934, Beckett states, “Cezanne seems to have been the first to see landscape & state it as material of a strictly different order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever” (Letters 222). Beckett’s admiration for the artistic works of painters like Cezanne and Kandinsky grew out of their recognition of man’s alienation from the world:

How far Cezanne had moved from the snapshot puerilities of Manet & Cie when he could understand the dynamic intrusion to be himself & landscape to
be something by definition unapproachably alien, unintelligible arrangement of the Reliability Joneses.

(Letters 223)

Clearly, what is given in visual experience is very different from concepts and ideas stated in words. Yet, what Cezanne and Kandinsky paint is precisely the ‘breakdown of the object’ so actually sensed by Beckett, i.e. they show ‘the rupture in the lines of communication’ that Beckett seeks to express. Their paintings no doubt helped inspire him to experiment with the means of artistic presentation: a creative investigation that led to an increased emphasis on indeterminate phenomena, such as mis-movements, in his dramatic works.

From the realisation that the aesthetic object need not have an equivalent in the world of external phenomena grew the desire to be free from formal conventions regarding artistic expression and presentation. Both as writer, and subsequently as director of his own dramatic work, Beckett’s ‘solution’ to the problem of representation was to create poetic manifestations made up by mis-movements and gestures, lighting, costume and props etc., i.e. a panoply of visual, auditory and kinetic presentations.

Indeed, Beckett became more aware of the significance of physical movement when he started to direct his own work, and there is a progression to be traced in his writing that shows physical movement becoming more and more important. Through his concern with visual presentation and through engaging in the process of staging his plays, Beckett came to work almost like a choreographer, the poetic manifestations of movement increasingly marked by a higher level of abstraction. As abstract phenomena, mis-movements are designed to resist rational apprehension. In order to try to make intelligible the logic behind these presentations, we must exert our meaning-making capacities. However, in so doing, our focus will ‘slip’ and we will cease attending to the moment of presentation, and so will therefore fail to experience the art as art. This, I argue, is Beckett’s ultimate goal in constructing his drama around mis-movements: to break down routine and habitual perception, to return us to the weight, the colour and the texture of things, to enable us once again to see the world afresh, to see it as we have never seen it before. Plato famously claimed that “philosophy begins in wonder”. For Beckett, art not only begins in wonder—it ends in it as well.

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151 “It looks as though Theodorous’ sketch of your character was accurate, my friend. I mean, this feeling—a sense of wonder [thauma]—is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation, in fact” (Theatetus 155d)
Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of Mis-Movements in *Waiting for Godot*

This section lists examples of mis-movements and of Beckett’s patterning of mis-movements into ‘balletic elements’, from *The Theatrical Notebooks: WAITING FOR GODOT, vol.1*. According to the standards of this edition, the following typographical notes signify that, “[t]ext between square brackets [ ] has been added to the original English text. Text between pointed brackets { } has been revised. A pair of angle brackets < > indicates that a section of text has been cut from the original English text” (6); i.e. [ ] – additions, { } – revisions, < > – cuts. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to highlight in red, sections and sequences in the text where mis-movements occur.

Act I — Section ‘before’ Pozzo and Lucky (A 1-2).

1. P 9: 4–7
   
   [VLADIMIR: *stands upstage right by the tree, half in shadow, listening.*] ESTRAGON *{is seated on a stone} [downstage left, still, bowed. Long silence. Spell broken by ESTRAGON]* < Trying to take off his [left] boot. He pulls at it with both hands, {grunting}. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before. >>

2. P. 9: 9
   
   VLADIMIR: ({$Advances, halts.$})

3. P 9: 20–22
   
   VLADIMIR: *{Hurt, coldly}* May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?
   ESTRAGON: In a ditch.
   VLADIMIR: *{Admiringly.} A ditch! Where?
   ESTRAGON: *{Without gesture.}* Over there.
4. P. 10: 57 –65

VLADIMIR: Sometimes […] [He takes off his hat, peers in it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.] How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time … [He searches for the word.] … appalled. [With emphasis.] AP-PALLED <> Funny. (He [takes off his hat again, peers inside it, turns it upside down,] knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into again, puts it on again.) Nothing to be done. (ESTRAGON with supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his [left] boot. He looks into it <> turns it upside down, {taps on it;} looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, <> staring sightlessly before him.

5. P. 11: 72–76

VLADIMIR: There’s man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet. <> This is getting alarming. [He takes off his hat again, peers inside it, <> knocks on the crown, blows into it, puts it on again.] Silence. VLADIMIR deep in thought. <> One of the thieves was saved. (Pause.) Gogo


ESTRAGON: Saved from what?
VLADIMIR: Hell.
ESTRAGON: I’m going. [He does not move.]

7. P. 12: 119–121

VLADIMIR: [(Advances, gesticulating with his fingers.)]
 […]
[(Face to face with ESTRAGON by the stone.)]

8. P. 12–13: 140–150

(He [throws his boot down violently,] rises painfully, goes limping [upstage] to extreme left, halts, gazes into distance off with his hand screening his eyes < >.
VLADIMIR < > Goes and picks up the boot, peers into it < >.)
VLADIMIR: Pah!
(< > [He drops the boot hastily and, as ESTRAGON turns and goes across stage right, he goes upstage left to observe him.])
ESTRAGON: [(He goes to extreme right, gazes into distance off with his hand screening his eyes.)] Charming spot.
(He turns, advances to front, halts [centre stage] facing auditorium [, as VLADIMIR also moves into the centre].)
Inspiring prospects. ({He goes back to VLADIMIR.}) Let’s go.

9. P. 13: 168

ESTRAGON: A bush. [(Turns face to face with VLADIMIR.)]

VLADIMIR: (Looking around) You recognize the place?

[...] 

VLADIMIR: All the same … that tree … [(They look at it)] … [that stone] … [(They look at it)] < > … that bog
[(They turn towards the auditorium.)]


VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (Pause.) I think.

[...] 

I must have made a note of it.

(He fumbles in his pockets < >.)

ESTRAGON: But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? [Advances towards VLADIMIR.)] […] (Pause. [Advances further.]) […] (Pause. [Advances further.]) […] 

VLADIMIR: (Looking about him wildly, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape) It’s not possible!

[...] 

ESTRAGON: [(He returns to the stone.)] If he came yesterday […] 

[(Sits.)]


(< >) ESTRAGON falls asleep. [VLADIMIR goes upstage extreme left, gazes into distance off left with his hands shielding his eyes, turns and goes extreme right, gazes into distance off.] {turns and approaches ESTRAGON. Halts.} Gogo! [(Approaches and halts behind ESTRAGON, shakes him gently awake.)] GOGO! 

(ESTRAGON wakes with a start.)


VLADIMIR: STOP IT!

(Exit VLADIMIR hurriedly. ESTRAGON gets up and follows him {a little past midstage to observe}. Gestures of ESTRAGON like those of a spectator encouraging a pugilist. Enter VLADIMIR. {He passes in front of ESTRAGON, crosses the stage, halts left with his back to ESTRAGON.} ESTRAGON takes a step towards him, halts.) 

ESTRAGON: You wanted to speak to me?

(Silence. ESTRAGON takes a step forward.) 

[...] 

(Silence. Another step forward.) 

Didi…

VLADIMIR: (Without turning) I’ve nothing to say to you. 

ESTRAGON: (Step forward.) You’re angry? 

(Silence. Step forward.) 

Forgive me.
(Silence. Step forward. < >)
Come Didi.
(Silence.)
Give me your hand.
((ESTRAGON tries to take VLADIMIR’S left hand. VLADIMIR pulls it away.))
Embrace me!
(VLADIMIR stiffens.)
Don’t be stubborn!
(VLADIMIR softens, {turns and stretches out his arms}. ESTRAGON recoils [backwards].)
You stink of garlic!
VLADIMIR: It’s for the kidneys.
(Silence. {Both face front.})


VLADIMIR: Don’t let’s do anything. It’s safer.
((ESTRAGON takes VLADIMIR’s right arm and begins to circle with him
downstage towards the stone.))
VLADIMIR: Let’s wait and see what he says.
[…]
[[(They halt by the stone.)]
[…]
[[(VLADIMIR takes ESTRAGON’s left arm and they continue to circle from
the stone downstage right.)]
[…]
[[(They halt downstage right.)]

15. P. 18: 361–369

(Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the
knees.)
ESTRAGON: (Feebly.) We’re not tied? (Pause.) We’re not–
[…]
(They [huddle together and] listen, grotesquely rigid)
[…]
{[(They huddle closer together, still listening.)]}
[…]
(Sighs of relief. They relax and separate.)

16. P. 19: 399–404

{ (VLADIMIR steps away then turns back as ESTRAGON begins to eat the
carrot.)}
[…]
[[(VLADIMIR turns away then back again to ESTRAGON]]
[…]
[(VLADIMIR moves away.)]

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Act I — Section ‘with’ Pozzo and Lucky (A3–5)


Enter POZZO and LUCKY [upstage right]. POZZO drives LUCKY by means of a rope passed around his neck, so that LUCKY is the first to appear, followed by the rope which is long enough to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before POZZO appears. LUCKY carries a heavy bag [in his right hand], a folding stool [under his right arm], a picnic basket [in his left hand] and [over his left arm] a greatcoat. POZZO a whip.

POZZO: (Off) On! (Crack of whip.) [Faster!] (POZZO appears. They cross the stage. LUCKY passes {behind }VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON and exit. POZZO at the sight of VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON stops short. The rope tautens. POZZO jerks it violently.)

BACK!
(Noise of LUCKY falling with all his baggage. VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON turn towards him, half wishing half fearing to go to his assistance. VLADIMIR takes a step towards LUCKY, ESTRAGON holds him back by the {hand}.)

18. P. 23: 528–532

(Enter LUCKY backwards)
Stop!
(LUCKY stops.)
Turn!
(LUCKY turns.)

19. P. 24: 582–584

([…] LUCKY sags slowly, until the bag and basket touch the ground, then straightens up with a start and begins to sag again. Rhythm of one sleeping on his feet. […])

20. P. 34: 968–969

POZZO: […]
(He sits down. [ESTRAGON returns to stone and sits down simultaneously with POZZO.])


[VLADIMIR takes off his hat and looks in it. ESTRAGON takes the bones from his pocket. LUCKY’s hat falls down.]
[…]
(Silence. ESTRAGON is fiddling with {the bones}, VLADIMIR with his hat.)
[…]
VLADIMIR: Let’s go.
< >
[(He puts on his hat and moves to ESTRAGON who puts away his bones)]
22. P. 35: 1072–1080

POZZO: Dance misery!

(LUCKY puts down [bag and] basket, < > turns to POZZO. LUCKY
dances. He stops.)¹⁵²

[...]

(LUCKY executes the same movements, stops.)

ESTRAGON: [...] (He [stands,] imitates LUCKY, almost falls[, sits])

23. P. 38: 1100–1101

VLADIMIR: I’ll give it to him.

(He does not move.)

24. P. 38: 1104–1105

VLADIMIR: I’ll give it to him.

(He goes round behind LUCKY, approaches him cautiously, puts the hat
on his head and recoils smartly. LUCKY does not move. Silence.)


POZZO: (To VLADIMIR) Stand back!

([VLADIMIR joins ESTRAGON at the stone.]< >)

Think, pig!

(LUCKY begins to dance.)

Stop!

26. P. 40: 1194–1200

POZZO: His hat!

(VLADIMIR seizes Lucky’s hat. Silence of LUCKY. He falls [slowly for-
ward on knees then on his face to the ground], Silence. Panting of victors.)

[...]

(VLADIMIR examines the hat, peers inside it.)

¹⁵² “Lucky’s dance in Schiller was a structured image of aspiration leading to failure: ‘Starts
very slow. Arms up elegantly. Arms up and down. On toes. On one leg as if he wanted to
climb higher and higher. Loses [recte loses] balance. Bumps on ground with feet, bent for-
ward” (TN 129). The characters’ comments as to the meaning of the dance were cut in the
Schiller-Theater production to align it with Beckett’s vision of a “co-ordinated visual effect”,
designed to be “neither markedly tragic or comic”, and with “no specific cause or predictable
resolution” (TN 130)
27. P. 41: 1207–1209

POZZO: Raise him up!
(VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON hoist LUCKY to his feet, support him an instant, then let him go [and move away from him]. He falls [as before].)

28. P. 41: 1215–1233

[VLADIMIR: Come on.]
(They raise LUCKY, hold him up.)
POZZO: Don’t let him go!
(VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON totter.)
Don’t move!
(POZZO fetches bag < > and brings [it] towards LUCKY.)
Hold him tight!
(He puts the bag in LUCKY’s hand. LUCKY drops it immediately [on ESTTRAGON’S foot].)
Don’t let him go!
(He puts back the bag in LUCKY’s hand. Gradually, at the feel of the bag, LUCKY recovers his senses and his fingers close round the handle.)
Hold him tight!
(As before with basket. [Steadies LUCKY with butt of whip under chin then picks up rope.]
Now! You can let him go.
(VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON move away from LUCKY [to the stone]
[He] totters, reels, sags, but succeeds in remaining on his feet, bag and basket in hands. POZZO steps back < >.)
Forward
(LUCKY totters forward.)
Back!
(LUCKY totters back.)
Turn!
(LUCKY turns.)
Done it! He can walk.

29. P. 42: 1274–1277

POZZO: Adieu.
VLADIMIR: Adieu.
POZZO: Adieu
(Silence. No one moves.)

30. P. 43–44: 1292–1320

(POZZO turns, moves away from LUCKY towards the wings [upstage right], paying out the rope as he goes.)
VLADIMIR: [(Following POZZO)] You’re going the wrong way.
POZZO: I need a running start. (Having come to the end of the rope, i.e. off-stage, he stops turns and cries.) Stand back!
({ESTRAGON joins VLADIMIR.} Crack of whip.)
[...]  
('POZZO appears, crosses the stage preceded by LUCKY [who exists as POZZO reaches midstage].')  
[ESTRAGON: Faster!]  
VLADIMIR: Faster!  
< >  
(The rope tautens. Noise of LUCKY falling off.)  
POZZO: Stool!  
{VLADIMIR: Stool!}  
(ESTRAGON Fetches stool.)  
ESTRAGON: (Throwing it to VLADIMIR between him and POZZO) Stool!  
VLADIMIR: (Throwing it to POZZO) Stool!  
POZZO: (Throwing it offstage to LUCKY) Stool!  
Up pig!  
(Pause. Noise of LUCKY getting up.)  
On!  
(Exit POZZO.)  
ESTRAGON: On!  
VLADIMIR: On!  
[...]

Act I — Section ‘after’ Pozzo and Lucky (A 6)
31. P. 48: 1490–1497

VLADIMIR: Tell him … (hesitates [, advances a step towards the BOY who retreats backwards a step]) … tell him you saw us. (Pause[, advances another step as before. Desparingly,]) You did see us, didn’t you?  
[(Advances another step.)]  
< >  
({The BOY exits backwards calmly.} The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene.)  
[(With back to audience, looking at the moon)] At last!  
(ESTRAGON {wakes, takes off right boot, stands with a boot in each hand, contemplates VLADIMIR. Tableau. He limps downstage a little off-centre left, puts down boots. VLADIMIR turns from the moon and goes towards ESTRAGON who, after tasteful arrangement of the boots, turns upstage to contemplate the moon. })

32. P. 49: 1522–1534

VLADIMIR: He said that GODOT was sure to come tomorrow. (Pause.) What do you say to that?  
ESTRAGON: Then all we have to do is to wait on here.  
VLADIMIR: Are you mad? We must take cover.  
(He takes [ESTRAGON’s left hand with his right]. [They begin to circle up towards the tree.])  
Come on.
(He draws ESTRAGON after him. ESTRAGON yields, then resists. They halt.)

ESTRAGON: (Looking at the tree) Pity we haven’t got a bit of rope.
VLADIMIR: Come on. It’s cold.

(He draws ESTRAGON after him. As before.)

[...]

(He draws him after him. As before.)

[(They drop hands and halt, ESTRAGON to the left of the tree and VLADIMIR to the right.)]

33. P. 49: 1544

[(He attempts to take ESTRAGOR’s left hand. ESTRAGON resists.)]

34. P. 50: 1550–1569

(ESTRAGON moves away from VLADIMIR [, and starts for stone alone, halts halfway].)

ESTRAGON: I [sometimes] wonder if we wouldn’t [...].

(ESTRAGON continues on to the stone while VLADIMIR moves halfway towards it. They halt at the same time.)

We weren’t made for the same road.

[ESTRAGON sits, leaving little room for VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR slowly crosses the stage and sits down beside ESTRAGON.]

[...]

(Silence. [They look at each other, then face front.])

ESTRAGON: [(Looking down)] Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: [(Looking up)] Yes, let’s go.

(Long silence.)

They do not move.

Curtain.)

Act II — Section ‘before’ Pozzo and Lucky (B 1–2)

35. P. 50–51: 1572–1583

Next day. Same time. Same place.

[CURTAIN.]

Estragon’s boots front centre, heels together, toes splayed. Lucky’s hat at same place. The tree has {three} leaves. [ESTRAGON is standing midstage left at edge of shadow, bowed.]

[VLADIMIR a little upstage and slightly right of centre, with his back to audience, head raised, intent. Long silence.] [VLADIMIR breaks tableau with move upstage, halts extreme left to look into wings off with his hand screening his eyes. He turns and goes right, halts and looks long at the tree in passing, touches leaf, halts extreme right to look into wings off with his hand screening his eyes. He turns, goes downstage centre, halts, looks back at tree, goes to]
the boots, picks one up, examines it, sniffs it, \{shows pleasure of recognition\}, puts it back carefully. < > Halts suddenly and begins to sing loudly.

36. P. 51: 1608–1612

(< > \{From edge of shadow left, ESTRAGON, barefoot, head bowed, slowly crosses the stage.\} VLADIMIR turns and sees him.)

You again!

ESTRAGON halts, but does not raise his head. VLADIMIR goes towards him, [stretches out his arms].)

37. P. 58: 1858–1867

ESTRAGON: [(Moving away left)] That wasn’t such a bad little canter.

VLADIMIR: [(Moving away right)] Yes, but now we’ll have to find something else.

[(They take off their hats, concentrate)]

ESTRAGON: [(Advancing towards centre)] Let me see. [Let me see.]

< >

VLADIMIR: [(Advancing towards centre)] Let me see. [Let me see.]

(They turn just before collision.) < >

ESTRAGON: [(Moving away left)] Let me see. Let me see.

VLADIMIR: [(Moving away right)] Let me see. Let me see.

(They halt and put on their hats.)]


VLADIMIR {feels} in his pockets, < > finally brings out a radish, [goes and hands it to ESTRAGON], [moves away]. [ESTRAGON] examines it. < >.)

[…]

((VLADIMIR returns to ESTRAGON, takes back the radish and moves away.))

ESTRAGON: I’ll go and get a carrot

(He does not move.)


[(They converge on the boots. VLADIMIR stoops to pick up boot. ESTRAGON pulls him up.)]

ESTRAGON: We don’t manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?

[…]

[(VLADIMIR stoops and up as before.)]

ESTRAGON: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

\[153\] Cf this section as an example of a “co-ordinated visual effect”, designed to be “neither markedly tragic or comic”, and with “no specific cause or predictable resolution” (TN 130)
VLADIMIR: Yes yes, we’re magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. (He picks up [the left] boot.) Come on, give me your foot.

(ESTRAGON raises his [right] foot.)
The other, hog!

(ESTRAGON raises the other foot.)

Higher!

({They circle anti-clockwise in a half-round.} VLADIMIR succeeds finally in getting on the boot.)

Try and walk.

({VLADIMIR moves away a little to observe. ESTRAGON takes a few steps right and returns.})

Well?

ESTRAGON: It fits

[...]

VLADIMIR: […] Let’s try the other.

(As before [but clockwise. ESTRAGON walks to the stone, halts there].)

40. P. 63–64: 2051–2082

[ESTRAGON]

(He looks for a place to sit down, then goes and sits down on the {stone} [leaving a small edge for VLADIMIR].)

[...]

(He resumes his foetal posture, head between his knees.)

VLADIMIR: Wait.

(He goes over and sits down beside ESTRAGON and {croons loudly with arm around him rocking him}.)

Bye bye bye bye

[...]

(ESTRAGON sleeps. VLADIMIR gets up softly, takes off his coat and lays it across ESTRAGON’s shoulders, then starts walking [upstage right then left], swinging his arms to keep himself warm. ESTRAGON wakes with a start, jumps up, casts about wildly. VLADIMIR runs to him, puts his arms round him.)

[...]

(He takes ESTRAGON by the {hand} and walks him up and down [intoning Chopin’s Funeral March] until ESTRAGON refuses to go any further.)

[...]

(He pulls his arm free and moves away.)

41. P. 64: 2086–2092

[VLADIMIR]

(He < > picks up his coat [,] puts it on [, and paces about the stage].)

[...]

(VLADIMIR walks up and down.)
VLADIMIR: Lucky’s hat. (He goes towards it [downstage right].) I’ve been here an hour and never saw it. (He picks it up. Very pleased) Fine!

[…]

VLADIMIR: […] (He < > contemplates [the hat], straightens it.) […] (He [goes midstage.] puts it on [with his left hand] in place of his own, which he hands to ESTRAGON [with his right hand].)

[…]

VLADIMIR: Hold that.

(ESTRAGON takes Vladimir’s hat [with his right hand]. VLADIMIR adjusts Lucky’s hat on his head. [It is roughly the same size as his.] ESTRAGON puts on Vladimir’s hat [with his right hand] in place of his own, which he hands to VLADIMIR [with his left hand]. VLADIMIR takes Estragon’s hat. ESTRAGON adjusts Vladimir’s hat on his head. [There is a great disparity of size. The effect is grotesque.] VLADIMIR puts on Eestragon’s hat in place of Lucky’s which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes Lucky’s hat. VLADIMIR adjusts Estragon’s hat on his head. [Grotesque disparity.] ESTRAGON puts on Lucky’s hat in place of Vladimir’s which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR takes his hat. ESTRAGON adjusts his hat on his head. VLADIMIR puts on Lucky’s hat in place of his own, which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes Vladimir’s hat. VLADIMIR adjusts Lucky’s hat on his head. ESTRAGON hands Vladimir’s hat back to VLADIMIR who takes it and hands it back to ESTRAGON who takes it and hands it back to VLADIMIR who throws it down. [The whole exchange is rapid and uninterrupted.]

How does it fit me?

ESTRAGON: How would I know?

VLADIMIR: No, but how do I look in it?

(He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.)

ESTRAGON: Hideous.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but not more than usual?

ESTRAGON: Neither more nor less.

VLADIMIR: Then I can keep it. Mine irked me. (Pause.) How shall I say? It itched me.

(He takes Lucky’s hat, peers into it, < > puts it on again.)

ESTRAGON: I’m going.

(Silence.)

43. P. 66: 2171–2178

VLADIMIR: Tell me to dance.

ESTRAGON: {There’s enough of that.}

VLADIMIR: Dance hog!

[ESTRAGON: I’m going.]

(VLADIMIR writhes. Exit ESTRAGON left, precipitately.)

VLADIMIR: I can’t. (He looks up, misses ESTRAGON.) Gogo!

(Exit right to look for him. Re-enters.) Enter ESTRAGON left, panting. He hastens towards VLADIMIR, {Meets him in the centre}.)
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44. P. 67: 2189–2193

VLADIMIR: Let’s go and meet him!
(He drags ESTRAGON towards the wings, [left]. ESTRAGON resists, pulls himself free, exit right.)
Gogo! Come back!
([VLADIMIR runs and exit left. Enter ESTRAGON right, VLADIMIR left. They hasten towards each other and meet in the centre.])

45. P. 68: 2221–2257

ESTRAGON: You go and stand here.
(He draws VLADIMIR to extreme right and places his back to the stage.)
There, don’t move, and watch out.
(VLADIMIR scans horizon, screening his eyes with his hand. ESTRAGON runs and takes up the same position, extreme left. They turn their heads and look at each other.)
ESTRAGON and VLADIMIR: [(Simultaneously.)] Back to back like in the good old days!
(They continue to look at each other for a moment, then resume their watch. Long silence.)
ESTRAGON: Do you see anything coming?
VLADIMIR: (Turning his head) What?
[…]
VLADIMIR: No.
ESTRAGON: Nor I.
(They resume their watch. Silence.)
VLADIMIR: You must have had a vision!
ESTRAGON: (Turning his head) What?
[…]
ESTRAGON and VLADIMIR: (Turning simultaneously) Do you —
[…]
(They glare at each other angrily as they draw closer.)
[…]
ESTRAGON: That’s the idea, let’s abuse each other.
(They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.)

46. P. 69: 2276–2278

(They embrace. [Waltz in a full circle humming the Waltz Duet from The Merry Widow.] They separate [and move apart]. Silence.)

47. P. 69–70: 2281–2305

ESTRAGON: What do we do now?
[…]
VLADIMIR: We could do our excersises.
[…]
(VLADIMIR hops from one foot to the other. ESTRAGON imitates him.)
[…]

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(VLADIMIR does the tree, staggering about on one leg.)
[…]
(ESTRAGON does the tree, staggars.)
ESTRAGON: Do you think God sees me?
VLADIMIR: You must close your eyes.
(ESTRAGON closes his eyes, staggars worse.)

Act II — Section ‘with’ Pozzo and Lucky (B3–4)154
48. P. 70: 2310–2319

(Enter POZZO and LUCKY [from the left. VLADIMIR runs to ESTRAGON. They flee to the stone and huddle together.] POZZO is blind. LUCKY burdened as before [except for POZZO’s coat, which POZZO is wearing]. Rope as before, but much shorter, so that POZZO may follow more easily. LUCKY wearing a different hat. At the sight of VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON he stops short. POZZO, continuing on his way, bumps into him.)
< >
POZZO: (Clutching on to LUCKY who staggars) What is it? Who is it?
(LUCKY falls [as in Act I]155, drops everything and brings down POZZO with him [in the same manner]. They lie helpless among the scattered baggage [perpendicular across each other midstage off-centre right].)

49. P. 70–72: 2322–2395

VLADIMIR: At last! (He goes towards the heap.) Reinforcements at last!
[…]
[((Retreats to ESTRAGON.)]
[…]
[((Advances towards POZZO, halts, retreats.)]
[…]
((They go towards POZZO in the heap, conspiring in whispers. POZZO beats the ground with his feet. ESTRAGON initiates the retreat.))
[…]
((They go a little closer than before towards POZZO in the heap, halt, then VLADIMIR initiates the retreat.))
[…]
((They go closer towards LUCKY in the heap, halt, then VLADIMIR gestures towards him.))
[…]
((Retreat to stone initiated by VLADIMIR.))

154 B3 is a reversal of A4; this time Vladimir dominates the scene with his rhetoric while it is Pozzo who begs for help.
155 P. 40, lines 1194–1200
To end Lucky’s dance: (VLADIMIR seizes Lucky’s hat. Silence of LUCKY. He falls [slowly forward on knees then on his face to the ground]. Silence. Panting of victors.)
[...] 
((They go closer to heap, pushing up their sleeves.)
[...]
((They retreat)

50. P. 72–73: 2408–2422

[[(VLADIMIR takes ESTRAGONs arm, leading him in an anti-clockwise circle upstage around the heap.)] 
VLADIMIR: Let us not waste time in idle discourse! < > Let’s do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. ((They halt at the top of the circle a little off-centre right.))
[...]
((Pause. They pose.))
[...]
((They continue to circle downstage, halt just right of the stone.))
[...]
(ESTRAGON [pulls free and, tired, sits] says nothing.)

51. P. 74: 2463–2505

POZZO [((Holding out his right hand)] Two hundred!
VLADIMIR: We’re coming! 
(He tries to pull POZZO to his feet, fails, < > stumbles, falls [backwards] < >.)
ESTRAGON: [(<Stands and moves towards the pile.)] What’s the matter with you all?
VLADIMIR: Help!
ESTRAGON: I’m going.
[...]
VLADIMIR: Help me up first. Then we’ll go together.
[...]
((Extends hand.))
ESTRAGON: ((Extends hand to take VLADIMIR’s, suddenly recoils.)) Who farted?
[...]
VLADIMIR: Quick! [(Extending hand again)] Give me your hand.
ESTRAGON: I’m going. (Pause. Louder.) I’m going.
[...]
(He stretches out his hand which VLADIMIR makes haste to seize.)
VLADIMIR: Pull!
(ESTRAGON pulls, stumbles, falls [backwards like VLADIMIR earlier].
Long silence.)
POZZO: Help!
VLADIMIR: We’ve arrived.

52. P. 76: 2527–2534

VLADIMIR: < > Will you stop it! [(Striking POZZO)] Crablouse!
POZZO extricates himself with cries of pain and crawls away [upstage left]. He stops, saws the air blindly, calling for help. VLADIMIR, propped on his elbow, observes his retreat.

[POZZO: Lucky!]
VLADIMIR: He’s [up]!
[POZZO: Lucky!]
(POZZO collapses.)
[VLADIMIR:] He’s down!

53. P. 77: 2555–2597

ESTRAGON: Suppose we got up to begin with.
VLADIMIR: No harm in trying.
(They get up.)

[…]
VLADIMIR: He wants us to help him to get up.
ESTRAGON: Then why don’t we? What are we waiting for?
(They [go to POZZO and help him to his feet], let him go [, move away to left and right]. He falls [forward as before.])
[He’s doing it on purpose.]
VLADIMIR: We must hold him.
(They [go to him and] get him up again. POZZO sags between them, his arms round their necks.)

54. P. 79: 2660–2661

ESTRAGON: Oh the brute!
(He sits down on the {stone} and tries to take off his boot. But he soon desists and disposes himself for sleep, his arms on his knees and his head on his arms.)

55. P. 80: 2682–2731

POZZO
Up!
(LUCKY gets up < >)
[VLADIMIR: he’s getting up.
POZZO: He’d better!
(LUCKY gathers up all his burdens save for the whip and stands tottering with his back to POZZO)
VLADIMIR: He’s picking up all his bags. Now he’s all set.
POZZO. Whip!]
VLADIMIR: Where are you going from here?
[POZZO: No concern of mine.
VLADIMIR: How changed you are.]
POZZO: On.
(LUCKY laden down, takes his places before POZZO.)
Whip!
(LUCKY puts everything down, looks for whip, finds it, puts it into POZZOs [right] hand, takes up everything again.)
[On!]
VLADIMIR: What is there in the bag?
POZZO: Sand. (He jerks the rope.) On!
[(They start towards the wings right.)]
VLADIMIR: [(Halting them.)] Don’t go yet.
POZZO: I’m going. [On!]
[(They start to leave again)]
VLADIMIR: [(Halting them again.)] What do you do when you fall far from help?
POZZO: We wait until we can get up. Then we go on. On!
[(They start to leave again)]
VLADIMIR: [(Halting them.)] Before you go tell him to sing!
POZZO: Who?
VLADIMIR: Lucky.
POZZO: To sing?
[...]
(Exeunt POZZO and LUCKY [right]. VLADIMIR follows them to the edge of the stage, looks after them. The noise of falling reinforced by mimic of VLADIMIR announces that they are down again. Silence. VLADIMIR goes towards ESTRAGON, contemplates him a moment, then shakes him awake.)

Act II — Section ‘after’ Pozzo and Lucky (B 5)

56. P. 82: 2756–2773

ESTRAGON: My feet! < > Help me!
(He sits down, tries to take off his boots.)
VLADIMIR: Was I sleeping [...].
(ESTRAGON, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again.
VLADIMIR stares at him.)

He’ll know nothing. [...] But habit is a great deadener. [...]  
[(He looks away upstage right.)]
 [...]  
[(He looks front)], he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on.  
(Pause. [He goes silently upstage left, stands brooding.]) I can’t go on!
(Pause. [He looks back front to where he stood before.]) What have I said?
(< > Enter boy right. He halts. Silence.)

57. P. 83: 2822–2826

VLADIMIR: Tell him [... that you saw me ...
(Silence. [VLADIMIR advances a step. The BOY exits calmly backwards.] Silence. The sun sets, the moon rises. As in Act I. VLADIMIR [moves down-stage centre and] stands motionless and bowed. ESTRAGON wakes, takes off his boots, gets up with one in each hand and goes and puts them down centre front, then goes towards VLADIMIR.)
Estragon: (Looking at the tree.) What is it?

[...]  

Vladimir: I don’t know. A willow. [Let’s go.]

(‘Vladimir takes Estragon’s hand and they go to the tree, halting with Vladimír to the right and Estragon to the left of it.)

Estragon: [(Let’s go of Vladimír’s hand.)] Why don’t we hang ourselves?

[...]  

Vladimír: [(Takes the hand again.)] Let’s go.

Estragon: [(Let’s go of hand.)] Wait, there’s my belt.

[...]  

(Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, falls about his ankles. They look at the cord.)

[...]  

(They each take an end of the cord and pull. It breaks.)

[...]  

Estragon: (RealiSing his trousers are down) {Ah yes!}

Vladimír: [(Looking up)] Well? Shall we go?

Estragon: [(Looking down.)] Yes, let’s go.

(They do not move. [Silence.])

Curtain

Appendix 2: Examples of Mis-Movements in Come and Go  

This section lists examples of mis-movements in Come and Go as they appear in The Theatrical Notebooks: The Shorter Plays, Vol. IV. According to the standards of this edition, the following typographical notes signify that, “[t]ext between square brackets [ ] has been added to the original English text. Text between pointed brackets { } has been revised. A pair of angle brackets< > indicates that a section of text has been cut from the original English text” (204); i.e. [ ] – additions, { } – revisions, < > – cuts (6). For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to highlight instances of mis-movements and sequences of patterns, or ‘balletic elements’ in red.

1.  P. 207: 1–3

   Sitting centre side by side stage right to left FLO, VI and RU.

   Very erect, facing front, hands clasped in laps.

   Silence.

2.  P. 207: 9–28

   (FLO): Let us not speak.
(Silence.
Exit VI right.
Silence.)
[…]
FLO: What do you think of Vi?
RU: I see little change
(FLO moves to centre seat, whispers in RU’s ear.)
(Appalled) Oh!
(They look at each other. FLO puts her finger to her lips.)
Does she not realize?
FLO: God grant not.
(Enter VI. FLO and RU turn back front, resume pose. VI sits right.
Silence.)
[…]
(Silence.
Exit FLO left.
Silence.)

3.  P. 207–208: 31–44

RU: How do you find Flo?
VI: She seems much the same.
(RU moves to centre seat, whispers in VI’s ear.)
(Appalled.) Oh!
(They look at each other. RU puts her finger to her lips.)
Has she not been told?
RU: God forbid.
(Enter FLO. RU and VI turn back front, resume pose, FLO sits left.
[Silence.])
Holding hands … that way.
{VI}: Dreaming of … love
(Silence.
Enter RU right.
Silence.)


VI: How do you think Ru is looking?
FLO: One sees little in that light.
(VI moves to centre seat, whispers in FLO’s ear.)
(Appalled.) Oh!
(They look at each other. VI puts her finger to her lips.)
Does she not know?
VI: Please God not.
(Enter RU. VI and FLO turn back front, resume pose, RU sits right.
(Silence.)

5.  P. 208–209: 56–71

{VI}
Shall we hold hands in the old way?

(After a moment they join hands as follows: VI’s right hand with RU’s right hand, VI’s left hand with FLO’s left hand, FLO’s right hand with RU’s left hand, VI’s arms being above RU’s left arm and FLO’s right arm. The three pairs of clasped hands rest on three laps.

Silence.)

FLO: [RU.

(Silence.)

Vi.

(Silence.)

I can feel the rings.

(Silence.)

CURTAIN

Appendix 3: Examples of Mis-Movements in Quad

This section lists examples of mis-movements from Quad. All examples are from The Complete Dramatic Works, London: Faber 1986.

1. P. 451

Course 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA
Course 2: BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB
Course 3: CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC
Course 4: DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD

2. P. 451

1 enters at A, completes his course and is joined by 3. Together they complete their courses and are joined by 4. Together all three complete their courses and are joined by 2. Together all four complete their courses. Exit 1. 2, 3 and 4 continue and complete their courses. Exit 4. End pf 1st series. 2 continues, opening 2nd series, completes his course and is joined by 1. Etc. Unbroken movement.

3. P. 451

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