

The Relationship between Surrealism and Corporeality in Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin's *Tongues*, *Savage/Love* and *The War in Heaven*

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Abstract

Shepard's early plays are concerned with a frustration with the limitations of language. This article investigates the failure of language, particularly in the context of the simulation of aphasic linguistic expression in *Tongues* (1978), *Savage/Love* (1979) and *The War in Heaven* (*Angel's Monologue*) (1985), theatre pieces that Shepard co-created with Joseph Chaikin. This essay demonstrates how the failure of the body can mirror language's shortcomings by analyzing Shepard's collaborations with Chaikin, who suffered from aphasia following a stroke in 1984. This enquiry traces a Surrealist lineage through this partnership and through both writers' links to Beckett. It suggests that the depreciation of language and of rational control can facilitate the liberation of automatist Surrealist expression. Nonetheless, the ultimate conclusion emerges in these works that language exists independently of the body.

Keywords: *Sam Shepard, Joseph Chaikin, Beckett, Surrealism, American Theatre*

This essay investigates language's failure to transcend its corporeal origin, particularly in the context of *Tongues* (1978), *Savage/Love* (1979) and *The War in Heaven* (*Angel's Monologue*) (1985), theatre pieces that Shepard co-created with Joseph Chaikin. This essay interrogates how an analysis of the relationship between Surrealism and corporeality can provide an insight into the treatment of language in these works. The language of Surrealism offers us a new vocabulary with which to address these performance pieces as a means of addressing the anti-naturalistic stage image that emerges in production. Thus, a Surrealist aesthetic emerges in the images of corporeal dismemberment, the suggestions of mediumship and simulated aphasic articulation. As the correspondence between Chaikin and Shepard as published by Barry Daniels in 1994 testifies,¹ both writers were greatly influenced by the radical devaluation of language in the plays of Samuel Beckett. As Beckett suggests, "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express".² This essay argues that Chaikin and Shepard's drama demonstrates an attempt to free language from

¹ Barry Daniels, *Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard: Letters and Texts, 1972-1984*, ed. Barry Daniels (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994).

² Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999), 103.

its physical origins by producing “thought music” akin to the Surrealists’ attempt to encapsulate “spoken thought”. Thus it seeks to transcend the death that corporeal demise determines, an endeavour that ultimately is futile.

Tongues was first performed by Joseph Chaikin at the Magic Theatre, San Francisco in 1978 with Sam Shepard as the percussionist, dressed in black, seated with his back to both the audience and Chaikin so that only his arms were visible as they play the instruments. Eileen Blumenthal described the image as “vaguely suggesting a multi-limbed Hindu god”³ while William Kleb wrote: “Only Shepard’s bare, sinewy arms were visible as he reached out to pick up and play the different instruments”.⁴ In this arrangement, the image of Chaikin’s body was deceptive, his arms were not his own; they were phantom limbs, drawing comparisons with the aesthetics of bodily fragmentation in Surrealism. The very foundations of Surrealism are equated with the experience of carnal trauma. André Breton trained as a physician, along with Louis Aragon at the Parisian military hospital of Val-de-Grâce during the First World War. Amy Lyford has investigated how Surrealist imagery was informed by the “aesthetics of dismemberment” as evident in Val-de-Grâce as “a place that represented bodily trauma in terms that were as visual as they were physical or psychological”,⁵ distinctly the trauma of the male body. Eileen Blumenthal suggested of the premiere production of *Tongues* that the total stage image was indicative of illness.⁶ Surrealism, as Lyford points out, is fundamentally based on masculine bodily trauma. She notes how Breton’s hallucinatory vision of a “man cut in two”, as documented in the first Surrealist manifesto, highlights the centrality of dismemberment to Surrealism:⁷

One night, before falling asleep, I perceived, clearly articulated to the point where it was impossible to change one word, but distracted nonetheless by the sound of many voices, a rather bizarre phrase [...] [a] phrase that seemed to me insistent, a phrase dare I say it that was tapping at the window. [...] In truth this phrase surprised me [...] it was something like: ‘There is a man cut in two by the window’ but it could not suffer from any ambivalence, accompanied as it was by the weak visual representation of a man walking and truncated half-way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body. No doubt it was about the simple standing up in space of a man who stood leaning toward the window. But this window having followed the movement of the man, I understood that I had to deal with a rather rare type of image and that I had quickly no other idea than to incorporate it into my material for poetic construction.⁸

The fragmentation of body parts was a central Surrealist aesthetic; that Chaikin is arm-less in *Tongues* is particularly relevant in this regard. In the preface to Max Ernst’s Surrealist collage novel *La Femme 100 Têtes* (1929), Breton wrote that “Surrealism will be in any case a function of our willingness to completely defamiliarize everything [...]

³ Eileen Blumenthal, “Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin: Speaking in *Tongues*,” in *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, ed Bonnie Marranca (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1981), 142-43.

⁴ William Kleb, “Shepard and Chaikin Speaking in *Tongues*,” *Theater* 10 (Fall 1978): 6.

⁵ Kleb, “Shepard and Chaikin Speaking in *Tongues*,” 65.

⁶ Blumenthal, “Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin: Speaking in *Tongues*,” 143.

⁷ André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1972), 21-22.

⁸ Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 21-22.

right up to the point of defamiliarizing a hand by isolating it from an arm”.⁹ In the visual suggestion that Chaikin’s arms are prosthetic, the audience is confronted with an image of dismemberment, pertaining to the concept of lack. Indeed, in highlighting the actor’s body as an active tool, no longer subordinate to other elements of the dramatic staging, the body is utilized in a manner akin to that required of the actors of Beckett’s late drama. Ulrika Maude has noted the presence of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological theories on “bodily memory”, signalled by suggestions of a phantom limb, in his writing:

We are dealing with a bodily memory, an organic intelligence, whose applicability reaches far beyond the experiences of mutilation. We are faced with a phenomenon akin to repression, in which a traumatic occurrence leaves the subject forever trapped in a past future which is no longer accessible to him.¹⁰

In similar terms, Amy Lyford writes that “Breton’s ‘surreality’ would be used like a knife to separate hand from arm, to map out the structure of Surrealist vision in terms of *absence*, something like a figure for the gap between body parts or stages of medical treatment”.¹¹ A passage in *Savage/Love* seems to describe the very experience of prosthesis:

Sometimes I would want to reach
My arm would start
Something in my arm would start

Sometimes I would almost reach
Something near my neck would move
And then come back

I wanted something on my face to show
Some sign
Unlock my face
Instead I lock my arms (107)

The speaker could also be describing the condition of anosognosia, whereby a patient is unable to recognize specific parts of their body, or is unaware that a specific body part is diseased. The imagery of bodily fragmentation emerges in *Savage/Love*: “The head would nod / While you spoke / I wasn’t sure what it was saying”. Elsewhere the speaker states: “I held my face together / My mouth on my hand / then it dropped / my hands held each other” (107-108). Limbs and organs recurrently appear independent of the body.

Lyford posits that the “repetition of dismemberment in Surrealist imagery—whether male *or* female [...]—figures the human body as a sign of psychic mutilation, as traumatic experience incarnate”.¹² Hence, in the suggestion of mutilation, the stage image of Chaikin’s body in *Tongues* is symbolic of psychological trauma from the onset. Both the body and the voice are rendered surreal. The language of disembodiment as

⁹ André Breton, “Avis au Lecteur,” preface to Max Ernst’s *La Femme 100 Têtes*, quoted in Amy Lyford, “The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the Musée du Val-de-Grâce in 1917,” *Cultural Critique* 46 (Autumn 2000): 53.

¹⁰ Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 13.

¹¹ Lyford, “The Aesthetics of Dismemberment,” 53.

¹² Lyford, “The Aesthetics of Dismemberment,” 56.

symptomatic of a deeper emotional anxiety also permeates *Savage/Love*. In the section entitled "Absence", the speaker pines for a lover like a lost limb:

You who are not here
You who are missing in my body
Holes in my body
Places like holes
Like bullets made
Patches of agony (103)

Similarly, in "Salvation", love is described as capable of physical restoration: "Now that I'm with you I'm saved / From being in parts". The imagery evoked recalls surreal incongruous juxtaposition and the subversion of anticipated sensory stimuli. Sight morphs into taste: "You had sort of a flavor / The way you looked"; sight becomes speech: "And you said / Look at me with your eyes"; sight is a weapon: "It was in one moment / When we looked / When we saw each other / That I killed you". In *Savage/Love* sight does not see. As in *Un chien andalou*, the eye is rendered ineffective at capturing sensory experience. Language cannot speak.

Tongues is also centered on the unreliability of language. In the opening section a voice emerges, telling "Him" that he is already dead. But death is deferred. Although he leaves his body, his life continues: "His whole body he leaves / He leaves his whole body behind" (304). Language is artificial in this piece. We belong in silence. Language, or more specifically words, seem to be an impediment to pure expression. Rather, as Sheila Rabillard argues in a discussion of Shepard's earlier play *Icarus's Mother* (1965), "the words spoken by the characters in the play are the bearers of power, rather than of meaning".¹³ Rabillard compares the non-referential "small talk" in *Icarus's Mother* to the phatic exchanges in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: "conversations [...] seem to be about nothing, their only content becomes the very act of communication and the conditions of exercise".¹⁴ Thus, the use of language removed from the body functions as a comment on the conditions of the theatricality of the drama itself, the drama as text written to be performed, and the audience as witness to the performance. This emerges in the section in *Tongues* on hunger. Two voices of different register courteously discuss the possibility of going somewhere to eat; the effect is like a swinging pendulum. Since the voice and the body are severed, both speakers downplay their hunger, until it emerges that they are *both* ravenous. Here, the vacuity of courtesy is mocked in line with the Surrealists' rejection of societal formalities. The speakers' voices betray their bodies.

The failure of language firstly to fulfill the needs of the body and secondly as a vehicle that could articulate such bodily experience is a theme revisited in *Savage/Love*. "Babble (1)" and "Babble (2)" are stuttered pieces of non-expression. The speaker is either dealing with constant interruption or the words are sticking in his/her mouth. In another section, the voice of a new mother emerges, describing how the sensation of childbirth is incomparable to anything she had been told. Language has failed to prepare her for the experience, one which she describes as free from pain, but also in terms of disembodiment: "Nothing they told me was like this. I don't know whose skin this is [...]" (306). Language is again regarded with suspicion by the concluding voices in

¹³ Sheila Rabillard, "Sam Shepard: Theatrical Power and American Dreams," *Modern Drama* 30.1 (1987): 60.

¹⁴ Rabillard, "Sam Shepard: Theatrical Power and American Dreams," 61.

Tongues. A speaker's demagoguery belies the subject of his oration: "I'm not here today to lay down the law to you people. On the contrary" (316). The speaker's words are rousing but empty and cliché-ridden: "I'm here so that you can openly voice your opinions. I'm here so that you can see that those opinions are not falling on deaf ears. I'm here so that we can join together in this struggle. So that we can unite" (316).

In its treatment of language, *Tongues* forges links with Surrealism and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. This connection is established by a fixation with the fallibility of language, with the "real", and the rejection of a traditional lineage of dramatic narration. *Tongues* channels Artaud's theory that words should not be granted greater status than other means of expression. In *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud writes:

It is not a matter of suppressing speech in the theater but of changing its role, and especially of reducing its position, of considering it as something else than a means of conducting human characters to their external ends, since the theater is concerned only with the way feelings, and passions conflict with one another, and man with man, in life.¹⁵

Artaud argued for the liberation of language from its communicative origins and Chaikin and Shepard give imagistic and aesthetic value to Artaud's theories in the severance of language and corporeality. Artaud's words evoke Breton's discussion in the first Surrealist manifesto on the ineffectualness of conversation to "allow the heart of the matter to be plumbed".¹⁶ He also wrote on the obligatory disconnection of words from their meaning as essential to automatist representation: "I shall even go so far as to maintain that [language] instructs me and, indeed, I have had occasion to use *surreally* words whose meanings I have forgotten".¹⁷ However, the disconnection of the signified from the signifier in *Tongues*, and language from the body, evokes comparisons with an aphasic state. One voice in *Tongues* seems to have particular defects in spoken expression:

Where—Let's see—Is this—Wait—Now—Listen—Now—No—
Wait—Let's see—Is this—Is this the one? No—Just a minute. (306).

Chaikin's aphasia greatly influenced the conception of *The War in Heaven* in 1985, a play which will be discussed in greater detail later in this essay. However, the deliberate assimilation of a neurological disorder as evident here is significant in the context of Beckett's use of language. Benjamin Keatinge regards this as a conscious attempt at "systemizing confusion"¹⁸ by imitating the deranged language of the insane, particularly the "formal thought disorder" of schizophrenia. This is characterized by the derailment of language and the absence of a unifying theme in self-expression. *Tongues* seems to satisfy as an example of a schizophrenic's "poverty of content of speech" which features "empty philosophizing".¹⁹ The defamiliarization of language brought about by the aphasic state produces a disconnection between words and the self so that the language itself produces a series of autonomous dream-like images. Thus, Breton's, Beckett's and Chaikin's writing produces aphasic effects, regardless of whether this is deliberate or not. Breton advocated that the Surrealists utilize language in an aphasic manner. Aesthetically, Lyford compares the Surrealist technique of collage and the

¹⁵ Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 72.

¹⁶ Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 34.

¹⁷ Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 34.

¹⁸ Benjamin Keatinge, "Beckett and Language Pathology," *Journal of Modern Literature* 31 (2008): 87.

¹⁹ Keatinge, "Beckett and Language Pathology," 90.

imagery of dismemberment in Surrealist art as evident of a “postwar aestheticization of bodily trauma”.²⁰ Her argument raises the question as to whether language can survive after the body disintegrates and if it can offer transcendence over the visceral. This idea is given further consideration in *The War in Heaven* as this essay will address.

The origins of Surrealism were documented by Breton as an attempt to capture an expression close to “spoken thought”.²¹ Mediumship offered the Surrealists a means of disabling the body and an attempt to channel a meta-physical dimension of thought. However, this can only emerge from the body, our only means of expression. This highlights the limits of linguistic expression, since the Surrealists seem to be suggesting that it is incapable of communicating certain bodily facets of thought. Chaikin described the expression he sought in *Tongues* in remarkably similar terms as “thought music”,²² thus suggesting that music is a better means of expression than language. The accounts of the creation of *Tongues* suggest that Chaikin was to act as a shaman, channeling voices that emerge from the unconscious. Similarly, the first period of Surrealism featured the *epoch des sommeils* during which the Surrealists used hypnosis to create sleep-like conditions so that automatic images or writing could be produced without rational interference. It is also important to note here that Breton referred to his fellow Surrealists as “simple receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments*” in the first manifesto, again suggesting the disabling of conscious control and the mere documentation of bodily thought. Correspondingly, Chaikin and Shepard’s work was devised from an attempt to channel untapped or repressed “voices” or “echoes” in line with the Surrealist mantra which centered on the liberation of uncontaminated expression void of conscious control. In an article for *Drama Review* in 1977, Shepard describes his playwriting process in terms that also imply mediumship: “The picture is moving in the mind and being allowed to move more and more freely as you follow it. [...] In other words, I’m taking notes in as much detail as possible on an event that’s happening somewhere inside me”.²³ In production, Chaikin, immobile, seated with a Mexican blanket covering his legs, seems as though in preparation for sleep and for the dream state to be released. The setting immediately invites comparisons with both a dreamscape and mediumship. On the other hand, Mel Gussow experienced the premiere production of *Savage/Love* as “a restless, confused erotic dream, a post-bedtime story”.²⁴ In “Haunted”, the speaker questions whether the object of his affection is but a figment of his imagination or a spirit: “Am I dreaming you up” (101). In both works the diegetic space trumps the mimetic. This staging also conforms to Esslin’s definition of the Theatre of the Absurd which “tends toward a radical devaluation of language, toward a poetry that is to emerge from the concrete and objectified images of the stage itself”.²⁵

Tongues can be viewed as a dramatization of Breton’s definition of “spoken thought” since the accounts of its creation suggest that Chaikin and Shepard were channeling voices which emerge from the subconscious. However, Dawn Ades points out that the Surrealists did not use mediumship to seek out the voices of the *dead* but rather to summon “things which are beyond the bounds of immediate reality but which

²⁰ Lyford, “The Aesthetics of Dismemberment,” 65.

²¹ Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 22-23.

²² Blumenthal, “Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin: Speaking in Tongues,” 139.

²³ Sam Shepard, “Language, Visualization and the Inner Library,” in *American Dreams*, 215.

²⁴ Johan Callens, *Dis/Figuring Shepard* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2007), 141 n.8.

²⁵ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin, 1991), 26.

can be revealed to us by our unconscious or by our senses of heightened sensibility".²⁶ Indeed, such is the case with *Tongues*; the voices exhumed are voices from within, guttural voices from the psyche that remind us daily of our mortality and corporeal extinction. Rather than communicating with the dead, Chaikin is establishing a dialogue with his own death, with the inevitable failure of his body, a cessation which will automatically denote the extinguishing of his thoughts. Like Surrealist poetry, the piece was devised as "an act of spontaneous creation". It is connected to Surrealism by its emphasis on the emancipation of the myriad "voices" of the human psyche and its concentration on imagistic rather than aesthetic representation. In its imagistic and scenographic severance of the body from the thoughts produced by the mind, *Tongues* is an ambitious endeavor to rescue language from corporeal decay by liberating it from an ailing physicality. Rather than "guiding one's attention away from metaphysics, towards bodies and their unambiguous, secular reality" as Robinson argues,²⁷ *Tongues* relates, I contend, to the failure of the body to produce sensory stimuli, which must be produced by the mind instead. But Shepard is indeed concerned with the carnal. He wrote in a program note in 1971, "I like to yodel and dance and fuck a lot" and that "[w]riting is neat because you do it on a very physical level".²⁸ Yet this play is concerned with the contrary—physical inadequacy. "If I had the use of my body I would throw it out the window" says Beckett's Malone.²⁹ Likewise, a section in *Savage/Love* represents a yearning for genuine connection rather than corporeal proximity, also pertaining to physical inadequacy. In "How I Look to You" the speaker asks, "Which presentation of myself / Would make you want to touch / What would make you cross the border?"; In "Beggar", "Could you just come near enough / So I could feel as though you might be able to hold me" (100). Further on, in "Watching the Sleeping Lover", the voice describes physical intimacy as a poor substitute for emotional attachment. Thus the body is an impediment to true expression, a subjective partition that screens true feeling. In the lines above, it is the impetus behind the gestures that qualifies their value, the desire for intimacy and not the physical act itself.

The limitation of the body lies in its temporality; physical decay is inexorable and ultimately the body fails us all. With regard to Chaikin's ailing health, his physical deterioration suggested that he was reaching the periphery of his mortal life and thus recalls the characters of Beckett's late plays. Anna McMullan's interpretation of these figures is pertinent here: "Many of the personae of the late plays are ghost-like figures who are "not quite there" [...], but not entirely "gone" either. They are exiled between presence and absence, the present and the past, the mortal boundaries of a life and what may lie beyond".³⁰ Chaikin's body becomes interwoven into the text. He is not performing his illness, he embodies it. He is thus the ideal medium for communication with his own death as he appears to the audience on the threshold of life. Hence, his performance of a section entitled "*to One about to Die*" is ironic. Stories, rituals, and myths are evoked in an attempt to counteract the uncertainty around death, but language/stories/narration are ineffectual weapons against the uncertainty of unknowing

²⁶ Dawn Ades, "Dada and Surrealism," in *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 126.

²⁷ Marc Robinson, "Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard in Collaboration," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard*, ed. Matthew Roudané (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 98.

²⁸ In Marc Robinson, *The Other American Drama* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 77.

²⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy; Malone Dies; The Unnamable*, trans. Patrick Bowles and Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove, 1965), 218.

³⁰ Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel's Drama* (London: Routledge, 2010), 105-106.

and corporeal decay. Chaikin's body acts in this play as both medium and metaphor for death— although segregated, the failure of the body is thus linked with the failure of language. As in Beckett's late plays, "the performance of the subject's story is a rite of passage that produces or imagines the ending of both story and life".³¹ Chaikin's bodily performance is part of the narrative. Quoting Roland Barthes, McMullan argues that in Beckett's plays, "the body is [...] "a tissue of quotations" haunted by its acquired grammar of movement and legacies of cultural inscription"³² Susan Harris Smith has written about the "physio-psychological aesthetic" in Shepard's work, demonstrating how the body is the "citadel of the self in the mental act of experiencing".³³ What ultimately emerges in these three works that Shepard devised with Chaikin is the all-encompassing drive to counteract death by verbal self-expression.

There is the suggestion in these works that death is not an ending. A disembodied voice still remains, removed from language, life and the body. Thus, these pieces are concerned with finding genuine expression that the body cannot produce. Shepard's structuralist emphasis, his conjecture that by naming something you destroy it, branches from his striving for authenticity of expression. At one stage in *Tongues*, a voice self-consciously laments its own loss: "It's not like I'm not ever going to find my voice again. Ever again. Nothing as final as that. It's like a lapse. That's it. A little lapse. It's already coming back. I can feel a certain familiarity" (307). In "Invocation" a new voice emerges from beyond the physical: "Between the shape I'm leaving / and the space I'm joining / The dead one tells me now"; and from the "inbetween": "Behind the voice that's speaking / and the one that's thinking / A dead one tells me now" (311). Both *Tongues* and *Savage/Love* revolve around efforts to distil the authentic expression which emerges in the silences, when language and bodily expression die away. These pieces are indeed Surrealist in their dedication to pure imagistic expression, their explorations of an inner consciousness, and their interest in the liberation of this consciousness from the physical realm. *Tongues* ends in a pledge to learn a new language, one that is no longer reliant on the body. "*Talk song*" charts a re-awakening, a new moment of realization, and new modes of expression:

Today the wind roared through the center of town.
Tonight I hear its voice.
percussion—soft
Today the river lay wide open to the sun.
Tonight I hear it speaking.
percussion—soft
Today the moon remained in the sky.
Tonight I feel it moving.
percussion—soft
Today the people talked without speaking.
Tonight I can hear what they're saying.
percussion—soft
Today the tree bloomed without a word.
Tonight I'm learning its language.

³¹ Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, 108.

³² Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, 108.

³³ Susan Harris Smith, "Estrangement and Engagement: Sam Shepard's Dramaturgical Strategies," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 3:1 (Fall 1988): 80.

*No percussion, arms stay frozen,
silence, blackout. (318)*

In May 1984, Chaikin suffered a stroke during open-heart surgery and, as a result, was diagnosed with a combination of Broca's and Wernicke's aphasia.³⁴ Wernicke's aphasia denotes an impairment of receptive speech whilst Broca's area of the brain controls the memory of motor patterns of speech.³⁵ Directly before the surgery, he had been directing *Waiting for Godot* in Stratford, Ontario and had been rehearsing the role of King Lear for an upcoming production of Shakespeare's play at the Public Theatre, New York. He had also been working with Shepard in a workshop from February 1984 on a new piece, *The War in Heaven*, sponsored by The American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts.³⁶ The final voice that emerges in *The War in Heaven* is indeed one of a fallen angel in captivity. The angel's voice mirrors Chaikin's aphasic state and his sudden transition into unfamiliar territory. It suggests a disillusionment with his surroundings after his means of interaction with the world as he knew it was eradicated.

An interest in transitions and alienation were pressing concerns for Shepard throughout his playwriting career, and Chaikin's experiences recovering from aphasia seemed to offer the apposite territory required for *The War in Heaven* to be realized. As a result of his condition, Chaikin became an agent of liminality, his psyche imprisoned in the shell of his ineffectual body and estranged from the universe outside. His aphasia offered the ultimate segregation between body and mind. It signalled the divorce of an inner "self" from an unresponsive, deadened physicality since aphasia "is a non-functioning of the association areas of the brain which interferes with the transmission of the necessary messages to the organs of speech".³⁷ This invites comparisons with Victor Egger's concept of *langage intérieur* which posits that "all our thoughts are accompanied by a faint inward voice or echo".³⁸ According to David Lomas, Egger's theories were significantly influential on Breton as they complemented his hypothesis that this inner language correlated to the unconscious.³⁹ In his liminal state, between life and death, frozen in a failing body, Chaikin's condition could be described as somnambulistic. It pertained to the condition of the "inbetween" with which he was persistently concerned. The imagery evoked in *The War in Heaven* could thus be read as a hypnagogic hallucination, the liberation of repressed desire accessed through a "sleeping" body. This would suggest that his aphasia offered a medium for automatic entry into the unconscious, the objective of all Surrealist inquiry. As I have mentioned, Chaikin's aphasia as an impairment of both receptive and expressive language mirrors the deliberate divorce of the signified from the signifier, the body from the imagination. This is evident in both *Tongues* and *Savage/Love* and it is also reminiscent, as I have suggested, of the Beckettian model of a radical devaluation of language. *The War in Heaven* was originally intended for radio and was first broadcast on the 8th January 1984; however, Chaikin subsequently performed *The War in Heaven* in San Diego the

³⁴ Gene A. Plunka, "Staging Aphasia: Jean-Claude Van Itallie's *The Traveller*," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (1991): 5.

³⁵ Aleen Agranowitz and Milfred Riddle McKeown, *Aphasia Handbook for Adults and Children* (Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1970), 17.

³⁶ Daniels, *Letters and Texts*, 111.

³⁷ Agranowitz and McKeown, *Aphasia Handbook*, 7.

³⁸ David Lomas, "'Modest Recording Instruments': Science, Surrealism and Visuality," *Art History* 27. 4 (2004): 629.

³⁹ Lomas, "'Modest Recording Instruments'," 630.

following year, directed by Steven Kent, before touring with the piece both nationally and internationally throughout the next decade. The language in *A War in Heaven* is even more fragmented than the previous two pieces. Chaikin's aphasic syntax was incorporated into the work and combined with the drafts already written at a workshop in Cambridge.

Roman Jakobson wrote that aphasic injury affects either metaphoric or metonymic command and highlights the centrality of the metaphor to the Surrealist movement:

The alternative predominance of one or the other of these two processes is by no means confined to verbal art. The same oscillation occurs in sign systems other than language. A salient example from the history of painting is the manifestly metonymical orientation of cubism, where the object is transformed into a set of synecdoches; the Surrealist painters responded with a patently metaphorical attitude.⁴⁰

In *The War in Heaven*, there is evidence of Jakobson's definition of a "contexture-deficient aphasia" or "contiguity disorder" in the collapse of grammatical syntax and fragmented sentence structure. *The War in Heaven* contains split, terse, often monosyllabic verse. This describes a desire for both continuity and cessation. We see the scarcity of language and agrammatism of Broca's aphasia juxtaposed with features of Wernicke's aphasia. This is especially evident in the speaker's difficulties with word location: ("ancient / old old old"), ("not killed / still going"), ("sometimes sex together / fucking"). Other sections take the form of sentences but the words are incongruous and are grammatically erroneous:

but maybe it's not so
maybe something new starts
there
maybe I can't think it
can't remember
maybe not human
maybe a turtle
I can't tell
maybe some wonder (169)

The Beckettian voice is still resonant in this piece. The suggestion of death as a rejection of the body and as a retreat toward birth and to a condition of pre-consciousness or pre-corporeal existence is particularly redolent of Beckett's Molloy. The opening lines of *The War in Heaven* recall both Pozzo's lines in *Waiting for Godot*: "they give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then its night once more".⁴¹ They also echo Vladimir's words: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps".⁴² The opening lines of Beckett's *A Piece of Monologue* are also evoked: "Birth was the death of him".⁴³

⁴⁰ Lomas, "'Modest Recording Instruments,'" 70.

⁴¹ Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 83.

⁴² Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 85.

⁴³ Beckett, *A Piece of Monologue* in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 425.

I died
 the day I was born
 and became an Angel
 on that day (158)

The angel has fallen from Heaven and is in captivity on earth: "I'll perish / if I stay tied up like this / I will / I'll perish" (162). These words could be interpreted as the speaker's anxious reaction to assuming human form. As in the environment imagined in *How It Is*, there is no light and no sound in the universe in which the speaker is being held: "Now look / no light / nothing", "Now listen / nothing / no sound / but the sound / of my voice" (164). The sound of his voice does not qualify as true sound. The speaker speaks of being in a state of limbo: "you can't see / as I'm intended to be / unless I'm turned loose" (162). The angel seems aghast at the limitations posed by his physicality and his corporeal form is at odds with his true self. Hence this section in which the speaker seems to recount an out-of-body experience:

I'm hovering
 above myself
 looking
 for a way
 back in (164-165)

In recalling Bishop Berkeley's treatise "*esse est percipi*" ("to be is to be perceived"), these words intimate that if the speaker can perceive himself externally, then he exists. Proposing a psychological explanation for out-of-body experiences, Susan J. Blackmore argues that our dominant cognitive system of "reality" can, under stress, be eclipsed by alternative "models of reality", constructed from information in memory and imagination that the brain "thinks it should be seeing".⁴⁴ Thus, the brain's sensory simulation of its surroundings is a performance that becomes indistinguishable from reality. These pieces ultimately utilize mediumship and out-of-body techniques in their subjective emphasis on the liberation of unconscious desires, amongst which the drive against death and corporeal decay is the most prevalent. Shepard creates new "realities" that rely on the imaginations of both the audience and the characters. Thus, the angel's words in *The War in Heaven*, "I can't live without you imagining me", present a desperate fear of "the death of the imagination", to invoke Ren Frutkin's phrase, a fear which Frutkin first sensed in Shepard's *Cowboys # 2* from 1967. Frutkin, in 1969, read Shepard's plays as "thought in a dramatic mode".⁴⁵

The language of *Tongues*, *Savage/Love* and *The War in Heaven* can be described as aphasic. Although this is literally realized in *The War in Heaven*, an interest in the failure of language and its constant deferral of meaning is evident in the works that the two writers developed before Chaikin's stroke. An assessment of the influence of Beckett on *Tongues*, *Savage/Love* and *The War in Heaven* reinforces the connections between these three pieces and the Surrealists' predilection for using words independent of their meaning. Shepard's interest in language pathology can be traced back to Beckett's "discrediting of reality" which Benjamin Keatinge suggests "he adapted for his own purposes from the Surrealists".⁴⁶ However, Chaikin's Open Theatre also

⁴⁴ Susan J. Blackmore, "A Psychological Theory of the Out-of-Body Experience," *Journal of Parapsychology* 48 (Sept. 1984): 208.

⁴⁵ Ren Frutkin "Paired Existence Meets the Monster," in *American Dreams*, 108.

⁴⁶ Keatinge, "Beckett and Language Pathology," 87.

explored the devaluation of language in the means of communication, seemingly replicating aphasic expression, prior to Chaikin's stroke. The employment of the language of disembodiment in these works denotes a segregation of the body from the psyche. As a result, the speakers witness their own thought processes and become spectators themselves, further agents in self-affirmation which, as we have seen, depends on the presence of an audience for verification. Thus, the speaker is in the position of the "in-between" in a liminal space between the "inside" and the "outside". This is a dramatic terrain long exalted and sought after by Chaikin's Open Theatre and by Shepard who, in a letter to Chaikin in 1977 wrote: "I'm interested in the whole process of visualization. What happens when we visualize pictures to ourselves—inside?"⁴⁷ The process of "visualizing pictures" implies a distancing from "inner speech" in tune with the requirements of Surrealism. This is since "[i]t was precisely the splitting of the subject (a chiasmus) that Surrealism demanded the subject occupy, as a spectator to their own thoughts".⁴⁸

There is an almost utopian belief in Beckett's writing, Breton's treatises and in these plays that Shepard conceived with Chaikin, that language can transcend corporeal existence. Language ultimately emerges as empty, phatic; words dissipate and dissolve in air without an ear to hear them. Language is inseparably bound to the body: it too must disintegrate with corporeal decay. *Tongues, Savage/Love* and *The War in Heaven* all contain the suggestion that the corporeal must be transgressed. This endeavor turns to the recesses of the mind in a search for a dimension where language cannot fail, in the quest for authentic expression. Yet this pursuit is ultimately doomed by language's subservience to the corporeal.

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⁴⁷ Daniels, *Letters and Texts*, 35.

⁴⁸ David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 72.

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Relația dintre Suprarealism și corporalitate în operele lui Sam Shepard și Joseph Chaikin: *Tongues* [Limbi] *Savage/Love* [Sălbatică/Iubire] și *The War in Heaven* [Războiul din Rai]

Piesele timpurii ale lui Shepard sunt preocupate de tema frustrării cauzate de limitele limbajului. Acest articol investighează neputințele limbii, în mod particular în contextul simulării expresiei lingvistice afazice din *Tongues* (1978), *Savage/Love* (1979) și *The War in Heaven* (*Angel's Monologue*) (1985), piese de teatru pe care Shepard le-a scris împreună cu Joseph Chaikin. Eseul demonstrează cum eșecurile corporalității pot oglindi limitele limbii prin analiza colaborării dintre Shepard și Chaikin, cel din urmă fiind diagnosticat cu afazie în urma atacului cerebral pe care acesta l-a suferit în 1984. Această investigație regăsește filiații de factură suprarealistă și face trimiteri la Beckett prin intermediul relațiilor dintre cei doi scriitori. Articolul sugerează că deprecierea limbii și a controlul rațional pot facilita eliberarea de sub automatismul verbal suprarealist. Totuși, concluzia este că, așa cum rezultă din aceste opere, limba există independent de corp.