

# Sacred Time/Ecological Time in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (with a Little Help from Maurice Blanchot)

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## Abstract

My argument takes as its premise the idea that western theatre, what we might call, in shorthand, Aristotelian theatre, invests in a theological notion of time, which I associate, on the one hand, with a causal, linear narrative (beginning, middle, end), and, on the other, with a viewing experience which produces an absorptive temporality, rooted in a kind of weightlessness, a mode of temporal transcendence, an exiting from the earth. By taking us out of time, by abstracting us from our bodies, the dramatic logic of western theatre, invests in a time of redemption, in which the temporality of artificial/staged events is perceived as being somehow more real than time itself. Against synchronous identification and the time of drama, the article argues that Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, purposively produces an experience of 'presentness', in which the subject – the spectator – is compelled to undergo an alternative temporality – the time of waiting. This is immanent time, the time of a different theatrical event, the time in which, to cite Beckett's *Endgame*, 'something takes its course'. 'Presentness,' as I define it here, has nothing in common with what the art critic Michael Fried sees as a moment of grace, and neither does it refer to an act of metaphysical self-coincidence. Rather, it is best seen as an ambivalent, impossible mode of temporality which I term 'sacred time'. Crucially, this is not the time of cycles and myths; more disconcertingly, as in the sense of the English adverb presently, this is a time that is never quite here, a time of deferral, suspension and disappointment. The time, then, that I am interested in designating as sacred or as presentness has much in common with Maurice Blanchot's notion of time as disaster or catastrophe; it is time that never arrives primarily, and scandalously, because it is always already here, weighing on us, insisting on its absent but irreducible gravity. It is a time that roots us to the earth.

**Keywords:** *sacred time, presentness, temporality, Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot*

POZZO: (*suddenly furious*): Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable. When! When! (Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 83)

According to the tenets of classical theism, God, who is One, is the Supreme Creator, who, through mediation of His divine Logos, brings the world into being and providentially directs its course. This primal origin (First cause or *Arche*) is also the ultimate end (Final Goal or *Telos*). (Mark C. Taylor, *Erring a Postmodern A/theology*, 7)

## Beginning I – Definitions and Propositions

My argument takes as its premise the idea that western theatre, what we might call in shorthand Aristotelian theatre, invests in a theological notion of time, which I associate, on the one hand, with a causal, linear narrative (beginning, middle, end), and, on the other, with a viewing experience which, on account of its capacity to obliterate our usual multi-directional experience of time, creates an absorptive (a)temporality, characterized by weightlessness, a sort of eternal present. By taking us out of time, by abstracting us from our bodies, the dramatic logic of western theatre invests in a kind of

redemption or 'grace', in which the (a)temporality of artificially staged events are perceived as somehow more real than time itself. We might also term this abstract (a)temporal logic, 'synchronous identification', the moment when – and here I make a connection between Aristotelian dramaturgy and cinema – 'reel' time replaces 'real time'. For in synchronous identification (be that with the action or inner life of character), the spectator or viewer gets lost in the (a)temporality of the artwork. In the Aristotelian tradition, this temporality, more often than not, is figured as the temporality of suspense, an (a)temporality in which the fugitive, banal time of everyday life is forgotten or repressed in a melodramatic desire to bring the narrative to an end, and so obtain a satisfactory sense of closure.

Against synchronous identification and the time of drama, I want to argue that contemporary theatre, by purposefully rejecting Aristotelian, Brechtian and Artaudian dramaturgies, allows an alternative experience of time to disclose itself. By escaping narrative 'patterning' of onto-theological thinking, contemporary theatre - theatre that, as the theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann points out, 'turns *time as such* into an object of the aesthetic experience'<sup>1</sup> – has the potential to open up alternative ways of being a subject, and thus, by extension, different possibilities for existing on the earth.

To explain what contemporary theatre is, I take Samuel Beckett's 1953 work *Waiting for Godot* as my exemplar, a play which, as many have recognised, deconstructs the theological stage both in terms of its structure, and most importantly, for my argument, in how audience members experience it bodily within the 'presentness' of the theatre event. Presentness, as I define it, here has nothing in common with how the art critic Michael Fried conceptualizes it in his influential 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood'. In that text, Fried contends that presentness is a moment of 'grace', a sort of redemptive timelessness that he finds in abstract painting.<sup>2</sup> For me, by contrast presentness is best approached as an ambivalent, impossible mode of temporality, which I associate with 'sacred time'. In the extent to which it inherits both the static landscape of Symbolist drama as well as pointing forward to contemporary durational theatre and performance (Forced Entertainment, Robert Wilson, Bruce Nauman, Douglas Gordon, Christain Marclay, Goat Island, Heiner Goebbels, etc.), *Waiting for Godot* is a perfect play to concentrate on, a work that, despite the fact it is written by an author, offers an excellent example of the sacred time that comes into play when the theological stage is abandoned.

What I am terming sacred time does not contest the teleological narrative of theological time by investing in cycles and repetitions. Rather, it is a time of presentness in the sense of the English adverb presently, that is to say, a time that is never quite here, something always deferred, a time, then, of suspension rather than suspense. For that reason, the time that I am interested in designating as sacred or as presentness has much in common with Maurice Blanchot's notion of time as a disaster or catastrophe. It also might be usefully approached as *a/theological* time, as defined by Mark C. Taylor:

Erring thought [thought that wanders] is neither properly theological nor non-theological, theistic nor atheistic, religious nor secular, believing nor nonbelieving. A/theology represents the liminal thinking of marginal thinkers. The / of /atheology (which it is important to note, can be

<sup>1</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 156, original italics.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essay and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 192.

written but not spoken) marks the *limen* that signifies both proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority. This strangely permeable membrane forms a border where fixed borders disintegrate. Along this boundless boundary the traditional polarities between which Western theology has been suspended are inverted and subverted. Since it is forever *entre-deux*, a/theology is undeniably ambiguous.<sup>3</sup>

## Beginning II – The A/Theological Stage

The move away from the theological stage is first adumbrated, theoretically and practically, by Antonin Artaud, in his writings of the 1920s and 1930s, most importantly, perhaps, in *The Theatre and its Double*. In that collection, Artaud argued for a theatre that would not be a theatre of *representation*, a theatre dependent on the words of an author – a surrogate father or God. On the contrary, what Artaud sought was a theatre of *presentation* that would do away with the written text as its primary mode of communication. Artaud's anti-theological theatre, then, in its purest form would be physical, visual, and aural, a theatre that looks to explore the autonomous materiality and energetics of pure *mise-en scene*, as opposed to the more derivative activity of simply transposing a text from page to stage: 'The theatre, an independent and autonomous art, must, in order to revive or simply to live, realize what differentiates it from text, pure speech, literature, and all other fixed and written means.'<sup>4</sup>

The philosophical stakes of Artaud's argument for a cruel theatre, or anti-theological stage, are teased out by Jacques Derrida in two important texts, published in 1967. In these two essays – 'La Parole soufflée' and 'La Clôture de la représentation' – Derrida both celebrates *and* deconstructs Artaud's desire to produce a new form of 'holy theatre',<sup>5</sup> a theatre that by rejecting the onto-theology inherent in Aristotelian drama would create a metaphysics of the sacred, shattering spectators and actors alike and producing a new kind of dark communion.

A good indication of the type of sacred, elemental theatre that Artaud is after is provided in the following citation, in which the plague metaphor illuminates his concern to infect and contaminate us with alterity:

For if theatre is like the plague, this is not just because it acts on large groups and disturbs them in one and the same way. There is both something victorious and vengeful in theatre just as in the plague, for we clearly feel that the spontaneous fire the plague lights as it passes by is nothing but a gigantic liquidation.

Such a complete social disaster, such organic disorder overflowing with vice, this kind of wholesale exorcism constricting the soul, driving it to the limit, indicates the presence of a condition which is an extreme force and where all the powers of nature are newly rediscovered the instant something fundamental is about to be accomplished.<sup>6</sup>

It is not difficult to see why Derrida, with his interest in an ethics of deferral, would be suspicious of Artaud's dark and negative theology. For Derrida, Artaud's desire to kill

<sup>3</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Erring a Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 106.

<sup>5</sup> See Christopher Innes, *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, 27.

the author god, regardless of its virulent attack on logocentrism, suffers, ultimately from a logic of replacement, in which the author is now superseded by the director, word with body, text with stage. This is problematic for Derrida, in the extent to which Artaud's cruel theatre ends by reinvesting in a logic of self-presence – the very essence of onto-theology. For on the Artaudian stage, as Derrida realizes all too well, the spectator is to be penetrated by a kind of transcendental truth, placed in contact with the dark forces of life, born again, renewed through a dialectics of evil. This explains why, as Derrida points out, Artaud seeks to use theatre to annihilate the thing that, for him, establishes the intimate bond theatre and theology: namely, repetition, a concept and process that, Artaud believes, deprives life of its difference, its autonomy, its vitality. Derrida notes:

Here we touch upon what seems to be the profound essence of Artaud's project, his historico-metaphysical decision. Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general. For him, repetition was evil..... This power of repetition governed everything that Artaud wished to destroy: and it has several names: God, Being, Dialectics<sup>7</sup> (*WaD*, 310).

While Derrida is sympathetic to Artaud's to abandon the logos, to find new ways of signifying, he contends that Artaud's mistake is to abandon repetition, in the hope of providing us with an experience of self-presence. For all that happens, in this move – and, for Derrida, it is ultimately a tragic move – is to harness us yet again to a centre, to an ego, to a God:

Can one not affirm the non-referral to the centre, rather than bemoan the absence of the centre? Why would one mourn for the centre? Is not the centre, the absence of play and difference, another name for death? The death which reassures and appeases, but also, with its hole, creates anguish and puts at stake? (*WaD*, 374).

Against this problematic version, Derrida tentatively proposes a different theatre of cruelty, at the end of his second essay on Artaud, 'La Clôture de la Représentation'. This would be a theatre that keeps Artaud's original insight into the nature of repetition, but does not seek to bring it to an end in a moment of metaphysical presence. Rather what Derrida appears to be arguing for is a type of cruel theatre that would highlight the endlessness of repetition, and thus draw attention to our inability to ever coincide with ourselves:

Because it has always already begun, representation therefore has no end. But one can conceive of the closure of that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself. That is to say, closure is its playing space [...]. To think the closure of representation is thus to think the cruel powers of death and play which permit presence to be born to itself, and pleurably to consume itself through the representation in which it eludes itself in this deferral. To think the closure of representation is to think the tragic: not as the representation of fate, but the fate of representation. Its gratuitous and baseless necessity (*WaD*, 316).

Although Derrida's idea of a closure for representation – *une clôture* in French – is primarily spatial, his comments have an important temporal dimension. They suggest that a sacred stage would be a stage in which nothing finishes, and where suspension and ellipsis condition new a/theological dramaturgies. In this way, Derrida posits an

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans., intro., and additional notes Alan Bass (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 310. Hereafter abbreviated as *WaD* in the text.

alternative form of theatre; one where Artaud's dark theology is refused for an a/theology, a theatre where the quest for self-presence is deconstructed, left in tatters. For what an a/theological stage discloses – and this is what I will go on to argue below – is the impossibility of ever finishing with representation. Where both theological and atheological theatres, for all their differences, seek a *dénouement*, an unknotting that would train spectators to experience time as an eschatology, the a/theological work, by contrast, is one in which temporality is lived in a more agonistic and open-ended manner. In the a/theological theatre, time is not something to be forgotten, mere background to the concerns of human agents seeking redemption or fulfilment. On the contrary, it becomes the very stuff of theatre itself, the thing that is fore-grounded. Understood in this way, the a/theological stage has the potential, I want to suggest, to exist as an ecological stage, a space where human subjects, spectators and performance, come to be undone, to put their humanness, their exceptionality on trial. Moreover, the a/theological stage is not, as Artaud famously wanted, a stage without authors. On the contrary, it is a stage in which authors create plays that reveal the fundamental weakness and fragility of the human subject, who has now been set adrift in a sea of meaningless words. In these ruins of representation, we become aware of the very thing that theology, according to Mark C. Taylor, wants us to forget – radical temporality, the anarchic time that escapes all attempts to narrate it:

Throughout the Western tradition there has been a very close relationship between being and time. Being has been consistently interpreted as presence and hence constantly regarded in terms of the present. While apparently establishing the essentiality of time, this customary view of the relation between being and time actually serves to repress the inevitable temporality of selfhood.<sup>8</sup>

In what remains of this essay, I would like to explore how Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* exposes this repression, and in the process offers us the possibility of living an alternative 'time ecology.'<sup>9</sup> Indeed to be somewhat provocative about it, I aim to show how a/theological time, in as much as it forecloses the human desire for self-presence and roots us, immanently, to the earth, is ecological time, or at least a manifestation of it.

### **Beginning III: By Way of Anecdote**

For a long time now, since I was a child in fact, I have been somewhat mystified by our tendency to divide the week – to organize time – into seven theological days: the temporality of Genesis, the chronophilia of a sky God. This has sometimes led me, perhaps madly, certainly comically, to seek the essence of a Wednesday or the atmosphere of a Friday. There have been moments – insane moments – when I think I have discovered this essence: the anxiety of a Monday morning, for instance, as emails flood into an office computer and my colleagues seem tired and listless, unhappy at the prospect of resuming the week again; or perhaps a Wednesday afternoon, when things have slowed down, and you start to pay attention to the streaks of rain on a wet window pane in Glasgow as the light slowly darkens outside. But juxtaposed to this, there are

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Erring a Postmodern A/theology*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> See Barbara Adam et al., 'Time for the Environment: The Tutzing Time Ecology Project', *Time and Society* 61.1 (1997): 73-84.

other moments when I feel that I have lost the capacity to distinguish between the days completely. On such occasions, my eyes open like globes, like moons, and what I see and feel is a mysterious sense of nothing, a kind of void or abyss in which things lose their discreteness, topple into one, and make no sense whatsoever. At these moments, in this abyss, one feels time as an abstract flow that has nothing human or anthropocentric about it. This is the time of evisceration, of erasure, of some strange undoing in a neutrality that is as passive as it is empty. A moment of impossibility, where humans, animals, minerals are entangled and intertwined, while always keeping their distance, in a temporality without beginning or end. Empty time, cosmic time, the time of impossibility, a time of undoing. I have been attracted to this untimely time, caught in its nonchalant, oxymoronic seduction, for as long as I can remember, and ever thus. As always, though, Beckett was there before me, like a ghost of the past haunting my future. Consider, the following late poem from Beckett:

I am this flow of sand that slips  
 Between the pebble and the dune  
 Summer's rain on my life  
 On me my life that flees me chases me  
 And will end on its beginning day  
 Dear moment I see you  
 In this shroud of fading mist  
 Where I will no longer have to walk these long moving thresholds  
 And live the time of a gateway  
 That opens and closes again.<sup>10</sup>

But what has this poem to do with theatre and performance, in general, and *Waiting for Godot*, in particular? We could start perhaps with the image of the gateway that opens and closes again. Is there, I wonder, a better image or analogy for the theatre event? For what else is theatre if not a temporal act that unfolds in a unique, unrepeatable moment – that moves through the gate – only for it to be renewed again and again, in some endless series that repeats at the very moment it finishes? As every actor knows, the end of play, the closing of the gate, is forever synonymous with the very act of opening the gate again. Time passes in theatre and performance, and yet it never ends – that's its paradox, its condition, its symptom. The gate is always left unhinged, as if one were hovering at the very crossroads of time.

Derrida is right. Regardless of Aristotelian's theatre's obsession with *dénouement* and Artaud's frenzy for cruelty, theatre's temporality is ultimately resistant to closure. In its differential and deferred staging, theatre shows us that time is both ruined and ruinous, something that moves, stubbornly and blindly, into an endless horizon without any hope of stopping or providing redemption.<sup>11</sup> In theatre, there is always another Hamlet, another Lear, another Pheadra. In this respect, theatre, I would suggest, deconstructs, in its very operation alone (and without need for words), the moment of *parousia*, the return of Christ as some definitive moment whose future will arrive to put an end to time. The rationale for this deconstructionist aspect of theatre, the always

<sup>10</sup> Beckett, new translation in Stephen Barker, 'Qu'est-ce que c'est d'après in Beckettian Time', in S. E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (eds), *Beckett after Beckett* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2006), 112.

<sup>11</sup> S. E. Gontarski makes a similar point when he compares the temporality of Beckett's theatre with the 'time-image' of Gilles Deleuze [S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014): 7].

excessive relationship existing between play-text and performance-text, is given in Derrida's 1966 essay 'Structure, Sign, Play', when he comments that the 'absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely' (*WaD*, 352). In theatre, there is always 'a more'.

*Waiting for Godot*, too, is a play about play, a performance where time passes and nothing completes. The only difference between the start of the play and its ending, apparently two moons later, is that Pozzo goes blind, two identical boys, supposedly brothers, announce the non-arrival of Godot to the tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, and four or 5 leaves have sprouted on the once naked tree that stands there, according to the stage directions, on some nameless country road, in the evening.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it is perhaps most accurate to define Beckett's play – and this applies to all his early stage work – as properly in-terminable, a performance that never reaches its destination, a play, then, that errs. Interestingly, Beckett's 'organisation of chaos'<sup>13</sup> is both contiguous with and ironically opposed to the quest of Vladimir and Estragon, who – or at least they appear to be – are waiting for Godot to arrive, in the hope of putting an end to the boredom, the daytime insomnia, of their endless waiting. Where Vladimir and Estragon are rooted to the spot, anxious, as they are of moving – they always stay in the vicinity of the tree – Beckett's play, by contrast, moves this way and that, refusing to still itself, as if it sought, by subterfuge, to outwit any possibility that it might be touched by grace, and so removed from its restless, playful errance. This refusal of grace through endless movement, this commitment to anachronistic and untimely time, allows us to see why, as I have mentioned elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> Beckett is a quintessentially Nietzschean playwright, an artist willing to wager on the earth as opposed to the heavens. To borrow the words of the art critic Boris Groys – and this is precisely what makes Beckett approach a/theological – we might see Beckett as a 'comrade of time',<sup>15</sup> someone who seeks to help it, when everything in our onto-theological culture conspires against it, either by seeking to exploit it for economic gain, or to control it like religion, in the desire that we might escape from it, and live in eternity as disembodied, unperturbed souls.

To speak somewhat candidly, we might say that Beckett's uses theatre to show us, meta-theatrically, what theatre always was and is but mostly tries to deny: quite simply, an art *of* and *for* time.<sup>16</sup> My use of the preposition *for* in this context is deliberately double. On the one hand, it signifies an act of giving oneself up to something or someone (*for you*, I came) as well being willing to lend one support to a person or cause (I am *for you* in this game). As I argue below, to be *for* time, as Beckett most certainly is, is to sculpt a dramaturgy that 'exhausts' theatre of its possibility, and, by doing so,

<sup>12</sup> The strange double temporality – the dynamic stasis - of Beckett's crossroad setting is captured, beautifully, I think, in the series of images by the Irish artist Gerard Byrne who sought to find the tree that might have inspired Beckett in Ireland and the South of France.

<sup>13</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Trying to Understand Endgame', trans. M.T. Jones, *New German Critique* 26 (1982): 120.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Lavery, 'Samuel Beckett', in John Deeney and Maggie Gales (eds), *Fifty Modern and Contemporary Dramatists* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Boris Groys, 'Comrades of Time', *E-Flux*, 2009; available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/comrades-of-time>. [accessed 20 October 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Beckett's longstanding commitment to disclosing the disturbing qualities of time is evident in his first book *Proust*. For Beckett, Proust's greatness is found in how shows us chained to habit 'like a dog to his vomit'. [Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1970), 19.]

allows for a new type of theatrical experience to emerge.<sup>17</sup> One that seeks to do *almost* nothing, that runs the risk of getting too close to what Martin Heidegger calls 'profound boredom', a mode of temporalization in which we are the mercy of time, lost in its slow passing.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Beginning IV: Errancy, Ruins and the Time of Ecology**

Perhaps the best way to think about Beckett's dramaturgy of time in *Waiting for Godot* is to approach it as a kind of errancy, a work that moves by mistakes, interruptions, and meanders. If we wished to give an image to this errancy, we could see the play as a labyrinth, a site or space in which there is no real hope of exiting, and in which we have to try out circuitous routes in a time-space devoid of transcendence. Or to use a different image, we could approach it as a ruin, a structure that is blasted and porous – just about holding itself together, and which situates itself in the liminal or parallax space between the no longer and not yet. The play, then, is something that leaves gaps, huge holes and distances that the spectator must give himself over to and exist in. In *Waiting For Godot* – and this is what a reading of the work as text can never quite capture – the spectator is asked to spend time with a situation, in a landscape, where time itself has been put out of joint, made palpable, extended, and dilated. And in this dilation, this work of never ending deferral, the invisible is not made visible in an act of theatricalized transubstantiation, but rather left invisible, a temporality that is always there, always eluding us, even now at the very moment in which I write this sentence.<sup>19</sup>

Maurice Blanchot, in an essay on Beckett's prose text, *How it is* or in French *Comment c'est*, a title which, when spoken, translates as *commencer* (to start), states that Beckett's text is not a text to be read, but one to listen to. In that listening, Blanchot continues, one discovers a voice – the voice of the author – which at the same time is the voice of nothing, a voice without meaning, a neutral voice in which everything and everyone is implicated, an infinite murmur:

- But what is this voice?
- That is the question not to ask, for the voice is already present in one's hearing of the question one asks about it. A voice that is old, older than any past...it is perhaps the voice of all us, the impersonal, errant, continuous...<sup>20</sup>

In this production of an anonymous, neutral voice, Blanchot states that Beckett collapses the distinction between author and reader, producing a space – and a time – where all are complicit, enveloped together, in-different:

The term hearing would befit this act of approach better than reading. Behind the words that are read, as before the words written, there is a voice already inscribed, not heard, not

<sup>17</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance* 24.3 (1995): 3-28.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, new ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 77.

<sup>19</sup> Beckett's notion of what we might call a/theological transubstantiation is very different from the more positive theological version promulgated by theatre practitioners such as Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>20</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 330. Hereafter abbreviated as *IC* in the text.

speaking; and the author, close to this voice is on an equal footing with the reader – each nearly merged with the other, seeking to recognise it (*IC*, 329).

To speak of voice, as Blanchot so astutely does, is of course, to draw close to the thing that Beckett wanted his texts to become: music, a rhythmic sculpting of time in which the listener/spectator is invited to participate in what the German director composer Heiner Goebbels calls ‘the time of the other’,<sup>21</sup> a duration whereby horological or clock time is put on hold, messed up, and decomposed.<sup>22</sup>

Theatre time, too, is durational, a field or frame carved out from everyday reality, where we are allowed to live time differently, or, in the case of Beckett’s theatre, to experience the very flow of time as it passes, heavily and impossibly, in and through our bodies. Within the domain of performance, the neutral voice of the no one, that murmur that merges author and reader in the time of listening, is found in silence rather than sound. There is nothing new in saying that *Waiting for Godot* is a play about time – the very title of the work alludes us to the fact that it is about waiting, and numerous commentators have discussed its meaning from that perspective (see Richard Schechner (1966), Steven Connor (1988), James L. Calderwood (1992)). But what has been less discussed, however, even by contemporary Beckett scholars such as Yoshiki Tajiri (2007) Anna McMullan (2010), and Trish McTighe (2013) interested in embodiment and hapticity, is the way in which Beckett structures his play to include us, the spectators, within the very dilemma that so pains his characters. In this respect, we might say that Beckett creates a *mise-en- abyme* in which we, the spectators, are eroded by the passing of time in the same way that organic and inorganic materials are weathered by the play of wind and air. In French, as Michel Serres reminds us so fortuitously, the word *temps* translates as both weather and time.<sup>23</sup> In Beckett, *il a fait un temps*.<sup>24</sup>

## Beginning V – Word Games

Before exploring how Beckett composes this weathering, this implication in time, I want to turn to something that Beckett talks about in his *Three Dialogues*, with respect to expression. In the third dialogue with Georges Duthuit, where they discuss the work of the Dutch painter Bram Van Velde, Beckett criticizes artists for their humanism, commenting that ‘among those whom we call great artists, I can think of none whose concern was not predominantly with his expressive possibilities, those of his vehicle, those of humanity’ (*D*, 142). In contradistinction to this anthropocentric desire to humanize the universe, Beckett’s calls for an inhuman art, which, as Jean-François

<sup>21</sup> Heiner Goebbels, *Aesthetics of Absence: Texts on Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 32.

<sup>22</sup> In a letter to his most faithful director, Alan Schneider, Beckett wrote about *Endgame*: ‘My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept no responsibility for anything else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones let them. And provide their own aspirin.’ [Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 109. Hereafter abbreviated as *D* in the text].

<sup>23</sup> Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>24</sup> For a fascinating ecological reading of weather in Beckett’s novels see Paul Davies (2006). Whereas Davies’s reading is largely textual and representational – he deals with actual weather – mine is more concerned with weather in the abstract, as both a formal structure and mode of temporal experience.

Lyotard has also pointed out, ought not be confused with an art of inhumanity.<sup>25</sup> In the realm of Beckettian aesthetics, the dream is for an inhuman work that would be 'unresentful of its insuperable indigence, and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving' (*D*, 141).

But what is an art of insuperable indigence? And how does it relate to time? Indigence is a word that translates as poverty, but which also contains the word indigeneity in its root. Etymologically, then, to be indigenous is to be both poor and also of the earth. And perhaps the most penurious state that we encounter is to be exposed to the elements, to live without shelter, as an orphan, exile or animal. To be precisely, then, like Vladimir and Estragon, beggars and mendicants, subjects who live outdoors, in the weather, *dans le temps*, and who, in their indigence, in their poverty, are condemned to a life without objects, deprived of those tools or things that would protect us, albeit chimerically, from time itself. As such, an art of insuperable indigence, as I see it, might be considered as an art that replaces human time with the anonymous time of the Blanchottian inhuman, the time of endless waiting in which Godot never comes, the time of the earth, then.

In French, the word *attendre* has numerous meanings and qualities, all of which are at work in the French title of Beckett's play *En attendant Godot*. To attend is simultaneously to wait, to pay to attention to, to care for, and within this verbal polysemy, one also hears the ghostly rumble of the nouns tension and tender. Could it be then that in waiting, in attending, one is softened up, made tender, weathered? Crucially, however, tenderizing is not an easy action or simple emotion, for it arises from tension, from not, in other words, being able to finish, to reach transcendence, to exit the world. To attend then is to live in tension, to stay on the limit. This is what Beckett's play is *about*, I think. For what Beckett does in *Waiting for Godot* is to present us with an inhuman or a/theological time that is so intimate it is extimate, so close it is far away. Although we are in and of this time, we can never coincide with it: it always outruns us, refusing, as the philosopher Stanley Cavell realized in his essay on *Endgame*, 'to sit still'.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the time of Godot passes like a weather system. *Il a fait un temps*.

## Beginning VI: The Time of the Spectator

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett is able to produce attendance by fashioning a work that refuses to represent a world that we are able to recognize or identify with. There is no overtly semiotic logic in the work, nothing really to unpack, unless one wants to 'get a headache'. Rather Beckett prefers to present us with what we might call real signs, bodies that refuse to signify, entities of dense materiality, exposed to weather and change. This is surely the meta-theatrical meaning of the following passage towards the end of Act I, when in one of their interminable games of waiting, purposefully designed to 'pass the time',<sup>27</sup> Vladimir and Estragon are acutely aware that Pozzo and Lucky have already changed in the short term they have known them:

<sup>25</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (London: Polity, 1991), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 162.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 46. Hereafter abbreviated as *WG* in the text.

VLADIMIR: How they've changed?  
 ESTRAGON: Who?  
 VLADIMIR: Those two.  
 ESTRAGON: That's the idea. Let's make a little conversation.  
 VLADIMIR: Haven't they?  
 ESTRAGON: What?  
 VLADIMIR: Changed  
 ESTRAGON: Very likely. They all change. Only we can't (WG, 47).

From a theatrical perspective, this passage is complex as well as humorous. For not only does it draw attention, meta-theatrically, to the extent to which theatre, like music, is a temporal art, an art of the weather predicated on transience and mutability, it also highlights the fact that as characters in a play, Vladimir and Estragon, in Pirandellian fashion, are stuck there for eternity, names that have entered the realms of culture and history.

But what is the point of this metatheatricalization of time? What does it do to us as spectators? Ostensibly this: it brings the audience into the play, to show that we too are weathered by the passing of the performance, condemned to *do* time.<sup>28</sup> Throughout *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon continually remind the audience that the play they are watching is contiguous with the actual performance unfolding in front of them. In these meta-theatrical exchanges, the audience are no longer behind the dramatic action, in what Gertrude Stein called 'theatre's syncopated rhythm'; rather, they are coeval with it. The examples of meta-theatricalized temporality in the play are legion, but I'll concentrate on this one – to my mind, the funniest – which occurs in Act I when the slave master Pozzo is rummaging around in his pockets, tellingly looking for a lost pipe, his briar:

VLADIMIR: Charming evening we're having.  
 ESTRAGON: Unforgettable.  
 VLADIMIR: And it's not over.  
 ESTRAGON: Apparently not.  
 VLADIMIR: It's only beginning.  
 ESTRAGON: It's awful.  
 VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime.  
 ESTRAGON: The circus.  
 VLADIMIR: The music-hall.  
 ESTRAGON: The circus.  
 POZZO: What can I have done with that briar?  
 ESTRAGON: He's a scream: he's lost his dudden. (*Laughs noisily*)  
 VLADIMIR: I'll be back. (*He hastens towards the wings*)  
 ESTRAGON: End of the corridor, on the left.  
 VLADIMIR: Keep my seat (WG, 34-35).

By drawing attention to the theatricality of their own situation, Vladimir and Estragon's hold a mirror up to the audience, allowing them to see that the characters predicament is their predicament, too. In the same way that Beckett's tramps use theatre as a diversionary tactic to make time pass a little quicker or to repress its flow altogether, so, we, the spectators, do the same thing, going to see a play like *Waiting for Godot* as

<sup>28</sup> This idea of 'doing time,' a phrase used by prisoners, explains the great success that Beckett's work had amongst the inmates of San Quentin Prison when it was performed there in 1957. [See Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 19].

medicine for our temporal ills. Beckett, of course, undermines our diversionary tactics by confronting us with a play that is, conventional speaking, 'awful', a drama 'where nothing happens twice', a ruined performance that goes nowhere. Paradoxically or ironically, depending on your choice of word, the awfulness of the 'pantomime' we are watching derives from the fact that it is deliberately botched entertainment, a diversion which does not hold our attention, and that is unable to absorb us in some timeless moment of pure drama or suspense. In *Waiting for Godot*, theatre, like badly whipped mayonnaise, is something that does not take, something, then, like the cricket in T.S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* that offers no relief.

In Beckett's weathering dramaturgy, we are confronted with a situation in which, as Estragon says in the opening line of the play, from the off, as it were, 'there is nothing to be done' (WG, 11). Remembering that drama in Greek, signifies a doing, an action, Estragon's comment highlights the futility, the sheer ineptitude of the drama we are constrained to sit and undergo. For if drama is supposed to do something – namely, to hurry time along, to provide a kind of solace, a mask over the abyss – then a play that stubbornly refuses to do that can only ever be chronic, a word which discloses the intimate connection relating time (*chronos*) to pain. Hence, to return to Derrida's Artaud, we can now see that the cruelty of Beckett's work, is found in the refusal of the theological act *par excellence*: the gift of sacrifice that would supposedly result in some form of closure or resolution. Like Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* (1957) and Winnie in *Happy Days* (1961), Vladimir and Estragon remain rooted at the end of the play to the spot, condemned to wait for a Godot who never comes, precisely because he is already there, indeed has always been there.

VLADIMIR: Well? shall we go?  
 ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go (*they do not move*).  
*Curtain* (WG, 88).

So far I have concentrated on explaining how Beckett's metatheatricality works as a dramaturgical concept, but what about my promise to analyse what it does to us as bodies in the here and now of the auditorium, as spectators, as attendants? Why, and how, in other words, is Beckett's play so chronic, so agonizing? What does it feel like? And how do we write about it? At this point, it should be noted that it is not only Beckett's early audiences who were disturbed or discomfited by his play about nothing. Rather, contemporary spectators are still troubled – perhaps even more so in a world of instant communication and digital gratification – by the slow passing of time in his work. Every time I see a Beckett performance, as I did recently in Glasgow in the Tron Theatre's production of *Happy Days* and in The Lyceum Theatre's *Waiting for Godot* in Edinburgh, I witness walk outs, feel tension, hear the sound of shuffling, the scraping of throats, the rustling of programmes. It is as if the audience, like Winnie in *Happy Days*, are trapped in their seats, up to their necks in it.

A good place to analyse the corporeal effects or affects produced by the play, is to consider the way in which a joke, story, anecdote or parable is told only to be interrupted, again and again, and thus is never able to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Early in Act I, Estragon, after a long pause, asks Vladimir, if he 'knows the story of the Englishman in the brothel' (WG, 17). To which Vladimir replies 'yes'. In response, Estragon then asks Vladimir to recount the story, which the latter refuses to do, irrespective of Estragon's prompts: 'An Englishman having drunk a little more than usual goes to a brothel. The bawd asks him if he wants a fair one, a dark one, or a red-

haired one. Go on' (WG, 17). Vladimir's response to the prompts is to shout 'STOP IT' (WG, 17). After which, he gets up, walks to the far end of the stage, exits and then comes back on, before standing opposite Estragon in a silent pose. In the exchange that ensues, the telling of the joke is forgotten, becoming a pointless *non sequitur*, in which the very idea of a *telos* or punch-line, the usual cause of intellectual fulfilment or pleasure, is abandoned. As I follow this sequence in the theatre, and watch it interrupted by staccato sentences and physical gestures and actions, I am, like Estragon frustrated, irritated by the discordant rhythms and movement, wanting the actors to stop, to be still, to finish what they have started. Beckett purposefully frustrates this desire, this need I – we – have for consistency and continuity, for the synchronous rhythm that will take us out of time by allowing us to lose ourselves in some external object or event. In this way, by insisting on discordance, Beckett produces a form of impatience, which reminds me, all too painfully, that I am a creature of time, subject to its own tempo and pace, a passive participant, we might even say, in time's autonomous movement. Such a revelation is experienced as a kind of subjection; and it produces, in turn, a reaction on the part of the spectator. One, moreover, that is decidedly corporeal. The performance gets on 'my nerves', to use one of Beckett's own phrases.<sup>29</sup> To get on someone's nerves, to penetrate their skin, no less, is to touch them in such a way that they are affected, drawn out of themselves, into the orbit of a world that refuses to conform to their desires, and which provokes a kind of ontological crisis. I want the irritation to cease so that I can return to a state of quiet, a position of repose, and yet it is not in my power to do so. Like Vladimir and Estragon, I am left at the mercy of an Other, exposed, strung out, suspended, left dangling. In this attending, this waiting, something catapults me, against my will, into time. The most – the best ? – we can do, is to put up with the awfulness, to accept our weakness and passivity, the time of 'dis-appointment'.

Another example to consider. At the very start of Act II, there is – or it can certainly be played that way – the potential to inflict temporal cruelty on the audience. In this section, which takes place on a new day that will always be the same, Vladimir enters the stage to find Lucky's hat and Estragon's ravaged boots before him, lying there alone in front of the tree. In Beckett's stage directions, it says that Vladimir comes and goes on three occasions, halting each time at the edge of the stage, 'gazing into the distance, shading his eyes with his hands' (WG, 51). As we follow, bodily or phenomenologically, Vladimir's slow movements, we too are put in motion. Again, as happens so many times in the play, I want Vladimir to get on with it, to make me forget that I am in attendance. My only solution, if I don't get up and walk out as some do, is to give myself up to the painful, gratuitousness of time, to enter its abyss, to undergo it.

One begins now to understand (again) why Beckett was so drawn to the stage to play out his a/theological notion of time. For in the theatre, there is a curious relationship between actor and audience, sender and receiver. As opposed to cinema, where the actor's body disappears into the screen, and exists as something spirit-like, a shining star or spectre whose imprint has been captured and fixed forever in some distant galaxy, in the theatre, the actor remains heavy, trapped in the density of their bodies, a dark star of matter from which no light can ultimately shine. The physicality of the actor is primordial. We feel it everywhere in the theatre, and Beckett, knowing

<sup>29</sup> In a letter to the US actress Jessica Tandy who was performing in *Not I*, Beckett explained that 'I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece may work on the nerves of its audience, not its intellect' [Samuel Beckett in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 36].

this, is always concerned to exploit it, to draw attention to the corpse, to the person inhabiting the character.

As in much contemporary dance and theatre work, there is a lot of breath and breathing in *Waiting for Godot*. We feel the labour, knowing that the actors are there, close enough for us to touch. And yet, strangely, something withdraws in this presentness, in this intimacy. There is, I would suggest, an essential shyness or furtiveness about the live body of the stage actor. Perhaps it is because the actor is double, both body and spirit, self and other, theatrical and dramatic, but one is constantly aware in the theatre, in this art of presentness, that something is lacking, missing, absent. By making this absence, this solid void appear in a kind of *Augenblick* or blinking, we share, once again, the same space as Vladimir and Estragon, waiting for something to arrive that we know will never come. In his important book *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans Thies Lehman states that:

Ancient tragedy insists that representability in this sense should be thought of as an inherent quality of the [human being's] existence as a speaking creature. Namely in this sense: life never attains such a representation but in being articulated theatrically its 'representability' appears. The truth about life is not given at any moment, at any 'date', because it corresponds to its nature...to be represented in a different sphere....In theatre what is perceived is not given but only giving. It is arriving, an event that is an advent.<sup>30</sup>

What Lehmann is stressing here, is the extent to which theatre is an art of the present participle, a temporal art of arriving, an event that starts but never comes to an end. Again, then, we can observe the metatheatrical dimension of Beckett's play asserting itself, highlighting an unpunctual temporality. Like the actor, whose very presence on the stage disturbs the very possibility of self-coincidence, Godot's arrival is not something that will occur in the future, in some specified eschatology, for Godot is always and forever on his way. Beckett's brilliance, the reason why, in my view, he is always our 'contemporary', is because he shows us what cannot be shown: principally, that the time of waiting, 'is a time of ...disjunction',<sup>31</sup> time that never arrives.

## Beginning VII: Maurice Blanchot

In her translation of Maurice Blanchot's text *L'Écriture du désastre* as *The Writing of the Disaster*, Ann Smock notes that the French verb *subir* translates as both 'to undergo and to suffer'.<sup>32</sup> But what if we added another meaning? What if to *subir*, to undergo, was also a going across, an act that allowed for a shift in things to occur, something properly eventual? This undergoing that is always a going across, a transversal, would not, of course, repair the irreparable in *Waiting for Godot* by means of some terminal communion, some restoration of totality. Rather I imagine it, in the sense that Blanchot himself proposed, as a kind of ethics of waiting, a 'respons-able' temporality we might say. In *The Writing of the Disaster* (1995), Blanchot equates ethics with patience and passivity, with, that is, the ability to attend to something that never comes:

<sup>30</sup> Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 145.

<sup>31</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 41.

<sup>32</sup> See Ann Smock, note 1, in Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 147. Hereafter abbreviated as *WD* in the text.

If the Other is not my enemy...then how can he become the one who wrests me from my identity and whose proximity (for he is my neighbour) wounds, exhausts, and hounds me, tormenting me so that I am bereft of my selfhood and so that this torment, this lassitude which leaves me destitute becomes my responsibility? For responsibility is the extreme of *subissement*: it is that for which I must answer when I am without any answer and without any self save a borrowed, a simulated self, or the stand-in for identity: the mandatory proxy. Responsibility is innocent guilt [...] It is the trauma of creation or birth. (WD, 22)

Little wonder Blanchot was so admiring of Beckett! For in his use of the oxymoron ‘innocent guilt’, the requirement to answer when there is no answer, Blanchot stumbles upon, draws near to Beckett’s own ethics of temporality in *Waiting for Godot*. The relationship between the two is even more pronounced when we consider the following quotation:

There is suffering, there would be suffering, but no longer any ‘I’ suffering, and this suffering does not make itself known in the present: it is not borne into the present (still less is it experienced in the present). It is without present, just as it is without beginning or end: time has radically changed its meaning and its flow. Time without present, I without I. (WD, 15).

As Blanchot suggests or evokes in a necessarily oblique style, to wait is to become absent to oneself, and, through that absence, to both suffer and to become responsible. This responsibility is a difficult responsibility for it is found in undergoing, in submitting oneself (*en subissant*), to the ungraspable passing of time. It is here, in our ability to welcome our temporal undoing (if such a thing where possible) that we encounter (without knowing) the Other, the Godot, the absent present, the cosmos without end.

Tellingly, this time of waiting, this chronic attendance, is opposed, in its very essence, to the redemptive time of the theological calendar as well as to the speculative time of neo-liberal economics. In both of these instances, the endless, ungraspable quality of *chronos* is denied, replaced by, on the hand, the closure of the ontotheological *telos* (the time of eternity where nothing changes or transforms because all movement has stopped), and, on the other, the frenzied speed of impatient acquisition, which as the sociologist Hartmut Rosa explains, mistakenly offers us an eternity within life itself:

In secular modern society, acceleration serves as a functional equivalent for the ‘religious’ promise of eternal life. The *eudaemonistic* promise of modern acceleration therefore lies in the (unspoken) idea that the acceleration of the ‘pace of life’ is our (i.e. modernity’s) answer to the problem of finitude and death.<sup>33</sup>

As we can see here, despite their very different attitudes towards transcendence, ontotheology and capitalism share the same temporalized metaphysic: they both seek to exit the world, to veil transience, and by extension, the weathering work of time – or, as Hamm puts it in Beckett’s *Endgame*, the fact that ‘something is taking its course’.<sup>34</sup> What Beckett shows by contrast, and again his title gives it away, is that there is no *fin de partie*, no end to leaving, no way to escape ‘this bitch of an earth’ (*E*, 37).

<sup>33</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Malmo: NSU Press, 2014), 30.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 107. Hereafter abbreviated as *E* in the text.

In his insistence in waiting, in making us suffer, Beckett slows us down, and opens us to what I term the time of ecology, a time of non-production, in which passivity is an ethic of responsibility, an exposure to the alterity of the earth, to its transformations and weather. In this mode of temporalizing, the spectator is made aware, in the most perceptible of ways, of his/her corporeality, compelled to experience the finitude of the flesh, to live the time of muscle, sinew. To that extent, Beckett humiliates the human, questions and erases its exceptional status as the subject who thinks. In *Waiting for Godot*, thought does not guarantee our transcendence from the world. On the contrary, it only serves to highlight our failure, to disclose our fragility and weakness even further. By putting us in time, Beckett shows his commitment to immanence, thereby allowing us to perceive our contiguity with the world, our interdependence. Critically, this interdependence is not a *panacea*, a final word or signifier that some eco-critics, particularly those interested in eco-phenomenology, brandish all too easily as a solution that would put an end to environmental destruction. Rather interdependence in Beckett is something to work towards, the project of a lifetime, something that always and inevitably fails, and is not without its own agonies and tensions.<sup>35</sup> Beckett, like Blanchot, knows all too well that interdependence is not something we will or want in some act of volition; it is something we undergo go, and are subjected to, in errance.

‘Be patient’. A simple motto, very demanding. Patience has already withdrawn me not only from the will in me, but from my power to be patient: if I can be patient, then patience has not worn out I me that which I can cling to self-preservation (*WD*, 13).

We can say the same about waiting, the very thing that Beckett's theatre makes us do. To wait is to undo oneself, to give up on the insistence for self-preservation, to accept, if we ever can, that there is no ‘escape velocity’,<sup>36</sup> no way of escaping the body and the telluric rhythms of the earth. And within this difficult and disabused purview, Estragon is surely right in his retort to Vladimir's idealism: ‘You and your landscapes. Tell me about the worms’ (*WG*, 57).

Vladimir's angry rejection of eco-criticism's traditional pastoral aesthetic highlights the extent to which waiting, for Beckett, is the quintessential ecological problem. To wait is to affirm the earth as earth, to be exposed to the weather (*le temps*). In the impossible time of waiting, in being subject to time, we discover ourselves as creatures of immanence, tied to worm and rock. Beckett's great generosity, his important ecocritical significance, is found, I think, in disclosing that fact, in insisting on what we might call a ‘green a/theology’, a new kind of sacred earth.

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<sup>35</sup> Beckett's ecology is much closer to the ‘dark ecology’ of Timothy Morton (2009), who always insists on the need for distance, the impossibility of fusion. For more on dark ecology and Beckett, see the collection *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Environment, Ecology and the ‘Greening’ of the Modern Stage* (2015).

<sup>36</sup> Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 119.

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### **Timpul sacru / timpul ecologic în *Așteptându-l pe Godot* al lui Beckett (cu puțin ajutor din partea lui Maurice Blanchot)**

Argumentul meu pornește de la premisa că teatrul vestic, sau ceea ce putem numi pe scurt teatrul aristotelian, investește în noțiunea teologică de timp, pe care o asociez, pe de o parte, cu narațiunea cauzală, lineară (care urmează etapele inițială, mediană și finală), și, pe de altă parte, cu experiența de a privi care produce o temporalitate ce ne preocupă, o temporalitate care izvorăște dintr-o lipsă de greutate, un mod de transcendență temporală, o ieșire din pământ. Purtându-ne dincolo de timp, prin abstractizarea trupurilor noastre, logica dramatică a teatrului vestic, investește într-un timp al răscumpărării, în care temporalitatea evenimentelor artificiale/puse în scenă este percepută ca existență mai reală decât timpul însuși. În contextul identificării sincrone și a timpului dramei, articolul argumentează că piesa *Așteptându-l pe Godot* al lui Samuel Beckett produce în mod intenționat o experiență a prezentității (presentness), în care subiectul – spectatorul – este constrâns să treacă printr-o temporalitate alternativă – timpul așteptării. Acesta este un timp imanent, timpul unui eveniment teatral diferit, timpul în care, ca să-l cităm pe Beckett în *Sfârșit de partidă*, „ceva își urmează cursul”. „Prezentitatea” (presentness), așa cum definesc termenul în acest articol, nu are nimic de-a face cu ceea ce criticul de artă Michael Fried vede ca un moment de grație și nici nu se referă la un act metafizic de coincidență a sinelui. Aceasta este cel mai bine văzută ca ambivalentă, un mod imposibil de temporalitate pe care îl numesc „timp sacru”. În mod crucial, acesta nu este un timp al ciclurilor și al miturilor mai deconcertant, în sensul adverbului englez „presently” (actualmente), acesta

este un timp care nu este niciodată chiar aici, un timp al amânării, al suspendării și al dez-amăgirii. Astfel, timpul pe care sunt interesat a-l denumi ca sacru sau ca „prezență” se apropie foarte mult de noțiunea lui Maurice Blanchot de timp ca dezastru sau catastrofă; este un timp care nu ajunge niciodată primul sau în mod scandalos, pentru că el este deja acolo, apăsându-ne cu greutatea lui și insitând cu gravitatea sa absentă, dar ireductibilă. Este timpul care ne înrădăcinează cu pământul.