Tout Moun

Caribbean Journal of Cultural Studies
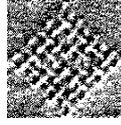
Seeking Space
Shaping Aesthetics

Distortion and Cinema in the Work of Samuel Beckett

JEAN ANTOINE-DUNNE

Beckett's concern with the limits of representation, as evident from his meditation on Bram van Velde[1], underscores his attempts at alternative methods of projecting his understanding of human experience. This search for alternatives led to his testing of the boundaries of several media: painting in light, television, cinema, radio and stage, as well as the written word in prose and poetry.

The primary problem Beckett sought to address was that of the 'how' of adapting his artistic method to his vision. His uses of the body and sense perception, and his concern with the false images of memory are key elements of his interrogation. The revelation in cinema of the body as a site of memory, trauma, and psychic states as imaged and theorized by montage artists of the early period of the new art provided ample structures and ideas for him in this endeavor, since many of these early directors and editors were themselves intrigued by the ways in which film could extend the limits of representation and human understanding, as well as providing a new channel of power. Film's ability to mold opinion and change attitudes was seductive and led to its co-option for the purposes of propaganda and political control, in particular in the new communist state after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the creation of the Soviet Union. Sergei Eisenstein, as Soviet filmmaker and aesthetician, sought throughout his career to analyze film's radical potential and Beckett not only attempted to apprentice himself to the director, but studied his and the work of other Soviet theorists.[2]

It is difficult to assess how much of Eisenstein's constant circling of the idea of 'cinema as power' hinged on his own very precarious position after the rise of Stalin. Certainly, his later writings harbor warnings against solipsism and seem to strive against the very processes about which he had written in the nineteen twenties. Nonetheless, these writings and, in particular, those published posthumously provide blueprints for the coercion of the audience/reader through artistic means. Perhaps the most carefully worked out of Eisenstein's calculations in this regard relate to the importance of fragmentation aligned with movement. These elements are already present in all of his structures and form part of his discussions of "the attraction", *pathos* structure, and his use of

---

[1] Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* ([1965] John Calder, 1987).

[2] See James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett,* (Bloomsbury, 1996): 226. and Letter to Sergei Eisenstein, 2 March 1936 in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1*,* 1929 -1940, eds*. Martha* Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge University Press, 2009): 317.

overtonal montage. But fragmentation also provides the rationale for a particular use of the disabled and disfigured body.

Beckett's affiliation to cinema allowed him to conceive of the fragmentation of the object and its reconstitution in a moving line as a mechanism for the projection of psychic states of being and also for the interpolation of the perceiving subject within the frame of the artistic work. It also suggested ways in which the enfeebled or deformed psyche and its unattainable desires could be exteriorized.

Fragmentation and the follow up to this in a reshaping or reconstitution of these fragments provided the basis for a universally recognizable idea of the human in terms of a skeletal contour, but it is also the basis for film's manipulative dimension. Rudolf Arnheim foregrounds in *Film as Art* the fact that our perception of a thing is invariably distorted even when we make an apparently objective or 'true' visual recording through photography. Point of view manipulated by the director inevitably leads to forms of distortion, since the director 'plays' with the innate potential of the cinematic to break causality or to insert a false causality.[3] In other words, through photography and editing the cinematic gives power over perception to the director. According to Arnheim, "If I wish to photograph a cube, it is not enough for me to bring the object within range of my camera. It is rather a question of my position relative to the object, or of where I place it" (14).

This question of perspective or point of view is of vast importance in filmmaking and in the reception of film. Such matters have become central concerns in film theory and, in particular, in the relation between film and philosophy. How one sees an object and the techniques used to frame the viewer's perception of that object determine how that filmic object is read. The truth content of the work of art is not something that can be objectively determined, since the framing or positioning of an object is determined by a subjective response to the thing that is being recorded:

> There is no formula to help one choose the most characteristic aspect: it is a question of feeling. Whether a person is "more himself" in profile than full face, whether the palm or the out-side of the hand is more expressive, whether a particular mountain is better taken from the north or the west cannot be ascertained mathematically—they are matters of delicate sensibility. (Arnheim, 14)

George Wilson identifies three key categories in the purveyance of point of view. These are epistemic authority, epistemic distance and epistemic reliability. In general, as Wilson points out, the audience has a higher degree of knowledge about events than the subjects within a film, however this assumption of knowledge may be overturned through various strategies, leading to forms of distortion. These may involve "extensive and delicate manipulation of perceptual habits and expectations" (7).

---

[3] See George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1986). Wilson looks specifically at the ways in which directors such as Fritz Lang and Hitchcock for example manipulate the perception of the viewer through the narrational dimensions of "epistemic distance, reliability and authority" (9).

The mutability of artistic sensibility is a truth in itself and part of the reality that the object signifies. Fragmentation and the positioning of the viewer determine how a narrative in fiction or film is read. The famous close-up of the shattered eyeglass in the Odessa Steps sequence of *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) remains a perfect example. The camera is used to isolate a particular moment in time and to make this moment iconic through the close focus on the mouth and the shattered glass of the spectacles and the look of horror. These focal points, isolated from their context, are filled with the horror that the filmmaker wishes the audience to feel at the massacre of the crowd. Both artist and audience are chained to the terror of the moment through an intense evocation of a fragment that acts as a signpost to an historical and moving event. These sequences and images, that for example of the baby's pram hurtling down the Odessa steps or the shattered pince-nez in *Potemkin*, are so powerful that they have become part of artistic language and have been used by painters such as Francis Bacon, who has inserted and reinterpreted the woman's face with shattered eyeglass in his works. Countless other visual artists including filmmakers have appropriated these images because of their emotional power.

The isolation of the woman's face within the frame both disorients the viewer and contextualizes the moment. The organicism of the shot (its development within a series) serves to situate the event within a particular historical moment. Its isolation as close-up acts as a discordant break with this context and generates the shock that creates the after-effect or resonance that remains and in itself triggers a 'moment' or memory of trauma that is 'out of time'. This moment ceases to be strictly historical and assumes the physiognomy of a general image or idea. It is replete with its own horror. Film is at a deep level about movement and the manipulation of reality. It is also about the shock of recognition that film manages to elicit through a reorganization of the real.

The movement of E in Beckett's only work for cinema, *Film* (1965), is equivalent to the movement of the camera as it traces a line of images. As a mechanical eye it sees around corners or edges. Unlike O, who sees through gauze, E is the mechanical eye. Film as art allows this 'pure' seeing and movement of the real to exist in conjunction with the emotional filled lens of human perception. The two do not merge. The close-up privileges the psychic and psychological states of mind and is used by Beckett to generate a potent effect.

For Arnheim the film image is more than a simulation of reality; it has a hold on truth beyond the capacity of the human eye and, as such, film discloses more than normal seeing. Arnheim distinguishes between our retinal compensation in real life and film's utilization of the distorted image. For him the fact that there is a reduction of "three-dimensionality" and a degree of "unreality" caused as he saw it at the time, by an "absence of color and the delimitation of the screen", meant that filmic images are seen as they appear in truth and the camera does not compensate for the fact that perspective changes the way the image actually appears to the eye. As Arnheim also points out, the use of black and white film enables light and dark to be used for many expressive purposes and as it were, carves film out as a distinct art that is not dependent on its relationship to the 'real'. This use of the

simulacrum enables what Deleuze discusses as the capacity to see beyond accustomed ideas through difference.[4]

In this regard it is apt to cite recent interventions into studies of perception by Beckett scholars. Yael Levin (2018), for example, explores how a study of Beckett might enable new ways of looking at disability. He eschews the very idea of correspondence and analogy in literature in favor of a determined recognition of difference "without falling into the potential solipsism of nonrelation" (162). This is both an ethical and an aesthetic response to a codified hierarchy of relations based on resemblance or an accustomed way of seeing. All is based on a single "generative principle" (167). The process, as in Deleuze's reading of Beckett, is on differentiation. Michelle Chiang also foregrounds differentiation. She argues that Beckett enables a rejection of the habitual, seen as distortion, and enables a move towards an activation of audience intuition "by *deterritorialising* habit" (2018, 51).[5] This removal of a "net of relations" (51) through which the spectator is made to relinquish a zone of comfort, is accomplished by making the mind a ground or blind space. She specifies Eisenstein's *pathos* structure in her analysis of Beckett's *Film*, seeing it as an interesting example of Beckett's failure of intent which seeks, but does not deliver, the intensity of perception that mirrors the leap outside of self to a different dimension as occurs in Eisensteinian *pathos*. Nonetheless, both camera and narrative force the spectator out of a "habitual way of knowing" (58) and engender a form of ex-stasis. She argues, using Deleuze's theories of "the body without organs" and "becoming imperceptible", that Beckett's *Film*, through a series of contradictory maneuvers, forces an intuitive awareness born of a kind of "seeing blindness" (59) that enables "lateral multiplicity" rather than "stratified limits" (186). Body and mind become sundered and ultimately deterritorialized. The question of perception in Beckett's work hinges on how the habitual dominates the way one sees and Beckett's attempt to remove the spectator from such domination.

The image of the perceptual apparatus and its domination of reality are explored in Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1955):

> These lights for instance, which I do not require to mean anything, what is there so strange about them, so wrong? Is it their irregularity, their instability, their shining strong one minute and weak the next, but never beyond the power of one or two candles? Malone appears and disappears with the punctuality of clockwork, always at the same remove, the same velocity, in the same direction, the same attitude. But the play of the lights is truly unpredictable. It is only fair to say that to eyes less knowing than mine they would probably pass unseen. But even to mine do they not sometimes do so? They are perhaps unwavering and fixed and my fitful perceiving the cause of their inconstancy. (294)

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton (Routledge, 2012). See also: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Athlone Press, 1989).

[5] Michelle Chiang's *Beckett's Intuitive Spectator: Me to Play* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) provides an interesting examination of Beckett's use of Eisensteinian *patho*s structure and its relationship to Deleuze's concept of "becoming imperceptible".

Light and dark and black and white suggest the flickering unreliability of human perception. The possibility of seeing "constantly" as opposed to only "fitfully" is here linked to the artistic problem of seeing and representing an object. It links this core problem of art to the will to power and domination and control. The two positions, that of artist and that of human controller, are interrogated with no real resolution. *Catastrophe* (1982) goes further and makes light and dark the equivalent to the need to control. This desire for domination is both ideological, as in the reference to Havel, and suggestive of the shaping principles of the artistic form as these come under the will of the artistic mind. Film's hold on truth is manifest in the use of light and is taken to its limit in works such as *Play* (1963) and *Catastrophe*. Light becomes a vehicle of terror demanding truth even beyond the grave.

Beckett, through his reading of film theory and his study of film, evolved a form through which he could reduce human interactions and interiority to their simplest expression or graph. The close-up and its simulation become prime vehicles for this purpose. Fragmentation and its attendant distortion becomes a vehicle for mapping the impact of the past on the body and of giving psychologically intense depictions of the sustained effect of experience on body and bodily functions.

Beckett's own experience of the traumatized body, its apparent decay under pressure in his own breakdown and treatment in the thirties, is relevant here. In particular, the body as it may become immobile under trauma and emotional pressure seems to give rise to his own consideration of the several bodies that malfunction in his work. This fact of the psychosomatic is current within psychology where specialists cite the somatic as both vehicle of trauma and organ of cure.[6]

The novel *Watt* (1953), for example, gives the reader a strong impression that as humans we are unaware of the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of our 'look' in the world. The isolation of human foibles and gestures and habitual behavior is one aspect in the creation of a distorted image. The self is shown to be so absorbed with its own reality and existence that it takes no cognizance of any other in the world, and this view of the 'real' is a reduction of the world to itself and a re-inscription of that world within the experience of that self. This Beckett extends to the function of memory, which he notes blocks out extraneous matter as in the constant will to remember and the problem of forgetting in *Watt* in terms of the telling of a story. In many ways our reading of his works falls prey to this forgetfulness, since his form seeks to replicate the very processes of willful forgetting in its constant spiraling and turning back on itself and in its repetitions.

Beckett's early doodlings in the marginalia of the *Watt* notebooks, held at the Harry Ransom Research Centre at the University of Texas at Austin, reinforce the sense that Beckett is deliberately using distortion as a narrative technique in the service of unity and as an emotional tool. He uses what Naum Kleiman, in his discussion of silent Soviet cinema, calls "ciné-metaphorism" (11). This is a form of "evaluative" montage, which Kleiman, President of the Eisenstein Museum in Moscow, describes in

---

[6] See writings on transgenerational trauma as for example in Gabriele Schwab's, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (Columbia University Press, 2010) who cites Beckett's "The End" as a story "that resides in a transitional space, between memory and forgetting" (41). Whereas in real life it is "dangerous" for these parallel sites "to touch", they must converge "in writing".

Eisenstein at Ninety as the inclusion of images that are evaluated according to a comparison of specific qualities that the artist assesses as similar (13). He lists as examples: informers-animals; abattoirs-police attack. Eisenstein's film *Strike* provides us with some of the best examples of this kind of film metaphor. This "zoomorphism" "introduces the greater depth of dramatic action into shot, image and character" (11-17).

Peter Gidal in "Beckett & Others & Art: A System"(2001), focuses attention on the work of art as form and as process to its own becoming. He has also noted the impact of metaphor as a vehicle for adding depth to how a thing is seen but warns that "the care we need to take, against metaphor, is so that one thing does not in the end stand in for another, otherwise why have the one thing in the first place if the other can be its adequate stand-in or doppelganger, or condensation (superimposition of one signifier upon another)" (1995, 162).

Metaphor in film is not a replacement of one thing by another, but a way of forcing the viewer to see the underlying and often hidden agendas of situations, or myths (Barthes, 2000). Such metaphors find similarities that lie at the base of objects. This is done in Eisenstein in works as varied as *Strike* (1925) and *October* (1928) through the use of animal metaphors. In this way the underlying ideologies or motivations are laid bare.

What the use of animal metaphor in Beckett as in Eisenstein accomplishes is, as Gidal suggests in his discussion, not a condensation of experience, but an intensification of experience. In other words, the metaphors do not 'stand in' for the thing analyzed, but allow the viewer to feel with intensity the impact of the event. Zoomorphism is, as Kleiman states, a form of visual rhyme (very much in keeping with Eisenstein's own descriptions of the visual fugue and visual poetry). In discussing drawings by Eisenstein, Kleiman elaborates on the question of substitution: "The trick is to make each transparent to the other, so that they mingle and both zoomorphism and anthromorphism are transformed, not in the stasis of a comparative drawing, but into the dynamic of the look which is studying the drawing" (13).

The idea of the incursion of the 'look' of the other into the object being looked at takes precedence. It is "the dynamic of the look" studying the drawing that enables the dialogic relation in film. The object is one step in a process; another takes the form of the response to the object. Film montage transmits the dynamism that exists between the two. Thinking and feeling are replicated in the linear development of the line of images.

The most obvious example of this is the use of animal images in the film *Strike* as, for example, in the juxtaposition of the massacre of the strikers with the slaughter of cattle at an abattoir, a scene that in its ideational line leads the viewer to contemplate the coldness and inhumanity of capitalism. Another example is a sequence that returns us to Eisenstein's *October* where Kerensky walks up the staircase. The peacock with its back to the camera acts as a fan that mimics the strut and the self-consciousness and also the vanity of Kerensky. When the doors close, and the feathers also close, it becomes a superimposition of one image on the other leading to our understanding that Kerensky is no less superficially attractive and preening than the peacock. He is 'reduced' to this creature. However, the image in its movement goes beyond this. Kerensky is absorbed into the peacock through the closing of the back feathers, thus creating a visual pun that is startlingly effective in producing an animalistic

sense that aligns itself to the idea of Kerensky's vanity, but does more than this by enclosing the leader in the back feathers of a bird.

The effect of this pun moves the image beyond 'condensation' to the level of a dialogic relation and response. It transmits the way that the director feels about Kerensky, but also forces the viewer to look again and, quite literally, closes him in this instance into that look. To apply Deleuze's analysis of metaphor in film, the montage that enables the appearance of Kerensky enclosed in the fan of the peacock brings to the image the similarity at the base of two figures: Kerensky and the peacock. This montage play creates a metaphor through montage through what Deleuze calls the harmonics of the image. This is a form of "affective fusion" that generates an idea and "can dissolve movement by connecting it with the whole that it expresses" (Deleuze, 1989, 160).

As Ian Christie has pointed out, for Eisenstein drawing is also "thinking and feeling by different means; just as writing was more like drawing than it would be for others" (10). In his drawings of animals and his use of zoomorphism Eisenstein was, as Christie comments, grappling with his desire to link psychology and physiology. This is already apparent in his writings on the evocative nature of moving rhythmic lines in Walt Disney's movies (*The Film Sense*, 127). A close analysis of Beckett's drawings in the *Watt* notebooks yields a similar sense of a dynamic interrelationship between line, movement and rhythm. Moreover, these drawings superimpose animal heads onto human bodies suggesting that Beckett too was concerned with the relationship between the body and thought or psychological projection through the body. These images are placed within lines that flow into each other, each image a fragment of a continuing ideational process or the working out of a set of relationships. Beckett, therefore, through this process replicates that interrelationship that copies the dynamism of the look, which is studying the drawing, both his look and that of the viewer, and does so through the use of a moving line of superimposed shots.

In *Happy Days* (1961), in which Winnie's body is replaced by a mound, the sand or earth fragments and, therefore, distorts the female body. The manuscript (Reading MS 1730) suggests a graphic representation of the way in which the close-up operates and its logical outcome in terms of its concretization via the idea-image. The head of the woman and the moving line of Willie taken together provide us with a bawdy but quite truthful representation of a psychic state that is initially post-coital, but that in the later stages of the drama becomes "limp".

Willie moves towards the mound, but the absence of his body for much of the play and placed against a body devoid of full presence (Winnie) gives material shape to a very feminist idea, that of woman as object and as one who has internalized an idea of a diminished self. The actual movements are therefore graphic traces of an idea.

Winnie is fragmented and increasingly imprisoned in the mound. Since the fragment is a close-up in the sense that it is a close view of one part of a whole, and these parts are chosen by virtue of the particularity of the idea itself and the emotion to be conveyed, the lines in the manuscripts provide an actual break down of how the artist is shaping the idea itself.

Beckett's drawings in this sense appear to be pen and pencil sketches of the intent of the works and should not be dismissed since they suggest an unconscious musing on an idea that is becoming increasingly and concretely realized in the work itself. Oppenheim arrives at a similar conclusion through her use of phenomenology and notes that the "erasure of the mind-world division in Beckett's fictive geography" leads to a chiasmic structure or "overlapping of visible landscape with seeing artist" that allows for "the arrestation", as opposed to "the re-presentation of the real," and that this enables the force of vibration on the body that the artist seeks to elicit (106).

The impact on the body, then, as she suggests, is shaped by the very dynamism of one thing on another, of two apparently different worlds colliding, in this way creating a shock of recognition on the body that freezes the image into an idea of something different as it unfolds before the reader or viewer. For Deleuze this is the "nooshock" that generates thought or that moves us to think. It is in effect the "attraction", an idea or principle that underlies all of Eisenstein's structural principles.

The disorientation of the seer and in particular the use of distortion for this purpose creates a very modernist framework for Beckett's use of film. For Moorjani:

> The power of Klee's works to entrance and disturb so greatly – not unlike Beckett's – has to do partly with the ways they undermine the power of the gaze by an instability that keeps viewers and readers from settling into fixed positions of seeing. You look and you look and you can't answer that question "What do you see?" in the conventional manner. Klee's and Beckett's countermovement to the will to know and to see led to their fascination with genesis. (188-189)

This need to undo the world and to unsettle the viewer so that s/he can see without knowing or even wanting to know is reminiscent of what Sergei Eisenstein called the "film attraction", which is at the heart, according to Jacques Aumont, (1987), of all of Eisenstein's formulations and experiments. It is also related to his adoption and valorization of the child like movements and antics of the clown, in particular as used by a figure such as Charlie Chaplin. Many of Beckett's plays and novels depend for their impact on the antics of the circus and the music hall, and these figures and actions are central to a play such as *Waiting for Godot* (1953) or a novel such as *Watt*.

Deleuze describes "the attraction" as a very difficult concept. On the surface it is not, since Eisenstein linked it to the music hall and to the circus. According to Eisenstein it is "striking a blow on the psyche" of the auditor/viewer. So, in effect it is based on "any aggressive means" towards the enthrallment of the spectator.[7] Its method is founded on the techniques of the circus and music hall and embedded in theories of reflexology. "The attraction" became a physiological means of giving a "blow" to the psyche of the audience. It is aimed at the direct transmission of an emotional feeling or the direct evocation of a psychological response.[8] Its roots are to be found in comedy and Eisenstein's writings on Charlie Chaplin extend significantly the boundaries of his initial formulation.

[7] Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions", [1924] *Sergei Eisenstein. Selected Works. Writings 1922-1934*. Vol. 1, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (BFI, 1988).

[8] Anthony Paraskeva in his 2017 text, *Beckett and Cinema,* Historicizing Modernism*,* Bloomsbury, 2017, attributes Eisenstein's use of reflexology and biomechanics to Kleist via Meyerhold. See my review questioning this in the *Journal of*

The comic, as represented by Chaplin, is an escape from tyrannical, form-ridden, codified social structures. It is also dream transference and a movement backwards to the infantile. Its cruelty, bizarre themes, and movements are materializations of the childlike psyche and worldview, which have been unrelinquished by the comedian. Later, in his more intellectually developed theories, Eisenstein saw this childlike perception as synonymous with a particular distorted view or construction of the world, a primal perception that bound the material environment to itself and simultaneously mastered it, by imposing its own viewpoint on the world. This return to primary perception is attained through the use of what Todd McGowan (2007) calls "excess" in terms of repetition of image and the slowing down of time, which makes the Eisensteinian image one that is doubly effective, as in the Odessa steps sequence of *The Battleship Potemkin*.

While Eisenstein exposes this excess through montage, according to McGowan, Chaplin reveals a different form of excess through *mise-en-scène*. The revelation of excess is visible throughout Chaplin's work, but especially, according to McGowan, in *Modern Times* (1936). Here, as he reads it, the excess is evident in the over emphasis given by Chaplin to the task of keeping up production and in his use of repetition. But this idea of excess is made more apparent when Chaplin's actions become at one with the assembly line as his movements become increasingly mechanical. He has become in essence a reified worker. Chaplin eventually climbs onto the conveyor belt in an effort to keep up with the fast moving parts. He is then sucked into the factory's main artery, "following the path meant for the manufactured objects". McGowan comments that while Charlie is being processed through the machinery, as if he is one of the mechanized parts, he is seen essentially as "excess". While Eisenstein's portrait of "excess" [in *Potemkin*] reveals the link between excess and social authority, Chaplin's depiction of it reveals excess in the body of the working class that results from the imprint of the capitalist mode of production. He quotes Balzac as evidence that "cinema through excess" exposes the obscenities at the heart of capitalist ideology and enterprise (40-41).

The technique that McGowan identifies as "excess" is a constitutive part of that process through which Eisenstein sought a form of defamiliarization and a means of shocking the proletariat out of bourgeois ways of thinking and being, and away from the control of the dominant classes. As a communist, the machine, for Eisenstein, was not a means of servitude, but a vehicle of freedom, as evident in his film *The Old and the New* (aka *The General Line*) (1929). As McGowan notes, the politics and the ideologies of Chaplin and Eisenstein are different, but the mechanisms and the use of exaggerated images allowed the purveyance of ideas through shocks that led the individual into new ways of seeing. It is what Deleuze identifies in *Cinema 1* as the capacity of film to break through the apathy of the thinking apparatus and, in *Cinema 2*, to force the observer, who no longer knows how to react or even act post-WW2 trauma, to see in new ways. Film, in this way, generates a new ethical response through its continuing movement to difference and individuation.

The idea of "shock" that leads to new ways of seeing is crucial to Beckett's work. His interest in the filmic as derived from early cinema therefore goes beyond the comedic and originary (or childlike)

perception for themselves, but rather, is calculated for the impact on the psyche of the observer. His use is therefore closer to what Eisenstein perceived to be the capabilities of the "attraction" in securing the purpose and project of art. I argue therefore that Beckett's use of the comedic is an appropriation of the "attraction" as used in early Soviet cinema. This marks one point of origin for his experiments in form and for an ongoing affiliation to the filmic. But at this point, as in others, Deleuze's insight into thought merges with that of Beckett and of Eisenstein.

The attraction enables a delving into the depths of interiority and moves to that state of "becoming imperceptible" that is a refusal of subjectivity and a move to communality based on constant and generative difference. It does this by setting in play a system of vibrations that work on the nervous system.

Beckett seeks the extension of the vibratory activity of music in visual movement, as well as in the play or opposition of sound and visual image. The question that needs to be asked is what precisely is the impact of fluid sound and static visual, and how does this process elicit the strong emotive effect of the play on the audience. Trish McTighe (2013) locates vibratory activity in sound, yet the movement of the eye is calculated to act in conflict with the movement of sound and it is the interplay of the still and the moving that sets off the affective response, as one finds it for example in the conflict between the lines of the hull and the movement of light in the Odessa Mist sequence of *The Battleship Potemkin*.

Not I (1972), perhaps more than any other play in Beckett's oeuvre, affects the body in a similar way through its use of visual music combined with the sound of voice and the creation of an "after sound." Its combination of buzzing, the static image of the gaping mouth as void and creative vortex, its interplay between silent gesturing auditor and mouth and the monistic ensemble of these combined and carefully chosen sense images, strike a "hammer blow" on the psyche of the audience who cannot escape the visceral impact on their own bodies. Each line is in itself a fragment of potent effect. Together they combine to produce a vibrating after effect that attacks the very nerves, as in the montage sequences of early film. Beckett moves beyond the visual fugue of silent cinema and experiments with the source of affect, eliciting from each sense its potential for affective responses in the listener and viewer. One might go so far as to say that in *Not I* the auditor represents the helpless audience who feel and can only move their arms in affective sympathy--almost, to the beat of pathos.

The focus on mouth in *Not I* is a foregrounding of the visual and is equivalent to the use of the close-up in film, the close-up being the most "affective" weapon of the cinema (Oppenheim,109). This simulation of a fragmented image that is carefully chosen according to psychological imperatives causes the full impact of the mouth. This visually conceived surface or hole interacts with the sound heard on stage and these provide the action in terms of a play of movement in space. The rhythm of sound is conceived as in itself a visualization of female sexuality, since the process of issuing forth is shaped as a fissure and a flow, as Oppenheim argues; that is, the opening as mouth and flow in terms of words or as vagina. The dynamic of the utterance is further concretized as a buzzing in the ears, in fact the buzzing breaks up the flow of sentences and creates a rhythmic line that enacts the shape or contour that is at one and the same time the impact and the effect on the psyche of energy articulated as sound, or image that torments because it cannot be categorized in precise terms. Its very

imprecision makes it incapable of being represented as anything other than a fluctuating and painful sound or movement in space: a buzz, for example.

As McTighe has indicated:

> Visually, kinetically, these plays are sparse, almost static, yet each of them [*A Piece of Monologue*, *That Time*, *Not I*] shares a structural dialogue between their visual and verbal elements. Exploring how sound and image, text and performance, and language and the material body come into contact, their action occurs along the haptic interface between these elements. The figure of the mouth acts as a metaphor for this. (62)

This is also where my analysis differs from Oppenheim. For while Oppenheim recognizes the unity beyond diversity in Beckett's work, she does not see the similarity in "affect" between sound and visual music (107-120). Edvard Munch's *The Cry* (1893), for example, makes sound and image mutual because, like the image of the figure with the long white hair in *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), the silence that is "at the eye of the scream" is a visualization of the shock of "horror", and its very continuance "by another" to the third level of intensity (28-29). The force of this mutual identify of sound and image (in the negative application in the title) is neither that of sound, nor visual, but a resonating silence formed by the reverberating continuation or after shock that the work seeks to transmit. The silence in *Ill Seen Ill Said* is the silence of the tomb. As a whole its process in terms of both form and language shapes the horror in a way not unlike the cavernous mouth of Munch's painting.

How is this done? Take for example the narrative leading up to the image in this play of "The long white hair stares in a fan" (1986, 28). The sense of the negation of sense perception is ascribed to the woman at the onset of the narration. Her seeing leads to, "Then she rails at the source of all life". Her motion is frozen and as "if turned to stone". Her refusal of life, or as it emerges, her existence after life, is described in terms of a fixed image. Her ghost like appearance is reinforced by the creation of a close-up reminiscent of *Ghost Trio.* "Save for the white of her hair and faintly bluish white of face and hands all is black". The light is here suggestive of the phosphorescence of a ghost. And the eye (that "eye of prey") has "no need of light to see" because she is of the "present", but not "still of this world" (1986, 8). Beckett seeks a vehicle to express that lack of sensory activity or appetite and does so by increasingly filmic means, as Stan Gontarski intimates in describing Beckett's attempt to "find the technical equivalent, a visual, technical cinematic equivalent for visual appetite and visual distaste. A reluctant disgusted vision and a ferociously voracious one" (192). While his discussion is about Beckett's *Film*, the same analysis may be applied to *Ill Seen Ill Said*, but in reverse. The zone of being here is situated in what appears to be a cemetery, with an "Invisible nearby sea. Inaudible" (*Ill Seen, Ill Said,* 28-29). The echoes that the visual triggers in terms of the interplay of the expressive lines of the prose are equivalent to the echoes that a deep piercing cry would trigger or that issue from silent enclosed space. Silence reverberates because the visual is made to resound—from the inside. It is this resonance that emerges from Beckett's work and that he actively seeks. This echoing reverberation in the psyche has much to do with the limits or constraints enforced by the stage directions in terms of the rigid positioning of the image.

The peacock metaphor in Eisenstein's *October* uses a similar method to achieve this effect: one image, "white hair", superimposed on a second image, "a fan". In *October*, one image, the man, is followed by another image, that of the peacock's fan-like feathers. Collapsed, they create an idea that is doubly intense. The seeing eye collapses the two and this capacity of the eye to bring these two disparate objects together causes the resonance in body and mind. Beckett also identifies the psychological and emotional force of the close-up in *Ill Seen Ill Said*: "Silver shimmers some evenings when the skies are clear. Close-up then. In which in defiance of reason the nail prevails. Long this image till suddenly it blurs" (28). Here, Beckett's use of the close-up in "defiance of reason" shapes an emotional effect, one that moves and through this movement, moves the reader.

The body in Eisenstein's understanding of fragmentation, could be deconstructed in montage so that its various parts are resituated in apparently unnatural positions; but these physical parts, limbs for example, appear nonetheless to have a 'fit' in terms of the artist's desire or intention or point of view. This is one example of what we mean by distortion. This distortion allows meaning to flow through the gaps, that is, between the fragments that have been edited together. This is so because the movement that causes these fragments to cohere is in itself the vehicle for the sensation that generates feeling or a response in the viewer. The movement of parts as a result of the particular kind of shaping rhythm causes this bodily sensation. This sensation is what we might call 'direct' thinking.

Peter Gidal has suggested that rhythm in movement is in itself a way of introducing thought in the Beckettian work:

> One such image is Beckett's use of the rocking chair, in which Murphy sits obsessively, self-consciously, and hysterically. Rocking as such is an image of silence because of the rhythm it produces on a physical/material level. This repetitive rhythm, one of ultimate persistent monotony (in spite of speed variance) may also connect to an image of a person thinking. Rocking and thinking (external silence) or rocking and non-thinking (internal silence) both have as prerequisite a silence, a void. If the head is filled with words, with (self-) conscious attempts at clarification, this internal absence (of silence) forges the external situation, the fact of silence. (2001, 311)

The act of thinking is projected directly into the mind of the viewer by a rhythm that is both monotonous and repetitive but also broken and reconstituted and that is set in play through materialized presence. The actual unity of the whole is, however, shaped in our minds through "persistence of vision". O in *Film*, for example, also rocks. Note the script instructions:

> gentle steady rock for 1to 4,

> rock stilled (foot to ground) after 2 seconds of 5,

> rock resumed between 5 and 6,

> rock stilled after two seconds of 6, rock resumed after 6 and for

> 7 as for 1-4. (1986, 334)

Lines moving in space here mimic movement in time and together generate a sensation that leads to thought. This enables Beckett to instruct, 'Profit by rocking-chair to emotionalize inspection' (1986, 334). Thought is therefore perceived as being transmittable via the sensations of the body and the emotions generated by such sensations in terms of visual and temporal fragments that are forced into a unified whole (idea /image) by the act of movement itself.

The reconstruction of the fragments in our mind's eye and their positioning provides a powerfully transmitted image of the artist's purpose and may account for the great fascination that the early notebook of *Watt* holds for scholars. Often the shape that becomes evident is that of a film ribbon. This film ribbon allows the idea to unfold as a series of images that exist as planes, but are threaded together as a whole through a unifying mechanism. We perceive the whole because in the process of seeing each part serially we also collapse them together.

Film distortion, in particular as in the close-up and fragmentation of the body, allows Beckett to effect the conveyance of emotional and psychological themes beyond simple representation. Film allows this possibility through the co-option of sense (the sonic and the visual) that bypasses the cerebral apprehension of reality to think the unthought.

It is by no means coincidental that *Waiting for Godot* is intrinsically about the inability to communicate the need or inter-dependence of one for another and that one of its characters is, or was, an artist and that Pozzo's influence over Lucky and of Vladimir and Estragon, is achieved through a manipulation of words that generate pity. He is the artist/poet whose control of language has been used to persuade and to coerce. He is concerned, moreover, with the transmission of his own feelings and with serving his own needs. Words become conspirators in this project. There is a relationship here with Leslie Hill's perceptive comment that

> What Beckett's work addresses and reflects on are not the problems of language or meaning in themselves (and even less the so-called 'metaphysical condition of modern man' devised by disconcerted critics in the 1950s or 1960s), but more the movement of a body across and through languages, coming and going, stopping and starting, ingesting and excreting. (`Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles, says Beckett's narrator in *Malone Dies*). Such a body, however, is not an origin outside of language, sexuality or history, nor is it a source of identity or self-presence. It figures rather, in Beckett's writing as an oscillation in language and meaning, as a force of affirmation or intensity that deconstitutes the subject and dramatizes the fundamental otherness of subjectivity from itself. (55)

Hill's observation here suggests that it is the force or intensity of the artist's perception that acts as a transmitter of a subject that is already seen in its several constituent parts. Beckett's work in its "deconstruction" of the subject and its dramatization of the artist's own alterity even as he creates a work of art is essentially a striving after truth content.

There is another form of distortion used in Beckett's work that suggests a concern with physiology and thought. Here the human body is superimposed or "folded" into the earth. Oppenheim notes

Beckett's descriptions of the body as seen in relation to the world as a "pregnant belly is a cavernous mountain" in page 34 of *From an Abandoned Work* (1957) and in *Malone Dies* (1951) in which Malone becomes the world "with his arse in Australia" on page 235. She notes that what she calls "superimposition" of earth and body are at times reversed and the world is given human features as for example in *Malone Dies* on page 182 where a road is denoted as being blind or as on page 227 where "the wind-swept wastes" have a face, or perhaps availing of the dead body as in the world that is "corpsed" in *Endgame* (1957). (Oppenheim 106).

One of the key climactic passages in Molloy has the protagonist "crawling on his belly, like a reptile" on his way to the light in the forest," and later the narrator describes Molloy as a bear charging and swaying to and fro in an oscillating movement within narrow confines of space and indeed time. Willie in *Happy Days* also moves in animal-like fashion on all fours. The erasure of the dichotomy between world and mind therefore extends through the imposition of the human form onto the hard world and encompasses those animal features which foreground distinctive and mutual qualities between the world of objects, and the primal nature of things, despite the logical or categorizing qualities of humanity. They suggest a complex that is not truly reducible to either. As Colm *Tóibín* has put it, "His

characters did not need to think in order to be, or be in order to think. They knew they existed because of the odd habits and deep discomforts of their bodies. I itch therefore I am" (xiii).

This seems to me to be quite crucial to Beckett's image making. He distills the force of the concrete world and creates alliances between the objects of that world, whether this is sucking stone or animal form, so that we see a reduced presence, one that is neither male nor female, neither human nor animal, neither flesh nor hard surface, but all interfacing at different points. The characteristics of each, in terms of how these are perceived, are explored in a process similar to that exploited by Eisenstein in his use of "ciné-metaphorism". These structures lead to a powerfully projected image of the human as existing within a world of which he is part, perhaps no more, and no less.

Works Cited

Arnheim, Rudolph. *Film as Art*. University of California Press, 1957.

Aumont, Jacques. *Montage Eisenstein*. Translated by Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, Andrew Ross, Indiana University Press, 1987.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. Palladin, 1972.

Beckett, Samuel. 1955. *The Unnamable*. *Three Novels.* Grove Press, 1991.

---. 1965. *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*. John Calder, 1987.

---. *Samuel Beckett. The Complete Dramatic Works*. Faber and Faber, 1986.

---. *Ill Seen Ill Said*. John Calder Ltd, 1981.

---. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*. Volume 1. 1929-1940. Eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

---. Happy Days. MS 1730. Beckett International Foundation. Reading University Library.

---. Watt notebooks. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Chiang, Michelle. *Beckett's Intuitive Spectator. Me to Play*. New Interpretations of Beckett in the Twenty-First century. Palgrave and Macmillan, 2018.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2*: *The Time-Image.* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Athlone Press, 1989.

---. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton, Routledge, 2012.

Eisenstein, Sergei. 1924. "The Montage of Film Attractions", *Sergei Eisenstein: Selected Works. Writings 1922-1934, Vol. 1*. Edited and translated by Richard Taylor, BFI, 1988.

---. 1943. *The Film Sense.* Faber and Faber, 1986.

Gidal, Peter. "Beckett & Others & Art: A System." *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui*, *Samuel Beckett: Endlessness in the Year 2000.* Edited by Angela Moorjani and Carola Veit, Rodopi, 2001, 303-313.

---. "No Eye: Theoretical Reflections on the Eye, Metaphor, Film/Video," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui 4*, "The Savage Eye. L'Œil Fauve." Edited by Catharina Wulf, Rodopi, 1995, 161-164.

Gontarski, Stan. *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts*. Indiana University Press, 1985.

Hill, Leslie. *Radical Indecision. Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida and the Future of Criticism*. Notre Dame University Press, 2010.

Kleiman, Naum. "Eisenstein's Graphic Work." *Eisenstein at Ninety*. Edited by Ian Christie and David Elliott, Museum of Modern Art, 1988.

Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett*. Bloomsbury, 1996.

Levin, Yael. "Univocity, Exhaustion and Failing Better: Reading Beckett with Disability Studies." *Journal of Beckett Studies* 27.2 (2018): 157–174.

McGowan, Todd. *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*. University of New York Press, 2007.

McTighe, Trish. *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Moorjani, Angela. "Genesis, Child's Play, and the Gaze of Silence: Samuel Beckett and Paul Klee." *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui 19*, "Beckett Sans Frontières." Edited by Minako Okamuro, et al. Rodopi, 2008, 187-197.

Oppenheim, Lois. *The Painted Word*. *Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art*. The University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Paraskeva, Anthony. *Samuel Beckett and Cinema*. Historicizing Modernism. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Tóibín, Colm. "Introduction." *Samuel Beckett: Vol I: Novels*. Edited by Paul Auster, Grove Press, 2006.

Wilson, George. *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.