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Revisiting the Absurd: Posthuman Affects in Samuel Beckett's Theatre

The 'Theatre of the Absurd', the popular label for Samuel Beckett's theatre, has been challenged over the past decades before its implications were fully explored. This article reconsiders the 'absurd' with respect to Beckett and the human/nonhuman relations in the Anthropocene. It draws upon affect theory and posthumanism, arguing that the absurd in Beckett's theatre takes root in the theatricalization of posthuman affects, which connect the human body and the non-human world. Posthuman affects subvert human sovereignty and disintegrate humans into nothingness. Yet they also give birth to a different cosmic ontology, which involves a call for change in the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. Revisited from the perspective of posthuman affect, the absurd in Beckett's theatre acquires new complexities that bring glimmering possibilities of endurance and comfort in the face of catastrophe. Chen Chang is an assistant researcher of the English Department at Nanjing University, where she recently completed her PhD dissertation on Beckett and the posthuman body. She has published several articles on Beckett as well as in gender studies.

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THE PHRASE 'Theatre of the Absurd', coined by Martin Esslin in 1961 to characterize a cluster of European plays, has been contested over the past decades.[1] This is so because, although significant, it risked constricting the scope of the plays and playwrights concerned, notably, apart from Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet.[2] All of these playwrights have rejected Esslin's categorization. Samuel Beckett explicitly states: 'I have never accepted the notion of a theatre of the absurd, a concept that implies a judgement of value.'[3] Esslin, when mainly referring to Albert Camus's philosophical discourse on absurdism in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, initiates a humanist-existentialist tradition in Beckett studies with his idea of 'the dignity of man [that] lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness: to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions – and to laugh at it.'[4] Yet Beckett's renowned distance from any form of intellectual certainty or existential salvation questions the value of the term 'absurd'.

Existentialist value judgement aside, some of Esslin's arguments have illuminated a significant aspect of the absurd in Beckett's works. He writes that 'the Theatre of the Absurd is intent on making its audience aware of man's precarious and mysterious position in the universe', and 'it presents the audience with a picture of a disintegrating world that has lost its unifying principle, its meaning, and its purpose – an absurd universe'.[5] For Esslin, then, absurdity specifically denotes the disintegration of human rationalism, which, since the Enlightenment, has emphasized progress and human domination of the world. By contrast, Beckett's theatre proves to work against reason and sense, forcefully collapsing the growing anthropocentric illusion that the human is the measure and master of the vast universe.

Like Sisyphus, whose subordination to the boulder and the mountain demonstrates human insignificance against powerful Nature, many of Beckett's characters are also chained to Nature. They often sit motionlessly on stones, alluding not only to the indolent Belaqua in *The Divine Comedy* but, more importantly, to Walther von der Vogelweide's poem: 'I sat on a stone . . . Thus I probingly considered how one should live on this earth, but could not give myself any advice.'[6] In Beckett's theatre, humans are inferior to the daunting and ungraspable nonhuman world,

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and they are impotent when up against it. Such is the case of Hamm and Clov, secluded in a depopulated world in *Endgame*, Winnie devoured by earth in *Happy Days*, the man witnessing sustenance and tools withdrawing from his reach in *Acts without Words I*, and the sounds of breath amid miscellaneous rubbish in *Breath.* Beckett's characters do not have jurisdiction over the nonhuman world. They are merely constituents of its inestimably chaotic and convoluted networks, and absurdity grows precisely out of this violent destruction of anthropocentric conviction.

The de-anthropocentrism presented by Beckett does not lead this article to designate the absurd as an existentialist-humanist ethos or to discard the word altogether, but to revisit it in the context of posthumanism. Bernard Siegert argues that the various intellectual trends of posthumanism ask a common question: 'How was the human already historically mixed with the nonhuman?'[7] The question itself suggests that posthumanism functions as a transhistorical way of thinking and being that underlines the immanent connection between the human and the nonhuman, and this debunks the myth of rational and autonomous Man. Posthumanism thus differs from anti-humanism or in-humanism in that it emphatically rethinks the ways in which humans are intrinsically shaped by the nonhuman forces of the animate and inanimate surroundings of the Earth and the vast universe.[8]

Many studies of Beckett's works have identified them as posthumanist. However, instead of focusing on the immanent relation between the human and the nonhuman, they predominantly adopt the approaches of anti-humanism.[9] Many others have begun to pay justified attention to such nonhuman existence in Beckett's works as animals, objects, media, and ecology. The most notable examples are the anthology *Beckett and Animals*, edited by Mary Bryden, Jean-Michel Rabaté's *Think, Pig!: Beckett at the Limit of the Human*, and the recent special issue of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* titled *Samuel Beckett and the Nonhuman* and edited by Amanda Dennis in 2020.[10] This article joins these cogent studies to examine Beckett's theatre through the lens of the crisis of anthropocentrism. It aims specifically to shed new light on how the undercurrent of the absurd in Beckett's theatre is embedded in an aesthetics and ontology fundamentally founded on posthuman affects, a matter of growing relevance in our time of ecological catastrophe.

The Absurd as the Posthuman Affect

As argued above, the absurd in Beckett's theatre arises in one fundamental way from the disintegration of human rationalism and sovereignty through nonhuman forces. This indicates that the absurd could be accordingly understood as an experience of desubjectivation, which prompts re-thinking the absurd from the perspective of affect theory. In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's ontology, affect holds sway over a human subject when forces and energies flow between him/her and the nonhuman to transform him/her from one state to another.[11] As Deleuze and Guattari have argued: 'Affects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man.'[12] That is to say, affect does not grow inside the psyche of the human subject, but germinates as a de-subjective power capable of casting the subject under the impact of the nonhuman and breaking down the illusion of human sovereignty. Seen from this perspective, affect is posthumanist in its essence.

A number of existing studies draw links between the posthumanist discourses that foreground materialism and embodiment – the theories of Rosi Braidotti and Katherine Hayles, for instance – and the affective perspective led by Brian Massumi.[13] The links emphasize desubjectivation so as to 'register affectivity on the map of a posthumanist theory of the subject'.[14] They argue that affective and experiential connections between the human and the nonhuman do not arise from the human subject but constitute this subject, thus reconfiguring the concepts of 'subjectivity' and 'human'. This article adopts the term 'posthuman affect' in order to accentuate this feature of affect. It upholds the idea that posthuman affects flow throughout the cosmos of which the human is an immanent constituent

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responding automatically and unceasingly to cosmic stimulation.

The absurd could be understood precisely in this way. The human subject, when encountering ungraspable cosmic forces, is seized by the posthuman affects from the outside and plunged into a certain state of being without the subject's knowing why. The absurd is then born out of this demolition of man's rational needs to preside over the chaotic cosmos and extract meanings from it. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus writes that 'The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together.'[15] This link comes from 'the confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world'.[16] For example, the absurd may grow out of Nature's transcendence of human rationalization. Camus writes:

> A step lower and strangeness creeps in: perceiving that the world is 'dense,' sensing to what a degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, with what intensity nature or a landscape can *negate* us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise.[17]

Nature subverts human rational desire for a sense of clarity and control, and this link combining human/nonhuman confrontation gives rise to the posthuman affects that overwhelm the human subject with absurdity.

Such absurdity is concomitant with the rise of absurdist feelings and emotions. Massumi contends that it is the autonomous affect which gives rise to qualified emotions, the latter being the subjective translation of the former into functions and meanings.[18] Camus follows a similar line of thought. He distinguishes three aspects of 'absurd': the feeling of the absurd, the appearances of the feeling of the absurd, and the notion of the absurd. The 'feeling of the absurd' is described as 'indeterminate', 'vague', 'elusive'; the 'appearances of the feeling of the absurd' are much clearer emotions, including weariness, anxiety, strangeness, nausea, and horror; the feeling of the absurd lays the foundations for 'the notion of the absurd'.[19] The distinction between 'the feeling of the absurd' and its appearances as emotions is crucial. Although Camus adopts the word 'feeling', it is actually an 'affect', for its indeterminate and elusive quality is the pre-subjective quality of affect, as is its role as the source of emotions. Posthuman affect aligns well with Camus's characterization of 'feeling of the absurd' as the failure of human beings to 'apprehend the world' which, in turn, gives birth to 'appearances' or 'emotions' of the absurd.[20]

The absurd in Beckett's theatre also produces a form of posthuman affect which gives rise to absurdist emotions. Overwhelmed by formidable nonhuman forces such as stones, earth, mud, and the cosmos, the impotent Beckettian characters collapse into dismembered human organs such as a head trapped in a container, or buried in a mound, or floating in darkness. Such emotions as anxiety and horror are bound to arise in viewers who confront such destruction of the human. The excruciating violence that prevails in Beckett's theatre echoes his intense awareness of atrocities committed during the Second World War and the Cold War, as numerous scholars have demonstrated.[21] Nazi eugenics, the Holocaust, nuclear disaster, and human tortures in the Algerian War – all register what Beckett calls 'humanity in ruins' caused by the machinery of war.[22]

Yet Beckett's works are never quite so clear-cut. While emotions are consciously determinate, affects are not, and to restrict posthuman affects in Beckett's theatre to a devastating nihilism of human destruction is simply a disguised reinforcement of anthropocentric bias. Revisiting the absurd as the pre-subjective, ontological posthuman affects could help develop a second position that 'resituate[s] human life in more capacious spatio-temporal orders, even while refusing to become sentimental about the cosmic downgrading of human existence'.[23]

Re-situation of this kind is useful because, as petrifying as the disintegration of the human into the nonhuman cosmos may be, prospects of a different cosmic reality also emerge. By seeing humanity in ruins, Beckett not only confronts us with violence, but he also envisions the infinite cosmic flows to

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which humanity is joined. This alternative position, which receives little attention from Beckett scholars, is a posture of humility and reverence. It withstands violence not only with feelings and emotions of the absurd, but, more importantly, also with the acknowledgement that humankind is not the centre of the cosmos. This second position, which conceives of the world altogether differently, aims to dispel the anthropocentric illusion.

On the one hand, the posthuman affects in Beckett's theatre disintegrate human sovereignty to evoke horror and anxiety – absurdist feelings and emotions – from within humanist viewpoints. On the other hand, they present a cosmic ontology that articulates the integration of humans into the cosmos and ecologically envisions a transformational universe. Together, these two dimensions demonstrate how Beckett's posthuman imagination does not stop merely at laying bare a horrifying apocalypse, but goes further to reshape how human/nonhuman relations might be conceived. As devastating as the circumstances are, potential for change always looms large. Through posthuman affects, Beckett offers glimmers of endurance and transformation.

The Mechanical Being and Posthuman Affect in *Happy Days*

Waiting for Godot is considered Beckett's seminal dramatic work of the absurd. Didi's unbending legs and Gogo's stiff hobbling invite laughter, following western comic traditions of slapstick, music hall, vaudeville, and the silent films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. However, this laughter is mingled with the heart-rending realization that the characters with prostate problems and injured feet have long lost their autonomy as masterful humans, and the comic, mixed with the tragic, thus turns into the absurd. Bergson's well-known proposition that laughter derives from 'something mechanical encrusted on the living' is given a new light here.[24] If the living were shown to be deprived of effortless agility and were reduced to mechanical rigidity, laughter would be infected by the negative sentiments of the absurd identified by Camus.

Although the mechanical aspects of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* may evoke absurdist feelings and emotions, Beckett has developed a contrasting idea about how such devices have been influenced by modern European dramatic thought. The first and most direct influence comes from Heinrich von Kleist's essay 'On the Marionette Theatre'. When directing *Happy Days* in 1971, Beckett quoted Kleist to illustrate his demands that Eva-Katharina Schultz, who played Winnie, should have 'movements . . . as crisp, precise and economical as possible' because 'precision and economy would produce the maximum of grace'.[25]

In 'On the Marionette Theatre', Kleist does not directly argue that precision and economy are key to grace and guarantee it, but the approximation of these qualities by something that is not human. As Kleist says, 'it would be almost impossible for a man to attain even an approximation of a mechanical being'.[26] So what is the link between precision and economy and the mechanical marionette when it comes to Winnie's grace in *Happy Days*?

For Kleist, mechanical puppets obtain grace by two means. First, placed in the centre of gravity, they move purely under the sway of external forces in line with physical laws; they are free from the burden of human consciousness, which always engages in processes of objectification that obstruct the smooth flow of physical forces.[27] Second, mechanical puppets are less affected by gravitational force than human beings because the puppeteer's strength lifts them up, outweighing gravity.[28] The puppets' grace thus has to do with floating lightness, which human dancers cannot fully achieve, since they must constantly summon up the necessary physical strength to fight gravity. This in part explains Beckett's association of economy and precision with Kleist's exposition of grace: human movements that are not crisp or precise indicate the dancer's weak bodily control, which cedes to gravitational force.

Consequently, a mechanical figure enjoys the grace that a human fails to enjoy, fundamentally because it is governed by the flow of the larger forces that pass through it; a

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human's self-consciousness and inertia of matter cut off that flow. Only by imitating the precision and simplicity of mechanical puppets can human dancers guard against the fragmentation of the body caused by self-consciousness; only by doing this can they eradicate superfluous acts that are dragged down by gravity. Only then, in short, can they exhibit the flow of cosmic forces through the human body. Although Beckett's mechanical characters often act in reified ways, triggering negative emotions of the absurd, they also show grace when they connect up with larger, nonhuman cosmic forces. This is when, to use Deleuze and Guattari's words, 'nonhuman becomings of man' occur.

The idea of mechanical bodies of precision and economy is a thread that runs through some of the most important theatrical experiments of the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, it was Edward Gordon Craig who relaunched the discussion concerning the superiority of marionette theatre. He writes in *The Theatre – Advancing*: 'If a machine should try to move in imitation of human beings, that would be unnatural. Now follow me: the Marionette is more than natural; it has Style – that is to say, Unity of expression; therefore the Marionette Theatre is the true theatre.'[29] Craig's assertion resonates strongly with Kleist's proclamation above.

Craig believes that actors' bodies should be completely subservient to the mind/soul, which belongs to 'pantheistic nature' and connects the human to nonhuman divinity through its intelligent conception of the perfect laws of Nature.[30] Yet, 'there never has been an actor who reached such a state of mechanical perfection that his body was absolutely the slave of his mind' such that the latter should replace the former.[31] The mechanical marionette achieves Style because it strictly follows and expresses the mind of God as puppeteer. Kleist and Craig thus join hands in their praise of the 'nonhuman becomings of man' in the precision and depersonalization of the mechanical figure.

Vsevolod Meyerhold also sought mechanical precision and grace through 'biomechanics', which held to 'the correct positioning of the body's centre of gravity' – Kleist's view – and, in the case of factory workers, to 'an absence of superfluous, unproductive movements', which he transferred to the work of his actors.[32] He urged that actors learn from workers so that their physical movements were not dictated by their psychological states or emotions but by pure reflexes founded on the laws of biomechanics, which are the laws of Nature expressed through the human body. In this way Meyerhold can be said also to endorse 'the nonhuman becomings of man'. Sergei Eisenstein, Meyerhold's most famous pupil, whom Beckett esteemed, was also a great admirer of Kleist and once cited Kleist's argument on the mechanical puppet to reinforce his conception of montage. He pointed out that in both his montage and Kleist's marionette, each found ultimate grace in mathematic and faultless performance.[33]

Kleist, Craig, and Meyerhold converge, then, in a distinctive 'mechanical tradition': a mechanical figure, such as a marionette, deprived of consciousness but gifted with the precision and economy derived from the laws of Nature and which supersedes human interiority, reaches the gracefulness unobtainable in naturalistic or realistic styles of performance. The mechanical features of Beckett's characters are quite evident in that they are like ghosts, without emotion or self-consciousness, as they perform their restrained movements. Beckett was also familiar with the theatrical works of W. B. Yeats, who is known to have been profoundly influenced by Craig. In his *At the Hawk's Well*, Yeats gives a stage instruction that stresses the marionette features of his characters.[34] He also borrowed a puppet theatre and its little cardboard figures from his brother J. B. Yeats, one of Beckett's closest friends, which 'might well have had some bearing on Beckett's early approach to character'.[35] Beckett thus has an undeniable connection with a theatrical tradition that views a mechanical entity as the epitome of cosmic fluidity and grace, even when it seems rigid or absurd.

It is not, then, a mere coincidence that Deleuze and Guattari, devotees of Beckett's

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art, have also taken notice of Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre':

> Kleist offers a wonderful explanation of how forms and persons are only appearances produced by the displacement of a centre of gravity on an abstract line, and by the conjunction of these lines on a plane of immanence. He is fascinated by bears; they are impossible to fool because their cruel little eyes see through appearances to the true 'soul of movement,' the *Gemut* or nonsubjective affect: the becoming-bear of Kleist.[36]

Deleuze and Guattari explain that Kleist is able to see through the appearances of mechanical movements to identify the non-subjective affects of the 'soul of movement' on a plane of immanence, which is where the laws of Nature operate to connect and move everything.[37] In Stephen Zepke's words: 'the affect is the becoming-other of the assemblage, a corporeal (re)composition expressing the cosmic plane of Nature in a Spinozian sense.'[38]

It is the intensities circulating between the puppeteer, the puppet, and gravity that produce affects to mobilize the mechanical puppet's dance. Human dancers, who are restricted by gravity, lose connections with the intensities of other forces. They are, as a consequence, less affected and, because 'the more an individual is capable of being affected, the more powerful that individual is', human dancers seem more stagnant and less graceful.[39] It is possibly safe to interpret from this line of thought that the real magnitude of promoting the non-conscious mechanical figure lies in how this figure suggests the expansion and becoming of the human via posthuman affects. The human interiority of psychologies and emotions matters very little in the dimension of the cosmic posthuman affects, where humans are externalized to join the latter's rhythms, intensities, and flows. All these go beyond the theatre.[40]

Such posthuman affects in the theatre find their most telling expression in Beckett's *Happy Days*, where the protagonist Winnie is inhumanly buried in a mound, able only to move her upper body in the first act, before the devouring earth buries her to her neck in the second. Marie-Claude Hubert identifies in *Happy Days* a turning point of Beckett's dramatic works, when the 'quest for the unified image becomes more central than the physical suffering of the body'.[41] Indeed, although the suffocating burial evokes horror and anxiety, Winnie's upper-body movements are highly stylistic and graceful. Beckett's direction is that Winnie be as crisp and precise as possible. But he also described her as a 'weightless being' – and 'unaware' – hearkening back to Kleist's weightless marionette, freed from the burden of gravity, and lacking consciousness.[42]

By the same token, Beckett seeks to depict the forces that strangle Winnie's grace and confine her fluidity so as to accentuate through contrast and tension the significance of grace. He told Martha Fehsenfeld that Winnie is 'like a bird with oil on its feathers', and the oil evidently refers to the devouring earth that traps Winnie.[43] The tension between the weightless grace of the bird and the oil that blocks its soaring freedom is Winnie's core. As she says:

> Yes, the feeling more and more that if I were not held – (*gesture*) – in this way, I would simply float up into the blue. (*Pause.*) And that perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all around me and let me out.[44]

James Knowlson and John Pilling argue that this tension fundamentally concerns the divide between Winnie's spirit and matter, which reverts to dualism.[45] Yet *Happy Days* is not a play about the opposition between the body and the mind, but about the non-severable immanent ties between the human and the nonhuman, whether such ties are liberating, linking the human and the mechanical, or suffocating, holding the human to the earth.

Winnie's body, which frequently '*gazes at zenith*', and the mound that traps it up to its neck, incisively depict how human autonomy and sovereignty are a mere illusion in the face of the powerful nonhuman forces surrounding them.[46] This collapse of anthropocentrism in the bleak and apocalyptic image of a human on the verge of being buried alive inevitably sets into motion feelings of absurd horror and anxiety. Nevertheless, it also presents an ontological cosmic vision founded on the affects of

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the mechanical marionette not meant for absurdist feelings.

Machinic Affect in *Play* and *Not I*

In Beckett's later plays, the co-existence between feelings of absurdity and posthuman affects continues, each play taking its unique individual shape. His 1962 *Play* provides a change of form in his theatrical oeuvre.[47] Three heads, W1, W2, and M, protrude motionlessly at the mouth of three identical grey urns one yard in height, which resemble the earth that traps Winnie. The three heads spurt words out like bullets, and talk in relays with abrupt starts and stops by taking cues directly from a harsh spotlight directed at their faces. The heads are thus dehumanized, reified, and, in particular, mechanized, like three talking gadgets switched on and off. Beckett himself once compared the dramatic structure of *Play* to 'the action of a manual lawn-mower – a burst of energy followed by a pause; a renewed burst followed by yet another pause'.[48] This comparison provides a compelling account of the mechanical alternation between the sudden bursts of energy and the stillness of the three heads.

Although different from the mechanical features of a puppet – precision and economy – the alternation between energy and stillness is related to affects, for 'an affect is a rise or fall of power within a machinic assemblage'.[49] In Deleuze and Guattari's ontology, 'machinic' is different from 'mechanical', since it specifically refers to the nature of energy flow in machines. Different machines are connected through energy flows to form machinic assemblages, which can be disconnected at any moment for new couplings to materialize. When the old assemblages are broken down and new ones are established, intensities rise and fall, from which emerge affects. In other words, machinic affects are the disruption and reconnection of energy flows. In this sense, the apparatus of the machinic assemblage parallels Beckett's description of the lawn-mower.

The three talking heads in *Play* experience the rise and fall of intensities, which may drop to zero when chattering is interrupted by an instant of pause, followed by an outpour of words. However, they are always ready for resurgences when new machinic assemblages are established. If in *Happy Days* posthuman affects are subdued by the earth, in *Play* they fill the stage, mobilizing the three heads to quieten or to burst out when they are disconnected from, or connected to, the spotlight. The three heads, the urns, and the spotlight thus together constitute machinic assemblages between humans and nonhumans in different routes of intensities, demanding that spectators in the theatre rise above their anthropocentric feelings of horror and anxiety, and feel, instead, the rhythm of the cosmic energy in theatre.

Billie Whitelaw, who played Mouth in *Not I* in 1973, stresses that a similar mechanism is at play there: 'I think when Beckett writes a laugh, certainly with the ladies I seem to play, it's usually a laugh that comes piercing into the air out of nothing and stops dead. And it's the same with the scream – the scream just comes out of nothing.'[50] Beckett wrote *Not I* in 1972, ten years after *Play*, but the formal similarities between the two are plain to see. *Not I* is composed of two simple elements: a mouth floating in darkness, and an auditor enveloped in a djellaba. Mouth, like the heads in *Play*, explodes into wild laughter and sometimes screams after a brief pause in the middle of broken words. Mouth has even explicitly compared herself to a disconnected machine unable to make a single sound, right after which she gushes screams, followed by an immediate and long silence, and then once again screams, followed by the same silence.[51] This rise and fall of energy in *Not I* illustrates again Beckett's metaphor of the lawn-mower and Deleuze and Guattari's illustration of machinic affects.

In *Not I*, the 'nothing' and 'stops dead' mentioned by Whitelaw are increased considerably more than in *Play*, where three heads talk in relays with only instants of pause in between. *Not I* gives longer silences, leaving the whole stage inactive from time to time. Beckett once wrote in a letter to Harold Pinter: 'If you insist on finding form, I'll describe it for you. I was in hospital once. There was a man in another ward, dying of throat cancer. In the silence, I could hear his screams continually. That's the only kind of form my work has.'[52] This confession demonstrates that Beckett

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aims ultimately to drop energy as silence and nothingness – fierce powers that are imperceptible but nonetheless real.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari borrow from Antonin Artaud's idea of a 'body without organs' to describe such powers. Different from the machinic assemblages of screaming or laughing bodies, a body without organs has no connection or intensity and so does not experience affects while having only their imperceptible potential. Deleuze and Guattari thus introduce a new concept, that of 'the abstract machine', to combine the two types in their subsequent work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, describing the abstract machine as 'abstract, singular, and creative, here and now, real yet non-concrete, actual yet non-effectuated'.[53] Their abstract machine, then, has non-effectuated energies, just as happens with Mouth, which, during its pause between two screams, does not stop screaming since it is screaming virtually, silently.

Such an abstract machine appears in Beckett mostly in the form of a subdued, mute, and motionless body. In most of his later plays – *Eh Joe*, *That Time*, *A Piece of Monologue*, *Rockaby*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe*, and *Nacht und Träume* – the characters are dead silent, rooted to the spot, sitting or standing like tableaux in confined spaces. Such a state is methodologically probed in the psychophysical acting approach proposed by Phillip B. Zarrilli in training based on Asian martial/meditation arts that work towards a psychophysical state of readiness, impulse, and action where the performer is 'controlled, yet simultaneously in a state of released/fluid "flow" . . . still and ready, but emanating potential power and movement in that state of stillness . . . a "blank space" where there is apparently "nothing", and yet everything at once'.[54]

The condition of nothing, and yet everything at once, is perhaps the best illustration of the subdued bodies as abstract machine in Beckett's theatre. The silent scream, the active stillness, and the non-effectuated affects nurture infinite potentialities, which indicates that the human body is no longer a bounded and autonomous entity; instead, it is fluid, virtual, and permeated with transformational possibilities. The boundary between the interior and the exterior of the human therefore becomes more porous and precarious than ever.

Furthermore, Beckett's nonhuman surroundings, which appear to be inanimate, static, muted, or empty, such as the earth in *Happy Days*, the urns in *Play*, or the darkness enveloping Mouth in *Not I*, also accommodate infinite potentialities. Such potentialities of affect may, for instance, cause Winnie to metamorphose like Echo metamorphosing into stone, alluded to in Beckett's *Echo's Bones.* The same holds for the darkness in *Not I.* Blurring the perimeters of the human organ, and sucking it into an abyss of imperceptible uncertainties, the darkness of nothing may hide boundless potential for transfiguration, like a black hole hiding immeasurable secrets. The darkness could thus be the *chora* of nothing and yet everything at once.

On the one hand, then, the subdued human bodies, the suffocating earth, and the encroaching darkness invite horror and anxiety as humans lose their autonomy and boundary. On the other, as abstract machines, they also suggest the potential for change regarding the human and nonhuman alike. Such a potential underlies Beckett's distinctive rationale for presenting posthuman affects on stage.

Becoming Posthuman in *That Time*

One potential for change noted above is suggested in *That Time*, written immediately after *Not I*, which also features a human head that, once again, floats in the complete darkness of nothing. In contrast to the mouth in *Not I*, however, it listens silently to its own voices uttering confabulations from three separate directions. While this seems to indicate that the character is immersed in his own mental voices, an examination of Beckett's entire oeuvre suggests that more is at stake. Beckett frequently depicts a fantastical otherworld segregated from the natural world in which his characters dwell. Some are trapped inside walls but not rooms (*Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Ping*, and *The Lost Ones*); others are buried in the dark void (*Play*, *Not I*, and *Fizzle 8: For to End Yet Again*); still others crawl in a world of mud (*How It Is*). So many of his characters

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dream of the natural world of sky and earth, seemingly forever inaccessible to them (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, *Texts for Nothing 5*, *Texts for Nothing 8*, *Lessness*, *Fizzle 6: Old Earth*, *Endgame*, and *How It Is*).

The inaccessibility of the natural world had always been a fascination of Beckett's. He once wrote to Thomas MacGreevy about Paul Cézanne being 'the first to see landscape & state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever'.[55] And Beckett's deep suspicion of the appearance of the natural world is in line with the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who distinguishes world as will from world as representation. Natural phenomena as representations and appearances metamorphose constantly, but the will is permanent beyond the life and death of natural beings, including mankind.[56] The natural world perceived by humans is thus a mere illusion that needs to be pierced for the permanent world of will to emerge as the true reality. Beckett's otherworld segregated from the natural world manifestly approximates to the world of will.

This is also why Beckett depicts his otherworld as a realm beyond life and death. In his own words, his characters 'moved with the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born'.[57] The otherworld could be purgatory as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, or the womb to which Beckett's characters repeatedly long to return. In the case of the head in *That Time*, the otherworld is likely the world experienced of a man close to death. As Beckett's close friend and publisher John Calder observes:

> During the Fifties there was a macabre experiment in Paris where two guillotined heads of executed criminals managed to respond to questions by raising and lowering their eyelids some time after the heads had been amputated. Beckett could not have been unaware of this widely reported event, which became part of his collection of useful images. The fading of consciousness while the mind tries desperately to stay alive is present in his novels from *Malone Dies* to *How It Is*.[58]

The head severed from the rest of the body is in possession of no more than a remnant of consciousness, so one could interpret *That Time* as Beckett's imagination of a fading consciousness entering a realm of alterity. Beckettian characters, neither dead or alive, transcend the natural world of representation to arrive at the world of will.

The world of will is the root of suffering. The severed head in *That Time* is evocative of massacres in the Second World War, human tortures in the Algerian War, and capital punishment in the political prison of Santé, which faced Beckett's flat on Boulevard Saint-Jacques.[59] It is bound to flood the viewers with waves of horror and anxiety, but the ending smile of the head insinuates as well possible relief from death. Death in *That Time* is best symbolized by the engulfing darkness on stage, but, as in *Not I*, the darkness could also be nurturing imperceptible potential for transformation. Schopenhauer, after identifying the will, goes on to deny it, arguing that the denial of the will would result in a relative nothingness, which comes with death and extinction but does not mean nihilism.[60] Instead, it is associated with the Buddhist Nirvana and its undertone of salvation.[61] As Schopenhauer writes: 'He willingly gives up the existence that we know; what comes to him instead of it is in our eyes nothing, because our existence in reference to that one is nothing. The Buddhist faith calls that existence Nirvana, that is to say, extinction.'[62]

Knowlson claims that Beckett borrows Freud's concept of 'the mineral state' for self-diagnosis.[63] Inspired by Schopenhauer's thoughts on Buddhist Nirvana, Freud develops this concept affiliated with the death instinct.[64] Beckett also describes Murphy's experience of Nothing as 'a rare postnatal treat', suggesting that it is a pleasure beyond the realm of human life.[65] Hence, if the floating head and the surrounding voices in *That Time* represent a world of will straddled between life and death, then the complete darkness on stage signifies death and extinction as the enlightened nothingness.

It is also through a lesser known German philosopher named Olga Plumacher that Beckett accessed the Buddhist notion of nothingness. A copy of Plumacher's monograph *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* [*Pessimism in the Past and Present*] was

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found in Beckett's Paris library, annotated in his hand.[66] Plumacher summarizes the fundamental principle of Buddhism: 'the world is non-existence, because it grows out of nothing [*die Welt is das Nichtsein-sollende, weil sie wirklich dem Nichts entsprossen ist*].'[67] 'Non-existence' (*Nichtsein*) designates illusion, while 'nothing' (*Nichts*) designates complete perceptual nothingness, which is the true nature of the world and the true path towards salvation.[68]

This Buddhist perceptual nothingness resonates strongly with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the abstract machine, both being nothing and everything at once, although the former foregrounds extinction while the latter potentiality. Rosi Braidotti's reinterpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-imperceptible' in *The Posthuman* proves that extinction and potentiality are two sides of the same coin. She argues that Life, as opposed to human life, is cosmic force and energy, and thus impersonal, and that death serves merely as a porous threshold to the cosmic flow which delivers humans from their finitude:

> What we humans truly yearn for is to disappear by merging into this generative flow of becoming, the precondition for which is the loss, disappearance, and disruption of the atomized, individual self . . . This can be described also as the moment of ascetic dissolution of the subject; the moment of its merging with the web of nonhuman forces that frame him/her, the cosmos as a whole. We may call it death . . . That is to say the grounded totality of the moment when we coincide completely with our body in becoming at last what we will have been all along: a virtual corpse.[69]

In Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary, 'becoming-imperceptible' is the process of experiencing affects as the drop of intensities to become pure potentiality. Accordingly, in Braidotti's context, becoming-imperceptible by dying, humans are experiencing posthuman affects to become virtual corpses in the cosmos. Imperceptible nothingness, rather than absolute annihilation, is an ontological real imbued with imperceptible potentials for posthuman affects that draw the human world into the inexhaustible cosmic flow. *That Time*, besides generating horror at the prospect of extinction, also hints at the potential for change on the journey towards death.

Grey Nothingness, Dusts, and Posthuman Affect in *Was Wo*

While the head in *That Time* is on its course into complete darkness, the human world depicted in his confabulations disintegrates as well, although into dust rather than darkness. The library, the symbol of human civilization, is filled with nothing but dust from floor to ceiling at the end of the play.[70] Significantly, Beckett's otherworld is often an apocalyptic grey world of dust. For instance, in *Fizzle 8: For to End Yet Again*, the imagery of 'skull alone in a dark place' gradually dissolves into a world of grey dusts. Beckett writes:

> Skull last place of all black void within without till all at once or by degrees this leaden dawn at last checked no sooner dawned. Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see long desert to begin. Sand pale as dust ah but dust indeed deep to engulf the haughtiest monuments which too it once was here and there.[71]

What is the relationship, then, between darkness and dust, and why would the latter replace the former?

Dust is known for its pervasiveness and its undertone of calamity, as after a nuclear fallout only dust would prevail. This ecological association between dust and atomic explosion in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the nuclear arms race in the Cold War, has been addressed by Beckett scholars, especially in the context of the apocalyptic grey world in *Endgame.* This certainly makes dust the perfect symbol of Beckett's otherworld, but a phenomenological description of dust would show that dust not only has apocalyptic connotations, but also ontological significance in regard to nothingness. Michael Marder, in his study of the subject, *Dust* (2018), writes: 'Invading the milieu of perception, it vacillates between invisibility and those discrete instances when it appears in the spotlight and immediately redirects our gazes to the space it impregnates.'[72] In other words, dust constitutes the nothingness of air,

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real but imperceptible; the flurry of dust makes us aware of the space of air distinctly. In this sense, dust symbolizes the potentiality of being in nothingness, while nothingness is manifest in being.

This trait of dust is vividly displayed in Beckett's teleplay *Ghost Trio.* Female Voice observes that the room is filled with dust, but only rectangles of grey are exhibited on the screen, because, according to Ruby Cohn, 'dust is invisible'.[73] Invisible dust appears as a vastness of grey, which accentuates the nothingness of space because the monochrome colour does not delineate anything. Yet it implies that something imperceptible is lodged inside, otherwise the space would not be grey. Dust in Beckett's otherworld thus not only suggests ecological catastrophe, but also represents a state that is paradoxically both nothingness and being.

This forms an important dialogue between Beckett and another Eastern school of thought, Daoism, whose cosmology underlines the interrelation between nothing and being. At the very beginning of *Tao Te Ching*, Lau Tzu, the founder of Daoism, writes:

> Nothingness is the Originator of heaven and earth; being is the Mother of all things. Always experiencing nothingness, we feel the mystery of Dao; always experiencing being, we feel the limits of Dao. Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the Mystery.[74]

'The essence of "being" is to show the limit of all presence; while the thorough and complete exposure of these limits is the manifestation of "nothingness".'[75] In other words, Dao is both nothingness and being: it is nothingness as the potentiality of being, and being as the manifestation of nothingness.

Dust could, accordingly, be understood as the manifestation of Dao. It is no coincidence that Lao Tzu is alluded to by Beckett in *That Time* as the 'old Chinaman long before Christ born with long white hair'.[76] Beckett's 'Dream Notebook' also proves that, in the 1930s, he had read Herbert A. Giles's *The Civilization of China*, in which Giles translates a story on the nature of nothingness from *Chuang Tzu*, another classic text of Daoism:

> If there is existence, there must have been non-existence. And if there was a time when nothing existed, then there must have been a time before that, when even nothing did not exist. Then when nothing came into existence, could one really say whether it belonged to existence or non-existence?[77]

Daoist understanding of indistinguishable existence and non-existence, and nothingness and being, must have had some influence on Beckett.

Peter Boxall writes: 'It might be argued that the question of the relation between form and formlessness, between something and nothing, is that which has determined the passage of Beckett's reception from the 1950s to the present day.'[78] Indeed, Murphy's perception of Nothing is the only direct experience of nothingness in Beckett's oeuvre. In his subsequent works, nothingness stayed inaccessible. The voice in *The Unnamable* forever oscillates between silence and murmur, and its conundrum only reaches a dead end: 'You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.'[79] Also, in one of his last prose works, *Worstward Ho*, Beckett writes: 'All gnawing to be naught. Never to be naught.'[80]

Although in such early prose works as *Murphy* Nothing is described as darkness, images of greyness or dust dominate Beckett's later works so as to emphasize the potential of being inherent in the nothingness.[81] For Beckett, nothingness does not denote nothing-ness, but no-thingness, for it nourishes imperceptible and unrealized 'things'. When the world of grey dusts replaces the world of darkness in Beckett's later works, he finds different imagery for the non-effectuated potentialities of intensity and affect in the nothingness.

This association between affect, nothingness and grey is most potently demonstrated in Beckett's *Was Wo*, a German teleplay adapted from his last play *What Where.* Here Bam interrogates three other characters, all with grey hair and in grey robes, and a megaphone plays Bam's pre-recorded voice to command the course of the interrogations. The political connotations of torture exist in *What*

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Where, but like all of Beckett's previous plays, there is always another layer of meaning. 'Beckett called [*What Where*] the experimental field of memory, on which all is remembered as from a distant past . . . for him, the play was integrally related to the memory of departed friends, fallen "Like leaves in wintry weather"'.[82] The recurring motif of dying into the darkness of nothing thus survives in Beckett's last play.

Three years later, Beckett adapted this play into *Was Wo.* Floating and speaking faces substitute for characters, and the megaphone has gone. Faces, like heads, denote interiority, a function performed by the megaphone of *What Where.* Bam closes his eyes, and his face is much larger than that of the other three. As the cameraman of *Was Wo*, Jim Lewis, explains: 'Keeping the eyes closed really gave you the feeling this is coming out of him. He's remembering.'[83] The same effects of *What Where* are thereby realized, but the question is: Why bother? Why would Beckett, who is acutely sensitive to medium specificities, produce *Was Wo*?[84]

One of the most significant reasons is that theatre cannot stage a grey world, but television is the perfect medium for it. Due to its greyscale imaging mechanism, grey is the main tone of black-and-white television or monochrome television, which is the format of all Beckett's teleplays. Grey 'is also the colour that a television screen takes on when it is switched off'.[85] Besides, in the 1980s, households usually had cathode-ray-tube television and, due to its low level of greyscale and its small number of electronic beams scanned per second, images displayed a heavily grey graininess, which seemed especially fitting for presenting an apocalyptic, derelict otherworld utterly in contrast with human reality. In *Was Wo*, Beckett specifically demanded a grey tone to compensate for the insignificant grey robe and hair in *What Where.* Lewis told Martha Fehsenfeld that 'they were trying to avoid clear delineation among black, grey, and white. There was to be a blurring among them: grey would have black in it, and white grey'.[86]

Moreover, the three smaller faces in the grey fade-in and fade-out effect were added in post-production, and their contours are so blurred that it is hard to tell where their faces begin or end. According to Lewis:

> Sam suggested to me at one point that he'd seen statues that were deteriorating because of pollution, and that the contours were eaten away, and perhaps we could get an effect something like that. First he said 'blurred', said he'd like to see the image blurred. Then he said perhaps in combination with this deterioration.[87]

The achieved effect of faces shown to be merging into their environment of grey void ingeniously illustrates the process of humans becoming-imperceptible.

Becoming-imperceptible in grey is significant, for as Genesis reads, 'for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'.[88] God 'formed man of the dust of the ground', and humans would return to dust as their destination of death.[89] The greyness of dust thus epitomizes posthuman affects in the cosmic flow that both realizes human beings and disintegrates them.

The medium specificity of the theatre demands that *That Time* can only hint at human descent into cosmic nothingness through the static image of a head in darkness. In contrast, *Was Wo* could poetically visualize the exact *process* of 'becoming-imperceptible', of posthuman affects dissolving and producing humans in the cosmic nothingness. The insignificance of human life within the vast universe and the cosmic flow of dust are indeed imbued with anguish, distress, and absurdity, but a transformative de-anthropocentrism also comes to light in this cosmic vision. By exceeding the everyday phenomena of human reality so radically, this cosmic vision is not only daunting, but also accounts for the undeniable greatness of Beckett's art.

Conclusion

In Samuel Beckett's artistic vision, the reality in which human beings dwell is merely a drop in the cosmic ocean, and his vision bears witness to the absurd. Apart from inducing absurdist feelings, it showcases the ontological posthuman affects that can transform viewers' conceptions of the place of humans

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in the universe. This issue deserves continuous attention in the Anthropocene, especially since we are faced with ecological catastrophe. In *Malone Dies*, Malone faces the catastrophe of losing his stick, but this catastrophe also helps him realize the irreplaceable value of the stick, so he says: 'So that I half discern, in the veritable catastrophe that has befallen me, a blessing in disguise. How comforting that is.'[90] Hopefully, such catastrophes as Covid-19 (and others) will also broaden the mind of humankind to the values of the nonhuman world. Just as the defiant gaze of the powerless and submissive Protagonist suggests resistance and change at the end of *Catastrophe* (1982), so hope always hides in Pandora's box.

Notes and References

1. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to Professor Maria Shevtsova for her invaluable suggestions and meticulous edits of this article.

2. More diverse approaches were introduced after the 1960s to challenge the existential-humanist tradition initiated by Esslin, drawing inspiration from literary theories, historical materialism, and cultural studies. Several scholars over the last decade began specifically to re-examine the phrase 'Theatre of the Absurd'. See Michael Y. Bennet, *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus*, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter (New York: Palgrave, 2011); Carl Lavery and Clare Finburg, eds., *Re-thinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, the Environment, and the Greening of the Modern Stage* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); and Carmen Dominte, *Re-Thinking Character in the Theatre of the Absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020).

3. Charles Juliet, 'Meeting Beckett', trans. and ed. Suzanne Chamier, *TriQuarterly*, LXXVII (1989–90), p. 9–30 (p. 17).

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5. Ibid., p. 402, 411.

6. See Dirk van Hulle, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's 'Stirrings Still' / 'Soubresauts' and 'Comment Dire' / 'what is the word'* (Antwerp: University Press Antwerp, 2011), p. 90.

7. Bernhard Siegert, 'Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory', *Theory, Culture & Society*, XXX, No. 6 (2013), p. 48–65 (p. 58).

8. This interpretation differs from other posthumanist theories that see posthumanism as a historical way of being and thinking concomitant only with the rise of cybernetics and high tech.

9. See, for example, Jonathan Boulter, *Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2008); Elizabeth Effinger, 'Beckett's Posthuman: The Ontopology of *The Unnamable*', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, XXXIII (2011), p. 369–81; and Ruben Borg, 'Putting the Impossible to Work: Beckettian Afterlife and the Posthuman Future of Humanity', *Journal of Modern Literature*, XXXV, No. 4 (2012), p. 163–80.

10. Mary Bryden, ed., *Beckett and Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Think, Pig!: Beckett at the Limit of the Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); and Amanda Dennis, ed., *Samuel Beckett and the Nonhuman*, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, XXXII (2020).

11. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Scizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 256–7. 'Affect' means the transformation from one state to another, which is caused by the rise and fall of the intensities. Massumi, who reinforces the difference between affect and emotion, does not distinguish between affect and intensities. This article retains the subtle difference by defining 'affect' as the transformation of a state.

12. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 169.

13. Rosi Braidotti's approach to the posthuman is materialist and vitalist. See her *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 4. Katherine Hayles argues against the erasure of embodiment in theories of the posthuman in *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press,1999), p. xi–xii. Brian Massumi takes up the concept of affect in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy to complicate existing affect theories. See his 'The Autonomy of Affect', *Cultural Critique*, XXXI (1995), p. 83–109. For studies that draw links between Braidotti, Hayles, and Massumi on posthuman affect, see Pieter Vermeulen, 'Posthuman Affect', *European Journal of English Studies*, XVIII, No. 2 (2014), p. 121–34; Gerda Roelvink and Magdalena Zolkos, 'Post-humanist Perspectives on Affect', *Angelaki*, XX, No. 3 (2015), p. 1–20; Gerda Roelvink and Magdalena Zolkos, 'Affective Ontologies: Post-humanist Perspectives on the Self, Feeling, and Intersubjectivity', *Emotion, Space, and Society*, XIV (2015), p. 47–9.

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36. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 268.

37. Ibid., p. 255–6.

38. Stephen Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 179.

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40. This is not to say that emotions are completely absent in the theatre of Craig, Meyerhold, Yeats, or Beckett. It is just that emotions are not the foundation of their approach to actor training. Rather, these artists seek to reveal forces running through the flow of actors' physical bodies and then the power of emotion not only in the actors, but in the whole theatre, is engendered and delivered to the audience.

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61. Ibid., p. 174–6.

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67. Olga Plumacher, *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Heidelberg: Georg Weiss Verlag, 1888), p. 24 (my translation).

68. Ibid., p. 26.

69. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 136.

70. Samuel Beckett, *That Time*, in *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 396.

71. Beckett, *Complete Short Prose*, p. 243.

72. Michael Marder, *Dust* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 24.

73. Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 338.

74. I have based my translation on James Legge's translation of *Tao Te Ching* and made some adjustments. Legge's original translation is as follows: '(Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things. Always without desire we must be found, if its deep mystery we would sound; but if desire always within us be, Its outer fringe is all that we shall see. Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the Mystery.' The difference between Legge's translation and mine is caused by different ways of

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punctuating the original text. The original Chinese text is: 无名天地之始;有名万物之母。故常无欲以观其妙;常有欲以观其徼。此两者,同出而异名,同谓之玄。Most English translations, including Legge's, punctuate the sentences as follows: 无名,天地之始;有名,万物之母。故常无欲,以观其妙;常有欲,以观其徼。此两者,同出而异名,同谓之玄. This makes 有 and 无 only adjectives that modify nouns such as 名 (name), and the ontological connotations of nothingness and being, which are very significant in Daoism, are lost. In contrast, by following Chen Guying's notation, I prefer to highlight the ontological status of nothingness and being and punctuate the sentence as follows: 无,名天地之始;有,名万物之母。故常无,欲以观其妙;常有,欲以观其徼。此两者,同出而异名,同谓之玄。Thus my translation is slightly different. See James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Taoism. Part I: The Tao Teh King, The Writings of Kwang-ze* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1891), p. 47; and Chen Guying, *Lao Tzu: Contemporary Notes and Translation* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2006), p. 75.

75. Zhang Xianglong, *The Philosophy of Heidegger and Daoism of China* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1996), p. 28.

76. Beckett, *That Time*, p. 393.

77. Herbert A. Giles, *The Civilization of China* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1911), p. 146. See John Pilling, ed., *Beckett's Dream Notebook* (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999), p. 73.

78. Peter Boxall, 'Nothing of Value: Reading Beckett's Negativity', in Daniela Caselli, ed., *Beckett and Nothing: Trying to Understand Beckett* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 28–47 (p. 31–2).

79. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in Beckett, *Three Novels: 'Molloy', 'Malone Dies', 'The Unnamable'* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 407.

80. Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, in Beckett, *Nohow On* (New York: Grove Press, 2014), p. 120.

81. If it were not grey, it would be dim light suggestive of the integration between nothingness and being.

82. Chris Ackerley, '"Ever Know What Happened?": Shades and Echoes in Samuel Beckett's Television Plays', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, XVIII, Nos. 1–2 (2009), p. 136–64 (p. 159).

83. Martha D. Fehsenfeld, 'Everything Out but the Faces": Beckett's Reshaping of *What Where* for Television', *Modern Drama*, XXIX, No. 2 (1986), p. 229–40 (p. 237).

84. As Beckett said, 'If we can't keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down' (quoted in Fehsenfeld, '"Everything Out but the Faces"', p. 229).

85. Jonathan Bignell, *Beckett on Screen: The Television Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 42.

86. Fehsenfeld, '"Everything Out but the Faces"', p. 232.

87. Ibid., p. 237.

88. *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: Hendrickson Publishing, 2011), Genesis 3: 19.

89. Ibid., Genesis 2: 7.

90. Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*, in Beckett, *Three Novels*, p. 257.

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