The Trauma of the Body in the Drama of Artaud, Beckett and Genet: A Paradox of the Speaking Being

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ABSTRACT

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The Trauma of the Body in the Drama of Artaud, Beckett and Genet: A Paradox of the Speaking Being

The mind-body problem has perplexed scholars, philosophers and thinkers for centuries if not millennia. This doctoral thesis addresses an epistemology of the body in its regard to subjectivity through an analysis of the drama of Artaud, Beckett and Genet. A fundamental premise in this study is that there is a traumatic and alienating dimension to embodiment which is resistant to expression within representation systems. In particular, the ideas of Jacques Lacan, as they concern language, the body and trauma are applied to considering the representation of the body within the dramatic works. Hence, a fundamental principle in this thesis is that the human being is a divided subject regarding the body. The structure of this thesis is interdisciplinary and creates a dialogue between psychoanalytic studies, theatre studies, disability studies, and the subject of the body in the dramatic works of the three authors. The purpose of this encounter between disciplines is to formulate a mutually augmenting dialectic where the end 'product' regarding a knowledge of the body is a synthesis of this work. This approach aims to avoid the limitations of applying a theory to a subject that presumes a knowledge of the body *a priori*. Through a reading of specific texts and performances, this proposal challenges narratives and simplifications of the relationship between mind and body that permeate sociocultural discourse. The structure of the thesis consists of an overview of the background to the topic of the body and the context of the authors in chapter 1. A Lacanian account of the body and its application to theatre in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 4, focus on analyses of specific dramatic works. Finally, in chapter 5, I provide a comparative analysis of the theme of the body in the work of the three authors.

As soon as it becomes known, as soon as something comes to knowledge, something is lost and the surest way of approaching this lost something is to conceive of it as a bodily fragment.

(Lacan, 1962- 1963/2014, p. 134)

The artist has known how to push aside that which frustrates his gaze in order to find out what is left of man when pretenses are stripped away

(Jean Genet, 1958/2013, p. 1)

"And this indeed is what is expressed by the fact of using the verb 'to have'. One has one's body, one is not it to any degree". (Lacan, 1975-1976, I-11)

INTRODUCTION:

Setting the Stage: On Not Seeing it All

We are not masters in our own homes. This is the legacy of Freud in situating the unconscious as central to our experience as human beings. Lacan's paradigm of the divided subject stays faithful to this idea and that at any given time, we are not in a position of absolute knowledge of ourselves as subjects of our bodies. As human beings, we do not simply exist as our bodies, but we also have them (as an object) or corporeal entity through which we live and relate to as other. Furthermore, this paradox of being and having a body is conflictual, traumatic and non-harmonious; indeed, we are never at one with our bodies, though we strive to be.

In this research, I explore the nature of embodiment, within the dramatic work of three writers of the 20th century, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and Jean Genet (1910-1986). The question of knowledge lies at the heart of this exploration and of what it is possible to learn about the problematics of the body through the medium of theatre and the particularity of the works in question. I say problematics, given that the body that we speak of is not something that we can take for granted as if it refers to something stable, unchanging and substantive. This ambiguity is what makes a study of the body both challenging and productive, as it is within the very elaboration of a question that the body, in all its complexity, takes shape. All three chosen authors engage with the nature of embodiment, albeit at times indirectly, and grapple in their artistic work with the limits of representation in which the body is situated. Although I will refer to the representation of the body in the dramatic works, by this, I also imply that which cannot be seen of the body but exists as a bodily trace within the text or performance. In this sense, the nature of spectatorship is also significant as a place from which the body is seen, or I would also add not seen. Therefore, the context of subjectivity is paramount in considering these questions within this thesis as it is a prism through which many things become distorted, including knowledge.

The human being has a blind spot concerning the body of another, and this 'other' is also one's self. To put this another way, the visual spectacle of the body cannot tell us as much as we sometimes think about the nature of who or what we are looking at. In considering this idea, we can ask, what are the limits of knowability as regards the body of another? What is the purpose of this question? These questions shall be elaborated in detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, but for the moment it is enough to consider that something does not add up, is misaligned, regarding not simply the visual field of the body but what can be said or understood of it in the context of meaning structures, such as language and visual media. This asymmetry of relating (or knowing) comes to the fore in many particular and ubiquitous circumstances where communication is necessary to relay mental and physical states to another, or indeed, ourselves. These fields include psychotherapy, medical settings, academic and scientific disciplines that interrogate the nature of embodiment and even day-to-day social engagements.

In this thesis, an emphasis is placed on bodily states or physical manifestations that deviate from, and challenge cultural notions of the ideal body such as in the case of disability, impairment, and a general not working out or inherent failure of the body. The cultural imaginary generates images of the ideal body that are often associated with qualities such as productivity, functionality, Oneness, reproduction, and mastery. In this research, I expose the ideal body as a fantasy of the unconscious (where lack and impossibility are veiled), and I propose that this fantasy is structural to the desire 'not to know' something about the body.

However, in attempting to think differently about the body, as a consequence of the dialogue between psychoanalysis and drama, it is not the aim of this research to propose a paradigm that may inadvertently form yet another ideal (or narrative) in the place of the gap in knowledge constitutive of the body. In other words, I do not wish to propose a theoretical proposition of alternate embodied states which undermine the difficult reality of those living with difference, such as a construction of a non-normative paradigm where difference is reduced to sameness. Similarly, Mitchell & Snyder argue in *The Biopolitics of Disability* (2015) that well-meaning attempts to deconstruct the stigma and marginalisation of differential embodiments by aligning everyone as inherently disabled or temporarily able-bodied (an argument within

disability studies), actually dissipates the radical potential of these physical states and the particularities of living with impairment.

Despite this caveat, the tensions that arise from this engagement situate a dialogue in the maelstrom of ideas that is the historically enduring body-mind problematic. In this thesis, these signifiers are expanded through a conception of the unconscious as that phenomenon which subverts the desire to know. This also raises the issue of the relationship of the body with the unconscious. Although a thorough exploration of the dynamics between the unconscious and the body is beyond the scope of this thesis, this relationship is considered as a backdrop to the topic and is scope for further research. Fundamentally, we shall see that for the human subject and within the drama in question, the body matters.

The Body Matters

In this thesis, I take the view that the body is not a static entity, but a phenomenon that upon investigation yields to an understanding of fluidity, instability and immanent heterogeneity. This is in keeping with what Shildrick has called the post-conventional approach where, "all categories are slippery, fluid, heterogeneous, deeply intersectional, and thus resistant to definition" (2009, p. 4). Therefore, I contend that to have a body, as a human being, is to experience heterogeneity from within, as the experience of being different from ourselves, immanently alienated, embodied as an Other. We exist as the body and in relation to it (or indeed, as that very relation). Thus, the body is not something self-evident, strictly material, nor merely a reflection of the mind as a symmetrical counterpart. This critique allows for a more complex account of what it means to exist with the body and the potential for challenging simplistic narratives that deny the innately traumatic dimensions of embodiment. These more simplistic accounts of body and mind are often found in the guise of popular discourses such as the cult of positive thinking (addressed by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Smile and Die [2010]*), therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy, and psychoanalytic discourse where hysteria can become the catchall for somatic complaints; what Julia Segal refers to as the predominance of a belief in mind over matter, where a healthy mind presupposes a healthy body (J. Segal, personal communication, Oct 6th, 2014). I argue that this predominance of understanding

embodiment through the influence of the 'mind' is a response to the tension generated by a gap in knowledge concerning the body. This gap is structural and not merely a consequence of a lack of empirical investigation. I develop this idea through Lacan's account of the Real as the gap in knowledge that can never be completely bridged through meaning systems. Although it is true that empiricism is hugely important regarding certain physical matters, particularly in the medical and scientific domains, from a psychoanalytic perspective, it does not have the same place as for science. This is due to the emphasis that psychoanalysis places on the function of language within the perimeters of subjectivity and the place given to what cannot be accounted for by objective means. The subject of the unconscious always alludes the more tangible structure of empirical methods that adhere to principles of measurement and quantification.

In essence then, knowledge cannot completely define what eludes definition or representation. Derek Briton (2002) captures this distinction between knowledge and truth as it concerns psychoanalysis and science:

> The scientific notion of truth, then, is linear, progressive, and cumulative-equivalent to the accumulation of knowledge to the point of certainty. The truth of psychoanalysis, however, is not located in the realm of knowledge, the Symbolic, but in that which science must exclude to make knowledge possible, the Real (paragraph 6).

As Briton specifies, truth and the Lacanian Real are connected but at odds with the domain of scientific knowledge. The Real is that which resists representation; it exists.[1] From this perspective, the gap in knowledge I am referring to in this thesis is not scientific knowledge but rather relates to the Real as it is in relation to trauma, which operates as a gap in knowledge concerning the body. This gap alienates the human subject in a discordance of images and identifications, and the lived reality of everyday as experienced through the prism of the body. Fundamentally then, this thesis addresses the gap in knowledge concerning the body by investigating this gap within dramatic works but **not** by replacing it with certainty or the creation of an empirical product. We should be suspicious of utopic theoretical claims, including those that

[1] In this thesis when I refer to reality (or real) I take into account the Lacanian view that reality is composed of the fictional. The Real in contrast, is not reality, but that which is outside, in a representational sense.

have the best interests of the marginalised at heart, as can occur in the discourse of human rights where difference is often elided in favour of equality.

In the plays under discussion, I contend that there is a possibility for the spectator to have an ethical encounter regarding the body. Although it is important to address the particularities of alienation experienced by certain subjects in relation to the body, I argue that it is not only through finding meaning that alienation is eased. Paradoxically, it can be through the encounter with a disruption of sense that a moment of alternate perception can be generated. Instead of attempting to fix the discord inherent to subjectivity and the body, the presentation of this discord confronts the viewer with something difficult to face, perhaps even unconscious. In the next section, I outline the rationale for the selected corpus.

Selection of Corpus

The comparative analysis of the dramatic works of Artaud, Beckett and Genet entails a large corpus. All three authors were novelists, playwrights and poets, and also worked with the medium of film. Artaud had several appearances as an actor on screen as well as playing the central part of Count Cenci in his play *The Cenci*. Consequently, the range of writings and literary works is substantial, indeed, with the exception of Artaud's produced dramatic work. Beckett, in particular, has been the most prolific when it comes to the stage, with a body of drama that surpasses both Genet and Artaud. Increasingly, Beckett's short stories and prose texts have been adapted for the stage with recent productions such as *Watt* by Barry McGovern (2019), *Company* by Sarah Jane Scaife (2018*)* and *No's Knife* (2017) by Lisa Dwan. These recent adaptations situate Beckett's dense novelistic worlds within a visual space where the transition from reader to spectator takes place. As the focus in this thesis is predominantly drama, it has narrowed the scope of the corpus somewhat and consequently, not all writings by each author feature in this research.

In choosing to focus more specifically on the context of dramatic texts and performance, a more coherent and thorough approach to the subject is possible. Nonetheless, transitions are made from particular writings and prose texts when relevant in relation to themes, styles and motivations deemed to be pertinent to the

topic of the body within the dramatic context. The exploration of transitions from text to stage emphasises movements inherent to representing the body with the subsequent implications for representation, embodiment and spectatorship. For example, Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* after completing the trilogy with *The Unnamable,* where in certain respects the process of narration was exhausted in the very act of that narration and where the interior space of the novel is plumbed to its very limits. The theatre of Jean Genet differs significantly from his previous prose works, where the bodily abject was more pervasive. Artaud's theoretical project, although ornate and perspicacious in its formulation, is deemed to have been a failure when put to the stage. Therefore, taking this into account, we can ask what the stage can do with the question of the body that makes it particular to this medium?

This question regarding the stage and the body features very clearly in Artaud's work in his manifesto for a Theatre of Cruelty. In order to fully appreciate his vision and due to the shortage of staged productions of his work, it is necessary to investigate his theoretical writings regarding theatre. Artaud is also a popular figure of avant-garde iconography, an emblem of poetic martyrdom, a romanticised madman whose writings on the sufferings of his own body and his relationship to language have interested many a philosopher and literary critic, including Derrida, Deleuze and Kristeva.[2] Additionally, Artaud's art and the drawings he created in the psychiatric institution of Rodez, between 1938 and 1945, are of great interest to studies on the nature of psychosis, such as *Incandescent Alphabets: Psychosis and the Enigma of Language* (2016/2018) by Annie Rogers. It is for this reason that I take into account the influence of Artaud on contemporary culture.

Another consideration relating to the corpus has been the selection of Lacanian works and seminars pertinent to the methodology. In order to understand the questions posed by any so-called representation of the body, and the implications for issues concerning embodiment, such as anomalous corporality/disability, a reading of Lacan's texts has been conducted insofar as it has been possible within the timeframe. Secondary criticism from theorists working at the cross-sections of psychoanalysis and literature, such as Jean-Michel Rabaté and Azari, has been

[2] See for example, Deleuze (1969/1990) *The Logic of Sense*, Derrida (1978)'*The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*' and Kristeva (1972) *The Subject in Process*.

invaluable in identifying the potential of utilising certain Lacanian concepts in the study of literature. Other secondary criticism from psychoanalysts working clinically and theoretically, including literature, (Nobus, Verhaeghe, Vanheule, Fink, to name a few) have also been invaluable. An assumption in this thesis is that while the domains of literature and psychoanalysis encounter tensions on application, they are not entirely separate fields. In the next section, I look at some of the issues pertaining to the interdisciplinary framework of the thesis.

Methodology and Layout

The structure of this thesis is interdisciplinary and creates a dialogue between psychoanalytic studies, theatre studies, disability studies, and the subject of the body in the dramatic works of Artaud, Beckett and Genet. Ultimately, although the context of the body differs within each of these disciplines and fields, the question of knowledge remains constant. As this thesis is informed by a Lacanian method, the function of knowledge has particular import where we move towards what Nobus & Quinn (2005) call the "epistemological fall" regarding the topic of the body within the work of the authors:

> Whereas ordinary discourse separates the victorious moment of acquiring knowledge from the trauma of being unable to lay hold of it, psychoanalysis sees this very moment of triumphant acquisition as being marked by the inexorability of the epistemological fall (p. 3).

Thus, from a psychoanalytic point of view, there is a tension in any study concerning the production of knowledge about a particular lack of knowledge. This is especially pertinent to the context of the present study, where subjectivity is at the fore. In this sense, there is also a tension in forming interpretations regarding dramatic or artistic works as meaning is always involved in transmission. In this research, I attempt to underline this tension in order to demonstrate the productivity of encountering the lack in the Other or in other words, the points at which meaning fails. For it is at these points, that something of the body also emerges.

The methodological application will work dialectically from text to theory. The comparative analysis of Artaud, Beckett and Genet provides a multifaceted lens within which different angles on this topic come to the fore. There is something different at

work in the style of each dramatist, a difference that can be assessed through the context of understanding the relationship to meaning in each dramatic work and the implications for the field of spectatorship. Although studies of the body in some respects have been conducted on the works and writing of these authors, a study that comprises a cross-disciplinary analysis while positing the unconscious as central to the methodology is an important venture.

While biographical details of each author are kept at a minimum in the literary analysis, I have taken certain details as relevant in considering the stylistic position *vis-a-vis* the body, in particular regarding the work of Antonin Artaud.

Given that the subject of the body is not simply a statement but also a question (what is a body?), this is a question that I address in this research. A human body is not a static phenomenon but is also influenced by culture, and as a result, representations of it change over time.

For this reason, the methodological approach is separated between Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 1 (The Construction of a Paradox), the opening argument regarding the paradox of the body is contextualised in an interdisciplinary context. I also provide an introduction to issues concerning embodiment within the work of the three authors. The theme of failure as it relates to the body and theatrical aesthetics is also outlined.

Furthermore, as theatre is an art form comprised of both text and performance, the methodology includes theory concerning performance as well as that which concerns the texts. It is not possible to speak of theatre without taking this dual aspect into account even if this results in inevitable tensions or deficits. By this, I mean that while wherever possible, I attended performances of the dramatic works in question, but some were not available as a live performance though accessible in pre-recorded form. In order to develop a method of 'reading' the body in theatre I have chosen to focus on a semiotic approach, as per critics such as Anne Ubersfeld, Kier Elam and Michael Issacharoff. This approach delineates the particularities of representation on the dramatic stage and the nature of the relationship concerning certain modes of signification with the spectator. In order to appreciate the innovation or specificity concerning the relevant authors, as regards the aesthetic spectacle in each case, a semiotic approach takes account of both convention (in a social context) and

invention (in an individual one). In this sense, some of the phenomenological qualities generally associated with dramatic performances (liveness, presence, immediacy) are analysed through the lens of a materialist approach (the actuality of the dramatic setup) as well as a philosophical interpretation of the body within this frame. The semiotic approach to reading theatre and the implications for spectatorship intersects with a Lacanian theory of the body. For example, I consider whether the body of the actor is an actual body (the body here and now) or an object of perception that is always filtered through the subjective fantasy of the spectator. Neither position is mutually exclusive. Considering this as a critical factor will have a bearing on understanding, for example, the role of the body in Antonin Artaud's theatre and writings, and the consequences for both performance and contemporary ideas of the body. In talking of the body and body matters, (a frequent topic in psychotherapeutic discourse), the qualities of presence and truth are often invoked as if the 'materiality' of the flesh bore all secrets.

Chapter 2 (The Body: A Trauma of the Speaking Being) focuses specifically on this question of the body and the position it occupies in subjectivity. I also devise a method within which the body can be read in theatre. This involves focusing on particular concepts in Lacanian theory while adapting and collating these ideas towards the study of theatre. Given the parameters of this research, the elaboration of Lacan's ideas is far from exhaustive. As regards terminology, concepts such as the *object a,* are defined according to a particular timeframe or particular seminar. Thus, it is important to note that these definitions are provisional on the timeframe in question and that these concepts may change or develop in later seminars as shown in studies such as Guy Le Gaufey's account of *The Object a* (1995). However, the main focus is the relevancy of the concepts to a reading of the body and not the change in Lacan's thinking per se, although this is also noted where possible.

Additionally, the term *object a* was not intended to be translated, as is similar in the case of *jouissance.*[3]As such, it is not possible to have completely satisfactory or conclusive definitions of these terms, but the position they occupy in the methodology is supported through Lacan's words and secondary criticism. As the

[3] Throughout this thesis I use the translation 'object a' for the objet a as given by Adrian Price in his translation of Lacan's Seminar X *Anxiety* (1962- 1963/2014) and Guy Le Gaufey in *The Object a* (1995). I have also placed it within italics for clarity within the text.

method and application are dialectic, in that the dramatic texts may also inform Lacanian theory in relation to the body, these ideas remain open to further interpretation or elaboration in this thesis. As I have indicated already, in order to "read" the body in a theatrical context, the body itself must come under inspection as a question, a signifier and ultimately as a subjective phenomenon.

Chapters 3 and 4 concern the analyses of dramatic texts from within the propositions outlined in the theoretical overview. Chapter 3 (At the Limits of Meaning: Alienated Subjects, Wounded Figures) is focused upon the concept of alienation as a paradigm within which the relationship to the body is situated within particular plays. While embodiment contains a traumatic component, this component is often experienced as alienation. In approaching the dramatic works this way, meaning is brought into question as a framework for contextualising the representation of the body. In each analysis, the nuances of meaning or lack thereof serve to elucidate issues pertaining to the representation of the body and what I refer to as the stylistic orientation of each author.

Chapter 4 (The Trauma of the Sexed Being) builds on this idea of the problematics of meaning, as regards the representation of sexuality in specific plays. The relationship between sexuality and death, jouissance and the drive are explored in the context of each author. In relation to the epistemology of the body, the vagaries of sexuality are paramount in understanding that we are not master of our bodies but subject to them, and the knowledge of this subjection is not always conscious.

Finally, in Chapter 5 (Reconsidering the Body as an Aesthet(h)ics of the Theatrical Encounter), I engage in a comparative analysis of the themes discovered regarding the body as they concern each author. I argue that the aesthetic form of theatre, and how it involves matters of failure pertaining to the body, generates the possibility of an ethical encounter with the spectator; an encounter that cannot be known in advance. I also summarise and consider the implications of pertinent and contemporary questions concerning embodiment, as understood and inflected by the drama of each author. These topics include disability as both a material and social phenomenon (Beckett), the role of affect and the unconscious (Artaud) and the erotics of the image (Genet). I will also identify what I consider to be the predominant orientation of the dramatic works, concerning that which is seen and

unseen of the body. In this way, the implications for spectatorship and indeed a paradigm for understanding any human relationship to the body are drawn.

CHAPTER 1:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PARADOX

1. Introduction: On the Origin of a Conflict

"The end is in the beginning, and yet you go on" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 126)

One thing is certain, there is no subject without a body, or perhaps we should say without an organism. In order to live as human beings, we must possess some sort of corporeal frame that breathes life into our existence. This is where conflicts begin. For to exist as a human being is to inhabit a body that is subject to inner drives, determinants and contingencies that cause traumatic disturbances in lived experience. We are familiar with thinking of trauma as an external event that occurs to a subject, at a certain time or place and as a phenomenon that can shatter, overwhelm and paralyse a person's defences. This study of the drama of Artaud, Beckett and Genet approaches the subject of trauma from a different perspective, as that which is immanent to the human subject and a constitutive factor of embodiment. One of the features of trauma, as it is currently and widely understood, is that it resists representation: that is to say traumatic experience is beyond the limits of sense and is not adequately conveyed in words. Assuming this is true, where does that leave us in relation to an epistemology of the body? It is the assertion of this thesis that there is something of the body that cannot be represented, and that remains as a traumatic point of non-knowledge. However, although this traumatic component of existence resists representation, it is nonetheless possible to deepen an understanding of this phenomenon through this study of dramatic works by authors whose style lends itself to this work. As this chapter elaborates, it is not simply through what theatre shows, but often through what the stage fails to represent (or how it frames and ruptures sense) that a paradox at the heart of the subject can be inferred. In light of this, we shall see how the dramatic works under discussion portray and contextualise important factors relating to the representation of the body, and both 'body' in respect of the material form and the ineffable, unrepresentable substance.

A fundamental premise of this thesis is that the traumatic and discordant elements pertaining to embodiment are related to the organising structures of language and culture, which are central to existence for all human beings. This premise implies a certain universality inherent to the argument, with universality (as opposed to

singularity) referring to how we are embedded within culture – we cannot survive alone and are formulated through relationships with significant Others. Singularity, on the other hand, is emphasised by Lacan to be a critical component of subjectivity and not necessarily a kind of subjectivity that is easy to engender or live with, inculcated as we are within desires that are not always our own. In the context of the dramatic works, we shall see that the universal and the singular overlap both thematically and stylistically – meaning is formed through convention (at the intersections between the individual and the social) but convention can be ruptured or at least challenged. For it is not simply the 'what' (enunciated) of the performance of a piece that impacts on the spectator but also the 'how'(enunciating) as in the 'how' that piece is conveyed through the modalities of the respective medium, that is relevant for considering a problematics of the body. This overlap of the reception of signification and the style of the conveyance is where the methodologies of theatre studies and Lacanian theory intersect.

A psychoanalytic perspective on the body enables a complexification of the terms inherent to the perimeters of subjectivity, such as body, mind and substance, and provides a non-dualistic analysis of such components. In other words, the very terms of the debate are held in conceptual abeyance as signifiers and not as concrete signifieds. In viewing literary and dramatic works from this perspective, we take account of the unconscious and hence identify the divided subject as situated both on the side of the author and of the spectator.[4] Subsequently, an interrogation of meaning becomes problematized and open to critique at the level of the signifier and not the signified. In other words, we remain open to a hermeneutics without closure, deferring final resolution, and without turning signifiers into signs.

This chapter provides the background and introduction to the theoretical framework and conceptual apparatus applicable to theatre that I will apply in subsequent

[4] The divided subject is Lacan's account of the human being as split between the conscious and unconscious properties of subjectivity, where language instigates the divide between what can be said or known and that which cannot be said (the Real). So instead of a seemingly autonomous subject who knows him/her self through speaking or thinking, as in Descartes's "I think therefore I am" the Lacanian subject is split when it comes to knowledge. Lacan reverses the terms of thinking and being in a dichotomy of mutual exclusion "I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking" (Lacan, 1957/2004, p. 157).

chapters. Although I outline the fundamental issues pertaining to the body in the following sections, it is in Chapter 2 that a comprehensive theoretical overview of the body is developed. Presently, I will contextualise the paradox of the body in academic and psychoanalytic debate and focus on issues that have been somewhat neglected, in particular, that which relates to the non-normative or anomalous body. We shall also explore the intersections between theatre studies and the subject (that is the unconscious subject) of the body while also setting the stage for the position of the body in the dramatic works of the three writers. Lastly, we shall examine the language of theatre, particularly as it serves as a modality of staging paradox and framing the gap in knowledge inherent to the body.

The concept of absence is also central to this work, for it is through the confrontation with absence and non-meaning concerning the desire of the Other that a subject experiences freedom from the shackles of conventional mores and discourse. This 'destitution of the subject' in the face of a void is linked with poetic creation and the realm of metaphor. For it is in the face of nothing that creativity comes to the fore – *creatio ex nihilo.* As Lacan says in *Desire and Its Interpretation*, "every kind of metaphorical unveiling, provided it is audacious and challenges what is always veiled by language, and what it always veils at the final term, is death" (1958-59, Session 1, Nov 12th). We shall see how the poetic dimensions of theatrical signification support this view and help to frame the paradoxes of the human subject as an embodied being. Firstly, we will outline the nature of this paradox.

1.1. The Paradox of the Body

> Je suis dans cette main et je n'y suis pas. Elle est moi et non-moi. Et en effet, cette presence exige une contradiction; mon corps est contradiction, inspire, impose contradiction (Marzano, 2007, p. 7)

Human beings are embodied subjects. We exist as a function of corporeal materiality and as a relationship to the body (which is not reducible to material flesh). As Marzano describes in the above quote, we both are and have a body and exist in the interstices of this contradiction. This dichotomy is one of the first complexities encountered when asking what does it mean to be or have a body? When referring to the body in this thesis, what exactly are we referring to? The answer to this question

might seem obvious; as in the body we are referring to is the one that we can see touch and feel. However, from a Lacanian point of view, defining the body is not so clear-cut. Indeed, Colette Soler (1984) has pointed out that psychoanalysis has not brought much in the way of knowledge about the biological body. The body is a reality, but reality is a superstructure, it is not a primary given. In this way, the organism and the body are not the same thing. As she says: "There is a distinction to be made between the organism, the living being, on the one hand, and that which, on the other hand, is called the body" (p. 3). A central argument in this thesis is that exploring an epistemology of the body does not lead to a definitive answer that can categorically signify the meaning of a body as some indisputable substance. The nature of materiality is always in question, and this is captured within Lacan's differentiation of the biological body and the body of language. Apart from being a biological entity, the body is also a discursive product that is impacted by processes of representation in a cultural and individual context through language, thought, visual media as well as the realms of affect, feeling and emotion.

As I refer to embodiment quite frequently in this thesis, and as it is a burgeoning concept in current academic discourse, we shall take a moment to consider the nature of this term. Definitions of embodiment also take account of symbolisation and representation as integral to the process of making something material - a bringing forth into form as it were. To 'embody' something is to actualise or represent a concept or idea in material form. This emphasis on representation as a function of embodied subjectivity is central to our methodological focus on reading the body in theatre, and indeed to the question of knowledge concerning the body. It is through representation that we interact with the world and other people, our bodies acquiring meaning and 'taking shape' from these interactions. The concept of representation is also critical in understanding the link between the organic, physical body (matter) and the signifiers we associate with the realm of the mind: thoughts, memories and imagination et cetera. The much speculated connection between body and mind has been called the 'mind-body problem' and has fascinated philosophers, scientists and psychoanalysts for centuries. In our current times, the topic of the body and the highlighting of its role in subjectivity has become a strong focus within many disciplines, including theatre studies, gender studies, disability studies, philosophy to name but a few. But, before reading too much significance into this proliferation of

research, as I said earlier, we need to ask what body is being referred to when it comes under focus? I would suggest that there is a certain tendency in psychotherapeutic modalities toward idealising the body, or exalting it as a source of truth as evidenced in what Soler describes as the proliferation of "physical therapies" (1984, p. 1). From this perspective, trauma, defined as the effect of a past experience, can often be seen as a potential avenue for liberation and release. The rationale here is that if we can access the trauma that is inscribed upon the body, a liberation from the effect of this trauma can occur. Another example of such corporeal idealisation is found in the domain of theatre studies and indeed relates to Artaud's invention of the Theatre of Cruelty. The qualities of a dramatic performance such as immediacy, liveness, and actuality cause the staged body to be seen as a pure phenomenological experience where the mediation of the spectator's gaze is left out of the equation.

Nonetheless, despite the reductionist tendencies within certain theories of body studies, the increasing focus on corporality suggests a shift in the nature of considering what it means to be a human. In other words, the privileging of the body as a subject of debate is another way of asking a question concerning cause, the constituents of what makes us human. In Chapter 2, we shall look more closely at this idea of cause as it concerns the body, through the Lacanian concept of the *object a* as that mythical object that has been lost to the body in its constitution. For the present, let us examine why the body has been a source of such enigma and controversy over the passage of time.

Theoretical solutions to the mind-body problem and attempts to define the difference between matter and mind have changed over time. While Descartes conjectured that animal spirits were the means by which mind and body communicate, by 1915 Freud referred to ideational representatives as that which represented something of the body in the unconscious. Both Descartes and Freud, in different ways, were attempting to identify the pathway through which one part of the human being communicates to another, i.e. for Freud, signals from bodily sensations become represented within the unconscious by a signifier, which is not the sensation per se. Therefore, there is something in the psyche that represents the body, in a way that we are not conscious of. Freud's conception of the ego as first and foremost a 'bodily ego', describes the ego as a gateway between the internal sensations of the body and the representations

of the external world. In this sense, the ego is a part representative of the body without being reduced to it as a bodily substance. The phenomenologists of the 20th century also took account of the different modes of perception pertaining to the experience of the body. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty discusses the body's status as an object within the perceptual field. The disjunction of being and having is manifest in the paradoxical situation of the body, where the body is both subject and object of perception. In writing of the centrality of the body in subjective experience, he makes the critical point that we can never see our bodies as they are from the perspective of our own body. As he says: "But when it comes to my body, I never observe it itself. I would need a second body to be able to do so, which would itself be unobservable" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 95). Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty recognised that the body exists on two distinct levels in relation to consciousness, that of the "in-itself and the "for-itself" – the in itself relating to the felt and affective dimension of physical experience and the 'for-itself' pertaining to the object status of the body within the perceptual field and realm of appearances. This dual characteristic of embodied experience or "dual-aspect monism" is also described by Mark Solms, a pioneer of the emergent discipline of neuropsychoanalysis. In *The Feeling Brain* (2015), Solms argues for an integration of neuroscience and psychoanalysis in order to account for the subjective component of the brain within the scientific field. He argues that the brain is a feeling agent (it reflects on itself) and this contingency has been ignored by previous models of the brain. The 'mind' is as much a part of nature as any other object, even though we cannot "know" it directly. From this model, subjectivity stems from the brain but is not reducible to it. Similarly, "there can be no mind without body" (p. 3).

In our modern times, as shifts occur in religious beliefs and the role of the Other (as the guarantor of meaning) within ideology, understandings of subjectivity become more focused on internal factors rather than external (such as God). In many disciplines including science and psychoanalysis, attempts have been made to situate the body as more central in the experience of the individual, although there is a big difference in the nature of what is considered to be the body in these debates. In some ways, privileging the body as central to experience of the human subject has led paradoxically, (in response to the Cartesian mind/body split), to a collapse in the distinction or gap between body and mind, minimising the reality of the fragility of

the body and the nature of contingencies that surround embodiment. Descartes is often assumed to have influenced conceptualisations of a binary being, split between body and mind, where the rationality of thought takes precedence over the fleshy materiality the body. His (in) famous statement of *cogito Ergo sum* "I think therefore I am" places the ego or the one who is thinking as central to the ontological question of existence and displaces doubt as a marker of being. Conversely, Lacan's teachings completely undercut Descartes's privileging of the 'I' as central to the experience of knowledge and instead the unconscious becomes the locus of the subject's decentralisation. In Seminar IX on *Identification*, Lacan argues against Descartes's proposal that thinking proves the existence of the subject. As he says:

> "I think" is not a thought. Descartes, of course, proposes these formulae at the end of a long process of thinking, and it is quite certain that the thinking involved is the thinking of a thinker. I would go even further: this characteristic, it is a thinking of a thinker, is not required for us to talk about thought. A thought, in a word, in no way requires that one thinks about the thought. For us in particular, thinking begins with the unconscious (Lacan, 1961-62, Session 1, Nov 15th).

Descartes is often credited with influencing binary paradigms of thought regarding body/ mind that as Dunne and Butler point out "legitimize a patriarchal and phallocentric mode of reasoning" (2012, p. 1). It is often proposed that this phallocentric mode of reasoning privileges a binary view of gender, where rationality is favoured over the 'emotional or leaky body' and hence masculinity over femininity; given that rationality is often associated with the male of the species and the emotional with the female. Nonetheless, and regardless of the complete accuracy of these claims, at the other end of the debate lie equally erroneous conceptions that privilege ideas of mind-body unity as harmonious and symmetrical. The epistemological gap concerning the connection of body and mind is a stubborn and not fully resolved issue even today. Furthermore, attempts to fill this epistemological gap concerning the nature of psyche and soma have led to problematic and overdetermined interpretations of bodily or psychic events. This can be seen in the increasing popularity of various psychological practices such as cognitive behavioural therapy, as well as other interventions associated with the medical field. In his study on the *Subject and Body* (2001), Paul Verhaeghe notes that attempts to suture the gap between psyche and soma, have further reinforced it as these attempts fail to understand what distinguishes the gap in the first place. In contrast, he argues

that Lacanian theory concerning the body allows for a new way of thinking through the connections between the subject and the body. As Verhaeghe writes:

> If we study Lacan's entire work, we find a more complex relationship between the subject and the body, one that differs from the classical opposition between psyche and soma. The Lacanian opposition is between the I and the body as an organism and this leads to an opposition between the divided subject and the sexualised, that is, phallicized body (Verhaeghe, 2001, p. 18).

This account of the division between the 'I' and the body as an organism, contextualises the split inherent to subjectivity and highlights the complexity of the traditional mind-body debate. For Lacan, the body does not consist as a whole entity but rather is made up of "holes." These holes concern the incompleteness of meaning. Verhaeghe argues that the human subject is not simply divided but quartered: "the human subject is not a divided subject but a quartered being" (*ibid*, p. 21). In quartering the subject, as it were, we move away from the polarities of separation and unity, which are ultimately qualities and categories stemming from the organisational structure of language.

At this point, the implications of this statement and the preceding theoretical path are not applicable, but it highlights a perspective elaborated in this thesis, that subjectivity as it relates to the body is discontinuous and not defined by conclusions resting on binary assumptions.

In psychoanalysis, the unconscious is privileged as central to experience and introduces a discontinuity, an Otherness within subjectivity. The unconscious is a dimension of Otherness, and its presence subverts any coherent or stable sense of identity, that could be taken to be a core originality. Subjectivity is as Lacan says, "always a question of the subject qua indeterminate" (Lacan, 1964/978, p. 26). As the realm of the indeterminate, the unconscious serves as a mediating point between the organic matter of the body and the symbolic structures of self-identity. This mediation of the unconscious is facilitated and expressed by processes of representation concerning language and other signifiers. By taking account of the position of the unconscious in embodied subjectivity, we can broaden the previous debates on the mind/body problem. No longer do we have to remain within a binary model where mind and body are conceived as separate substances or at the other extreme as a union of symmetrical proportion. Instead, we can conceptualise the

issue as being neither one nor the other, but as something infinitely more complex. As Lacan argues in a critique of phenomenological thinking regarding mind/body dualism*:*

> This path, which is rich with a whole cornucopia of facts, affords us something that for a long time has struck us as very desirable, namely, the solution of mind/body dualism. It sees the body, taken at the functional level, as a kind of double, the lining, of all the functions of the mind. We should not be satisfied with this, however, because there is still some sleight of hand going on (Lacan, 1964/1978, p. 219).

This sleight of hand, as Lacan puts it, relates to the concept of the *object a* as that marker of an 'object' that is lost to the body and that can never be recovered. Again, we shall look more closely at this in the next chapter when we develop concepts as modes of reading for the body, its discontinuities, traumas and ruptures.

It is interesting that within the psychoanalytic domain, there is a dearth of studies and application relating to the subjectivity of embodied states (such as anomalous embodiment) that challenge normative ideals of embodiment, such as disability, illness, physical pain. Psychoanalysis, like any other discourse, can fall prey to the illusions, elisions and ideals of the prevailing culture. In contemporary times a dominant paradigm is that of the neoliberal consuming subject who must produce in order to be of value. In concordance with this paradigm, bodies that are productive (in the sense of labour, profit, output) are privileged as desirable, and those that are not can be viewed as a cost, a liability. The cultural imaginary, as both an individual and collective phenomenon, influences our perception of particular bodies. Anomalous embodiment is a category employed by Margrit Shildrick, one of the best-known disability theorists. In *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality* (2009), she elaborates on the factors surrounding non-normative embodiment and the fear and anxiety it engenders. Shildrick theorises, using Lacan's account of the imaginary, that all embodiment is characterised by an "irreducible vulnerability", a vulnerability that all subjects share (2009, p. 2). In this way, Shildrick accounts for the universal fragility that all humans experience at the core of embodied subjectivity, and how human society disavows this fragility through its marginalisation of those who are differentially abled. Although disability is not the central theme of this thesis, it certainly features prominently in narratives of the body

as Other and as representations within the dramatic works, in particular, that of Beckett.

The non-normative body is a body that deviates from expected or prescribed norms of what constitutes an acceptable body. This type of deviant body or what I shall call provocatively, 'the failed body' (in keeping with the current rehabilitation of the concept of failure) pertains to, but is not reducible to, situations where an individual's physical appearance, expression and/or functionality is anomalous or outside the norm (as that which is the majority).

A central argument in this thesis is that the body is a multifarious concept impacted by discourse and not just a material static reality. Contrary to the ideal of the body that is represented as whole, desirable and omnipotent, the dramatic works I investigate portray a non-idealistic representation of the body, that of the failed or dislocated body, the body in pieces or, "the body without organs." (Artaud, 1947). In this way, I aim to surpass the polarities of mind-body problematics where ideas of duality or symmetrical union (of these putative entities) attempt to fill the gap of the epistemological uncertainty consistent to embodiment. From this perspective, we find that the body can be conceptualised as an impossible object that cannot be fully known but is lived and felt. One of the ways that the body is lived is through the medium of theatre.

1.2. The Theatrical Body

In this section, we will examine how the body is viewed in theatre, as both the subject of a performance and as an object for the spectator. As Ubersfeld (1999) states, the body is central to the theatrical experience, but it is not a simple construct:

> Theatrical practice is 'materialist': it states that there is no thought without the body. Theatre is body, and the body is primary, demanding the right to live. But in all its activity it is subject to concrete conditions, and these conditions are social. (p. 190).

The social conditions to which the body is subject, influence how we see the body on the theatrical stage. Therefore, although the theatrical body is material, it is also social. Fundamentally, theatre is an art form that frames the material body as an

aesthetic object. That is to say, the body of the actor becomes a signifier in the eyes of the audience, so once it becomes staged, the body is no longer simply an actual body. The stage, as space of the fictional, serves as a platform of altered signification, taking objects out of their familiar everyday context. From the perspective of the spectator, the body on stage is always a body that is perceived as a specular object and felt through the senses, through hearing, seeing and possibly even touching. This fact is important in considering the impact a theatrical performance has on the viewer and the repercussion for theories of spectatorship and reception, including framing the limitations of knowledge concerning the body. It may seem that we can know more about the body in a theatrical context, due to the perimeters of immediacy and actuality than in other contexts, such as film. However, the presence of the material body on stage, framed by the artifices of the theatrical performance serves as a referent for what it cannot represent as a totality. As we shall explore, the body can never be represented in its entirety, as its material and signifying contours are shaped by the processes of signification itself. In other words, there will always be something of corporeal experience that remains un-representable within the confines of the modalities of representation. This unrepresentable 'object' is a remainder of the cut of language pertaining to existence; it is that which we experience nonetheless as an absence of sense or something unnameable within a chain of signification. I will refer to this phenomenon concerning spectatorship in theatre as the body-as-felt, in order to distinguish it from that which is not specific to the visual field.

Although theatre is live, immediate and happening 'now', the presence of performance seduces us into privileging the now as a sign of verisimilitude or a signifier of something more 'real' than fiction. In fact, the art form of theatre generates a distance related to language and representation, where the method of acting repeats an action in service of signification. The nature of presence in theatre is paradoxical as captured by Cormac Power (2008): "Theatre's distinctiveness, I will suggest, is less about making fictions than it is about making our experience of the present a subject of contemplation" (p. 16). From a Lacanian perspective, what we consider to be presence (as the here and now) is a function of signification. Presence is intimately connected with absence in that the signifier both creates and annuls. In other words, there is no experience that is not mediated by the signifier,

even that which we recount to ourselves about the theatrical experience. For the human subject, the signifier gives birth to being yet mortifies it at the same time through the transmission of the desire of the Other within the signifier. The theatrical stage frames the paradox of presence and absence through the modality of fiction. The events are present and visible, but they also refer to another scene, another layer of 'reality'. From the perspective of spectatorship, the liveness of theatre enables us to imagine that we can capture something that has been lost to our bodies with the collision of language and culture: to reduce the distance from ourselves engendered through language.

Thus, to say that theatre cannot represent the un-representable as this is impossible, does not preclude the perspective that it can show us something profound about embodiment. Paradoxically, it is also by the failure of theatre to completely represent or say the unsayable that a fundamental dimension of human existence is framed.

The theatrical body is both an actual and an aesthetic object. It is both more or less than what it appears to be. As a body that is perceived, it is a visual and auditory body - an agent of representation. The body of the actor plays a role in conveying the gap between illusion and reality; it serves as the mediating point between the actuality of a material body and that which has been referred to as a 'body as signifier' (Porter, 2010). The specular dimension of the staged body is important in understanding how it serves as a signifier for the audience.[5]

If we view it in Lacanian terms, human experience is formulated within the registers of the Real, the imaginary and symbolic. The body-as-perceived, as I will refer to in this thesis, concerns the imaginary and symbolic axes of the visual image and also takes into account that perception takes place through the subjective fantasy of the spectator. Therefore, the body is perceived not simply as it is, but as we see it subjectively. We see the exterior of the actor's body and interpret it from a network of available linguistic signifiers inherited by us as the code of discourse inherent to culture. However, we cannot know the Real of the body, that invisible aspect of another person's experience that is not represented in the specular image. In the next

[5] I wish to stress this particular analysis of the body-as-perceived is pertinent to theatre and its fictional frame. The body is not always framed so acutely as an aesthetic object and our perceptions may change according to particular environments.

section, I examine the rationale for the choice of the three authors in this comparative study.

2. RATIONALE FOR CHOICE OF AUTHORS

The study of the body in this thesis is complex and multi-dimensional, and this diversity is reflected in the work of the chosen authors. There is both a structural and singular dimension to the relationship we have to our bodies; structural as regards language, trauma and knowledge and singular in that each human being has to negotiate these factors in a unique way. We shall see in the following chapters how the comparison of dramatic works elucidates and illuminates this theme, in a way, a study of a single author would not have done. Hence, in juxtaposing these authors, issues relating to embodiment will be understood more clearly. For example: in Genet's theatre the specular image predominates, in Artaud's (cruel) theatre he attempted to surpass the limitations of language, and with Beckett, we have a style of minimalism that makes a slow and inevitable encroachment towards nothing. While, in this thesis, we are focusing on the theme of the body, in an almost phenomenological way, that is as it is presented within the drama, I do not concentrate in-depth on historical factors pertaining to the context and background of the authors. Nonetheless, certain elements are important in situating these authors together and painting a picture of the symbolic and social factors surrounding their work and epoch. An interesting connection between these three authors, (who as Matthew Melia [2007] points out, never actually met) is the director and actor Roger Blin. Blin directed Artaud's *The Cenci (1925)*, Beckett's *Endgame* (1957), *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and Genet's *The Screens* (1961), thereby establishing a link between the work of these authors at least in the productive context. Indeed, Jean Genet has attributed a connection with Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty to the staging and style of *The Screens*.

In his famous category of the "Theatre of the Absurd" Martin Esslin (1961) included Artaud, Beckett and Genet as practitioners of this style of "New Theatre" where the

events on stage (as forms) transcend the words spoken.[6] As Esslin puts it in drawing a distinction between the philosopher and poet: "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being - that is, in terms of concrete stage images. This is the difference between the approach of the philosopher and that of the poet;" (1961, paragraph, 21). Esslin's categorisation is an interesting historical coordinate in juxtaposing the stylistic similarities and differences in the various dramatic works I will consider, and it situates the dramatists in a context that concerns a question of meaning. According to Esslin, absurdity is a "sense of the senselessness of life, of the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" (*ibid*, intro, paragraph 18). In this context, the stage abandons the linear movement of textual narrative in favour of a style of performance that shows in aesthetic form 'how it is'. Although Esslin connects absurdity as related to particular societal conditions and a type of 'metaphysical anguish' within existence, from the perspective of this thesis, we can view this concept differently. In other words, it can be argued that anguish or absurdity is rooted in the state of embodied existence as a structural precondition of society. That is to say; there is a lack of meaning or senselessness at the heart of subjectivity that is partially camouflaged by the structures of language and the imaginary dimension of ego identifications.

Esslin's characterisation of the absurd in relation to the theatre of the post-war period has sparked much debate both for and against the relevancy of this category including Michael Y Bennett's recent text *Reassessing The Theatre of the Absurd* (2011). Jean-Paul Sartre has also disagreed with the characterisation of certain dramatists as absurd:

> They have been called the writers of the "theatre of the absurd," but the title itself is absurd in the first place, because none of them regards human life and the world as an absurdity[…] What they in fact represent either through their inner conflicts or through their contrast with each other is a flare-up of the contradictions which are the very basis of dramatic art (Sartre, 1973, p. 136).

In this refutation of the absurd as a category or style of drama, Sartre points out that conflict and contradiction are at the very basis of art; contradiction is the signature of

[6] Esslin places Artaud's theoretical writings within the category of the absurd and not specifically the relatively few plays under his name.

dramatic art. The three authors I examine in this thesis all find ways to deal with contradiction, either as inner conflicts or through the complexity of the aesthetic medium of theatre in an individual and stylised way. In thinking about ideas of sense, meaning, absurdity and alienation in these dramatic texts, we can take the concept of absence as an orientation point. Absence is a term that signifies something lost, something not present or indeed something which is veiled by an excessive presence. In other words, we can ask how does the style of the authors relate to absence as a signifier connected to meaning?

In Lacanian terms, meaning exists at the intersections of the imaginary and the symbolic, or at the crossover of the individual and the social (see Chapter 2, 2.4). Ultimately, however, while meaning is supported by social and cultural discursive systems, the ultimate meaning as it were (or the "locus of the word"), a positon altered by Lacan over the course of his work, is that the Other (the guarantor of meaning) is another that lacks. There is "no Other of the Other"- a transcendent point of meaning, something is missing in the totality of signifiers, "Something which can be only a signifier is lacking to it". (Lacan, 1958-59, Session 16, April 8th). Language is not secure; it does not guarantee an original meaning or a secure foundation of being. In different ways, the drama that we shall analyse can be orientated through the idea of the failure of the Other. This is manifest in the overtly transgressive *mise-en-scène* and the inversion of bourgeois ideals by Genet, the surrealist and revolutionary manifesto of Artaud and the bleak existential landscapes of Beckett's drama, where a belief in meaning is inverted as a laughable enterprise. In these 'absurdist' terms, the ideals of the cultural imaginary order are laid bare, meaning is exposed as precarious, and the body stands out in stark relief as an agent of ridicule or an object of surrealist assemblage. In contextualising the 'presence' of absence in the work of the three authors, it is essential to pay attention to the particularities of the dramatic medium as a system of signification. This is where the role of theatrical semiotics comes to the fore. Critics such as Keir Elam, Anne Ubersfeld and Michael Issacharoff have elaborated on the semiotics of theatre, the ways that we can read theatre from the perspective of its multiple elements of signification, such as signs, codes, gestures, reference, signifier and signified etc.

This study of the parameters or limits of meaning-making in theatre allows us to understand how particular dramatists portray the absence of meaning at the core of signification or knowledge systems; it will clarify the role of absence and presence within a dramatic performance. As theatre is comprised of both the elements of text and performance, performance in theatre can be viewed as a network of significatory elements forming a particular type of text or context. Therefore, with this method, it is not so much the meaning of a theatrical performance that is interrogated, but rather it is revised as a question of how theatre frames meaning, posing layers of sense interpretation to the audience.

In this context, we can ask what type of theatre can provoke the audience to question meaning per se as opposed to blindly accepting it? For example, as is so often asked of Beckett's famous play, what is *Waiting for Godot* about? Who is Godot? From the perspective of this methodology, this question can be reframed as: why do I need to know what Godot is about? Why is not knowing so disturbing? What drives the urge to know? We shall keep these questions in mind over the coming chapters.

These questions of meaning are particularly relevant in thinking of the dramatic works of Artaud, Genet and Beckett- authors whose work penetrates to the heart of existential questions surrounding human existence and whose particular style of drama parodies conventions of communication and representation. The space of theatre becomes an alternate space or alternate imaginary where deformations and aesthetic transformations take place outside of more oppressive socio-political discourses.

The failure of language to represent the self as a totality and to communicate harmoniously with other human beings is a feature also of the three authors, where drama works to expose the abyss or void of meaning (trauma) at the core of embodiment. However, there is a difference in how this theme is stylistically conveyed and in the emphasis placed on existential realities. As James Roberts states speaking of Genet and Beckett:

> Genet's dramatic interest, so different from Beckett's and Ionesco's, is in the psychological exploration of man's predilection to being trapped in his own egocentric world, rather than facing the realities of existence. Man, for Genet, is trapped by his own fantastic illusions; man's absurdity results partially from the fact that he prefers his own disjointed images to those of reality (1980, p. 7).

While it is certainly true that Genet portrays the position of human beings entrapped within a hall of illusions, this portrayal, while different in form to Beckett, nonetheless in a similar way, exposes the fragility of the human subject in relation to existence. In subsequent chapters, I analyse how the issues that we have identified concerning the discordance of the body within subjectivity manifest in particular dramatic works, involving close readings of the text and its translation into performance. At this point, I will look briefly at the position of the body in the work of each author to situate best how this methodology will be applied.

2.1. Jean Genet: Theatre of the Image and the Reflection

Jean Genet has one of the most interesting histories of any artist, writer or dramatist. Born of a prostitute and placed in an orphanage without knowledge of his father, Genet's early years were marred by abandonment and dislocation. At a later point, he was convicted of thieving and spent many years in French prisons from which his life as an outlaw, outcast and homosexual developed a trajectory. It is not surprising then that the heroes of Genet's drama are those of the underworld, the marginalised, the lower class and the sexually deviant. What makes Genet's work exceptional is the transformation of that which is abject, painful and marginal into that which is erotic and poetic. His theatre is not, as he often inferred, to be seen as sociological imitation but should be elevated to the level of the aesthetic as pure form.

In *How to Perform the Balcony,* the preface to *The Balcony,* Genet made the following direction:

> One more thing: the play should not be performed as if it was a satire on this or that. It is- and must therefore be performed as-the glorification of the Image and the Reflection. Only then will its meaning-whether satirical or not-become apparent (Genet, 1962, p. xiii).

In this text, Genet criticised previous performances of the play in London, Paris and Berlin and emphasised that the tone of *The Balcony* should be one of equivocation and exaggeration. His words imply that the play should not be self-consciously satirical, (that would be too close to a concrete intention) but rather it should "glorify the Image and the Reflection". This statement reveals a core characteristic of Genet's

theatre, the raising of the specular image to the level of a symbol, albeit a symbol without a referent. It is the image qua image and not what it reveals as a veil of reality that is being emphasised in this direction. In this context, we shall approach the representation of the body in Genet's drama, through the "hall of mirrors" presented by the 'characters' and the scenography of performance so pertinent to his style. We shall also consider the function of the image of the body within the network of elements that comprise subjectivity and explore the signifying system in which it is situated in his drama.

The body for Genet is contingent upon the image; it relies on the gaze of the other for its existence. In subsequent chapters, we shall see the nuances of this idea as it concerns the position of the body within Artaud and Beckett. The predominance of the image within Genet's drama contributes to a captivation of the narcissistic structures of identity (the psychic defences surrounding the ego), not simply within the plots of the performances but within the very *mise-en-scène*. We could say that human identity for Genet is a form of theatre. To put it another way, the characters of Genet's plays are dependent on the image as a marker of being and indeed find their being through the performance of the body. In this sense, the characters do not rely on any 'substance' of the body as authentic guarantor of meaning. For Genet, the theatrical body is an imaginary body, a reflection alienated by the dominant images of day-to-day reality that trap the subject in a permanent misrepresentation or *manque-à-être*. In Chapter 2, we shall look more closely at the psychoanalytic concept of identity and the misrecognitions pertaining to any supposed coherent sense of self. There is always a discord between the image and the internal experience of subjectivity. Genet's style captures this lack in being inherent to the ego and its relation to identification. This misrecognition of the ego with its own image will always render a discord or gap between the image one sees of oneself, and the lived reality, resulting in an inherent conflict at the core of subjectivity.

In the analyses that follow on *The Maids* and *The Balcony*, in Chapters 3 and 4, we shall explore this idea from the perspective of the body and the sociocultural ideals that are perpetuated as cultural norms. Sociocultural norms are also turned upside down in the drama of Samuel Beckett, where the failure of the body is performed as an intrinsic property of existence.

2.2. Beckett: Performing the Failure of the Body

The span of Beckett's work, from prose to theatre, reveals a fascination with the frailty of the human body and the portrayal of existence reduced to its bare essentials: the ground zero of the body as it were. The frequency with which we encounter the 'fragmented' or 'failed body' is too often to mention all occurrences, and it is this very pervasiveness of the 'non-able' or 'not whole' body that places the accent of ontology (and failure as a state of being) on these representations. In plays such as *Endgame* (1957) and *Happy Days* (1961) and *Play* (1963), the bodies of characters are presented as restricted and immobilised; buried in sand, trapped in dustbins/pots or confined to a chair, these characters are hemmed in by their environment and represent the existence of the human being as subject to limitations, both interior and exterior to the body. In *Endgame*, the emotionally dependent coupling of Ham and Clov is also a physically decrepit one. In *Waiting for Godot,* Vladimir and Estragon cannot do without each other nor leave the situation they are in.

In Beckett's later drama, the body as fragmented, partial and uncanny is found in *Not I* (1973), *Footfalls* (1975) and *Ohio impromptu* (1981). Beckett's characters are subject to something they cannot escape, the parameters of time, existence itself and the pressures of the drives as they relate to the body.

In stripping the environment down to its bare minimum, where the structures of meaning that support the extension of ourselves beyond the physical is collapsed, Beckett's work illustrates that we are subject to the body and its *jouissance*, the body is our master as it were. The body is both a necessity and contingency that the subject is tied to throughout the trajectory of life, a life that will end with the failure of that body. In encountering the impaired body in Beckett's work, it is important to distinguish between the body as a literal representation of 'disability' and its function as a figure for the ineffable paradox of being. Of course, these two categories overlap, but they are not reducible to each other. I emphasise the latter appropriation of the figure of the body in order to draw out the aesthetic complexities and the metaphorical implications of Beckett's failed bodies. It is not simply that these bodies are disabled but when taking Beckett's work as a whole and the ubiquitous

nature of these partial bodies, a more subtle distinction emerges between the body as material and the incomplete knowledge of inhabiting it. Beckett's work displays the influence of Descartes's philosophy concerning the mind-body problem and the posited separation of physical and mental substances; as the following passage from *Murphy* illustrates:

> [T]hus Murphy found himself to be split in two, a body and a mind, they had intercourse apparently otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common, but he felt his mind to be body tight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was affected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither came before the other. (Beckett, 1938/2009, p. 70).

Murphy thus finds himself in the quintessential Cartesian dilemma; that is the mystery of what connects body and mind and the feeling of being divided as a consequence. Indeed, Beckett's first published poem, *Whoroscope (1930)* displays a keen interest in this contentious philosopher.[7] In this poem, a grumpy René Descartes awaits the serving of an extremely matured egg. Interestingly, in light of the split of body and mind in *Murphy*, Melia (2007) points out that in Beckett's later drama, there is an increased undermining of a rational Cartesian self. We will see this clearly in Chapter 4, through *Not I*, where the 'I' cannot be anchored as a centralised point of identity (2007, p. 188). In this context, Beckett's narrators are often in situations involving a dislocation of the body from the parameters of rational and egoic sense in a move toward a representation of the dehiscence of the subject. As we look to Artaud now, we also encounter a desire to expose the body as a lining of the mind, in a theatre that endeavours to transcend the impossible.

2.3. Artaud: The Impossible Transcendence of Being

In *Mad like Artaud* (2003/2015), Sylvere Lotringer recounts that in 1938, Jacques Lacan examined Artaud in the psychiatric institution of the Sainte-Anne hospital in Paris and pronounced that he was fixed in his delusion and "will never write again".[8] Lacan was clearly wrong in this pronouncement about Artaud's future as a writer, as

[7] According to Jean-Michel Rabaté (2016), Descartes was superstitious about having his horoscope drawn, hence the allusion in Beckett's title.

[8] "Doctor Lacan visited the inmate Artaud in 1938, shortly after his hospitalisation in Saint Anne. On that occasion he declared: "Artaud is obsessed, he will live for eighty years without writing a single sentence, he is obsessed"(Chiesa, 2006, p. 336)

the “mad poet” went on to write texts that would fill 25 volumes of the complete works (2003/2015, p. 39). Although suffering from delusions, and episodes of paranoid psychosis (including the effects of an opium addiction), not to mention the ravages of the psychiatric treatment he received, Artaud has achieved mythical status as a writer a *poète maudit* and is one of the most influential figures in the development of the ‘Living Theatre’ tradition. In fact, it is maybe not despite of, but because of these aforementioned difficulties that Artaud’s writings on the body strike a chord with so many, philosophers, literary critics and performance theorists.

A key focus in exploring Artaud’s work in this thesis is a tension that is expressed between the concept of representation and the body, and as a corollary to this, the tension between presence and absence. From his writings, it is clear that this was a cruelty not of physical violence but one that expressed the painful existential reality of human existence through the medium of gesture and bodily drives rather than language. In his invention of The Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud wanted to take theatrical representation to a level beyond language. Instead of implementing words as a representation of experience or interiority, his theatre endeavoured to access the essence of bodily experience itself, to uncover a “truthful” reality of experience through an “affective athleticism.” According to Artaud:

> It has not been definitively proved that the language of words is the best possible language. And it seems that on the stage, which is above all a space to fill and a place where something happens, the language of words may have to give way before a language of *signs* whose objective aspect is the one that has the most immediate impact upon us (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 107).

In this passage, we see that Artaud wanted to revolutionise the theatre by creating a system of performance that could transcend the rational and psychologising qualities of language. Through the medium of performance he could create a signifying system composed of gestures and bodily signs, affects and intensity of experience where something of the body could be both represented and transcended. Adrian Morfee (2005) describes Artaud’s gestural language of performance as a syntax of bodily drives (p. 5), therefore extending the signification of the physical body beyond the semantical impositions of everyday linguistic sense.

In his conception of cruelty, Artaud wanted to assault the spectator with the double of life on stage, a spectacle so intense that through the realm of affect it could

potentially liberate the viewer and himself from unconscious conflicts. This was a style of theatre that would shock people through the body, shaking them up from the habitual inertia of the everyday; a metaphysical project of transcendence. As he says in *Theatre and its Double:*

> To make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express: to make use of it in a new, exceptional, and unaccustomed fashion; to reveal its possibilities for producing physical shock (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 46).

With this metaphysical project, Artaud attempts to touch the impossible through theatre, to render absence as presence; to transcend the limitations of language. In subsequent chapters, I will explore how this idea manifests and the implications for considering the position of the body in Artaud's work. For the moment, we can consider that Artaud wanted to suture the split between the conscious and unconscious as it related to the divide between materiality and representation.[9]

Or to put it differently, Lotringer states that Artaud's mission on Earth was "to liberate the body and its abject organic libido from its bewitchment by the incorrigible human mass" (2003/2015, p. 55). This bewitchment by the incorrigible human mass is addressed in Artaud's famous concept of "the body without organs" (see Chapter 5, 3.1), a concept that worked to free the subject from the chains of the physical body.

Although Artaud's artistic vision straddles the impossible, the Theatre of Cruelty delimited the possibilities of understanding the representation of the body in theatre and beyond. In this sense, the Theatre of Cruelty and its limits also provide an essential backdrop to exploring the dramatic works of Beckett and Genet and the role of the spectator within the dialectic of art and audience. We shall now look to considering failure as it relates to the body and as an aesthetic in the analysis of the dramatic works. This is an aesthet(h)ics that contains the possibility of thinking through an ethical stance to the body, which is a body that fails.

[9] According to Lotringer (2015), the file at Sainte-Anne specified that Artaud was suffering from "a magic bewitchment torturing his language and thinking. Split personality."(p. 59).

3. STAGES OF FAILURE

3.1. Failure and the Body

The body we possess does not always (or ever) match up to our expectations of it; it can falter, interrupt us through pain, illness, fall prey to accidents and eventually we will die as a result of its finite condition. Hamm in *Endgame* describes this entropic process as one of loss: "But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 97). Although as I have already said, trauma is an integral component of embodiment, particular events of the body can cause a more severe rupture in the day to day semblance of bodily integrity and have an alienating and traumatic effect on subjectivity. By interrogating the presence of failure as a motif in the chosen dramatic works, this analysis shall open onto what Lisa Dietrich (2005) has called "an ethics of failure". A trajectory of analysis that takes account of failure, absence and 'subjective destitution' as immanent to the very constituents of embodied existence. In *Anti Heroic Cancer Narratives* (2005), Dietrich describes how discourses of health and cancer often refuse the reality of people who do not experience recovery, where an insistence on positivity and cure elides the valid and equally heroic stories of those who die from the disease.[10]As Dietrich argues regarding the discourse of cancer, words such as: battle, survivor, lost and won are indicative of an assumption that a person has agency relative to the disease. Of course, it would be inaccurate to say that we have no agency in the course of the disease, and incorrect to suggest that nothing could be done, but the suggested implications concerning the level of agency in popular culture are overdetermined. The representation of diseases as battles that we may win or lose points to the desire for mastery over the body and subsequently, the spectre of chance, a huge factor in the outcome of the disease is largely denied. The resistance to these non-recovery narratives can be understood within the context of the pressure

[10]A recuperation of the topic of failure, as something which is not inherently negative has become under increased focus. As Jack Halberstam argues, "While failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life (2011, p. 3).

of societal normative expectations of how a body should work. Thus, negative attitudes towards these bodies are shaped through the lens of convention.

Failure is also a word that connotes aspects of the subjective experience of acquiring damage to the body.[11] The limitations induced by disease, including sensations of physical pain, can be felt like a rupture at the level of the organism - something is not working out within the body. As evidenced in the title of Lisa I. Iezzoni's research on mobility problems in "*When Walking Fails*" (2003) and the following passage concerning experiences of bodily impairment:

> Some people refer to their bodies in the third person, as does Sally Ann Jones: "I say to my feet, 'Move, dammit!' And they say, 'no. We are on strike.' "Candy Stoops experiences an eerie dual reality: "it's almost like your brain is saying, 'Do something! Do something!' And your body is not responding. In my mind, I'm doing something, but in reality, my limbs are not moving." (2003, p. 70).

Furthermore, although certain situations bring a sense of failure into stark relief, failure (at the level of the body and representation) is also something that accompanies all states of embodiment. There is always a gap between the body (and indeed the organism) as we imagine it to be and that which it 'is' concerning both ourselves and other embodied subjects.

The concept of failure as an embodied phenomenon can be understood through the prism of psychoanalytic theory. In a Lacanian reading, failure is at the core of the construction of subjectivity; the failure of ever reaching total self-presence or harmony. As Lacan says regarding the connection between the unconscious and failure:

> A knot can fail, just as much as the Unconscious is there to show us that it is starting from, that it is starting from its own consistency, that of the Unconscious, that there are a whole lot of failures (Lacan, 1975-76, Feb, 17th).

In Chapter 2, on the theory of the body, we will look more closely at failure within a subjective context and the limits of representation as it concerns the relationship between the subject and body.

[11] As Jackie Leach Scully (2009) explains, physical experience may be outside the realm of cognitive experience and hence scenarios of physical rupture are not adequately conveyed in language. Elaine Scarry (1985) has a similar view on pain.

3.2. Recuperating the Tragic

The characterisation of failure as a bodily phenomenon is a provocation that highlights the tension between the ideal body, rendered as desirable in the cultural imaginary (represented through the channels of media, film and advertising) and a less visible tragic body that is renounced overtly or tacitly as undesirable and problematic.[12]The antithesis to health and happiness. Another way of thinking about this is that in our current times, socio-cultural discourse propagates a "demand for happiness" and this demand is also reflected in the type of bodies that are deemed acceptable or that can contribute to 'happiness'. Lacan commented on this demand in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, stating that regarding the client who demands happiness, the only response to this is one of desire, which circles an absence. He argues against making prescriptions for what would constitute a good life:

> The ethics of psychoanalysis has nothing to do with speculation about prescriptions for, or the regulation of, what I have called the service of goods. Properly speaking, that ethics implies the dimension that is expressed in what we call the tragic sense of life (1959-60/1997, p. 313).

This tragic sense of life, as Lacan calls it, is crucial to the nature of failure as it is conceptualised within this thesis and to its figuration within the representation of the body in the dramatic works.

In the *Culture of Pain*, Desmond Morris (1991) advocates a return to the study of classical tragedy as a means of accessing a truth concerning the trajectory of the body. Greek tragedies such as *Philoctetes* teach us that the body must endure through defeat, a truth that modern medicine works to deny. Morris says that this exposition of suffering in dramatic tragedy teaches us how to endure and confront the limitations of the body. This connection of tragedy to the inherent fragility of the body can be aligned with what Maeterlinck termed the '*tragique quotidien'* or the tragedy of everydayness (McGuinness, 2000). The ultimate tragic fate of human existence is that of the decay and death of our bodies; we are subject to this fate and the wheels of chance in determining the nature of this demise. McGuinness points

[12] We could also think of the ideal body as associated with cultural images of thin, 'aesthetically perfect' or cosmetically enhanced bodies that 'feed' into the imaginary (as in body image) component of eating disorders. See *Bodies* (2009) by Susie Orbach.

out that staging this tragedy of everydayness is not easy to do as something of day to day reality evades direct capture and remains in an almost invisible zone, where it is experienced but not known objectively. Similarly, in *The New Wounded* (2007/2012), Catherine Malabou provides an account of the subjective impact of neurological damage, and refers to Beckett's work as an example of a 'theatre of absence'. In Beckett's theatre, the stage gives voice to an exhaustion of being, an absence of sense associated with the contingencies of the physical body. As she says, "the theatre of exhaustion gives voice to coolness as absence of sense, staging it as absence of persistence, of revivification, or of regression" (p. 56).

This tragic and finite dimension of the body is a reality that we try to shield ourselves from and that the imaginary register of identification (the ego and its vicissitudes) veils to some degree. Of course, it is also, and this is what makes the human subject so complex, a dimension which we are also drawn towards in the morbid vicissitudes of *jouissance* or simply as subjects who while fearing the unknown also find it compelling. We like to take a chance with chance so to speak. We shall now consider how failure is a motif and stylistic feature of the work of Artaud, Beckett and Genet.

3.3. An Aesthet(h)ics of Failure

As I have just outlined, failure is a structural component of embodiment, one that cannot be avoided in the trajectory of life. Given that we are mortal beings and in this sense "beings unto death", it could be said that the inherent entropy at the heart of subjectivity is the necessary spark for all acts of creativity. Indeed, we could say that all art is driven by failure, the failure of words to fully represent the nature of human experience. In the following passage, Beckett affirms that to be an artist is to fail, even to be driven to fail and that this is an impossible but necessary obligation of the creative act:

> [T]o be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living. No, no allow me to expire. I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admonition, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new form of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of the impossibility, of its obligation. (Beckett quoted in Calder, 2001, p. 83).

This passage is very redolent of the paradoxes inherent to Beckett's work regarding the predicament of the human subject in relation to expression, speech and communication. This "new form of relation" as he puts it, born of the impossibility of the creative act incorporates failure as that very relation. In this idea of relation there is an ethical impulse, which Rabaté (2016) defines as Beckett's "ethics of nonrelation," puncturing the "humanistic illusion that we are alike": "On the contrary, it is because we are all infinitely different that a true rapport can be posited" (p. 91). Thus, we could call this "ethics of non-relation" an ethics of the radical Otherness of the human subject, the opening of an abyss where meaning does not function to shield us from the reality of this non-relation. Similarly, both Artaud and Genet share a relationship with this idea of radical Otherness, not that it is equivalent to Beckett, but certainly crosses over at various junctures. Carl Lavery (2003) argues that the figure of the wound is of great importance for Genet regarding an ethics of the Other as radical difference. We shall look at this in more detail in Chapter 5. For Artaud, language failed to provide a means of accessing being, and his theatre generates another 'form' of representation that could ultimately bypass the failure of language in an attempt to bridge the non-relation of self and body.

In tracing points of the trauma of the body in the work of Artaud, Beckett and Genet, the idea of the non-relation shall be of critical importance. This idea shall be examined in relation to the alienation of meaning and the otherness of the body (Chapter 3) and the non-rapport of the sexual relationship as the trauma of the sexed being. (Chapter 4). We shall see that motifs of failure are both a function of plot and the spatial signification of the stage, either as embedded within the scenography (Genet), the restricted body (Beckett) or as a bodily signifier (Artaud) contained within performance. For example, the scream, as an auditory emission from the human body and one of the most primal utterances we can make in response to pain is a prominent element in Artaud's work, in particular in one of his last productions before his death *For Having Done with the Judgement of God* (1947). The scream (or attempts at) is also an important feature of several of Beckett's plays such as *Not I* and *Play* and in Genet's *The Balcony.* At the level of the body, a scream marks the point at which something fails, as a result of physical or emotional pain, a shock, or a traumatic encounter that triggers the flight or fight response. A scream in this sense is at the border of representation, a point at which language fails.

Fundamentally, as I envisage it, an aesthet(h)ics of failure may stimulate a desire for knowledge in the viewer, for that which cannot be seen in its entirety but is stimulated by the visual image. In the following sections, we now consider the nature of representation in theatre to determine its particularities as an art form and to explore the nature of staging a paradox.

4. PERFORMING PARADOX

4.1. The Language of Theatre

The art form of theatre is a communicative medium that utilises particular modalities of signification both verbal and non-verbal, textual and performative. In this sense, it has a 'language' of its own. To think of theatre as operating as a language does not mean that it functions exactly like verbal language, but rather that analogies (and tensions) exist with the unconscious processes of signification that operate through what Lacan discovered as metaphor and metonymy.[13]

A theatrical performance signifies or performs meaning differently to other artistic mediums such as film and outlining these differences highlights some of the essential features of the enunciating form of theatre. The recorded images of a film convey objects in a fictional frame with a higher degree of verisimilitude than theatre. A tree depicted on screen is often an actual tree, but on stage, an object would come to stand in for a tree; such as a piece of painted cardboard, or as in an early production of *Waiting for Godot* a variety of coat hangers twisted together. By referring to semiotic theory, I do not wish to suggest that theatre emits meanings to be interpreted in a totalising way by reading signifiers as signs. Instead, it is to highlight its potential as a complex signifying apparatus and to explore the implications for considering the impact on the subjectivity of the spectator. As Issacharoff (1989) points out, performance is a type of discourse, and one must specify the nature of the discourse under analysis. For example, theatre has particular representative devices that are unique to it. Ostension is one such device and involves an act of

[13] In a similar vein, the unconscious is a not specific language but functions as one. As Lacan says, "The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject. Consequently, the unconscious is structured like a language" (1964, p. 149).

representation by showing where an object on stage is pointed to as being the thing itself (Elam, 2005, p. 19). Objects such as an apple, a chair or a hat can simply be an apple, a chair or a hat. However, in the aesthetic and fictional sense, what is shown on stage refers to another world which is not seen. There is something present in excess of what can be seen. Similarly, the written text that inspires the performance is out of sight, in another space. Thus, the paradox of showing and not seeing is intrinsic to the signifying structure of theatre.

In the structure of theatrical representation, meaning is polysemic. Theorists of theatrical semiotics such as Ubersfeld (1999) and Elam (2005) have interrogated the meaning and communication systems of performance as a complex and diverse system. As Elam points out, it is important to distinguish between the written word and visual performance (*ibid*, p. 5). In line with this distinction, I analyse the dramatic works in this thesis as both text and performance but do not reduce them to each other. Theatrical semiotics is a useful means of considering the many avenues of signification arising from the combination of verbal and non-verbal expressions on stage. In this analysis, elements of linguistic representation such as the signifier, signified, and referent become particular to the context of performance and the interaction with the audience. In this way, we can account for spectatorship (the reception of a play) as a function of the system of signification that is particular to performance. The fictional worlds and imaginative spaces that theatre depicts exist as a dialectic between performance and audience. From the perspective of communications theory, there is a sender and an addressee in the form of the actors on stage and the audience (Elam, 2005). In exploring theatrical representation, we can forge a bridging point between thinking of the body on stage as a material (actual) entity and considering it as a signifier – that which is perceived by the spectator. The body of the actor is a 'real' body plus any codifications it may entail, such as costume, mannerisms and the dialogue spoken. As Elam states: "In traditional dramatic performance the actor's body acquires its mimetic and representational powers by becoming something other than itself, more and less than individual" (2005, p. 6). This phenomenon of becoming more and less than itself is directly a function of an aesthetic platform. Also, as we briefly touched on, the perception of the viewer is always coloured by individual subjectivity and that aspect of the body which cannot be rendered visible.

Most importantly, for this study, as Chiesa points out, the system of signification comprised of signifiers is not just reduced to words but can be body movements, gesturing, fragments of words:

> [W]hat is more, the signifier does not necessarily correspond to a word (in a sentence): oppositional units at all hierarchical levels of language,from the phoneme to the sentence, can function as signifiers. Human body language—for example, shaking one's head, nodding, waving, and so on—insofar as it is equivocal, can also work as a signifier (2007, p. 49).

Although the quality of liveness is the *sine qua non* of theatre's method, where actions take place before our eyes in the here and now - this here and now is embedded within a salient fictional frame. In other words, it is a representation of the 'now'. Liveness does not equate with actuality; that is if we associate actuality with fact and reality, rather it is another layer of fiction. As spectators, we can never escape the fictionality of theatre. And yet, the fictional component of theatre can, by its very emphasis on illusion, call into question the nature of fantasy and reality as experienced by the spectator.

There is a fundamental paradox inherent to the concept of presence in theatre, as Power argues: "Presence in theatre does not equate to a stable "here and now" but is far more ambiguous than this simple formulation would suggest" (2008, p. 9). The significance of theatre lies not only in confronting us with immediacy (or immediacy as representation), but it leaves impressions that may affect us at a later point. Not everything that happens is happening now. The human mind takes time to process what it experiences, not all connections or pathways of thought happen immediately (p. 44). The linguistic mechanisms of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche all feature strongly in an analysis of theatrical representation as functions of the substitutive process of representation. A study of the language of theatre (in this, I include performance) related to the body can pave the way to conceptualising the body beyond its material frame. A body on stage can become more than the static representation of its actual form through the surrounding communication devices inherent with production and with its reception by the gaze of the spectator. This idea of the extension of the body through the usual parameters of representation is encapsulated in Artaud's concept of "the body without organs" (Chapter 5). I shall develop this idea at a later point, but briefly, the body without organs is a concept

that envisages an extension of the body beyond its physical frame. In other words, the pastiche of signification pertinent to the theatre can be conceived as an extension of the physical body. Therefore we can say that the aesthetic form of theatre dislocates the body from its usual surroundings and raises it to a platform of another space.

4.2. Dislocated Bodies: A Function of Theatrical Space

As Peter Brook surmises, to create an act of theatre, there must simply be a space and a spectator, a location and an observer:

> I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged (Brook, 1968/1996, p. 7).

From this perspective, to contextualise the body in theatre we must think of it as existing in a particular space. This particular artistic space alters the contours of the body as it is perceived, given that the stage setting raises the body of the actor to an aesthetic signifier. Of course, the bodies of the actors are 'actual' and belong to real people, but as spectators, we perceive the events taking place with what Ubersfeld (1999) calls a minus sign, the characteristic symbol of performance. This minus sign is a function of the fictionality of the stage setting, including the parameters of space and the objects that exist within these limits (p. 24). The minus sign of theatrical signification is linked with the theoretical focus of this thesis; the orientation of the concept of absence as a characteristic of the dramatic works. The minus sign is a symbol; it indicates that something is missing, and relates to the substitutive process of one object for another, or one signifier standing in for another. As Ubersfeld states: "A chair on the stage is not a chair in the real world. Spectators cannot go and sit on it, or move it somewhere else; for them it is forbidden, it does not exist" (p. 24). The chair does not exist in its usual format and as such, this implies a dislocation within the perception of the viewer relative to the object on stage. The object **is** there, but it is not there in the way I would usually experience, where I would have the freedom to sit on it. Thus, it is removed from the usual perceptual co-ordinates.

In this sense, the stage space inherently dislocates the body of the actor; it renders it strange from the everyday setting enacting a distance from the habitual imaginary. The term dislocation conveys a dual meaning: that of physical injury and that of an

altered position in space such as the dislocation of refugees from their homeland or a part of the body not where it should be. In both of these senses, dislocation can be traumatic and alters an individual's perception of reality; a disturbance has occurred, and suddenly, things may not make sense.

In speaking of theatrical discourse Michael Issacharoff (1989) discusses the effects of elimination and juxtaposition occurring in certain styles of drama. Something is removed (-), and something is added to forge new metaphors. In this sense, theatre dislocates how we encounter bodies and allows for a shift in how we conceive of everyday reality. In Beckett's *Eh Joe* (1965), Joe's staged body is dislocated from language and from the image of the face. The stage setting consists of Joe sitting on the bed, subject to a voice coming from somewhere - his face is then projected onto a screen in front of the audience. In this dislocated image, we have a clear representation of the Lacanian split subject, the body that serves as a reminder of the material presence of the character. Relative to the magnified image on the screen, this body is small in comparison, analogous with the role of the image in the subjective economy. Joe's facial image and emotional gestures juxtaposed with the narrating female voice confront the spectator with multiple representations of the same person, confusing whether it is Joe speaking or someone else. In this play, which was initially made for television and subsequently adapted to the stage, Beckett manages to perform a dissociation between body and voice, image and materiality revealing one of the essential facets of embodied subjectivity, the gap between speech and body. The 'I' who speaks is in a perpetual deferral from that to which it refers, given the matrix of shifting layers of identity - the I is never a stable position.

The theatrical space automatically restricts the movements of a body as the physical environment creates the contours of possible action for the actors and acts as a framing device. Space defines the body, and the body inflects the meaning of space. As Westphal (2011) says: "Space revolves around the body, just as the body is located in space. The body gives the environment a spatiotemporal consistency" (p. 64). From a phenomenological perspective, our bodies are intimately connected with the world and the objects around them; they extend into space and into the world. Objects or material edifices such as a house, or a theatre space are examples of

embodied spaces in that they allow for an extension of the body into the world. As Westphal points out, these material spaces are first realised in the imagination. In connecting the processes of representation with the lived spaces of our environment, Westphal states: "As for lived space, it is constituted by the spaces of representation, which is to say, lived spaces are experienced through images and symbols'' (p. 76).

From this perspective, the body in theatre is an example of a conceived and lived space as it is constituted both as a material substance and through the registers of images and symbols. In the fields of art and culture, the body is also a site of intertextuality, revealing its complicity in a semiotic system of representation and not simply an object of pure corporeal materiality. As a result, the body is somewhat of a discursive product that is subject to the signifying effects of language and other mediums. The body becomes an unstable agent susceptible to external forces. The multiplicity of devices of representation and signification on the stage and the breadth of performance-based semiotics, demonstrate how difficult it is to pin down a material referent for the body, be that concerning place or space. Dramatic space forms a mediating point between the performativity of reality and the unreality of performance. We are not only dealing with the distance between two points, that which separates objects, but also the space connecting points. It is within this space that absence is framed.

4.3. Mediating the Gap

> There can be no complete theater which does not take account of these cartilaginous transformations of ideas; which does not add to our fully known feelings the expression of states of mind belonging to the half-conscious realm, which the suggestions of gestures will always express more adequately than the precise localized meanings of words (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 109).

In the above quote, Artaud privileges the signifying potential of gestures over the more relocatable meaning of words. For him, theatre was a place where we can access the half-conscious realm, and avail of a form of representation superior to language. Artaud is aware that language cannot say 'the all' of being. In this way, his writings indicate an awareness of what Lacan referred to as the Real. The Real is always beyond representation - the zone of the impossible where thought alone

cannot reach. We cannot grasp the nature of being through thought, as thought is related to language. As Lacan says, in contrast to Descartes's *cogito*:

> Being cannot be grasped as thought except in an alternating fashion. It is in a succession of alternating moments that he thinks, that his memory appropriates its thinking reality without this thinking being at any moment able to join up with itself in its own certainty (Lacan, 1961-62, Seminar 2, Nov 22nd).

As Lacan indicates above, and as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 2, something of being escapes representation within thought as it is intrinsic to the very structure of the linguistic composition of subjectivity and inherent to the relation of the signifier with the body. In this study of the trauma of the body in theatre, I argue that theatrical performance has the potential to work dialectically with the imagination of the spectator to forge new metaphors and by so doing, mediate the Real of being. Thus, through the mediation of metaphors, poetic constructions serve to expand the parameters of individual subjectivity. As Lacan argues:

> What are these great mythical themes which the creations of poets tackle throughout the ages if not a kind of long approximation which ensures that the myth by circumscribing its possibilities in the closest possible way ends up by entering properly speaking into subjectivity and psychology. I maintain, and I would maintain unambiguously - and I think I am in accord with Freud in saying it - that poetic creations engender rather than reflect psychological creations (Lacan, 1958-59, Session 13, March 4th).

In engendering rather than simply reflecting psychological creations, we hear the potential for the direct influence of literature and poetic works on the psychic and indeed physical life of the human being. Myth and the poetic structures of fiction are intrinsically linked to our psychological processes and poetry enters our imaginations and alters us as a result. Literature is both created from the subject and creative as the subject.

A central argument in this research is that a lack of knowledge about the body is inherent to subjectivity; something of our embodied being is lived but not known. As we saw with Malabou's *New Wounded*, Samuel Beckett's theatre of absence works to address this unknowability of the wounded body by framing it on stage as an exhaustion of forms. I argue that despite the impossibility of representing being, through the poetics of performance, a spectator may encounter a particular form of knowledge, the knowledge that the unknown cannot be accurately represented. As I said earlier, working with absence is a crucial theoretical orientation point in the

work of the three authors. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is the loss of an original primordial object that haunts the parameters of representation, driving the quest for signification. We cannot make sense of this loss; it is outside of logic, relating to a preverbal state of development prior to the effects of differentiation. It may be tempting as with Artaud, to try to capture the *object a* (elaborated in section 3.1 Chapter 2) *within* theatre - that is to make something visible where it cannot be seen, to attempt to eradicate the distance within the act of representation and to fill the gap in knowledge with a product of sense. Alternatively, we can trace the contours and curvatures of what we consider to be reality and look to fiction as an analogy of the theatre of the subject. The events on stage are the referents for 'that which does not exist' in actuality rather than a reflection of reality. In this light, it is paradoxically the distance engendered by the fictional frame of performance that forms a productive encounter between the spectator's imagination and the events depicted.

Theatrical performances that emphasise an absence of sense at the core of reality can also have alienating effects. As Féral and Birmingham say concerning the social effects of an alienating performance:

> Alienation is, in fact, the passage between real and fictional orders that takes place on stage, the passage that transforms fiction into a discursive object, thereby introducing a rupture, the pertinence and effectiveness of which are measured on a socio-analytical scale (1987, p. 467).

These alienating ruptures within drama stimulate in the mind of the spectator the forging of new metaphors serving to expand the parameters of subjectivity. In the case of knowledge and representation of the body, and at the level of failure, systems of conventional meaning operate against the accurate representation of these experiences of the body. The signifying modalities of theatre revolve around the mechanisms of substitution, with representation taking different forms, not simply discourse and language. The first substitution that takes places in theatre is that of the performance in place of the text. The second is that of fiction for another fiction and not another reality.

In 'everyday' reality, there is always a fictional element attached to the identity of the subject. The ego is always acting, identifying with roles and images that are external to and not original to the self. We shall see this idea illustrated clearly in

Jean Genet's theatre of *The Maids* and *The Balcony*. The fact that fiction can represent the mechanisms of psychic reality (albeit of which we are not conscious) is perhaps why the absence of actuality on stage does not prevent the drama from having a powerful impact on our imaginations. The presence of distance or absence is necessary to provoke the metaphoric qualities of the imagination as we process the information received. In the following chapters, the concept of absence will orientate us within the dramatic style of each author, and we shall see the nuances of this theme as it concerns the body, as that which is both seen and not seen.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have approached the study of the body as a fundamental paradox of subjectivity and outlined how this contradiction is framed through theatrical representation. As we have seen, the connection between mind and body has fascinated thinkers, philosophers and scientists for centuries. Indeed, it is certainly evident from the writings and theatre of Artaud and Beckett that the nature of embodiment was of central concern in thematic content and structure. In Genet's theatre, this relationship is not so overt, but the contours of the body are drawn through the hall of mirrors that constitutes his theatre and the analogue of the imaginary drama that is everyday subjectivity. In approaching the critical factors of this opening paradox, we saw that the signifiers of mind-body are relative to historical contexts and the meanings that are attributed to these terms. Reductionist and misappropriated determinations concerning cause (within an epistemology of the body) have been prominent; either the mind is given undue agency over the body, and we are purported to be masters of our destiny, or the opposite elision takes place. These reductionistic interpretations concern a difficulty concerning knowledge of the body and indeed what we mean when we refer to this body at all. This chapter has delineated key features of the argument in this thesis surrounding the body, that of knowledge, representation and failure as a point in which discordance and fracture comes to light. In delineating an aesthetics of failure, the momentum of the theatrical work of Artaud, Beckett and Genet is brought to bear on re-considering the body from the perspective of an ethics where failure is at the heart of meaning. An aesthet(h)ics of failure, that which concerns both the representation of the body and

the processes of signification pertaining to theatre, is something they all share. These signifying processes of the dramatic medium convey that which is absent through the paradoxical effect of presence as a function of the fictional modality of performance. We are now in a position to move to Chapter 2, where we shall explore a more detailed elaboration of the theoretical points concerning the body within a framework of Lacanian theory. In particular, we shall look to the concept of trauma and alienation as a central characteristic of embodiment and consider its relevance to the dramatic works of the three authors. In Chapters 3 and 4, these concepts will then be applied to a reading of particular dramatic works. As we shall see, the body is always more or less than what it seems.

CHAPTER 2.

THE BODY: A TRAUMA OF THE SPEAKING BEING

"The relationship to the body is not, in any man, a simple relationship" (Lacan, 1975-1976, Seminar 11, 2nd May).

1. FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A DIVIDED SUBJECT

In the previous chapter, I delineated the paradox of the body as it relates to subjectivity, which laid the foundation for a discussion of the topic in relation to my three chosen authors. In this chapter, a theoretical framework of the body is devised that will facilitate the exploration of the representation of the body in the dramatic works in subsequent chapters. This framework draws together some of Lacan's concepts and ideas that are most relevant to the body, and then situates these ideas within the context of this research. As I pointed out in the introduction, Lacan's work is voluminous and spans several decades with significant concepts becoming altered and shifting over time. Thus, the following elaboration of ideas is not exhaustive but particular to the nature of this present study. There will also be some concepts that I cannot do justice to within the scope of this research, in particular, that of the gaze and the *sinthome*. Also, as there is no unified or totalising Lacanian theory (Nobus, 1997, p. xi), we cannot simply apply a ready-made model that would draw out a form of knowledge *a priori*). Thus, the concepts and the emphasis of the theoretical framework in the following sections are structured to focus in particular on the body in the dramatic work of Artaud, Beckett and Genet and to mediate the complexities of the comparative context.

As I have outlined in chapter 1, the theoretical premise of this thesis is that the human subject is divided, split and decentered in relation to the 'I' of the Cartesian *cogito*. Consequently, the subject has no essence or substance, nothing that could be classified as material and concrete; it is, in fact, what Verhaeghe describes as a pre-ontological nonbeing. As he states:

> The important thing about the divided subject is that it has no essence, no ontological substance, but, on the contrary, comes down to a pre-ontological, indeterminate non-being which can only give rise to an identity, an ego, in retrospect (2002, p. 13).

A Lacanian methodology provides a lens to understand the construction of subjectivity and the role of the body as that which is not merely a flesh and blood entity but also a construct, a signifier and an assemblage that is always more or less than its physical frame. Lacan places emphasis on the singularity of the human subject, a perspective that defies the generalisations inherent to certain modes of philosophical and psychological thought. The fact that the human being is a speaking being (a *parlêtre*) implies the critical presence of language within the very 'substance' of our existence. The 'essence' of being is tied to the signifier. As Lacan says, "if he did not speak, he would not have the word being" (1974-75, Seminar 6, Feb 18th).

That is to say, if we obtain our being from the fact that we speak the very concept of being is a function of language. The subjection of the human subject to language takes place even before birth through the signifiers used to refer to us. We are in part the effect of the signifier: "it is from the effect of the signifier that the subject as such emerges." (Lacan, 1961-62, Seminar IV, Dec 12th). In conceptualising being as a function of language and not as pure immanence (a natural substance) Lacan's theory differs from materialistic conceptions of being where the body is understood to be material and privileged as symmetrical with the world.

The Lacanian 'speaking being' poses a challenge to the fantasy and cultural ideal of an autonomous self-governing subject who masters the vicissitudes of the body through a strengthening of the ego as the dominant principle. While other therapies, (including post-Freudian ego psychology) aimed at strengthening the ego to reinforce a belief in the rational and conscious self; where the I of the statement is taken to refer to a knowable entity, Lacan categorically rejected the notion that an ideal ego state could be reached, in favour of what has become referred to at the end of analysis as - "subjective destitution" (Verhaeghe & Declercq, 2002, p. 11).[14] While psychoanalysis aims to disentangle the subject from the desire of the Other, (through the process of speaking and scanning the unconscious) and to allow for a subjectivation of desire as singular, this is not a freedom based on finding the last word on oneself. On the contrary, as Beckett encountered in his writings through

[14] Verhaeghe makes the point that although subjective destitution is widely attributed to Lacan, this is the result of Slavoj Žižek's extensive commentaries on it.

texts such as *The Unnamable*, there can be no 'last word' to the articulations of the subject, no point at which the question of 'who am I' is answered adequately. The ground is always shifting beneath the personal pronoun. The very structure of the signifier proves that the 'last word' is impossible. This is also a critical point when considering an approach to literary and dramatic analysis.

We shall now turn to consider the role of psychoanalysis within literary studies in order to identify the position of the unconscious within this methodology.

1.1. Staging the Unconscious

The application of psychoanalysis to the artistic and literary domain is not without its tensions. As Azari reassuringly explains:

> There is a downside to every academic daring to write on Lacan and especially the use of his clinical and theoretical works for literary theory and criticism. Every time I describe or interpret Lacan's obscure points or argue with him, I wish to write in a parenthesis: [if I am right!] (2008, p. 8).

Apart from grappling with Lacan's concepts that change over time and destabilise the reader within the context of meaning, we also have the issue of knowledge and the question of reading the unconscious in a nonclinical setting. That is a setting that is not particular to the speech of one person in the presence of another.

However, Freud and Lacan have often turned to literature and drama to illustrate and indeed to verify the nature of their theoretical arguments. As Lacan said, philosophical thought is integrated with that which is artistic and literary: "Philosophy is moreover in no way to be distinguished from the artistic, from the literary" (Lacan, 1974-75, Seminar IX, April 8th)

Interestingly, in *The New Black*, psychoanalyst and Darian Leader describes turning to literature to explore the nature of subjective experiences regarding depression, loss and melancholia and the corresponding dearth of information on this experience in the scientific field. As he says: "It then occurred to me that perhaps the scientific literature on mourning that I had been searching for was simply all literature" (Leader, 2008, p. 6). Thus, we can see from Leader's discovery that qualities and 'truths' of subjective experience are often better documented through the arts rather than through so-called empirical sciences. Poetic expression and the expanses of

metaphor may succeed in transmitting subjective experience that other modes of expression may stifle.

Indeed, Azari explains that psychoanalysis and literature share the same object of study: while literature illustrates and dramatises human subjectivity, "psychoanalysis stages the theoretical *mise-en acte* of what literature shows" *(*Azari, 2008, p. 2). With these words, and by emphasising the 'dramatic' quality of psychoanalytic theory, Azari strikes a chord with the focus of this research. In other words, the staging of the subject through the production of theory.

Lacan's seminars are permeated with literary references and examples, including ones gleaned from theatre and drama. These include but are not limited to *The Balcony* in Seminar V, *Hamlet* in Seminar VI concerning tragedy and desire and *Antigone* in Seminar VII. In Seminar XXIII, Lacan develops the theory of the *sinthome* through a focus on Joyce and the position of the artist. In earlier years Lacan's path crossed with the Surrealists, and he published in *Le Minotaure* in 1933 on the topic of paranoia. According to Roudinesco, Lacan had been influenced by Salvador Dali in developing his theories of language and psychosis. In his doctoral thesis, Lacan investigated the case of Aimée, a woman who attacked a well-known French actress called Huguette Duflos in a state of what he called '*délire à deux'*. His insights into this case led him to apply this theory of paranoia to the case of the Papin sisters, the two maids who killed their mistress and her daughter in a violent act of murder (Roudinesco, 1997). Jean Genet's play *The Maids* was inspired by this famous crime, with some significant nuances and distinctions. We shall see in Chapter 3 how Lacan's theory of paranoia, focused on this particular play, serves to shed light on the tenuous boundaries of love and hate as the polarities of narcissistic structure in *The Maids*.

Given that the unconscious is a central component of this methodology concerning a theory of the body, it is essential to consider what this entails for its application to the dramatic texts. From the outset, a fundamental tension arises in how to read or account for the unconscious (as it relates to the body) in this study. This tension is elaborated in the following quote by Lacan, where he states that a literary work is not an imitation of the effects of the unconscious. In other words, we cannot merely read a text or performance as a manifestation of the unconscious, but rather as an

"equivalent" (Rabaté, 2001, p. 3). It is that which actively forms part of the structural curvature of the unconscious rather than as an imitation. Lacan says:

> [T]he literary work succeeds or fails, but not in imitating the effects of structure. It only exists in the curvature which is that itself of the structure. This is not there an analogy. The curvature in question is no more a metaphor of the structure than the structure is the metaphor of the reality of the unconscious. It is the real of it and it is in this sense that the work does not imitate anything. It is, as fiction, a truthful structure. (Lacan, 1977, p. 10).

Therefore, examining artworks through the prism of Lacan's ideas does not entail reducing a dramatic literary work to an interpretation of the unconscious, a symptom of neurosis or as some sort of concrete meaning. As Rabaté explains, the act of writing is caught up in the processes of the unconscious, there is always an unknown knowledge at work from the position of the author, not least the reader, and in this sense, it would be wrong to reduce the 'meaning' of a text to a product of empiricism. Hence, my reading of these dramatic works and the theoretical position concerning the body rests on identifying analogues of the unconscious through which the model of the body can be presented and indeed critiqued. In thinking of analogues, we maintain a distance from creating signifieds for the unconscious. Nonetheless, this is not without the tension of falling into giving "examples" to support a view or trying to find an anchor within representation to pin down an abstract idea. However, this may be mitigated by thinking of the nature of dramatic structure, rather than imitation. We shall keep this idea in mind as we move through the following sections that concern Lacanian concepts as they relate to the 'nature' of the body.

2. THE SUBJECT AND THE BODY: A NON-RELATION

As I have already outlined, there is a fundamental discontinuity at the heart of embodiment as it concerns the signifiers of body and mind. In this section, we extend this idea by elaborating on the role of the unconscious as it involves the subject and the body. In light of the unconscious, we move away from the binary of the mind/ body paradigm and incorporate a more complex account of subjectivity, where there are more elements at work than simply two separate substances.

As a concept (and indeed as a phenomenon), the unconscious is not easy to 'locate' theoretically, (particularly as something of the unconscious lies outside representation) but I will use Lacan's definitions in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964) as a guiding principle. Fundamentally, and somewhat counterintuitively, the unconscious is something that is outside the subject, as Lacan says: "*the unconscious is the discourse of the Other* ... Now, the discourse of the Other that is to be realized, that of the unconscious, is not beyond the closure, it is *outside* ." (1964, p. 134). Thus, rather than existing in locatable space, the unconscious manifests as a phenomenon of discontinuity: "discontinuity then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon – discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation" (*ibid*, p. 25). Lacan explains that the unconscious is not something clear-'cut' as it were, but rather functions as that cut, a discontinuity within the conventions of meaning resulting in a rupture or vacillation of sense. In this way, the unconscious operates as a "rupture, split" (*ibid*, p. 26); it is in the flash of this momentary opening that the subject of the unconscious reveals itself. Lacan's conception of the unconscious differed from that of Freud, most notably in the nature of its structure. For Lacan, the unconscious is not a basement space full of repressed desires but instead exists as a curve in space and time functioning within language as an Other space.[15]

As this Other space, the unconscious as a discontinuity, a "gap", an "unpublished word" (Lacan, 1971, Seminar 10, June 16th), marks the divide of the subject (of the unconscious) and indeed the ego (subject of the image) from the body. The relationship of the unconscious to the body is one of discontinuity, and this discontinuity will always subvert a stable or reliable conception of what a body is within the realm of meaning. As Lacan says:

> There is nothing in the unconscious - if it is made as I have stated to you - that makes an agreement with the body. The unconscious is discordant. The

[15] Although still a space of discontinuity, the Freudian unconscious was more topographical than topological. That is to say, it was schematised as more linear and stratified than circular. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud analyses the ways in which the unconscious manifests in everyday life. He coined the term parapraxis to designate a phenomenon where the unconscious is manifest as an error in the intentioned aim, such as a bungled action, a slip of the tongue, or a case of forgetting. A parapraxis denotes where a conscious intention is interrupted by a discontinuity, a presence of something unexpected that throws meaning into question.

> unconscious is that which, by speaking, determines the subject as being, but being to be removed from this metonymy, by which *I* support desire, as forever impossible to say as such. (Lacan, 1974-75, Seminar 4, Jan 22nd)

In *The Subject of Addiction* (2002), Rik Loose captures this discontinuity generated by language and the implications it has for our understanding of the subject of the unconscious: "Language, therefore, constitutes a subject and a body, but not in the same place—the subject is not the body…… Despite this fundamental disjunction there is a relationship but it is problematic in nature" (p. 179).
Therefore, if the subject and the body are not constituted in the same place, there can never be a direct synchrony of 'body and mind', rather as we shall see, layers of identity (related to the ego and the imaginary order), cover or veil the discord between subject and body. The imaginary gives consistency to the substance of the body: "There is no Imaginary which does not suppose a substance" (Lacan, 1974-75, Seminar 2, Dec 17th).

In other words, there is no final referent, signified or meaning that can be attributed to the subject's relationship to the materiality of the flesh, as this discontinuity is inherent to the signifier. The gap between the materiality of the body and the experience of it as image or signification has a traumatic component.

2.1. The Trauma of the Body: A Missed Encounter

As I have said in chapter 1, the emphasis in this thesis is on a Lacanian account of trauma that differs from traditional and chronologically inflected notions of trauma. Firstly, I will set out the resonances of the 'meaning' of trauma as I will apply it in subsequent chapters drawing on Lacan's account of the missed encounter in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*:

> What is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs... as if by chance.... The function of the tuche, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma. Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin? (Lacan, 1964, p. 55).

In this quote, Lacan draws on the Aristotelian concept of automaton and *tuche*, where automaton relates to the network of signifiers that encircles the void of meaning and *tuche* the Real. There is a connection made here between chance the Real and trauma; the real presents itself 'in the form of' a trauma.[16] From this perspective, an encounter with the Real is a missed encounter, something that by its very nature does not add up. As the Real is that aspect of human experience which resists symbolisation or is in excess of language, the nature of this missed encounter cannot be represented in words. Rather it ex-ists as the impossible dimension of the subject.

As a function of the missed encounter, the Real is, 'that which always comes back to the same place-the place where the subject does not meet it'' (Lacan, 1964/1978, p. 49). We may well ask then, what is this missed encounter? Fundamentally, it is the missed encounter of the signifier and the Real, and this missed encounter contains an element of chance. This is a trauma that differs from a narrative of a traumatic event. As Gil Caroz explains, "[Lacan] somehow purifies the Freudian theory of trauma. He empties it of the drama and the story that surrounds it and makes of the trauma a moment of encounter between the body and a trace of the signifier" (Caroz, n.d, p. 4). In other words, the missed encounter is the impossibility of the human subject to ever encounter the cause of being, as the cause is paradoxically both structural and yet outside of the subject. This impossibility is identifiable through the act of repetition. As Lacan pointed out in 1964, trauma is marked by the mechanism of repetition compulsion, but repetition can only repeat something as a missed encounter; it can never actually be the traumatic event itself.

In the chapters that follow, concerning the analyses of the plays, the model of the missed encounter will serve as a dramatic motif to identify points of failure regarding the subject and the body. These are points that prove productive in depicting the discord at the heart of embodiment. We shall also see in Chapter 4 on the trauma of sexuality, how the missed encounter relates to the nature of the non-rapport of the sexual relationship. In section 4.3 of this chapter, we shall look more closely at the idea of trauma within the field of literary studies, the nature of its burgeoning

[16] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to extrapolate on the very interesting implications of the intersections of chance, the Real and the body. Catherine Malabou's work on *The New Wounded* (2012) expands on what she feels to be a neglected component of psychoanalysis, the accidental as trauma within physical states of damage such as Alzheimer's disease.

popularity, and I will specify further the particular context it occupies in this thesis. For the moment, we shall look to the discord of subject and body in the context of dramatic structure and draw points of comparison with the structure of the unconscious.

2.2. Truth, the Unconscious and Dramatic Structure

The discord between the subject and the body creates slippages between temporality and meaning. For example, we speak of the body as that which is subject to time, ageing and mortality, whereas the subject of the unconscious does not have the same linear organisation; the subject exists in the interstices of the signifier. As Lacan says, "the sign is what represents something for someone, whereas the signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier" (1964/1978, p. 62). The unconscious, as Freud discovered, does not obey the same temporal sequences that conscious experience follows. This conception of the unconscious as a non-linear space and as a structurally 'curved' phenomenon provides a useful model to contextualise the dramatic styles of Artaud, Beckett and Genet. From this perspective, it is not so much that there are 'truths' buried in the unconscious, but rather that the unconscious **is** the lining of truth that disrupts the rational, cognitive, basis of knowledge. As Belau explains, through the metaphor of theatre:

> Psychoanalysis does not attempt to turn this negativity into something tenable or meaningful. Instead, it works at the level of this impossibility as an act of staging (rather than solving) the mystery of the subject's lost origin. (Belau, 2001)

Thus, we can think of a similar logic in relation to the style of the three authors. The ideas of truth and liberation, as a freedom from constraint, convention and repression are very significant when examining Artaud's drama, particularly his desire to liberate the unconscious through the mechanisms and affective excess of the spectacle. The drive to liberate the unconscious from repression incorporates a model of the unconscious in which truth is buried as something that can be released. Artaud's innovations of form placed the question of being within bodily existence, and the attempt to unveil a core nonmimetic self within the signifying structures of theatre. Artaud's theatre has been viewed as an attempt to bring forward the real truth

of life through the live and dramatic qualities of theatre. However, revealing a central core to the self is questionable. As Laurens de Vos contends:

> But whereas Artaud believed in the capability of the theater to bring forward the real truth of life, and to that purpose abandoned repetition, his postmodernist inheritor turns to Artaudian theatrical elements, precisely in order to show that the real does not exist[….] Postdramatic theater seems to share psychoanalysis's scepticism about the possibility of Artaudian unity. (De Vos, 2011).

The idea of affect and repression in Artaud's theatre (and its connection with psychoanalysis), will be discussed further in Chapter 5 when considering a more detailed account of the implications of this theatre of excess. While Artaud pursued the impossible quest of uncovering the truth of being through a vision of the unconscious as repressed, Beckett encapsulated this impossibility within the very structure of particular plays.

For example, in *Waiting for Godot,* the dramatic action is circular, raising the question of time, change, location and meaning for the viewer. There are allusions to a knowledge we (the spectator) do not have access to, nor the characters. Who is this Godot? Will he ever arrive? Taking waiting at face value here is to diminish the effect that it is Godot's lack of arrival, the missed encounter as it were, that points to something that has already happened, not that will or could happen in the future as waiting would imply. Godot does not appear as his nonappearance is structurally necessary to Vladimir and Estragon's existence which is supported by waiting, as per the nature of existence. From this perspective, it is not so much who or what Godot symbolises (as meaning) that should be questioned but rather how does this nonappearance or missed encounter of Godot structure the play (as non-meaning).

Thus, *Waiting for Godot* dramatises an existential question concerning cause and effect in relation to humanity. The structure of the play mirrors the space of the unconscious, movement and repetitive action circling something that, at its core, does not make sense. The continuation of the act of waiting in the play reveals that there is no single identifiable truth (meaning or signified) that can accurately account for our existence, nor truths buried in our unconscious, which, if released, would afford us relief.

In the theatre of Jean Genet, the structure of his plays reveals an ambiguity at the level of meaning. This is reflected in the manner in which he constructs a realm of

artifice on stage. The style of *The Maids* and *The Balcony* point to the dynamics of theatre, and representation per se and serves to critique theories that situate meaning as a privileged point of interpretation. Truth for Genet is farce, the bodies of the actors serving as vehicles for the pageantry of illusion which is conveyed through their metaphorical and literal costumes. As Kamenish (2003) argues, Genet was never concerned with telling the truth in his theatre, preferring the technique of deceit. This is in keeping with the emphasis in his novels on cowardice, betrayal and the aesthetics of the lie. Genet's theatre consists of layering deceptive mechanisms that serve to confuse the viewer between illusion and reality. A peeling away of these layers does not reveal a stable point of reference, a final anchor point but rather reveals yet another layer of alienation. Jean Genet's theatre is very often associated with the void, a hole in meaning that is revealed through the layers of artifice. We shall examine this idea in more detail in the analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters, but I would be slow in reducing the complexity of his theatre to this interpretation as while the void may indeed be delimited for Genet, it is also disavowed. This disavowal is clearer in the writings of his poetic novels, where metaphors of merging with the other, quite frequently through an erotic act, mark an absence that has been filled and the desire to escape from painful solitude.[17] In other words, alongside the figure of the void in Genet's work, there is also a fantasy of oneness, where the boundaries between self and other are infused with bodily fluids and psychic identities that merge and emerge from each other. We shall see the question of the void in Genet's work emerge in the next chapter, through the narcissistic entanglement of the two maids Claire and Solange and the nature of what is driving this coupling. Claire and Solange are alienated in their proximity to each other; they have not separated as individual subjects. On this note, we shall now look at a core theme of this methodology, the role of alienation in embodied subjectivity.

2.3. The Alienated Subject: The 'I' is an Other (Body)

[17] An example from *Our Lady of the Flowers,* "I was his at once, as if (who said that?) he had discharged through my mouth right to my heart. Entering me until there was no room left for myself, so that now I merge with gangsters, burglars and pimps, and the police mistakenly arrest me"(Genet, 1943/2004, p. 6).

A central proposition in this thesis concerns the fact that the body is an Other for the human being. We are never simply at one with our bodies, there is an inherent estrangement, at times more acute than others. Principally then, we are alienated as speaking beings from the very fact that we are embodied subjects. Although alienation has a long and diffuse history in philosophical thought, in the context of this research, this concept is employed from within the Lacanian paradigm in which language and Otherness are central to the construction of subjectivity. As Martin Jay (2018) has pointed out, Lacan's account of alienation, encapsulated within the poststructuralist turn, differs from his philosophical contemporaries and predecessors as it envisages alienation not as pathological and something to be overcome, but as structural, inevitable. In this sense, alienation marks the resistance to conceptions of the self that presume a wholeness or unity. In Lacanian terms, alienation is a function of the meaning systems we are born into, both as a consequence of the signifier and the function of the image as template for the body. The study of the body in and through the dramatic works demands that we take account of the orientation toward meaning and language as a context within which the body is situated. In this way, we shall be able to identify nuances concerning the complexity of this representation, where the body is not simply material, but also a signifier, an image and an absence. We shall see the implications of applying the paradigm of alienation in more detail in the following Chapter 3: (At the Limits of Meaning. Alienated Subjects: Wounded Figures). In this section, I identify the relationship between being, meaning and the body, moving to consider in more detail the role of the image and the imaginary in section 2.4.

Fundamentally for Lacan, the concept of alienation represents the situation of the divided subject, divided between meaning and being and between subject and body. In the context of language, alienation involves a forced choice and one to which the subject is condemned. Lacan refers to this as the *vel* (Latin word meaning or) of alienation – a forced choice between being and meaning: a choice which is, "neither one, nor the other" (Lacan 1964/1978, p. 211). As he says:

> Alienation consists in this ad, which—if you do not object to the word condemned, I will use it—condemns the subject to appearing only in that division which, it seems to me, I have just articulated sufficiently by saying that, if it

> appears on one side as meaning, produced by the signifier, it appears on the other as aphanisis (*ibid*, p. 211).

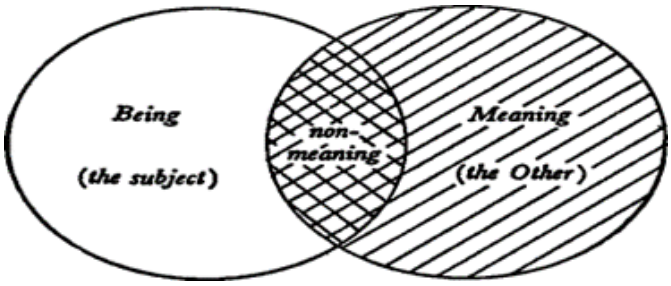

FIGURE 1 (P. 211).

As Lacan says here, the subject is condemned to appear only in that division where being and meaning cannot coincide. As we see from figure 1, the subject of the unconscious appears under Being when it is not intersected with the Other (as Meaning). The signifier, as that which eclipses being, is on the side of the Other. However, as we see, the place of non-meaning intersects these two circles. Therefore, we could deduce that in between being and meaning is The Real (as nonrepresentation) of being – and so something of being is outside of signification.

For Lacan, this being that is founded in the Other is born of an alienation constituted by language. However, the alienation inherent to language is secondary to an even more primordial split at the level of the living being, a level that distinguishes us as sexed beings:

> This lack takes up the other lack, which is the real, earlier lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being, that is to say, at sexed reproduction. The real lack is what the living being loses, that part of himself qua living being, in reproducing himself through the way of sex. This lack is real because it relates to something real, namely, that the living being, by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death (*ibid*, p. 205).

Thus, the very inception of the living being renders the human subject a being unto death. This real lack, as Lacan calls it, is not something produced by language, it precedes it. Language generates another layer of lack, this time within the symbolic, around a cause that cannot be symbolised. We shall see this connection between sex and death elucidated in Chapter 4 within depictions of the inherent trauma of sexuality. As Lacan says "the introduction of sexuality is traumatizing [….]The central bad encounter is at the level of the sexual" (*ibid*, p. 64).

The concept of alienation is contingent upon a relationship to the Other in Lacan's work. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Other is that which supports the system of

meaning but is nonetheless devoid of meaning – it lacks, fails and comes undone. Language is an Other: we have not created the words we use for ourselves; we are born into them, they shape and mould us, causing a split between what is conscious and unconscious. This split constitutes an inherent discord, a non-totalising dimension to the 'being of the subject' and the impossibility of ever becoming One. In the context of the imaginary register, we are alienated within the images and meanings that form the basis of our unique identity. The image of ourselves is never in line with the nature of what or who we are. As Verhaeghe puts it: "Thus is laid the foundation of human identity, immediately indicating its alienated nature. The attribution of our identity comes from the Other, the subject must identify with the presented images and signifiers" (Verhaeghe, 2019, p. 372). Essentially, the concept of the Other implies that human beings are made up of elements that are intrinsic and yet foreign to the subject at the same time. One of these elements of Otherness concerns the body, As Canellopoulos (2010) puts it, "The body is the Other and it is through the Other that an organism is transformed into a body" (p. 2).

This transformation of the organism into a body begins in early childhood (and indeed at a preverbal level) when a child incorporates the signifiers of a language that is not his or her own. This is a necessary moment of evolution in language acquisition, where a subject comes to be within the symbolic order of language and culture and leaves behind the undifferentiated zone of preverbal existence-the Real before the signifier. On another level, alienation takes place within the process of identification, through the dialectic of images and imagos pertaining to the imaginary. Subjectivity is thus comprised of layers of alienating substrata, and while this is a necessary or 'normal' situation for the individual subject, it presupposes discord and tension as endemic to identity. For once we start to use signifiers to represent ourselves to another, there will always be something that words or signifiers cannot show; words and signifiers will never fully account for who we are. We are alienated within the very mechanisms of meaning itself, caught within an estrangement of self-knowledge that will remain the basis for further knowledge acquisition. As Stijn Vanheule explains: "with regard to the alienated nature of self-knowledge, Lacan states that how the primitive subject deals with the mirror image constitutes the basis for later positions towards knowledge" (2011, p. 26). In other words, there is always a position of discordance within our relationship to

knowledge, and thus the potential to become identified with the products of knowledge; yet this is an identification that can only ever be a *méconnaisance.* We shall keep this point in mind when thinking about acquiring knowledge of the body in this study. In the next section, I shall examine in more detail, the nature of the imaginary register as a constitutive factor in alienation and as a modality through which we can understand the impact of the spectacle.

2.4. Formations and Deformations. From the Spectacle to the Non-Specular

A dramatic performance impacts on a spectator in particular ways, not all of which can be articulated. This thesis is also focused on the nature of performance as a signifying medium that engages with the imagination of the spectator. By taking spectatorship into account, we obtain a more thorough appraisal of the study of the body. For the body is not simply an actual object on the stage, but is also a body-that-is-perceived and imagined. By imagination, I refer to the perceptual field of the spectator and the subjective psychic interpretations of what is received as information. A question that we can formulate for subsequent chapters is: what role can the aesthetics of theatre play in reframing or challenging how we relate to the body? Given the misrecognitions of the ego (as both momentary and continuous identifications), is it possible for a spectacle to alter something at the level of the ego identification? Can particular drama generate awareness of dividedness and by so doing, produce a knowledge of the body? These are important questions to which I cannot offer a definitive answer at this point. For the present, it is enough to recognise that something takes place within the presence of the spectacle that may impact on the Real of experience. Furthermore, while the register of the imaginary is implicated within spectatorship, and mediates the subjective relation to the body, it also serves to orientate the representation of the body within the dramatic works. In order to develop these ideas further, it is essential to consider the nature of the imaginary register, both as Lacan conceived it and as we can apply it in this context.

The imaginary is one of the registers of Lacan's tripartite structure: the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. While the symbolic relates to language, the social order and structure, the imaginary concerns the realm of the ego and its misrecognitions, identifications and discontents. However, these two registers are not separate from

each other but coexist in the form of an imbrication. That is to say, language alters our perceptions and misrecognitions, and is directly implicated in the processes of identification. Systems of meaning have both a symbolic component and an imaginary one. The product of meaning is at the juncture where these two registers Imaginary and Symbolic intersect. As the following diagram illustrates:

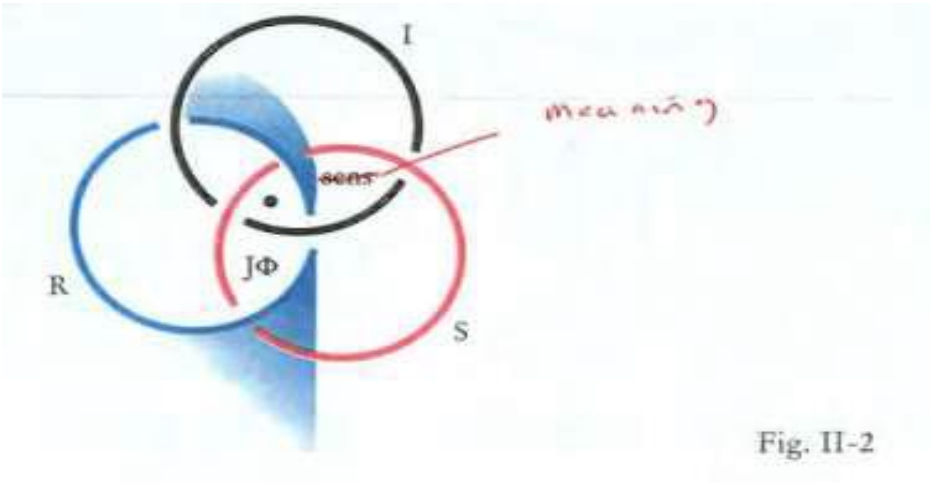

FIGURE 2

(LACAN, 1974-75, SEMINAR 2, DEC 17TH)

An account of the imaginary is crucial in understanding the issues that arise in subjective embodiment and the nature of miscommunication (non-rapport) that takes place within this context. The relationship to the body is always inflected by the imaginary register. This implies that there is always something lacking, or out of sync with how we relate to what we think of as the body. Lacan refers to this lack generated by the imaginary as a form of mental defectiveness. As he states:

> But what is the Imaginary? Does it even ek-sist? Since you hint, simply by pronouncing the term Imaginary, that there is something which ensures that the speaking being shows that he is destined for mental defectiveness. (Lacan, 1974-75, Seminar 1, Dec 12th).

In other words, in being destined for mental defectiveness, our perceptions of the body and the meanings associated with it (either cultural or personal) are infused with the distance inherent to the fundamentally paranoiac structure of the ego. Lacan's famous theory of the mirror stage illustrates the paranoiac structure of the ego. As the mirror stage is well-known, I will not go into too much detail here but will show its relevance for considering the representation of the body in the dramatic

works and the implications for spectatorship.[18]In essence, the mirror stage accounts for the alienation of the human subject within the very constitution of the earliest development of self. This is the point at which a small child looks in the mirror and mis-recognises their being as the image of its own body that is reflected. This pivotal misrecognition is the seat from which binary assumptions of self and other and identifications are often made.

In *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function* (1949), Lacan outlines the relationship between the child's body and the specular image reflected in the mirror. This image is assumed to be the subject, yet it is only a reflection. As he says: "the jubilant assumption[*assumption*] of his specular image by the kind of being – still trapped in his motor impotence and nursing dependence –[…] by which he must resolve, as I, his discordance with his own reality" (1949/2004, p. 4). As this suggests, the mirror stage marks a fundamental discord between the interior self and the specular image. The specular image serves as a Gestalt (unified image) with which the child begins to identify. This specular Gestalt is the introjection of an image that appears as a whole entity and paradoxically creates both unity and chaos as a consequence. The term Gestalt derives from a German word meaning form. Thus in the dialectic of the mirror stage, the outer form of the body is interpreted as an organised entity, serving to placate the inner helplessness of the formless interior. The discord concomitant with this process is referred to as a *méconnaisance*, or misrecognition, between the ego and the image, a misrecognition that leads to varying conflicts concerning aggression and rivalry. This point of discordant identification is the seat of all future identifications; there will always be a gap between the ideal ego (narcissistic image) and the ego-ideal (external world). The ideal ego refers to the primary narcissistic identification with a self-image that forms the basis of all future identifications, whereas the ego-ideal is the introjection of an image from the symbolic order and a primary significant other. According to Chiesa: "the ego-ideal is the subject's introjection of another external image that has a new (de)formative effect on his psyche. In other words, the ego-ideal adds to the ego a

[18] See Dany Nobus (1998) for a comprehansive elaboration of this concept. Nobus states: "the mirror stage is the incarnated matheme of the imaginary constitution of the 'me' (mol) and its alienating function for the advent of the subject, integrating a Kojevian interpretation of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit on the one hand, and a combination of specific neuro-anatomical data and psychological observations on the other hand" (p. 105).

new stratum that provides the subject with a secondary identification" (Chiesa, 2007, p 22)

For Lacan, the body (as image) is complicit in the alienating constitution of ego identity; it is part of the exterior illusion that becomes introjected as a seemingly stable image of what the 'moi' or self is. As Lacan says:

> For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted (Lacan, 1949/2004, p. 4).

In this way, the body and the ego are intimately connected within the dialectic of misrecognition. One of the most critical points to extract from this idea is that the experience of the body is related to an image (as a form of substance) and not simply material (as matter).

Lacan's ideas concerning the mirror stage and the process of identification, are often employed within the field of the arts, in particular regarding the context of spectatorship. Indeed, as Dany Nobus has argued, the widespread use of the mirror stage in this field has caused it to become somewhat of a conceptual blunt knife. (1998, p. 123).

Similarly, Lacan's concept of the gaze is also a pertinent investigative lens within the context of theatre or film, given the nature of the specular and visual dimension of these mediums. The gaze shifts the theory of the imaginary away from the human subject's identification with the image, to a subversion of identification within the image (caused by a lack within the specular). Hence, the application of the gaze in the field of the arts allows for a subversion of binary formulations of spectatorship where the look is deemed to be on the side of the spectator and egoic identification a potential consequence of the artistic encounter. Lacan, on the other hand, positions the gaze in the field of the Other. In contrast to the concept of the gaze in Sartre, it is "not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (Lacan, 1964, p. 84). The gaze "is that underside of consciousness" (*ibid*, p. 83) which is outside the visual object but inside as something that lures us into looking. The gaze is the *object a* in the field of the visible, a lack induced by the split of the divided subject, where desire circulates around a nothingness framed by an image: "The objet a in the

field of the visible is the gaze." (*Ibid*, p. 105). In constructing this methodology, while I take account of the gaze in particular ways, I have opted for focusing more on a theory of the imaginary and the potential for its de-formations within the context of theatre and spectatorship. Although in many respects, a deformation of the imaginary is similar to the idea that the gaze is a distortion in the field of the visible, I feel a more thorough study of the gaze is beyond the scope of this research at this time. This is due to the complexity and discrepancies of this concept in Lacan's thinking. As Maria Scott (2015) points out, in Seminar 11 (1964), where Lacan elaborates on the gaze, there are several variations or shifts in his thinking which demand closer scrutiny. While the gaze appears to be on the side of the real as that lost object, it also veers into the imaginary as that object that substitutes for lack. According to Scott, these variations have led to a lot of confusion regarding its application in film theory.

Furthermore, although the gaze is a function of the *object a*, I do not situate all employments of the *object a* in this research within the field of the gaze. Despite the emphasis placed here on spectatorship, the *object a* as it concerns the body has broader implications within the context of each individual dramatic work. I shall now situate the concept of the *object a* as it relates to the body and as a fundamental concept in understanding the position of the body in the dramatic works.[19] In a dramatic performance, the body is both represented as a physical phenomenon but also as that which has remainders; bodily traces within the spectacle.

[19] It is important to say that for Lacan, the human subject is not simply entrapped within the processes of alienation. There is also a possibility of a certain degree of separation constituted by a relationship to the lost object of desire, or in other words to that which causes us to be a subject (the *object a*).

3. SURPLUS TO A BODY

3.1. *Object a:* The Remainder of a Body

The Lacanian body is not a unified entity, but a body that is missing something – this missing element is represented by the concept of the *object a.* The 'a' of *object a* derives from the French word for other (*autre),* and therefore the loss is related to something that has been subtracted from the field of the Other. As Lacan puts it: "The a is called a in our discourse[…]Because it's what *on n'a plus*, what we ain't got no more" (Lacan, 1962-1963/2014, p. 117). This missing element of the body is essential to the dialectics of subjective desire and cannot be retrieved or 'refound' in a material sense. This lost 'object' or "pound of flesh" has been cut from the body as a result of the invasion of the Otherness of the signifier: "in the body there is always, by virtue of this engagement in the signifying dialectic, something that is separated off, something that is sacrificed, something inert, and this something is the pound of flesh." (*Ibid*, p. 219). As a concept, the *object a* distinguishes Lacanian psychoanalysis from other schools of psychoanalysis such as that of object relations, in as much as there is always something Other than two bodies (relating to the signifying chain) at stake in the dialectics of human attachment. Similarly, the *object a*, as that which is outside of representation, introduces a distinction concerning the body as it is conceived within phenomenology versus psychoanalysis.

Lacan deduced that a certain amount of being is lost to those who speak (*manque à être*) as a result of the constitutional cut of language that forms the divided subject. That the subject is divided through the defiles of the signifier, results in a separation of the conceptual categories of being and existence. Hence, for the Lacanian subject, existence does not precede essence; there is no essence to being: it is a being which lacks. Therefore, it is the signifier which precedes existence. So that we can exist within the symbolic and communicate with others, we forego a pound of flesh in the Real. As speaking subjects, therefore, we 'exist' through the signifier while a certain portion of being remains unnameable, unrepresentable and inaccessible to us.

As Vanheule (2011) writes: "The *object a* refers to the element of the living being that cannot be inserted into the order of the symbolic; a component of flesh and

blood that remains inert in relation to the signifier." (p. 131). Thus, the *object a* marks a cut rather than signifying a particular object. As a component of flesh and blood that cannot be represented by language, the *object a* is, "being in so far as it is essentially missing in the text of the world" (Lacan, 1961-62, Seminar XXVI, Feb 22nd).

By 'locating' this object as irretrievable, never to be refound and forever lost, Lacan conceptualises a structural dissatisfaction inherent to embodiment and addresses the shortfalls of other materialist and phenomenological analyses. This object is not an object that if found could provide satisfaction to a need but is instead a remainder, a placeholder marking a cut, a mark on the body of the subject resulting from the encounter with the symbolic order. In this sense, the *object a* is also defined as the object cause of desire as it drives the metonymical quest from one object to another. This remainder "is what survives the ordeal of the division of the field of the Other through the presence of the subject" (Lacan, 1964/2014, p. 220). In this sense, it cannot be uncovered empirically as if it were an object of specific knowledge. As Lacan states:

> This object of desire oughtn't to be confused with the object defined by epistemology. The advent of the object of our science is very specifically defined by a particular discovery of the efficacy of the signifying operation as such. (*Ibid*, p. 37).

In the realm of sexuality, the *object a* serves to mark the trauma of the non-rapport of the sexual relationship, where there is always something missing in the so-called idealised sexual union.

The non-rapport of the sexual relation subverts traditional ideas of Oneness and synchrony in the vicissitudes of sexual attraction. Rather than complementing each other as in one part of a missing half, we are seduced by a quality of lack in the other; something of the Real is touched. This is how the object cause of desire functions, through enigma, the desire of the Other. The object cause of desire manifests through the gaze, the voice or another enigmatic attribute. In his observations on sexuality, Lacan opposed conventional psychoanalytic ideas concerning the putative normative trajectory of the sexual drive. Traditional psychoanalytic ideas underscored the view that satisfaction and general happiness in life occurred through the union of the genitals with somebody of the opposite sex.

The introduction of the *object a* disturbs this view; happiness is not to be found in the arms of another, as obtaining full satisfaction is impossible due to the primordial loss. There will always be a residue, something that does not add up, something that keeps the human being circling a cause-a traumatic cause of non-meaning.

This concept of that which is 'found' in the object but cannot be seen, the invisible trace of something lost, irretrievable, and yet compelling with regard to knowledge is crucial to the paradoxes inherent to theatre. As we saw earlier, theatre is renowned for certain qualities of expression such as: the immediacy of performance, presence, liveness, actuality, and embodiment. However, behind the 'reality' of presence lies an equally significant domain of absence, veiled by the plausibility of immediacy. From the spectator's perspective, the body-as-perceived, framed by the fictional dimension of the stage and the aestheticisation of its form, lacks something, a distance is created by the fictional representation. However, this is not a conscious perception of lack, but it enables the enjoyment of the specular image. The *objet a* is something that cannot be represented by an actual body; it is that very part of ourselves which distorts the visible field and prevents us from seeing accurately. In this sense, the body on stage signifies absence as presence through the impossibility of revealing the entirety of experience. Lacan puts it slightly differently: "because of the fact that where he is represented he is absent, that nevertheless being represented, he thus finds himself divided (Lacan, 1971, Seminar 1, Jan 1st). Therefore, we see the paradox of representation, where ever the subject is present, they are also absent. In the next section, we look at another component of the body as Other, in that which concerns the relation of the subject to enjoyment. It is not only the subject but the body that enjoys.

3.2. The Body that Enjoys: *Jouissance*

We are not master of our bodies but subject to them in the nature of a missed encounter. In the subsequent analyses of the dramatic works, we shall encounter the concept of *jouissance* as that quality of 'enjoyment' that goes beyond the knowledge of the subject. This is a concept that can elucidate the nuances of pleasure, catharsis and enjoyment as it concerns the position of the body within the dramatic works and as a feature of the impact of spectatorship. *Jouissance* has a quality of immediacy

and intensity that surpasses the logical and grammatical structures of cognition and rationalisation. It is both within and Other to the subject. In Chapter 4 on The Trauma of the Sexed Being, we shall focus in detail on the relationship between *jouissance*, sexuality as a traumatic point of non-knowledge, and the spectacle. In fact, *jouissance* is often inscribed within the very act of the spectacle, as a structuring backdrop to performance. The work of the three authors bears a relation to *jouissance*, and this is a relation that we will expand upon in subsequent chapters.

Lacan's term *jouissance* (which is deemed untranslatable) captures the tension at the heart of the drives, within the polarities of the life and death instinct and the stimulus paradigm of excitation and release.[20] *Jouissance* denotes a satisfaction that is not simply pleasure, but that goes 'beyond the pleasure principle', as conceived by Freud. In contrast to pleasure, *jouissance* contains a quality of 'too much' (*plus de jouir*) or "surplus enjoyment"; it is a principle of excess, beyond what is rational and measured (Miller, 1995, p. 8). This 'too-muchness' can be found in the morbid quality of symptoms that repeat themselves over and again, the repetition-compulsion that characterises the excessive dimension of particular acts. In this respect, *jouissance* is traumatic and contains a paradox; we are both drawn to and threatened by this mysterious quality of excess and its capacity to overwhelm the rational defences of the ego. As Verhaeghe (2018) explains in an essay on the drive, *jouissance* threatens the ego with annihilation, overcoming the narcissistic defences and subverting the order of rational and linear time.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)*, Freud identifies subjective phenomena that do not obey the principles of the pleasure principle as he had previously conceived and instead cause people to relive traumatic experience. This reconceptualization of trauma counteracted the idea that the human being only seeks a release from tension and not an increase. In this text, phenomena that go beyond the pleasure principle concern acts of repetition-compulsion that provoke pain and displeasure, such as the dreams of soldiers depicting traumatic war incidents and scenarios that analysands

[20] The drive is a complex concept in psychoanalysis and fundamental to considering that an aspect of trauma (Real) is intrinsic to the experience of having a body; in other words, there is something inherently conflictual at the core of embodiment that is not simply related to external events but arises from within the organism. As Freud states: "In the first place, an instinctual stimulus does not arise from the external world but from within the organism itself" (Freud, 1915, p. 6).

play out within the parameters of transference neurosis. That is to say; Freud conjectured that there is a force impelling the human subject to repeat trauma and relive unpleasurable, unpleasant experiences.

Lacan's concept of *jouissance* incorporates Freud's insights in relation to the drive and the inherent dissatisfaction of its trajectory.[21] Freud conjectured that due to the nature of the drive, there can be "no satisfaction" for the human subject:

> The repressed instinct never ceases to strive after its complete satisfaction which would consist in the repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction: all substitution- or reaction-formations and sublimations avail nothing towards relaxing the continual tension; and out of the excess of the satisfaction demanded over that found is born the driving momentum which allows of no abiding in any situation presented to it, but in the poet's words 'urges ever forward, ever unsubdued' (Mephisto in _Faust', Act i. Faust's study.). (Freud, 1920, p. 34).

Jouissance is that which incorporates a satisfaction in this tension of inherent dissatisfaction. It is the satisfaction component of the drive but not the drive itself. *Jouissance* can be alienating and traumatic; it is a border phenomenon. As Caroz explains: "*Jouissance* is a body event because it is perceived by the subject as strange to the body image and intimate to the subject at the same time. It comes from outside, and yet it is internal" (Caroz, p. 3). In the sexual realm, *Jouissance* marks the lack of the sexual relation and the fact that there can never be a harmony between the sexes (either as a hetero or homo couple). In the love relation, two people do not become One but remain divided through *jouissance*. As Lacan says:

> [B]eing is the *jouissance* of the body as such, that is, as asexual (asexui), because what is known as sexual *jouissance* is marked and dominated by the impossibility of establishing as such, anywhere in the enunciable, the sole One that interests us, the One of the relation "sexual relationship" (rapport sexuel) (Lacan, 1972-1973/1999, p. 7).

Fundamentally, the non-rapport of the sexual relationship is a trauma at the heart of the human subject's experience of sexuality; it is something that always remains outside of knowledge. Given that something of sexuality cannot be represented,

[21] In Freud's early conception, the drive is a phenomenon that is neither solely somatic nor psychic and exists on the border of the physical and psychical (or perhaps is that very border, the line between representation and substance). In describing the liminal position of the drive the drive is: "on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body" (Freud, 1915, p. 121)

narratives are often constructed around this lack of representation. Narratives are a way of organising what is particular and what is universal in human experience, but what is particular often becomes subsumed under generalisations. We shall now turn to the following section concerning the relation of fantasy within the parameters of what can be conceived as the normal body. This will contextualise the 'failed body' within the dramatic works, as that which falls outside of the perimeters of the fantasy of the 'normal' and the discord inherent to this fantasy.

4. NARRATIVES OF THE BODY

4.1. The Fantasy of the 'Normal Body'.

In the following quote, Lacan outlines a paradox concerning our relationship to normality: "But should all the norms, that is, that which makes for anomaly just as much as that which makes for lack, happen all of a sudden not to be lacking, that's when the anxiety starts". (Lacan, 1962-1963/2014, p. 42). Another way of saying this is that should normality seem too Real or too present where the distance engendered by the fictional nature of reality is diminished; we experience the anxiety of something that is lacking as a support to our being. Reality becomes too Real. In essence, then, reality or 'normality' is inherently lacking; it is a fantasy that sustains our existence and our relationship to the place of lack engendered by language. In supporting our existence, a screen or a veil is placed over the trauma of the real. As Lacan says:

> The place of the real, which stretches from the trauma to the phantasy—in so far as the phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinant in the function of repetition (Lacan, 1964, p. 60).

In concealing something primary, fantasy is that which mediates the relation of the divided subject between the real (as the realm of the non-representable) and that of the fictional spaces of the symbolic and the imaginary, as language and miscognition. Subjective fantasy shields us from a trauma of the inexpressible Real of the body and

serves as a palliating mechanism in the face of the anxiety of the unnameable. Fantasy has a dual function pertaining to lack. As Chiesa describes:

> Fantasy has two basic interconnected functions: it both relates the barred subject to the real lack in the Symbolic, that of the real objet a, and, at the same time, "veils" this lack in the unconscious through the imaginary dimension of the objet a (2007, p. 142).

In this sense, reality as we know it is largely refracted by subjective fantasy: hence reality is a fiction. As we have seen, the experience of embodiment contains a traumatic kernel, as that which signifies a lack of knowledge concerning the body. Fantasy is a veil that covers this hole in knowledge and in this way, it is linked to the imagination as a lining of representation, but is not something that can be directly accessed through words. Lacan's matheme for fantasy is represented by the following:

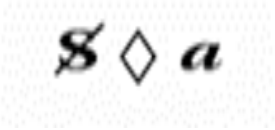

FIGURE 3: MATHEME OF THE FANTASY

which should be read as "the divided subject in relation to *object a"* (Fink, 1996, p. 59). The subject is divided in respect of the split of the signifier and fantasy is that which mediates the subject's relationship with the lost object of desire, the *object a*. Thus, fantasy constructs an orientation of the subject's position in relation to this lost object. In this sense, we could say that through fantasy, we can construct narratives surrounding something that is no longer present but that we wish to experience again. It enables us to touch the impossible, that which is out of reach temporarily and permanently.

Fundamentally, regarding the body, there is always a gap or deficit between the inner excitations of the physical body and what can be released through the motricity of the organism. That is to say; there is always a gap between what is imagined in the psyche (part fantasy) and what can be achieved through the organic body.[22] This is a very significant point in situating the nature of the discordance inherent to the relation of body and psyche and the mediating role of fantasy to this end. The gap

[22] In relating fantasy to the imagination, I do not mean to equate one is equal to the other, but there is a relationship. Fantasy is the underside of the imagination.

between fantasy and body is particularly relevant to neurotic symptoms, where displacement has taken place at the level of meaning, and unconscious complexes are 'formed' through a substitute object. Although of course, this gap can prove extremely productive, as human beings can far exceed the limitations of the body in their endeavours to push the limits of experience. Poetry is one such transformation and one that fantasy contributes to. As Lacan says, "there is no reality. Reality is constituted only by phantasy, and phantasy is moreover what gives material for poetry" (1977-1978, Seminar 3, Dec 20th).

We see this tension between the inner 'reality' of the body portrayed most accurately in Beckett's work through texts such as *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and illustrated by the immobilised bodies of his dramatic works. In situations where the body is imprisoned or restricted, either through that of environmental space (such as *Happy Days*) or of impending death and illness in *Malone Dies*, the workings of the imagination carry on pushing ever forward despite the dying embers of the body. Frequently, Beckett juxtaposes the non-linear and somewhat immortal space of memory and the imagination with the finite substance of the flesh decaying in time.

Fantasy is also pertinent to the working of the physical body, as Julia Segal explains in working psychotherapeutically with the chronically ill; unconscious phantasy (Klein) underlies the very physical movements of our bodies. In the case of disability or physical illness, these phantasies are disrupted, and it takes time for new ones to form around the altered physical state (2017, p. 45). As we have seen, fantasy bridges the gap between the Real of the body and reality; it mediates the raw materiality of the flesh (meaningless in itself) and the linguistically mediated realm of the social order where the body 'means' something in an imaginary sense. One way of looking at Segal's description of fantasy is to think about the movements of the body as forming a map with which an individual becomes used to pursuing certain paths be they related to need, desire etc. Indeed, Freud defined the ego as a bodily ego (1923/1989, p. 20).[23] Thus, when the body is wounded, unconscious

[23] Freud: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface. If we wish to find an anatomical analogy for it we can best identify it with the 'cortical homunculus' of the anatomists, which stands on its head in the cortex, sticks up its heels, faces backwards and, as we know, has its speech-area on the left-hand side." (1923/1989, p. 20)

fantasies may be altered or shattered, and an energy displacement takes place at the level of the ego (Nasio, 2004). Therefore, a change in a body's functioning or the inability to move may result in disorientation, a reshaping of *jouissance* pathways, caused by an inability to pursue the usual avenues or possibilities of satisfaction/necessity previously available.

The fantasy of the normal body manages to shield 'temporarily able-bodied people' from what the 'impaired' bodies experience as a traumatic rupture.[24] A rupture in the normative conception of the body can be alienating, as articulated by Gavin Rae:

> In general terms, therefore, alienation describes a situation or state of being in which an individual is separated from, at least, one of the aspects deemed necessary to live in accordance with a normative conception of the preferable, or authentic, self (2011, p. 2).

If one of the conceptions of a preferable self involves the image of an ideal body, any deviation from this ideal can be alienating. Having outlined the nature of fantasy as regards the concept of the 'normal' body, we shall turn to look at the significance of this within the category of disability as an aspect of embodiment that challenges both the ideals and aesthetics of the norm.

4.2. The Othered Body: Narratives of Disability

In the following chapters, the topic of disability will come to light through the representation of the impaired body in the work of Samuel Beckett and the metaphors, images and concepts of Artaud's cruel theatre and his bodies without organs. A corollary to this theme, that of the abject, othered body is a feature of Jean Genet's prose and drama. The act of reading and being a spectator to the work of these authors enables consideration of essential and under-represented categories of embodiments. In particular, the work of Samuel Beckett as we shall see in Chapter 5 will provide a useful framework to mitigate the lacunae within representations of the anomalous body in psychoanalytic and philosophical discourse. As theorists such as Margaret Shildrick (2009) and Anna Mallow (2018) explain, theorists of disability

[24] It is important to reiterate that by identifying a fantasy of the normal, I do not wish to suggest that fantasy can be deconstructed to some utopic end: nor consequently, that we are all disabled. As Segal points out, unconscious fantasy is necessary to the functioning of the corporeal body. For example, psychoanalysis indicates that although none of us are normal, we are not all mad.

studies have not favoured psychoanalysis as a satisfactory explanatory lens with which to further the cause or interrogate the experience of the disabled subject. According to this view, psychoanalysis has contributed to the pathologisation and marginalisation of disabled people including as Mallow argues, the widespread implications of the category of hysteria as a paradigm of understanding bodily symptoms and the category of what she calls the "epistemologically disabled." In other words, those who are purported not to know something about themselves due to the undocumented nature of their medical condition. Psychoanalysis and its association with psychic pathology (and concepts such as secondary gain from illness) have been discouraging for theorists attempting to break free of medical models of disability (where the individual is othered as deficient) or who feel a psychoanalytic emphasis takes away from political debates. In one of the very few references to disability in *The Letter,* (a Journal of Lacanian Psychoanalysis) Philip Dodd (2000) outlines some of the resistances within psychoanalytic history to working with learning disabilities, resistances which I would say are somewhat reflected with examining physical disability also. As he explains, some psychoanalysts feared that due to the organic deficiency inherent to certain learning disabilities, psychoanalysis could have no role to play, as it would reach an organic impasse. Or that the client would not have the cognitive capacity to work through transference issues.

While psychoanalysis may have not often privileged the trauma associated with the contingent and accidental properties of the flesh, at the same time, as James Berger points out, the concept of trauma is an almost unspeakable issue within disability studies. Berger describes this unspeakability as a consequence of a denial of loss and mourning inherent to the experience of impairment or physical difficulty. As he explains: "It seems to me, then, that disability studies exhibit a significant degree of *denial* concerning trauma and loss. It *refuses* to mention them, though they would seem to be unavoidable." (2004, p. 572). Berger makes an excellent point here, and one that is highly relevant to this study of the traumatic dimension of the body. In conceptualising the body as inherently traumatic, subject to *jouissance*, drives and the constitutional split of the signifier we not only depict the reality of able-bodied subjects, but have come part of the way for approaching the experience of disabled subjects. It is important to stress that I do not wish to collapse both categories of

embodiment together as if difference could be elided through a linguistic deconstruction of the normal. As Mitchell & Snyder (2015) argue, there is a radical dimension to the experience of disability that is undermined by deconstructing it as a reality. Nonetheless, it is equally important to reinforce the nature of the divided subject within the context of disability, in order to fully realise the import of the bodily event of impairment or limitation.

In focusing on the reality of difference within disability, Jackie Leach Scully writes that the anomalous body has not featured significantly within phenomenological analyses of the body. She asks the important question of whether a change in the body (or disability) alters the structure of cognition and thought. In this analysis, she critiques Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of embodied cognition where the body is privileged as primary in shaping cognition and perception. Pointing out that more work is required in this area, she says:

> We could predict that not having standard issue arms and legs, for instance, will result in an unusual orientation of body to its surroundings, establishing and reinforcing slightly variant pathways of Sensory input and motor response, and in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology this would matter for the subject's grip on the world – indeed, whether it is possible to establish an adequate grip at all, but to suggest that this might influence the processes of abstract thought takes things a significant step further. (Leach Scully, 2009, p. 63).

To have an "adequate grip on the world" designates the corporeality of the body's hold on the world. This hold is challenged by situations where the body comes under siege either through limitation of a certain kind or through physical restrictions in cases of illness, disability, and physical pain.[25] These situations can be a source of great anxiety, where inner sensations and physiological processes of the body may overpower our psychic representation systems. As Lacan stated, anxiety is 'not without an object'; it signals an excessive presence of something that should remain hidden, or absent. The interior workings of our physical bodies remain an alien world to us as we live every day: we are not aware of the functioning of the internal organs

[25] It is interesting that in *The Book of Love and Pain* (2004) Juan David Nasio points out that there is a lack of devoted study to the subject of pain in psychoanalytic literature. I would ask whether this is related to the intrinsic problematics of theorising pain. For Nasio, pain has a paradoxical status. It is a limit point, a defence against *jouissance*, a barrier to an invasion of the drives of the body.

nor have a visual image unless of course, something goes wrong causing pain or disease.

At this point, I shall make a distinction between the terms impairment and disability as used in this thesis as nuances of these terms are impacted and reframed through an analysis of particular dramatic works. This distinction will illustrate a dichotomy of thought within the field of disability studies pertaining to the rationale of "the social model." (Shakespeare, 2002). The social model of disability is a response to the "medical model" and its inherent flaws regarding treating people with disabilities as equal citizens. The medical model, as the name implies, categorises disability as a medical condition, and this suggests that a person is inherently ill and in need of treatment. This approach leads some people with disabilities to feel pathologised, a problem in need of fixing.

By contrast, the social model contends that it is society, which disables the individual, and not the physical limitation. Therefore, the limitation is not an essential component of the person's being but can be addressed through changing infrastructure and attitudes within society. In the literature on disability, impairment is a signifier for the physical or biological issue/injury or limitation pertaining to the body and disability is a signifier for the social and cultural repercussions of this physical impairment. There is a lacuna in this argument that works to cover the reality of particular physical challenges and ultimately denies difference and suffering. As Shakespeare explains: "Most activists concede that behind closed doors they talk about aches and pains and urinary tract infections, even while they deny any relevance of the body while they are out campaigning" (2002, p. 6).

Therefore, I contend that equality based discourse does not always accurately reflect the losses of those living with disabilities. As Berger rightly states:

> Disability studies, then, is concerned with ideological misuses of language, but has no interest in catechresis and the unsayable. It is different, not other; it is quite sayable, as sayable as anything else, if said in the right way—that is, in a way that respects the political and cultural autonomy of its subjects.

On one level, the effect of this discourse is to cover the radical difference and Otherness of a person's own body with repeated narratives and signifiers of non-difference and equality. In *A History of Disability* (1999), Henri -Jacques Stiker

captures this radical difference as he refers to an encounter of an individual's perceptual field with a disabled body. This encounter provokes a, "tear in our being that reveals {the body's} open-endedness, its incompleteness, its precariousness." The visceral nature of this "tear" reveals the extent of our investment in the fantasy of the normal (Stiker, 1999, p. 10).

The experience of physical difference is both a tear within the perceptual field and in the symbolic structure of language. Stiker's account of disability highlights the precarious nature of what constitutes normality. If the normal body is a fantasy, then it is situated as a construct of the unconscious and not a substantive reality. However, while this view helps to deconstruct some of the issues concerning disability, I do not want to discard the concept of normal altogether, as it serves as a benchmark to formulate the losses and the discordances encountered by those whose bodies change either dramatically or slowly over time. In this vein, in a phenomenological account of abnormal embodiment and trauma, Dylan Trigg describes "spatial normality" as "the body in its taken-for-grantedness" (2012, p. 259). Thus, a movement away from this taken-for- grantedness must result in a temporary or permanent dislocation from familiar planes of embodiment.

States of illness and physical pain exemplify subjective dislocation from the familiar planes of embodiment. *In The Phenomenology of Falling ill,* Svenaeus elaborates on the process of alienation inherent to becoming ill and the foregrounding of the otherness of the body through illness. According to Svenaeus, we cannot fully know the nature of our suffering, but we live it nonetheless. The body can appear to consciousness as an alien object. As he says the body is, "a for-itself which is mine, yet still alien since it resists and disturbs, rather than supports, consciousness" (2009, p. 5). This view resonates strongly with the argument presented in this thesis. If suffering is lived and not known, this suggests physical suffering resists representation on various levels, at the level of the subject and the level of the social. The question remains, therefore, if we cannot know the body through language or other signifying systems, how can we convey physical experiences to others or even to ourselves?

Indeed, the question of pain and representation haunted Artaud in his striving for a theatre that could communicate the 'truth' of being within the dialectic of

performance and spectator. We could say that while this question of suffering and communication is pertinent for all three authors, its manifestation as a bodily theme takes different forms. Beckett's drama has a particular focus on the topic of disability and indeed is one of the most prominent in studies at the intersections between literature on disability. As Siobhan Purcell notes: "While Joyce's works are certainly interesting in how they represent disability, among Irish writers, it is Beckett that gives us the most fully rounded and striking reconsideration of disability" (2018, p. 40). Genet's drama, while not abundant with references to disability, certainly raises the platform in considering the otherness of the body and the symbolic and imaginary structures that support the narratives of the body. While Beckett captures a question of being in minimalist physical form, Genet places it in a quasi societal context where the ground is continuously shifting along with the spectator. Disability, while an unmistakable reality of difference, also forms narratives surrounding the body within the socio-political context. It is interesting that any signifier of difference can quickly lose its radical import when circulating within the desire of the Other (as part of the signifying chain). In the next section, we shall look at the concept of trauma and how it has become a burgeoning signifier within literary studies in what could be classified as the embodied turn of the 21st-century.

4.3. The Traumatic Body of Literary Studies

Trauma has become a popular narrative in academic studies. Indeed, it has also become a popular and current paradigm within the psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic clinical practice and theory. Therefore, it is important to be aware of rhetorics of interpretation within narratives of literary and cultural studies where trauma is losing its sharpness as a concept. In other words, through an organisation of trauma as a concept, the very utility of trauma as a signifier of the unsayable, of the unknowable, becomes a means of veiling the disorganisation inherent to the epistemologically inaccessible regions of subjectivity. As Alan Gibbs observes regarding the proliferation of trauma: "its creeping ubiquity as a critical paradigm eventually becomes limiting" (Gibbs, 2014, p. 1).

This limitation of trauma as a critical paradigm is inherent in the very repetitions of it as a concept. In modern literary studies, a reading of trauma frequently forms a methodological critique of the representation of time as symptomatic of the traumatic event within a text, performance or film. As Berger explains, the traumatic event cannot be reconstructed, the effects of trauma are inferred through reading the symptoms of this rupture: "Trauma studies is primarily a hermeneutics whose goal is to read traumatic-symptomatic texts." (Berger, 2004, p .565).

In disciplines of psychotherapy and theatre studies, the body can be aligned with signifiers of the present tense (immediacy, presence, and aliveness). Despite the presence of the body, representations of it in speech are conflated semantically with the past and future. Theorists such as Cathy Caruth (1996) in adopting the Freudian model of *Nachträglichkeit* (afterwardness), have contributed to the organisation of 'trauma narratives' where time is positioned as central to the structural composition of a traumatic event.

The trend of trauma studies and its upsurge of application within academia and beyond coincides with the emergent and modern poststructuralist traumatised subject who identifies more with fragility than with stability (Rowan, 2010). As Colette Soler (2005) in *The Era of Traumatism* argues, "We live today in a world that has both ratified and privileged the traumatic event" (quoted in Rowan, p. 94). From this perspective, it could be said that the utilisation of trauma as an interpretive trope within the humanities is an attempt to bridge the gap in encountering the unsayable, the unrepresentable, and the limitations of language. However, there is a danger in this utilisation given that 'trauma discourse' inadvertently becomes part of the rhetoric of the symbolic, acquiring meaning and associations with other signifiers such as PTSD, psychiatric medication etc. In this sense, trauma as a signifier loses its edge as a signifier of the Real. Medical conceptions of trauma place the subject as a passive recipient of the traumatic event without taking into account the individual subjective structure beneath that "impact" trauma.

It is widely accepted within psychoanalytic studies that trauma disrupts fixity of meaning and introduces instability within signification. In fact, trauma is that disruption of meaning, a discord inherent to the symbolic order. The perspective of trauma adopted in this thesis is that of trauma as the "the missed encounter"; an event

that has never taken place due to its position outside of meaning. An account of trauma as the inherent gap in subjectivity places it outside a linear model of time but implicit in the very constituents of embodiment.

In dramatic studies, it is interesting to note that, according to Boulter: "Beckett's work is rarely analysed in the major theoretical writings on trauma" despite the representation of what he calls the traumatised body (2004, p. 345). In the analysis of this present study, it is more important to emphasize how the body traumatises the subject rather than that the body is traumatised per se. The difference between these statements concerns a perspective on subjectivity, temporality, and theories of causation that takes account of the effects of language on the body. The body is the subject of language in as much as we speak language through the status of bodies. The term traumatised implies the past tense; something has occurred previously to render a body in this state of being traumatised. If we bear in mind that the split of the human subject is a function of language and its collision with the human body. Trauma becomes not something past tense but continuous, a 'present' and ongoing effect of language. In this sense, trauma is a function of the forms that are generated in theatre as it is always on the horizon of signification and inherent to the process of creativity.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I devised a theoretical account of the body from the perspective of the divided subject of the unconscious. The presence of the unconscious is central to the methodological frame and to the nature of discord inherent to embodiment. As a gap in the field of representation, the unconscious subverts any notion of empirical, concrete knowledge as regards subjectivity. Therefore, this study of the body in the dramatic works of the three authors will frame the gap in knowledge that is constitutive of subjective embodiment. However, it cannot fill that gap, as that is structurally impossible and the very 'non-essence' of being. There is always a distance between the subject and its being, between the ego and the image, and the subject and the body. The methodological framework of this chapter has identified the complexity of the relationship between the subject and the body and the non-reducible nature of its meaning. In particular, we saw in the model of alienation how

being and meaning are in a relationship of discord and the principal tenet of the Cartesian subject (I think therefore I am) is reversed. The discord between subject and body is manifest through the register of the imaginary order, where there is always something that is distorted in relation to the body. This distortion is also conveyed through narratives, ways of speaking about the body, which inadvertently support the 'fantasy of the normal' body. In the following Chapters 3 and 4, I focus directly on individual plays and performances through the lens of the concepts outlined here. In Chapter 3, the paradigm of alienation and dislocation within the dramatic works elucidates the human subject's relation to meaning and leads to consequences for understanding embodiment. In this exploration of the epistemology of the body in the dramatic works, the idea of representation is twofold. It concerns both the body-as-perceived (visual entity) but also the relationship to the body within the dramatic works as a function of the *object a* (the unseen remainder of a body). In this way, the body as it exists within different registers, seen and unseen, signifier and visual image, comes to light.

CHAPTER 3:

AT THE LIMITS OF MEANING: ALIENATED SUBJECTS. WOUNDED FIGURES

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I apply the interdisciplinary methodological approach outlined in chapter 1 to selected theatrical works of Artaud, Genet and Beckett. The works chosen for analysis in this chapter are *The Maids* (Genet), *Spurt of Blood* (Artaud) and *Endgame* (Beckett). In this application, I would like to draw on an idea espoused by Laura Cull (2012) in *Performance as Philosophy: Responding to the Problem of 'Application'* regarding the particularities of methodological application and theatrical performance. Cull points out that, "Etymologically, 'apply' comes from the Latin *applicare*, which simply means 'to bring things in contact with one another' (p. 21). From this point of view, analysing a theatrical work is not a hermeneutics where we extract essentialist meanings but rather, both methodology and its subject become altered from the encounter. This approach reduces the conceptual division between theory and application as if one could be directly applicable to the other and draw out knowledge *a priori*. As Cull argues, performance is a form of thinking; it is philosophy in action and therefore, does not exist in isolation from theory.

As I elaborated in the previous chapter, this study of dramatic works is not an exploration of how theatre can help us master (through knowledge) our own bodies via the operations of theatre, but rather how our 'knowledge' of embodiment is challenged and subverted through particular performances. Therefore, this study underlines a question of how representation (and indeed, absence of representation) on stage can trigger unconscious desire. For example, if we feel disturbed, dislocated from our usual perceptions, we may want to investigate what has caused this disturbance, leading to new insights. Alternatively, of course, a play could be dismissed by a spectator, with no seeming relevance or importance to uncover.

Within the critical examination of the dramatic works in this chapter, we encounter a paradox concerning the effect of spectatorship and the distance of critical evaluation. As Joseph Harris points out: "One aim of dramatic performances is to defer the point at which the spectator's critical faculties are engaged.… To think critically about a play is already to be detached enough to prove its failure" (2014, p. 11). However, I would add that thinking critically often happens *after* the performance as a response to the power of that performance and to the unknown of the effect that has taken

place, if indeed that has occurred. Furthermore, to think critically does not imply that we can say it all concerning what did take place in the dialectic of artwork and audience. There will always be remainders. The theme of the remainder features within the works of all three authors in this chapter. This is a remainder concerning meaning, the body and its representation within the performances. The remainder of representation is not captured within the image of the actual body, but as that relationship to language and meaning within the text and performance. The following sections, as grouped under individual authors, should be seen as forms of vignettes generating a dialogue with the central theme of this thesis. Thus, these analyses are not exhaustive, nor do they target all available themes, but they are juxtaposed to draw on key principles of the methodology, particularly as it relates to structure, the unconscious and embodiment. The task is to explore an epistemology of the body from within the preconceptions already outlined, and yet to identify points of intersection that augment the theory of the body from the interdisciplinary perspective.

As we have seen, from the perspective of a divided subject, and with regard to the unconscious, the nature of embodiment is one of discontinuity and Otherness. The following dramatic analyses are linked under the theme of alienation and dislocation. As we have seen, alienation is a principal constitutive dimension of living as a subject in the face of the Other of language and the Otherness of the body. To reiterate, the body in this context is not simply the organism as the material flesh but is also a body of signifiers and images. Hence, the body relates to the Other of discourse and is bound with meaning and symbolic values.

I have shown in section 2.3 (Chapter 2) that alienation has a direct correspondence with meaning and signification. We are alienated within the structure of meaning from the very beginning, but also further alienated when signifiers fail to account for experience. Alienation is also closely correlated with trauma, as trauma is a rupture at the heart of meaning as well as a shock within habitual systems of meaning. In this sense, trauma is alienating, and alienation becomes the situational effect of trauma. In the following texts/performances, we shall encounter subjects who are dislocated either from their bodies, their environment (both social and immediate) or as a consequence of the imaginary dimension of identification. Thus, the model of the

imaginary, as proposed in Chapter 2 is of prime importance in the concept of alienation and in orientating the varying depictions of embodiment in the works of the three authors. The fundamental *méconnaisan*ce of the human subject distorts the assumption of all forms of knowledge, including that of the body. As I argued in Chapter 1, the role of the Other as locus of meaning, can be viewed from the perspective of absence and presence within the style and language of the dramatic works.

The following sections on the works of the individual authors are not ordered chronologically, but rather in terms of dimensions of Otherness. Beginning with Jean Genet's *The Maids*, in which the tragedy of narcissism prevails, we shall see how the body, in its abjection and viscerality comes to the fore through a play of identifications, reversals and dislocations. For Artaud, although driven by a desire for originality and a quest for immanence, the representation of the fragmented body, is also mired within the symbolic and historical context in which he writes. In the case of Beckett's *Endgame,* we shall see how the body is situated within an alienated landscape where meaning and its absence influence this representation.

2. GENET: THE MAIDS – CAPTIVATED SUBJECTS

The Maids was first performed on 17 April 1947 and directed by Louis Jouvet. The plot concerns four characters: the maids, Claire and Solange, (also sisters), Madame and Monsieur.

The opening scene is situated in a bedroom, where Claire and Solange, both sisters, are enacting a role-play. Claire, pretending to be her sister Solange, is giving instructions to Solange who is impersonating Madame, the mistress of the household. After a few minutes, we realise that Solange is really Claire and Claire is really Solange. A theatrical game is afoot. We find ourselves in a play within a play, a reality within a reality, the stylistic mark of Genet. The question of reality, or, more accurately, what it is that constitutes reality, is posed from the offset here. As in *The Balcony* (Chapter 4), the opening gambit is a portrayal of an inner fantasy world, with characters assuming the roles of other characters – those they idealise or eroticise. Significantly and as I will discuss in section 2.2 on space, the inner fantasies of the characters are juxtaposed with the play's symbolic structure, a

geographic space we can recognise, such as a brothel, bedroom, a symbolic location. In Madame's bedroom, Claire and Solange perform fantasies of their relationship with Madame and plan to murder her by poisoning her tea. Although we never see Monsieur, he is present by his notable absence and is fundamental to the dynamics between the characters. We know he is in custody following Claire's anonymous tipoff to the police of a crime we presume he did not commit but of which she wanted to incriminate him. The relationship of the maids to their mistress depicted through the masquerade of the role-playing is one of hierarchical domination, submission and eroticisation. There is a sadomasochistic element to the eroticisation of their servile position *vis-à-vis* Madame. They receive a palpable enjoyment from giving and receiving words of abuse to each other.[26] The dramatic momentum of the play centres on the planning of Madame's murder, which climaxes in the tragic denouement of Claire's suicide, a moment of bacchian catharsis and poetic transformation.

From the very opening minutes in *The Maids*, theatrical illusion is juxtaposed with reality and reality with fiction. The spectator is immediately confronted with the question of what is true? What lies behind the appearance of pretence? In this play, nothing is straightforward. Genet had directed that the maids should be played by men in drag, adding yet another layer of masquerade to this subversive game of identities. Therefore, not even the gender of the maids should be apparent, further disrupting the audience's expectations of verisimilitude and setting the scene for what we would now understand as the concept of performativity.[27] It is through this dramatisation of the play of appearances and the provocation of what might lie beyond that the question of the body emerges. I said in Chapter 1 that the representation of the body is tied to the image in Genet's work. However, the image is unstable (without an essence) and dependent upon the Other as a source of stability. Christopher Lane (1997) makes the interesting observation that the maids'

[26] In this chapter, for time constraints I do not focus in detail on the sexual aspects of *The Maids* choosing instead to concentrate on the nature of alienation, and otherness.

[27] For many years now, performativity has been a seminal theme within sexuality and gender theory, Judith Butler having become almost a metonym for performativity, under the heading of which essentialism versus constructionism have been deconstructed. In brief, performativity denotes that there is a lack of essence at the core of gender identity, where the act of repetition installs a copy of an image of gender, rather than a substance.

masquerade fails at specific key points, and it is within these points of failure that the libidinal drives of the body come to the fore. In other words, it is precisely when the narcissistic twinning of the identity of Claire and Solange comes undone, that something of the body leaks through. In the next section, we shall examine how *The Maids* and its play of identification supports a theory of narcissism and succeeds in capturing the position of the body as Other.

2.1. Refracted identities. The Perils of the Mirror

The Maids is a tragedy concerning the perils of identification as contained within the unravelling of the masquerade of identities. This tragedy of identification is operative within the narcissistic structure of Claire and Solange, who have fallen prey to the captivating narcissistic image both of themselves (one onto the other) and of Madame. In *Comment Jouer Les Bonnes,* Genet describes the maids as monsters who are like ourselves when we dream, "Sacrées ou non, ces bonnes sont des monstres, comme nous-même quand nous nous rêvons ceci ou cela" (Genet, 1963). In this respect, the actions of the maids can be seen as a form of enacted wish fulfilment, the fantasies that we 'play' out in our dreams.

In this analysis of *The Maids,* we can see how narcissism functions within the parameters of subjectivity, and identify implications for the subject when identification takes certain forms. A human being inhabits a body from within the structure of identifications, and we can, therefore, examine the position of the body in *The Maids* through the prism of narcissism. As we saw earlier, the subject and the body do not align to form a whole entity, and there is no direct synchrony or harmony within the relation. For all human subjects, therefore, the play of identifications involves a conflict, a gap that escapes nomination. However, this is more problematic for some than for others, as we shall see with the paranoid structure of the sisters.

In *Saint Genet Actor and Martyr* (1952/2012), Sartre argued that the maids had no being of their own, in that they exist only as a form of relationality to each other. This is in contrast to Madame, who is in a position of "absolute being". As Sartre says: "Their being is defined by its absolute relativity. They are *others"* (p. 617). In this context, there is no implicit substance or essence to the inner world of the maids;

they rely on each other for existence, and neither has individuated sufficiently to subsist each on their own. Instead, it could be said that there is an inherent void or an absence at the core of their identity. This idea, the maids' lack of being, is implicit in the play's anti-theatrical unfolding of the plot where the structure reflects content. In other words, the construction of the stage setting, posited so as to deceive the spectator into doubting the distinction between fiction and reality, expresses a truth concerning the 'reality' of subjectivity; that beneath the layers of subjectivity we encounter not truth but yet another fantasy. Furthermore, with regard to Claire and Solange's subjectivity, there is some doubt as to whether there is a void at the heart of the masquerade or whether Claire and Solange suffer from a lack of a void. In other words, the question remains as to whether the sisters have a neurotic or a psychotic structure, or whether in some respects they have neither, as they are also simply "poetic creations".[28] [29] I mentioned in Chapter 2, that despite the prevalence of criticism that centres on the void in Genet's drama, there is, in fact, an ambiguity concerning the expression of the void in his work. On the one hand, the maids lack substance. How the masquerades function in this play certainly add credence to this view, that through the peeling back of layers of identification, we encounter the 'nothing'. However, on the other hand, the poetic language in the play, and the dialogues of the sisters, is where the 'nothing' becomes obfuscated with the beauty of words and the desire of the Other. The desire of the Other transmitted through language mitigates the experience of an abyss. This is also an important point to consider when we analyse the dramatic works of Artaud and Beckett, especially in relation to how the positioning of the body, both as material and a signifier, is understood as a function of language and meaning.

In chapter 1, we examined the role of the mirror stage in Lacan's work and its central role in understanding the concept of the imaginary. The imaginary, that aspect of

[28] Theoretically the concept of lack is aligned with neurosis and that of the hole with psychosis. A subject with a neurotic structure has undergone the process of repression where language serves as a partial substitute for the loss of the object prohibited by the Oedipus complex. In psychosis, repression has been foreclosed, and there is a hole, where the conditions of meaning have not taken place in the same way.

[29] Lacan makes this point of Hamlet in *Desire and its Interpretation*: "Let us note all the same that if Hamlet, who I told you is not this or that, is not an obsessional for the good reason first of all that he is a poetic creation - Hamlet does not have a neurosis; Hamlet demonstrates some neurosis to us, and this is a completely different thing than being one". (Lacan, 1958-1959, Seminar 16, April 8th).

human subjectivity linked to the ego and identity is founded upon a misrecognition. It is the illusionary basis for the seat of all subsequent identifications. Freud coined the terms primary and secondary narcissism to describe the developmental process the child undergoes in differentiating between self and other. Primary narcissism refers to the developmental stage where the child takes itself as a libidinal object. Secondary narcissism is the movement outward into the world, the orientation of the libido towards others, something which is ultimately, for Freud, the ability to love. He states: "We say that a human being has originally two sexual objects-himself and the woman who nurses him" (Freud, 1914/2012, p. 66). Within the theory of the mirror stage, with its dualistic interpretation of the divisions between you *or* me, Lacan positioned the ego-ideal as a component emanating from the symbolic order. A symbolic order which structures what we see and how we are seen.[30]

The concept of the ego ideal (as defined in Chapter 2, 2.4) is pertinent to understanding the subjective structure of Claire and Solange. Ultimately, it seems that this symbolic anchor is lacking for the sisters, and hence there is no regulatory input of the imaginary narcissistic domain. This is evidenced by the suffocating proximity of the sisters that keeps them locked within a prison of the ideal ego.[31] The characteristics of the enclosed world of the ideal (imaginary) ego relate to a binary logic, me or not me. If a subject's sense of being is pivoted upon the domain of the image without a symbolic intervention, then a toxic proximity of the Other might prevail, an invasion of signification without the distance engendered by language. This toxic proximity is revealed in the theatrical ritual of becoming Madame, where Claire and Solange reflect something unbearable at each other; the form of their own image. As the following dialogue indicates: Solange: "And me, I'm sick of seeing my image thrown back at me by a mirror, like a bad smell. You're my bad smell. Well, I'm ready. Ready to bite" (Genet, 1963, p. 20).

[30] For example, this outside agency is illustrated when the child looks at its own image in the mirror and receives confirmation from their parents that "yes that is you". In this sense, the symbolic as a realm of signifiers structures the imaginary; it allows for distance in intersubjective relations and influences the values and judgements that are applied to certain images and identifications.

As we saw in Chapter 2, the domain of the imaginary is connected with the potential for aggression and rivalry. As Chiesa specifies, "narcissism and aggressivity are thus one and the same thing". (2007, p. 20). The dialogue between Claire and Solange indicates the self-hate and projection of their embattled egos. We see, in their exchanges, both the aggressive and rivalrous dimension of their interaction which is a function of the paranoiac structure of the ego. As Lacan explains:

> Thus the two moments, when the subject negates himself and when he accuses the other, become indistinguishable; and we see here the paranoiac structure of the ego that finds its analog in the fundamental negations highlighted by Freud in the three delusions: jealousy, erotomania and interpretation. (Lacan, 1948/2004, p. 21).

Therefore, we can understand that what the subject negates in him/ her self becomes an object of hate in the other. From this perspective, Madame or her symbolic function, i.e. what she represents, (such as an object of hate in the external world) becomes internalised and forms part of the ego of Claire and Solange. This process is also at the crux of what Freud called melancholia, where something that is lost and/or hated forms part of the person's own ego leading to states of mental and emotional ambivalence. In the final section, 2.3 we shall examine how Claire's suicide at the ending of the play, enables the maids to escape from the melancholic entrapment through a *jouissance* of the body, that aims at destruction. In the next section, we shall look at the concept of space, as that which is inside (to the self) and outside as in stage space and semiotic contours or geographical location. Within this play, there is a hierarchy of space within which the narcissistic boundaries of the self and the positioning of the body come to the fore. We will now examine this more closely.

2.2. Dislocations and Reversals: The Body in a Hierarchy of Space

The concept of space in *The Maids* exists on two distinct structural levels: 1) the action, plot and progression (the enunciated), and 2) the manner or style in which this action is conveyed (enunciating). In this and other plays by Genet, the aesthetic form of the stage setting is as important as the content. Namely, the structure of form reflects content, and what is said is as important as how it is conveyed. Genet's theatre has been referred to as "antitheatre" given its self-reflexive style of

representing theatre as a modality of expression, where the stage reflects the stage qua stage: a world within a world (Pucciani, 1963, p. 42). In this way, the spectator can be drawn into the spectacle of a mirage portrayed as a mirage, where representation itself becomes the focus. To put this differently, the very mechanisms supporting everyday reality are conveyed through the exposure of the fictional medium as fiction.

The juxtaposition of alternating spaces (psychological and environmental, internal and external) within staged perimeters is a hallmark of Genet's style, as exemplified in *The Maids* and *The Balcony*. The implications of this when considering the body and the context of spectatorship can be understood through a semiological analysis of the stage elements. *The Maids* consists of four characters, Claire and Solange, Madame and Monsieur, yet we only physically see three characters through the course of the play. In *Discourse as Performance*, Michael Issacharoff applies the concepts of mimetic and diegetic space to an analysis of the different levels of space in *The Maids* (p. 55). Mimetic space, as the name suggests, is a space that does not require mediation by language, it is there as is within the spectacle. In contrast, diegetic space refers to a space outside of sight and is mediated by verbal signs that are "communicated verbally and not visually" (1989, p. 58). For example, the absence of Monsieur's physical presence within the visual dimension of the plot fits this category.

Monsieur's physical absence has a significant structural effect on events and acts as an organising signifying principle to the masquerade of the sisters. He is both outside of stage space and yet central to the structure of events. Thus, his absence evokes another scene. It is possible to make a parallel with *Waiting for Godot* here, in that a central character who is absent physically is crucial to the dramatic action. Admittedly, Monsieur does not have the same degree of existential importance that Godot has. Nonetheless, the actions of the maids are structured by the wait for his potential release from prison and the fear that they will be discovered as conspiring against him (most notably due to Claire's anonymous letters accusing him of theft). As a character, we know very little about Monsieur; he has little substance, a signifier without a concrete referent. When the phone rings, and it is Monsieur, calling to say he will soon be released from prison, Claire and Solange are stopped in

their reverie. The phone call enacts a cut to the fantasy of Claire and Solange and functions as a temporal scansion. An outside agency has intervened (a male one no less) to break up the affected and heated dialogue of the sisters. As an outside agency, Monsieur is positioned in what Oswald calls, an "off-stage space", an outside space relative to the action taking place visually (1987, p. 10). The visual and absent elements of stage space convey the structural component of dramatic space. Moreover, the language of *The Maid*s contributes to a conveying of the body as visual and visceral, seen and unseen.

In these metaphors and images, which concern alternating spaces of the body, that which is both inside and pertinent to the flesh is projected onto the exterior world of objects. This projection is illustrated through the physical language of Claire and Solange, where references to spitting, belching, and vomiting connote the desire for the expulsion of the waste products of the body. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in Genet's work, particularly in his poetic novels, such as *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943), the body and the environment are intertwined with an abject connectivity. These waste products of the body are in the realm of the abject as defined by Kristeva (1982), elements of the self that are integral to the body but rejected as waste: elements that remain as a spectral presence on the horizons of subjectivity. In Freud's paradigm of identification and ego formation, he identified introjection and projection as mechanisms relevant to the creation of borders within subjectivity. That which is good for me, I introject and become attached to as an identification. That which is perceived as bad or hated is expelled and seen as Other. The process of identification was aligned with the oral cannibalistic drive; a literal ingestion of the outer world becomes traced onto the psyche. The emotions and mental states of love and hate serve as markers of introjection and expulsion. Freud theorised that the only way for the unconscious id to give up its first love objects was through the process of identification. Thus, subjective identification bears the mark of something that has been severed; identity marks the passage of time on the psyche, a graveyard of the objects that have passed through an individual's life. In the ambivalence of all emotions, love very easily gives way to hate and hate is the flip side of love (Freud, 1918). We cannot love without being subject to hate. This is evident in the relationship of the maids to each other and to Madame. As Solange says:

> I'm ready.--I'm tired of being an object of disgust. I hate you, too. I despise you. I hate your scented bosom. Your. ivory bosom! Your. . golden thighs! Your. ... amber feet! I hate you! (She spits on the red dress.) (Genet, 1963, p. 12)

The toxic proximity of Claire and Solange reveals a lack of individuation between the sisters, as we have seen in the previous section on narcissism and the mirror image. Their fantasmatic games go beyond the pursuit of pleasure and move toward the realm of the death drive, a morbid repetitive *jouissance*. While the sisters alternate in assuming the identity of each other and Madame, their interactions are fuelled by the desire to merge and emerge from each other. Thus, the boundaries between the sisters' bodies are confused. What is inside and outside the self becomes blurred; there is not enough space for either of them to live separately, as Solange indicates murmuring to herself, "Claire, Solange, Claire." (Genet, 1963, p. 12).

Thus, Claire and Solange are trapped within an imaginary, dyadic psychic structure, introjecting an idealised image of Madame and expelling the hated waste product of their own image. The extremes of love and hate expressed by them through the fantasy of attacking Madame indicate the narcissistic oscillations of the sisters' interior worlds. Solange:

> We're merged, enveloped in our fumes, in our revels, in our hatred of you. The mould is setting. We're taking shape, Madame. Don't laugh—ah! above all, don't laugh at my grandiloquence". (Genet, 1963, p. 11).

The toxic proximity between Claire and Solange reaches its apotheosis with Claire's suicide towards the end of the play. To be free of the conflictual image of Madame and the conflict between the ego ideal and the hated part of herself (ideal ego), she must kill herself as Madame. The play of identification between the maids is stifling; it cannot provide a solution to their dilemma. Within this claustrophobic atmosphere, death (as suicide) provides an outlet.

Apart from the absence of Monsieur, other theatrical elements serve to illustrate the distinction between the interior fantasy space of Claire and Solange and the external world or reality. The alarm clock rings and interrupts the initial masquerade, precisely at the point, the maids are enacting the murder of Madame. The sisters are suddenly jolted out of the reverie of play acting as Madame/ Solange /Claire. According to Issacharoff, the alarm clock, in a semiotic context, is a "sign with several meanings" (1989, p. 65). In this instance, the alarm clock is very symbolic; it

is an object that wakes one up from sleep or a dream state and, at this moment in the play, it marks the division between the realm of illusion (that of the maids and subjectivity per se) and that of another space. Although, we should be wary about designating that other space 'reality', as, from the perspective of the unconscious, the nature of objective reality is always in question.

Therefore, the alarm clock is an agent linking time and space in *The Maids*. As a physical object on the stage, it is representative of itself in terms of what it shows itself to be (ostension). However, as a signifier, it has another function within the architecture and temporal progression of the play. At a critical juncture in the play, the simulated strangulation of Madame, the ring of the clock suggests a warning; there is something "alarming" taking place. The alarm is an intrusion of reality or outside space into Claire and Solange's inner worlds. By referring to the alarm clock as a signifier, I take into account its dual function within the spectator's imagination and its capacity to provoke an awareness of multiple yet simultaneous spaces. When Madame suddenly notices the alarm clock in the bedroom, she is suspicious, and we are alerted to something that is out of its usual place, dislocated from the norm.

According to Issacharoff, the significance of the objects in *The Maids* is that they 'change places'. The links between stage spaces and other outside spaces within the play are forged through other objects: notably, the telephone, the alarm clock and the desk key (1989, p. 64). These objects function as complex signifiers within the imagination of the spectator.

In Ubersfeld's analysis of theatrical space, the art of theatre is divided into its literary form and its role in the imagination of the spectator. As she says, "theatre is not only an artistic (literary) object (and thus the legitimate object of an interpretive reading) but also a unique psychological (imaginary) activity" (1999, p. 98). As I outlined in Chapter 1, the impact of performance does not always entail a positive material encounter; it also manifests itself within the spaces, the absences and gaps traced by elements within the performance. In these absences, a space is created for desire to emerge in the witnessing of the spectacle, points at which a question rather than interpretation can emerge. In the juxtaposition of a dreamlike rendition and the familiarity of a social space, Genet seduces the spectator into a question concerning reality, where we are like the maids when we dream.

The social setting of *The Maids* has implications when considering the position of the body in this play. The bodies of Claire and Solange are not simply dislocated through the toxic proximity of narcissism but also because of their position within the class hierarchy, where they 'enjoy' their lowly position. The social hierarchy of the play situates the maids in a dislocated space, where the maids figure as lower-class *vis-à-vis* the bourgeois status of Monsieur and Madame. The events take place in the bedroom space of Madame and therefore, it is her space, not theirs. Claire and Solange do not occupy their own space both literally and metaphorically. The space they inhabit is restricted by the parameters of their social class; they follow orders and obey instructions. This dynamic of submission and obedience to a "higher" class is eroticised in their fantasies and role-playing. Their social class is a prison, but it also serves to fuel at the same time, a fantasy of escape into the prestigious social order. The element of class hierarchy exhibited by *The Maids* was also a topic of intellectual speculation regarding the potential background of Genet's inspiration for the play – the horrific crime of the Le Mans murders. However, what Genet managed to expose, is not only the oppression of social hierarchy but the enjoying underside of this oppression. This enjoyment is conveyed within the portrait of the maids as poetic transformations.

2.3. The Sisters: Paranoid Motifs and Poetic Transformations

The plot of *The Maids* carries an unmistakable tone of the famous crime committed by the Papin sisters in 1933 in the town of Le Mans. On 23rd of February 1933 two sisters, Christine and Lea brutally murdered and dismembered the bodies of Madame and Mademoiselle Lancelin. The crime was particularly heinous and gruesome, with the bodies of the women savagely attacked and mutilated, their eyes were gorged, and genitals cut into indicating a possible sexual element to the killing. That an act of eye-gouging took place in a murder was a first in the history of crime in France, and there has been much intrigue and speculation as to why it occurred. The Le Mans murders fascinated the circles of contemporary intellectuals in France including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jacques Lacan. Writing in *Motives of Paranoiac Crime* (1933), Lacan speaks of an aggressive drive located within the unconscious and triggered by the disinhibition of delirium, a symptom of a psychotic

episode. He observes a potential homosexual link between the sisters, as a result of Christine's statement, "I really think that in another life I must have been my sister's husband'" (paragraph, 9).[32] When the trial came to court, the Papin sisters gave no motive for their crime. Instead, their most notable response was that they wanted to take responsibility for their actions without explanation. It was this mystery concerning the motivation for such a heinous act, and the savagery and mutilation in relation to the murder, which caused so much fascination in literary and intellectual circles.

A dominant theme of the discussions in these circles concerned the question of responsibility and motivation: could the maids be held accountable within available templates of knowledge? In Lacan's article in *Le Minotoure* he accounted for the crime as a form of *délire à deux*, arguing that the two sisters had merged and shared the same delusion. This delusional situation involves a pairing of two people, where one is passive and one more dominant. One year previously, Lacan's doctoral thesis concerned the case of Aimée (1932) who attacked the celebrity Huguette Duflos in what Lacan described as a state of self-punishing paranoia. It is interesting that speaking from a theatrical point of view, Kamenish (1996) contends that Lacan's interpretation of what potentially drove the Papin sisters to the murders stopped short of a full account of the subjective details, in particular that of the homosexual tendencies of the maids. Instead, she says that the speculative gaps of the driving forces of the maids' relationship and acts are bridged by the theatre of Jean Genet and Wendy Kesselman.[33] This is an important point regarding the potential intersections of literature and psychoanalysis, as I mentioned in Chapter 2. Sometimes a subjective experience or the affect of that experience is conveyed through the medium of the arts in a way that clinical theory does not capture.

[32] Freud (1915) had previously linked homosexuality and paranoia, given that paranoia concerns a psychic state where an individual projects anxiety about a suspected knowledge onto the other. Further to this, in 1948, Lacan linked paranoia and aggressive tendencies: "the aggressive tendency proves to be fundamental in a certain series of significant personality states, namely, the paranoid and paranoiac psychoses" (1948/2004, p. 18).

[33] According to Kamenish (1996), Wendy Kesselman's play *My Sister in This House* (1981) was influenced by the dialogue of the intellectual circles who had theorised on the crime of the Papin sisters. This dialogue influenced the metamorphosis of transforming crime into art.

Certainly, in *The Maids,* Genet's maids are given centre stage in the spectacle of sinister farce, a place that the Le Mans maids, the Papin sisters did not have. This theatrical spectacle raises the crime to the aesthetic realm where imagination and fiction palliate the horror of the actuality of the background event. Given the structure and evocations of the play, it seems as if Genet could have been influenced by Lacan's interpretation of the murders. Claire and Solange merge and emerge from each other, as they enact a play of identities that shifts from make-believe and fantasy into delusion. The sisters are trapped within a chiasmatic construct of the imaginary dimension. They are narcissistically entwined, one reflecting the other in mutual support of their being. We must consider the significance of the term 'reflecting' in the context of Claire and Solange's identity, given the centrality of the ego in considerations of identity. In *Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,* Lacan says, "by "ego" I designate the nucleus given to consciousness – though it is opaque to reflection" (1948/2004, p. 17). In other words, there will always be something missing in the image that could correspond to this narcissistic aspect of the self. This something missing in the image has a relationship with the body and bears a correlation with *jouissance.* Through *jouissance,* we 'enjoy' what is lacking in desire or we can rephrase this as 'the body enjoys'.

In *The Maids* Genet captures the *jouissance* of the maids' game with poetic alacrity. *Jouissance* in this sense not referring to an experience of pleasure but a morbid excitement of the body that resists representation in language, the intoxication of a ritualistic transcendence. Solange's closing speech has a debaucherous tone: "We are drunken, joyous and free" (Genet, 1963, p. 44). She moves towards a defiant stance: "Madame is dead. Her two maids are alive: they've just risen up, free, from Madame's icy form. All the maids were present at her side—not they themselves, but rather the hellish agony of their names". (*Ibid*, p. 44). Solange's words indicate the split between the signifier and the register of being inherent to subjectivity. In this description, the maids are not still present in body, yet a trace of them remain through the signifier of their names. Significantly, it is the name that is connected to the pain of their existence, "the hellish agony of their names" and not their being. This statement reveals that something has been displaced here; pain is attributed more to the signifier than to the physical body. Yet as we have seen, the body is also directly connected with the signifier, it is an Other impacted by discourse. In this

description, Genet has managed to capture something of the *jouissance* inherent to language and the symbolic order and the imprisonment of the maids within the hierarchical structure of their social class. They have been named by the system as maids, and this symbolic nomination ties Claire and Solange to their role as servants. There is a deficit in the sisters' narcissistic structure that serves as an analogy to the oppression of the social class. This oppression ultimately leads to the drive for death expressed by Claire through the faltering make-believe of her role as Madame. As Solange's defiant speech proclaims: "Now we are Mademoiselle Solange Lemercier, that Lemercier woman. The famous criminal. And above all, Monsieur need not be uneasy. I'm not a maid. I have a noble soul". (Genet, 1963, p. 43). This merging of the two sisters as 'Mademoiselle Solange Lemercier' creates a bridge between "the world of outcasts" (p. 43) that the maids feel they belong to, and the elitist upper-class world of Madame.

Critics have warned against interpreting Genet's play as a form of activism concerning the oppressed societal position of the maids and therefore rendering a reductive political account of *The Maids*. In fact, Genet had said that a trade union would have been a better implement for addressing the maid's societal oppression: "Une chose doit être écrite: il ne s'agit pas d'un plaidoyer sur le sort des domestiques. Je suppose qu'il existe un syndicat des gens de maison – cela ne nous regarde pas" (Genet, 1963). In this resistance to political interpretation, Genet distinguishes between art and activism, and by doing so, avoids the pitfalls of narcissistic idealism inherent to the group dynamics of fighting social causes.

As a way of enacting change, activism gathers its forces around a collective desire for change and improvement within a socio-political system. This collective desire tends to formulate around an ideal, a principle that becomes elevated as something to strive for, around which identity forms. In *The Maids,* Genet goes in a different direction than social idealism by accessing poetically the very ground beneath ideals and refracting it to the audience. This fictional account of the maids' subjectivity serves not to uphold an ideal of redemptive possibility for these characters but rather supports the notion that this redemptive narrative is unnecessary. Genet has redeemed the maids by letting them roam free in their imaginations and juxtaposing the attempted murder of Madame with poetry and aestheticism. In addition, and most

importantly, while they attempt to kill Madame, they do not succeed in the end. Thus, Genet's vision incorporates an aesthetic frame for the embattled desire of Claire and Solange and influences the viewer's perception of the background to the Le Mans murder. As Kamenish says:

> Our interest in the darker side of life, in the unaccountable brutal murder by two otherwise innocuous maids, should, no doubt, terrify us when we realize the pleasure we derive from the artistic rendering of their violence" (2003, p. 134).

The final redemption of the maids is encapsulated with Claire's attempted suicide and the failure to complete the murder of Madame. They have failed in their endeavour and yet are "drunken, joyous and free". On this Dionysian note, we shall move to the next section on the Artaudian Theatre of Excess.

3. ARTAUD: THEATRE OF EXCESS

"Writing is all trash". (Artaud, 1968, p. 75)

In this section, I classify Artaud's dramaturgy within the category of a 'Theatre of Excess'. Excess is certainly a quality that pervaded Artaud's life, from the ravages of opium addiction to the delusions of paranoid psychosis and transformations within art and literature. In this context, the concept of excess is related to the idea of *jouissance,* something that is too much, at the border of the body and the mind. In Artaud's writings, his essays, poetry and his manifesto for theatre, Artaud's preoccupation with the ravages of the body is significant. Indeed it is not simply the body that preoccupies, but the excesses of the mind also. For Artaud, there is an obvious tension between the body as a material substance and the body within thought. In other words, he writes of the disjunction/separation between body and mind, a disjunction he would like to be free from. As he writes in an essay *On Suicide*, "I would free myself from the conditioned reflexes of my organs which are so badly correlated with my ego. (Artaud, 1956/1968, p. 157). The momentum of Artaud's writings reveals a gap between thought and the material flesh, and the drive to access an experience that could transcend his corporeal suffering and mental anguish. As he says, "There are gaps and stops at every stage in my thinking mechanism" (*ibid*, p. 74). This aspired for transcendent experience is conceptualised through the idea of being. Indeed, the emphasis on being in Artaud's dramaturgy

comes close to an idealisation, and we must take note that this is Artaud's concept of being as opposed to a particular formation of it within a philosophical paradigm. The drive for obtaining something original in his work is captured within the adjectives pertinent to his dramatic lexicon with words such as immediacy, presence, act, transcendence. These are qualities that invoke a conception of being; they refer to something essential, an ontological given, an identification of the body with affectual experience, affect in this sense having a strong correlation with being for Artaud. Artaud's conception of being is translated into theatre and is encapsulated within the emphasis he places on performance. In *Reading Theatre*, Ubersfeld schematises the widely accepted view on Artaud's approach to theatre in the following diagram. In the circle below, the modality of performance is privileged over the written text. Indeed the written text is excluded or negated.

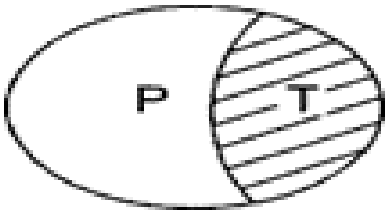

FIGURE 4. ARTAUD'S THESIS

As Ubersfeld explains: "This is Artaud's thesis, probably not as he enunciated it but as it has too often been misunderstood: a radical rejection of text-based theatre." (1999, p. 7). According to her, this misunderstanding is due to the fact that the materiality of theatre, as represented by performance, is also contained within language.

Although Artaud privileged the idea of originality and resisted that of repetition, his work is paradoxically, as Crombez puts it, a form of, "literary and theatrical cleptomania" (2008, p. 11). In attempting to move beyond words, Artaud placed emphasis on gesture and physical movement as an alternative modality of representation to language. Having been greatly influenced by the Balinese and Oriental style of performance, he incorporated these bodily movements of dance and gesture into a repertoire of physical theatre. In a critique of the semiotics of gesture, Elam critiques Artaud's intention to move beyond language by arguing that gesture and language are not separate but complementary semiotic agents within theatrical discourse. As he says:

> Despite Artaud's insistence on an absolute semiotic polarity between language and gesture in the theatre, the fact remains that, except in extreme cases of gestural autonomy (mime), the two are bound to cooperate in the production of theatrical discourse (2005, p. 45).

Therefore, although language serves to delimit the perimeters of what can be said, the realm of signification as related to the structure of language may not have been as narrow as Artaud envisaged. As we saw in chapter 1, Chiesa defines a signifier as something that can encompass more than words; it can also be a gesture, a sound, or a body movement. From this perspective, language is not reduced to actual words or sounds but is a signification system that already extends beyond words. From this perspective, the Artaudian distinction between body movement/gestures and the psychological and mental properties of words becomes tenuous.

Artaud's invention of a physical language of the theatre highlights his struggle with the mind-body problem. Through his writings, it is clear that he grappled with a tension of being and having in relation to the body. We could say that through writing, and the ambivalence Artaud showed to this medium, as both mediation and waste product, his words are a way of seeking for the missing "text of being" through the mediation of the body. In this mediation of the body, there is an attempt to render something material through the process of writing, not simply as representation, but as Ros Murray (2014) explains, as an attempt to leave material traces of a bodily presence. As she says:

> But all of Artaud's work has a performative, theatrical element to it, in that it attempts to conjure bodily presence, to render it visible often through leaving material traces, rather than to simply represent an absent body (2014, p 33).

There are frequent references to the materiality and viscera of the body, such as caca, the digestive processes and a general sense of corporeal 'isness' that Artaud aligns with a state of being.

We could say that there is a drive both for and against the body in Artaud's work. The body is both a suffering substance and a force for artistic mediation and transformation, a way of containing mental anguish and yet also a source of it. The following excerpt articulates Artaud's struggle with the material force that is both internal and external to his thought processes. Artaud writes *in Fragments from a Diary in Hell:*

> Forms of capital despair (truly vital),
> Crossroads of separation,
> Crossroads of awareness of my flesh,
> Abandoned by my body,
> Abandoned by every possible human feeling.
> I can only compare it to that condition in the throes of a
> delirious fever during a serious illness.
> I am dying of the torment created by this paradox
> between my inner facility and my external difficulty. (Artaud, 1968, p. 82)

Within this passage, Artaud articulates the paradox of the inner state of thoughts and mental representations with something (the body) that is external, problematic and a source of anguish. The anguish articulated in these words is related to what he describes as separation, a sense of abandonment within and by the body. This is an articulation with Cartesian resonances, where there appears to be a split between mind and body. Artaud's suffering as it is expressed here is metaphysical - not simply physical. He is grappling with something that goes beyond the body but is also related to it. We have seen that the body is never simply what can be said in words and nor can it be reduced to a material substance. Although the nature of the discord inherent to embodiment is a given factor in subjectivity, we are not always conscious of this discord, and certainly not to the extent that it would appear Artaud was. Given the nature of Artaud's episodic paranoid deliriums, it is also possible that the body, in its inherent Otherness, served as a persecutory force in his psychic world. The Other in this sense, as that which is external but also internalised, is disordered.[34] We shall now look to this idea of disorder in Artaud's written play *Spurt of Blood.*

3.1. *Spurt of Blood* – Disorder from the Heavens

According to Artaud, poetry has an anarchic capacity to disrupt linguistic signification, and as a creative act, it is fuelled by a pre-existing state of chaos:

> Poetry is anarchic to the degree
> that it brings into play all the relationships of object to object and
> of form to signification. It is anarchic also to the degree that its
> occurrence is the consequence of a disorder that draws us closer

[34] Vanheule (2011) makes the point that the Other is disordered in cases of psychosis.

> to chaos. (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 42)

Thus according to Artaud, poetry enables a subversion of meaning, a rebellion of forms and significations; it is a vehicle for disconnecting conventional signifieds from established signifiers. Artaud's 1925 play *Spurt of Blood* illustrates this vision of poetry as anarchy and draws the spectator into a fast-paced and absurdist ensemble of theatrical elements and chaos.

Spurt of Blood was written in 1925, but not staged for a further 40 years due to its reputation for being unperformable. (The Flaneur, 2018). In its composition, it is a short performance, about 14 to 22 minutes. The text of the play features in Artaud's complete works. The plot (a very loose term in this context), is composed of an assemblage of elements that form a disjointed narrative concerning the nature of a disrupted love relationship. The disruption of this relationship is placed in the context of contingency and external shock, as opposed to an intrinsic determination. The sky is literally falling on their heads.

The opening scene presents a Young man and Girl who profess love to each other:

> Young man "I love you and everything is fine": Girl – "You love me, and everything is fine": Young Man [lower]: I love you, and everything is fine. Girl [lower still]: You love me and everything is fine" (Artaud, 1938/ 1958, p. 62).

Suddenly, their dialogue is interrupted by a chaotic interlude when a hurricane descends, the stars collide, and dismembered limbs and other objects fall from the sky:

> [A]t the same time, two Stars are seen colliding and from them fall a series of legs of living flesh with feet, hands, scalps, masks, colonnades, porticos, temples, alembics, falling more and more slowly, as if falling in a vacuum: then three scorpions one after another and finally a frog and a beetle which come to rest with desperate slowness, nauseating slowness] (*ibid,* p. 63)

Following this onslaught from the heavens, a knight and wet nurse with 'enormous breasts' discuss whether the young couple is 'fucking' (p. 63) with the inference that they may be the parents of this couple. An implication that the affair between the young couple is incestuous. Subsequently, the girl disappears and when the young

man returns other characters advance on stage – “A priest, a cobbler, a beadle, a whore, a judge, and a barrow- woman”. The young man laments where his wife has gone, and we discover that she has died. She is carried in by the wet nurse who drops her to the ground. Miraculously, by the end of the play, she rises from the dead proclaiming: “The Virgin! Ah, that's what he was looking for” (*Ibid*, p. 65).

In an analysis of *Spurt of Blood,* Ruby Cohn remarks critics have not always recognised that Artaud’s play is a response to “*La Boule de Verre*”, a one-act play by Armand Salacrou. The original title of Artaud’s manuscript was: "*Spurt of Blood ou la Boule de Verre* (1979, p. 311).Within this context, the parody of *Spurt of Blood* is given an intertextual and not simply absurdist connotation. In other words, although portraying a dislocation of sense, this dislocation is set within the symbolic context of historical influences. One of these influences stems from Artaud’s surrealist associations pertinent to the time in question: the juxtaposition of images, objects that seem out of place, and a dislocation of the body from the perimeters of everyday ‘imaginary’ sense. In the 1920s, Artaud had a strong involvement with the Surrealists. Indeed, in November 1926, he was banished from the surrealist group as a result of trying to set up a theatre company the Théâtre Alfred Jarry (Crombez, 2008, p. 9). Although displaying a clear association with surrealism, in his commitment to theatre, Artaud took a different direction than that espoused by the surrealist groups of his time. Automatic writing was deemed by André Breton to be something that should not be related to artistic practice. It is important to note that at the time of the play, 1925, Artaud had not yet written the essays that would become the manifesto for a Theatre of Cruelty, as would be published in *Theatre and its Double* (1931-1938). However, the genesis of these ideas is present within the envisioned spectacle of *Spurt of Blood*. Disorder as a disruptive, anarchic and potentially liberating poetic force is one such idea. The disorder of sexuality or sexuality as disorder is another, and this shall be explored more thoroughly in the hellish destruction of the Cenci family in *The Cenci* (1935) (Chapter 4).

In *Spurt of Blood* the sky is falling down upon its heroes, “Artaud's hero declares that the heavens have gone mad” (Cohn, p. 316). The young couple’s profession of love for each other is ruptured by the invasion of chaos, symbolised by fragmented objects and a mutilated body: limbs and random objects that fall from the sky. The

objects descending from the heavens are, on the one hand, a meaningless pastiche of elements, but they also represent disorder itself as the overarching theme of the performance. In later years, when Artaud developed his vision of the Theatre of Cruelty, he distinguishes between the cruelty of physical violence, and the metaphysical cruelty of a theatre that reflects the dark realities of life, its tragedies, conflicts and fatalism. As he says: "We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all" (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 79). From this statement, it is clear that chance and not a deified determinism is central to an Artaudian worldview. We also hear resistance to what would later become existentialism, the responsibility and the inherent freedom of the individual to choose. For Artaud, the theatre should not be a place of pure entertainment where spectators may escape from the realities of life; instead theatre should reflect the inconsistencies and traumatic uncertainties of life, and the potential of what "may fall from the sky". Conversely, the theatre should be a space of infectious force, a place of contagion and rupture that could invade the audience like the plague:

> The theater, like the plague, is in the image of this carnage and this essential separation. It releases conflicts, disengages powers, liberates possibilities, and if these possibilities and these powers are dark, it is the fault not of the plague nor of the theater, but of life (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 31).

Therefore, for Artaud, theatre works to engage directly with life and actively intervene in the psyche or imagination of the spectator. As a spectator of the Theatre of Cruelty, we are not passive bystanders enjoying the spectacle but become part of that spectacle through the igniting of passions and sensory effects triggered by the performance.

Artaud compared the theatre to the plague because it is the "means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized". (*Ibid*, p 30). Theatre, therefore, is a place of possibility and also impossibility, where the censors of everyday life and pervading discourses are stretched to their limits. As Ubersfeld comments:

> What Artaud calls the Plague is a violent release, for the spectator, of a given specific, overwhelming, but productive emotion: the spectator is made to

> experience something to which she or he is absolutely obliged to give meaning (1999, p. 192).

While the spectator of Artaudian Theatre is certainly implicated in this violent release, the question of giving meaning to this effect is uncertain. In particular, as the subject matters of the play challenge the very basis of the symbolic structures of meaning in society. *Spurt of Blood* challenges taboos and convention with its references to incest, the infallibility of God and the absurdity of religion, through the presence of certain signifiers and the scattered construction of plot and narrative. It is a play that captures themes of chance and tragedy within the disorganisation of the plot, although the tragic hero is not presented as Aristotle would have instructed. There is no space to identify with any of the characters or to feel pity and fear; the spectacle is the central source of tragedy. The sky has fallen on the two lovers in the shape of a mutilated body, most notably just after they have expressed their love for each other. They become separated by chaos of a *disjecta membra*: this is a disruption coming from a space outside the earthly setting, with no cause or meaning, a surrealist pastiche of objects signifying disorganisation. We saw earlier that the body is not just traumatic in the past tense but is also continuously porous as a 'body of holes'. The holes of the body (holes related to meaning) subvert the subject's desire for a complete mastery of life's trajectory and become furrows and gullies within which memories of the past experience of the body are lodged. In the context of the temporality of human experience, the body is constructed of layers of re-membering, and dis-membering as memories of previous configurations collide with present and future possibilities. Thus, in Artaud's corporeal poetics the representation of the body is both reduced to its materiality as a mutilated substance and raised to the level of the signifier by its capacity for transformation as divisible pieces, 'a body without organs'. However, although Artaud's dismembered body takes on particular significance within the context of his work, it is also situated within the symbolic systems pertinent to theatre at that particular time. The next section takes up this point within the context of the semiotics of the dis-membered body in theatre.

3.2. Situating the Dismembered Body in Artaud's Work

Where do I come from?
I am Antonin Artaud
and I say this
as I know how to say this
immediately
you will see my present body
burst into fragments
and remake itself
under ten thousand notorious aspects
a new body
where you will
never forget me. (Artaud, *To Have Done With The Judgment Of God*, 1947)

The body in pieces is a theme of Artaud's work, and it is clear that it is both a psychic fantasy from his personal life and an artistic motif of his poetics and dramaturgy. In the above quotation, Artaud devises a path to becoming reborn through a bursting into fragments of the body. We should remember here, that the body as it is referred to within signification is always already a part body, a signifier of something that cannot be represented in totality. In *Spurt of Blood* the fragmented body acts as an interruption to proceedings and gives fuel to an antireligious or ante-sacred tone within the play. The figure of the dismembered body is also a feature of Artaud's 1933 text *La Conquête du Mexique* (The Conquest of Mexico). The timing of this "disorder from the heavens" within the play is also significant as it is after the lovers convey a feeling of wholeness and fullness that everything falls apart. Artaud's disjointed lovers parody the ideal of mythical oneness in the figure of the couple as the course of their relationship is ruptured by a violent excess of nature, a drive toward entropy and death.

In *Stages of Dismemberment,* Margaret E Owens (2005), documents the symbolic and cultural history of the staging of the dismembered body. The dismembered body in theatre has served as a semiotic device with which to convey social, religious and cultural mores, in particular, those that support and challenge notions of unity and fragmentation. Philosophically, ideas of harmony and fragmentation in relation to the self/body dialectic changed over time. As Owens describes, pre-reformation theatre sought to rectify the fragmentation of the body through a vision of unity condensed

in narrative and ideological paradigms within drama.[35] However, the paradigm of unifying the body through ritual changed after the Reformation. As she says:

> Dismemberment on the post-Reformation stage is not so much a necessary sacrificial phase in a larger ritual process of regeneration as a graphic sign of the vulnerability that is inherent in the condition of embodiment (p. 252)

In other words, in post-reformation times, there was increased recognition of the fragility of earthly flesh. In this context, therefore, the representation of the body in *Spurt of Blood* is divorced from a vision of Eucharistic unity and idealism and rather indicates the fragmentary traumatic component of embodiment.

In a reading that focuses on the theatrical significance of Artaud's dismembered body, Crombez (2008) refers to the domination of poststructuralist thinking regarding Artaud and the reading of the dismembered body within symbolist terms. Arguing against metaphorical resonances of Artaud's inner state, he offers an alternative reading. The focus is on a more literal appraisal of this image, within which he refers to Artaud's dramaturgy as "the systematically wrong style" within the context of the surrealist tradition — remembering, that Artaud broke ranks with the Surrealists due to his belief in the power of theatre, and poetics. However, I would argue that both readings are possible; the dismembered body is situated at the juncture of psychic fantasy and semiotic signification.

Thus, while the image of the fragmented body in this play cannot be completely divorced from its semiotic and historical context, including that of surrealism, it can also be situated within the methodology we have previously outlined. In the context of Artaud's writings, the fragmented, shattered body signifies a paradox concerning unity versus fragmentation as the polarities of human experience. On the one hand, a shattering of the body into pieces without "organs" situates the body in a state of disorganisation; that is outside of the 'organs' of meaning. On the other hand, a shattering of the body may also be an attempt at a unification of body and mind through the breaking up of a body that is problematic, traumatic and codified by convention. In this way, fragmentation becomes defragmentation, a way of processing and reorganising and, indeed, re-codifying the inherent disorder

[35] Drawing from Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in which imagos of fragmented bodies and mutilation haunt subjectivity she finds that human beings are subject to "nightmares of dismemberment" (p. 12).

constitutive of embodiment and subjectivity. This is in keeping with what Crombez describes as Artaud's "refashioning of the self appropriating alien selves *within* one's own condition" (2008, p. 14).

Furthermore, I would argue that the assemblage of dislocated limbs in *Spurt of Blood* can be viewed as a metaphor for the Freudian death drive, the instinct of returning to an inanimate state (Freud, 1920). This drive to return to a previous inanimate state acts as a point of rupture or absence of sense to the lived temporality of the body. If we look at the word dismemberment in terms of its two distinct units, dis and member, we have a construct that signifies the opposite of re-membering or piecing together the moments of time. In the act of remembering, we reassemble the elements (member) of an event or sequence of moments to capture it again in memory. Therefore, to 'dis-member' is to tear apart the integrity of the memory itself, to fragilise the elements of something for it to become unrecognisable, to disorder the pieces outside of time.

The representation of the body (or part body) in *Spurt of Blood* is suffused with the idea of rupture and tearing. A 'spurt of blood' serves as a referent for a body that is not whole but torn, injured, and partial. Blood is a physical substance that flows from a tear to the body; it leaks and spills from the body; it is both part of and alien to the subject. As something that crosses from the inside to the exterior of the body, it is within the realm of the abject. Furthermore, in this play, it is God's hand that is bleeding after being bitten by the whore. The metaphoric resonances of this image are subversive of the authority of the Christian patriarchal God. Rather than being omnipotent, God is depicted as vulnerable and prone to wounding, and reduced to the earthly realities of human beings. Thus, biting the hand of God is an act of revenge, particularly as in this sacrilegious and surrealist context, it is the whore who bites back. In this defiant act, the prostitute is symbolic of sin and untrammelled sexual desire, an example of the flawed earthly humanity that is beneath God's imagined perfection. In his assault on meaning, Artaud pitted himself against the logocentric authority of the symbolic Other, frustrated by convention and what he may have experienced as the claustrophobia of the body. This claustrophobia is offset by a poetics of anarchy.

3.3. A Poetics of Anarchy

In *The Poetics,* Aristotle gives directions for the dramatic factors constitutive of a good tragedy. According to his dictates, the best tragedy is not constructed by the theatrical spectacle but rather by the structure of the events themselves:

> It is possible for the evocation of fear and pity to result from the spectacle, and also from the structure of the event itself. The latter is preferable and is the mark of a better poet[…..]Those who use spectacle to produce an effect which is not evocative of fear, but simply monstrous, have nothing to do with tragedy; one should not seek every pleasure from tragedy, but the one that is characteristic of it (Aristotle, c 335 BC/1996, p. 22).

According to director Mark Pilkington, "'Spurt of Blood' challenges the traditional Aristotelian concept of theatre" (quoted in the Observer, Fordice, 2008). In the elaborations of *The Poetics,* Aristotle underlines a call for order in the production of a poetics of tragedy; he stipulates rules or pointers to follow for theatre to provoke catharsis. Catharsis connotes an emotional release brought about through the provocation of the emotions, pity and fear. In contrast to the Aristotelian model of catharsis, Artaud emphatically uses the theatrical spectacle as a provocation of potential bodily effects with the audience. We could call this a *jouissance* of the spectacle. Whereas Aristotle was concerned with matters of harmony and moderation, there is an appeal to disorder in Artaud's theatrics that exalts in an excess of the theatrical principle.

Instead of holding the "mirror up to nature" and conjuring a theatrical copy of reality; Artaud wanted the stage to be part of nature, a double of life, not just a reflection. Thus, the theatrical performance was to exceed the limits of mimetical representation, as Morfee says, "All Artaud's writing is profoundly influenced by the idea of replacing representation with performance" (2005, p. 5). In writing on the nature of theatrical action, Artaud employs metaphors of the ruptured body to generate the violence of the performative impact. Artaud writes: "A violent and concentrated action is a kind of lyricism: it summons up supernatural images, a bloodstream of images, a bleeding spurt of images in the poet's head and in the spectator's as well" (1938/1958, p. 82).

With these words, the imagery of the spurt of blood is invoked and acts both as metonym and metaphor for the potential expansion of the spectator's imagination. The spectator's imagination is inscribed as both physical (material) and intangible (as metaphor). The visceral nature of this image is in keeping with Artaud's desire to provoke the body of the spectator through the senses.

The style of *Spurt of Blood* is reflective of Artaud's desire to summon up "the spirit of profound anarchy which is at the root of all poetry" (*ibid,* p. 42). In this vision for theatre (or performance) the audience should be woken up to what he perceives as the inertia of Western theatre. Indeed, according to Sylvere Lotringer (Walker Art Center, 2015), this desire to wake up the audience stemmed from the fact that Artaud felt dead, void of affect, and was attempting to revive his own life force as well as that of the audience through the Theatre of Cruelty.

It is somewhat ironic given Artaud's insistence on the liveness and beyond linguistic nature of performance that it is within his theoretical writings that his vision of performance is truly realised. Furthermore, the perspicacity of Artaud's vision in relation to performance and theatrical signification is important in considering the particularities of theatre as a genre of expression. In working with Artaud's vision, both in its limitations and innovations, we come closer to understanding the nature of representation within theatre and indeed representation per se. For it is also what the Theatre of Cruelty fails to do, but nonetheless, endeavours to do, that generates a truth of human subjectivity.

The Theatre of Cruelty has served as a precursor to what is classified as 'The Living Theatre' and has been an influencing factor in current trends of performance art, such as that of the body performance artist Orlan. Orlan undergoes cosmetic procedures while reading from texts of Artaud and Lacan, thus, performing a contemporary enactment of the Theatre of Cruelty. The concept of presence, as captured by Artaud and as it has become associated with his theatre, is a factor in the work of artists who render the body present as the object of performance.

In comparison to current multimedia performances and the range of technological enhancements possible within the theatre, Artaud's work would not stand out as unusual. However, as Cohn remarks, certain elements in Artaud's production: the

image of a Giant hand, non-verbal noises, zigzags of lightning and a suddenly transparent dress would certainly have been novel in 1925 (1979, p. 318). Therefore, at this time, it could be said that these phenomena of performance are not part of the conventional context or historical lexicon of stage signification and serve as signifiers of something not coherently symbolic, but outside of everyday sense. Although Artaud places great emphasis on the spectator in his writings and vision of the nature of theatre, a question I would ask is who is this audience? In other words, what kind of communication is being addressed within the conceptualisations of a Theatre of Cruelty designed for maximum impact on the audience? In Artaud's essays and short pieces of writing, the position of other people as beings to which Artaud relates is not clearly evident and so, I would argue that the privileging of the audience as the defining force of performance is questionable. Similarly, in identifying the issue of communication in Artaud's work, Murray captures an ambiguity within the distinction of his invention of a universal language versus the reality of a language that is particular to his own corporeal experience:

> What Artaud communicates, or attempts to communicate, is his own corporeal experience; perhaps for this reason his language can never be universal or transcendent in the way that he seeks. His own experience is for him a reflection of universal truth, and his body becomes a microcosm of the external world. This does not take into account the possibility that the viewer, reader, or audience might not experience what he takes to be the 'direct' and 'immediate' physical response that he demands (2014, p. 25).

This ambiguity concerning Artaud's own corporeal experience and that which is conveyed to the audience is a significant point in considering the implications for spectatorship via the tenets of the Theatre of Cruelty. From the perspective of spectatorship, there is always a singular response to performance and one that we cannot always predict in advance. As I have previously outlined, an essential factor in situating and orientating the work of the three authors is through the concept of the Other, as that aspect of the symbolic that both guarantees and fails to guarantee meaning. In other words, the inherent nonsense of an ultimate anchor point in meaning can be both accepted and denied, and the effects of these positions can be understood through the relationship to the *object a*. The orientation toward meaning is correspondent to the representation of the body in the dramatic works. The position of meaning and Otherness in Artaud's work is complex, and it is important

not to be overly reductive in summing it up in binary terms. Therefore, although I defined excess as the characteristic of Artaud's style and personal momentum, in that the *jouissance* of the body and the Other takes precedence over a sense of absence, this is only an approximation formed through the inadequacy of language.

In the next section on Beckett's *Endgame*, we look more closely at an author whose style of theatre fits with the category of a 'Theatre of Absence'. The stratifications of meaning and alienation are laid bare through a dramatic minimalism that points to the ultimate subtraction of forms, where we may be left with nothing. However, this nothing is a significant phenomenon.

3. BECKETT: ENDGAME'S CHRONIC BODIES

Endgame was first performed in England in French on 3 April 1957. Beckett translated the work himself, and the English version was published in 1958.

From the off, the environment of *Endgame* emits a fatal tone, and we are drawn into a scene where time is drawing to a close, yet without an obvious cause. It is not certain what is happening, but "something is taking its course", and "nearly finished". Clov's opening lines, reminiscent of the crucifixion, set the apocalyptic tone, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished". (1958/2006, p. 93).

The characters of *Endgame* are pawns of an existential game ruled by time and the parameters of their bodies: Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg are enclosed in a sparse, minimally furnished room, all compromised by physical restrictions and tied to each other like a set of mutually dependent entities. Nell and Nagg are trapped in dustbins and at the mercy of their son Hamm who is blind and confined to a chair. We may presume he is disabled, but nothing is certain.

The play begins with the spectacle of inanimate objects; there is a stillness, a corpse-like feel to the objects. Hamm covered by a sheet is motionless in an armchair. A sheet also covers both dustbins. Clov appears and shuffles around the room removing the sheets and opening the blinds, laughing curiously and somewhat hysterically at

each unveiling. Clov has a pronounced limp and cannot sit down in contrast with Hamm's inability to stand up. In a darkly comic way, the pair are the perfect match. Clov has an itch in his nether regions to which he applies powder to alleviate the problem. Other ailments are implied through his interactions with Hamm about the state of their mutual physical health: Hamm: "how are your eyes? Clov: Bad- Hamm: how are your legs? Clov: Bad" (*ibid*, p. 95). Hamm is dependent on Clov to help him in his infirmity, and Clov cannot leave Hamm until the very end of the play. There is no marker of standard chronological time; the time is 'zero', signifying a space outside of the usual markers of an everyday temporality. We are in no man's land. If the time is zero, the ambience is akin to ground zero, a location directly impacted by a hostile threat. As Hamm describes, "Outside of here it's death" (*ibid*, p. 96).

The title *Endgame* alerts us to a salient and complex metaphor pervading the drama; the closing stages of a game of chess when few pieces remain on the board. The complexity of this metaphor lies in its polysemic potential within the parameters of the characters situational landscape. Hamm's initial words "Me… to play" (p. 93) mark the opening of an implied game and a reference to chess. In chess, the endgame is an outcome of a series of actions that lead towards either a winner or loser or stalemate – checkmate marking the point of victory. In an analysis of the chess metaphor in *Endgame,* Kumar argues that it "functions as a unifying element" of various symbols in the play and through which it "presents the existential angst of man" (1997, p. 540). This existential angst is reflected in the environment of *Endgame*, which is bleak, and this aspect reflects its content. The only room is dark and shabby, minimalist and sparse, dislocated from anywhere familiar and situated in an unknown territory. This adds to the intimation of impending checkmate in the play; the environment of the characters is closing in on them, and they are possibly encountering the last few moves available to them *vis-à-vis* existence itself. Regardless of whatever choices the characters make, though, it is futile as nature as the dominant overseer will always play the last move on earth. And yet even nature as the support of life is running out. Clov: "There's no more nature. Hamm: No more nature! You exaggerate". (*Ibid*, p. 97). An air of finality overhangs the dialogue and the action between the characters, and a shadow of futility is cast over all. However, this gloomy atmosphere is cut through with a dark humour inherent to this absurd situation, as in Hamm and Clov's master-slave dynamic, and the bizarre confinement

of Hamm's parents to dustbins. As many factors in the setting of *Endgame* are ambiguous, such as location, time and meaning, the bodies of the characters stand out, not simply in their infirmity, but also as dislocated objects in a moribund world. The bodies in *Endgame* are positioned as prisoners of the external world, nature and their own personal demons, and this positioning subverts the fantasy of narcissistic mastery pertaining to the ego and by so doing renders the situation darkly comic. The bleak ambience of *Endgame* is evocative of the final stages of life and possibly the final stages of the world. In this barren landscape of bare boards and alienating dialogue, the bodies of the characters feature strongly as emblems of all that remains of a dying world.

Endgame has provided a hermeneutic challenge to critics. Indeed, if the play has a 'meaning' this may be to challenge any conventionalist account of meaning per se. As Hamm and Clov illustrate with their ruminations:

> Hamm: "we are not beginning to… to… mean something?
>
> Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one!" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 108).

Michael Springer argues in his essay on the play that: "The paradoxical task of interpretation thus becomes the reflexive attempt not to do violence to the work by ascribing a meaning but rather to see through the assumptions that bring about the ideological commitments to do so" (2010, p. 186).

Alternatively, other critics have attempted to 'locate' the drama in time, thus rendering it more within the context of meaning. In *Remainders*, Russell Smith (2007) provides a historical context to the apocalyptic aura of the play from the perspective of individual and societal trauma post World War II. *Endgame* is like the scene of the aftermath of a historical catastrophe that has left traumatised subjects in its wake. Freud's categories of mourning and melancholia frame the accounts of loss in the drama. As Smith describes: "To some extent *Endgame* can be seen as a traumatised acting-out in the wake of a catastrophic event" (2007, p. 107). This traumatised acting out takes the form of "repetition compulsion" between Hamm and Clov. Smith comments on the repetition of phrases within the dialogue that punctuate a loss or a lack of something:

> *Endgame* is a play of losses, not just absences: historical losses that take the form of events that may be narrated, that in fact are repeatedly narrated through the formula "There's no more". "there are no more bicycles… no more painkiller… no more nature" (*ibid*, p. 85).

While I would agree that *Endgame* is certainly a play of losses, I would add that this loss does not have to be situated within a historical context. Rather, viewing it in a subjective context, the repetition of the phrase 'no more' as it relates to objects signifies the futility of substitution in ever reaching a total satisfaction of desire. There are no more objects that can punctuate and palliate the eroding progression of time. Therefore, something is marked here by the punctuation of absence, an awareness that something is missing. The subjective void and the discord inherent to embodiment can no longer be avoided through the distraction of earthly objects. The successive references to missing objects in the play represent the metonymic process of substitution inherent to language, where one object may take the place of another. In this drama, as in many others, Beckett manages to carve out the place of symbolic absence through the materiality of forms and corresponding linguistic devices in what Elam refers to as Beckett's "art of the whatnot" (1986, p. 127). The very conditions of meaning are laid bare in order to be eroded, leaving both an absence as a figurative loss and yet a space for possibility. Beckett's tendency toward the entropy of signification is what Elam refers to as semantic disintegration, a "strategic leaving out" that can only frustrate any standard attempt at exegesis:

> Moreover, one might see more than a little irony in the critical endeavour to unveil a full and integral, albeit unappealing, semantic substance lying as it were behind the scenes, for the dramatist's own efforts seem to go increasingly in the opposite direction, namely that of semantic disintegration (*ibid*, p. 126)

In this running aground of options, in which Hamm and Clov are situated, we encounter a scenario of ultimate dread, where existence is reduced to itself and desire may run aground, leaving us in the 'pain of existing'. Namely, "existing when desire is no longer there" (Lacan, 1958-1959, Seminar 5, Dec 12th). Shadows of loss fall on the objects in *Endgame* generating melancholic and uncanny undercurrents. Thus, the objects that are named (painkiller, bicycle, et cetera) and the fact that they become subtracted within the context of a speech act, symbolise a state of absence and emptiness correlated with the subjectivity of the characters. With these objects,

as in melancholia, “the shadow of the object falls upon the ego”. (Freud, 1917, p. 248).

To interpret *Endgame* through a historical lens has its limitations, given the unlocalisable coordinates of the space concerned, and the ambiguity of meaning that pervades the play. Although of course, Beckett was deeply affected by the war and the maimed bodies that he encountered in the Red Cross. Alternatively, however, and the view most relevant to the method in this thesis, is that the refusal to locate the events in a specific time or place positions *Endgame* in a more existential context, where the non-sense of being and the powerlessness of the subject in the face of time are portrayed. The human being is more a prisoner of circumstance than history and is held captive in the chronic senselessness of time. For time itself has no meaning other than what humans ascribe to it. Hamm and Clov express the frustration of an experience which never seems to end, similar to Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Indeed, while there are other similarities between the plays, such as a quasi pseudo-couple who abuse each other to pass the time and the uncertainty of what is to come, *Endgam*e moves further along the axis of nothingness, where not even Godot awaits. This staging of coming and going or rather coming and *not* going is characteristic of Beckett’s work, the dialectics of which create a discontinuity of relations, a drama of missed encounters.

4.1. A Discontinuity of ‘Relations’

‘Events’ in *Endgame* proceed by a series of missed encounters and fractious relations. Hamm and Clov are tied together in a quasi-sadomasochistic coupling in which they are dependent on each other for survival. Hamm appears to control Clov, blowing a whistle to call him to attention. In the background, Hamm’s decrepit parents take up an uncanny presence, although presence is an ambiguous word to use in the case of the ethereal Nell and Nagg. Imprisoned by their dustbins, Nell and Nagg are unable to touch each other beyond the dustbins (although they try and fail). Consequently, they are in solitary confinement once the lid is closed and serve as metaphors for aloneness and isolation, “the old folks at home” (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 96).

In relegating the aged to dustbins, Beckett has aligned the elderly (as symbolic figures of the temporality of the body) with the abject. A dustbin is an object where we throw discarded and useless waste products, rotting and decaying food, and the remainders of our daily life. As an image or signifier of the abject, the dustbin is a container for the repudiated and disgusting remnants of the flesh. However, these characters also serve as representations of the remainders of Hamm's life, ghostly figures with a disembodied presence; we only ever see their heads – Nagg refers to his stumps in sawdust as if he has no legs. The body as a totalising image is acutely absent. Metaphorically, Nell and Nagg are like the dying embers of Hamm's imagination or psychic memories, and he can never see them in the flesh as it were, not least as he is also blind. Positioned behind him, they serve as a ghostly chorus, suggesting that these figures are representations in memory, traces of the Mother and Father he once had. The relation between Hamm and his parents is not one of tenderness; they irritate him and are nuisances to be kept a lid on. Nagg is the "cursed progenitor", the one who is cursed with having given Hamm life.

Within the dynamics between Hamm and his parents, it could be said that Hamm is punishing them, enacting a revenge fantasy where he can dominate and control in a way he was powerless to as a boy. Nagg and Hamm's dialogue reveal aspects of Hamm's interior life. According to Nagg, when Hamm was a baby he was not listened to, he cried, but there was no response. Nagg's taunting is malicious as he hopes that one day Hamm will need to be listened to, that he will experience what it is like to have that vulnerability. This resentful tone is then shared by Hamm in telling Clov that one day he too might be blind and need help, but there will be nobody there. These fractious relations point to an absence at the heart of communication where a cry for help cannot be adequately responded to, a strong motif in Beckett's drama. As Vladimir states, "the air is full of our cries" (Beckett, 1953/2006, p. 84). This is a metaphor for a suffering that reveals a gap in the symbolic, where the Other (or to whom the cry is addressed) fails to respond adequately to this cry; Godot never arrives, and night never comes. Furthermore, the drives can never be satisfied. The nonresponse signals a remainder, a point of angst that is in excess of human communicative relations. This non-rapport of communication in the play is also figured through the toy dog who lacks a leg. Hamm desires to be gazed at by the one-legged toy dog. He is blind so cannot

witness the gazing, yet imagines in a wishful fantasy that the dog is looking at him in adoration. When Hamm enquires as to whether the dog is looking at him, the dog duly falls over, unable to stay upright on its missing leg.

To survive the trajectory of existence the human being is both aware and in denial of death, in Hamm's words, "The end is in the beginning, and yet you go on" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 126). This statement captures both the futility and endurance characteristic of the human spirit and frames an echo of finality that haunts embodiment. On several occasions, Hamm and Clov ask each other have they not had enough. The difficulty of going on and yet continuing to live frequently recurs throughout Beckett's work, summed up in *The Unnamable*: "You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on" (Beckett, 19531978, p. 103). In *Beckett and Decay* (2009) Katherine White captures the struggle between life and death in Beckett's work when she says: "Beckett was well aware of the realities of life, that in life there exists only death, and from the moment of birth we are essentially 'Dying on' " (p. 4).

All bodies in *Endgame* suffer an apparent restriction in their outward manifestation. In this 'dying on' the body is depicted as somewhat of a waste product, a remainder of the slow decomposition of the human being over time. The very fact that we are born introduces us to finite parameters, such as those inherent to the body. The body is a function of time. As an organic entity, our physicality has a finite and limited trajectory and is in constant change. These changes are largely imperceptible on a day-to-day basis, but ultimately the trajectory of the body is "taking its course" and subject to the laws of nature. Interestingly, Smith observes that 'old stancher', (Hamm's handkerchief) is derived from the word 'stanch' meaning "to stop the flow of blood". From this perspective, the handkerchief becomes a "provisional bandage", an object that signifies the attempt to plug a wound (2007, p. 100).

The notion of the chronic dominates the movement of *Endgame*. There is an absence of the signification of actual time; we don't know where or when the events take place. Signifiers of the ambiguity of life and death, as depicted through movement and stillness resound in the objects and dialogues of the play. This blurring of the categories between animate and inanimate, life and death is further resonant of the concept of the uncanny, that which Freud (1919) denoted as *Das Unheimlich*. The

uncanny is that which is both familiar and strange, intimate yet haunting.[36] The uncanny is also an interval or in-between space, that space between life and death. As Freud says: "the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1919, p. 1).

It is important to take care when assigning interpretations to particular objects in the play and to resist totalising explanations. Although there are biblical connotations to Hamm's name, sheet and handkerchief as resonant of the shroud of Turin or Mary Magdalen's handkerchief, we run the risk in assigning particular symbolic qualities to these objects, and that our interpretations 'begin to mean something'.

Nonetheless, from a semiotic perspective, the metonymical resonances of these objects are important in framing spaces of presence and absence, as long as we do not construct a monolithic meaning of the play as a result. The staged objects of *Endgame* stand out in sharp relief against the minimalist background and atmosphere of the set. These objects function as metonymic signifiers in a cascading chain of fragments, remainders, and disjointed memories. Ubersfeld makes the point that Nell and Nagg's garbage can, for example, serves to dislocate speech from its usual trajectory. As she says:

> In *Endgame* the old men's speeches come out of a garbage can, and the message is less in the speeches than it is in the speech-garbage can relation. What can you say when your message comes out of a garbage can? (1999, p. 162).

Thus, this example implies that the symbolic construction of the stage setting, and the juxtaposition of objects and language, works to dislocate habitual associations of form. Instead of being presented as a whole, coherent scene, the dialogue, characters and objects of *Endgame* are linked together like the intersecting and disparate elements of a dream while being infiltrated with silent gaps of dramatic import. Dialogue is set against a backdrop of silence, where the atmosphere of futility swallows up the effort of speaking. In working with the objects absent and present in

[36] In Freud's essay on the uncanny, he provides an analysis of the etymology of the word *Das Unheimlich* and its paradoxical connotation of an experience that is both familiar and strange (homely and unhomely). Fundamentally, Freud connects the feeling of the uncanny with the return of the repressed, the transformation of an affect pertaining to the unconscious into the experience of anxiety. Something known to us but foreclosed has returned in different form, an aspect of ourselves that is frightening, anxiety provoking. The concept of the *doppelgänger*, or the double illustrates this principle. In *Endgame* familiar objects are transformed into metonymic signifiers associated with death, decay and the suspension of everyday reality rendering uncanny effects.

Endgame, what matters is not what the elements comprised together actually mean, but where the fragments of meaning can take us within an alien environment. In this alien environment, all of the characters experience an impairment at a physical level and the concept of the whole-body has come undone. In its stead, rather than witnessing the fantasy of normality, we encounter the fantasy of debility.

4.2. The Fantasy of Debility

Human beings live "astride of a grave and a difficult birth" (Beckett, 1953/2006, p. 83). In other words, both the beginning and the end of life are constituted by powerlessness, and a subjection to something that is "taking its course". This somewhat fatalistic idea is framed through the representation of the body as impaired and finite in *Endgame*. While the bodies in *Endgame* could be classified as disabled, this is not a representation of disability that succumbs to narratives of political correctness. Beckett does not attempt to paint a redeeming picture of this kind of scenario. Hamm is not a likeable character, and we could even deduce from the dialogue that he is paying for his sins with his infirmity. According to Catanzaro, Hamm's paralysis challenges taboos of representing the disabled: "With his high camp version of the paralytic, Hamm breaks taboos against denigrating the disabled, made acceptably chic by his decadent affectations" (2007, p. 175). All characters in *Endgame* have an infirmity or 'lack' something physically, including and strikingly the one-legged toy dog. These ailments are not set within a concrete narrative. It is not clear when Hamm went blind or if he was always so, but somehow one imagines his physical ailments have been acquired as opposed to congenital. A salient feature of the play is that there is no contrast on stage with any able-bodied character that would give the specular juxtaposition of disability versus the able-bodied. There is no imaginary stabilising point of ability. In other words, there is no contrast with an image of the 'norm' or an ideal from which these bodies become registered as disabled; they simply exist as is. Consequently, the spectator has no reprieve from the confrontation with decomposition nor a refuge within an able-bodied frame of reference. This ubiquitous depiction of infirmity highlights the instability and temporary nature of the able-bodied category per se. As McRuer defines in a seminal statement within Crip and disability studies:

> Everyone is virtually disabled, both in the sense that able-bodied norms are "intrinsically impossible to embody" fully and in the sense that able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough (2006, p. 31).

However, it must be said that being virtually disabled, although an ontological potentiality does not equate with the reality of becoming so. That being said, McRuer's statement points to the inevitability of a failure at the level of the body and gives us a frame within which to situate the bodies of *Endgame,* bodies that challenge the fantasy of the normal. In today's times of increasing awareness of equality and disability rights, tropes and recurring images of the ideal disabled person emerge in popular culture. These include narratives of the 'overcomer', the 'Olympian', 'the noncomplainer' and the person that, no matter what the disability, is just as 'productive' as everybody else. These images or narrative categories of disabled people are idealised within our culture as hallmarks of how we conceive of value and worth regarding the citizen and the subject. I outlined in Chapter 2 (section 4.2) how disability narratives within discourses (such as the social model of disability) can often deny the reality of physical impairment, by working to undo the negative associations of such bodies. In contrast, Beckett's bodies are disabled in such a way as to flaunt an inherently non-productive image of the human, posing a resistance to any conception of an idealised gestalt. This representation could be viewed as both liberating and contemptuous. However, I would be slow to interpret these bodily manifestations as simply concrete representations of disability. Frequently representations of impairment or ill health occur in Beckett's work without an overt nomination of these physical states as disability. In this sense, bodily existence is presented as inherently non-ideal, to begin with, and debility is the norm, not the exception. Thus, I would argue that the repetition of fragmented and not whole bodies across Beckett's oeuvre is indicative of something symptomatic at the level of representation. What is it that the impaired body is saying we might ask? While not only being signifiers of disability, Beckett's truncated bodies form a poetics of carcerality, where action and movement are immobilised within the image of an imprisoned self. Victoria Swanson describes this feature of Beckett's work from within the language of institutional incarceration, as the body that is disciplined by external forces:

> The desolation revealed in the repetitiousness of the perpetual immobilizing forces, which are either thrust upon or adopted by the characters, frames *Endgame* and mirrors the institutional carcerality of the prison where restrained movement and total confinement are coupled with constant surveillance (Swanson, 2011).

In *Endgame*, Beckett often uses the environment to capture the effects of psychic distress and the disorientating task of exploring where the self begins or ends. In *The Unnamable,* the narrator describes the experience of confinement without knowledge of the boundary of self: "The sawdust no longer presses against my stumps. I don't know where I end. I left it yesterday" (Beckett, 1953/1978, p. 47).

Interestingly, the same physical image appears in *Endgame* where Nell and Nagg's stumps are situated within the sawdust of their dustbins. In thinking of the spatial properties of the physical body, the truncated body, open-ended and incomplete is both limited and unlimited, finite and infinite. In this way, the ambiguous experience of subjective time is conveyed through paradox; we cannot remember not being alive, yet we know that someday we won't be.

The bodies in *Endgame* bear the hallmarks of time's chronic progression, as it erodes little by little the egoic dreams of immortality. As Elizabeth Freeman explains in *Theorising the Chronic*, the term chronic stems from the meaning of 'in time' but also contains echoes of references to pathological states such as chronic illness, deficits of character, and ill-fated occurrences (2011, p. 3). With this in mind, the bodies in *Endgame* are symbols of the chronic; they are both altered by the progression of time and serve as a symbol of temporality. Viewing the body through the lens of the chronic captures the active principle of the body as a source of traumatic discord throughout an individual's life. As a marker of measuring change, the paradigm of the chronic is a temporal index and signals the movement of the subject's physical experience from animate to inanimate, life to death. Although we cannot say that we experience the final stage of the inanimate (as in death we cease existing), we do experience the potentiality of this final stillness within language and encounter it in the death and silence of the deceased. The paradox of the subjective experience of the chronic and the enigma of temporality pervades staged elements of *Endgame*. As we saw earlier, there is a gap between the experience of the body's failures and its representation, a point of "outside sense" that cognition cannot grasp.

This idea of outside sense or a lack of knowledge inherent to the body is captured in the momentum of Beckett's drive toward inertia within his prose and dramatic texts.

4.3. Next Move? The Drive Toward Inertia

The depiction of the body as constrained, infirm or damaged in some way is recurrent in Beckett's work. In *Happy Days* (1961), the body is subject to the encroachment of the environment as the sand increasingly envelops Winnie's body. In this instance, the environment is a visual metaphor for existential constraints of the subject, hemmed in by ever-decreasing circles of possibility. Winnie's seeming indifference to the suffocating sand, further emphasises the existential quality of the act. The ubiquity of these immobilised or physically restricted characters is striking and leads to the consideration that, for Beckett, the constrained body serves as a metaphor for unnameable or ineffable psychic states. Siobhan Purcell (2018) argues that the images of immobility in Beckett's work do not function simply as figures of physical inertia: "States of paralysis and immobility are not simply sites of inertia but are instead recast by Beckett as pared down moments of reflection on the will, the wish, and on external pressures" (p. 190). In other words, the restricted body gives form to the subjective experience of other less tangible subjective restrictions. That being said, we could also say that the restricted body of Beckett's drama gives materiality to an ethereal dimension of mind, an aspect of psychic reality that feels "disabled" or constrained by the physical frame of embodiment. So although the disabled body is not simply a site of inertia, the concept of stasis is nonetheless present as it relates to the experience of the limitations of the physical flesh. Furthermore, it is because the bodies of the characters cannot move, as in Nell, Nagg and Hamm, that they become like inanimate objects or 'pawns' in a game where they are both actor and subject. Hamm's paralytic confinement causes him to be moved (pushed by Clov) around the stage as would a chess piece around a board. He is both king of his surroundings, giving orders and commanding moves, yet a passive recipient of what is taking its course in the environment. With the metaphor of a chess game, Beckett introduces a mathematical dimension to the play, a metaphor that conveys a geometric space, a board with a number of possible or impossible moves. In 'playing' with the concept of possibility and impossibility via the material

medium of movement and stasis, Beckett outlines the contours of the paradox in which the embodied human subject is situated.

Therefore, in light of the viewpoint in this thesis, we could say that the impasse of a totalising epistemology of the body becomes formulated, in Beckett's drama, as a discord or reduction of the subject to the closed world of the body. In effect, the constrained theatrical body, manifest as a visible specular image becomes a figure of this impasse where the subject and the body are involved in a missed encounter.

A missed encounter as it relates to the body is also a source of dissatisfaction. As we saw regarding Freud and the drive, in Chapter 2, there can be no complete satisfaction for the human subject; the drive can never be fully satisfied. The travails of dissatisfaction pervade Beckett's work, and there is a categorical refusal to conceptualise happiness or satisfaction as an ideal. The following dialogue between Hamm and Clov is typical of an exchange of Beckettian characters:

> Clov: "he's crying," Hamm: then he's living,
> Hamm: did you ever had an instant of happiness?…
> Clov: not to my knowledge". (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 123).

The motif of dissatisfaction satirises the ideal of happiness so often promulgated by social discourses. As Hamm and Clov's interaction illustrates, life is characterised more by suffering than by happiness. At specific points, Clov attempts to scream, but even this rings of futility and points to a frustration that is not conveyed through words alone. At the level of the body, the scream is symbolic of a sensation of powerlessness in the face of something overwhelming.[37] As Nasio describes:

> But what is a scream if not the most authentic expression of our powerlessness? Our screams always express our rage at being subject to our limits and to our inability to overcome them. Thus, we can say that, if the scream expresses the primordial powerlessness of being human, it also expresses the primary source of all moral sentiments (2004, p. 107).

Although *Endgame* has very little light relief as it were, Hamm and Clov's complementing disabilities, and sarcastic wordplay reveals an aspect of physical

[37] Freud identified the scream as one of the first communications a baby has with the world; it is a cry that links the inner world of sensations with the outer world of other human beings and signification. Moments of extreme pain can reduce us to screaming and as Elaine Scarry (1985) argues destroys our ability to use words.

comedy. Impairments of the body that are ordinarily deemed tragic, are portrayed with the sarcasm that imprints physical infirmity within the very expression of a person's character. As Hamm says, commenting on their respective physical misfortunes, "Every man their speciality" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 97). The comedy of physical ailments is a running theme in Beckett's work, where the human subject is not permitted to take up a grandiose position in relation to physicality. Instead, our noses are ground in the dirt as it were, and we encounter the reality that, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (*ibid*, p. 101). Beckett's sardonic humour allows us to approach the realisation that, as White states, "To be physical is to suffer, and Beckett illustrates the pain of existence, denying us the possibility that death may provide a release" (2009, p. 3). White also makes the curious and somewhat optimistic point that the physical ailments of the characters are a source of hope; as they are portents for the drawing near of death and the possible soon release from the enclosure of the body. In this sense, the fragmented bodies of Beckett's drama illustrate the appeal of a death drive, an attempt to return through an entropic decomposition, to a state preceding cognition and structure.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to enact a dialogue between the methodological framework and particular dramatic works of the chosen authors in order to elucidate the conflictual situation of the body. The parameters of theory and application are not clear-cut, and as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the dialectic between art and psychoanalysis involves a cross-fertilisation of ideas where both disciplines may be enriched as a result. In this chapter, the dramatic works assessed through both text and performance were situated within a frame of alienation, Otherness and meaning. In this way, it enables us to approach the representation of the body within the specific works as a function of the relationship to the Other and as an orientation toward absence and presence.

In Jean Genet's *The Maids,* the perils of the imaginary are revealed through the style of masquerade and fantasy. In the particular narcissistic structure of the maids, where

separation from each other is embattled, identification has a tragic dimension. The vicissitudes of love and hate are projected onto the body, and the abject as a realm of disgust and repudiation comes to the fore. Ultimately for the maids, the death drive is turned against the body to alleviate the persecutory dimension of this identification. We saw that the vehicle of the poetic medium, in this dramatic context, served to illustrate the *jouissance* of the maids regarding both their societal position and toward each other.

The death drive is also present in Artaud's theatre of excess where the suffering body is implicit within his vision for a Theatre of Cruelty, a theatre that leaves the spectator burning at the stake rather than in a state of passive enjoyment of the spectacle. *Spurt of Blood* captures the theme of disorganisation that is characteristic of Artaud's work and is conveyed in part through the image of a dismembered body, a metaphor for the ambiguous relationship in his work concerning signifiers of body and mind.

Lastly, in Beckett's *Endgame,* we encountered the image of failure and dislocation on a grand scale. Not one character is able-bodied nor reflects the fantasy of the whole autonomous and independent subject. This is the subversive component of the dramatic spectacle; the spectator is not permitted a position from which to identify as superior and separate from this fragmentation. The concept of the 'normal productive' body is undercut; the structures of meaning are laid bare through the carving out of an absence pertaining to the symbolic objects in the play. Instead, embodiment is characterised as related to an inherent fatality, an endgame.

In the next chapter, we shall look to the traumatic component of embodiment as it relates to sexuality in the dramatic works. Indeed, sexuality is one of the most central issues of human existence and situates the body as both an enjoying substance and an object of desire.

CHAPTER 4

DRIVING FORCES: THE TRAUMA OF THE SEXED BEING.

> There is no sexual relationship, except for neighbouring generations, namely, the parents on the one hand, the children on the other – I am talking about sexual relationship – this is what is warded off by the prohibition of incest (Lacan, 1977, Seminar 10, April 10th).

1. INTRODUCTION

So far, in this thesis, we have developed a theory of the body from the perspective of the 'divided' subject, and in Chapter 2, we examined the potential implications of this method when applied to a theatrical context. In Chapter 3, we explored how the body and meaning are related through an analysis of the concept of alienation and dislocation within the dramatic works. The representation of the body within these works is directly connected with the orientation toward the Other as the limit of sense. Ultimately, as we have seen, in the context of the social order, there is no guarantee of a final meaning that we could apply either to the body or to any component of subjectivity, including what is referred to as the mind. This absence of ultimate meaning in the face of these questions is a fact whose effects are not benign but problematic and anxiety-provoking for the human being.

In this chapter, we take the epistemology of the body in the dramatic works to the level of sexuality, or rather to that of the sexed being. I shall trace this theme through the following plays: *The Cenci* (Artaud), *The Balcony* (Genet) and *Not I* (Beckett). Fundamentally, I argue in this chapter that sexuality is a modality of experience for the human being, which is at its core traumatic (Lacan, 1964, p. 64) and that this idea can be developed through an analysis of the chosen works. In other words, this principle assertion of sexuality concerns the fact that no knowledge or object can satisfy the sexual drive or provide an ultimate meaning to the proliferation of its expression – a knowledge of sexuality cannot be reduced to empiricism. As Alenka Zupančič, (2017) argues in "*What is Sex*?", there is no definition that would satisfy the ontology of sex adequately, no signified or meaning that would fit the bill and put an end to the interrogation and ambiguity of sexuality. In this sense, we are subjects of sexuality in the passive sense as well as subjects for sexuality. That is to say; we are subject to the drive and the ambiguity of its expression.

This chapter explores the concept of sexuality in the dramatic works of the three authors as a function of bodily experience that extends far beyond actual events or

representations of sexual acts and orientations. In other words, sexuality and the trauma of the sexed being are also present in acts or mental and physical states that may not be ostensibly sexual but contain a component of *jouissance*, a libidinal force.

The trauma of sexuality begins at the very onset of life. As we saw in Chapter 2 (2.3), Lacan has argued that the primordial cut within subjectivity is inherent to the start of life itself, the condition of finitude and the potential of procreation frames our corporality. The initial cut linking sexuality and death is then manifest and re-played through the binary divisions of gender (Verhaeghe, 2001). Hence, through the domain of language and culture, the original division is expressed in displaced form, such as the quest for achieving harmony via the sexual relationship. For Lacan, as we noted earlier, this harmony of the sexual relationship is impossible. As Žižek explains: "there is no universal guarantee of a harmonious sexual relationship with one's partner. Every subject invents a fantasy of his or her own, a "private" formula for the sexual relationship." (2009, paragraph 9).

Therefore, to speak of the lack of the sexual relationship is to underline the non-rapport of the sexes and the impossibility of achieving a totalising knowledge of the body. The drama of Artaud, Genet and Beckett overlap thematically on this idea of the non-rapport and the failure of the sexual relationship, intersecting in what could be called a 'queer' encounter.

1.1. Queer Encounters. Theatre of the Non-Relation

"Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer". (Beckett, 1953/2006, p. 12)

It is safe to say that in the work of Artaud, Genet, and Beckett, the vagaries of sexuality, presented or rendered unrepresentable through theatrical devices, are not depicted as heteronormative, harmonious or idealistic. Neither do the dramatic works of these authors portray lovers coming together for reasons of romantic pleasure or for the benefit of the procreative act. Rather, we see figures, metaphors, and images of entropy and resistance regarding procreation and reproduction in the works of Artaud and Beckett, and characters whose sexual fantasies enable a sense of being

and power in Genet. That is to say in a play such as *The Balcony*, the sexual fantasies enacted do not provide a means of achieving a relationship with the other but rather signify its very non-relation. This idea of non-relationality in the dramatic works can be viewed through the concept of 'queer' as a term that signifies identity categories and sexualities that run counter to the prescribed ideals of heteronormativity.[38] The word queer has a complex and multifaceted range of significations, including acting as a signifier of the very resistance of identity to any adequate nomination, and as a form of disturbance to identity per se. As Lee Edelman states, "queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (quoted in Giffney & O'Rourke, 2004, p. 17). Something in the very nature of sexuality is both inherently traumatic and also inherently queer; that is to say, the sexual drive is always disturbing and partial, rather than harmonious and complete. Therefore, it could be said that all human beings are queer (in the non-relational sense) at the level of the drive. It is at the level of identity that sides concerning orientation, so to speak, are taken.

The plays and performances under analysis in this chapter serve as a challenge to normative conceptions of both sexuality and the family. The limits of the body and the eroticisation (or *jouissance*) of the sexual function are brought into focus through a subversion of traditional heterosexual couplings and totalising narratives concerning love and procreation. *The Cenci* depicts the heinous crime of incest and the retaliation of revenge through an act of parricide resulting in the tragic destruction of the whole family. In *The Balcony*, Genet reverses the standard order of what classes as eroticism. While depicting the sexual fantasies of characters in a brothel, he underscores the eroticisation of the fiction of everyday life encapsulated in symbolic positions of authority. In Beckett's work, while initially, one might feel hard-pressed to envisage its sexual import, there are many examples of the underside or bedrock of fantasy, where the mechanisation of the sexual act is exposed, in contrast to an eroticisation of the One of the couple (as the ideal of harmonious fulfilment).

[38] As Noreen Giffney (2009) in describing the range of the word queer explains, "Queer is a contentious term and one that encompasses defiance, celebration and refusal within its remit.… It signifies the messiness of identity, the fact that desire and thus desiring subjects cannot be placed into discrete identity categories, which remain static for the duration of people's lives" (Giffney & O'Rourke, 2004, p. 2).

The representation of sexuality in Beckett's work is a far cry from idealistic and is, at times, animalistic and brutal. Through Beckett's characters, we encounter a certain immediacy of the drive as partial and non-unified, operating almost autonomously without the agency of the individual. The body is not presented as a total entity that the mind can control but is divisible into parts, such as Mouth in *Not I* and the "mucous membrane" of *Molloy*: "She had a hole between her legs, oh not the bunghole I had always imagined, but a slit, and in this I put, rather she put, my so-called virile member…. (A) mugs game in my opinion." (Beckett, 1958, p. 51). In his depictions of this mug's game of sexuality, Beckett lays bare the lack in the sexual relation and does not offer a compensation for this lack through the operation of love, which is what substitutes for the "non-rapport". As Lacan says: "What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love […]the idea of love begins with that. It is truly the crudest way of providing the sexual relationship, that term that manifestly slips away, with its signified" (1972-73/1975, p. 45/47).

In other words, love compensates for the lack of satisfaction inherent to the sexual relationship. That is to say; the drive does not achieve complete satisfaction through a member of the opposite or same-sex but rather the *jouissance* component of the drive and the sexual act always aims at something beyond pleasure. There is a gap between the sexual aim and the object acquired to satisfy the urge, and always an element of the unknowable in our relationship to sexuality in both its physical and psychical components. This element of the unknowable also relates to *jouissance* as that to which the body is subject within the sexual relation.

In the following theatrical works, it will be apparent that the respective authors relate to and stage the *jouissance* of the sexual body in comparatively different ways. Bearing in mind that *jouissance* (as it relates to the Real) is not necessarily representable either through the specular image or through language but is a force at the border of the physical and psychic impact of performance.

2. HORROR IN *THE CENCI*: THE NUCLEAR FAMILY AND THE WILL TO POWER

The Cenci was staged in 1935 at the Théâtre des Folies-Wagram in Paris. This was Artaud's last theatrical production in which, significantly, he also acted the role of

the main protagonist Count Cenci. It was also his only full-length play to be produced and was a disappointment both from a critical and commercial point of view (Vork, 2013)**.** Artaud's production is loosely based on a true story of the Cenci family in 16th century Italy that had attained legendary significance and is adapted from Percy Bysshe Shelley's verse form of the tragedy *The Cenci* (although Artaud said that this was an original play). The dramatisation of the Cenci family downfall is one of horror and tragedy with echoes of the ancient myths concerning parricide and incest.

Count Cenci is the main protagonist of the narrative and is a villain par excellence. Married to Lucretia, he is a father to four sons and one daughter Beatrice. His ultimate aim is to control and dominate his whole family, and from the beginning of the play, Cenci makes these omnipotent intentions clear. He desires to exercise a supreme will over his family by murdering two of his sons and raping his daughter. Cenci succeeds in executing these acts and subsequently, his traumatised and devastated daughter Beatrice plots revenge upon him, with the help of her mother and brother in organising his murder by two mute assassins. She is then found guilty of executing this crime and on papal orders is sentenced to death, all the while refusing to admit or repent for her act. In this act of non-compliance unto death, hers resembles the tragic fate of Antigone; daughter of Oedipus, whose refusal to relent on her position regarding her brother's burial causes her own demise at the hands of her uncle, King Creon. Antigone's act of refusal and her uncompromising desire to bury her brother signifies her desire as pure ideal. In *The Cenci,* Beatrice's stance toward her own death is equally staunch and self-sacrificing although admittedly the preceding incestuous trauma is more immediate, more panic-stricken than Antigone's inferred traumatic inheritance. Beatrice will not give up on her desire to oppose her father even after his death by capitulating and succumbing to the Pope's request for repentance. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959 -1960/1997), Lacan argues that the only thing one is guilty of is of giving ground relative to one's desire (p. 321). One interpretation of this statement is that the blind determination to **Not** give up on one's desire is the ideal ethical act, in which case anything goes as long as it is what you desire. However, the caveat to this interpretation is that desire is not so straightforward to decipher; what we desire is often the Other's desire manifest as something that we are either rebelling against or in conformance with. In this sense,

Beatrice's act of non-compliance can be viewed from multiple perspectives and raises the following questions: is her non-capitulation to the admission of parricide an act of heroic and moral courage in the face of the abuse and injustice she has suffered at the hands of her father? Or is it a compulsion to repeat a morbid *jouissance* leading to her own death, a sign of her identification with her father? As her last line of the play, poignantly reads: "in the end, I fear it will teach me I am not unlike him after all" (Artaud, 1935, 4.3. p. 153).

The position of Beatrice as a tragic heroine who avenges the incest she suffered can be contrasted with that of Dinah in Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), a hard-hitting drama where the trauma of incest permeates several generations of the Raftery family. Dinah's response to the abuse inflicted on her by her father is in stark contrast to Beatrice's radical alterity toward her abuser. It is important to compare these alternate subject positions in the genre of tragedy as it highlights the singularity of an individual's response to trauma. The trauma of abuse and the internal trauma of the drive are always singular in how they are experienced, (in that people are impacted differently and make different choices) and incorporate an ethical position regarding desire.

A play concerned with the themes of incest and parricide, *The Cenci* is situated within the lineage of the historical and theatrical echoes of the Oedipal myth, as staged in one of the most notable tragedies of our time *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex is based loosely around this myth and Sophocles' version of the play. The Oedipus complex is a fundamental theoretical and clinical paradigm in both past and modern psychoanalysis concerning the sexual development of children as a function of the influence of parental relationships. Originally, Freud postulated that a child unconsciously desires the parent of the opposite sex and becomes rivalrous with the parent of the same gender as themselves. However, in light of a reading of the Sophoclean tragedy, it is curious that as Lacan (1959-1960) points out, Oedipus himself does not suffer from the Oedipus complex as he slept with his mother and killed his father without knowing it. Freud contended that the oedipal myth provoked such fascination across the

centuries due to its universality of structure regarding human subjectivity.[39] In other words, its widespread appeal was a testament to the representation of a fundamental desire of the human psyche and the relationship of the individual to the incest taboo. While the story of Oedipus is more prominently concerned with the desire of the child regarding the law against incest, in contrast to the transgression of the Father in *The Cenci*, it cannot be forgotten that it was King Laius who abandoned his son and left him to die. Therefore, the first sin of the oedipal myth is that of the father's abandonment.

In contrast to *Oedipus Rex*, in *The Cenci*, the father desires to violate his daughter and surpass the limits imposed by the symbolic order against this act. Count Cenci is a father who has no desire to control his destructive, abusive urges and expresses no remorse for these acts; he acts knowingly, without the ignorance of Oedipus. In his megalomania and fantasies of omnipotence, Count Cenci is comparable to the tyrannical father of the mythical primal horde who has access to the All of *jouissance*, and who wants to surpass the castration imposed by the law (Dempsey, 2012, p. 885). The myth of the primal father describes an imaginary state of existence preceding the law before any limits were set and before prohibition had been inculcated as a regulatory force. In this myth, the sons murder the father and thus, the structures of modern civilisation are set in motion; the bonds of society are founded upon an act of destruction. The murder of the father is the act that triggers guilt, repression, and prohibition. Similarly, in Sophocles' play, Oedipus' recognition that he has married his mother and killed his father proves catastrophic and leads to his tragic downfall. The guilt is too much to bear for Oedipus as he blinds himself with his mother's brooch after she hangs herself in horror at the realisation of her act. Oedipus recoils at the Real of his own drive and his ignorance of fulfilling the prophecy he tried to avoid. In this sense, the confrontation with the consequences of his own sexual drive becomes traumatic *after* realising that Jocasta is his mother.

[39] "His fate (Oedipus) moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon us before our birth the very curse which rested upon him. It may be that we were all destined to direct our first sexual impulses toward our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence toward our fathers; our dreams convince us that we were. King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jocasta, is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfilment --the fulfilment of the wish of our childhood." (Freud, 1900, p. 110)

In *The Cenci*, there is no such ignorance at work in the count's depraved lust; the forces of repression and conscience do not appear to operate in his character. Therefore, it is possible that the structures of his unconscious do not operate as they would in the case of a neurotic subject and that he feels no guilt for his depraved desire.

In this play, Artaud foregrounds the family unit as the source of extreme ill and wrongdoing. As he said, he wanted to challenge the myths associated with the family, what he refers to as its social superstition:

> In this play, nothing is treated with respect. I want to make everyone understand that I attack the social superstition of the family without asking one take up arms against such and such an individual. The same for order, same for Justice (Artaud, 1935/1972, p. 92)

In treating nothing with respect, Artaud attacks the fundamental structures supporting society, in particular by demonstrating a transgression of the ultimate societal taboo of incest. This act of incest tears the family in *The Cenci* apart. In his wish to dominate and destroy his children, Cenci's acts are traumatic for all his family members. His mode of *jouissance* is devouring and cannibalistic (characteristic of the oral drive) and features a will to incorporate unto himself all that he has procreated, to leave no space from which his children can separate from him. In thinking of the concept of trauma in this play, we can approach it on various levels and within a temporal context: it is both that which occurs as an act/event and traumatic anxiety experienced as anticipation before the event. The anticipation of a horrific event is illustrated by Beatrice's knowledge that her father intends to rape her as her father makes it clear to her that this is what he intends to do. The staging of the premeditated nature of count Cenci's rape is particularly grotesque even more so (if it is possible to say) than a seemingly impulsive act of sexual assault. From the perspective of the particularities of the performance, and in keeping with Stendhal's style, Vork explains that these 'unspeakable acts' are never actually shown in Artaud's production. Instead, they take place between the spaces in the acts and dialogue and are referred to as "acts" or "actions." (2013, p. 313). This technique contrasts with the violence portrayed in Carr's play where at the end of the first act, the spectator is confronted with the horror of the incestuous act as the father rapes his youngest daughter Sorel on the kitchen table. The way this scene is staged has the

effect of incorporating the spectator's desire as an onlooker of this act. Sorel asks us for help, and we sit idly by. This provocation is evocative of the reality of the experience of abuse and incest sufferers, and the disbelief and disapproval they can encounter in those in whom they have had confidence.

With *The Cenci* Artaud inculcates disorder on a grand scale. Artaud argues that the play is not an incitement to absolute anarchy but instead challenges the concept of order itself. In a Catholic context, the ideal of the heterosexual family is the bedrock of societal order, and its privileged place is protected by the dictates of the Catholic Church, headed by the Pope as master of the patriarchy. That the concept of the nuclear family is founded on an ideal is evidenced by all the attempts to protect this social unit from influences that would disrupt its very basis, such as contraception, homosexuality, incest, and infidelity. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the family can be viewed as a structural component of society that is founded upon the repression of the drive toward Oneness. The drive for oneness refers to the undifferentiated *jouissance* encapsulated by the unity of the mother and child and existing before the separating, and alienating effects of language have taken place. From this perspective, we could say that Artaud's version of the play (as performed in the style of the Theatre of Cruelty) attempts to undo the forces of repression and to generate the *jouissance* of transgressing beyond the law. We must also remember that the desire for *jouissance*, is often a means of attempting to quell a more difficult type of *jouissance*, possibly in the form of bodily (somatic) suffering. In other words, *jouissance* as that enjoyment of the body or pleasure in pain exists on different levels. It is often both a release and a cause of suffering. In *The Cenci*, this quest for what Vork calls "annihilation" reaches its zenith with the actions of a villain whose mode of *jouissance* disobeys any form of societal or mythical loss.

2.1. Beyond the Law. Cenci and Beatrice

A transgression of the law in the case of a sexual act is often referred to as perversion. Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), revised in later years, outline the multiple possibilities of sexual aberrations and perversions pertaining to the human being. Within this framework, Count Cenci's acts are certainly perverse and signify a movement toward death and fragmentation.

The fact that the death drive acts as a regressive force attempting to return to a previous state or a zero point of tension does not directly imply that it is always destructive or indeed that it manifests as destruction. However, in the case of *The Cenci* destruction is at the apex of the acts committed. As Artaud describes: "The father in *The Cenci* is a destroyer. And it is in such a way that this subject revives the Great Myth" (Blin, 1935/1972, p. 16). The reference to the Great Myth here is possibly a reference to the father of the primal horde or that of Oedipus Rex. In act one, scene 1, Count Cenci's destructive impulse is expressed in flagrantly candid terms:

> There is no life, no death, no God, no incest, no contrition, no crime in my existence. I obey my own law, of which I am my own master—…My rule, my intent, is to seek out and to practice evil. I cannot resist the forces burning with violence inside me. (Artaud, 1935/1999, 1.1, p. 123).

Furthermore, he outlines the particularity of the pleasure associated with evil: "Evil, after all, is not without its pleasures. I shall torture the soul while enjoying the body." (*Ibid*, 1.1, p. 124). Thus, Count Cenci describes a state of division between body and soul concerning a certain enjoying of the body, an excess of the flesh. Through the desire to dominate and subvert the law of the social order, the Count releases the aggressive, sadistic impulse of the drive.

The acts committed by Count Cenci exceed any rational argument; they are as Vork describes in the realm of the "unspeakable." (2013, p. 309). In this context, his acts are in the Real, there is no accounting for them, and they go beyond the law of the social order, a law that prohibits incest. Cenci wants to embody his own law, a law that destroys as the ultimate power. He refuses to recognise the prohibitive parameters of the Oedipus complex. The following dialogue between Cenci and his wife Lucretia illustrates the recognition of this complex as endemic to the societal structure, including Cenci's desire to destroy it:

> Cenci: There can be no human relationships between those born only to replace their kin, between those thirsting to devour one another.
>
> Lucretia: But there would be no society if such ideas were true.
>
> Cenci: The family I command and that I have created is the only society I recognise.
>
> Lucretia: That is tyranny.

> Cenci: Tyranny is my last remaining weapon to fight your war against me. (Artaud, 1935, p. 134)

Thus, tyrannical and despotic, Cenci defies any obstacle to his satisfaction and is a horrifying portrait of the desire to become One (like the primal father omitting all lack) in relation to an enjoyment of the flesh.

So far, I have extrapolated on the driving forces of Count Cenci and the resonances of death, destruction and sexual *jouissance* therein. The position of Beatrice's desire toward the murder of her father and her own impending death is also crucial in this analysis.

There is a question concerning the status of Beatrice as a tragic heroine, given that as Dempsey points out, she does not reach a point of *anagnorisis* in the play (2012, p. 880). She does not admit the truth of her action and refuses to accept responsibility, continually stating her innocence up to the end and despite her torture in prison. However, in another light, this recalcitrance regarding her crime can also be understood as a stubborn refusal to capitulate to her father even after he has died. A confession would admit defeat, but her battle cry is motivated by a plea for just revenge: how can there be murder when her father has committed such a heinous violation? Beatrice like Antigone does not refuse to cede to her desire; she holds steadfast despite knowing she will die. Although she may not be a tragic heroine, her character has an ethical dimension, and her choices determine her fate. Despite her protests of innocence, Beatrice is not without feelings of ambivalence towards her abuser: "I ought to hate him, yet I cannot. His living form is inside me like the guilt of a crime." (Artaud, 1935/1999, p. 132). Again, like Antigone, who awaits her own death in the cave, lamenting the life not led and grieving her demise, Beatrice also regrets the losses incurred in her untimely exit.[40] As she laments:

> I am to die, yet I have not chosen to do so […] to die so young. To be swallowed by the mournful earth, endlessly cursing oneself. The world I leave behind will not survive me" [….] My heart was never happy, yet it will stop beating before it has ever been stirred. (*Ibid*, p. 153).

[40] Interestingly, in a text entitled *Antigone chez les Français* (1977), written while interred in Rodez, Artaud recounts the power of Antigone's name as legacy and inspirational force in the battle of the self against the forces of being. "Antigone est le nom de cette victoire terrible… "(p. 154). For Lacan also, Antigone signified an image of tremendous resistance in the face of the desire of the Other and a paragon of an intransigent disposition toward her uncle, Creon.

The origins of Beatrice's unhappiness lie in the dreams she recounts in the play, a dream that marks that which is unspeakable.

2.2. Marking the Unspeakable. Beatrice's Dream

Artaud expressed that the characters in *The Cenci* say most of what they are thinking and also what they cannot say. As a signifier of the unconscious and of what cannot be spoken without censorship, dreams play an important part in the spoken and unspoken dialogue and the dramatic architecture of the play. Through an account of Beatrice's dream, we gain insight into her relationship to the traumatic 'knowledge' of her sexuality and her father's previous pursuit of her:

> When I was little, I had the same dream every night. I was naked, alone in a vast bedroom with a wild animal such as only exists in dreams. I could hear it breathing. I could escape, but I had to hide my glaring nudity (*Ibid*. p. 140).

Beatrice's dream or rather, this nightmare indicates her awareness regarding the danger surrounding her sexuality and the presence of a menacing force that pursued her. The fact that she dreamed this sequence of images "every night", or in other words repeatedly, emphasises its traumatic dimension, displaying the repetition-compulsion inherent to its continuous manifestation. In the dream, Beatrice is aware that she can escape the danger by covering her body and nudity, her desire or wish to escape the wild animal resonates with her position in the play regarding her father's advances. Therefore, we get the impression that she has been sensing these wild animalistic forces (embodied by her father) pursuing her all her life and consequently, her trauma extends far beyond the present circumstance. Freud said that dreams operated in the psyche as 'the royal road to the unconscious', and in the case of traumatic neuroses they served to enact, within the dream, the compulsion to repeat the painful, traumatic experience. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud discussed the symbolism of wild beasts for the dreamer:

> The dream-work usually symbolises passionate impulses; those of the dreamer, and also those of other persons of whom the dreamer is afraid; or thus, by means of a very slight displacement, the persons who experience these passions. From this, it is not very far to the totemistic representation of the dreaded father by means of vicious animals, dogs, wild horses, etc. One might say that wild beasts serve to represent the *libido*, feared by the ego, and combated by repression (Freud, 1900, p. 197).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud places the dreams of injured soldiers who relive the painful experiences as an example of that which exceeds the pleasure principle. In Beatrice's dream, the wild beast may be a symbolic representation of her father, but another facet to consider is that it is also a representative or metaphor of her sexuality; that unruly wild animal from which she attempts to escape. In this context, therefore, an image of a wild beast may represent an internal instinct, something that is innate to her yet pertains to the primitive realm, a metaphor for the sexual drives that threaten the ego with fragmentation and danger. It is also significant that the wild beasts are described in the plural: "there is not one beast, but many of them swarming at her feet" (Artaud, 1935, p. 140).

That the forces pursuing Beatrice are also her own inner compulsions is illustrated through the implication of her singular subjective position in the language of the dream. In describing the thirst of the wild beasts, there is a slippage in Beatrice's reference to her thirst: "And this horde was also thirsty… I realised my thirst was not only stubbornness." (*Ibid*, p. 140). This verbal slippage indicates that Beatrice is both separate from and included in the wild horde. Furthermore, the point at which Beatrice wakes up from this dream is greatly significant and indicates the missed encounter of trauma as the Real that cannot be encountered. As she recounts: "Each time I felt my strength was about to fail, I immediately awoke" (*Ibid*, p. 140). Instead of experiencing that horrifying moment where the beasts catch up with her, and she confronts "the thing", Beatrice wakes up to (as the events in this play shows), a reality more terrifying than that which the dream can signify.[41] It is at the very point of a trauma (the 'missed encounter') that cannot be represented in images or words that Beatrice wakes up, and her becoming conscious at this point serves as a cut that marks a rupture in the events. Her waking up at this moment of terror prevents an encounter with the void (Real) that would render her absent as a subject. In the waking moments of the play, with the advances of her father startlingly close, Beatrice recognises that life is a dream (or nightmare) from which there is no waking up, apart from through death. Vork accurately contends that just as the heinous acts

[41] An example of trauma as an encounter with the Real in a dream is elaborated by Lacan through 'the dream of the burning child' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964). In the father's dream, the child's reproach "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" (p. 34) situates a question concerning the nature of what is being experienced as the Real.

committed are not depicted in actuality, the dream sequence in *The Cenci* functions to mark what cannot be presented, or represented concerning subjectivity within the performance structure of the play (2013, p. 318).

Interestingly, the feature of the dream is a detail introduced by Artaud into the plot structure, an addition to Shelley's rendition and demonstrates Artaud's affiliation with the Surrealists. The inscriptions of the dream index a metaphysical space (the unconscious) where representation fails within the performance as staged space and is an appropriation of the "unsayable", where an event or feeling cannot be directly depicted. As we know from psychoanalysis, that which is repressed returns in dreams, in disguised form, serving partly to release the tension of the veiled wish or desire.

In the torture scene at the end of the play, Beatrice expresses the ambivalence she feels regarding her father and her fear of becoming just like him. This is the real tragedy of her act of parricide; her revenge has caused her to act brutally and to die with blood on her hands, resembling somewhat the crimes of her father. The tragic figure of Beatrice like Antigone may well have been an icon of heroism for Artaud. In *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud expresses a fascination with the character Annabella in *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c1633) by John Ford, a character who bears a strong resemblance to Beatrice. Artaud writes:

> Annabella is captured, convicted of adultery and incest, trampled upon, insulted, dragged by the hair, and we are astonished to discover that far from seeking a means of escape, she provokes her executioner still further and sings out in a kind of obstinate heroism. It is the absolute condition of revolt; it is an exemplary case of love without respite which makes us, the spectators, gasp with anguish at the idea that nothing will ever be able to stop it. (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 29).

From this passage, we can see where Artaud received inspiration for Beatrice's obstinate heroism. Artaud also indicates that the element of destiny or fate at play in this heroism is experienced by the spectator as a sense of powerlessness at the inability to stop the injustice of the execution.

The role of fate and destiny is significant in *The Cenci*. The question of free will is illustrated through the words of Count Cenci as he invokes a passive subjection to fate as motivation for his desire: "Before anyone condemns my crime, let them accuse fate. Are we free? Who can maintain we are free when the heavens are ready

to fall on us?" (Artaud, 1935, p. 144). We remember from Chapter 3 that this line of 'the heavens falling' is the overarching momentum of *Spurt of Blood* and features in Artaud's written philosophy of theatre. This statement reveals Cenci's refusal of responsibility regarding his actions; he describes himself as a victim of fate and not the arbiter of his own decisions. In the next section, we shall look at how Artaud stages the destruction of the Cenci family through his vision of the cruelty of theatrical performance.

2.3. Performing Destruction: The *Jouissance* of Fiction

At the time of its production, *The Cenci* received mixed reviews and was not deemed a box office success; it was brought to a close after 17 performances due to a lack of interest. It is possible that this is partly due to the subject matter concerned, that of incest and parricide. Despite the mixed reviews of *The Cenci* a member of the audience summed up its import and invention as: "One can either love or detest this unusual play, but one should not remain indifferent to the courage and audacity of the effort. (Blin, 1972, p. 40). In directing the play, Artaud was categorical that the performance would incorporate his vision of a Theatre of Cruelty, namely that it would penetrate the nerves of the spectator and engage the senses. He writes:

I want the theatrical representation to have the aspect of a devouring focus where action, situation, characters and images are brought to a degree of implacable incandescence: Through my play I also want the public to be plunged into a bath of fire…. What happiness for me if I can make the spectator participate with his soul and his nerves in the tragedy of *The Cenci*! (Blin, 1972, p. 14).The phrase 'devouring focus' is interesting when considering the cannibalistic and devouring passion exhibited by Count Cenci, thus revealing that the form and architecture of the performance reflect the narrative content. Artaud's vision of the spectacle is one that would engulf the spectator in the form of an incandescent experience. He aligns theatrical representation with the cannibalistic quality of the oral drive where the elements of theatrical performance serve to devour the participating audience members. The Theatre of Cruelty moved from the static enactment of staging verisimilitude toward a dynamic dialectic between actor and spectator. In speaking of the dynamics of character in *The Cenci*, Artaud writes: "this character who says what

he thinks represents at the same time my own thought but represents it dramatically, that is to say dynamically, that is to say dialectically" (Blin, 1972, p. 92).

The dialectic that Artaud speaks of here is the extension of his own being through the dramatisation enacted by the characters, and in this particular case, we might imagine that Count Cenci activates at least some of his inner thoughts. Artaud's stress on the emphasis of tone and volume of sound and intensity of lighting in a theatrical production was an attempt to bypass (as sensory experience) what he felt to be the rationality of language and dialogue in Occidental theatre. In contrast to the stifling status quo of rational thought, Artaud pursued a theatre of disorder, where the representation of the physical body was stretched to the limits, and the *mise-en-scène* constructed an aesthetics of the 'organ'. In Artaud's words:

> Text, gesture, sound, lighting-each is equally important to me: The play lives off this whole, and whoever neglects one of these elements is depriving this body of an essential organ ... There is no true language in the theatre except action. It alone counts. (Blin, 1935/1972, p. 97).

As we see from this passage, Artaud aligns the elements of the theatrical production, with a body that has organs. We shall look at this more closely in Chapter 5. The spectator in the Theatre of Cruelty should be set adrift from the everyday coordinates of social reality and its habitual moderations and cast into the flames that burn the body from within. In his artistic developments, Artaud was visionary, yet there was another side to this productive insistence that Jannarone (2010) argues was nihilistic and tyrannical.

Jannarone is critical of Artaud's drive for complete control of the production as his directing of the play displayed omnipotent didacticism and obsessive instructions. She says that for all of Artaud's proclamations of anarchy, ironically, the staged directions are more imbued by a genre of order, what she calls "organised anarchy" (p. 171). In this context of the question of organisation, it is highly significant that Artaud chose to play the role of Count Cenci, the tyrannical, despotic Lord, which by certain accounts was viewed as an inappropriate casting. If we view it from Jannarone's perspective, Artaud's desire to control and dominate the spectator through the forces of the spectacle becomes realised in his embodiment of the despotic Cenci. Artaud's embodiment of count Cenci takes on particular psychoanalytic import, given that his psychic state bore all the hallmarks of

psychosis. Not simply because of his incarcerations in the institution of Rodez, but evidenced by his relationship to language and his desire to embody the Real (as the non-representable component of the body) through performance. Therefore we could say that, through the medium of theatre, Artaud transforms delusion into fantasy by taking something that exists for him at the level of the Real (non-meaning) and transmuting it into the stage of illusion, within the realm of fiction. The ambiguity of what constitutes fiction is also a theme of Artaud's writings, and as such, he wanted to break down the division between fiction and reality.

The use of intense sound and lighting to provoke the visceral response of the audience member is a technique that attempts to break down the distance between stage and audience, where the dialectic of spectator and actor is alive and immediate. Thus, an Artaudian catharsis is one of a "too much" of the spectacle, and a surpassing of what may be tolerated comfortably, a theatrical enactment of a beyond of the pleasure principle, a *jouissance* of the senses. Therefore, I would argue that the catharsis he envisaged is more in the realm of an affective communication of suffering than a restoration to order. The emphasis on the creation of an affective experience in the Theatre of Cruelty makes it akin to that of ritual, a type of ceremony begetting or symbolising a transformative process in the human psyche. For Artaud, the aim of theatre was not about simply staging make-believe but rather it endeavoured to make present what was already pertinent to the spectator's inner life. As he describes:

> [T]he spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior. (Artaud,1938/1958, p. 92).

When Artaud speaks of the spectator in this way, as having a taste for crime, erotic obsessions, et cetera, he is of course also speaking of himself. As we have seen, with the production of *The Cenci* Artaud attacked and challenged the ideal of the heterosexual nuclear family or as he referred to it, the "social superstition" of the family. In attacking the ideology of the family, Artaud could subvert the basis of order itself, and formulate his own myth as it were. In this subversion of order, the fundamental prerequisites for existing as a subject also come under attack, including

sexuality and procreation. Significantly, it was known amongst his friends and associates that Artaud found the idea of sex and procreation unpalatable. As Jannarone states, his theatre did not celebrate naked bodies but rather expressed "a loathing of the body and of sex" (2010, p. 15).

This loathing of the body and of sex indicates a profound anxiety in relation to sexuality. As Lotringer (2015) recounts in *Mad like Artaud*, Artaud was terrified of women and particularly of pregnant women, spitting as he went past his psychiatrist's pregnant wife to avoid contact with demons. Although Artaud's position regarding his fear of women might have implied homosexuality, it is more likely that his horror of sexuality was a consequence of his relationship to meaning and the trauma of the desire of the Other. According to Lotringer, Artaud was almost certainly incapable of having sex. His drawings throughout his stay in the sanatorium of Rodez depict scenes of great fragmentation and death and images of copulation, suffering bodies and disembodied vaginas. Furthermore, Martin Esslin underlines a contradiction inherent to Artaud's relationship to sexuality. As he says, although Artaud "saw salvation in sexual excess and the wildest indulgence of the senses", he also saw sexuality as "the ultimate source of all the ills that beset mankind" (1976, p. 7).

I would argue, therefore, that for Artaud, the vicissitudes of sex and the mystery of procreation (symbolised by pregnant females, for example) constituted a trauma, a hole in his subjectivity. In this sense, sexuality, for Artaud, may have been experienced as an acute manifestation of the death drive; a phenomenon that threatened to engulf his body through a *jouissance* that lacked the limits of the pleasure principle. Language could not contain this oppressive force.

In the next section, we shall look at the concept of representation, sexuality and the body through a reading of Jean Genet's *The Balcony*. I will consider in particular, the role of the image in this play as an erotic spectacle and its function (as fantasy) in shielding us from the trauma of the Real.

3. JEAN GENET – THE PARODY OF SEX IN *THE BALCONY*

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, sexuality is traumatic as it concerns a *jouissance* of the body and a lack of knowledge or anchor point in meaning. In other

words, we are driven by the forces of sexuality, and yet it can never be fully defined or controlled. In Genet's work, the realm of the imaginary, as that which concerns the misrecognition/illusions of the ego and the web of meanings we live through, functions as a particular type of satisfaction and hence as an outlet for the drive. In this context, we can speak of a *jouissance* of the imaginary, or what Lacan refers to as the "the enjoyment of the body qua Imaginary." (Lacan, 1975, Seminar 3, Dec 12th). We shall examine this idea of the *jouissance* of the imaginary in the structure of the play.

The Balcony was first performed in London on 22 April 1957.

'The balcony' is a brothel run by Mme Irma within which ordinary characters enact sexual fantasies that enable them to dress up and play the roles of symbolic and authority figures. In enacting these fantasies, they experience a vestige of power they lack in their commonplace roles of everyday life. The distinguished notables of the masquerades include a Bishop, a Judge, a General, and a Thief. The studios of Mme Irma's brothel cater for all manner of erotic whims and scenarios, from re-enacting Christ on the cross to the ravages of St Theresa. In the enactment of these fantasies, the clients that frequent this brothel can escape the drudgery of their usual existence. As Mme Irma states of the clientele: "In real life they're props of a display that they have to drag in the mud of the real and commonplace. Here, Comedy and Appearance remain pure" (Genet, 1958/1962, p. 36).

At the same time as these fantasies are enacted inside the studios, a revolution is taking place outside the brothel. The revolution attempts to overthrow all the real dignitaries (outside the space of the balcony) headed by the mysterious figure of the Queen. As the revolution progresses, it is necessary for the 'fake' dignitaries of the Bishop, Judge and General (who assumed their function in the mirrors of the brothel) to take the place (as figureheads) of the absent or murdered dignitaries on the outside. In this way, there is a comic dimension or note of "farce in high taste" to proceedings. (Lacan, 1957-1958/2017, p. 250). Near the end of the play, Mme Irma, (both Madame and prostitute), enacts the role of Queen, ironic indeed. The fake dignitaries can hold sway over the populace because the image of who they represent has been enacted in the brothel, unlike that of the Chief of Police. In a reversal of a stereotypical dichotomy of villain versus the law, the 'ordinary' and possibly

perverse characters enable restitution of order to society, an order that is restored through farce. Frequently in Genet's theatre, the 'outcast' reigns supreme as it were, and the figures of nobility are exposed as empty substanceless (exploiters) who enjoy at the expense of the underdog. By subverting the figureheads of authority within the transgressive space of the brothel, *The Balcony* exposes the hypocrisy and hidden enjoyment of political and social ideology and emphasises the prevalence of the imaginary as that which veils and exposes this enjoyment. In this way, Genet's play works to expose what Todd McGowan (2007) has referred to as the senseless core of ideology: "Ideology must repress its own origin because this origin represents the senseless dimension of the law, the law simply proclaiming itself as law without any attempt at justification" (p. 37). In a sense, Genet highlights the origin of ideology as that very farce upon which ideology is built.

The Balcony is a complex play at the level of spatial and semiotic criticism and as is characteristic of Genet's style is composed of intersecting and alternating spaces, both physically and metaphorically. Instead of simply representing reality as we might imagine it to be in the 'real world' offstage, reality in *The Balcony* (as in *The Maids*) is exposed as that which is driven by fantasy, as exemplified through the erotic masquerades and the style of the *mise-en-scène*. The imaginary underside of everyday reality is brought into focus through the representation of the enjoyment of the pseudo-characters in the brothel, including that of the chief of police who seeks satisfaction in becoming the image of authority. In Genet's theatre, the parameters of what constitutes reality are stretched to the point that as Sartre says of Genet's work: "Reality is worn so thin that one can see the light through it" (Sartre, 1952/2012, p. 14). Regarding the structure of the play, the complexity of the spatial dynamics forms a textual *mise en abyme* where the imbrication of subtext permeates the drama in a kaleidoscopic fashion (Rosen, 1992, p. 515). The "dynamic of mise en abyme" inherent to the structure of *The Balcony* operate as a series of tableaux that operate like "Chinese boxes." (White, 1997). Consequently, a dialectical tension is created between the nature of truth and falsity through the dialogue of the clients of the brothel and the deceitful mirrors of the stage setting. From a semiotic perspective, the physical stage props of *The Balcony*, most notably the mirrors, costumes and the bed of the studio, function as material prostheses within the sexual masquerades of the characters. Although being actual or physical objects, they are nonetheless symbols

of what is make-believe and deceptive. On a metaphysical level and operating as a symbol of appearance and trickery, the mirror offers the satisfaction of a false being, the specular agent of *méconnaisance* and illusion. In the brothel, being is upheld by the image, but the image can always be severed. As the Chief of Police says: "You don't need me to tell you that brothel tricks are mainly mirror tricks . . . . But I'll make my image detach itself from me" (Genet, 1958/1962, p. 48).

The ambiguity of the position of truth and falsity in the brothel is captured by Mme Irma in her explanation of the desires of her clients: "They all want everything to be as true as possible... Minus something indefinable, so that it won't be true." (*ibid*, 1.5, p. 36). In other words, the gratification inherent to the fantasy is in appearing to be true while remaining false. The erotic performances or "mimetic rituals" in the brothel stage a 'theatre of the sexual' through which a parody of both sex (as an epistemological question) and social hierarchy (as social criticism) takes place. This mimetic ritual inherent to the studios of the balcony is what Rosen calls an "Artaudian dramaturgy". She states, "In Mme. Irma's bedrooms of mirrors, an image of the secret self — the double of Artaud's dark, metaphysical theater — is manifested" (1992, p. 516). This image of the secret self is the space of unconscious desires as portrayed within the masquerades of Genet's play, desires which surround power and eroticism.

Structurally, the action of *The Balcony* takes place within two distinct dramatic spaces that operate at the same time, with one space invading the other; the events within the brothel, and the revolution on the streets outside. As in *The Maids*, the division between outside and inside space is problematized, lending a dreamlike quality to events as subjective interiority merges with the outside world. Genet's utilisation of dramatic space is topological (there is no clear demarcation), as the signifiers of an exterior place outside the brothel stretch the boundaries of the interior enclosed space of the studios.[42]

From time to time, screams and the sounds of gunshot fire penetrate the brothel, indicating the bloody scenes of the revolution outside. These elements function

[42] Topology "is a study of continuous properties" (Ragland and Milovanovic, 2004). Topology moves beyond binary conceptions of space and time and is useful in formulating an approach to the interactive dimension between fictional worlds and reality.

semiotically (as we saw in the analysis of space in *The Maids*) as a signifier of both what is present on stage and of a world beyond that cannot be seen. The interruption by the screams and gunfire to the action in the brothel functions as a cut to the performative fantasies of the characters and acts as a reminder of the revolution outside. This juxtaposition of revolution and fantasy is very pertinent in light of the connection, as stated by McGowan, between ideology and fantasy: *"*For psychoanalysis, fantasy is an imaginary scenario that fills in the gaps within ideology. In other words, it serves as a way for the individual subject to imagine a path out of the dissatisfaction produced by the demands of social existence. (2007, p. 23). Therefore, from this perspective, revolution is the flipside of fantasy, and it provides an alternative outlet for the dissatisfactions performed in the brothel.

Furthermore, as we had seen in the previous chapter, the scream is also symbolic of affects such as anguish and pain, signals of something at the level of the body, that which, according to Scarry remains outside of language. As a signal of human helplessness, the screams within and outside the brothel undercut the specular *jouissance* of the sexual fantasies and subvert the power and potency enacted through the masquerades. Alongside the generated masquerade of power, we hear the helplessness of the human subject, a subject under siege. This juxtaposition of power and a morbid satisfaction pertaining to the image dramatises a tension inherent to inhabiting the body. The image provides satisfaction, but it is also a mask beyond which lies a lack, something that cannot be satisfied. This lack in the image is what Lacan refers to as the gaze, as that which can be veiled through the play of the mask. According to Lacan: "Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze" (1964/1978, p. 107). It is certainly true that Genet revels in this game of the mask and lures the spectator into considering a beyond of the image, a beyond which ex-ists.

In keeping this idea in mind, in the next section, we shall examine the function of the image in *The Balcony* through Genet's prefacing of its glorification and reflection.

3.1. The Glorification of the Image and Reflection

In *How to Perform the Balcony*, Genet describes the production of *The Balcony* as a "glorification of the Image and Reflection" (1962, xi). This statement strikes a note of defiance about any reductive interpretation of the image in his work as trope or metaphor. In other words, it poses a resistance to attributing any particular meaning to the function of the image but rather points to its very enjoyment as a phenomenon. That the image and reflection are exalted in the establishment of the brothel is very evident as we encounter the many layers of pretence, make-believe, and fantasy that construct the dramatic space. In glorifying the specular image as a theatrical device, Genet refuses to submit to a traditional style of theatrical verisimilitude or to narratives of truth that position substance/essence over appearance. Within the dominant aesthetics of the image, we encounter a representation of the imaginary veil that shields the subject from the trauma of being; however, this shield of the Real has a deathly aspect. In *The Balcony*, the image is not just a medium that reflects the nature of illusion or that serves as a shield for the anxieties of death but is linked to the inception of death itself. The references to death anticipate an invasion of the Real into the enjoyment of the specular in the brothel, "people claim that our house sends them to Death." (Genet, 1958/1962, 1.5, p. 40).

That references to death frequently occur in *The Balcony* implies that the sexual fantasies enacted in the brothel are of a grave nature; there is a seriousness associated with them. They are enacted through a compulsion that is intrinsic to the being of the clients rather than the singular pursuit of pleasure. For sexual satisfaction to be achieved in the studios, certain details (rules) need to be in place – always something false, and something real, the equation for subjective fantasy. The sexual fantasies have an element of repetition and rigidity, qualities associated with the deadening effect of habit. In their adopted costumes, the individuals who frequent the brothel deaden themselves to their real-life personas with the repetitive formula of their sexual gratification. Through the exaltation of their cultivated image in the mirror, they can experience a sexual *jouissance* and die temporarily to who they really are. As Carmen explains to Roger: "the scenarios are all reducible to a major theme. .Roger: Which is . . . ? Carman: Death". (Genet, 1958, p. 87).

The signifier of death functions as a limit to the *jouissance* of the sexual acts in the studios. It can thus be argued that, if the sexual masquerades are associated with death, then the glorification of the image is a pathway toward aestheticising death and conjectures a metaphysical subjective transformation through the sexual act.

In *Saint Genet Actor and Martyr*, Sartre asserts that Genet's works concern a preoccupation with death, including Genet's own in the past tense: "His works are filled with meditations on death. The peculiarity of these spiritual exercises is that they almost never concern his future death, his being-to-die, but rather his being-dead, his death as past event" (Sartre, 1952, p. 2). Death in its different guises, both literal and metaphorical certainly pervades Genet's work, from the ritualistic murder in *The Maids* and *The Blacks* to the staging of voices of the dead in *The Screens*. There are instances in which this idea is captured in the words of the characters in *The Balcony*, like the role-play concerning the pseudo-judge who when speaking to the pseudo-thief says, "I'm dead I inhabit that region of exact freedom I, King of Hell, weigh those who are dead, like me, She's a dead person, like myself" (Genet, 1958, 1.2, p. 17).

The death in question here may be a symbolic death rather than an actual one. This is because the characters in the brothel are cyphers without substance, animated by their mirror image and the draw of outward appearances that serves as an exit from the suffocating lie of their day-to-day fictions. Death is the ultimate transgression of the law or ritual of metaphysical transcendence, a means of escaping social reality. For Genet, the symbol of death becomes part of an aesthetic performance that raises the silence of the dead and the finality of life's trajectory to the level of poetic immortality. The glorification of the image speaks to immortality as the representation of an image, (such as its description in words or a replica of the image itself) can live on when the body is absent. Therefore, in *The Balcony*, the image (and its reflection) is a signifier of the body that functions as a representation that can extend the life or presence of the body in the absence of the subject; a theatrical example of Artaud's body without organs. As a signifier, the image can be detached from the body yet remain present as a sign of authority, as the Chief of Police tells Irma concerning the potency of his image: "But I'll make my image detach itself

from me, I'll make it penetrate into your studios, force its way in, reflect and multiply itself" (Genet, 1958, 1.4, p. 48).

In *The Balcony*, we encounter several modalities of the specular image; from the symbolism of the mirror and the inverted or inflated reflection to that of the photograph in scene nine. In this scene, three photographers are capturing the image of the make-believe Judge, General and Bishop, and the envoy remarks that this is "a true image born of a false spectacle" (*Ibid,* 1.8, p. 75). The false spectacle in this instance is the masquerade performed by the characters who are playing at being the notables. The photograph is true as it captures what it sees faithfully as appearance, it is an image of characters who 'appear' to be these dignitaries, yet the audience knows they are in costume and only pretend to assume their function. Thus there is a discrepancy between the subject of the photograph and its representation as image, a gap is generated between truth and reality, but this reality (as appearance) is also false (or pretence). From this reasoning, what appears in the image has more truth than the substance behind the appearance, albeit at the level of the visual aesthetic form. If a visual image hides a reality, it is not the image that lies but the subjective fictions through which we interpret the image. We project our unconscious identifications or preconceptions onto the image, and the internalised imaginary fictions of the body influence the meaning that the image takes on in the world.

Although the image can be detached from the body and potentially "reflect to infinity", there is also a deathly and inanimate component of the specular form illustrated by the photographic image. The photograph, while bridging immortality through the image, similar to the function of the word, 'murders the thing'. Oswald contends that "photography stages a scene of violence tantamount to murder" due to the possibility of the infinite production of replicas of the image, individual identity is destroyed" (1987, p. 214). Roland Barthes has described the imprisonment of the subject within the photographic image, in funereal terms, "they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures" (1981, p. 6).

I have argued in this chapter that sexuality has a traumatic dimension, in that we can never achieve a totalising knowledge that can satisfy the constant pulsation of the drives. There will always be a dissatisfaction within subjectivity. In *The Balcony*, the

elevation of the image to the level of an ideal is what mediates for the lack of rapport constitutive of the sexual relationship. The characters in the brothel achieve sexual enjoyment through the mediating property of the image as source of pretence rather than through relating to a partner as a substantive reality. Thus, the non-rapport of the sexual relation is illustrated through the glorification of the image as source of sexual *jouissance*. The characters are all appearance, propped up by their costumes, masquerades, and symbolic functions. However, I do not mean to suggest that beneath the costumes, there is a definitive subjective essence hiding beneath the masquerade as if the truth could be uncovered from peeling back the layers. This could be one interpretation of the behaviour of the 'perverts' of the Grand Balcony, yet the complexity of Genet's *mise-en-scène* provokes a more ontological question concerning the eroticism of the image as a substitute for a knowledge of sexuality, an eroticism that provides support to being.

The categories of epistemology and truth are closely aligned; what is known can take on the properties of fact and what we take to be truth, particularly in certain academic, scientific discourses. Therefore, knowledge becomes a signifier for what we classify as truth, even if that knowledge is, in some cases, a knowledge of the fictional. Regarding the human being's relationship to sexuality, knowledge cannot reveal the truth of sexuality, as this is already an ontological impossibility. (Zupančič, 2017). It is because there is no essence to what sexuality is, or answer to its mystery thereof, that the question of sex provokes endless permutations and representations within the cultural and personal imaginary. As she says:

> What is at stake with this lack is thus not a missing piece of knowledge about the sexual (as a full entity in itself); what is at stake is that (drive) sexuality and knowledge are structured around a fundamental negativity, which unites them at the point of the unconscious. (p. 11).

This fundamental negativity regarding sexuality and knowledge becomes veiled and represented by the lure of desire, where we are seduced into mitigating this void through fantasy. Another way of thinking about this void is through the concept of the *object a* and the gaze (see Chapter 2, 2.4). This has particular relevance in considering the complexities pertaining to the specular realm of Genet's theatre. The gaze is not something tangible (or a concrete look) but rather how we imagine we are seen in the field of the Other. It is the *object a*, (the nothing) in the field of the

visible. From this perspective, the ambivalence of the image in *The Balcony*, for example, can be considered in light of the attempt to access the impossible *object a* that supports our being seen in the world. In generating an ambiguity at the level of the fictional and at the level of appearances, Genet promotes a fascination pertaining to the spectacle and in this way lures the spectator into looking for the truth beyond the image or within the sexual act. In this regard, Genet's privileging of the image as agent of the erotic phenomenon is as much a 'truthful' representation of sexuality as would be an attempt to demonstrate a 'real' essence. This real essence can only ever be accessed in its nonexistence through the image as veil of being. This veil is a cause for eroticism.

3.2. The Erotics of the Specular as the Veil of Being

Similar to Genet's other plays *The Balcony* is constructed as a play within a play, or multiple plays within plays. The brothel operates as a theatre, where each client acts out fantasies of how they would like to see themselves, as seen by another. As a geographic location, the brothel symbolises a transgressive space on the margins of society, an underworld. The brothel is a signifier of the commodification of sexual acts, acts that are performed as a service and are marked by the exchange of money. The sexual relationship in this establishment is mediated by the symbolic exchange symbolised by the monetary component of the brothel, and the unconscious power plays associated with the structure of societal authority. Thus the 'play' of sex as it were, illuminates the dynamics at work in hierarchical systems and serves to expose the absurd underside, the 'enjoyment' of hegemonic discourse.[43] Lacan makes the point in his analysis of *The Balcony* that these symbolic power plays are already sexualised, and Genet exposes not just the eroticism inherent to masquerade, but also the masquerade of eroticism, and the sexual element of symbolic functions. As he says:

> Each of these characters represents functions from which the subject finds himself alienated - they are functions of speech of which he finds himself the support but which go well beyond his singularity. Now, as it happens these characters are all of a sudden going to be

[43] The parody and performative rituals of the play predate the theory of gender performativity. In a similar vein, in 1964, Lacan indicated that gender was not an essential (pre-existing) phenomenon of the human subject; he writes "In the psyche, there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as a male or female being." (Lacan, 1964, p. 204).

> subject to the laws of comedy. That is, we begin to imagine what it is like to enjoy these functions. Disrespectful, no doubt, to pose the question in this way, but the disrespect of comedy is not something one should stop at without trying to discover what it leads to later. (Lacan, 1957-58/2017, p. 247)

In other words, Lacan contends that taking up a position in society or assuming a function of authority such as bishop, judge or general does not simply sublimate the sexual impulse but rather already incorporates a particular eroticisation within this very assumption. As a corollary to this point, I would argue that from this perspective, identity categories per se, including those of the sexual, are eroticised. That is to say, there is a *jouissance* at the level of the imaginary in relation to the naming of oneself, to the securing of meaning to the unnameable abyss of subjectivity — a way of palliating the trauma of the unknowable.

In a Lacanian reading of *The Balcony,* Lorenzo Chiesa further elaborates on the eroticism of these symbolic functions and the implications for the structure of society. As he says, the : "("erotization" of the functions themselves)… is what in the end we all unconsciously idealise as an image of libidinal satisfaction, and without which human sexuality would not be viable. Society is structurally perverse" (2015, p. 10).

In this way, society is perverse as it takes its enjoyment from something that is not on the face of it sexual but tied up with meaning. We could say, therefore, that an "image of libidinal satisfaction" is critical to our experience of sexuality, and this image veils the trauma of the non-rapport of the sexual relationship. As Jacques Alain Miller explains concerning the role of the image of the body: "There is no better indicator of the absence of sexual relation in the real than the imaginary profusion of the body as it devotes itself to being given and being taken." (Miller, 2016, paragraph 7).

Genet then, in glorifying the image and reflection through the studios of the brothel, frames the image as that which is eroticised and by so doing reflects the lack of rapport inherent to the sexual realm. As Lacan says of the 'perverse' characters of the play: "We thus see this clearly perverse subject basking in the pleasure of seeking his satisfaction in this image, insofar as it's the reflection of a function essentially of signifiers". (Lacan, 1957-1958/2017, p. 248).

The implication here is that the essentially signifying function of the image is the value attributed by the symbolic order to this function. For example, the image of a judge takes its valence from the authority already bestowed on the position of being a judge. In order to become a judge we must be recognised by the societal Other who recognises this authority: "in order to be a model judge, you must be a model thief" (Genet, 1958, p. 15). Hence there is a dialectical movement between recognition and function exemplified through the staged scenarios of masquerade. In the sexual masquerades of the balcony, each character's function or existence is dependent on an addressee (the one to whom the function is addressed) to activate the role they wish to enact. This role is dependent on an image (even a fake one) to sustain the existence of the symbolic function, as the scenario of judge and thief reveals: "What then? What then? But you won't refuse, will you? You won't refuse to be a thief? That would be wicked. It would be criminal. You'd deprive me of being!" (*Ibid*, p. 18).

In this drama of mistaken identities then as Sartre (1952) points out, "to be is to be perceived.[*Esse est Percipi*, Berkeley] . However, what this being is is not clear. In *Saint Genet*, Sartre postulates that Genet relied on the perception of others to recognise himself in being:

> [He] judges that the appearance (which he is to others) and that the reality (which he is to himself) is only appearance […] he recognises himself in being only in that he is perceived. Our certainty ourselves finds its truth in the Other when the latter recognises us (Sartre, 1952, p. 36).

This need for the recognition of the Other is symbolised by the mirror and the re-occurring emphasis on the forms of the image in *The Balcony*. The image alone is revealed as the source of power rather than an inference to a 'more meaningful' substance or essence inherent to that identity position. This lack of a subjective essence is captured by the *mise-en-scène*. The stage setting of *The Balcony* involves the positioning of mirrors through which the inverted reflections of the characters encapsulate the distance between the interiority and exteriority of the body. The presence of the mirror serves to heighten the erotic function of the fantasies as the characters can enjoy the image of themselves in costumes; a large part of the enjoyment is in witnessing the reflection of the imagined persona. In this sense, the

scoptophilic drive to see and be seen is embodied through the masquerades, implying an excess that can never be satisfied through the act of looking.

The characters subjective 'enjoyment' of these reflections is represented through the costumed exaggeration of the actor's physical form (as in the didascalia of the play, where the image of an actor suddenly appears gigantic). This serves as a metaphor for the inflation of the ego that accompanies such erotic performances. However, despite the sexual enjoyment inherent in the captivation of the image, there will always be something that falls short of complete satisfaction, as the image is always lacking and misrepresents being. There will always be a remainder: "What holds the image together is a remainder" (Lacan, 1972-1973/1999, p. 6). The remainder that Lacan refers to cannot be represented in the image (*object a*) and is related to the traumatic cause as lack propelling desire. This lack pertaining to the cause of desire is represented by the signifier of the phallus. In the next section, we shall examine the role of the phallus in *The Balcony* .

3.3. The Signifier of the Phallus

> I've been advised to appear in the form of a gigantic phallus, a prick of great stature. (*Chief of Police*) (Genet, 1958, 1.9, p. 78).

The phallus as an image of the penis and metaphor for the function of the law plays a 'vital' role in *The Balcony*. The image of the penis is an important signifier in Genet's prose, serving as a symbol of erotic and homosexual potency and a metaphor for the merging of bodies. In *The Balcony*, the penis recedes from the erotic potency of the novels to that of something symbolic, a comic figure. It is this symbolic quality to the phallus that captured Lacan's attention in 1958. In *Formations of the Unconscious* (1957-1958), Lacan elaborates his theory of the phallus through the scenes of Genet's play.[44] In the dynamics of the Oedipus complex, the phallus is what bars access to the *jouissance* of the mother; it acts as a signifier of separation,

[44] For Lacan, the phallus was ostensibly not the penis or image of the penis but a signifier, something that designates a lack. In Lacan's elaborations the phallus is a derivative of the function of language, and as the "signifier of desire," it places a conceptual wedge in traditional biological interpretations of sexuality shifting the emphasis onto the nature of symbolic relations. Paradoxically, the phallus signifies the nature of signification per se rather than something specific. As Zupančič argues, "the phallic signifier is a tautological signifier that signifies nothing but that it signifies; it functions as a hidden proposition (and reference) of the signifying order, guaranteeing its meaning" (2016, p. 220).

naming a point of desire that is beyond the dyadic matrix. In other words, it breaks up the Oneness of the original mother-child bond. It is also a representative of the Law, a derivative of the paternal function (authority) and that which imposes a limit on enjoyment as the bar of prohibition.

Therefore, in Genet's play, the positioning of the phallus in the drama illuminates the function of the law through the role of the Chief of Police.[45] George, the Chief of Police, represents the law in all its comic inversion.

Most significantly, within the first act of *The Balcony*, the symbolic dignitaries of the Judge, General and Bishop have been impersonated within the studios of the brothel, yet the Chief of Police remains 'unrepresented'. This is a cause of great concern to him, as it effectively relegates him to a position of lesser power in the eyes of others. If his representation were to occur as an image in the sexual masquerade of Irma's studios, he would resonate to infinity as a reflection, an image without borders: "where mirrors will reflect to infinity ..I say infinity" (Genet, 1958, 1.7, p. 69).

As we saw earlier, it is the image as representation of a symbolic function that confers power in this play and not the substance or inherent value of the function. There is no inherent value to the role of the dignitary, only through what is conferred by the other. It is not until the very last scene when Roger impersonates the Chief of Police in the mausoleum that George gets to enjoy his representation, a scene that most significantly culminates in the act of auto-castration. Again, in this scene, there is the juxtaposition of a symbol for death (the mausoleum) and immortality (an image that can reflect to infinity).

Previously the Chief of Police reports that he has been advised to appear as a giant phallus, "a prick of great stature." This phallic iconography has obvious comic value (particularly in its alignment with the approval of the church). The 'Hero', and the character who represents the law in the play becomes aligned with the symbol of a giant piece of 'rubber', an idiot in other words. Although inverting and subverting

[45] Although the concept of the phallus has been a point of contention for many feminists and academic scholars, I argue that it is also an innovation of non-binary thinking in relation to sexuality, and as such is a precursor to what we now know as Queer theory (Meehan O'Callaghan 2015). As a signifier of desire the phallus intercepts the dualistic biological model of male/female relations and inserts a symbolic dimension into the unfolding of gender identity and desire.

the figure of the law through the Chief of Police, Genet also makes the law present (as figure of an ideal) albeit in comic form. Given Genet's past as thief and vagabond, and his position as 'outside' the law, due in part to criminality and homosexuality, this representation of the law as both idiotic and yet somewhat desirable is understandable. In *The Balcony*, the image of the phallus achieves gigantic proportions revealing the inflation of this symbol within societal perimeters and satirises the patriarchal characteristics of the law.

Lacan contends that the phallus operates as a "signifier of desire" in *The Balcony* (Lacan, 1957-1958/2017, p. 252). Roger's act of auto-castration serves as a staging of the symbolic castration inherent to the function of the 'father' in the paternal metaphor.[46] As Lacan says of this scene in *The Balcony*:

> [H]e has passed the test, only on condition of being castrated. That is to say, only on condition of bringing it about that the phallus is again promoted to the status of signifier, as this something that can be given or withheld, conferred or not conferred by the one who at this time is confused, in the most explicit manner, with the image of the creator of the signifier, the 'Our Father', the 'Our Father who art in heaven'.. (Lacan, 1957- 1958/2017, p. 252).

In other words, by simulating an act of castration within the field of the symbolic (as a performance), the phallus becomes more than an object attached to the body. It is possible to give it or take it away, confer or not confer. In the staging of Roger's act of castration (which in *The Balcony* is a double staging, a play within a play), a symbolic lack is brought into the field of the visible. An act has taken place in the field of the Other. This symbolic lack is the re-enactment of something that can be severed from the body and transmuted into a signifier. In this way, the realm of the spectacle serves to generate a metaphor for what is missing in the image as that which can never be refound, but only replayed in fantasy as a signifier. In this analysis of Genet's play, we have focused on the role of the image and the corresponding jouissance of the body associated with an erotics of the specular. In the next section, turning to Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, we have an example of a play that takes the specular image and strips it of all that is familiar as erotic, resulting in an uncanny abyss of a spectacle. This abyss is nonetheless, an erogenous zone.

[46] Lacan wrote his analysis of the phallus in *The Balcony* in 1958, the year the play was staged. It would be interesting to consider what he would have said about it had this occurred in 1964, when he elaborated on the theory of the gaze.

4. SAMUEL BECKETT. *NOT I*: DELIMITING THE VOID

Samuel Beckett's short play *Not I* takes the spectator to the edge of an abyss, an abyss delimited by a human mouth suspended in space and shrouded by darkness. In this ultimate performance of Beckettian phenomenal subtraction, the motif of the absent body culminates in a form that is both strange and too familiar. Through Mouth's uncanny form we enter the zone of aesthetic deformations where the reassuring landmarks of the quotidian and the banal are absent, and instead, we are suspended in the dark at the mercy of a voice.

Not I was written in English in spring 1972 and first performed at the Forum Theatre of the Lincoln Centre, New York, in September 1972. In this stark rendition, a mouth suspended in the dark, only the lips and teeth visible, speaks at tremendous speed while a hooded auditor of "sex undeterminable" stands downstage raising arms occasionally "in a gesture of helpless compassion." (Beckett, 1972/2006, p. 375). There is no physical body attached to the mouth that we can see; it has been covered to magnify the presence of the deranged orifice that speaks as if from nowhere and to no-one in particular. Actresses that have performed the part of Mouth, such as Billie Whitelaw and Lisa Dwan were required to place their bodies in a restrictive posture on stage. The body was effectively tied in place so that the head and mouth would remain as still as possible in order to amplify the oral orifice as a singular and autonomous body part. Lisa Dwan speaks of the liberating effect of embodying this physical amputation where all the markers of female gender (bar the mouth) are kept in abeyance. Instead, the specular image of the female body is reduced to an entity that barely represents it. Whitelaw writes of the subjective dislocation brought about through this embodiment of incorporating a 'no body':

> If you are blindfolded and have a hood over your face, you hyperventilate, you suffer from sensory deprivation [...] And I hung on and hung on until I couldn't any longer. I just went to pieces because I was convinced I was like an astronaut tumbling out into space. *Billie Whitelaw* (Quoted in Wakeling, 2015, p. 91).

Whitelaw's experience of performing *Not I* gives voice to something fundamental concerning the Beckettian existential landscape in which the presentation of the body is often situated at the intersection of meaning and nonbeing. In other words, the physical parameters of the body as in the case of *Not I* and *Play* and *The Unnamable*,

recede in the face of disembodied articulations and the linguistic complexities concerned with interrogating the existence of the personal pronoun I. Alternatively, in less verbally intense performances, such as *Endgame*, a backdrop of silence infiltrates both dialogue and dramatic momentum, and the body is distinctly present in its frailty and contingent inconvenience. Luke Thurston captures this point in recounting Adorno's admiration of the disintegration of meaning in Beckett's drama:

> The disintegration of meaning on the Beckettian stage is always bound up with the body's mute opacity (with what in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) Adorno will call "the somatic, unmeaningful stratum of life [p. 365]), its awkward intrusions onto the terrain of Geist, the "higher" sphere of the conceptual and semantic (2003, p. 35).

Endgame is one of Beckett's earlier plays and, therefore, it is important to remember that *Not I* features in the timeframe of the 'later Beckett', a period in which the later plays demonstrate an increasing degree of performative sensory deprivation. In an Artaudian tone, Beckett had said that he wanted *Not I* to play on the nerves of the audience, thereby bypass the cognitive avenues of psychic simulation of this piece. It certainly appears to have evoked this disturbing and affect-laden response as Whitelaw describes how some audience members tried running into the toilet to get away from the constant stream of language. In this context, theatre is very much the double of life as Artaud had said. The performance of *Not I* was extremely physically and emotionally demanding for the actress Billie Whitelaw, and she suffered breakdowns and collapsed during one of the rehearsals. Paradoxically, in this play, the absence of the actor's body as a visible image on stage is coupled with the extreme physical discomfort in attempting to act this otherworldly or unearthly role. As in the case of a neurotic symptom, the body becomes painfully present through the attempt at making it absent.

Despite its novel theatrical form, *Not I* is in keeping with Beckett's previous existential preoccupations concerning the vagaries of the personal pronoun 'I' and bears a particular affinity with the narrator of *The Unnamable*. However, Enoch Brater makes an important distinction concerning the momentum of this quest as it differentiates from the latter text. He states, "In Not I, however, Mouth is no longer searching for coexistence with its authentic first-person singular, but is instead

frantically running away from such an encounter" (Brater, 1974 p. 193). While the narrator in *The Unnamable* meanders down labyrinthine paths of repetitious utterance to perhaps isolate the very singularity of this personal pronoun, *Not I* operates at the level of the shriek, where the narrator is fleeing in a state of terror from this encounter.

The presentation of the human subject as immobilised and reduced to the restricted corporality of the flesh is a reoccurring image throughout Beckett's dramatic and prose work. In this play, this motif reaches its apotheosis, and the human subject is collapsed into the representation of one single body part; significantly, the one from which we verbally communicate with the world. I have outlined previously that the body is a source of inherent alienation for the human subject and can be experienced as acutely Other in states of extreme emotional or physical distress. The narrator in *Not I* gives voice to this estrangement within language and the state of being at the mercy of the body: The following passage illustrates the narrator's helplessness in the face of the stream of words emanating from the mouth:

> whole body like gone . . . just the mouth . . . lips . . . cheeks . . . jaws . . . never– . . . what?. . tongue? . . yes . . . lips. . . cheeks . . . jaws . . . tongue . . . never still a second . . . mouth on fire . . . stream of words . . . in her ear . . . practically in her ear . . . not catching the half . . . not the quarter . . . no idea what she's saying . . . imagine! . . no idea what she's saying! . . and can't stop . . . no stopping it . . (. .) and the whole brain begging . . . something begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop. (Beckett, 1972/2006, p. 380)

We note in this passage, the pleadings of the narrator, "and the whole brain begging… Begging in the brain, begging the mouth to stop". It is not only the body that is partial in *Not I,* but also the sentence structures and the grammatical formulations. The female narrator staggers out, amidst the ellipses, the sentence that the whole body is gone and instead in its place, are the individual physical elements comprising the mouth and surrounding facial features (lips, cheeks, jaws). She has been reduced to the terror of the part object of the Mouth that refuses to stop, despite the protestations within her brain. Within this torrent of verbal articulations, her experience of the body is cast adrift from the imaginary or narcissistic gestalt of the self (that visual image which provides an illusionary but coherent sense of self). As Brater has pointed out, this is an experience where the 'I' is not simply cast adrift but

also refused, in a fleeing from the tenuous and unstable normative conditions of bodily coherence.

Immediately the title *Not I* alerts us to a negativity, a refusal of ownership, and a statement of denial. As Beckett writes in the directions for the play, "Mouth recovers from vehement refusal to relinquish third person" (Beckett, 1972, p. 375). The narrator in *Not I* refuses to speak in the first person singular, referring to herself as "she", with the cacophony of words and sentences broken into fragments flowing incessantly from the garish orifice. While the fragmented narrative of *Not I* could be said to depict the situation of the poststructuralist subject, unmoored from a central anchor of meaning that would guarantee stability (a subject decentered in relation to the I of the statement), the emphasis is also singular. This particular narrator is not only decentralised but acutely dislocated. The narrator in *Not I* is not master of her own thoughts and appears to fade as a subject under the weight of her incessant cognition. Instead of illustrating the Cartesian formulation of "I think therefore I am", Mouth cannot own or accept her individual being as represented by the I statement. In Lacan's reconceptualisation of Descartes's statement, the being of the subject is foreclosed when thought is present (as we saw on page 22). From this perspective, Mouth is fleeing from her being, her words emanating at the speed of thought.

Although some critics have attempted to interpret the narrative of this play as the fragmented memory of a particular character who is behind the words, and thus provide coherence to the discontinuous stream of consciousness, it is also possible to accept that Beckett has left the character out of the frame in order to present the very lining of what constitutes a body or a self- or to present the self as not whole. According to Keir Elam, Beckett's mastery of the art of "leaving out" has been achieved in *Not I* in its most spectacular iconic form, where the very notion of theatrical characterisation is fragmented. As he says: "Mouth is neither a metaphor nor metonym of the whole personality of a character" (1986, p. 129). In her ephemeral existence, Mouth is literally and metaphorically not all there. Moreover, as would be in keeping with Beckett's dramatic style, the very notion of making sense of events within a play is subverted. Therefore, to assign Mouth to a specific personality or character (behind-the-scenes) is to remain within a linear narrative

structure in which making sense prevails. Through the seducing paradigms of literary interpretation, it may also be tempting to comprehend the *jouissance* laden diatribe of *Not I* as a form of psychosis. In an article on *The Unnamable* and the **not** being mad account of *Not I*, Olga Cox Cameron (1994) critiques the subtleties illustrated by the artistic format concerning the aesthetics of a discourse that while mocking madness, is not madness per se:

> The mocking echo which madness offers to reason, audible in the speculative systems of great paranoiacs, makes itself heard here in the domain of language itself, and in the extraordinarily sophisticated and self-reflexive gesture by which a fictional work, in paralysing all fictional movement, exposes not the silent depths but the ragged clamour at the heart of human subjectivity (p. 82).

In this article, Cox Cameron argues that Beckett's writing, while revealing the mechanisms of a potential experience of psychotic delusion is not by its nature psychotic, but resonates with all of us as a reflection of the inner tumult hidden beneath the pacifying fictions of the ego. In the next section, in the context of the central theme of this thesis, we shall look at the significance of the presentation of Mouth as a part object of a body that is missing.

4.1. Not All There

As a signifier on the theatrical stage, Mouth is an uncanny object, both familiar and strange, alien and intimate. It is the opening to the interior of the body, and in the context of the theatrical performance, a dark space that threatens to engulf the spectator with its incessant speech. When we see a human mouth, we expect to see a body, so in *Not I* something is missing and yet something is omnipotently present within that magnified image.

The darkness of the stage setting defines the physical outlines of Mouth and functions to delimit a hole pertaining to the body that is suspended in space rather than attached to a physical form. The physicality of Mouth speaks to the corporeal substance of the human subject, while also serving as a metaphor for the substanceless void interior to subjectivity. Thus, the alienating part object of Mouth contextualises the human subject as disembodied, fragmented and deterritorialized. Within this alienating spectacle, the gaze of the spectator is dislocated from the

normative strictures of habitual perception. In speaking of the presence of the fragmented and denaturalised body and its impact for spectatorship in Beckett's work, Anna McMullan argues: "the frequent separation of body and voice decentres the subject by creating a position of perception and discourse outside of the body and establishing the body as an object of perception." (2010, p. 10).
Thus, in establishing the body as an object of perception on the theatrical stage, we the spectator view a phenomenon of the everyday in a context that defamiliarises the object by placing it at an altered level of perception. We do not always see clearly the contours of what is most familiar to us and often require an alternate context in which we are "decentered". This process of decentring may frame more clearly the particularities of the subject in question.

However, in this context, Llewellyn Brown notes that interpretations of *Not I* through a medical lens (such as likening Mouth's diatribe to a neurological condition like Tourettes) paradoxically normalises the alienating and traumatic presence of the voice as *jouissance*. As he says, "such an approach ignores *jouissance*: the question of what inhabits the subject and is at stake for him (2016, p. 122).

In a recent interpretation and performance of *Not I* by Jess Thom in the Edinburgh Theatre Festival 2017, the fragmented and automated language emanating from a brain that has lost control is given voice through the speech of a woman living with Tourette's syndrome. Beckett's words become punctuated with the ticks and involuntary movements (such as cries of Biscuit) that are part of the condition with which Jess is living. Mouth, therefore, becomes a signifier of a physical condition concerning the brain, or provides what Lyn Gardner (2017) describes as "context" and moves the reception of the performance away from the more indeterminate and symptomatic resonances of the original text. This interpretation of Beckett's monologue is in keeping with the current and increasing research on reading for disability in his work as a whole.

It is interesting that situating Mouth within the light of a physical impairment is categorised as a "normative point of view", given how physical difference is often considered to be non-normative. However, this is where the subtlety of both Brown's argument and Beckett's representation of the body come to the fore. For to consider Mouth within the light of a medical condition might be to miss the inherently

alienating and traumatic immanent processes of the body as they occur for everyone, including what Lacan in later years referred to as the parasitic dimension of language. From this perspective, speech is a foreign agent that invades the subject, capable of "inflicting suffering comparable to an illness" (Brown, 2006, p. 243). As Lacan says in Seminar XXIV:

> There is, for this knot, a cord. The cord is also corps-de (body-of). This corps-de, is parasited on by the signifier; for the signifier though it forms part of the Real, it is indeed there that I am right to situate the Symbolic, one must think of the following, which is that we might well have dealings with this corps-de only in the dark. (Lacan, 1977, Seminar 7, 15 Feb)

In this passage Lacan plays on the word cord and corps to draw a connection between the idea of a knot and the body. The body is the body of (corps-de) the signifier, it is knotted as would be a cord. In this sense language invades the body as a parasite. Of course, it is also possible to incorporate both these viewpoints (that of disability and that of the *jouissance* of the signifier) in an appraisal of the resonances of Mouth's alienating rendition. That is to say; one can be subject to the vagaries and impositions of a medical condition at the same time as being subject to the *jouissance* that pervades all human beings to some degree or another.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the human body as we are conceiving it, is not a whole entity in the sense of being unified and complete, a thing in itself, but is rather, a body that has holes. (Lacan, 1975- 1976, Seminar X, May 11th). These holes relate to the *jouissance* of the flesh and the impossibility of ever obtaining full knowledge of the experience of the body. The non-rapport of the sexual relation and the traumatic underside of sexuality is fully exposed here in the figure of the speaking subject (represented by a hole in space) and driven by an irrational linguistic force. In *Not I,* the spectator is not provided with a fantasy of a whole body that could shield us from entering the abyss of Mouth's fragmented world. The gaze of the spectator is subverted through the sensory deprivation of the performance, and instead of being seduced by a spectacle that presents the ego (through the illusion of a whole character) as an autonomous agent, the audience encounters the opaque interior of the body, an interior that reminds us of our inherent viscerality.

4.2. The Erogenous Zones of *Not I*

To include *Not I* as a dramatic work that fits the theme of sexuality, may seem initially incongruous. What could be sexual about an isolated mouth ranting and raving in the dark, with nothing but language echoing in this empty space? It is precisely this isolation of the mouth as part object of the body that represents an erogenous zone where pleasure and *jouissance* converge. Mouth's suspension in the dark delimits an erogenous zone of the body with its discreet components of lips, teeth, tongue. As Lacan describes, "at the erogenous level we speak of the mouth, of the lips and the teeth, of what Homer calls the enclosure of the teeth". (1964/1978, p. 169).

In psychoanalytic terms, the mouth is the orifice corresponding to the oral drive, one of the constituents in the series of drives schematised by Lacan as anal, scopic, oral and invocatory.[47] The drives relate to the holes in the body around which pleasure and a relationship to others converge; such as the eyes, anus and mouth. The mouth is not only an erogenous zone stimulated through sexual activity but is also the organ implicated in the act of speech and language. We speak words with our mouths and perform a transformation of thought to signification. In Lacanian terms, the voice is one of the 'objects' relating to the invocatory drive and is a cause of subjective desire. As a sound, it originates within the body, yet it can appear to be cut off from this body manifesting as the uncanny, something that is alien or strange and yet familiar. In states of psychosis, voices that appear to originate from the outside world and which form a persecutory and invasive presence can be disavowed voices of the internal psyche. This phenomenon underlines the significance of the voice as an object that can exist as an experience of something alien, a presence that can be traumatic and perceived as intrusive by the psyche.

According to Lacan, the voice resonates in the body as it corresponds with the orifice of the ear, which in contrast to the other orifices cannot be shut. (Lacan, 1964, p. 195). The orifices of the body are sites of potential pleasure either through the fulfilment of need and sexual satisfaction and consequently are also potential sites of

[47] In *The Book of Love and Pain (2004),* Nasio argues that pain is also an object of the drive.

jouissance. Where there is pleasure for the human subject, there is also the potential for excess, an excess that often enjoys at our expense. The spectacle of Mouth performs this paradox of the human subject's relationship to enjoyment and the partial drives, as something intrinsic and yet alien to the self. This type of enjoyment, as we saw in *The Balcony*, is not simply performed through the act of sex, but as part of the very symbolic structures that make up our everyday world. Lacan proposed that language is a form of *jouissance* at the level of speech and therefore that sexuality and its concomitant 'enjoyment' is not just attributable to sexual acts but is enveloped within the very act of speaking. In other words, there is an enjoyment in and of the signifier. The very act of speaking is a mode of enjoyment, a means of *jouissance* for the one who speaks. As Lacan puts it: "For the moment, I am not fucking, I am talking to you. Well! I can have exactly the same satisfaction as if I were fucking." (1964, p. 165).

Therefore, if satisfaction is inherent to speech, we can conceive of *jouissance* as something that lies between meaning (as it concerns the Other) and the organism of the body, as that which is unknowable in a cognitive sense. It is neither solely natural, as in a pregiven fact of physical existence, nor is it purely in the realm of culture, as something that inhabits us from without.

In Beckett's performance, Mouth functions as a synecdoche of the body and provides an image of a form that signifies the paradox of pleasure and *jouissance* attributable to this orifice. By pleasure, I refer to the erotic connotation of the magnification of an erogenous zone, without drawing any conclusions on Beckett's motivation in this context. As an autonomous and singular agent of the performance, Mouth is animated without being animate, an object without an owner. This acephalous narrator denies being present to her own experiences and does not position herself in the place of I (as ennunciator of the statement). Instead, the *jouissance* of language as a corollary to the substance of the body enjoys in the place of the I. Indeed, Mouth captures this displacement of enjoyment in her denial of the first person pronoun. It is *Not I* who is enjoying but she. The narrator expresses a time which might have been related to a sexual experience where she did not feel pleasure:

> just as the odd time . . . in her life . . . when clearly intended to be having pleasure . . . she was in fact . . . having none . . . not the slightest . . (Beckett, 1972/2006, p. 377).

Although professing that she did not experience pleasure, paradoxically the expression of this experience in *Not I* indicates a *jouissance* at the level of the drive. The human mouth is a vehicle for pleasure in acts of eating, drinking, speaking and sexuality, but all these activities also contain a possibility for *jouissance*, a going beyond the pleasure principle and a drive toward death. It is precisely because no object of any kind can satisfy the drive, that the mouth as oral orifice corresponding to the drive is insatiable. As Lacan states: "Even when you stuff the mouth—the mouth that opens in the register of the drive—it is not the food that satisfies it, it is as one says, the pleasure of the mouth" (Lacan, 1964/1978, p. 67). Therefore, we can obtain pleasure through the very act of putting something in the mouth and not simply from the object that we may be eating. The pleasure of the mouth need not have a teleological purpose, such as the satiation of need as in the feeling of hunger.

As is characteristic of references to sexuality and sexual organs in Beckett's work, there is an ambivalence inherent to this presentation of Mouth; it is both an object of erotic lure and an object of disgust.[48] Appearing as an orifice that is spitting and raving, it is also symbolic of the female sex organ. Indeed Mouth, as it spews forth words, is redolent of an evacuation orifice, and given Beckett's conflation between the vagina and the anus in texts such as *Molloy* (the anus as the birth canal), Mouth becomes an image suggestive of all of these orifices. As Keir Elam points out, this particular magnification of lips, teeth and tongue is also resonant in its specular form, of the vagina. Similarly, Freud had observed the symbolism of the mouth in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and wrote that the image of a mouth and other part objects of the body in a dream may be symbolic and representative of the genitals. Freud states: "The genitals may even be represented in dreams by other parts of the body: the male member by the hand or the foot, the female genital orifice by the mouth, the ear, or even the eye". (Freud, 1900, p. 171). In *The Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud

[48] Molloy: "Unfortunately it is not of them I have to speak, but of her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit" (Beckett, 1958, p. 12).

notes the non-totalising component of the sexual drive and its tendency to become aligned with individual parts of the body. Therefore, as Mouth exists as a part object on the border of the erotic and the alien, the erogenous and the abject, Beckett captures the polymorphous perversity of sexuality beneath the imaginary gestalt of wholeness (where two become one) perpetuated by popular culture.

The depiction of sexual part objects is a frequent occurrence in Beckett's work, and references to sexuality and sexual acts are often mechanistic and empirical, devoid of pleasure and eroticism. The needs and eroticisations of the body are represented with an almost animalistic quality where the sexual acts are hinged on instinct (as a compulsion) and not from desire. In some respects, Beckett's depictions of sexuality, reproduction and love resonate with what has become formulated in contemporary times as an anti relational queer perspective.[49] Sexuality is 'enjoyed' without the end goal of reproduction, and where the connection between sex and death is laid bare. In keeping with this view, with his depictions of truncated selves, Beckett refuses the fantasy of Oneness that veils the trauma of the absence of the sexual relation. In *Not I*, the satisfaction of the drive is conveyed through the image of a truncated body, and a brain that goes on buzzing tormented by an insatiable impulse to speak. The drive is always partial and associated with the different orifices and libidinal intensities of the body, it obtains satisfaction in a piecemeal fashion, but can never be fully satisfied. The drive is a constant force on the border of the organic and imaginary body. From the perspective of the drive, and as is depicted in *Not I*, the human subject is an "acephalous" (headless) subject.

Despite the fragmented stream of words and the specular image of a part body, rather than a whole character, the drama of *Not I* is nonetheless structured around a semblance of sender-receiver communication. That is to say that despite this spectacle of ultimate subjective alienation, from self and other, the Other as receiver of the communication is present in some fashion. As Brater (1987) describes, "Although Mouth speaks, Auditor hears, and audience sees" (p. 19). The auditor is a hooded and indeterminate figure, and can only respond helplessly to Mouth with

[49] For example, as explored in the work of Lee Edelman (2004) - *Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. For Edelman, the figure of the queer, as situated in a non-teleological sexuality is the ultimate embodiment of the death drive.

vague gestures indicating a powerlessness to aid her distress. In this way, he or she serves a purpose as a semblance of the vaguest possibility of communication, a silent but significant receptacle of the female narration. In order to exist as a subject, there must always be someone to whom we address our speech.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have investigated the paradox of the speaking being through the theme of sexuality as applicable to particular dramatic works of Beckett, Artaud and Genet. The human subject is a sexed being, and by definition, we are marked as finite creatures impelled largely to procreate or in service of that act. Fundamentally, despite the significance of sexuality to our mortal lives, there is no empirical knowledge that can satisfy the vagaries of the sexual and erogenous drives; no signification with which we could fully articulate and contain the experience of sexuality. This idea is articulated through the analyses of the dramatic works chosen in this chapter where the representation of the body and bodily traces facilitate an understanding of the excess pertaining to sexuality. An excess that results in the non-rapport of the sexual relationship. The traumatic component of sexuality is related to the phenomenon of *jouissance* as a form of enjoyment that marks this non-rapport. In the plays of this chapter, we encountered different modalities of *jouissance*, an exploration of which elucidated the relationship that each piece has regarding the notion of a bodily trace. By referring to the relationship that an individual play may have to excess, I am not simply underlining an orientation of the author, but also pointing to something that goes beyond the author and that lies within the theatrical medium itself. In this way, something important is elucidated regarding the epistemology of the body. By elaborating in detail on each play and juxtaposing the analyses of each author, we encounter certain contradictions inherent to the representation and experience of the body.

In Artaud's *The Cenci*, we encountered *jouissance* as that which is pivoted upon the law and its transgression as it unfolded within the tragic destruction of the Cenci family. The cannibalistic desires of the despotic father who attempted to destroy his

whole family, including his daughter Beatrice displayed the horrific and dramatic potential of the nuclear family under siege. We saw with this play that Artaud strove to depict an anarchic force at the heart of the myth of the family and by so doing bypass the prescriptions of the symbolic order centring on the Oedipus complex. In *The Cenci*, there is a *jouissance* both in and of the spectacle, as that which is represented as a traumatic experience of sexuality and that which is generated by the spectacle *vis-à-vis* the spectator.

In *The Balcony*, I identified a jouissance of the specular image (as the glorification) and the eroticism inherent to the specular realm. The trope of the image and reflection features strongly in Genet's theatre and is connected with the creation of a veil that shields the human subject from the trauma of the real inherent to sexuality. In Genet's theatre, sexuality is inherent to the functioning of the symbolic order and is not separate to the social realm. We 'enjoy' our symbolic positions; they are a source of libidinal pleasure. In *The Balcony*, the non-rapport of the sexual relation is illustrated through the role of the image as guarantor of being.

Finally, in *Not I*, sexuality and the relationship of the subject to the drive is presented in its raw form. The image of an autonomous speaking mouth subverts the fantasy of the imaginary whole body in relation to another. An uncanny signifier, Mouth presents a paradox concerning the role of enjoyment in a subjective economy; there is both pleasure and *jouissance* (as traumatic enjoyment) connected with the erogenous zones of the body. The narrator is subject to drives of her body and the buzzing of the brain that cares not for pleasure but a morbid satisfaction. In these depictions of bodies that are driven or compelled by forces on the border of the body and mind, we encounter the trauma of the sexed being, pivoted between pleasure, enjoyment and compulsion. Turning to Chapter 5 now, having juxtaposed specific analyses of dramatic works in the last two chapters, I shall consider the implications of the aesthetic spectacle within a comparative context of the authors. We can then reconsider the body in light of an aesthet(h)ics of failure.

CHAPTER 5:

RECONSIDERING THE BODY THROUGH THE AESTHETICS OF THE THEATRICAL ENCOUNTER

> Admittedly or not, conscious or unconscious, the poetic state, a transcendent experience of life, is what the public is fundamentally seeking through love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection (Artaud, 1938/1958, p. 122).

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, I have argued that the relationship of the body to subjectivity is characterised by conflicts, traumas and misrecognitions and is not one of continuity, wholeness and harmony. This theoretical frame was then elaborated through an engagement with particular dramatic works of the chosen authors. In Chapters 3 and 4, I analysed specified texts and performances and focused on critical concepts arising within the methodology, those of alienation, Otherness and the immanent trauma of sexuality. These chapters interrogated the complexities of the representation of the body within these poetic works, from the perspective of each author's particular style and the themes occurring within these works.

At this juncture, the methodology takes an on intertextual focus where I explore how the themes, texts, and authors relate to each other rather than organising them separately. It should be stressed that this application endeavours to form a dialogue between Lacanian theory and dramatic analysis, in order to enhance our understanding of issues pertaining to the study of the body. In particular, I have emphasised bodies that fall from the ideals of normalcy in order to support greater investigation of this issue within psychoanalysis and the broader field of academic and literary debate. The purpose of this dialogue is not to identify an empirical object in the realm of meaning (as if the body could be conclusively tied to sense) but rather to further complexify conceptions of the relationship between body and mind. This relationship tends to be simplified within narratives of embodiment, including those that may arise within theatre studies, where the actuality of the body is privileged as an agent of truth. Since human beings speak and forge meaning at the intersections of our connections with each other (the symbolic order), and this meaning is never stable, the signifiers of body and mind take on particular signification depending on the context in which they are used. In other words, they are slippery terms that cannot be taken for granted and should be approached with caution.

This chapter will explore the implications for the epistemology of the body in light of the analysis of the dramatic works of previous chapters. We shall return to an idea outlined in Chapter 1, regarding an aesthetics of failure as a feature of the work of the three authors, and as a lens through which to view the subject of the body.

The implications of this analysis in relation to narratives of embodiment in a contemporary context are considered, including the depiction of physical impairment and disability in Beckett and the wider debate of the body-mind problem generated by Artaud. The concept of abjection, the erotics and the monstrous in Genet is approached through the idea of an abject humanism. In thinking of spectatorship, and the ethical position of the spectacle, we shall also return to the idea of a "deformation of the imaginary" (Chapter 2, 2.4). I theorise that the habitual ideals of the symbolic/imaginary registers are challenged through the dramatic spectacle, and I elaborate further on this question. Finally, I provide a summary of the orientations of the dramatic works as regards the relationship to meaning and argue that this is the frame through which we can understand the representation of the body in a comparative context. This point illustrates that we can approach the study of the body, in these texts and beyond, not simply through the visual actuality of a physical body, but also through the presence or absence of language and signification. Signification, of course, also pertains to the non-verbal dimensions of the semiotics of theatre.

Additionally, in this chapter, we will explore the role of theatre as an aesthetic modality that functions as a means of organising subjectivity. With this idea, I take into account the function of art as organisation of the Real, a way of defragmenting diffuse components of subjectivity. Alongside the thematic considerations generated by the body on stage, from the perspective of theatrical semiotics, the signifying form of performance is viewed as an expression of the semiotic potential of the body but never reducible to the physical body. As I have said previously, the body is always more or less than what it seems and is never simply what is perceived. There

is always an excess of signification produced by theatre and received by the spectator as an indeterminable remainder of the text.[50]

1.1. AN AESTHET(H)ICS OF THE BODY

"You're on Earth, there's no cure for that!" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 118)

With these words, Hamm sums up the existential situation of the human being on earth. There is a conflict at the heart of existence, which is always embodied existence, that cannot be cured. There is no ultimate solution for the lack in being that is incurred through the cut of language or the uncertainty (and hence anxiety) of the chance events that may befall us. We could also say that there is no cure for a particular type of trauma that is endemic to the fact that we are speaking beings who inhabit and relate to a body. This structural and existential conflict relates to what Artaud envisaged in the Theatre of Cruelty, in which theatre should confront the spectator with the reality that 'anything may fall from the sky'. Cruelty, in this sense, is the confrontation with everyday reality, a reality that cannot be cured. I referred in Chapter 1, to the potential of an ethics that is fuelled by the encounter with the theatrical spectacle, and in the instance of the three authors, this is an ethics that is inherent to the aesthetic form and not simply a conscious position of the author. Although we can say that ethical concerns (as that which concerns the relation to the Other and not morality) are certainly driving the authors in particular ways, the encounter with the theatrical spectacle is also in and of itself an ethical possibility, separate to any concrete intention on the part of the author and indeed that of the spectator.

[50] In *Le sujet en procès* (1972) Kristeva identifies that "Artaud is aiming for what metaphysics would call an exteriority of language, of the mark, that is, a deviated, signified operation; he is looking for a language as acceptable to exteriority, in conflict and thus in dialectic with himself." (1972/2014, p. 119) This aim for an exteriority of language concerns an excess of the body, which Artaud attempts to bind through the subject-object relationship of theatre. From the perspective of the subject in process, it can be said that performance is never just a static process, happening in time and then finished. Nor is it subject to a closure of objective production, instead, according to this approach, the spectator is also in the process of being produced.

In Chapter 1 (3.1), I outlined the productive potential of the concept of failure in considering the nature of embodiment as both a lived reality and as an encounter within the respective drama. These points, moments or metaphors of failure as they concern the body in these works, enable a greater understanding of the complexity of embodiment; they help us understand that embodiment contains failure as a constitutive and structural condition of life. Furthermore, it is also within the ambiguities and contradictions regarding the body and subjectivity in the work of each author that essential issues are illustrated. Therefore, in reconsidering the body as an aesthetics of the theatrical encounter, I mean to suggest not merely that the angle that we view the body from can change (or that norms could be inverted for example), but that the very problematics of knowing the body fully through this encounter point to the very issue at hand. That is that the body cannot be known in full. This is the essence of the ethical encounter.

The words of Martha Nussbaum on the effects of tragedy are apt here, as we not only benefit from watching the resolution of conflict, but also by remaining in the tension provoked by the disparity. As she says, "the spectacle of this tragedy is itself an orderly mystery, ambitiously yielding, healing without cure, whose very harmony (as we respond to it in common) is not simplicity but the tension of distinct and separate beauties" (2001, p. 82).

Nussbaum's phrase "healing without cure" is an apt description for dramas of the absurd tradition and the role that contingency, as opposed to metaphysical determination, plays within these dramatic structures. In my opinion, it is this refusal to offer resolution that makes certain spectacles particularly ethical. When the spectator is left with a question, an ambiguity or even a dissatisfaction, a space is generated for desire. This is a space that requires us to take up a position, somehow, *vis-à-vis* what we have witnessed. In each of the authors I have studied, the spectator is implicated in different ways, both overtly and tacitly. In what Jean-Michel Rabaté refers to as Beckett's ethic of the non-relation (Chapter 1, 3.3), the spectator is subject to a negation of, what I call, the 'fantasy of the normal' and in its place what is unknown can come to the fore as the unknown. As Rabaté says:

> The core of this thesis lies in a paradoxical ethics of non-relation, which alone can reject the myth of the romantic creator ready to fight until the bitter end in a

> heroic struggle with his material, a masculinist myth of the artists dominant in the 1950s-from Jackson Pollock to Ernest Hemingway, from Norman Mailer to Robert Lowell. Against this romanticism, Beckett opts for an aerte povera underpinned by an ethics of poverty and alterity (2016, p. 91)

In this *arte povera* the contours of a place that is otherwise 'ill seen, ill said', are shaped through the deformations of habitual forms. However, although the spectator may be familiar or experience a resonance with the events on stage, these can never be an exact replica or an imitation of the Real of embodiment.

We can also think of the ethics of the theatrical encounter, and the positioning of the spectator, through the notion of ideation. There is an idealism in Artaud's performance theory that contrasts with Beckett's Spartan realism. While the former articulates the necessity for a revolution in theatrical representation and a shift in reception and spectatorship, the latter abandons a teleological momentum in favour of creation through subtraction. For Artaud, who tried to avoid the erasure of originality generated by repetition within art, theatre becomes a trajectory toward something physical or is at least a form of that becoming. It could be said that Artaud attempted to demolish forms, and while it may be true that there is a drive for a reconfiguration of forms at work within the architecture of his spectacle, this is a drive that paradoxically demands a support through the image (as form). Within his manifesto for theatre, Artaud 'invents' the spectator in the way that he imagines the spectator should be impacted by the spectacle, and by so doing, formulates the Other (the symbolic guarantor of meaning) as a dialectical point of recognition. In other words, he invents a locus within theatre (the spectator) from which he can be seen.

For Genet, the spectacle is both a site of revelation and a form of entrapment for the spectator. Although he denies the subversive sociological implications of plays like *The Maids* and emphasises the role of the image and reflection, the nature of reality (in various senses) is indeed posed as a question to the audience. The very basis of representation comes to light in his work; without the spectator, there would be no theatrical illusion, without the audience to witness the 'veracity' of the falsity of the spectacle.

These subtle differences between the authors on the subject of spectatorship can be contextualised within the ideas of the Theatre of Cruelty. The Beckettian spectator is one who experiences a certain affectual bewilderment. In plays such as *Not I,*

Mouth's ceaseless diatribe penetrates the nerves of the spectator, causing potential panic. This is similar to the bombardment generated by the Theatre of Cruelty, which is "a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart" (Artaud, 1933/1958, p. 84). In his manifesto for a Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud delineates the nature of psychological cruelty that should be inflicted on the spectator of theatrical drama:

> One can very well imagine a pure cruelty, without bodily laceration. And philosophically speaking what indeed is cruelty? From the point of view of the mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination (Artaud, 1932/1958, p. 101).

With these words, Artaud is quite specific that he is not talking about damage to the physical body but is implying a more metaphysical will to power, associated with a resolute determination in the face of the contingencies of life. This position regarding the inevitable contingencies of life is shared by Beckett and reflected in the 'meaningless' landscapes within which the characters are situated.

From this perspective, cruelty certainly appears to have an ethical dimension. The determination to face up to the contingencies and tragedies of life. This also involves facing the reality and failures of the body. These realities include the issues of impairment, ageing and disability. At this point, and in the following sections, I shall return to the idea of disability in Beckett and situate it within the context of contemporary thought on the issue. We shall also consider the implications of a question I outlined in Chapter 2 (2.4), regarding the potential of a dramatic performance to impact on the imaginary parameters of embodiment.

2. SITUATING DISABILITY IN BECKETT

Currently, a growing area of scholarship focuses on the subject of disability and the impaired or ailing body in Beckett's prose and drama. The prevalence of the impaired body as a trope in Beckett's work creates possibilities to re-consider the position of the body within modern-day frameworks of disability in particular that of the social model – in which disability is conceived as a social phenomenon and not simply as a physical impairment (Chapter 2, 4.2). In Beckett's work, disability is not presented as something to be cured (as a medical or even tragic phenomenon) but is instead something that appears to be essential to the existential experience of life and

the characterisation of his protagonists. Bodily ailments and impositions are so frequent as to suggest that to consider the human subject as in any way ideal or grandiose regarding the manifestation of embodiment would be a farce. A great example of this is found in the novel *Watt* (1953), in which several generations of the Lynch family are, one after the other, afflicted in every way imaginable with disease and physical misfortune and the reader cannot but help laugh at such depictions. I referred in the first chapter to a question concerning the interpretation of the ubiquitous presence of imperfect and impaired bodies in the Beckettian terrain. In this instance, I again underline a caution in interpreting these presentations as simply signifiers of disability in the contemporary sense. As Siobhan Purcell (2018) argues: "Beckett undermines the perceived category of disability. In his innovations of aesthetic form, Beckett uses impairment as a route to new meaning" (p. iii). Also, as I said in Chapter 3 in the analysis of *Endgame*, the profusion of differential embodiment in the Beckett canon is indicative of something symptomatic, a repetition that formalises a question regarding being.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the emphasis in this thesis on the 'failed' or 'impaired' body provides a useful challenge to narratives surrounding both able-bodied idealism and politically correct appraisals of disability occurring within socio-political models.[51] From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, there is always something of the body that defies representation, and that cannot be adequately accounted for within the realm of cognitive knowledge. Hence, a discourse that forms as a solidification of prevailing narratives will always somehow miss the mark of this truth. This insight can also be applied to the domain of disability studies where narratives of normality can inadvertently form through political discourse and the ideals of culture. Therefore, although it is useful to view the immobilised, impaired and partial bodies in Beckett's work as analogous with disability, it would be reductionist to categorise them in this way. Nonetheless, these struggling bodies are ethical, insomuch as they challenge us to think differently or to think at all regarding the position of the body within the context that we see them. By distorting the habitual frame of our

[51] It must be said that certain disability advocates might take issue with the categorisation of disability as 'bodies that fail', fearing a negative stereotype of those that experience difference. Further to this it would be true to say that all bodies fail. Nonetheless I wish to attribute a particularity of subjective loss to the category of disability in order not to deny the lived experience of physical difference.

perception, we can access, not the body per se, but a representation of a question concerning its existence. In this presentation of a question, rather than a solution, the basis of narratives surrounding the body can be deconstructed.

Narratives function as particular ways of telling stories and of organising potentially traumatic experiences through the medium of familiar and acceptable social tropes. In the struggle for recognition and equality for bodies that do not live up to the standards of aesthetic or neoliberal ideologies, stories are told that may inadvertently tap into these expectations of 'normality', and as a consequence, the sufferings or radical alternatives of the differentially embodied are denied.

In contrast to political or ideological rhetoric, a theatrical performance can subvert the Othering effects of marginalisation through alienating the spectator's demand for coherence, action and rational argument. As Josh Cohen (2019), in arguing for the influence of art on the overworked subject of capitalist culture says: "the profound effect of a play by Samuel Beckett or a painting by Pablo Picasso is to alienate the empty modes of language and communication imposed on us by modern capitalist society" (p. xxi). In this context, the 'failed body' of Beckett's texts becomes an image of resistance to what Cohen calls "the tyranny of doing" (p. xix). This type of non-normative or unproductive (in a typical sense) body enables us to think differently about life that "has for its aim not doing but being" (p. xx). In Chapter 1, I mentioned that the image of the ideal body is also influenced by the social values of neoliberal market forces such as productivity and monetary value. As Verhaeghe (2014) argues, in our culture, the ideal individual is often classified as "the most productive man or woman" (p. 121). Our culture makes heroes of those who achieve, those who produce and those who take action.

Thus, the spectacle of the hero provides us with an image that we can either identify with or reject. Often, narratives of the hero, such as those of contemporary times, portray an idealism associated with the normative fantasy of the body. That is to say, a body that is autonomous, desirable and healthy: the overcomer, the winner of a victory. At the crux of the fascination with heroism lies the desire to be seduced by a spectacle of mastery over the human body and the conflictual forces within. Therefore, we could say that at the level of the imaginary, where images and ideals seduce us into identification and subjective fantasy, the effect of this discourse is to

cover the radical difference and trauma of the body with narratives and signifiers of non-difference. In other words, the Real of physical difference (what cannot be known) is overlain with constructs supporting the notion of a whole and plausibly represented subject.

Alternatively, in Beckett's drama, the ideal of mastery is subverted, and in its place, a form of existential endurance prevails. As Norrish puts it speaking of Beckett's theatre:

> [Beckett] creates a new kind of tragedy by placing the accent on suffering without heroism in the conventional sense, and by making the source of that suffering not the terrible workings of the gods but the pain of living, part of which consists of not being able to understand the 'mess' in which it has to be endured (1988, p. 73).

This pain of living and the endurance necessary to going on is transmitted to the spectator in plays such as *Not I*. The interior state of going on is metaphorically and viscerally portrayed through the form of Mouth's unbearable logorrhoea that leaves the audience with nowhere to escape but to endure the intense monologue. Rather than taking action against the situation and overcoming it through force, Beckett's characters simply find a way of going on in the face of the senselessness of their situation. In the absence of more lofty endeavours, they may resort to "abusing each other" (*Waiting for Godot)* or making conversation with a disinterested partner while being slowly swallowed in sand (*Happy Days*). These dramatic situations can be understood as metaphoric devices for describing the condition of the human being and the senselessness attached to certain experiences, including the vulnerability of the body to chance events. In this way, Beckett frustrates the tendency to idealise wholeness and challenges the 'fantasy of the normal' ideals of embodiment.

2.1. Deformations of the Imaginary

In this section, we look at the concept of the imaginary as it relates to Beckett's drama and how it contributes to a subversion of the "fantasy of the normal". That is to say, a normality that is supported by ideals of embodiment (Chapter 2, 4.1). Fundamentally, I argue that Beckett dislocates the spectator or reader from the usual coordinates of the normative imaginary and does not offer an alternative ideal in its place. The bodies in Beckett's writings are often dislocated geographically and

metaphysically and subsist in locations of ambiguous origin. 'Characters' (or creatures as Lisa Dwan [2017] calls them) are also estranged from the body parts that compose a physical integrity-Nell, and Nagg disembodied in dustbins, Mouth as a partial object, Winnie's encroaching encasement in sand and Hamm's general decrepitude and immobility. The image of a head with the body covered, missing or fragmented is prominent for Beckett, as in the case of *The Unnamable* (1953) or the disembodied characters in *Play* (1963). As Joanne Shaw (2010) describes regarding 'making bodies' in Beckett's trilogy, the deforming of the body in *The Unnamable* operates as a form of creation. Paradoxically a new body is shaped through the imagination or thought despite the absence of the usual coordinates of the "normal body". As she says:

> By the end, the Unnamable has very little body left; pushing the Cartesian mind-body duality to the limit, he exists almost entirely as thought. Nevertheless, it is through his thought that the Unnamable creates, in a biological way, a bodily other (2010, p. 46).

In these examples of de-formed or 'unmade' bodies, the mind carries on despite the absence of the body, seemingly trumping the reality of the organic deficiency and embodied incoherence. In *The Unnamable,* the voice of thought continues as an immortal presence that articulates incessantly, never reaching a conclusion as to the nature of who or what it is. In his account of abjection in Beckett's texts, David Houston Jones describes the "horrific fascination" engendered by this "narration" where the "customary distance from the act of narration is removed" (2000, p. 191). This reduction of distance between the text and the reader, where the reader is enveloped within the text as an experience of fragmentation is almost performative (both in the Austin sense of the speech act and as theatrical adjective).[52] The content becomes form, and the form reflects content. Through the unwinding of pathways of self-interrogation, the narrator never finds an essence or endpoint that would anchor the words to the body. This is a body that is strangely infinite, and as in the case of *Not I,* it lives (or thinks) without the usual organs that support the physical being.

[52] Performative is both a noun and adjective. It relates both to the nature of a speech act, as defined by J. L. Austin and a theatrical performance respectively. In *How to do Things with Words,* Austin (1955/1962) identified phrases that were neither true nor false but could also perform or do the action stated. In this instance, I mean to imply both senses of the word.

This literary conception is akin to what Artaud had called a 'body without organs' which shall be looked at in more detail in the following section.

From the perspective of the Lacanian imaginary (the realm of identifications and imagination), we could say that the unfamiliar and discombobulating tone of texts such as *The Unnamable* prevents the reader from acquiring a visual image or narrative bearing on the narrator. At times we do not know where we are, the reader is bewildered, the usual coordinates of perception are disturbed, and feelings of the uncanny hold sway instead. We are not given clear coordinates with which to imagine the life and visual appearance of this narrator. Beckett's dismantling of the coordinates of the bodily imaginary and the laying bare of the human subject differs from that of Artaud and Genet whose theatrical style circulates more evidently around an idealism of form, despite the subversion of social ideology pertaining to both.

Or to put it differently, the body and the corresponding emptiness of the subject is not as laid bare in their respective works. For Artaud, this idealism is conveyed in the form of a new theatrical language and for Genet, a promulgation of the specular image as that which is most revered and most deceptive. In a sense, we could say that theatrical idealism provides an imaginary compensation for the spectator, such as the excess (or altered state) created by the dreamlike rituals of *The Maids* or *The Balcony* or the affectual bombardment of the Artaudian spectacle. In contrast, Beckett does not offer the spectator (or reader) many aesthetic compensations for this dismantling of fantasy and the subsequent perils of confronting the reader with non-meaning; other than the dark humour of the human subject's relationship to meaning and the corresponding tragicomedy of embodied existence. As Norrish explains concerning Beckett's unrelenting vision:

> [H]e analyses life as most people are afraid to see it, that is, stripped of its compensations, reduced to its uncertainties and heading or more swiftly than they like to think towards helpless decrepitude and final, useless extinction (1988, p. 63).

Thus, in the presentations of helpless decrepitude, the human tragedy is presented without moral judgements and a prescription for living, and it is therein that

Beckett's compassion (and contempt for humanity) lies.[53] The pursuit of an idyllic existence as it is often represented in narratives of romance (the pursuit of the One and wholeness) is for Beckett an ironic pastime that can only result in the disappointment of encountering the non-rapport of the sexual relation.

Beckett's writing provides examples of depersonalisation, and disassociation through what Barry calls, "the destabilizing of boundaries between external and internal" in his texts (Barry, 2016). The meanderings of the personal pronoun 'I' are emphasised, in such a way, as to almost seem like external voices. While boundaries between self and other are certainly destabilised in the Beckett canon, I would argue that the presence of humour and dark irony is what distinguishes his drama from being categorised as psychotic. It is the ability to present a psychotic state from within literary mechanisms, but being at a distance from this state. Or as Olga Cox Cameron (1994) has put it, unlike other psychotic writers such as Schreber, Beckett's writing does not exclude the reader, but instead generates unaccountable laughter, the truest response of the unconscious (p. 91). This ability to generate laughter includes, rather than excludes, the spectator within Beckett's presentations of fragile humanity, where, as we saw with *Endgame*: "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (Beckett, 1958/2006, p. 101).

As I have already elaborated in this thesis, the nature of the speaking being consists of the divide between the subject of the unconscious and that of the body. In this frame, the subject of the unconscious can be located between the materiality of the body and the signifier (language). This contradiction is unsayable due to the structural operation of language as it functions to construct the subject of the unconscious. Remembering that the subject is not the ego, but that which is in relation to the unconscious, the subject cannot say itself as it were. This view is in opposition to Descartes's positioning of the I as a reliable narrator and source of ontological certainty. Indeed, according to Lacanian logic, if you can say who you are, you are not that. As Borch-Jacobsen describes, "the Lacanian subject is not what

[53] Siobhan Purcell has argued that Beckett's presentation of impaired bodies is fuelled by both compassion and contempt. This is an important point as recognising contempt prevents a simplistic interpretation of the body in Beckett's work. It enables an account of the ambivalence at the heart of all our relationships to the body.

he *is* (the 'signifier', or the statement that claims to fix him in his being 'in-himself'), and he is what he is *not"* (quoted in Tolini and Muller, 2015, p. 7).

Similarly for Beckett, the "I" of the statement never quite matches up with the words it speaks; the personal pronoun is always observing, separate in its reflections, and at times outwardly negating itself as in *Not I*. There is always a gap between the enunciated and the enunciating. One gets the sense that there is a search for the right question, which could align the self with stability, but this inevitably fails due to the inherent paradoxes of language. Instead, questions of being are figured materially through the form of the body as that object to which the subject relates through distortion and miscognition. If we attempt to formulate what these questions might be for Beckett, they might look like; who am I in relation to my body? Can I exist without a body? How do I get out of this body and still live? If the body fails, what becomes of desire? Beckett's bodies do more than challenge the structures of identity but point to the very conditions of that identity, opening a vista onto being. By not providing an alternative ideal (as physical integrity), we the spectator may remain within that decomposition and these very questions.

It is interesting to think of the role of formation and deformation in relation to the imaginary dimension of the aesthetic spectacle. I asked the question in Chapter 2 (2.4), regarding the nature of the impact of performance on the spectator and the complexities of a potential response. While I am arguing that, for example, the theatrical spectacle has the potential to impact on the perception of the spectator, there are limitations. In this sense, and having worked with the methodological approach of the divided subject, I would be cautious in making strong claims of liberation or radical change, particularly as all spectators operate from the place of singularity *vis-à-vis* the unconscious. We shall look at this further in the next section on Artaud and affect.

Furthermore, as Chiesa points out, only certain ego-ideal formations have the power to deform the ideal ego as it were (2007, p. 39). That is to say, the primary narcissistic image that we have of ourselves is not that easily altered or transformed and may only become modified through primary and significant attachment objects.

Nonetheless, works of art, novels, films and dramatic performances (as part of the symbolic order) have the potential to influence the normative and preconceived conceptions of ourselves if even for a moment. Putting it differently, what we see can reorientate us to how we see ourselves, either in the form of an alienating rupture or by providing succour for our fantasies of fulfilment. This idea of subjective rupture through art is captured by what Olga Cox Cameron (2018) refers to as the knocking out of the imaginary through the spectacle of tragedy.

Similarly, Todd McGowan (2007) refers to the potential of a film to disrupt our ideological position regarding enjoyment, "in the trauma of the gaze lies the freedom of the subject" (p. 210). Another way of viewing this is that certain performances (or works of art) disrupt our habitual relationship to everyday objects of knowledge, (including what we perceive as our own bodies) and provide possibilities for the dismantling of signifiers and signifieds. However, while new ways of looking and speaking about topics bring change and ease suffering, particularly those involving marginalisation and stigma, meaning can quickly form new edifices, ideals of thought that work to plug the traumatic hole of non-totalising knowledge. In this way, as soon as we may think we have found the meaning to the representation of the body in Beckett's drama, we may have missed the point. The body is that site of a very question concerning being.

As we turn to the next section on Artaud now, the nature of being as it relates to the body is also very significant. However, while Beckett provided at least a minimal amount of fictional distance to this issue, for Artaud, this question appears within his writings as a particularly personal quest to suture the gap between thought and materiality. The attempt to bridge this gap can be understood through the concepts of repetition and affect.

3. ARTAUD: BRIDGING THE GAP OF BEING: REPETITION AND AFFECT

Artaud was very interested in the physical processes of the body, in particular, "caca" regularly features in his writings. Furthermore, these physical processes were associated with being: "there where it smells of shit,
it smells of being" (Artaud, 1947). At this point, rather than delving into a psychoanalytic exposition on the meaning of faeces and anality in his work, we could simply notice the physical and abject materiality that he ascribes to being. This detail is important as it is indicative of the predilections and driving forces behind his conceptions of performance in theatre and the implications for considering the relationship of the body to subjectivity. Thus, I deduce that in his theatre, Artaud attempts to access being through the materiality of the body (as opposed to language) and by so doing circumvent or re-suture the split between representation and the physical body.[54] This is a split that is represented, in Lacanian terms, by the concept of the *object a*. This 'suturing' through performance is attempted through the invocation of affect and bodily excess as transmitters of an altered state. Whereas Beckett frames the empty space of the subject through the staged characteristics of minimalism, absence and silence; Artaud attempts to fill the silence, blocking out all lack.

In Artaud's dramatic vision, the spectacle of performance is idealised as a vehicle through which, I would argue, being can be accessed. However, it is clear from his writings that he is also conscious of the limitations of forms and the inexpressibility of being. In his ambition for an "affective athleticism" (1938/1958, p. 133), theatre may bypass the stagnation of static images and forms. As Artaud states: "This means that in the theater more than anywhere else it is the affective world of which the actor must be aware, ascribing to it virtues which are not those of an image but carry a material sense" (*ibid*, p. 135). As we can see from this statement, Artaud attributes materiality to the affective world of the actor, and it is this materiality that he privileges over the seemingly psychological basis of words.

[54] It is important to remember that, as I have shown in the first two chapters, the body, as it is conceptualised in this thesis, is never simply reducible to a physical entity. The body is also, in Lacanian terms, a body of signifiers and as such susceptible to the desire of the Other.

Therefore, in Artaud's theatre, the modality of performance emphasises the invocation of affect through the body. At this point, it is interesting to think about affect in relation to the concept of mind and body and the conceptual gap within the signifiers. In an analysis of Artaud's later work, Chiesa describes Artaud's attempted solution to mediate the split of mind (as thought) and body (as materiality) through the affect of pain. As he says: "Suffering, the immediacy of pain, which leaves the false dichotomy between the corporeal and the mental aside, becomes the sole and most immediate proof of my being-real" (Chiesa, 2006, p. 348). Therefore, at this point in Artaud's work, being becomes identified with suffering and pain is the affectual mediator of the lack in being which has been "stolen by God" (*ibid*, p. 348). To take a moment to consider the relation of pain to the subjective experience of the body and its role as affect.[55] Pain is a signal of the interiority or surface of the body (a feeling of damage/wounding) and is something that can overwhelm the rational mind; it is to a certain extent outside of language. Given that affect (and intensity of sensation or emotion) has a physical component, such as crying, laughing, et cetera, and physicality is often aligned with immediacy; affect could be conceived as a vehicle to overcome the gap between thought and a more primal form of experience. In other words, affect, as a sign of authenticity, could be perceived as closer to being than thought.

In effect, for Artaud then, pain (as bodily affect) is potentially the mediator for arriving at some original point of 'satisfaction' (if being is aligned with suffering), where loss is transmuted into a libidinal presence of pain (as *jouissance*).
Furthermore, if Artaud perceives that an authentic 'douleur' has been stolen by God, this implies that he thought it was possible to replace it somehow, instead of remaining lost as a structural metaphysical cause of existence.
However, if according to Lacan, affect cannot be being given in its immediacy, and we accept that pain is affect, then accessing being through pain is impossible. As he says: "To say what affect is not. It is not Being given in its immediacy, nor is it the

[55] In *The Book of Love and Pain* (2004), Nasio places pain in the realm of affect and as a phenomenon that goes beyond the pleasure principle: "pain is an affect that reflects the extreme variation of unconscious tension in consciousness, variations that evade the pleasure principle" (p. 16).

subject in a raw form either" (Lacan, 1962-1963/2014, p. 3). That affect is not the subject in a "raw form" indicates that affect may not be a superior form of 'knowing' concerning the subject and the body. In other words, a source of originality (as true meaning) may not be found in affect if indeed there is any origin concerning the subject. As Artaud attempts to move away from the less 'authentic' expression of words and cognitive psychological understanding, he demonstrates a concern with the avoidance of repetition and the transcendent endeavour of achieving self-presence, as essential originality. Interestingly, despite Artaud's insistence on originality, Bersani identifies a contradiction in Artaud's resistance to repetition, stating that Artaud "continuously repeats the project of abolishing repetitions" (2004, p. 98). Ironically then, the aspiration for originality is overshadowed by repeating the attempt to become original.

Artaud's project of transcendence through theatre has important implications for thinking about contemporary idealisations of the body, including those in the therapeutic realm. In his manifesto for a Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud imagines a theatre that could release the repression of the unconscious through a bombardment of affect and sensation, an intensity of experience that could paralyse the mind (and hence his emphasis on psychological interpretations). As Artaud argues:

> In the true theater a play disturbs the senses' repose, frees the repressed unconscious, incites a kind of virtual revolt (which moreover can have its full effect only if it remains virtual), and imposes on the assembled collectivity an attitude that is both difficult and heroic (1938/1958, p. 28).

While I agree that theatre has the potential to challenge normative and ideological crystallisations, including those of the socio-political, I would not go as far as Artaud that it can provide transcendence and freedom from unconscious repression. Not least because psychoanalysis demonstrates that physical catharsis or *jouissance* (as Artaud might have imagined it in performance) is not privileged over language in the release or uncovering of repression. As Bruce Fink (2019) argued in reference to the process of "affect hunting" in contemporary psychotherapy: affect hunting being the inclination to root out an intensity of feeling as a sign of authenticity, "it is only when thought and affect are brought together that repression can be overcome". In other words, repression cannot be undone or worked through simply through the

promotion of affect alone. From this perspective, Artaud's project of transcending language, the privileging of the body as immediacy and hence the attempt to free the unconscious through other modes of signification related to affect does not seem possible.

According to the theoretical approach in this thesis, knowledge of the self or subjectivity, as it is expressed in language, can never be fully present to itself in chronological time. Language and speech inject space and distance to our experience, while the unconscious does not operate chronologically. Our knowledge of the body as it is related to language and discourse is also affected by this lack of identical-self presence given the impact of the signifier on the body. As soon as we speak of the body to somebody else, it becomes a signifier in a temporal sequence, something that is never quite what we were feeling. This distance between word and flesh alters in states of severe pain, illness or mental distress where the boundaries of inside and outside the subject can collapse, and the world outside the body shrinks. The state of physical intensity found in pain is possibly what drove Artaud to privilege pain and bodily sensation as a vehicle to experience originality, a way of 'feeling' oneself acutely. Indeed as Lacan, in Seminar IX on *Identification* explains, pain can become a fetish given its propensity for taking over the body as libidinal affect. As he says:

> [T]he experience of one pain effaces that of another, I mean that in the present it is difficult to suffer two pains at the same time: one takes over, makes one forget the other as if the libidinal cathexis, even onto one's own body, showed itself in this case to be subject to the same law which I would call that of partiality which motivates the relation to the world of the objects of desire (1961-1962, Seminar XI, Feb 22nd).

The body was undoubtedly a source of conflict for Artaud. He was born with spinal meningitis and developed other afflictions over his lifetime, including opium addiction and other somatic symptoms, possibly in part due to psychosis. Therefore, his work was not simply art as a modality of representation concerning the conflict, but we could also say, an attempt at a solution to this bodily and metaphysical alienation and the split engendered by language. There is an inherent ambivalence in his writings regarding language - on the one hand, he attempts to transcend linguistic representation with other modes of theatrical signification, and on the other, he writes copiously as if writing could suture the hole in being he circumvents with art.

In this way, it seems to me that Artaud attempted to reduce the distance created by language between self-knowledge and the body and by so doing, to escape the chains of the physical body through artistic means. Through the actuality of the body on stage, mimesis as the distance inscribed within representation could become immanence, an immediacy of being. The Artaudian spectacle such as it is comprised of gesture, movement, vocal invocations envisages a performative form of representation that challenges Aristotle's definition of mimesis as imitation (Lehmann, 2006). The Artaudian spectacle does not endeavour to copy or imitate something but rather to be that something as transcendent presence and to capture the "the in-itself" of embodied experience.

The excessive quality of Artaud's dramaturgy is comparable to the style of his drawings and paintings where the available space on the paper is filled to the maximum. The cramming of space with objects metaphorically diminishes the room that might be left for absence or gaps, illustrating the difficulty of confronting a hole, which as we have seen for Artaud, is endemic to his relationship with language. As he says in *Theatre and its Double:*

> And just as there will be no unoccupied point in space, there will be neither respite nor vacancy in the spectator's mind or sensibility. That is, between life and the theater there will be no distinct division, but instead a continuity (1938/1958, p. 126).

Artaud's desire for continuity between life and theatre is exemplified by his instruction that the theatre space should extend into the audience and "physically envelop the spectator and immerse them in a constant bath of light, images, movements, and noises" (*Ibid*, p. 126). In this way, the body of the spectator is absorbed by the elements of performance and the space for distant, rational critique held in abeyance. This type of imagined continuity between performance and the spectator breaks down the distinction between subject and object and ultimately between life and art. The 'organs' of theatre infiltrate the body, extending it beyond the limits of everyday reality.

3.1. The Body Without Organs: Extending the Imaginary Body

This idea of continuity and freedom from constraint is encapsulated in Artaud's concept of "the body without organs", a concept through which the image of the

physical body is extended beyond its material frame. In the following words from Artaud, we hear the desire to be free from the constraints of the organism either as an instinctual or predetermined phenomenon: "When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom" (Artaud, 1947). The freedom that Artaud is referring to here appears to lie in a body that is determined by the agency of the subject and not something automatic to the life of the body.

The "body without organs" was first coined in Artaud's 1948 radio piece *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, a performance that resounds with cries, shrieks and strange noises, an unworldly eerie performance. The day before it was due to air in 1948, the French radio shelved it, and Artaud died one month later. This radio production is in the timeframe of the "later Artaud" after he emerged from his long internment in the psychiatric institution of Rodez where he experienced many terrible physical hardships including starvation (due to war rations) and the ravages of electric shock treatment. In *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, language is broken down into glossolalia, cries, shrieks, and primordial noises that evoke the sounds of someone in pain. This is signification brought to its limits where the scream functions as the point where language fails or breaks down. The shrieks and strange noises are like defiant war cries; Artaud is refusing to employ the language of the social order and instead gives voice to the sound of his own singular being. In this context, the emergence of the 'body without organs' may signify Artaud's desire to experience freedom from the institutional strictures of the medical profession that he deeply resented. Since Artaud coined the phrase, the body without organs has become an integral concept within philosophical and academic criticism. In particular, it has become associated with the philosophy of Deleuze and from this context is incorporated within the broader field of critical theory, philosophy and disability studies. Examples include the work of writers such as Slavoj Žižek *Organs Without Bodies* (2004), and that of Margrit Shildrick. This conception of a body that deviates from the normative perimeters of the physical body and is not hemmed in by the material limitations has inspired a series of diverse and imaginative responses; it is relevant for the problematics of phenomenology, as it has implications of our understanding of embodied being-in-the-world. In Deleuze's account of the body without organs, desire is conceptualised as productive and positive, and therefore

often deemed more fluid than Lacanian perspectives of desire that emphasise lack as the motor force. This has led to Artaud's conception being employed within the area of disability studies, as a way of envisaging a more fluid understanding of the body's potential.

In the field of critical theory, the body without organs is a fluid concept and has a broad appeal for considering alternative viewpoints on organisational structures and the human body. In her work on disability, Shildrick utilises a Deleuzian account of the body without organs, to envisage a pathway of becoming where the disabled body has more possibilities of valuation than other paradigms of embodiment. She argues: "the significance of Deleuzian notions like 'desiring machine', 'assemblage', and 'body without organs',[are] all terms that have the potential to radically disrupt the devaluation of the disabled body" (2009, p.125). From this perspective, the disabled body becomes something not limited to the actual physical dimensions of the flesh; it is something that can be transformed through a metaphorisation of its potential in a system of relating.

For our purposes, a full critique of this concept is beyond the scope of this research, but it is important to attribute this influential idea to Artaud and to acknowledge his status as an inventor of ideas that challenge normativity. Often, as we see with the above quote from Shildrick, the body without organs is referenced without Artaud as the original source. Additionally, this concept is applicable to considering the body within literary analysis as I referred to it in previous chapters. As we have seen in the light of Beckett's partial bodies, the maimed body may be in pieces, presented as virtually unlivable, but it continues to go on (in the imagination at least). From the perspective of this thesis, we could say that the body without organs is akin to a metaphor of the imaginary body, a fantasy of the body that is not inherently material but functions to support the organisation of subjectivity even in its drive toward disorganisation. In a sense, part of the subjective structure surrounding the physical body is akin to this imagined entity, to reiterate Freud, "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego"(1923, p. 20).[56] In other words, the ego is the psychical representative

[56] Footnote from Freud, *The Ego and the Id [*I.e. the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides, as we have seen above, representing the superficies of the mental apparatus. (1923, p. 20).

of the body without being a material entity in itself. Therefore the invention of this concept, and its wide appeal, point to a collective desire to extend the parameters of subjectivity by redefining what we know to be the body. As Jay Murphy (2015) writes:"Through it [the body without organs] Artaud intends to abolish interiority once and for all and forgo the limitations of the physical flesh" (paragraph, 3). While I would not agree entirely that Artaud wanted to abolish interiority, it is certainly true that he tried to transform the limitations of the physical body. In this way and in his association with the "living theatre" Artaud has provided inspiration for many contemporary artists who incorporate the body as an agent of the artistic enterprise.

For example, the work of Marina Abramović, as explored in the documentary *The Artist Is Present* (2012) underlines the concept of bodily presence in art as actual reality and not simply a fictional representation. I also mentioned in Chapter 3, that the bodily cosmetic art of the French artist Orlan is inspired by this living theatre. In both these examples, the spectator has to endure the spectacle of suffering and pain rendered visible through the bodies of the artists as happening *now* and not as signifiers of another space, another time. The concept of 'presence' in performance art is linked with Artaud's vision for a theatre, where art becomes the vehicle to experience the body as material flesh, and affect is emphasised over a critical receptive (as in psychological) distance.

Having laid out some of the issues pertaining to the mind-body problematics in Artaud's work, we now turn to look at the idea of an ethical humanism in the work of Jean Genet. In this respect, we shall look at the concept of abjection in his work and the tension that operates through the presentation of specular and linguistic contradictions that situate the human subject as a paradox of being.

4. GENET'S ABJECT HUMANISM: AN ALCHEMY OF THE BODY.

In his drama, Genet glorifies the image of the body qua image and not as a substance, as that which is perceived; it is a phenomenon that exists as a function of the other's gaze. As we have seen through the analysis of *The Maids* and *The Balcony*, Genet's theatre exposes the imaginary structure of all ideological positions, and the emptiness inherent to the meaning supporting them, by revealing the instability of identity at

the heart of subjectivity. This exposition of the structures of ideology has implications for considering the position of the body in these works. I say position rather than representation, as it incorporates the relationship to the body that is not completely visible within the presentation of the physical body. In other words, the bodily traces inherent within the structures of meaning, operational within the text or performance. For example, *The Balcony* exposes the erotic underside of symbolic positions as the libidinal force supporting authority. In this sense, the body as that vehicle of the erotic is illustrated to be a function of the power relations and the imaginary fictions that support them. Or, to put this in Lacanian terms, the body is featured as an accoutrement of the desire of the Other.

Given the spaces and environments that characterise Genet's drama: a brothel, a bourgeois bedroom, a country in war, a hotel, the body becomes part of his scenography. That is to say, the body functions within these spaces as both a signifier and a function of the power relations endemic to these social landscapes. The human subject is alienated within these very symbolic structures. In contrast, the dramaturgy of Beckett and Artaud conveys a more phenomenological account of embodiment; we can see the inherent alienation of the body (the body as Other) in the sparse and destitute landscapes of Beckettian space, where the subject is reduced to the body and dislocated from conventional forms. In this sense, the human subject is alienated from within the very limits of the physical body. For Artaud, the very performative gesture of the theatrical act is a way of delimiting the body in metaphysical terms, bringing corporality to the fore as being itself.

As I said in the previous section, the question of materiality featured prominently for Artaud. Genet, on the other hand, revels in the manipulation of the image without placing the same emphasis on materiality. That being said, there is nonetheless a transformation that takes place regarding material components of embodied reality, that which we could classify as the abject through the prevalence of the erotic dimension of the image. Furthermore, it is not simply the visible image that Genet exalts in his drama, but a presentation of the imaginary structures supporting the dynamics and fictions of the symbolic order. Materiality, therefore, is revealed as being at least in part a function of the imaginary. We could say that there is no body without the social order, as the body is also composed of signifiers. The social order

somewhat entraps the body, rendering certain subjects in a favourable position in comparison with others.

The landscapes of Genet's drama and prose texts are composed of characters who would usually be on the margins of society, or what Marion May Campbell (2014) calls "the monstrous". As she says, Genet's theatre:

> [I]s a theatre that knows power to be based on spectacle, an image, discourse, costume, movement and gesture, a theatre that rules by exalting the place of the humiliated, mutilated, or sacrificed body (p. 33) […. [I]t is not that the characters are *morally* abominable, but rather they are monstrous in the sense that they *show* what (in the classical theatre) is to be kept hidden (p. 38).

Thus, the "monsters" of Genet's texts are abjected characters who disturb the status quo of respectability and bourgeois values; these are characters who are typically marginalised within society such as prostitutes, perverts, vagabonds, thieves, blacks and servants (*ibid*, p. 35). In this account of abjection, the comparison with Genet's own life and his experience on the margins of society as thief, prisoner and homosexual is hard to miss. The power dynamics that take place within these domains of the underworld, the criminal underclass and the more shady spaces of homosexual relations (at that time) take a different form to power relations found within bourgeois society. Genet manages to aestheticise the more brutal and violent aspects of the underworld through his poetics of language and stylisation of form. For example, the elevation of murder to a ritualistic aesthetic act in his dramatic and prose texts (as in *The Maids*, *The Blacks*) takes an act of brutality, a criminal act and turns it into poetry. To put this another way, as we have seen with *The Maids*, the jouissance at the heart of the act is brought to light through the dramatic medium.

The intimacies of power arising in societal relations and within the authority of institutions would have been deeply familiar to Genet as his short film *Un chant d'Amour* (1950) demonstrates. This poetic film depicts the libidinal and erotically charged relationship to power invoked by sadomasochistic relations (in this case, the prison guards) where the body as the site of sexual and libidinal *jouissance* comes to the fore. In this scenario, the body is the underside/object of symbolic power expressed within the gaze of the prison guard, and subjective fantasy (where the erotics of power dimensions are played out) mediates the relation between body and gaze. As we have seen, Genet presents these power relations as intrinsic to the social

order and to the dynamics of the dialectic of recognition, where power is bestowed through the look of the other. In this sense, Genet, through the technique of masquerade exposes the emptiness of power and its libidinal intensities and reveals what Zupančič, in her discussion of *The Balcony* calls "the nothingness at the heart of symbolic power" (2016, p. 223).

In *The Balcony*, Genet reveres the abjected and subverts the bourgeois ideals of power as transmitted through the societal functions of respectable symbolic positions (judge, bishop, etc.). Similarly, in the analysis of *The Maids* in Chapter 3, the bodily references of waste, vomit, hate and disgust as they emerged in the discourse of Claire and Solange were contextualised as signifiers of introjection and expulsion through drawing on Kristeva's theory of the abject. The boundaries of inside and outside the body are blurred through the metaphors of ingestion and repudiation and hence serve as markers of their toxic and narcissistic identification. The Kristevean abject is that opaque realm of physical (or psychological) experience that is somewhat hidden to consciousness and that does not conform to the ideal of a contained and whole body. The substances of the body (blood, faeces, vomit) that reveal its inherent permeability and morbidity, and remind us we are flesh and blood creatures, can be anxiety-provoking, disgusting and potentially fetishised. Abjection is a reoccurring trope in Genet's work, both biographically and artistically. As he recounts in the introduction to *The Thief's Journal:*

> [B]ut it will seem that in order to be found guilty I must have committed the acts which make traitors, thieves or cowards; but this was not at all the case: within myself, with a little patience, I discovered, through reflection, adequate reasons for being named by these names. And it staggered me to know that I was composed of impurities. I became abject (Genet, 1949, p. 80).

In this semi-autobiographical text, Genet's protagonists are abject, lice-infested, deformed (one-handed Stillatano) and revel in criminality. These are heroes who master the shame and humiliation of their inferior societal position through an 'enjoying' of the erotics of the abject body. Through this poetic transformation, deformed and less sanitised spectacles of the body become human and eroticised — the vulnerability and fragility of the flesh act as a marker of bravado and seduction rather than one of disgust and revulsion. Most importantly, there are times when these images of the body do not conform to the ideals of beauty that are so often

inscribed in the cultural imaginary. Thus, Genet's art is an alchemic process where the abject is transformed into the erotic, and the division between the inside and outside of the body are blurred through the poetry of language and the deception of the spectacle.[57] In this blurring of boundaries, the line between self and other (as individual) or Other (as symbolic component) becomes less distinct.

4.1. Blurred Boundaries: Self and Other

In *What Remains of a Rembrandt Torn into Four Equal Pieces and Flushed Down the Toilet…* (1951/1988) Genet recounts the famous incident of meeting a stranger on a train whose gaze undid him and in this undoing revealed to him a radical intersubjective dimension in the experience of encountering the Other:

> His gaze was not someone else's: it was my own that I was meeting in a mirror, inadvertently and in a state of solitude and self- oblivion. I could only express as follows what I felt: I was flowing out of my body, through the eyes, into his at the same time as he was flowing into mine (Genet, 1951/1988, p. 13).

The distinction between self and other in this text is porous; the metaphors convey a bleeding of two bodies onto each other, where subjectivity becomes intersubjective, a flowing that emerges from the wound of being. According to Carl Lavery (2003), the figure of the "wound" in this passage is a crucial signifier in understanding the connection between ethics and politics in Genet's life and work. This episode with a stranger on the train, where Genet encountered the "impossible hole within subjectivity" greatly influenced his "humanism" in years to come (p. 164). As Lavery observes: "For Genet, engagement is not dependent on sameness, the triumph of totality, belonging: it is dependent on what wounds and divides us" (*ibid*, p. 175). Although this may be true, it would also be accurate to say that for Genet, engagement is also dependent on sameness, given the level of narcissistic figuration that takes place in his drama. Indeed, Genet writes of an equality of identity In *What Remains of a Rembrandt*, where beneath every appearance there is something identical, something in which all men are equal:

[57] It is interesting that the presence of the abject, while still present in his drama, recedes somewhat in theatrical form in comparison with his prose. Interestingly, this is also something that happens for Beckett, in his transition from text to stage.

> "Behind his charming or, to us, monstrous appearance," I said to myself, "every man-as has been revealed to me-retains a quality which seems to be a kind of ultimate recourse and owing to which he is, in a very secret, perhaps irreducible area, what every man is. (Quotations in original, Genet, 1951/ 1988, p. 18).

These words display a humanism on the part of Genet, and he realises that whatever appearance may present, either the image of beauty or the monstrous is simply appearance, beyond which we are all the same.

Another way of thinking of sameness or the idea of merging is through the dynamics of narcissism. As with the maids Claire and Solange, their downfall is their inability to separate either from each other or from Madame. I mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.2) that in Genet's earlier prose work, there are clear indications of a desire to merge with the other, conveyed through sexual and erotic analogies. Indeed, this occurs in the above passage with the stranger on the train, where two bodies almost become one paradoxically through an experience of radical difference. As I have been arguing in relation to the three authors, it is important to identify the contradictions inherent to both the representation of the body in their works and the form through which this is conveyed. An example being the situation of the body in pieces in Artaud's writing and drama, as a metaphor of both integration and disintegration as regards embodied subjectivity. For Genet, the representation of the body is, in fact, situated **as** a contradiction, contingent upon being an object of perception but also driven by visceral and erotic drives. It both is and is not. In this sense, the body is that which imprisons us within a web of identification, the hall of mirrors, beyond which there is no substance, but conversely, that which we 'enjoy' as a substance through the pursuit of erotic pleasure.

Previously from within *The Maids* and *The Balcony*, we saw that subjectivity is reflected as a "tragic masquerade" where the power dynamics in society (based on illusion) function to support this masquerade. The scenography within Genet's plays is fundamental to the conveyance of masquerade to the spectator. The artifice of mirrors and the assemblage of characters, all occupying multiple roles (roles within roles) belies any essential truth of subjectivity. For Genet, existence is a paradox based on falsity and deception. The appearance of the self as a specular image signifies through its distortion (and deception) the 'truth' of being (which is false). In

other words, beneath the roles and masquerades, characters rely on their reflection in the gaze of the other to support their existence and desire.

In *The Maids,* Claire and Solange are dependent on each other, they are narcissistically entwined and abject twins who love and hate the image in the other. We have seen in the context of the mirror stage (Chapter 2, 2.4), that the specular image of the body seduces the subject away from perceiving the lacking 'substance' of being. Therefore, in Genet's drama, the illusionary image of the body (body-as-perceived) is the referent for something immanent (the invisible body-as-felt) which cannot be named or signified other than through a presentation of contradiction. In other words, in his drama, it is in the relationship between the seeming opposites of the imaginary and the real, appearance and immanence, truth and falsity that the trauma of the body resonates. Through the parody and self-conscious exploitation of theatrical representation and infinite layers of deception, truth is accessed through farce. But exposing this farce does not equate to revealing an essential substance at the core of subjectivity. If anything is essential it is an ambiguity concerning being. I have argued in this thesis that being has a relationship to the body, and indeed that the body is that paradox of the speaking being. In this sense, when encountering a question of being in all three authors, we can consider its relationship to the body. In other words, if there is an ambiguity concerning being within a text or performance, this may imply an ambiguity concerning the body.

In *The Balcony,* we encounter linguistic paradoxes concerning the nature of something that is and is not. There is a slippage between being and not being, an expression of contradiction – as illustrated by the envoy: "I mean that the Queen is embroidering and that she is not embroidering". (Genet, 1958/1962, p. 62). We have already seen, from a Lacanian perspective that concerning the being of the subject, existence is posited as a function of the signifier. We come to 'be' through language since we are subjects of the unconscious and the symbolic order. Hence there is no intrinsic essence to being; it is a lack. This lack of being is also related to the relationship we have with our bodies (and its epistemological deficit). As Laurens de Vos (2011) argues, at times of great ontological uncertainty, the body becomes an agent of certainty, a potential anchor of meaning when human beings doubt as to the authenticity of the self. In other words, the question of 'who am I?' is often answered

through the appeal to the body; where the body appears to be a source of some stability. For Genet, the body as stability becomes an anchor as the site of eroticism, disgust, abjection and love but it is also a site of instability as characters obtain their being through the image.

Many of Genet's characters exist in the realm of appearance (as opposed to substance) and obtain a sense of being through the look or presence of the Other. As we saw in Chapter 3 (2.1) regarding the lack of being of the maids Claire and Solange, "their being is defined by its absolute relativity. They are *others"* (Sartre, 1952, p. 617). Therefore, in a variation of existentialist terms, we could say that for Genet, the image precedes existence. There is no 'essence' to the character played by the actor, but nor is he or she a function born of action (as in existentialist thought) but rather a precarious reflection of one's being in the eyes of the one who looks. As Norrish points out, the insubstantiality of these characters distinguishes Genet's drama from other modalities of tragedy introducing a more Brechtian distantiation effect regarding the spectator. In this type of tragic drama, characterisation is more based on symbols and metaphor than on the imitation of 'real' action. (1998, p. 110).

For Genet then, being, as that intrinsic unnameable quality of existence, is attached to the *semblant* (as that which appears) and action is almost secondary when it comes to the play on representation which his theatre enacts. Although, despite the emphasis on the artifices of theatre, it must be said that the dramatic mechanisms of action and plot are more prevalent than in Beckettian drama. In other words, Genet's style is less minimalist. In his analysis of *The Maids,* Sartre describes the oscillation between being and nonbeing that is played out in the maids role-playing scenario where appearance is in opposition to being. He says that Genet desires appearance to function as the screen behind which the spectator is exposed to the:

> [D]emoniacal intuition of nothingness[…] where being is revealed to be nothingness, but as appearance is usually effaced in the presence of being, the allusions which vanish leave him with the illusion that it *is being* which replaces them (p. 624).

This passage gets to the crux of Genet's presentation of being, its contradictions and complexities. Not only is appearance revealed to be an illusion, but there is no truth beneath appearance (as would be its opposite). Instead, we are left with the *illusion* of being as replacement. In other words, there is no substance of subjectivity that we

can rely on. When taking account of Genet's view as expressed in *What Remains of a Rembrandt,* that behind all appearance there is something identical, this positing of being as illusion takes on an ethical import.

While Genet's dramaturgy capitalises on the mechanisms of antirealist highly stylised performance to reveal what "theological and ideological discourse veils and denies" (Lavery, 2003, p. 163), I would argue that his theatre does not share the same dramatic idealism contained within Artaud's vision in *Theatre and its Double.* Genet's position in (1958) on the social impact of theatre is to underline it as an exaltation of reflection, not as revolution. As we saw in the prelude to *The Balcony,* this was to be a theatre of "the glorification of the Image and Reflection". Of course, it should be remembered, in line with the premise of the divided subject, that the artist's stated intention does not preclude consequences in excess of its original intention. As Azari states, "in literary discourse, the subject can say something other than what it is apparently saying" (2008, p. 61). That is to say, although Genet may not have intended for his theatre to have an ethical impact, this does not preclude it from being so. It is within the very glorification of the image in his theatre that the failure of representation to convey a totality of embodied experience is manifest. This encounter with failure is ethical as we are confronted with the cracks in the imaginary, as that which veils the trauma of the body.

In the next section, as a consequence of the themes outlined in this thesis, I shall now summarise a comparative account of the body in the works of the three authors and the limits concerning its representation.

5. ORIENTATIONS AS ORGANISATION: THE LIMITS OF THE BODY IN ARTAUD, BECKETT AND GENET

As I have been arguing thus far, there is no complete resolution of the split engendered by language for the human subject and of the gap inherent to 'knowing' the body. Nonetheless, there are ways of mediating this gap or at the very least of framing it. The aesthetic form of theatre is in part a bridge of this gap. The work of the chosen authors and the respective particularities of style, regarding the

orientation towards absence displayed in the drama, function as a modality of organisation *vis-à-vis* embodied subjectivity. By style, I refer to a composite concept of intention, that which is comprised of unconscious drive and the means (semiotics) by which it is conveyed. For example, Genet's predilection for the erotics and deception of the specular image, Artaud's mission of a metaphysical transcendence *through* theatre and Beckett's unravelling of any coherence of self and body, crystallise certain repetitions and motifs within an aesthetics of form. However, it is important not to be too conclusive regarding the nature of these orientations and to always bear in mind that within the work of all three authors, there are contradictions and ambiguities, alterations and developments; fundamentally there is always an excess to anything that we can say of these dramatic performances. That being said, the challenge in this thesis has been to formulate the outcome of the encounter between this artistic domain and psychoanalysis to elucidate a greater understanding of issues pertaining to embodiment.

The argument of stylistic orientation as organisation is constructed upon the idea that art, in this instance, dramatic works, occupies an organising function within the subjective constitution of the human being. Within the context of the unconscious, artworks play a role in organising the drives of the body, and the emptiness at the heart of signification. As Regnault argues:

> All art is characterized by a certain mode of organization around this emptiness[…].Art, then, is not just about decoration, illustration. In truth, it organizes[...] Couldn't we also say, instead of what is a psychoanalysis that includes art, what is an art that includes psychoanalysis? (Regnault, 2013, paragraph 4/ 43).

From this perspective, the category of art is not simply a representative medium where we can aesthetically appreciate what we see but, in psychoanalytic terms, it also serves to organise facets of subjectivity to form knots, points of contiguity that support the existence of the subject. The work of the three authors in this thesis, create and demolish familiar forms and structures by inventing new worlds and potentialities from and within the imagination. It is within this momentum that some of the contradictions lie. For even in the case of Beckett's most reduced landscapes, where shadows fall on the empty spaces, we are presented with a fecundity of the imagination as the capacity to generate the subjectivity of empty space through form.

Although in some respects, these existential spaces may be some of the most familiar to us, it is interesting that they cannot be represented with any ease, if at all. In this respect, it could be said that the creative act springs from the traumatic space of the unknowable dimension of embodiment. Llewellyn Brown captures this process very accurately when he says:

> The Beckettian subject finds himself facing an absence that nothing can palliate, other than the creation that endows it with form[…] the Beckettian subject is both 'born' and 'unborn', being unable to successfully integrate either state (2016, p. 386).

To be both born and unborn is to exist within a liminal space between being and nonbeing. Despite the seeming futility that this description of the Beckettian subject indicates, there is a note of optimism in this statement. The role of creation as it is manifest in an aesthetic work can palliate something of the anxiety of the Real, both from the perspective of the individual author and potentially for the viewing spectator or reader. In Lacanian terms, art is where the imaginary and symbolic (through the spectacle of form and signification) touches the Real (that which is outside of representation) creating something out of nothing. In keeping with this theme, we can also consider Beckett's drama as a form that takes the disorganisation of the body as its *raison d'être.* Yet paradoxically through the repetitions of the motifs of disorder, decomposition and the unravelling of subjectivity in the process of subtraction (an unknotting), the chaos of the self develops a pattern within representation. This pattern is what I refer to as an orientation of style, even if that style is a 'non-style', wherein the very basis of form is challenged and previous conventions subverted.

In contextualising this idea of orientation, and keeping in mind the representation of the body within the dramatic works, I shall draw on the concept of the *object a* as a frame to situate the basis of the argument. I outlined in Chapter 1 that the position of meaning and an orientation toward the Other was a significant factor in a comparative analysis of the three authors. We shall now consider the implications of this idea in light of what has emerged through the analyses. From this angle, we shall be able to consider the role of lack, absence and presence within the respective works and decipher nuances concerning the issues of knowledge and the body.

In drawing on the concept of the *object a*, as a marker of the orientation concerning meaning within the dramatic work, we can approach a dual analysis of the representation of the body. In other words, the body is both a phenomenon within the dramatic works and an entity that is perceived by the spectator. It is important to say that I do not collapse these two perspectives, where the body would become purely that which is perceived by the spectator, although they do overlap. Given the singularity of the spectator, I think the analysis of the body in theatre should not always be reduced to a conclusion based on its reception, but nor should this be left out of the equation. To remember a definition from Chapter 2 (3.1), the *object a* concerns a subjective relationship to the fantasy which veils the lack in being. It is a marker of something that has been lost to the body, but that finds its effects within representation, not as a concrete object, but as an insignia of loss.

Therefore, we can ask, in what sense is the spectator confronted with absence as that lack which may trigger desire, or is this absence covered? Fantasy, as we remember, functions as a mediation of the gap between the subject and the Real, and veils the hole in meaning related to the impossibility of achieving complete knowledge of the body. In other words, fantasy enables us to imagine that we are whole and complete as regards the body. For our purposes then, we can consider how the imaginary dimension of the *object a* functions within these texts to reveal something of the body, both the seen and the unseen; that is as it can be formulated through identifying lack, absence or excess in the performance. By imaginary, I am referring to the fact that the object cannot be represented in the specular image; it is, in fact, a remainder of that image. In this way, this concept can be approached through the positioning of language and the elements of non-verbal signification within the text and performances as semblances and veils of this 'object'. This imaginary dimension of the *object a* then, functions within the style of the respective authors as a way of contextualising the 'missing pound of flesh' of the body. In a sense, we can approach the traces of the body, even when the body is absent.

In Beckett's *mise-en-scène*, the absence of linear plot, the contours of minimalistic settings and the silences pervading dialogue, encourage an excess of the body to come to the fore. I would argue that in Beckett's drama, language is not so much devalued or rendered obsolete within the context of communication, as shown in its

alienating Otherness, its traumatic and "parasitic" dimension. The presence of language is in sharp relief with the silence surrounding it. Alternatively, language drowns out the silence in plays (such as *Not I*) where the visual body is less present. From the perspective of this thesis, the alienation within language is part of the 'cruelty' inherent to existence when there is nothing to guarantee meaning, or when the authority is revealed as lacking (as in concepts of God, the ravages of war, or ideology). We saw this drama of lack and absence in the prevailing motif of "there is no more" in *Endgame* (Chapter 3). In Beckett's entropic landscapes, the Other as a guarantor of meaning is lacking, and yet this absence is where the subtlety of the theatrical form comes to the fore. There is no ultimate meaning, and nothing to anchor the subject in the body bar the meanderings of thought and the companionship of other lost souls.

Nonetheless, Beckett manages to present this lack of the Other within the dimensions of form, and therefore paradoxically the Other is present somehow. Thus, the relationship to the *object a* is one of a distance, a distance that renders it visible as absence. The significance of this relationship shall become evident when we look to a similar idea in Artaud and Genet with different results. For Beckett, signification is not entirely absent but porous; it is present in fragments of narratives rather than a grand narrative where the situation would, on the whole, make sense.

In everyday life, the imaginary and the symbolic (as language, images and fantasy) knit together to form a partial veil around the hole of the Real and the epistemological paradox of the speaking subject. When the Other fails (as in a collapse of meaning) or is revealed as lacking, the cracks of the imaginary become evident (within the specular and linguistic organisation of the body), and the libidinal excess of the body comes to the fore. That is to say, the realm of meaning is imperfect and based on misrecognition, but enables us to live and engage with the world. In the sparse settings of the Beckettian stage, barren landscapes and ailing characters all serve to underline the subject as a waste product of existence, a slave to nature and not a master of circumstance. There is no grand design where we will be rescued, and the call to meaning answered; we must live with the questions existence poses. As we saw in Chapter 3, alienation as the concept signifying the discord between being and meaning, is the subjective background state within which the

human being oscillates between language and the Real. The representation of the body and our relationship to it are situated within this oscillation.

In the analysis of Genet's *The Maids*, we saw a portrayal of acute narcissistic alienation, where the boundaries between self and other (and by extension body and other) are not demarcated. Although meaning is somewhat 'carved out' at times in Beckett's drama, for Genet signification is both absent and excessive. This duality has implications for considering the representation of the body in his work. For example, murder, death and suicide all feature as moments of a cathartic trajectory for the bodies of individual characters, wherein a sense, meaning is evacuated and comes to a standstill.

Genet brings the very architecture and materiality of the stage to the fore as a device to lure the spectator into the hall of mirrors constitutive of his world. By doing so, a transgression of boundaries can take place, a subversion of cause and effect in relation to the spectator. This type of violence could be considered an aesthetics of the negative, where negation serves to disassemble and bring into question the fictive structures of life.

An aesthetics of the negative is also envisaged by Evelyn Grossman (2004) in her comparison of the melancholic and disintegrative tones of Artaud and Beckett. In *La Défiguration* she distinguishes the paradoxical aliveness of Artaudian cruelty "l'appétit de vie" from what she refers to in Beckett's work as "désintégration lente, supplice chinois de la goutte d'eau" (p. 55). This divergence of what she considers to be a vital pulsation of a disfiguring force and Beckett's slow disintegration of form is the crux of the nuances regarding cruelty in both authors. Grossman attributes a melancholic quality to Beckett's work where the shadow of the lost object (in a Freudian sense) haunts the characters as a spectral presence, depicted quite vividly in *Ghost trio* (1975) and *Ohio impromptu* (1980). As she explains:

> Le mélancolique,on le sait, est hanté par le deuil impossible de l'objet maternel ou plutôt de que Lacan appelle la Chose,ce pré-objet indéterminé, à la fois perdu à jamais et jamais perdu (p. 64).

We previously saw this melancholic tone in *Endgame* where all elements of the performance from the stage setting to the characters dialogue, culminating in a movement of dissolution, a running out, a subtraction of forms where something is

reaching an end. A decomposition of the subject haunts these moments where the Beckettian subject encounters the absent place that the object occupies rather than the *jouissance* of the object itself (as an erotic image, for example). This is a critical point in opening onto a comparison of the place of absence and hence the relationship to fantasy (as the hidden and forever unrecoverable *object a)* in the work of the three authors.

We are now in a position to summarise the relationship to the *object a* as determined within the analysis of the dramatic works of Artaud, Beckett and Genet. In this positioning of the *object a* as proxy of the Other, nuances concerning the body are defined. This relationship can be configured within the terms of excess, lack, and ambivalence, respectively. For Beckett the place of the lost *object a* is exposed as lost – there is no other of the Other that will guarantee a final resolution to the question of what existence means or the cause of its absurdity. Godot will never come, but as we have seen within the context of the play, the absence of Godot marks a structural necessity of the human subject where the striving for completion and the arrival of a 'being to come' promises some sort of relief from the deformations and bodily hardships of existence.

In contrast, for Artaud, the mythical lost *object a* is sought after through the modality of performance as a bodily presence that could mitigate the split of conscious and unconscious reality. We saw previously that the role of affect (as signifier of bodily flesh and pain) is placed in a privileged position in Artaud's theoretical writings and in his vision for a body that could transcend the splitting of the signifier. Hence, presence, as it is imagined to be in the role of bodily emissions (voice, affect, noise) functions as a substitute for the irrecoverable absence of being that has resulted from the imposition of the signifier and the birth of the subject.

Finally, for Genet, presence and absence intersect in a theatrical game of hide and seek; the *object a* (as that object of desire propelling identification) is presented as hidden beneath the folds of contradiction present in his dramatic style. It is not entirely absent (in which we might experience melancholic tones) nor is it entirely and potentially recoverable (in the idealistic sense of Artaud's transcendent project), but it functions as hidden in order to promote a *jouissance* of the image as an erotics of the specular. This type of enjoyment concerning the specular is also akin to an

enjoyment of the body (as an imaginary object or image). The *object a* in *The Balcony* is, as Christine Gormley (2019) puts it, a fetishised object, framed as a disavowal but not quite a refusal. The position of the imaginary, as we saw in this play, is pitched between sexual fantasy and the masks of identification, where roles within roles and functions without substance marked the precarious relationship between being and appearance. These masks point to something that cannot be revealed but is sustained through the appearance of a veil. In *The Maids* and *The Balcony,* fantasy is exposed as fantasy in the fake and fictitious presentation of the characters, who act themselves into being in front of our eyes. Yet fantasy, as it is conveyed, is not quite stripped bare of everything that would sustain it; in contrast to the decomposition of form within Beckett. Thus, the body remains attached to the imaginary spectacle in Genet, despite the predominance of artifices conveying pretence and falsity.

There is an important point to note in thinking of the imaginary register in relation to the body. Simply because the imaginary is the seat of miscognitions or "mental defectiveness" does not mean that beyond it lies some higher truth or substantive reality concerning the flesh. The imaginary is a necessary illusion that cannot be stripped bare to reveal something more Real. This is the reason that all narratives of the body must be considered in light of the imaginary.

The misrecognitions of the imaginary (and the identification surrounding the body) are necessary in order that we may live and tolerate 'reality' and obtain pleasure from living. As Freud stated:

> Illusions commend themselves to us because they save us pain and allow us to enjoy pleasure instead. We must, therefore, accept it without complaint when they sometimes collide with a bit of reality against which they are dashed to pieces (Freud, 1918, paragraph. 16).

In this thesis, through the dramatic works, we have examined how the imaginary and the domain of narcissistic identifications support embodiment. In the work of the three authors, we have seen how the imaginary functions both as a medium of organisation and coherence working through the spectacle and as the register that veils the lack in being and ultimately the trauma of the body. Although this lack in being is veiled, it cannot be stripped bare of all illusion. The coherence of the body

itself is an illusion, a necessary one. Nonetheless, it is one that will someday be dashed to pieces.

6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have engaged in a comparative analysis of the themes arising within the drama of the chosen authors in relation to the body as a paradox of the speaking being. I have argued in this thesis that all narratives concerning the body inevitably circle a void concerning knowledge, and that this void is often displaced onto ideals of embodiment, that veil this gap in knowledge. In the dramatic works that have been examined in previous chapters, I explored how the concept of alienation, imaginary identification and the trauma of sexuality elucidated the representation of the body as that which is never a complete representation. In this way, the analyses of the dramatic works challenge conceptions of the social constructs surrounding embodiment and the subjective experience of inhabiting the body. In this chapter, therefore, I argued that there is an ethical component to the aesthetic style of each author, not necessarily intentional or overt but arising as a potential of an encounter with failure both within representation and the form in which the body is presented.

Instead of presenting an image of the body as whole, autonomous, productive and aesthetically beautiful, Beckett's bodies are ailing, partial and generally not very active or productive. In Artaud's theatre, the dialectic between the work of art and the spectator is emphasised with the viewer subject to a specular cruelty that, he hoped, would wake them up to the realities of the suffering of life. For Genet, the abject repudiated body becomes something that can be eroticised, exalted within the image and recuperated from the margins. The body is situated within the contradiction of being, as an intrinsic quality, and existing for the other as the body as perceived. For all authors, being as that ungraspable aspect of existence is a strong consideration in their writings and works, and attention was paid to this as regards the implications for considering the body. Finally, we saw that in a comparison of the orientation of these authors relative to the concept of the *object a*, particularities of style can be identified as an orientation of organisation, a way of understanding the position of the body within the dramatic works. This model also serves to determine

how we can think of the body within systems of representation beyond the theatrical frame.

Furthermore, identifying the position of the *object a* in the dramatic works allows us to consider how these different styles impact on the spectator. This is in light of the assumption that the theatrical spectator is a divided subject, with the unconscious, posited as essential to experience. Considering spectatorship from the perspective of the divided subject enables an account of the role of subjective fantasy in orientating us toward what we see as well as what is not seen. Subjective fantasy also mediates the appropriation of our bodies as an object of perception within our psychology and that of others. Therefore, the contours of what is seen in a dramatic performance depend upon one's symbolic perspective or how we are unconsciously absorbed by the visual spectacle. Hence, we can say that we are influenced not only by how we look at the performance, but how that performance looks at us.

CONCLUSIONS:

Embodiment: Thinking at the Curve

This thesis began with a question concerning the body. Namely, what can be known about the constituents of embodiment that prove problematic for the human subject? Can the dramatic works of Artaud, Beckett and Genet provide a platform from which to access a knowledge of the body? In other words, can they create a knowledge that could illuminate the nature of the conflicts inherent to inhabiting the body? The aim of this investigation was to alter how we think of embodiment, both within the context of the theatrical works of the authors and within the broader debate of subjective embodiment.

In order to address these questions, it was necessary to consider the fundamental proposition of what is a body in the first place?

This comparative study was prompted by the need for an interdisciplinary approach concerning the topic of the body as an agent of traumatic discord. As I have argued from the beginning, this is a traumatic discord inherent to the body's facticity and not from the perspective of the body as 'holding' trauma. While the subject of the body already features strongly in psychoanalytic literature (within the Lacanian field there is an emphasis on the Real of the body as that which is beyond signification), there is a shortage of studies on the anomalous body. While many psychoanalytic studies focus on the relationship of mind to body (psychosomatics), less so do we find studies that focus on the reverse, body to mind (soma psychic) or the subjective consequences of a failure at the level of the physical. I have already shown in the early part of this thesis that the signifiers of body and mind are precarious and alter depending on the context in which they are used. Furthermore, the nature of embodiment and its complexity leads to particular constructions and narratives within a sociocultural context that often veil the innate heterogeneity of the body.

Initially, then, anomalous embodiment (disability, impairment, general anomaly) had been the predominant theme of this research. However, it was in working with the texts and performances within this thesis that this theme was approached from within

an epistemological frame, rather than centring on the anomalous body per se. Given that the works of Beckett, Artaud and Genet all presented, in differing ways, a representation of the body, or situation of the body that challenges social norms and ideals, their dramatic works provided an ideal field to investigate this question. It was evident that Beckett's work, in particular, was doing something quite significant with the impaired or maimed body, and positioning this within a comparative analysis of the drama of Artaud and Genet allowed for a more complex investigation of the nuances involved in the representation of the body in theatre.

Furthermore, these authors are situated in a timeframe of the 20th century in which the body comes under investigation as an agent within consciousness, and not simply as something that is separate or subordinate to a higher cause (as in a religious context). The Cartesian disjunction between mind and body and the privileging of rationality as a source of certainty and reliable knowledge had been challenged through a reconfiguration of the terms of the debate. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Lacan's incorporation of these ideas shifted the concept of body more centre stage within the economy of subjectivity. In chapter 1, I said that we can see the resonances of Cartesian dualism in Beckett's prose and drama and that the problematics of the mind-body relation are evident in his works and through the situations of his characters. I posited that this question of dualism regarding the body is relayed in Beckett's work in such a way as to situate a question of being as central to the experience of embodiment. The concept of being also proved significant in the drama of Artaud and Genet. As a result, it is this question of being and its relationship to the body that is of central importance to the outcome of this study. We have seen that for Lacan, the 'being' of the subject is constituted by a lack of being (*manque-à-être*), in effect, a lack of a substance (essence). By working with the body in all three authors, we come to see that a question concerning being can be displaced onto the body and the nature of its representation. Our experience of the body is always connected with being, for how would we exist otherwise? Yet the fact that the body is not simply a material entity but also something that is constituted by our relationship to it as an image and a signifier creates a situation where being is a paradox. This is the paradox the authors convey.

In Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, body and mind take on new significations in a transcendent 'revolution of the stage'. In grappling with the split he experienced between thought and materiality, Artaud invented a theatrical form of mediating the divide. For Genet, while this split is not so clearly articulated, the paradox of being and the trauma at the heart of embodiment is sublimated within poetry, eroticism and the glorification of the specular image. In Beckett's drama, the body is a vehicle with which to present a question of existence, a representation of a limited object that traces the contours of being.

The interdisciplinary structure of this thesis has been challenging. In formulating a dialogue between psychoanalytic theory, the semiotics of theatre and the work of Artaud, Beckett and Genet, I have encountered certain tensions concerning meaning and definitions at the cross-sections of these subjects. These points of tension are as productive as points of complementarity, as it is by tracing the limits of a subject that we gain perspective on it as a whole. However, the borders of disciplines, these 'bodies' of knowledge, are not seamless but already contain holes (in meaning) and are built on edifices where a cross-fertilisation of ideas has already taken place. In other words, no discipline stands alone and is always somewhat interdisciplinary, to begin with. As Jean-Michel Rabaté argues concerning the tenuous distinction between literature and theory:

> [L]iterature cannot be just an 'object' caught up, traversed or exhibited by a discourse seeking a simple justification through exemplification, it inhabits the theory from the start and makes it tremble, hesitate as to its own status, it ruins the mirage of a pure and clean theory neatly opposed to a few well-chosen examples (2001, p. 7)

Thus, literature and theory are not separate entities but inhabit each other, from the outset. As a corollary to this point, I argued in the earlier part of this thesis that there is also a tenuous separation between theory and application. In this sense, the act of theatrical performance is not separate from theory but is also as Laura Cull (2012) puts it, a form of thinking, a way of theorising. From this perspective, the concept of cause, as in which comes first, (theory versus application) is re-conceptualised from outside a binary paradigm. This philosophy of the method is analogous to the perspective of the body in this thesis where the subjective cause (as that lost object of desire) is always outside of knowledge; the *object a*. In other words, cause and effect

are not linear but circular, not topographical but topological. However, points of tension have arisen within this method, from where we must make assumptions, draw inferences and work with what the theatrical texts and performances are 'doing', given the theoretical principles that inform a reading of the body.

The purpose of the encounter between psychoanalysis and the works of Artaud, Beckett and Genet was to formulate a mutually augmenting dialectic where the end 'product' regarding a knowledge of the body was a synthesis of this encounter. This approach aimed to avoid the limitations of applying a theory to a subject that could prove or disprove the propositions therein and hence presume a knowledge of the body *a priori*. Furthermore, as there was a gap in the literature regarding the anomalous body in psychoanalysis, working with the drama in a phenomenological way could provide a basis to understand this topic better, a platform to 'show' an under-represented aspect of subjectivity. Similarly, the psychoanalytic approach to knowledge was an important method to formulate something different regarding the work of the authors in light of the unconscious. In the development of this method, I constructed a framework of Lacanian concepts that related to a way of reading for the body in theatre. Thus, I was limited, for time constraints also, to focusing on specific ideas that would bridge the gap between these domains. That being said, while this study has taken drama as its primary focus, a method designed to read the body in theatre is also of benefit beyond the field of drama and literature. For, in order to appreciate any in-depth study of embodiment across disciplines, an epistemological question concerning the body must always be asked, and the meaning structures surrounding the discipline also questioned. Therefore, the answer to any matter concerning the body must always rest on the notion of the curve, as it relates to the unconscious. That is to say; the answer must always take into account that the very question is structured within the parameters of language, where the divided subject formulates questions and responses in a language that never quite hits the mark.

I mentioned in Chapter 2, regarding the unconscious and the reading of literature, that Lacan argued that literature should not be interpreted as imitation but rather seen as part of the structure of the curve of the unconscious, insofar as, "[t]he work only exists in that curvature which is that of the structure itself" (Rabaté, 2001, p. 3). I felt

this was a critical distinction as regards working with the concept of the unconscious in this research, as it underlines the idea that the unconscious cannot be read as a sign but rather as a signifier. For example, from this perspective, if we were to take account of the biography of the author, we cannot reduce the dramatic work to simply an imitation of a life theme. That being said, the concept of the curve has been a difficult concept to work with within the context of a research question, given the strictures imposed by language; it demands that we take into account the shortfalls of the meaning systems that we have at our disposal.

The Intrinsic Otherness of the Body

As I mentioned in the introduction, a full study of the relationship between the unconscious and the body was beyond the scope of this research but has certainly informed the methodological approach. This thesis started with a question concerning the Real of the body (as that unrepresentable, un thinkable, domain) and reached a point where the imaginary is under investigation as the register through which change and dislocation of the fantasy of the normal are affected. As I have argued in Chapter 5, an aesthetics of failure may lead to an ethical encounter with the desire of the spectator. I did not wish to specify in advance what this counter may entail, but at the very least, it may provide a moment where the habitual and familiar ideological fantasies surrounding the body are punctured. In this research, it was necessary to place great emphasis on the imaginary (as a consequence of the dramatic form and the dialectic of spectatorship), and I would argue that this suggests something profound about the relationship between the human subject and the body. That is to say; there is a significant relationship between the imaginary and the Real as it concerns the body. This is a relationship that should be explored in greater detail and would have important implications for understanding the role of culture and the sensations we experience as physical beings.

Thus this thesis began with a question regarding the limits of knowledge of the body and asked if the study of particular theatre could allow for a greater understanding of these limits. Through this process, the nature of the theatrical spectacle and the methodology required to investigate the body in this context required discerning how this could be achieved. In Chapter 2, I drew on the concept of alienation and critical

issues relating to the theory of the imaginary register as a method to formulate the representation of the body within the context of the plays and the frame of spectatorship. With this approach, I was able to construct a model concerning the relationship (orientation) of the plays to meaning, and thus illuminate the representation of the body as a feature both of sense and of absence. From this perspective, the body becomes something that is present as an actual phenomenon but also absent as a bodily trace (relationship to *object a*) within performance. In Chapters 3 and 4, this model was applied to specific dramatic works to extract a hypothesis on the position of the body as it was particular to each author. The concept of alienation served to situate the dramatic works and the representation of the body *vis-à-vis* meaning and signification. I showed that there is a relationship between an emphasis on meaning as it relates to language and the position of the body within performance. In Chapter 4, this idea was developed through examining the trauma of sexuality as an experience of the body that is outside of knowledge and, therefore, also outside of language. In this process, I touched on the subject of bodily signification within theatrical performance, in particular as it relates to Artaud's vision of theatre.

As we saw in working with Artaud's ideas concerning theatre and performance, the attempt to generate an intensification of experience on the theatrical stage, through the mediums of sound, light and voice, pointed to ways that the body is signified beyond its physical frame. Loud noise, for example, hits the body of the spectator and may be generated by another body that is absent on stage, but present by digital recording. In working with Artaud's 'body without organs', it is evident that a more considerable study of this concept within the context of performance would be worthwhile. A closer examination of the signifying possibilities of performance might yield interesting findings regarding the receptivity of the body of the spectator. In this way, the concept of the *object a* and its relationship to the body without organs could be developed further through concepts, such as the gaze, voice, and invocatory dimensions of the drive.

From this perspective, the body without organs could be seen as a map through which the elements of performance trace the unseen filaments of the body. In Chapter 2, I explained the limitations concerning the employment of the Lacanian

gaze in this thesis. As this concept takes on several shifts within Lacan's theory in Seminar 11, it was not possible at this time to investigate a comprehensive account of the gaze within the dramatic works. Again, it would be important to elaborate on the divergences within Lacan's theory and attempt to plot this within a dedicated study of particular dramatic texts and performance. Only then could we account for the nuances and problematics of the gaze in the context of theatrical spectatorship. The art of theatre always constitutes something in the realm of the seen or for the purpose of being seen; it is a creation in the face of a witness, which is the audience. I have referred to the transition from prose to theatre in the case of Beckett and Genet and the predominance of Artaud's writings on theatre rather than staged performances. More work remains to be done on the nuances concerning the body within the shift from novel to performance. An analysis of the gaze as it concerns both text and spectacle could provide a paradigm to explore this idea further. The gaze is not simply that which concerns the spectacle but how we imagine ourselves to be in the field of the Other and in this sense may also be applied to a theory of prose and reader response. I have referred on several occasions to *The Unnamable*, Beckett's last prose text before *Waiting for Godot.* The shift of tone from this text to Beckett's first staged play is remarkable, and the transition it implies from the dimensions of written language to the body-as-perceived is worth investigating.

In the context of the broader field of Beckett studies, we saw that the body is coming under increased focus, in particular as regards the disabled and impaired body. This focus has led to interesting and far-reaching socio-cultural implications of Beckett's drama, where subjects such as compassion, and tolerance towards embodied difference are situated as emerging from his work. As I have argued, Beckett's depictions of ailing and marginalised characters provide a vision of humanity that runs counter to the ideals of neoliberal ideology and gives us room to pause on what it means to 'be'. Although in this thesis, I have not reduced Beckett's depictions of fragmented bodies to the signifier of disability, there is no doubt that his work provides a very fertile ground to explore the spectacle of a body that is Other. As I have argued, while this is a property that all human beings share, it is not an equivalent experience. Beckett's work demonstrates that there is no cure for this Otherness of the body, as it is an intrinsic part of being human, and this is something that must be acknowledged in face of all narratives of the body. However, despite

Otherness being an intrinsic property of embodied existence, we can mitigate our responses to it and acknowledge the gap in knowledge inherent to the imaginary. For, without the distortion of the imaginary, we would not be human. We should remember Hamm's words, "you're on Earth, there's no cure for that!"

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