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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Victoria Helen Swanson entitled ""I can't be punished anymore": Exploring Incapacity and Carceral Formations in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame, Happy Days, Play, Not I,* and *Catastrophe*." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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"I can't be punished anymore":
Exploring Incapacity and Carceral Formations in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame, Happy Days, Play, Not I,* and *Catastrophe*

A Thesis Presented for
the Master of Arts
Degree
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Victoria Helen Swanson
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Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to *all* of my teachers.

Most especially, I dedicate this work to my daughter, Sierra Swanson—who remains my most enthusiastic cheerleader and who never ceases to amaze me with her 'kid' wisdoms. My wish for you is that you never lose your love of learning. May this work serve to remind you that no matter the odds, there is virtually nothing that a determined mind cannot achieve.

To my parents, Salvatore and Joan Serio: This work would not have been possible without your encouragement and unwavering support. Thank you for teaching me early on, that my abilities far outweigh my disability.

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Abstract

While there has been a great deal of scholarship and a variety of approaches to analysis of the works of Samuel Beckett, there has been surprisingly little excavation of the carceral, restrictive, and debilitating formations vital to the structure of his plays. For example, the carcerality prevalent throughout *Endgame* informs the dramatic (motivations) through expressions of confinement, constraint, and immobility. Physical debilitation such as Hamm's literal paralysis is juxtaposed against Clov's self-imposed position of paralyzing servitude. The repetition that frames *Endgame* mirrors the institutional carcerality of the prison where restrained movement and total confinement are coupled with constant surveillance—and in Clov's case, self-surveillance. Michel Foucault's reference to the model of Bentham's Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* provides a framework through which to explore formations of surveillance, restriction, and carcerality in Beckett's dramatic works. Foucault's theories on carcerality are especially helpful in examining the centralizing elements in *Endgame,* such as Hamm's position at center stage, as a system of carcerality that presents a decidedly panoptic mechanism. Paralysis, incapacity, and debility are devices that are employed with abandon in Beckett's plays. This paper explores how incapacity and carceral structures in Beckett's *Endgame, Happy Days, Play, Not I,* and *Catastrophe* reflect larger social and historical implications and how Beckett's treatment of subjectivity anticipates Michel Foucault's explorations of carcerality.

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Introduction:

Beckett's novels and dramatic works sketch a composite profile of subjectivity as a painful, persistent state. Beckett's characters experience their isolation and fragmentation as physical realities. Indeed, Beckett's use of fragmentation is renowned: He presents whittled down remnants of people such as ash can dwelling amputees, partitioned heads, or a disembodied mouth. Each is an isolated consciousness, existing in a meaningless world that sets them at physical odds with their surroundings. They exist in worlds populated by other equally isolated consciousnesses which contribute to their alienation. The actions of Beckett's characters are notoriously arbitrary and often unintelligible, and the consequences of their actions are unpredictable. Within these worlds, social relationships are a comedy of misunderstanding and malice, and egotism is an unavoidable trap. In *Endgame* (1957), for instance, the tragic-comic discord of Hamm's absurd willfulness illustrates his alienation from the physical world and his vulnerability to the disruption of the 'Other.' Like many of Beckett's dramatic works the stasis, incapacity, and isolation of *Endgame* is punctuated by the characters' misperception of control. The ways in which Hamm directs a litany of orders to all of those around him are similar to the ways in which Winnie, the implanted protagonist of *Happy Days* (1961), attempts to organize her day by itemizing the contents of her shopping variety bag. Both Hamm and Winnie are incapacitated, both dwell in isolated confinement; however, both also operate under the illusion that they retain at least some measure of control.

As Deleuze so aptly reminds us, Beckett "exhausts the possible" (Deleuze 7), and this is indeed true of subjectivity for Beckett's characters as his characterizations magnify the dilemmas of Cartesian duality. Beckett often places each character's consciousness in stark contrast with

the substantial self on which it reflects. In so doing, Beckett presents subjectivity as a predicament of self-consciousness. Beckett's depictions are often said to reflect the human condition but can be linked more immediately to the historical moment in which he writes. Beckett's befuddled subjects are creatures of a post-war world. In both a historical and a philosophical sense, much of how Beckett presents images of subjectivity reflects the widespread disillusionment that followed in the wake of World War Two. Beckett writes in the shadow of The Holocaust—he knows firsthand the horrors of an unchecked power structure.

Beckett, by all accounts, was an integral participant within the most prolific intellectual and artistic circles in post-World-War-Two France—at a time when philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, and Claude Lévi-Strauss were parsing issues of existentialism, Marxism, and structural anthropology. Most thinkers in France, including Beckett, experienced the war as a socio-cultural rupture. Indeed, no one operating within proximity to Europe could have gone untouched by its long reach. Therefore, it is not surprising that similarities can be traced between various schools of French thought and Beckett's works. Beckett's work, given this historical context, reflects the existentialist thought of his time; therefore, his plays and novels are often read through a Sartrean lens. That Sartre defines the human gaze as a paralyzing, objectifying construct that denies subjectivity and freedom captures an important feature of Beckett's drama. Sartre sees the objectifying gaze of the 'Other' as something that is always already internalized by the subject. The organizing consciousness, the consciousness of the observer, displaces and objectifies the subject. Sartre and Beckett both present the gaze of the 'Other' as violent and subjectifying. In *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (1943), Sartre contemplates the visual apprehension of an Other by illustrating an encounter:

> I am in a public park. Not far away there is a lawn and along the edge of that lawn there are benches. A man passes by those benches. I see this man; I apprehend him as an object and at the same time as a man. What does this signify? What do I mean that this object *is a man?* […] We are dealing with a relation which is without *parts*, given at one stroke, inside of which there unfolds a spatiality which is not *my* spatiality; for instead of a grouping *toward me* of the objects, there is now an orientation *which flees from me*. (Sartre 341-42)

Yet, this existential framework overlooks a significant part of Beckett's work. Sartre presents subjectivity as a dilemma, but he grants the subject the possibility of a kind of existential heroism whereby the subject can achieve authenticity by willing his or her own absurd existence. Beckett diverges from Sartre's existential model in that Beckett's drama does not make possible the authentic act, will, or existential heroism—those movements of authenticity towards which the Sartrean subject aspires. For Beckett, the Sartrean vision of subjectivity is a trap that can only be escaped, if it can at all, by the kind of self-violence that leads to self-dissolution.

Sartre sees the subject-object relation in terms of exteriority whereby one sees while also being seen and where only through being seen does gazing actualize a relation which remains outside the self. Indeed, there is no escape from the Sartrean gaze, and for Beckett this condition cannot be resolved except through dissolution of subjectivity itself. In this way, Beckett both appropriates and resists Sartrean themes.

Beckett's subjects are bound by the gazes of 'Others' and struggle, unsuccessfully, to escape these gazes. Yet, what makes these gazes so powerful and inescapable is the way in which they are internalized. Beckett's works often present subjects straddling the line between subjectivity and subjugation. In Beckett's cosmos, subjectivity is, in itself, subjugation as self-

consciousness becomes its own worst enemy through its internalization of power. For instance, in *Endgame* Clov epitomizes the internalization of power as he allows himself to be both subjectified and subjugated by Hamm. Similarly, in *Catastrophe* (1982), the Protagonist's submissiveness coupled with the authority of the Director presents a dual tension wherein the Protagonist is simultaneously subjectified and subjugated. Through this self-conscious internalization of authority, Beckett employs subjectivity and subjugation interchangeably, often simultaneously.

Such structures in Beckett's dramatic works extend beyond the character-subject to reflect larger social and historical implications. Beckett's emphasis on the internalization of authority stretches beyond Sartre and anticipates poststructuralist explorations of carcerality, entrapment, confinement, and incapacity. In *Beckett and Poststructuralism,* for instance, Anthony Uhlmann notes that there are "numerous and striking points of intersection" between Beckett's works and the concerns of French philosophers in post-World-War-Two France; as he puts it, "they discuss the same problems because these were the social and intellectual problems inherent in the world they encountered" (Uhlmann, *BAP* 34). Uhlmann addresses what he refers to as "the problem field" (35) through which, he suggests, Beckett and post-World-War-Two French philosophers can be aligned as writers who "write in response to common problems [,…] certain common antecedents, and thereby develop similar themes, similar responses. This, then, might provide explication of how works, apparently unrelated and belonging to different disciplinary traditions, resonate with one another within a given milieu" (35).

Beckett's vision in transforming Sartre clearly anticipates the works of Michel Foucault. Where the Sartrean gaze objectifies, Foucault insists that the gaze creates the subject. Foucault

himself acknowledges that Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) served as a catalyst from which he developed a new critical perspective:

> I belong to that generation who, as students, had before their eyes, and were limited by, a horizon consisting of Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism. Interesting and stimulating as these might be, naturally they produced in the students completely immersed in them a feeling of being stifled, and the urge to look elsewhere. I was like all other students of philosophy at that time, and for me the break was first Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. (Begam, 185)

Foucault's admission indicates that Beckett provided the impetus which led to the "break" he sought from accepted praxis. Clearly, given Foucault's statement and his philosophical preoccupations, even a casual familiarity with Beckett's work reveals the importance of the imagery of confinement and surveillance to Foucault's thinking. Beyond such fortuitous connections, both bodies of work present the stark account of human subjectivity that emerges in post-war France which is, consequently, also the subject of Sartrean existentialism. Within the dialectic of comparisons, it is reasonable to assume that the connections between Beckett and Foucault have not been widely explored because the existentialist noir that epitomizes Beckettian constructs seems, in many ways, vastly different from Foucault's highly technical language of structuralism. While Beckett's works are understood as framed by a Sartrean milieu, where being precedes essence, it is reductive to read Beckett exclusively through a lens that insists upon reaching for the meaning and tragedy of language's failure. By contrasting Beckett's methodologies to those later developed by Michel Foucault, it may be argued that Beckett embraces the impossibility of meaning as liberation from the predicaments of subjectivity, power, and the limitations of language.

For both Beckett and Foucault, the ultimate redemption lies in the undoing of the subject. Beckett's plays are full of images of physical confinement, but they anticipate Foucault in the most "dramatic" fashion in the way they illustrate the internalization of authority. Michel Foucault, who attended the university at the École Normale Supérieure following the war (1946), reacted to the post-war intellectual environment through his own forays into the marginalization of the subject. For example, Foucault's explorations in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966) take previous accounts of subjectivity to task. Foucault diverges from Sartre's position that the subject is a centralized figure, recognizing, instead, the marginality of the subject. Foucault locates power in structures of observation in the carceral machinery and this renders the subject peripheral. For Foucault, power is internalized; it is within the system and the subject is the peripheral effect of the system.

Michel Foucault's theories on carcerality provide a useful framework through which to explore formations of surveillance, restriction, and carcerality in Beckett's dramatic works. Foucault's reference to the model of Bentham's Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) is particularly helpful in understanding the wider implications of Beckett's theatricized variations of confining structures as Foucault's illustration of panoptic surveillance presents an institutionalization of the Sartrean gaze. Foucault finds that Bentham's model of Panoptic surveillance promotes interiority and ensures the inverse of Sartre's model in that seeing has no relation to being seen:

> Bentham's *Panopticon* is the architectural figure of this composition [of Power]. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of

> which extends the whole width of the building; […] all that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. […] The Panopticon is a machine for dislocating the [Sartrean] see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. (Foucault, *D&P* 200-202)

While Sartre's concept of the gaze and Foucault's rendition of panoptic surveillance diverge, they both retain resonance when juxtaposed with Beckett's writings.

The immuration that frames much of Beckett's theatrical works foreshadows Foucault's insights on carcerality. For example, Beckett's *Endgame, Happy Days, Play, Not I* and *Catastrophe* all offer characters circumscribed to either restrained movement or total confinement. Within *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Play, Not I* and *Catastrophe*, Beckett uses paralysis and confinement as governing, subjectifying, and centralizing devices. Beckett's use of paralysis ensures his characters' vulnerability to observation, leaving them so restrained, so literally bound by authority, and so self-regulating that they might best be described as deriving their subjectivity from subjection. They are consistently undone by their own self-conscious obsessions. The effects of these obsessions are evident in both the character's dialogues and their physical confinement. Their limited physicality and consciousness marks them as fragments of beings rather than fully formed 'people.' Although these subjects are presented in varying degrees of fragmentation—figures buried up to their necks in earth or urns, disembodied lips, the elderly convalescing in ash cans—Beckett ceaselessly offers clues within the narratives which suggest that these remnant figures retain their corporeal origins. In so doing, Beckett depicts

these individuals as corporeally vulnerable; however, there are few revelations within the narratives that illuminate what these subjects may or may not think about their own vulnerability.

Beckett's imagery of confinement and claustrophobia finds its theoretical counterpart in Foucault's theories of carcerality. Both Beckett and Foucault see a world of stasis that seems designed to create and control human desire. Although the sources for inspiration may differ between these two thinkers, it is evident—through Foucault's quotations of Beckett in both the "The Order of Discourse" and "What is an Author?"—that Beckett's work resonates with Foucault. Further, there are similarities between the methodologies that Beckett and Foucault employ in their conceptualizations of subjectivity. Both Beckett and Foucault recognize the constraints of subjectivity, most broadly; they both call into question the personal and public functioning of the subject, the ways in which order impacts meaning and the reliability of subjectivity. However, for Foucault, subjectivity, while not desirable, is *productive* – serving purposeful functions within the constructs and operations of Power. Alternately, Beckett's work posits subjectivity as a failure of Power. Beckett does not acknowledge the predictability that is required for subjectivity to succeed. Rather, he recognizes the potential for a chaotic function of the subject. Perhaps the chaotic potential of the subject is demonstrated most effectively in Beckett's short prose piece "The Lost Ones" which portrays an "Abode where lost bodies roam […] Inside a flattened cylinder fifty meters round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony" (Beckett, *TLO* 101). The abode is described as being "Narrow enough for flight to be in vain" (101), and the "harmony" mentioned in the opening of the piece is achieved by the subjects' queuing up for their turn at a climb up and then back down a system of ladders to convey the "searchers" or subjects into and then back out of a series of niches and tunnels. Should an "unprincipled climber […] engross the ladder beyond what is reasonable [or] fancy to settle

down permanently in one of the niches or tunnels [he would leave] behind him a ladder out of service for good and all" (208). Beckett's narrator concedes that "This is indeed strange. But what is at stake is the fundamental principle of forbidding ascent more than one at a time the repeated violation of which would soon transform the abode into a pandemonium" (209). This suggests that the power structure would be disrupted by any "repeated violation" of the subjects' prescribed movements as such violations would lead to "pandemonium."

For Beckett, subjectivity *produces* nothing and the "harmony" that Power hopes to achieve through subjectivity remains vulnerable to disruption, to the potentially chaotic function of the subject. Beckett's use of carceral formations in his dramatic works, thus, confines and constricts both his theatrical subjects and his actors. In this way, Beckett demonstrates the kinds of containment, surveillance, and futility that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Foucault illustrates the reach of carcerality by first offering Bentham's Panopticon as an example of central Power and peripheral subjectivity: "An inspector arriving unexpectedly at the center of the Panopticon will be able to judge at a glance, without anything being concealed from him, how the entire establishment is functioning" (Foucault, *D&P* 204); however, Foucault then expands Bentham's model, suggesting that its utility extends beyond the prison, becoming an institutional mechanism that exacts its subjective gaze across society as a whole: "The Panopticon, on the other hand, must be understood as a generalized model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men" (205). Foucault points to the complicit subject as a central construct of Panopticism, whereby cooperation with the power structure becomes so ingrained and automatic that the subject requires little, if any, supervision. "The Lost Ones" depicts such subjects self-policing.

Whereas Foucault finds that the inevitability of panopticism is that it extends its reach beyond the prison until it is woven so tightly within the social matrix that liberation from its institutional gaze becomes an impossibility, Beckett demonstrates the aftermath of such constriction—the remnant fragments of self and being, the trace that exists as the only evidence of a potential whole from which the self must remain severed. In *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* Uhlmann states, "It is not by simple chance that Michel Foucault turns to the works of Samuel Beckett in order to illustrate his ideas [….] Foucault was not alone in developing a set of ideas related to these questions of the subject in France at this time [In Beckett's work] the critical eye focuses so fiercely on the self that the self disperses and flees, yet rather than the problem of the relation of the self to the work vanishing it becomes diabolically complex" (Uhlmann, *SB&TPI* 108-09). Beckett's partitioning of the subject and the dispersal of the self is mirrored in Foucault's work. This study examines the subjectivity of Beckett's characters and actors and explores incapacity, surveillance, and confinement in *Endgame, Happy Days, Play, Not I,* and *Catastrophe*. By parsing panoptic constructions with Beckett's portrayals of subjectivity, fragmentation, and debilitated physicality and/or consciousness, this study seeks to illuminate both the parallels and disparities within the constructs of carcerality and subjectivity present in Beckett and Foucault's respective milieus and works.

Chapter I

Panoptic Entrapment: The Panoptic Gaze and the Failure of Subjectivity

Foucault develops his theories of carcerality by tracing the gradual move away from punishments that were inflicted upon the body, such as tortures conducted under the scrutiny of public spectacle, to the practice of disciplining the subject through mechanisms of control that are internalized by the subject. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* details how the Prison and the Panoptic machinery associated with it place the body under restraint:

> This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and the periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchal figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined [,..] all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (197)

While Beckett's theatrical subjects endure varying levels of immobility, they are also subjected to constant surveillance. In *Endgame*, *Play*, and *Catastrophe*, the subjects are constantly assessed and surveilled by their theatrical counterparts. Further, *Endgame* (1957), *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1964), *Not I* (1972), and *Catastrophe* (1982) all depict subjects submitting to varying degrees of self-surveillance. And Beckett's inclusion of restraining stage props and sets ensures that his theatrical subjects are constrained within an ironic double-bind that leaves them simultaneously unable to move beyond the confines of the stage while sentencing them to endure the unrelenting gaze of the audience. Beckett thus positions his subjects within a spectrum of centralizing exactitude. His portrayals of confinement reverberate with a clear note of carcerality

which, when punctuated by the use of interrogatorial stage lighting, evokes a decidedly panoptic mechanism. Of Beckett's use of light in *Play*, Enoch Brater writes that "Beckett seems as much concerned with the movement of his spotlight as he is with anything else […] making *Play* a quartet rather than a trio [….] Players recite their lines only when their privacy has been invaded by this luminous source of energy" (Brater, 28). Beckett requires that the light come from a single source that remains within the "ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims" (*Play*, 366). Beckett's reference to his theatrical subjects as "victims" indicates that he intends for the light to be perceived as punishing. That Beckett intends for the light to serve an interrogatory function is evidenced as well through his meticulous stage directions which call for "*Strong spots simultaneously on all three faces*" (366). Foucault refers to a similar form of interrogatory light: "The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a center towards which all gazes would be turned" (Foucault, *D&P* 173).

Beckett's use of surveillance demonstrates how the Sartrean gaze imposes an external assault upon the subject being seen while also underscoring a key feature of the panoptic gaze, which offers the promise of self-regulation, an internalization of the laws governing subjectivity. For the urn-entrapped subjects in *Play* referenced in the stage direction only as W1, M, and W2, the "Hellish half-light" (*Play*, 361) leaves the play's characters "Dying for dark" (365) and longing for both the gaze of and a respite from the "Mere eye" (366) of the interrogating light. Beckett's stage directions call for the light to illuminate a face, to train its gaze and then "Spot off" (366), mimicking the blinking of an eye. Leaving the character in brief darkness offers no respite or no comfort, for the subject remains imperiled at having been left literally in-the-dark

by the merciless glare of the "eye" until the torment of its "Opening and shutting […]" (366) recommences. While this use of light disrupts the visual stream and magnifies incongruities, such as pauses woven within the monologues, it also emphasizes the subjects' imprisoned status. Buried up to their necks in their respective urns, the three subjects cannot move, duck, or shield their eyes from the punishing recurrence of the ever-vexing blaze of light.

The unyielding eye of the stage light is not unique to *Play*. While the light in *Play* is an inquisitorial spot light, in *Happy Days*, a similar glaring, although less direct, flood of light surrounds the character Winnie. As she is implanted up to her waist within a mound of earth, Winnie has no hope of escaping the severe, blazing light. Perhaps as a nod to the similarities between the confining structures and inquisitory light in *Happy Days* and *Play*, Beckett injects both plays with a nearly-identical description of the Panoptic, scrutinizing light, which is first suggested by Winnie's complaint against the "Hellish light" (*HD*, 277) and later mirrored in *Play* by W 2's irritation with the "Hellish half-light" (*Play*, 361). *Catastrophe* offers a different example of panoptic scrutiny. The play culminates with a wash of light directed at further separating the subject, referred to only as Protagonist (P) in the stage direction, from his surroundings via the illumination. The house lights fade out in accordance with the stage direction until "*Light on head alone […] Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies. Long pause. Fade-out of light on face*" (489). The concentration of light upon the Protagonist (P) in the final scene situates him in an illuminated vortex that isolates him from the rest of the theater. The play of the bright white spot against a dark backdrop produces a visual disjunction that casts all but (P)'s head in total blackness. The illuminated exposed white of the Protagonist's head produces the illusion of a disembodied face, floating midstage. Beckett's use of light to cordon the Protagonist's head from his body

punctuates the partitioning of (P)'s form through a final physical segmentation. Luminally partitioned from everything surrounding him, Protagonist (P) "fixes" the audience, even though the scrutinizing light should ensure that (P) has no way of seeing the darkened front-of-the-house; his gaze cannot operate in such a way as to invert the gaze of the spectators back upon them. The "catastrophe" is complete, in part, because he makes the attempt. The final "catastrophe" demonstrates the failure of panoptic subjectivity and occurs when the Protagonist's outward projected gaze fades out with the house light. By reflecting his gaze back upon the spectator, the Protagonist initiates a Sartrean confrontation which makes it clear to the spectator that he has caught them in the act of looking. The two gazes at an impasse, the light cannot gain mastery over (P)'s gaze-inversion unless it yields in its scrutiny. It has no other option but to leave him in darkness, utterly unobserved. Here we are reminded again of Sartre's encounter in the park whereupon considering the passing man, Sartre wonders at the relation of distance to the man-as-object he has apprehended within his visual field:

> If there exists necessarily a relation between the Other and the statue which stands on a pedestal in *the middle* of the lawn, and a relation between the Other and the big chestnut trees which border the walk; there is a total space which is grouped around the Other, and this space is made *with my space;* there is a regrouping in which I take part but which escapes me, a regrouping of all the objects which people my universe. (Sartre 343)

No longer scrutinized by the light, (P)'s subjectivity is effectually erased with the extinguishing of the light. The darkened theater also interrupts the objectifying gaze of the audience. By extinguishing their vantage point, Beckett renders the spectator, effectually, erased. In *Catastrophe* Beckett employs light as an implement of subjectivity. The light's culpability in

(P)'s subjectivity is amplified by its contrast: darkness—which serves as the great equalizer by disrupting the visual field and obliterating all gazes. While Foucault sees the Panopticon as a potentially insurmountable social construct, *Catastrophe* demonstrates the vulnerabilities in Power's reliance on passive subjectivity by emphasizing Beckett's recognition of the potentially chaotic function of the subject. For Beckett, even a marionette-like subject such as (P) can attempt to wrest control of his strings from his puppet-master unexpectedly. While evoking Sartre's seeing/being seen dyad juxtaposed against a surveilling panoptic mechanism, such as the stage light, (P)'s revolt suggests that subjectivity fails when it is challenged, even in a small way.

Chapter II
Confining, Incapacitating, and Partitioning the Body: Carcerality and Surveillance

Beckett's preoccupation with confined bodies is expressed across multiple dramatic texts. For example, being trapped, entombed, buried alive, crippled, blinded, or held captive are universally terrifying scenarios which the characters in *Endgame* are forced to endure to varying degrees. The carcerality imposed by or upon the play's characters is central to Beckett's development of the dramatic trajectory of repetition, confinement, constraint, and immobility throughout the play. Each of the four characters is physically handicapped to the point of limited or no mobility. Throughout the play, Beckett's use of incapacitation underscores the play's theme of repetitious misery wherein the characters remain utterly stuck. Beckett makes no attempt to extract dignity, love, or even a small amount of comfort from the stark nothingness of *Endgame's* bleak stage or characters; rather, he allows their handicaps to keep them physically and emotionally confined—sentenced to remain partitioned from the world, and in the case of Nell and Nagg, their ash can compartmentalization partitions them from one another. 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. Beckett's version of carcerality in *Endgame* holds with panoptic discipline and clearly depicts a carceral system wherein no one is *really* in charge. All of the surveillance in *Endgame* is self-regulated by the characters which is ironic considering that throughout the play, the antagonistic self-instilled warder is a blind man who manages to 'watch' and regulate everyone and everything around him.

Throughout the play, physical disability, such as Hamm's literal paralysis, is juxtaposed against Clov's seemingly self-imposed position of paralyzing servitude—and in Clov's case, a combination of *outside* (Hamm's) surveillance and *inside* or self-surveillance. Not unlike the prison, levels of confinement and surveillance vary within *Endgame*. Hamm's wheelchair projects the *potential* for at least some movement, Clov's limp merely *restricts* but does not necessarily confine him, and the compartmentalizing of Nell and Nagg into ash cans bears a striking similarity to the prison and most specifically to the utter enclosure of solitary confinement. Not unlike the prison, levels of confinement and surveillance vary within *Endgame*. Foucault's study reveals that in moving beyond punishment to the system of discipline which remains evident today, "The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibition" (Foucault, *D& P* II). *Endgame* certainly depicts bodies that fall within Foucault's definition of "instrument or intermediary." For example, the character Clov, who is the only mobile character in the play, completes a constant itinerary of instrumental tasks. Clov is obligated by the incapacity of the others to wait upon them. Most often, Clov simply does as he is told, his servitude prohibiting him from autonomous action. Beckett's use of this form of disciplined servitude, whereby his characters simply do as they are expected without question or thought to do otherwise, is not far removed from the ideas of self-regulating instrumentation of the subject espoused in Foucault's chapter on "The means of correct training" wherein he writes, "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise […;] the success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple

instruments […]" (170). Foucault describes "hierarchical observation" (170) which when utilized can suppress a group. While Clov is an individual subject, he consistently yields to the hierarchical observations of Hamm. In *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation,* Ato Quayson remarks that impairment and disability in Beckett's works "[…] bring together an array of different images of corporeality […]" (Quayson, 57). While the characters in *Endgame* remain partitioned from one another and whatever may or may not exist beyond their shelter, their collective non-movement presents containment as conditional *to* as much as a condition *of* their social system. The characters do lament their respective isolation—Nagg and Nell, for example, strain towards one another, hoping to kiss, but their physical distance prevents them (Beckett 14). However, Hamm, at least, appears suspicious of what or who might exist beyond the confines of their shelter's walls:

Hamm: […] Old wall! Beyond is the … other hell.

Closer! Closer! Up Against! (Beckett 25-26)

This scene mirrors Garcin's realization in Sartre's *No Exit* that "Hell is—other people!" (Sartre, *NE* 47). Hamm's reference to the "other" hell implies that he too equates hell with 'Others.' He also functions as a panoptic device as he is the absolute center and all else occurs at a peripheral distance to him. He imposes himself as the central figure by insisting that Clov, who is the only character who can move independently, place him in the physical center, literally center-stage:

Hamm: Am I right in the centre?

Clov: I'll measure it.

Hamm: More or less! More or less! […]

Am I more or less in the centre?

Clov: I'd say so.

Hamm: You'd say so! Put me right in the center! (Beckett 26-27)

Once satisfied that he is physically positioned in the center, the blind Hamm proceeds to assert a vantage point, but as he cannot see, he can only do so through Clov's gaze. Hamm demands that Clov "Look at the earth" (Beckett 27). Hamm's centrality coupled with the employment of his superficial gaze imposes a Panoptic, prison-like system of surveillance upon the 'Other' characters. Although Hamm's gaze is not a sighted one, he holds such hierarchy over Clov that he can use Clov's sight as an extension that replaces his own eyes. Such an extension of sight and power exemplifies Foucault's assertions that "the Panopticon presents a cruel, ingenious, cage" (205), and illustrates how the system of carcerality in *Endgame* presents a decidedly panoptic mechanism.

With Hamm at its center, directing the continuum of non-movement, the stage on which the play is performed becomes the *inside* or center into which the audience, the *outside,* concentrates its collective gaze. Like the containment prevalent in the prison, Beckett confines the characters to the socially and psychologically restrictive setting of their shelter. The litmus test for the Panopticon's effectiveness is its ability to cage and condition the mind into a state of self-regulation; in this way, the "cruel, ingenious cage" controls its subjects. The 'control' in *Endgame* presents as a mental cage, and the physical constraints endured by the play's characters ensure that they remain bound within that cage. By inhibiting spatial movement, Beckett frames his characters in such a way that all of their social and physical confines are compartmentally observed by the panoptic gaze of the audience, whose view can only be hindered by props such as Nell and Nagg's ash cans, Hamm's handkerchief, and Clov's retreats to his off-stage kitchen. Physical sight for the characters is either non-existent or restricted. Hamm is blind, Nell and

Nagg—whose ash cans are set side-by-side—can "hardly" see one another, and Clov's vision is poor. Only through the use of a prop—a "telescope"—can Clov turn his gaze onto the audience:

> Clov: Things are livening up. (He gets up on ladder,
> raises the telescope, lets it fall.)
> I did it on purpose. (He gets down, picks up the
> telescope, turns it on the auditorium.) I see… a multitude… in
> transports… of joy. That's what I call a magnifier.
> (He lowers the telescope turns it towards Hamm). (Beckett 29)

That Clov can only impose his gaze through the telescope denies him the capacity to see peripherally and implies that while he can extend his gaze, his agency in doing so must be asserted by means of an artificial substitution. This supplementation is not lost on Ato Quayson who observes that "Hamm's insistence on knowing what lies outside their desolate room is satisfied by Clov's spying out the landscape with the telescope, another prosthesis of vision that, significantly, also renders Clov himself dependent to a degree upon a notion of bodily extension"(Quayson 67).

Clov's incapacities are more ambiguous than the ailments of the others. He can walk, although it is with a stiff limp and while he is the only character who is able to independently move about, he is physically unable to sit. From the very opening lines of *Endgame*, Clov communicates that he longs for an end: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished [….] I can't be punished any more […]" (Beckett 1). That Clov defines himself as "being punished" signifies that he senses his own confinement. Beckett depicts Clov as irrevocably stuck in a self-perpetuating cycle of carcerality; one in which the characters' compliance with their own subjectivity manifests as a mental bind, as evidenced

through their self-regulation, rather than a punitive one. While physically able to leave, he remains trapped because he fears leaving and therefore ensures that his condemnation to the punishment he so grievously laments is never "finished." Foucault's explanation that punishment and correction "are processes that effect a transformation of the individual as a whole—of his body and of his habits by the daily work that he is forced to perform, of his mind and of his will [….] The prison [,…] will at the same time be a machine for altering minds" (Foucault 125) illuminates Clov's self-regulating state of confinement. Clov, not unlike a machine, is constantly at task. Beckett presents Clov's mind and will as cycling, almost mechanically, through a litany of tasks which seem habitual. Just as the functions of a machine must be regulated by some outside operator, Clov's movements are regulated by Hamm's manipulations. Effectually, Clov's "punished" state signifies as a machine-like process that is partly supervised by Hamm and partly self-regulated. Thereby, Beckett situates Clov as the embodiment of a machine which allows for a comic portrayal of Clov's pseudo-tragic confinement.

Vivian Mercier states in "How to Read *Endgame*" that "*Endgame* is a purposefully aborted tragedy. It does not purge our passions because we do not identify ourselves fully with either Hamm or Clov" (117), adding that as the audience laughs only unhappy laughs at the miserable characters, "*Endgame* is also a willfully aborted comedy" (117). She asserts that Hamm and Clov are not heroic underdogs but "monsters […]. Yet they suffer themselves as they torture others" (117). Certainly, Beckett does portray the characters as suffering, and in doing so, he initiates a sociological commentary on the social dysfunction of passive compliance because in *Endgame* the characters are aware that they suffer, but they do not aspire to improve their suffering; rather, they seem resolved to improve *at* suffering:

> Clov: I say to myself—sometimes, Clov you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you—one day. (Beckett 80)

Why Nell and Nagg dwell in garbage cans is never addressed, but the fact that they are stored as one would store refuse is more than just a device Beckett employs to visually assail *Endgame's* audience. The compartmentalization of Nell and Nagg corresponds to the isolating confinement of prison cells. The similarities between the panoptic prison and the *Endgame* stage are evident if we recall Foucault's description of the panoptical cells, designed to hold within them "a madman [Hamm], a patient [Nell], a condemned man [Nagg], a worker [Clov]" (Foucault, *D&P* 200). Regardless of Beckett's intent for the characters, the partitioning of Nell and Nagg serves, at the very least, as a microscope through which the audience can glimpse society's treatment of the old, disabled, and infirm.

Alternately, in "Disabling the Disabled: Samuel Beckett and the Plight of the Handicapped," Eugene Ngezem claims that "Beckett demonizes the handicapped, thus taking away the empathy the audience has for them. He also weakens these characters' ability to wrestle with the infirmities he imposes on them" (Ngezem 13). If, in fact, Beckett is "demonizing" the disabled in *Endgame*, then that portrayal mirrors the historio-sociological approach to the prison wherein Foucault reminds " the discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution, established in the edges of society, turned inward toward negative functions: arresting evil […] At first, they were expected to neutralize dangers, to fix useless or disturbed populations […]" (Foucault 209-10). In placing *Endgame's* disabled characters within the confines of a carceral system and making them an unlikable, useless, disturbed

population by "demonizing" them, Beckett presents a sociological paradox which Ngezem acknowledges:

> In contrast with the privileges often given to disabled people in the modern world, but in consonance with that manner and style exclusive to him, Beckett wrecks the lives of the helpless—his mentally deranged, dumb, blind, legless and wheelchair-bound characters […;] by giving them evil characteristics he deprives them of the sympathy that audiences by virtue of their humanity are inclined to give. (Ngezem15)

Ngezem suggests here that the sympathetic treatment of the disabled as 'Other' is a societal expectation but that the sympathetic gaze or any predisposition towards empathetically receiving the disabled subject is revoked when that subject carries the stigma of baseness. Clearly, Beckett hones in on a sociological tender spot, where compassion, even for the *Other*-abled, is subject to the social system which governs the collective societal gaze and must be perceived as *deserved* before it is extended. Rather than expand his characterizations in *Endgame*, Beckett whittles them down to their essence and invites the audience to imagine the scarcity of contact and incapacitation his characters endure. Hamm complains: "That's right. Me to play… You weep, and weep, for nothing, so as not to laugh, and little by little…you begin to grieve…" (Beckett 68).

In "Life in the Box," Hugh Kenner points to Beckett's frequent employment of the word "pause" in his stage directions (Kenner 2). This "move" by Beckett literally holds the characters in their respective position which, consequently, is not unlike the pause before an inmate is chaperoned into or out of a prison cell. Beckett evokes a game of chess in *Endgame*, and this prompts Kenner to suggest that Hamm can be considered a King, Clov a Knight, and

Nell and Nagg pawns with their movements or lack thereof governed by the game (Kenner 1). Taken one step further, any mention of *Endgame's* chess-like framework should also refer to the chess board—the stage on which the game is played—which is itself partitioned by virtue of its squares and is contained by the confines of the board. Kenner touches upon the idea of containment in *Endgame* whereby ideas in the play are imposed externally, from the audience: "the play contains whatever ideas we discover inside it; no idea contains the play" (Kenner 4). In conceptualizing containment as delivered from *outside* the text as opposed to existing within or *inside* the dramatic structure, Kenner invites rumination on the dispensation of occurrences of containment upon the *Endgame* stage as binary formations and on the discursive layers of narrative, as each character has his or her own individual performance which develops into outside/inside binaries of "performance within the performance" (Kenner 4). Michel Foucault offers insight into the idea of "performance within the performance" in terms of how such duality is mirrored in the structure of the carceral system, asserting that "The carceral 'naturalizes' the legal power to punish, as it legalizes the 'technical' power to discipline" (Foucault 303). In *Endgame*, Samuel Beckett presents the punishments endured by the characters as 'natural' or, at the very least, second nature to them. He portrays Hamm as the 'technical' overseer, endowing him with the 'technical' ability to discipline the others, particularly as Hamm has the combination to the larder, which gives him the ability to ration out or withhold food.

In "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," Theodor W. Adorno defines *Endgame's* "abstract domination" as reflective of concentration camps—the dark side of human nature, "the domination of nature which destroys itself "(Adorno 145). Here, again, "nature" is placed in terms of carcerality where either dominating nature or being dominated by nature paradoxically

produces the same result: the destruction of nature. If this is the case, then it is arguable that Hamm's central dominant position, his "nature," forms the catalyst which dismantles his and, consequently, the 'Other' characters' world. Adorno states, "*Endgame* occupies the nadir of what philosophy's construction of the subject-object confiscated at its zenith: pure identity becomes the identity of annihilation, identity of subject and object in the state of complete alienation" (Adorno 128). The character Nell, whose life is reduced to peeking her head out of the top of the ash can she lives in, is the virtual embodiment of "the identity of alienation," but she jests at her predicament, stating "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness […]" (Beckett 18). Her comment contrasts humor against the dismal setting in which she lives. Adorno postulates that Beckett's *Endgame* exists as "an expression of meaning's absence" (Adorno 126). A sense of hopelessness within what Adorno calls its "organized meaninglessness" prevails in *Endgame;* as he states, "the prison of individuation is revealed as a prison and simultaneously as mere semblance" (Adorno 127). The characters in *Endgame,* while partitioned from the world that may or may not exist just beyond the views of the earth and the ocean that at least Clov can take in, remain in every way stuck. They are bound to their place on the stage, constrained by debility, and confined to mutual subjugation.

Beckett continues to experiment with precepts of surveillance, incapacity and confinement in later plays. Perhaps the ash cans that contain Nell and Nagg in *Endgame* inspired the confining mound of earth in *Happy Days.* Throughout the play, Beckett's protagonist Winnie remains implanted within the inescapable mound. The play opens with Winnie, asleep, hunched over the ground, buried to her waist within a mound of earth. A bell rings, according to the stage directions, "*piercingly, say ten seconds, stops. She does not move. Pause. Bell more piercingly, say five seconds. She wakes. Bell stops"* (*HD*, 275). The piercing quality of the bell as described

in Beckett's stage directions gives the impression that the sound should mimic an institutional or industrial ring not unlike the bell ringing in a school that directs students to move through its hallways, or perhaps a factory buzzer that rings at the beginning and ending of a work shift, or the clamoring bell that rings in a prison whenever a security or cell door opens. Like the characters in *Endgame,* Winnie also suffers from a physical malady. She starts off examining herself, inspecting the skin of her arms: "Ah well, no worse. No better, no worse, no change. No pain. Perhaps a shade off colour just the same" (*HD* 278) and then rummages through her shopping variety bag to retrieve a revolver—which she kisses. Next, she pulls a near-empty bottle of medicine from her bag, pulls the bottle to her lips and swigs back the last drop. Satisfied that she has used the last drop of pain reliever, she pitches the empty bottle over her shoulder. It lands at a distance behind her, and as Winnie cannot turn in that direction, any relief of her pain is cast away—literally behind her (*HD* 278). Winnie's partner Willie is, like Clov, able to move about, but not without physical limitation. Beckett restricts Willie's movements to crawling between his hole and Winnie's mound. Unlike Clov, however, Willie does very little to aid his counterpart and barely speaks. Still, Winnie frets over what her life would become without Willie: "If you were to die […] or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what *could* I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep?" (*HD* 282). From Winnie's confined position, she can lead only a simplified existence: sleeping, waking, rummaging through her bag, cataloguing her things, brushing her hair and teeth and talking to Willie. She wonders, "Perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all around me and let me out" (*HD* 289). However, the second act opens with "*Winnie imbedded up to neck […] Her head, which she can no longer turn, nor bow, nor raise, faces*

motionless throughout the act" (*HD*, 299). Again Winnie is summoned by the bell, but this time she expresses her resentment of the clamor and with her pain reliever gone, she laments her pain:

> The bell. [*Pause*.] It hurts like a knife. [*Pause*.] A gouge. [*Pause*.] One cannot ignore it. [*Pause*.] How often…[*pause*]…I say how often I have said, Ignore it, Winnie, ignore the bell, pay no heed, just sleep and wake, sleep and wake, as you please, open and close the eyes, as you please […]. (*HD* 302)

The bell holds sway over Winnie's waking and sleeping. While the bell lacks a panoptic "eye," it nevertheless functions as an apparatus of surveillance in that its ringing dictates the terms by which Winnie conducts her daily routine. Winnie, who is in every way a prisoner, remains powerless to exact her freedom at the close of the play. Her imprisoned state is reminiscent of the solitary confinement of early prisons, which, ironically, inmates referred to as being sent to *the hole*.

In "What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute to Disability Theory?" Bill Hughes remarks, "The central contradiction of the human body is this: it is simultaneously a potential source of our enslavement and of our freedom" (Hughes 89), and while Hughes may be correct in asserting that "Foucault would not see the body in these dialectical terms" (89), I would argue that Beckett certainly does. Hughes insists that "For Foucault, the body does not act in and on the world; rather, the body is docile" (86), and while Winnie's passivity and resignation to her plight exemplifies docile compliance, Beckett weaves hints within her dialogue which suggest a bodily *potential*: "I used to perspire freely. [Pause.] Now hardly at all. [Pause.] The heat is much greater. [Pause.] The perspiration much less. [Pause.] That is what I find so wonderful. [Pause.] The way man adapts himself. [Pause.] To changing conditions" (*HD* 290). That Winnie recognizes her body's adaptation to her physical confinement suggests that Beckett does indeed

see the human body as a potential source of either enslavement or of freedom. For Winnie, while her body continues to function, she will inevitably remain entrapped, enslaved to linger in her half-life within the mound, but her body's adaptation to her entrapment, the eventual failure of her body, and ultimately the death of her body will facilitate her escape. For Winnie, the only way to freedom remains, quite literally, through her body.

The figures in *Play*, which are far more otherworldly than the characters in *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, suffer a level of incapacity and captivity which mirrors Winnie's entrapment by virtue of the urns in which they are implanted. Beckett's stage directions instruct that the urns be placed "*Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns of about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of W 2, M and W 1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns*" (*Play*, 355). The subjects in *Play* are trapped bodily and also in a stream of memory, wherefrom they issue a constant verbal regurgitation of moments from their past selves. While they are animate, they seem to have passed from the realm of the living. The method by which they are interred casts a hellish pallor that announces the insignificance of their bodies. The trio is encased, save from the neck up, within urns that trap them in a punitive stasis from which "*They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns*" (*Play*, 354). The psychological entanglement between the three stems from a love-triangle-fueled-suicide that culminates in their purgatorial present. The partitioning of the subjects in *Play* punctuates their imprisoned status. Not unlike prisoners, the trio presents a collective—sharing a sentence, surveilled by the light to which they must respond and self-surveilling—"Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?

(362)—in what might best be described as a communal cognitive fracture. Disembodied by virtue of their imprisonment within the urns, the figures present mere fragments of physicality. Their disjunctive narrations underscore their physical segregation. Like prisoners, the trio are separated, yet confined only a short distance from one another. Unlike Winnie and Willie, however, Beckett does not allow for the three to interact with one another. Although they are constantly speaking, there is no discourse between them, and whether or not the trio is at all aware of one another remains unknowable throughout *Play*. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason,* Foucault reasons that:

> The substitution of a theme of madness for that of death does not mark a break, but rather a torsion within the same anxiety. What is in question is still the nothingness of existence, but this nothingness is no longer considered an external, final term, both threat and conclusion; it is experienced from within as the continuous and constant form of existence. (Foucault, *M&C* 16)

Here, Foucault's comparison between madness and death provides an avenue from which to explore the confinement of Beckett's subjects in *Play*. Clearly, the trio in *Play* no longer has the option of experiencing external relationships or livelihoods. They are caught within a system which prevents them from any external pursuit. The "nothingness of existence" that the trio endure is, in every respect, "experienced from within" as their respective woes can only be experience internally. All of their experiences must now take place "from within" the confines of their urns, and their imprisonment ensures that their respective anxieties form a "continuous and constant form of existence." Like a child placed on temporary restriction, (M) considers his external life—the "*that"* he refers to his life as having been—and wonders at the "*this"*(the present moment) within which he is trapped: "I know now, all that was just… play. And all this?

When will all this—[…] All this, when will all this have been…just play?" (*Play* 361). (M)'s questioning suggests some awareness on his part that *that* led to *this*. However, (M) minimizes any culpability for his part in *that*—that which led to suicide and led to *this*—maintaining *that* "was just…play."

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*, Michel Foucault discusses what he refers to as "the policing of statements" (Qtd. in *Norton* 1648). Foucault ruminates on how the policing of statements regarding sexuality or sexual practices leads to an "incitement to discourse" meant to counterbalance the increase in sexual discourse (*Norton* 1648-49). Foucault deals specifically with discourses spawned from instances of infraction—breaches that instigated discourses of confession, discourses which required restrained language: "But while the language may have been refined, the scope of the confession—the confession of the flesh—continually increased" (*Norton* 1649). While the discourse of confession leads to self-reflection, for the system of confession to yield the fruit of its intended purpose, it should inspire penance: "it attributed more and more importance in penance—[…]—to all the insinuations of the flesh: thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings, delectations, combined movements of the body and the soul […;] everything had to be told" (*Norton* 1649). Not unlike prisoners, within *Play*'s trio none take responsibility for how they conducted themselves prior to their confinement, but they readily recount one another's faults. They readily confess, to borrow Foucault's terms, "all the insinuations of the flesh: thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings" and "delectations" of their love triangle. However, where Foucault points to penance as the counterpoint to confession, Beckett diverges: the subjects in *Play* confess, but they do not repent, nor do they atone for their sexual infractions. By separating the trio into urns, alienating their discourses and sundering them from their external lives or the "*that"* that led to "*this,"* Beckett partitions the love triangle

three ways: they are physically trapped, cannot interact, and have no existence beyond their constraints. While they appear somewhat conscious, somewhat aware of their constrained stasis, Beckett excises them and their respective narrations from any hint of conscience. Like prisoners refusing to confess, the three remain in the purgation of their binds, unrepentant despite their interrogation.

Beckett's *Catastrophe* offers a stark contrast to the partitioning apparatuses in *Happy Days* and *Play* or the debilitating constructs in *Endgame*. *Catastrophe* does not depict an implanted, disabled or bodily constrained figure; rather, the play offers aesthetic duality and a commentary on subjectivity. Dedicated to writer and then-imprisoned political dissident Václav Havel, *Catastrophe* distills its silent, motionless Protagonist (P) in a state of suspension, balanced above the stage upon a box. The setting for *Catastrophe* is a theater, giving the staged production a sense of visual duality, whereby the audience views a theater-within-a-theater. This literal framing of the theater could easily stand as a commentary on observation, and for Beckett, known for an affinity for the word *perhaps*, perhaps it does. That his stage direction calls specifically for "P midstage standing on a black box 18 inches high" (*Catastrophe*, 486) indicates that Beckett wants the spectator's attention fixed upon the isolated, elevated subject (P). The dimensional affect of placing Protagonist (P) on a box segments him from the stage. The pedestal he remains rooted to throughout the play effectively places him on display. While (P)'s boxed position spatially separates him from Director (D) and his female assistant (A), the platform also presents as a mechanism of duality, as it places Protagonist (P) on a stage-within-a-stage.

The isolation of Protagonist (P) upon a box midstage, literally at center, places the figure in the center and partitions all else, including the theater, at the periphery. The centralized

position of Protagonist (P) places him under the scrutiny of observation from the director, his assistant and the spectator. Beckett carries this scrutiny through the narration as Director and Assistant manipulate (P)'s mannequin-like form as they decide how to present his form on stage. Essentially, (D) and (A) reduce (P)'s body to parts:

> D: […] The hands, how are the hands?
>
> A: Crippled. Fibrous degeneration
>
> D: Clawlike?
>
> A: If you like (*Catastrophe*, 486)
>
> D: Down the head. [*A at a loss. Irritably.*] Get going. Down his head. [*A puts back pad and pencil, goes to P, bows his head further, steps back*] A shade more. [*A advances,bows the head further.*] Stop! [*A steps back.*] Fine. It's coming. [*Pause.*] Could do with more nudity/
>
> A: I make a note [*She takes out pad, makes to take her pencil.*]
>
> (*Catastrophe,* 488)

The narrative splicing of Protagonist into segments deconstructs the subject by virtue of his parts. In allowing Director to initiate control over the physicality of the Protagonist, Beckett may be leveling a tongue-in-cheek commentary at the limits of directorial authority.

Chapter III

Confining Discourses: Carcerality, Subjectivity, and Forced Speech

Recollection and confession are methods of repairing and maintaining the self. For that reason, Foucault views them as suspect. The Foucaultian remedy for the pain of confession and the pain of memory would be the destruction of the subject. The pain of these impossible forms of longing exacts a kind of desire that vacillates between oblivion and release. Because of this, Foucault sees a dialectical tension with conventions of humanism and human subjectivity. Beckett, in an alternate sense, keeps us balanced between the desire for oblivion and the desire for reparation. With its disembodied 'Mouth,' *Not I,* at its essence, epitomizes complete and total fragmentation. Beckett partitions Mouth's lips, teeth, tongue and the "godforsaken hole" (*Not I,* 406) from all else, including the stage. Still, Mouth is conscious of her past self. Her oration consists wholly of recounting snippets of the life of "She" from which she evokes traces of "her" past, while never yielding her "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" (405). In "Counterpoint, Absence and the Medium in Beckett's *Not I,*" Paul Lawley affirms that part of Mouth's predicament is that "The text hovers in panic between a past other, of which and of whom it can safely talk, and a present self (hopelessly fragmented though that is), which must continue to deny: Not I. The counterpoint between stage and the text enacts the play's fundamental conflict: between a need to deny the imperfect self and to maintain […] a fictional other, and to wish for an oblivion which would come with the acknowledgement of the fragmented self" (Lawley, 409).

Mouth is stripped of her physicality; yet, while her lips are isolated, what remains of her 'self' is also trapped within an isolated consciousness. In Mouth's case, the repetition of her narrative is an attempt to re-present the self through discourse. However, her identity is

ambiguous—she will not speak of who "She" is—which prevents any reconstitution of *her*-self. In considering Mouth's refusal to self-identify, it is helpful to recall Foucault's discussion regarding confession and penance, wherein he finds that the purpose of confession is, ultimately, to secure penance. This is not penance in the theological sense per se. Rather, when Foucault speaks of confession and penance he reminds us that confession and reparation seek to appease an authoritative power structure—one that can level accusations, dispense discipline, and exact punishment. In this sense, confession and penance can be viewed as mechanisms that operate within the carceral matrix in that, by its authority, the power structure institutionalizes not only confession but also penance. In *Not I*, Mouth's rejection of first person indicates that she is not confessing as she is not *I*. However, Mouth's narration coupled with the Auditor's gestures "of helpless compassion" (*Not I* 405) sets up an exchange that is akin to confession. In *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*, James Knowlson and John Pilling take up Mouth's inability to obtain penance:

> And throughout *Not I*, Mouth's way of presenting the past life she describes and of accounting for her present Purgatorial state is in terms of a whole cycle of sin, guilt, and purgation that is derived from a guilt-ridden Christian upbringing. And yet the Christian sequence can never be completed to include repentance and amendment, let alone redemption. (Knowlson 203)

Mouth withholds confession by her refusal to surrender third person which, ultimately, negates any possibility of reparation. In bisecting Mouth from both confession and absolution, Beckett compounds Mouth's dislocation. The disjunctive effect of the dismembered Mouth gains latitude with Beckett's use of fragmented speech. Mouth tells a tattered tale stretching from her premature birth "…out…into this world…this world… tiny little thing…before its time (405)

leading to abandonment by her father, “he having vanished” (406), to her life as an orphan, “with the other waifs” (406), and an unexplained trial, “that time in court… what had she to say for herself… guilty or not guilty” (411) which leads to a description of “her” weeping on a mound one evening in Croker’s Acres and a morning in April when “wandering in a field…looking aimlessly for cowslips” (406) she found herself “face down in the grass” (411). Mouth’s ability to dictate key traces of “her” prior physical existence demonstrates how Beckett distills consciousness from the body. However, it should not go unnoticed that a childhood spent in an orphanage is key among Mouth’s recollections. By definition, an orphanage is an institution created by an authoritative power to contain children who, when discarded, are society’s most vulnerable subjects. While orphanages are not prisons, they are designed to perform a panoptic function, as they do not simply house children, they also train and prepare them to operate in society. Foucault gives us the example of the reformatory at Mettray, which he considers, “the model in which are concentrated all the coercive technologies of behavior. In it were to be found ‘cloister, prison, school, regiment’” (Foucault, *D&P* 293). Clearly, orphanages share most of these traits, most obviously “school,” “regiment,” and, to some extent, “cloister.”

Through Mouth’s recollection of “that time in court… what had she to say for herself…guilty or not guilty…stand up woman…speak up woman” (411), Beckett places her at the very center of a carceral authority—a court—within which she must confess guilt or profess her innocence. Mouth struggles with the idea of confession and the promise of penance, “something she had to tell… could that be it?... something she would tell […] something that would tell how it had been… how she had lived […] guilty or not […] then forgiven” (411). Beckett reconstructs the court sequence, at least to some extent, in the form of Auditor’s interrogatorial presence. The Auditor’s arm movements incite Mouth’s responses, and she speaks

much in the same way that a confessor might respond to a magistrate. Mouth recalls being forced to speak in court "something she *had* [emphasis mine] to tell" (411). Being forced to speak, forced to confess—in essence, to yield to an authoritative power structure—is an invasive form of subjectivity. However, it is also a form of subjectivity that requires some level of cooperation by the subject. Therefore, to a certain extent, and in keeping with the panoptic method, Mouth is self regulating and her speech is compliant. By having Mouth communicate that she has been twice subjectified by institutionalized power—the orphanage and the court—Beckett frames her as being inextricably bound to authoritative structures that are, in essence, carceral mechanisms.

Mouth describes her "whole body like gone…just the mouth" (411) over which she has no control, "…no idea what she's saying […] and can't stop… no stopping it…she who but a moment before… but a moment! …could not make a sound… any sound of any kind… now can't stop! […] can't stop the stream…" (410). Mouth seems frustrated and amazed that she "can't stop the stream" of words. That her narrative is out of her control suggests that her speech is being forced from her. The "stream" or flow of Mouth's oration seems to be regulated by the Auditor. The figure of the Auditor, which is raised four feet above the stage, presents as an uncanny warder of Mouth's confinement. Auditor remains silent and motionless but for four instances wherein the figure raises "arms from sides and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion" (406). Beckett instructs that Mouth be positioned eight feet above the stage. The resultant spatial division between Auditor and Mouth amplifies Mouth's solitude. In "The Orphic Mouth in *Not I,*" Katherine Kelly offers an alternate possibility for the Mouth/Auditor relationship suggesting that "Mouth and Auditor inhabit this underworld together, but it is uncertain whether they speak to or hear one another. It is even possible that they are sundered parts of the same being" (Kelly, 126). That Mouth cannot find meaning in her

words appears to be somehow related to her claim of being "…speechless all her days…practically speechless…even to herself… never out loud" until a "…steady stream…mad stuff… half the vowels wrong" (412). Benjamin Bennett suggests that within Beckettian narration "[…] our sense of a whole human self as the agent of expression is regularly thwarted; expression thus seems *fragmented*" (Bennett, 164). In applying Bennett's assertion to Mouth, it may be argued that Beckett frames her refusal to relinquish third-person as a response to her inability to "sense [a] whole human self as the agent of expression," thereby enhancing her fragmentation. The speculation over "her" identity notwithstanding, perhaps what is most disarming for theater goers is how much Beckett withholds from the narration itself. Beckett provides Mouth (and thereby the audience) with "her" fragmented narration: "…but no… spared that… the mouth alone… so far…ha!... so far…then thinking…oh long after…sudden flash… it can't go on… all this…all that…"(409), all modifiers, qualifiers, and explanations are left out. In considering the ways in which Beckett's use of fragmentation in *Not I* challenges his audiences, Stanton B. Garner, Jr. finds that "[…] the narrative fragments of *Not I* resist both clarification and integration, forcing audience comprehension into tentativeness and uncertainty" (Garner, 159). The "tentativeness and uncertainty" and the "forcing" of "comprehension" that Garner points to results, at least in part, to Mouth's forced speech—the stream of words that she cannot stop. Mouth spews nothing but fragments of narrative. The audience remains stranded in "tentativeness and uncertainty" not only by Mouth's forced narrative but also by the missing pieces of her speech.

Whereas Mouth remains frozen in a disembodied stasis which seems perpetual, Winnie's predicament in *Happy Days* deteriorates in the second act. Act II opens with Winnie encased up to her neck, suffering a complete restriction of movement as her head is now apportioned from

the rest of her body. She is now buried up to her chin within the mound of earth. As the bell for waking rings at the start of Act II, Winnie's response at waking changes significantly from that in Act I, wherein she quips, "Another heavenly day" (*HD* 275), to Act II's almost prayerful, "Hail, holy light. Someone is looking at me still. Caring for me still" (*HD* 300). While "Hail, holy light" mirrors the opening lines to the third book of Milton's "Paradise Lost," here, Winnie's narration takes on clear subject/object overtones. That she is *hailing* the light and referring to it as *holy* suggests that she now holds what she earlier called "Hellish light" (*HD* 277) in some sort of reverence. Winnie's sense that "Someone is looking at me still" implies that she is mindful of her own subjectivity. She considers herself an object of *holy* surveillance. That is not to say that Winnie thinks of that which observes her as having a divine origin, only that she recognizes herself at *wholly* surveilled—observed in every sense. Taking Beckett's sense of humor into account, the line "Someone is looking at me still" also serves as a double-entendre, suggesting that at the start of the second act, the audience—a veritable group of someone's, *is still looking at* Winnie. Beckett thus portrays Winnie as struggling with her own crisis of identity: "To have always been what I am—and so changed from what I was. [*Pause.*] I am the one, I say the one, then the other. [...] My arms. [*Pause.*] My breasts. [*Pause.*] What arms? [*Pause.*] What breasts?" (*HD* 300). Winnie expresses her frustration at her resounding physical lack by itemizing what remains:

> The face. [*Pause.*] The nose. I can see it… [*squinting down*]… the tip… the nostrils…breath of life… that curve you so admired [*Pause.*] a hint of lip… if I pout them out…[*sticks out tongue*] … the tongue of course… you so admired… if I stick it out […] … suspicion of a brow… eyebrow… imagination possibly… [*eyes left*] … cheek… no […] That is all. (*HD* 301)

The more Winnie suffers the confinement of her physical body, the more emphasis she places on what remains free. Winnie never loses sight of what she has retained: "I have not lost my reason," Winnie insists, adding, "Not yet. [*Pause.*] Not all. [*Pause.*] Some remains" (*HD* 302).

Toward the end of the second act, Winnie's entrapment leaves her unable to do anything but speak. However, this presents a conflict for Winnie. She announces, "I can do no more. [*Pause.*] Say no more. [*Pause.*] But I must say more. [*Pause.*] Problem here" (*HD* 305). The narrative illustrates a paradox that is problematic for Winnie: she has no more to say, yet she *must* say more. Winnie's assertion that she must say more implies that she feels compelled or coerced to speak her speech—a condition which must be categorized as forced speech. By her own admission, she cannot speak; she has no more to say. Yet, by virtue of her confinement and the constant gaze of the *holy* light under which she is *wholly* surveilled, Winnie *must* speak. Foucault's illustration of the panopticon offers a frame of reference from which to consider Winnie's compulsion to speak. She enthusiastically polices herself to comply, despite her confinement. Of course, she has little other option: Beckett offers her no other alternative for expression beyond discourse. As the second act winds to a close, Winnie asks, "Does anything remain? [*Pause.*] Any remains? [*Pause.*] No?" (*HD* 306). Beckett leaves Winnie to endure a state of gridlocked stasis that will, inevitably, swallow her up. Despite Winnie's attempts to adapt to her confinement, she has no real control. As her physical body slips deeper within its earthen cell, Winnie is caught in a state of unattainable longing. But, these indignities can only be understood in light of subjectivity's impossible yearnings. Throughout *Happy Days* we are continually reminded that the need for wholeness and reconciliation may be as pernicious as the lack of them. This is particularly evident in Winnie's closing words. Unable to choose between oblivion and a desire for reparation, she quips, "pray your old prayer, Winnie" (*HD* 297).

Chapter IV

Pulling the Strings in Catastrophe:

Surveillance, the Marionette, and the Dissolution of the Subject

Catastrophe is widely thought of as Beckett's most outwardly politicized play. That *Catastrophe* is dedicated to Václav Havel heralds the play as a response not only to Havel's imprisonment but also to oppression. In *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett,* James Knowlson notes that Beckett's writing of the play stemmed from an invitation by AIDA (International Association for the Defense of Artists) to author a work for presentation during the Avignon festival in support of Havel (Knowlson, *DTF* 596). Knowlson writes that:

> He took an avid interest in what was happening to intellectuals, writers and artists in Eastern Europe. His concern was aroused by press reports of arrests and imprisonments [….] Beckett was appalled to learn that, as part of the punishment for his courageous stand against abuses of human rights, Václav Havel had been forbidden to write. This seemed the ultimate oppression. (Knowlson, *DTF* 596)

Perhaps surprisingly, then, Beckett situates *Catastrophe's* silent character, the Protagonist (P), mid-stage, standing upon a pedestal. As was noted earlier, Beckett also frames a play-within-a-play with *Catastrophe*. Protagonist's body serves as the central site upon which a theater Director (D) expresses his artistic vision. All hopes of achieving the Director's idea of success hinge on the figure of the Protagonist, which the Assistant manipulates, poses, and disrobes. The Director and his Assistant talk around the Protagonist, discussing him like an object, a stage prop the sole purpose of which is to generate theatrical effect. The Protagonist does not move, he remains silent, and any hint of consciousness is buried beneath his blank expression. The elevation of the Protagonist above the stage floor separates him not only from the stage but also

from the rest of the theater, including his observers; the physical distance is breached only by the Assistant, whose touch presents as a violation against a subject who appears helpless, unable to prevent her intrusion. In a move that seems a tongue-in-cheek commentary on directorial authority, Beckett has Director (D) complain that he cannot see (P)'s toes from the first row, prompting the Assistant to make a note to "Raise pedestal" (Beckett, *Catastrophe* 487). In effect, the raising of the Protagonist's pedestal distances his body further from the theater while ensuring that he can be readily observed by the audience. The Protagonist is placed on display, posed like a mannequin in a window or a doll on a stand, trapped in a stasis of observation and manipulation. In this way, *Catastrophe* frames the possibility for a grotesque disconnect between the empowered and the subjugated.

Throughout the play, the Protagonist is systematically reduced to a manipulation of his parts. His idleness, his stillness, except insofar as his movements are governed by the Director's whim, give the Protagonist attributes similar to those of a puppet. Edward Gordon Craig in *On the Art of the Theater* states that "The über-marionette [….] Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood, but rather the body in trance […]" (Craig, 84-85). This image of a human-esque marionette may fall under Freud's definition of the uncanny: "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Qtd. in *Norton* , 930). Beckett injects the narrative with a dark humor that frames the subjugating authority as frightening. Beckett's particular brand of humor is evident in an exchange between the Assistant and Director: "A: [*timidly.*] What about a little… a little… gag? / D: For God's sake! This craze of explicitation! Every i dotted to death! Little gag! For God's sake!" (*Catastrophe*, 487). Beckett's use of the word "gag" seems intentionally ambiguous as it can be construed as being the variety of "gag" that prevents speech, given that Assistant (A) follows with, "Sure he won't utter?" (487).

However, "gag" can also be read as referring to a practical joke, choking, or nausea. While Beckett's inclusion of the word "gag" most superficially suggests a joke, that the word also evokes images of human sickness, frailty, punishment, interrogation, or torture is clearly also intended and must not be overlooked. While exploring the move from the spectacle of torture and bodily punishments in favor of surveillance and confinement, Foucault remarks, "It was the end of a certain kind of tragedy; comedy began, with shadow play, faceless voices, impalpable entities. The apparatus of punitive justice must now bite into this bodiless reality" (Foucault, *D&P* 16-17). *Catastrophe* can be approached in similar terms as it portrays "a certain kind of tragedy" that gives way to comedy with shadow play (the light and dark of the stage), faceless voices (of the audience), impalpable entities (Protagonist).

The Protagonist's marionette-like positioning necessarily exudes a sense of affliction. Likewise, the ways in which Protagonist yields to the manipulation of his body cause him to appear debilitated. Craig clarifies the subjectivity of the actor in relation to playing a part:

> It is no good to push it aside and protest that the actor is not the medium for another's thoughts [….] Even if the actor were to present none but the ideas which he himself should compose, his nature would still be in servitude; his body would have to become the slave of his mind; and that […] is what a healthy body utterly refuses to do. (Craig 60-61)

While in his stage directions Beckett instructs that for (P) "*Age and physique* [are] *unimportant"*(Beckett, *Catastrophe* I), Protagonist's description in the script indicates that he does not have a "healthy body" as exemplified by this exchange between Director and Assistant:

> D: How's the skull?
>
> A: Moulting. A few tufts.

D: Colour?

A: Ash. (Beckett, *Catastrophe* 486)

That the skull is "moulting" with only a few ash-colored tufts indicates that Protagonist is aged. As the discussion between Director and Assistant continues, there is further textual evidence that Protagonist is in some way infirm, that his figure is not representative of a "healthy body" :

D: How are they? [*A at a loss. Irritably.*] The hands, how are the hands?

A: You've seen them.

D: I forget.

A: Crippled. Fibrous degeneration.

D: Clawlike?

A: If you like.

D: Two claws?

A: Unless he clenches his fists. (Beckett, *Catastrophe* 486)

The descriptions of Protagonist suggest that Beckett was acutely aware of the same limitations of the actor that Craig outlines: that in order for the actor's "nature" to "be in servitude," in order for his body "to become the slave of his mind," that body *must* be *un*healthy. Health connects to Foucault's reasoning that the carceral system is designed to confine but, more importantly, to *observe* a societal fringe marked as "criminal" which defines them as abnormal, unwell, somehow mentally or socially fractured : "a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker, or a schoolboy" (Foucault, *D&P* 200). The Protagonist seems paralytic, stricken, unwell—he is the epitome of a patient in *need* of clinical observation. In this way, *Catastrophe*'s stage stands in substitution for an austere, perhaps medical, institution. The setting is cold (the Protagonist

shivers). And like a patient the Protagonist wears a gown, is examined under a bright light, his clothing is removed, and comments are made regarding his condition: crippled, clawed, fibrous.

However, if the Foucaultian concepts of carcerality are to be attributed to *Catastrophe,* they must be applied in the strictest sense and limited to consideration of (P)'s position as a figure that is surveilled, observed, manipulated, and subjugated. The protagonist presents more like a prop than a human figure: He is stripped and posed, and while the Assistant remarks that he is shivering, he remains entranced and remains reactionless until he lifts his head and "fixes the audience" just before the stage goes black. The catastrophic end to *Catastrophe* results at the moment Protagonist asserts his gaze, folding the gaze of the theater back upon itself. Reflecting, once more, on Sartre's illustration of the dueling gazes, one apprehending the Other in the park, it is clear that Protagonist's gaze meets the collective gaze of the theater in similar fashion. This inversion, his revolt, seems a small one, but we must recall that Beckett intended for the Protagonist to present as an actor in a play; therefore, his revolt is the revolt of the actor. That Beckett gives this fictional actor license to revolt against *direction* while on stage (a position amplified by the protagonist's elevation on a box upon the stage) verifies that Beckett does indeed see the constrainment of subjectivity as creating the potential for a chaotic reemergence of the subject as such. Invoking Beckett's affinity for the word 'perhaps,' *perhaps* this can also be seen as Beckett's caustic observation on how disobedient actors can affect, even dismantle, directorial vision, even on the political stage. Ironically, Knowlson recounts Beckett's disgust at the first performance of *Catastrophe* presented at the Avignon festival: "Beckett saw a brief extract from the production on television and was horrified to see the Protagonist bound from his shoulders down to his knees. 'It was literally massacred at Avignon by all accounts,' he [Beckett] wrote" (Knowlson, *DTF* 598).

Craig also explored the actor's potential for unpredictable performance and found that "Art is the exact antithesis of pandemonium [….] Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials" (Craig, 55-56). However, in *Catastrophe* the Protagonist's revolt suggests that Beckett recognizes that only through disrupting expectations of behavior, whereby the subject reacts or does something unanticipated, can subjugation be undermined. In considering the subjective experience of the actor, Craig finds that:

> The Theatre will continue its growth and actors will continue for some years to hinder its development. But I see a loop-hole by which in time the actors can escape the bondage they are in. They must create for themselves a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture. To-day they *impersonate* and interpret; to-morrow they must *represent* and interpret; and the third day they must create. (Craig 61)

Considering that *Catastrophe* is a play-within-a-play, centering on the protagonist's final movement, and his attempt to project his gaze back upon his observers, serves as an example of an actor (P) *creating*. However, the Protagonist is portrayed as more mannequin than man. The silent figure has no identity beyond the stage or the pedestal he balances upon—we never know him past the momentary insurrection glimpsed in his hollow, doll-like gaze. In *All Theater is Revolutionary Theater,* Benjamin Bennett examines the challenges faced by Beckett's characters, audience, and actors:

> The agony of Beckett's characters, in other words, and the agony of his audience and of course of his actors as well, is not that they cannot achieve a stable identity but that they cannot escape the delusion of identity, no matter how transparent

> that delusion has become; that they can never become sufficiently marionette-like to satisfy their own self knowledge. (Bennett, 167)

The relation between consciousness and identity in *Catastrophe* presents, then, a complex paradox: Only at the close of the play does the Protagonist reveal that he is at all conscious; however, he does not appear to be hindered by "the delusion of identity." For the Protagonist the inverse is true: Beckett frames him as a figure that is free of the fetters of identity, ensuring that the Protagonist remains eerily similar to a marionette or disguised as such for the majority of the time under the audience's gaze.

James Knowlson and John Pilling take up the issue of identity-consciousness or self-consciousness in their exploration of Beckett's use of Kleist's essay "On the Marionette Theatre":

> One of the parts of the essay which particularly impressed Beckett concerns the advent of self-consciousness and its effects on the natural charm of man. […] This discovery of self represents, of course, a Fall. Self-consciousness separates man from the world, even from his own Self since, essentially, the very consciousness of self means that he is perceiving himself as Other. (Knowlson/Pilling 278-79)

Whether or not the Protagonist recognizes or is conscious of his identity in *Catastrophe* remains unknowable; however, his final gesture suggests that at the very least he is aware of his reception as Other by his observers. This opens the door for the argument that the Protagonist is *self*-conscious to the extent that he is conscious of a self which is being perceived as Other. In a Foucaultian sense, the Protagonist seems to project an ecstatic response to his surveillance, and his apparent willing submission to observation is reminiscent of the prisoner's response to the panoptic vantage point of his warders: "The more numerous those anonymous and temporary

observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness at being observed" (Foucault, *D&P* 202). The Protagonist's response does not appear to be one of surprise, however; that he readily "fixes" the audience with his own gaze in response to their observation of him — his 'catastrophe'— suggests that he is not altogether unlike the anxious, surprised panoptic subject. But in a departure from Foucault, Beckett's Protagonist seems eager to be watched only while *rebelling*; he does not appear eager to invite continued surveillance. In this way, the Protagonist presents as a dissolved subject: he is without an identity, yet conscious and consciously disrupting the system under which he is subjugated. In *Catastrophe* Beckett provides a nuanced illustration of how dissolution of the subject upends and undoes subjectivity. Both Beckett and Foucault recognize the dissolution of the subject as the only remedy that might cure humanity of subjectivity; however, Foucault would likely remind us that the attempt at a remedy is in itself a form of delusional subjectivity. Alternately, Beckett might argue that a displaced identity combined with a trace consciousness of self when laced with rebellion creates enough destabilization that it dismantles the system of delusional and passive subjugation. Knowlson quotes Beckett's description of the Protagonist's final scene, about which Beckett said, "He's saying: You bastards, you haven't finished me yet!" (Knowlson, *DTF* 597).

Chapter V

Playing Still: Carcerality and Beckett's Actors

The partitioning of bodies evident in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Play*, *Not I,* and *Catastrophe* requires commitment to a mise-en-scène complicated by structural, practical, and physical obstacles. Beckett's explicit stage directions require props that confine, isolate, and restrict his theatrical subjects and, consequently, that engage his actors with performative complexities and physical expectations which extend well beyond traditional demands of characterization. The mound-imprisoned Winnie in *Happy Days*, the ash-can dwelling Nagg and Nell in *Endgame*, the urn-confined subjects in *Play*, the disembodied 'Mouth' in *Not I*, and the platform-restricted actor in *Catastrophe* all present varying degrees of physical isolation. While the resultant aesthetic magnifies Beckett's reductionist approach and foregrounds the textual fragmentation inherent within his narratives, the installations of physical partitioning within these plays require Beckett's actors to acquiesce to the conditions of subjugation that are endured by his fictional subjects.

The immobilization of Winnie within a mound of earth requires, for instance, the confinement of the actress who plays her. Bringing Winnie's debilitating entrenchment from the page to performance includes a variety of staging difficulties. However, the obstacles in producing *Happy Days* extend beyond constructing a sufficient earth-mound upon the stage. The physical limitations inherent in playing the role of Winnie place unusual and, in many ways, carceral demands upon Beckett's actresses. Enoch Brater in *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater* states that:

> *Happy Days* is a play of enormous physical restraint. Except for Willie's ultimate ascent that signals the play's closure, all the physical action must take place in or

> behind the mound. Even Winnie's many cues for limited body movement (in act 1) or rigorous eye contact (in act 2) exist primarily to provide her with a series of verbal opportunities which are, not coincidentally, dramatic opportunities as well. Beckett selected a woman for this role because the contents of a ladies handbag would provide such a character in crisis with more business to do onstage—and therefore much more to *say* about it. (Brater, 17)

In denying the actress mobility, Beckett places both physical and performative encumbrances upon her. While *Happy* Days consists of two acts, and certainly the run time of the production varies somewhat, the play cannot be considered short. The film version of *Happy Days* directed by Patricia Rozema for the project *Beckett on Film* has a run time of one hour and nineteen minutes. Theatrical productions of the play have comparable run times, requiring the actress who plays Winnie to endure a rather lengthy restriction within the earth mound which constitutes the set. In a recent (2008) production of *Happy Days* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, actress Fiona Shaw's initial concerns over the physical constraints she would endure in playing the part of Winnie were heightened during rehearsals: "It was terrible! Awful! I spent the winter sitting up in the middle of these sandbags and getting up every half hour to play badminton and keep warm and not lose all sensation in the arms and legs" (Schwartz). Ms. Shaw fretted, recognizing that once the play went into performance, she would no longer have the luxury of breaks to counteract the physical demands of the play, but with Winnie-esque cheer, she reassures us, "I've gotten quite used to it now […] And I find that my body goes to sleep except for my head" (Schwartz).

Shaw's reaction to playing the role of Winnie verifies what is already textually evident given Beckett's explicit set directions for the play: that gestures, physicality, and vocalization are

limited by the constraints of the mound apparatus. However, Shaw's description also provides insights which are not as textually obvious yet are relevant to understanding how the constraints of setting which are so crucial to realizing the mood and tenor of Beckett's dramatics works affects his actors and, in this case, the actress playing Winnie. In "Tyranny and Theatricality: The Example of Samuel Beckett," H. Porter Abbott articulates the actor's plight in undertaking one of Beckett's roles:

> Beckett is famous for his exactitude, for the precise realization of his will on stage. One should keep in mind, moreover, what Beckett does to his actors. He ties ropes around their necks and crams them in urns. He ties them to rockers. He buries them in sand under hot blinding lights and gives them impossible scripts to read at breakneck speed. The word for this is torture. (Abbott, 82)

Abbott follows this assertion by asking, "Why *does* he do it? Why did Beckett turn to theatre in October 1948 when he took a breather from *Malone Dies* to write *Godot?* And why does he keep on writing plays? [….] Is Beckett not just a little bit of a sadist, as incapable as any existentially impoverished being of doing without a socially legitimated vehicle of tyranny when he is lucky enough to have one?" (Abbott, 82-83).

While the physical hardships Beckett imposes upon his actors do evoke images of torture, the fact that these images are placed on stage, on *display,* inviting, as it were, public consumption and even mass scrutiny, demonstrates Beckett's utilization of one of the most effective theatrical devices: that of spectacle. While by no means comparable to the corporeal punishments that Foucault refers to early on in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* in his exploration of the ritualized 15th century practice of the 'spectacle of the scaffold,' wherein Foucault finds "Torture rests on a whole quantitative art of pain" (Foucault, *D&P* 34), the rigors that Beckett's

set designs impose upon his actors are indicative of an underlying torturous impulse. Extreme levels of constraint are undeniably woven within Beckett's brand of subjectivity. Beckett employs levels of confinement that approach torture, but such devices in Beckett's theater, whether he intends them to or not, amplify the surveillance endured by his theatrical subjects and, subsequently, by his actors.

Like *Happy Days*, the staging and acting of *Play* is complicated by virtue of Beckett's specifications for the play's set design. Beckett insists on specific requirements for the urns that contain the three protagonists:

> In order for the urns to be only one yard high, it is necessary either that traps be used, enabling the actors to stand below stage level, or that they kneel throughout the play […;] should traps not be available, and the kneeling posture found impractical, the actors should stand, the urns be enlarged to full length and moved back from front to mid-stage, the tallest actor setting the height, the broadest breadth, to which the three urns should conform. The sitting posture results in urns of unacceptable bulk and is not to be considered. (*Play*, 367)

Beckett's specifications suggest that his interest lies in the visual uniformity of the urns, not in how the actors will endure the physical challenges of containment within them. Any variance within the symmetrical cosmos of *Play* would disrupt the visual field which is vital to the play's purgative mood. Beckett's installations of constrictive props are crucial to ensuring that his actors and thereby his theatrical subjects remain in position at center stage. The topography of *Play*'s set also guarantees that the play's characters remain fixed under the surveilling eyes of the spectators and subject to the scrutiny of the panoptic stage light. In "Beckett's Actor," William B. Worthen likens the conditions under which the actors must perform *Play* as being "On the

rack, the actors must still overcome the considerable demands of the text itself […;] the performance holds a final, dismaying peripetia for its performers: for in the place of a promised end, Beckett asks them to '*Repeat Play,*' to reenact an already tiring performance, risking in weariness the high probability of failure" (Worthen, *BA* 416). The actors' difficulties of performing *Play* do not stop at the urns. The stage lighting forms an inquisitorial spot of "Hellish half-light," a surveilling and vexing "Mere eye" that is constantly "Looking for something" as it is mercilessly leveled upon the three urn-enshrined figures (Beckett, *Play* 361-66). Worthen considers the actor's dilemmas in dealing with the disconcerting blaze of the theatrical spot in *Play*:

> […] their cramped fatigue [is] exacerbated by the irritating glare of a spotlight [that is] intermittently trained on their faces from very close range […] The Stage rigidly contains the actors, holding their bodies in uncomfortable postures, bracing their necks against the slightest movement, forcing their eyes "undeviatingly front" into the bright light. (416)

The rigidity imposed by the urn apparatuses, while securing the location of the actors at center stage and propelling their gazes "undeviatingly front," also guards against any extraneous movements by the actors, ensuring placement of their respective characters under the full scrutinizing gaze of the spectators. In this way, Beckett achieves the total surveillance of his fictional characters while forcing his actors to yield to the conditions imposed upon them by his stage. In "Playing *Play*" Worthen contends that "The roles in *Play* assault the actors" (Worthen, *PP* 406) and comments on the surveilling action of the stage light: "the light enacts the attentive stare of the spectator, wandering with varying interest from character to character. The light

resembles an unseen, modern theatre patron, who (as Beckett suggests) is 'no less a victim of his inquiry' than the characters—or than the actors and their audience" (Worthen, 408).

The challenges faced by actors staging *Happy Days* and *Play* are similar to those of performers, particularly the actresses, who commit to productions of *Not I*. The narrative challenges inherent in *Not I* notwithstanding, any discussion of the play's challenges leads to exploring the complicated staging and performance of the play. Enoch Brater gives an account of actress Jessica Tandy's experiences playing Mouth:

> Jessica Tandy remembers her own "tremendous challenge" in portraying Mouth, "because it's so hard to do, I don't enjoy it—I don't enjoy having so much taken away. When she took this production on […] her eyes were covered by a black crepe blindfold in order to prevent them from reflecting any glare from the beam on her mouth: "There isn't another actor I can respond to—there isn't an audience I can see […] In this production Miss Tandy was […] placed on a modified pillory, specially arranged to hold her head in place; she was also attached to a metal back brace to prevent any possible shift in position. Her teeth were then coated with a substance that would exaggerate their brightness and her lips were polished to attract the glare. (Brater, *BM* 30)

Although staging the disembodied mouth requires tremendous commitment from the actress if the production is to realize Beckett's theatrical vision, the challenges associated with producing *Not I* for performance extend beyond merely adapting to set restrictions for the actress playing Mouth. Along with the height requirement that places Mouth at eight feet and Auditor at four feet above the stage, Beckett's stage directions call for the use of an "Invisible microphone" (*Not I*, 405). In the production involving Jessica Tandy, Enoch Brater relates that "this metallic prop

had to be as close to the actress as possible, not reflecting any light and never in the spectator's view" (Brater, 31). In this production of *Not I,* Jessica Tandy was also expected to meet Beckett's requirement of an eighteen-minute run-time (31). According to Brater, Tandy's understudy could not run through the monologue unless she took to "reading the text through her black crepe blindfold from a teletape machine invisible to the audience (31). By requiring Mouth's actress to run through the script so quickly, Beckett demands a discipline from his actress that moves beyond his famed authorial/directorial autocracy by imposing a form of textual surveillance upon her in the form of a time limit that she *wants* to meet and that encourages a rigorous self-discipline if the actress hopes to realize Beckett's artistic vision for the part of Mouth.

While Abbott's contention that the conditions faced by Beckett's actors seem a "torture" and Worthen's assessment of the actors' plight in Beckett's theatrical landscape as tantamount to "assault" describe the spectacle inherent in Beckett's theater, the constraints that Beckett imposes upon his actors by virtue of the props necessary to his theatrical vision are more carceral than torturous. Where Abbott asks that we consider the sadistic undertones of Beckett's sets, I suggest that we also recognize the ways in which the constraints imposed upon Beckett's theatrical subjects and, subsequently, upon his actors present subjectifying, carceral mechanisms. The settings of *Happy Days*, *Play,* and *Not I* lend themselves to panoptic comparison. In describing how panoptic mechanisms function, Foucault relates that "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault, *D&P* 202-03). Beckett's actors, like prisoners, are physically confined, isolated,

compartmentalized and observed. However, the nature of Beckett's theater demands that his actors discipline themselves in order to perfect the reductionist methods by which they must approach their performances. The actors' ability to physically endure Beckett's most restrictive and corporeally challenging roles serves to exemplify their self-subjugation to the theater, their roles, Beckett's scripts, as well as the scrutinizing gaze of the audience—and most especially in cases where the audience included Beckett himself. Beckett, even after death, still exacts authorial control to the extent that recent productions of his plays continue to adhere to his explicit stage directions. Where Beckett might be considered the "warden" of his prison-esque theatrical landscapes, the topography of his stage becomes a site of self-imposed mental restraint on the part of his actors. Within the sparcity of Beckett's theatrical cosmos, the actor's usual reliance on movement, physical bits of 'business,' or on props becomes an almost embarrassing and unnecessary materiality that stands in the way of theatrical effect.

Beckett's actors thus must become skilled at reductionist performance and, in a panoptic sense, at policing their own movements upon his sets. Beckett's elaborate yet strikingly sparse props of confinement become almost internalized appendages whereby the actors as Beckett's theatrical subjects are held under observation which they do not struggle against. Similarly, Beckett's characters cooperate with and in some cases seem to welcome or invite their surveillance. The complicit response to the panoptic gaze is evident, for example, when the male character in *Play* ponders at the intermittency of the panoptic light wondering, "Am I as much as… being seen?" (Beckett, *Play* 366). Similarly, at the start of Act II in *Happy Days*, Winnie says of the blazing sun "Hail holy light. Someone is looking at me still. Caring for me still" (Beckett, *HD* 299). Winnie's response indicates her desire to continue to be observed by the surveilling force of that "holy light." The lines of distinction between what Beckett's fictional

characters endure and what his actors experience are blurred as the actor's body becomes a point of intersection that is both self-conditioning and self-regulating. The actor's body and, subsequently, the body of the being he or she is characterizing become the focal point of Beckett's theater. This self-conditioning and self-regulation of the actor is illustrated well by Fiona Shaw. After building her endurance through many months of rehearsals for the role of Winnie, Shaw qualifies her complaints that she had lost "all sensation in the arms and legs" by adding, "I've gotten very used to it now. I actually quite like it" (Schwartz, 2). Brater contends in "The 'Absurd' Actor in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett" that:

> […] no playwright before Beckett has made his actors so consistently uncomfortable on the stage: the positions they are asked to assume and the words they are made to recite force them to experience a level of absurdity specifically designed to "dislocate" any conventional notions about stagecraft itself. Just as the metaphysical absurdity Camus discusses springs from man's awareness of the disruption between himself and the stage set he calls reality, so the literal absurdity Beckett has his actors experience makes them directly confront a fatal divorce between their own expectations about what they are supposed to do in their medium and what they are now asked to do on stage. (199)

If the confining and disjunctive apparatuses of Beckett's stage do indeed cause his actors to experience "the disruption between [themselves] and the stage set [they] call reality," then perhaps such self-dissolution should be considered the ultimate success of Beckett's theater. Perhaps most significantly for Beckett's constrained, surveilled, and confined actor, this shattering of traditional stagecraft, of the performer's 'ego ideal,' instigates the self-dissolution necessary for the actor to experience an unexpected level of performative freedom. While

Beckett does restrict his actors to tight textual and physical parameters, in doing so he may also be releasing them from their usual performative expectations and, thus, confines. Beckett's theater, in the truest sense, liberates his actors by freeing them from the constraints of self.

The obstacles in staging plays peopled with isolated body parts and highly constrained figures pose dramaturgical challenges ranging from the structural to the performative. Clearly, Beckett himself remained ever mindful of the potential staging difficulties characteristic of his plays, as evidenced by his foresight in providing the protagonist Winnie in *Happy Days* with a handbag filled with items designed to initiate responses from the character and serve as points of business for the actress playing her and also by his willingness to allow for changes that maintained the integrity of his vision in the film adaptation of *Not I*. Beckett's use of textual and physical constraints stretches the boundaries of narrative and performance, but no matter the structural or logistical boundaries his plays impose, he never falters in his determination that his plays should conform to his exacting standards or that his vision of the theatricality of his work translate unaltered from the page to performance. The use of fragmentation and compartmentalization frees Beckett's theater from the constraints of self and aids in his experimentation with the levels of physical disjunction and psychological fracture that he sees as our daily lot.

Conclusion:

Beckett's use of incapacity, surveillance, and carceral formations within *Endgame*, *Play*, *Happy Days*, *Not I*, and *Catastrophe* demonstrate the effects, consequences, and limits of subjugation and self-presentation. The carceral imagery and surveilling constructs that are woven within Beckett's works offer counterpoints of intersection when considered alongside both Sartre's and Foucault's theories of subjectivity. Indeed, Sartrean and Foucaultian themes are inextricably bound together in some of Beckett's major works. Within Beckett we see the objectifying Sartrean gaze appropriated and transformed. Beckett's theater both utilizes and diverges from Sartre's centralized subject/object configurations which see no possibility of the subject escaping the formalizing, objectifying gaze. Sartre emphasizes exteriority of the subject, requiring the gaze to be reflected back between subjects. In contrast, in Beckett's theater seeing does not guarantee *being seen,* as is exemplified in *Happy Days* wherein Winnie hails the "holy" light she assumes is watching her even though she has no evidence that it does. Similarly, in *Play* the three urn-interred subjects wonder at the spot that blinks on and off like an eye observing them, asking "Am I as much… as being seen?" (Beckett, *Play* 366). The scrutinizing light which exists in both *Happy Days* and *Play* is an intensification of the Sartrean gaze, and, certainly, in *Play* the interrogative quality of the light presents an enacted version of the all powerful gaze.

Foucault's work also provides insights into Beckett's work and helps us understand the Beckettian challenge to Sartre's model of existentialism. For Foucault, desire is never pure or purely accessible. This is also true of Beckett, for whom desire may be expunged altogether as the natural world is forever at odds with the emptiness and failings of human consciousness. Certainly, Beckett demonstrates congruence with Sartre's model of the gaze which paralyzes and

objectifies. However, Beckett diverges from this dyad, experimenting with mechanisms that Foucault would later identify as carceral, where violence—even the violence of the gaze—is visited upon the body as an object and surveillance governs the body as subject. Foucault sees the objectifying gaze as being internalized. This internalization is productive and economical as it keeps the subject working. Beckett utilizes internalization as a duality between objectification and self-presentation. This is particularly evident in *Endgame* wherein Clov, who is mobile and could leave, and, in fact, threatens to leave, never does. Instead, he submits himself to do Hamm's bidding. Whereas Clov is the worker within the cosmos of *Endgame,* and Hamm sets himself up as warder, even though he is blind and crippled, he has no *real* control over Clov. Clov epitomizes Foucault's panoptic subject because he polices himself; he self-regulates. While Foucault embraces subjectivity as necessary for the successful functioning of Power, Beckett presents subjectivity as a site of vulnerability which marks a failure of Power. Foucault sees subjectivity as not only productive but also necessary for production. For Beckett the inverse is true: subjectivity *produces* nothing.

Beckett's use of debilitated or incapacitated characters ensures their further surveillance. Even though Hamm cannot see, he cannot avoid being looked at. While he externalizes his version of a gaze through Clov, he is simultaneously subjected to the formalizing gaze of the spectator, including Clov. Hamm's blindness binds him as he cannot gaze back, sealing him within a static framework of immobility. Likewise, in *Not I,* Mouth's isolation from her body leaves her sightless, and although it remains unclear as to whether or not Mouth is aware that beyond her there is a visual field observing her, she does appear to respond to Auditor as indicated by her frequent use of the interrupting "what." In *Happy Days* Winnie's entrenchment within the mound of earth traps her, leaving her vulnerable in every way and especially to being

observed. Her imprisonment within the mound and upon the stage allows the subjective stare of the audience to operate unhindered. The urn-implanted figures of *Play* cannot move beyond their necks. Their collective confinement is amplified by the interrogating light and punctuated by the scrutinizing gaze of the theatergoer. *Catastrophe* offers a counterbalance to the subjectifying matrix common in Beckett's theater as the Protagonist 'actor' suffering from fibrous degeneration of the hands challenges his stage direction and inverts the subjectifying gaze of his audience back upon them. If we can ascribe a sense of carcerality to *Catastrophe*, it must be in terms of the Protagonist's seeming willingness to be observed. This is not unlike Foucault's description of the panoptic model which internalizes surveillance, resulting in subjects who are aware of their surveillance and are willing, even eager, to be observed. The marionette-like Protagonist never invokes an identity, but his final revolt reveals a consciousness that is aware of a self being perceived and objectified as Other. At the end of *Catastrophe*, the blackness of the theater dissolves the subject/object relationship. Beckett frames the dissolution of the subject as the construct that ultimately frees his characters from subjectivity.

Beckett's actors are similarly conditioned. While they are stripped of their usual reliance on movement, they must become skilled at delivering reductionist performances. They perform within a dual dynamic that has them resistant to the uncomfortable, confining conditions under which they must operate while encouraging them toward self-discipline. Beckett's sets and elaborate props instill a culture of discipline among his actors in such a way that they eventually internalize the confines of performance in which he binds them. Not only must Beckett's actors endure being constrained and surveilled, they must also come to terms with and perform without the safety net of traditional stagecraft. In essence, the Beckettian performer must yield to a certain level of self-dissolution, which liberates the actor from the constraints of self and frees

them of their own preconceived expectations of stagecraft. While Beckett's actors are governed by narrow textual and physical parameters, they are also released from conventional performative constructs. In this way, Beckett's theater liberates his actors from the familiar and releases them from the constraints of self.

Images of surveillance, restriction, and carcerality are ever present in Beckett's dramatic works. Understanding the carceral, restrictive, and debilitating formations vital to the structure of Beckett's plays is enabled by careful application of Foucault's concepts of carcerality and panoptic surveillance. However, in exploring Beckett's use of surveillance, we must also question at what point the discomfort of being objectified by the Other becomes the spur of subjectivity in the Panoptic system. Beckett's appropriation of both the Panoptic model and the Sartrean gaze might most fittingly be described as a willful embrace of the precondition of Sartrean subjectivity. Beckett never totally abandons Sartrean concepts; however, as he takes on the discomfort and paralysis of the Sartrean model of dueling gazes, he also moves more toward the kinds of surveilling constructs that would later prove central to Foucault's Panoptic model. In this way, Beckett's use of surveillance and carceral formations anticipates the works of Michel Foucault. Like Sartre and Foucault, Beckett constructs for our careful deliberation a mirror of the prisons in which we daily position and reposition ourselves.

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