REHEARSING BECKETT

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

KATELYN ELDER

Submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

December 2011

Major: Theatre Arts

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Approved by:

Research Advisor: Kirsten Pullen
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ABSTRACT

Rehearsing Beckett. (December 2011)

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Irish playwright Samuel Beckett won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969. His Absurdist works are known worldwide for their near incomprehensibility to audiences as well as challenges for performers posed by his specific and structured stage directions. I chose to work with Beckett's *Play* in rehearsal; I was able to find new meaning in the script by straying from the original stage directions and applying performance as a research method.

To begin, I researched performance as research. The use of performance as a teaching tool is spreading beyond theatre into education, religion, and therapy. Furthermore, theatre artists are incorporating developing technologies to create unique performance experiences.

I also examined previous productions of Beckett works, looking at those that attempted to adhere to Beckett's original stage directions, along with productions that admittedly

altered the scripts. Any organization wishing to perform a Beckett piece is contractually obligated to follow the original stage directions. Beckett closed productions that violated these directions; his estate has continued the practice since his death in 1989.

This research informed my work with Beckett's *Play*. I experimented with various choices in casting, setting, and acting technique. By altering performance style, I was able to find new meaning in the piece with each new rehearsal and improvised stage direction.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
>
> (Beckett *Worstward* 1)

Nobel-Prize winning playwright Samuel Beckett wrote some of theatre's most intricate and complex stage directions. This is not the case in traditional modern American theatre. The stage directions in most contemporary scripts merely outline the way the play was staged at its premiere. Occasionally diagrams of set furniture and lists of costume pieces and stage properties are included. Although some script publishers regard these supplements as ways to insure literary merit, actors and directors commonly view them as documentation for posterity, rather than exact instruction or commandment. Beckett, however, wrote his stage directions to be followed exactly, and threatened those who did not with legal action and production closures.

In 1994, British director Deborah Warner directed Beckett's *Footfalls*, intending to take her production on tour in France. Beckett's estate closed the show, however, stating that Warner had violated the contract in which she obtained rights to perform the play. Warner had cut five lines of dialogue, and placed actress Fiona Shaw's character in a red

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This thesis follows the style of *Text and Performance Quarterly*.

dress, rather than a grey one (*The Garrick*). Her show ran one week on London's West End before being shut down.

Part of theatre's appeal is that no one production is ever the same twice. Actors stumble, timing gets off, light boards delay, technicians get distracted, and every audience reacts differently to the text. And yet, Beckett determines every minute detail of how his plays should look, sound, and feel. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, he lists exactly how many seconds should pass between actions onstage. In *Come and Go*, Beckett goes so far as to dictate that the actors' shoes should have rubber soles (Beckett *Collected* 196). So, what is the appeal of continually performing Beckett? Beckett eliminates many design, acting, and directing choices. He specifies where light should come from, the tonality of voice, and the position of the actors onstage. Is the challenge of Beckett, then, to be as exact as possible, to try and meet the playwright's demands? We cannot completely eliminate the night-to-night inconsistencies of a production, and yet Beckett's goal seems to be to standardize and regiment each performance. How does this apply to ever-improving technologies in theatre? Many of Beckett's set design instructions call for footlights; modern lighting design practices tend to eschew these in favor of new equipment such as LEDs and automated instruments. If artists are limited to decades-old performance practices, audiences may become uninterested and disenchanted. And yet Beckett is still popular, a seminal figure in playwriting and directing, and his plays are central to the canon of twentieth-century literature.

Perhaps Beckett's plays are attractive to directors because they are a challenge: merely getting the production to opening is a success, regardless of ticket sales, show reviews, or acting talent. Maybe directors choose his pieces because they revere Beckett as one of the pioneers of Absurdist theatre, and can trace his influence through the works of contemporary, non-realist playwrights, including Caryl Churchill, Walter Wykes, and Sarah Ruhl. Some argue, however, that Beckett's works are not appealing because they've all been done before; they have evolved from something novel to something repetitive and static.

I originally planned to examine both approaches by producing multiple versions of Beckett's *Play* and *Come and Go.* I intended perform each piece once, as originally written, followed by a performance of each using my own interpretation of the text and stage directions. Through this process, I wanted to explore Beckett and Absurdist theatre through my own and other actors' rehearsal and performance experiences, as well as gauging audience response to Beckett in performance. Due to time, resource and workforce constraints, I later chose to work solely with *Play* and an ensemble of six actors and to explore Beckett and Absurdist theatre through the rehearsal process, by applying performance as research and examining actor experience.

In my research, I came across many narratives of how Beckett should be done, and several accounts of directors who've successfully gone against the grain. These directors give Beckett's plays a new voice and new identity, forming Beckett's works into

something new. Even directors who choose to incorporate a new element into a Beckett work often do so hesitantly. In 1982, Margaret Jordan directed a filmed version of *Act Without Words I* that deviated from Beckett's staging only because the sole character was played by a puppet manipulated by several puppeteers. Jordan adheres to the stage directions almost perfectly; her only independent choice was in casting.

A few major productions have been closed by Beckett and his estate, most famously Warner's *Footfalls* and a production of *Endgame* directed by Joanne Akalaitis, discussed in Chapter II. Very little has been written on smaller productions that have been shut down, especially in educational settings. I visited a production of Beckett short plays at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon to observe the rehearsal process. In their production of *Breath*, the infant's cry that opens and closes the piece in the original script was cut altogether. In interviews with the cast, director, and lighting designer, I learned the cry had been cut because of logistic recording issues and time constraints. Margaret Smith, an actor in the *Beckettshorts* ensemble had been recorded several times, trying out different cries. Nothing suited Dr. Jon Cole, the director, and the recordings were omitted entirely. When I asked Dr. Rachel Steck, the production's lighting designer, about the possibility of a surprise visit from the Beckett estate, she replied, "I think it's bullshit" (Steck). She went on to discuss the importance of interpretation in theatre, and that if Beckett's works aren't open for interpretation and growth, theatre artists will quit performing them. Steck sees the educational setting as a safe space, and therefore free for exploration and deviation from the original. Recently, however, a

Beckett production at Michigan State University was forcibly closed because of a breech of contract with the Beckett estate. Information of these closings spreads almost entirely by word of mouth; I have not been able to find any published articles on closed university productions. This could be for several reasons; perhaps universities don't want the bad press of having a production closed, journalists have essentially nothing to write about because the production was never actualized, or maybe there just aren't many cancellations occurring in educational settings.

I rehearsed *Play* with six actors in August of 2011. *Play* was written in 1962 for one male and two female characters (*Collected* 146). All three are in urns in hell, and recount the story of their death, overlapping each other. The play represents two intertwined heterosexual romantic relationships; the male character (Man) is committed to one woman, and having an affair with the other (Woman 1 and Woman 2). *Play* is one of Beckett's longer and more famous short works, giving me adequate research to pull from and various previous productions to interpret, including a 2001 film adaptation directed by Anthony Minghella (Minghella). The script outlines minute details of the setting and action. It specifies where each urn is placed, that each is one yard high, that the actors should show very little emotion, and that the spotlight should come from below, centered between the footlights (*Collected* 147).

In my own interpretation, I chose to play a lot with gender in casting. I worked with an all female cast and an all male cast, along with combinations and overlappings of the

two. My goal for the pieces was to learn what it meant for the work to alter the stage directions. Academically, I wanted to know if and how actors in varied versions of the play experience plot, characterization, and theme. Artistically, I wondered what it meant to change the most delicate details, or to perform in public. I was especially interested to see Beckett's Absurdist theatre in plain sight. Through our work on campus and in the community, we saw *Play* figuratively hidden in plain sight, at times completely unnoticed and unacknowledged.

Another issue I faced in my work was deciding what to do about obtaining performance rights from the Beckett estate. With little time and no budget, attempting to follow the original stage directions would have been impossible; I wanted to expand the script, purposely violating all written directions. We knew that creating these performances specifically to go against the original intentions of the playwright might have drawn attention from the Beckett estate, in turn forcing Texas A&M University and the Department of Performance Studies to close the production. After multiple discussions of logistics and resources with faculty members, we decided to frame the endeavor as a class project, and worked with *Play* solely through acting exercises as a rehearsal piece.

In my research, I read scripts and watched filmed productions of Beckett's short plays, examining specificity in the stage directions. I analyzed casting requirements and design decisions, along with the onstage pacing, blocking, and line delivery. I also travelled to Willamette University in Salem, Oregon to study their recent production of

Beckettshorts, a presentation of five Beckett works, including *Breath, Act Without Words I, Rockaby, Act Without Words II,* and *Footfalls*.

CHAPTER II

PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH

Performance as a research method involves a kind of embodied learning that goes beyond text work. Carsten Friberg, philosopher and professor at the Danish Centre for Design Research, outlines performance as research as "research where the object of research is the practice itself, either while the practice is carried out or as a reflection on a practice the researcher has previously participated in" (20). Friberg further describes the technique as "research *about* or *into* practice" (21). Therefore, we learn by performance and practice, rather than about it. The name of the process has varied over geographic region and time, occasionally also called embodiment and practice-based research, or PBR (Friberg 11). By examining performance as a research method in case studies, we can see its benefits in education, theatre, and creating the "self."

Richard Schechner, New York University professor and "the father of performance studies," describes performance as research as an educational approach that generates well-rounded and prepared theatre students and artists. Schechner writes that this new approach started with his colleagues at NYU in the late 1960's, and is continuing to spread to many educational programs in North and South America, Europe, and Asia (907). He defines these institutions as "graduating the most advanced young artists, many of whom are well-versed in the theories that profoundly shape their thinking and practice" (Schechner 907). I have used performance as research in my class work

productions at Texas A&M, and found it especially useful in my work with non-Western and experimental theatre.

Friberg argues that practice-based research and traditional research methods are not mutually exclusive. When asked about subjectivity in performance research, he writes, "…practitioners of practice-based research (PBR) should not feel obliged to legitimize PBR as a research model in any particular way when confronted with a critique of violating ideals of objectivity" (Friberg 20). Performance as research differs from traditional scientific research methods in that often, the subject of the research is the researcher. However, according to Friberg's writing, this fact is irrelevant. Because practice-based research is a qualitative approach, rather than a quantitative one, the experience of the researcher/performer is at least as important as the research done and the data collected.

Expanding on Friberg's writing, Danish director Jette Lund argues that contemporary theatre is shifting from ancient Greek and traditional European models, where the actors and audience are distinctly separate, to a more integrated model, rooted in visual and social arts (Lund 39). Through audience participation and direct address, the line of demarcation between actor and audience is blurred, creating a space of engaged participants. Lund goes on to state, "[i]t can no longer be taken for granted or even intended that every member of the audience is experiencing the same *text*" (40). The collaboration between and merging of audience and actor transforms any performance

from passive to active, creating an opportunity for performance research for each party. I have observed this in my work with a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Amy Guerin, in which robot fairies flew over (and occasionally crashed into) audience members. Actors had to occasionally recover wrecked robots from audience members, creating a unique form of audience interation.

Studies show that performance is efficient as a learning tool in the classroom. Neil Fleming, professor at Lincoln University in New Zealand, created the VARK model of learning theory in 1987, identifying four main methods of learning, including visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic approaches (Fleming). Fleming has created a questionnaire system to help individuals isolate their own learning style. According to Fleming's most recent data, collected in September 2010, fifteen percent of individuals surveyed were identified as bimodal, and thirteen percent were found to be trimodal, although most were found to be at least primarily kinesthetic learners (Fleming). Kinesthetic learners retain information best when presented with real-life examples, hands-on opportunities, trial and error, field trips, and laboratory work (Fleming). Of the 40,000 surveyed, kinesthetic learning styles were most prevalent in students and teachers in art and performance art categories in Europe, the Middle East, South America, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Fleming). From this data, it is apparent that performance is a particularly strong method of research for theatre practitioners; Fleming's own website suggests role-play as a valuable teaching technique for kinesthetic learners (Fleming). Performance as research goes beyond role-play, however,

by incorporating acting technique, physicality, and text work into an educationally meaningful experience.

Technology is also being used as a medium for teaching students through performance as research. Using computer-animated, three-dimensional representations informed by archaeological findings and perspective wall paintings at ancient ruins, students can now virtually walk through historical theaters and performance spaces including the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens, temporary Roman theaters, and the first permanent theater structure in Rome, built in 55 BC by Pompey the Great (Beacham 143). These computerized renderings look much like those used by contemporary set designers, and allow students to walk through them, learning about historical theatre traditions, architecture, and performance spaces (Beacham 147). Richard Beacham, a professor at the University of Warwick, helped pioneer the technology, and has used it as a tool to speculate about the architecture of other ancient theaters. He says, "…I took a painting from the Room of the Masks in the House of Augustus at Rome and used it as a sort of Rosetta Stone to analyse a great many other paintings" (Beacham 147). He was then later able to create wooden and computer models based on his data (Beacham 147). Beacham is also leader of the recently completed THEATRON (Theatre History in Europe: Architectural and Textual Resources Online) project, in which his computer models were published online, where other theatre students and historians can visit and learn from them (Richard). Another advantage of the computer models is that they are editable, incorporating continual new archaeological evidence (Richard). Due to

Beacham's work, we can learn about past performance practices through hands-on technology, echoing the efficient learning methods outlined by Fleming and VARK. Furthermore, the technology allows educators, students, historians, and designers worldwide to explore the structures.

Converting canonical works to performance texts is also valuable in exploring and interpreting literature for students. This is exemplified in Gerald Lee Ratliff's writing on Reader's Theatre, wherein literary works are dramatized in classroom settings to create an appreciation for literature and spoken language (Ratliff 1). Ratliff's Reader's Theatre creates a space for students to role-play, experience visual and aural involvement, and to use the voice and body fully, while learning about various genres and styles of literature over time (4). He encourages teachers to convert all texts to theatre, complete with a physical set, lighting, sound, costumes, projections, and props, in order to achieve a fully active student population (Ratliff 16). Admittedly, Ratliff's approach seems a bit improbable with current education budget resources and constraints in the United States; however, bringing a text to life through embodied learning proves to be a consistent method of reaching students and making canonical texts understandable and relevant.

Sha Xin Wei, professor of fine arts and computer science at Concordia University, has taken the idea of kinesthetic learning to a new level. He and his colleagues created TGarden, a performative research project that involved audience members as actors, performing for themselves and each other. Combining emerging technology and the

influences of theatre directors Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, and Jerzy Grotowski, Wei created an interactive performance project in which each movement by actors created and changed the atmosphere, tone, and direction of the piece (Wei 586). Participants were dressed in costumes of different silhouettes, materials, and textures, each equipped with accelerometers, magnetometers, and bend and stretch sensors (Wei 589). The performance space itself was a small room equipped with cameras, projectors, and audio equipment (Wei 589). Through this technology, each actor's movement controlled audio and video projection output within the room, constantly changing the environment of the playing space.

The TGarden project allowed participants to interact with each other and technological elements, while observing the transformations and actions of the other human and abiotic elements, blurring the line between the two. The process allowed performers to act, react, and observe all at once. The project is one example of a learning experience that cannot solely be researched textually; the experience of creation was key to making the project successful. Because there were no paying audience members present, actors felt no need to perform in the traditional sense; they were free to explore and create as they pleased, creating a genuine educational experience for all involved. A project like this one is impractical, if not impossible to attempt outside of an educational setting, because it requires access to extensive financial and technological resources, with no intent in turning a profit (Wei 599). Performance as research is a vital tool in education because it provides opportunities for experimentation that commercial theatre cannot.

Wei refers to his participants as creators, saying, “there are no pure spectators and no pure actors in a TGarden, only players” (Wei 596).

In 2001, Susan Broadhurst, a professor of technology and performance at Brunel University in London, directed *Blue Bloodshot Flowers*, a practice-based research performance using artificial intelligence, motion capture technology, and three-dimensional animation, with collaborator Richard Bowden, a systems engineer at the University of Surrey (Broadhurst 47). The project is truly performance as research, incorporating discovery opportunities for performer, audience, and Jeremiah, an avatar created for the piece. Jeremiah is a projected image of a face, complete with human bone structure and the ability to display emotions in real time based on the recognition of visual stimuli through the use of a video camera fitted with a wide-angle lens (Broadhurst 50). Jeremiah is also capable of learning; he was originally programmed to communicate happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, but later developed a “boredom” expression he displayed when visual stimuli existed in his view, but were not moving (Broadhurst 50). The avatar was projected on the back wall of the performance space, where the video camera, his eyes, was also mounted. *Blue Bloodshot Flowers*, and text and movement piece, was performed onstage in two parts: the first of which was a movement piece with Jeremiah lurking in the background, reacting to the onstage action, and the second in which performers invited spectators to interact directly with the avatar, in order to explore and further develop the technology (Broadhurst 51). Audience members were also allowed to come in late during the performance, as each new arrival

solicited recognition and response from Jeremiah, and in turn entertainment for the audience (Broadhurst 52).

Creating characters like Jeremiah uses existing technology in a new way by applying it to performance endeavors. In the case of Jeremiah, the performance aspect is imperative in the development and use of the technology. Audience members participated in a form of interactive performance, exposing them to novel facets of technology, design, theatre, and science. Actors learned to work with a completely new type of scene partner, one that was distracted easily and incapable of hiding his emotions. Jeremiah himself learned continually through the performance process, expanding the simple rules written for him into a larger vocabulary of movement and emotional reactions (Broadhurst 54). Broadhurst and Bowden were able to successfully share this new application with the world, while simultaneously discovering it for themselves. Broadhurst writes, "the rehearsal process proved extremely stimulating and may prove ultimately more beneficial for research than the finished product" (Broadhurst 55). I have also worked with integrating technology and theatre in my class work at Texas A&M by using programs like Adobe Photoshop and Premiere Pro for set and projection design. Echoing the University of Surrey's work with Jeremiah, I was able to use performance as research to discover new applications for technology by applying it to conceptual theatrical design.

Performance can also be used to communicate previous research findings to a new audience. In one project, Canadian scientist Katherine Boydell took data collected in a study on children experiencing first episode psychosis, and presented it through dance (Boydell). She gave her qualitative data to a choreographer and dance company, and challenged them to interpret the findings and apply a movement and music vocabulary (Boydell). This project was an effort to explain and describe the symptoms of psychosis to service providers, policy makers, and families of patients (Boydell). For the dancers, the performance served as a research experience, and provided a better understanding of the way children experience first episode psychosis, while simultaneously offering a new genre of dance to discover. Boydell writes, "The dance performance allowed us to address the visceral, emotional, and visual aspects of our research which are frequently invisible in traditional academia" (Boydell). The performance allows for a more embodied understanding of psychosis that text sources alone cannot provide.

In an effort to explore the relation of cognitive theory and performance, Pil Hansen and Bruce Barton worked on and collaborated to write about *Vertical City*, an aerial act that featured performers enacting everyday activities. The presentation was a combination of visual art and the representation of empirical data acquired through experimentation. Hansen and Barton were toying with the idea that true memory does not exist, but rather that the human brain recreates memories, rather than remembering them (Hansen 123). This discrepancy makes room for creative processes that can be observed through performance. The project was originally the brainchild of Lorie Le Mare and Diane

McGrath, two aerialists interested in transporting a circus-based spectacle and repositioning it within the context of theatre; the pair hired Hansen and Barton as director and dramaturge, respectively (Hansen 123). Because humans recreate their memories, Hansen could give each performer the same stimuli to solicit a different response; each aerialist also had different methods of responding including differences in spatial orientation, physicality, repetition, and tempo (Hansen 125).

To further illustrate their findings, Hansen and Barton developed a warm-up exercise to use throughout the rehearsal and performance process. Before the 5-30 minute exercise, each performer was asked to think of a personal habit they would like to break, or an activity they would like to begin doing habitually (Hansen 126). Each was then asked to act out the habit, using their own movement vocabulary. Actors would then trade habits, trying first to mirror the action exactly, then recreating the action using their own movement vocabulary (Hansen 126). Hansen writes, "we all discovered which aspects of one another's skill-sets we were most attentive and attracted to (and which we were most distant from and disinterested in), as well as which we were most inclined to adopt and attempt to translate into our own familiar performance strategies" (126). Through the act of performance, both research theorists and aerialists were able to learn the details of how memory works for different types of performers, and how the same stimuli can yield different manifestations of physicality.

Performative research is also being used in religion and therapy as a vehicle for creating the self and defining a social group. By enacting pieces of history and creating new texts, individuals can find, reinvent, or create a label or category within the whole of human society. In *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*, Todd Eric Johnson and Dale Savidge trace the role of theatre in religion, and its evolution from ritual performance in ancient Chinese, Greek, and Egyptian societies (22). Johnson and Savidge discuss the idea that all ritual is at the very least performative, if not theatrical. They go on to state that "Christians legitimately look for traces of the spiritual in every human activity," leading to opportunities for the two to blur into one (Johnson 24). Christians have long been using performance to convey Biblical texts; we see this today in Christmas and Easter pageants, living nativity scenes, church choirs, film, and music, along with large Sunday services which often incorporate stage lighting, live music, and projections. These performances serve as a religious experience for both performers and audience members, and work to create a unified group identity. By participating in these types of performance, actors deepen their faith by discovering new facets of their beliefs. Johnson and Savidge argue that the ability to perform is God-given: "Made in the image of the Creator, we are creative" (26). They also cite examples of theatre in the Old Testament, and suggest that most biblical stories and accounts are scripts in themselves, passed down through oral history and storytelling traditions (Johnson 27).

Performance as research has also recently been found to be a therapeutic tool to handle grief. Theatre artist and professor at George Washington University Jodi Kanter writes

about using theatre as a means to confront and cope with death in her book, *Performing Loss: Rebuilding Community through Theatre and Writing*. She details one activity in hospice caregiver training in which participants were asked specifics about their own ideal death scenarios and funerals, saying, “Having consciously rehearsed their own deaths, hospice volunteers are then better prepared to be empathetic participants in others’ dying” (Kanter 33). By their own performance in this and other exercises like it, volunteers learned to empathize rather than sympathize, making them more informed actors. Kanter goes on to discuss performance as a way of creating and reestablishing the idea of a group self after national tragedy, providing examples of performative writing as a coping mechanism after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (87).

Playwright Michael Macmillan has done work with black men in the United Kingdom, using performance as research in a workshop setting as a vehicle to indentify, evaluate, and overcome prejudice and racism. Through years of colonialization and racism in the education system, Macmillan argues that black men have been oppressed and changed as a social group, stating, “[t]he severing of the mind from the body and the soul suggests a fragmentation of identity in the construction of black masculinities” (60). Macmillan facilitates a workshop in which black men are encouraged to celebrate and promote themselves and each other through improvisation games, poetry, and monologue writing (Macmillan 69). Through this process, participants used their own and each other’s stories as a catalyst for conversation, performance, and change, uniting the men and creating a sense of group self. Macmillan illustrates, “The workshop process, in the

context of performance, enables us to unpack difference in the heterogeneous construction of black masculinities by empowering the subject (61).

Performance as research has long been a technique used by directors and theatre artists. No matter the style or genre, a director must go beyond text work to produce a show. Performative research provides learning that requires the whole body; coupling physical action with textual research and analysis. Furthermore, performance helps to develop an ensemble of connected actors, able to create more intricate, complex work. Konstantin Stanislavsky took this approach to the extreme, however, with his acting Method. He went beyond performance as research, and directed his actors to act from the inside out, drawing on previous experiences and emotions to portray the events of the play. For him, there was no "acting," only "being," believing that action is legitimate only if it is real, and that there is no pretending (Mitter 7). At the age of six, Stanislavsky was said to have been in a play where a candle represented fire, and, feeling the action was not true, he knocked the candle over and lit the set on fire, because he was "ashamed at having to make believe" (Mitter 6). Shomit Mitter writes of Stanislavsky's approach, "In order to be, the actor must feel, and in order to feel, the actor must move from the self to the play via the mind" (11). Stanislavsky often asked his actors to create a backstory for their characters, in order to fully submerge themselves in the narrative. He encouraged actors to answer simple questions like "How old am I?" and "What is my profession?," along with more complicated tasks, including drawing a groundplan of the character's apartment, complete with furniture in every room (Mitten 11). Creating a simple

backstory can be a helpful approach to characterization; I have worked with this technique at Texas A&M in *The Trojan Women* and *Th3 B3ggar's Op3ra*, directed by Dr. Kirsten Pullen. It is important, however, for an actor to maintain the boundary between performer and character.

Studies have shown that approaches like that of Stanislavsky can in fact be emotionally detrimental, especially to young actors. University of Missouri professor Suzanne Burgoyne writes of post-show nightmares and emotional stress in students, and calls this phenomenon "psychological fall-out" (Burgoyne). Method acting creates a blurring of boundaries between actor and character, one that can be hard for an inexperienced or student actor to isolate or control. Inside-out acting approaches facilitate and encourage this; drawing on personal experience to create a fictional character can lead to emotional imbalance and distress (Burgoyne). Burgoyne interviewed five inside-out actors, and found that they experienced "emotional hangovers" after finishing a production (Burgoyne). One respondent, Jennifer, described acting as "emotional prostitution," and the director's role as that of a "pimp," while another interviewee, Allen, said of acting, "You forget who you are sometimes. You start intermingling with this character and you lose yourself…" (Burgoyne). While this approach can be beneficial in convincing an audience of a character's motivation in the short term, it is unnecessary and sometimes dangerous. Performative research, however, employs an outside-in approach, which has proven to be more efficient in creating more versatile and stable theatre artists. An outside-in approach privileges acting varied acting technique and knowledge over

submersion into a text. Whereas an inside-out approach begins with emotion to develop a character, and outside-in approach begins with physicality, including a character's walk, gestus, and speech patterns.

Because the actors in Burgoyne's original study were all inside-out actors, she opted to do a subsequent study, seeking out outside-in actors specifically. She interviewed three, all of whom agreed that the approach made it more difficult to identify with a character, but prevented the inadvertent boundary blurring Burgoyne discovered in the first study (Burgoyne). Some even described Method acting as "indulgent" and "unethical" (Burgoyne). The interviewees listed techniques they had been taught to prevent boundary blurring, including imagining how a character would appear from the audience, making lists of personality traits they liked and disliked about a character, and referring to the character in the third person, a historically Brechtian approach (Burgoyne). By clearly delineating the boundary between actor and character, students can be better prepared for playing multiple roles at once and adapting to new genres and styles.

Performance as research is an especially valuable method in my work and experiments with Samuel Beckett. Beckett's stage directions dictate that every show is performed the same, every time. This dissolves the need for highly skilled or educated directors, actors, and designers, stagnating modern theatre. For this reason, I want to explore and expand Beckett's *Play* through nontraditional casting, setting, and acting style. For a project like

this one, performance is really the only reasonable or viable research option. Dissecting with the original text can yield a finite number of readings, and writings on previous productions of nontraditional Beckett works are limited, due to the habitual closing of productions by the Beckett estate. Visiting a production of a Beckett work as an audience member is only possible with a production attempting to follow the original stage directions; without this attempt, a theatre company cannot get performance rights.

Play, as a standard representation of a Beckett work, is absurdist. The text is dense, repetitive, and for many, hard to sit through, let alone memorize. As a cast, we can discuss theme, tone, and writing style, as if the script were any piece of literature, but in truth, it just isn't. While possible approaches, these techniques just will not yield the same results, I would be unable to discover the nuances of the text, to get at "true" meaning. And true meaning for a piece like this will be different for every reader, actor, designer, and director. I would much rather echo the approach of Hansen and Barton, by giving the cast the text, the equal stimuli, with loose guidelines, and observing how the text, action, and delivery change with each new performer added to the mix.

I think this approach also works well with Neil Fleming's VARK model of learning theory. I will approach the project from a kinesthetic standpoint. By acting through the script, performers will learn and experiment with how each action feels in the body. By working as a cast and with the text, the actors will also learn aurally, visually, and through text read-throughs. In this way, performance as research appeals to all areas of

the VARK model, and provides the best opportunity for learning and discovery. This also coincides with Gerald Lee Ratliff's writings on Reader's Theatre. Ratliff argues that students learn best when provided with production elements and by converting literature to real life. While not all of Ratliff's suggestions are applicable or available for a studio rehearsal process, moving rehearsals to public locations will provide new and constantly changing elements of set, lighting, and sound. This will serve as a challenge for myself and my actors; learning to adapt the text to a new environment echoes Jette Lund's work with audience interaction.

When rehearsing in a public place, the line between audience and performer is often blurred, if visible at all. It is possible, although not probable that we will be able to rehearse in peace, without interaction from outside observers. When not clearly labeled as performance entertainment, and therefore "other," passersby are much more likely to interact, both positively and negatively. Our work will take that of Lund one step further, to examine the degree with which viewers engage the actors, and how they do so. I imagine that tone, tempo, and physicality in the performance will illicit different responses and reactions from passersby. This will serve as valuable research data for both the performers and myself.

Lastly, using performance as research on Beckett's *Play* will allow those involved to cooperate and unite as performers. This project has the potential to operate like Michael Macmillan's work with black men of the UK, through workshopping the piece together,

actors will leave not only with more knowledge of *Play* and traditional methods of absurdist theatre, but also the ability to use performance as a research method.

CHAPTER III

PREVIOUS PRODUCTIONS

In 1984, Joanne Akalaitis directed a now-infamous production of *Endgame* at The American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts (McCarthy 102). Instead of the nearly bare stage with two small windows called for by Beckett, Akalaitis chose instead to set the play in an abandoned subway station with charred subway cars as set pieces (McCarthy 102). Beckett and his publisher, Grove Press, took legal action, and the matter was eventually settled out of court, with Akalaitis agreeing to include a statement from Beckett in an insert in her program (McCarthy 102). The statement read as follows:

> Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theater production which dismisses my directions is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this. (McCarthy 102)

Akalaitis's choices and the media coverage that followed made the production famous, and sparked debates in educational and professional theatre circles about creative authority and authorial intent. The production inspired some theatre artists to attempt to produce more Beckett works in an effort to see what they could get away with, while causing many others to shy away for fear of Beckett, his publishers and representatives,

and possible lawsuits. By examining previous productions of Beckettian plays, we can see that no production complies with Beckett's original stage directions completely, but that performance as research yields continual discoveries in meaning, while creating opportunities to apply new design, directing, and acting techniques to Beckett's works.

Attempting to produce a Beckett work is notoriously risky. Beckett and his estate have threatened lawsuits to close many modern productions, yet many others seem to slide by for no particular reason. Directors, designers, and actors openly admit to changing small pieces of the scripts and stage directions to create new shows, to make them different than previous productions. Beckett himself seemed to make fairly arbitrary choices regarding his characters and texts, changing small details in the final stages of editing, and with each new translation of his plays (Gussow 33). For example, in an interview with biographer Mel Gussow in 1978, Beckett stated that when writing *Waiting for Godot*, he'd originally chosen the name Levy for Estragon's character, and that he wasn't sure why he changed the name (Gussow 33). Many argue that manipulations this minute do not alter the story being told, but only add to it.

Frank Galati also directed a production of *Endgame*, with the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago in the spring of 2010, using an ensemble cast in the four roles (Shanahan 467). Contrasting Akalaitis's production, the set for Steppenwolf's *Endgame* was true to Beckett's stage directions, including a nearly bare stage with two small windows high on the back wall, covered in small curtains (Shanahan 467; *Endgame* 1).

Galati chose to cut Clov's stage business of looking at the audience through a telescope, and instead decided to emphasize Clov's illusions to being observed (Shanahan 468). Cutting one element and playing up another was Galati's attempt to alter the text but compensating for the change. The Steppenwolf production also chose to omit a curtain call, as per Beckett's preference, according to what can be discerned from his personal notes (Shanahan 468). Reviewer Ann M. Shanahan found flaws in the show the night she saw it, however. Shanahan did not enjoy William Peterson's delivery of Hamm's lines, saying that some sections were monotone and less engaging, while others had active characterization (468). Overall, however, Shanahan found the production to be a good combination of original Beckettian intent and modern theatrical convention. I have found no production that has executed, or even pretended to execute, Beckett's original stage directions exactly. A production like the Steppenwolf seems to be the best alternative, admittedly a step away from the original, but continuing in an effort to keep the integrity of text.

While the Akalaitis *Endgame* production discussed above is one of the most well known examples of confrontations with Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* is one of his most famous works. It was his first published play, released originally in French as *En Attendant Godot*, and produced in Paris in 1953 (Gussow 8). The show has been produced often since, in different languages and countries, many with slight adaptations from Beckett's original. Some of these productions attempt to meet Beckett's original expectations and fail, while others make unapologetic alterations to the stage directions. In the summer of

2010, The Fugard Theatre and The Little Theatre, both in Cape Town, South Africa, produced versions of *Waiting for Godot* (Parsons 257). Both of these included biracial casts, echoing a 1980 production that featured a biracial cast, and was sanctioned by Beckett (Gussow 257). The Fugard production featured Ian McKellen as Estragon, and sound design by Paul Groothuis. Groothuis's design included water drips and howling winds at various points, which reviewer Cóilín Parsons found to be "unnecessary in a play that is itself so hauntingly musical" (Gussow 258). Though *Waiting for Godot* is one of Beckett's less specific texts, making his stage directions more ambiguous, Groothuis's design for the Fugard production went against usual stage conventions, and changed the meaning of the play. His howling wind and water sounds grounded the show in a more violent, weathered place, going beyond the ambiguity of Beckett's "A country road. A tree. Evening" (*Godot* 1). The casting of both productions also added an element of race politics not mentioned in the original text.

In 1998, The Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. produced an interracial *Waiting for Godot*, but with much more criticism from the Beckett estate. Joy Zinoman directed the production, and cast African-American performers as Vladimir and Estragon, and white actors as Pozzo and Lucky (Klein 191). A widely circulated, favorable review in *The New York Times* in September of 1998 attracted the attention of US literary agents representing Beckett's estate, who threatened legal action (Klein 191). Zinoman received a cease-and-desist order, along with other letters, phone calls, and faxes that she described to *The Washington Post* as "bullying" and "intimidating," all calling for her to

close the production (Klein 191-92). The press coverage only added to the show's appeal, and its run was extended for a month past the originally scheduled closing date (Klein 192). Georges Borchardt, Inc., a New-York based literary agency representing Beckett's estate demanded the cancelling of the show, accusing her of "injecting race into the play" (Klein 192). Beckett did not mention race at all in his original stage directions. Although casting two black actors opposite two white actors does change the show and add a layer of race politics, Beckett did not specify any casting instructions. Further, he had sanctioned the 1980 interracial South African production discussed above. This is a prime example of the subjective unpredictability of the Beckett estate. It is as though the estate is going beyond Beckett's original texts to create their own visions of his works, thus going against Beckett's intentions, themselves. The Studio Theatre also set the show at an abandoned drive-in movie theater, and surrounded the tree in a heap of shredded rubber (Klein 192). Like the issue of race in casting, these choices are not advised or condemned by Beckett's text, but Georges Borchardt, Inc. chose not to mention them in their grievances. The liberties taken with the set in the Studio Theatre production were no more or less jarring than those of Akalaitis's *Endgame*, but were never singled out by Beckett's representatives, thus suggesting further inconsistency in the enforcement of the playwright's original stage directions. This irregularity is what leads some directors to attempting Beckett works, hoping to get by with unnoticed script changes, further lessening the intimidation and reverence for agencies like Georges Borchardt, Inc.

Yuri Butusov directed a production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Lensoviet Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia that won Russia's Golden Mask award for Best Show and Best Work for the 1997-98 season (Farber 653). The show went against many conventional Beckettian techniques, including placing the action on a round platform located in the audience (Farber 653). The audience was placed on the stage floor in the auditorium, so that spectators saw the vacant seats behind the onstage action (Farber 653). Beckett's original stage directions simply call for "a tree" (*Godot* 1). The Lensoviet production chose an abstract approach, creating a wire frame tree with bits of leather to resemble bark, an electric light, and a waterspout (Farber 653). There were metal bars at arbitrary intervals that served as a ladder for Estragon to climb during one scene (Farber 653). The tree remained suspended overhead for the entirety of the show, creating a focal point for the audience (Farber 653). Butusov also used sound cues not mentioned in the original script, adding a piece at the top of the show and between each scene (Farber 653). Reviewer Vreneli Farber described the piece as a "loud and lively piece of recorded music" that "set a tone of manic gaiety" (653). The production also included varying intensities in the light cues, to evoke more emotion in the audience, and at one moment, a flashlight was shone onto one member, creating an element of audience participation (Farber 653). Butusov also chose to cut the intermission and move through the show quickly; the show averaged a performance time of an hour and forty-five minutes (Farber 653). This production was a condensed, emotional version, using lighting, sound, and audience participation to engage and elicit a response from the audience. The design and directing choices made in this production purposefully altered

the meaning of the play, and yet went unacknowledged by the Beckett estate and the publisher.

The American Conservatory Theatre presented a revival of *Waiting for Godot* at the Geary Theatre in San Francisco in 2003 (Westgate 303). The production took influences from Pablo Picasso and cubism, and featured a geometric stage design by J.B. Wilson (Westgate 303). The proscenium arch was fitted with an ornate, gold frame, which separated the action from the audience (Westgate 303). Then, to break this concrete fourth wall, props and costume pieces not in use were placed on the apron, outside the frame, but still onstage (Westgate 303). The actors also used direct address to engage the audience, similar to the Lensoviet production (Westgate 303). Reviewer J. Chris Westgate also stated that the timing was off between Peter Frechette (Vladimir) and Gregory Wallace (Estragon) during the first act, causing the action to appear disjointed and slow (301-02). Westgate found the second act to be better, and compared it to famous Abbot and Costello comedic routines (Westgate 302). The first act represents exactly what I find most interesting about Beckett: no matter how hard a playwright, director, or actor may try to make a piece consistent and concrete, there is no way to absolutely prevent alteration. Frechette and Wallace were performing the same characters they spent time developing and rehearsing together, and for whatever reason, the performance Westgate saw was flawed. Furthermore, there is no way to know if Westgate was right; each viewer experiences the same show differently, and has their own idea of its positive and negative traits. Westgate described the timing discrepancy,

saying "it violates the symmetry so carefully crafted by Beckett for the two acts" (302-03). The incongruity in timing between acts was likely not intentional, and one reviewer's perspective does not make the show unsuccessful. From my previous work in acting and stage management, I have found that performance itself is largely vulnerable and uncontrollable, no matter the amount of work put in during rehearsal.

Robert Wilson directed, designed, and performed as Krapp in a production of *Krapp's Last Tape* with Change Performing Arts with the National Theater of Korea in Seoul in 2010 (Kim 250). Wilson, designer, director and playwright, Obie Award winner and Pulitzer Prize nominee, performed at age sixty-nine, the same age as Krapp, the play's sole character (Kim 250). In doing so, he chose to blatantly change Krapp's character; Krapp is often thought to be loosely based on Beckett himself, but Wilson chose to base his characterization on his own life, "by means of his own idiosyncratic physicality and his choice of theatrical environment" (Kim 250). He used sound, lighting, and physical gestures to add meaning to the piece beyond the spoken text (Kim 250). Wilson also played the sound of a rainstorm at the beginning of the show, because he felt it represented an accumulation of Krapp's emotions throughout the piece (Kim 250). This cue lasted fifteen minutes, in which Krapp silently wandered the stage, listening to the storm (Kim 250). Beckett's text includes a direction that reads "Krapp remains a moment motionless…" in the beginning section of the script, but makes no mention of a sound cue, or a wandering actor (*Collected* 55). For a production that was admittedly based on Wilson's life, Wilson actually stayed fairly true to the original script. Krapp's

voice was cold and metallic, and served a good contrast to the recording of himself thirty years younger, which was very warm (Kim 252). Wilson spent two hours prior to every performance applying white makeup to his face, which he said was in an effort to blend into the blue light, but nevertheless fits with Beckett's description of Krapp (Kim 252; *Collected* 55). Reviewer Jae Kyoung Kim also found nods to Noh and Kabuki performance traditions in the piece, saying that at times Wilson moved incredibly slowly, similar to Noh performers, although this performance strategy is also part of Wilson's directing aesthetic (Kim 252). At other times, however, "[h]e […] made sudden and eccentric gestures with exaggerated facial expressions, like a marionette or a Kabuki actor" (Kim 252). Furthermore, Wilson added bits of stage business, including Krapp sitting silently and moving his hands (which were also colored white), watching them move between light and shadow (Kim 253). Through this method, Wilson was able to use *Krapp's Last Tape* as a vehicle for his own work, a way to explore Beckett by applying his own acting and design approaches. Despite deliberate changes from the original text, Wilson was never approached by Beckett's representatives.

In 2006, Xavier Marchand directed *Le Derniére Bande/Krapp's Last Tape*, a multilingual version of *Krapp's Last Tape*, at the Athénée–Théâtre Louis-Jouvet in Paris, featuring Henry Pillsbury as Krapp (Camp 485). Marchand billed the one-act as a full-length show, and presented it twice, once in French, immediately followed by an English version, played by the same actor on a projection screen (Camp 486). The original script was not written this way, although repetition is common in Absurdist

theatre and Beckett's works. Reviewer Pannill Camp writes of Pillsbury's Krapp during the French act, saying, "[h]e tentatively kicks his banana peel over the front of the stage and moves from action to action so deliberately that one imagines the stage directions as they are carried out," referring to the stage business that takes place before Krapp's first line (Camp 485). Marchand, however, was not satisfied with just one version of the show. Although this production is the closest to the original text I have come across, Marchand chose to add the English portion. Marchand claimed he chose to do the show in both languages in order to examine the linguistic difference between the two; this argument is further strengthened by the fact that Pillsbury speaks French with an American accent and English with a slight French accent (Camp 486).

Marchand's production is another example of a lack of appeal to performing Beckett exactly as it was written, even when a production company like this one has the resources to do so. Perhaps Beckett is boring or dated, as compared to twenty-first century avant-garde and Absurdist theatre. Or perhaps directors feel an exact enactment is impossible, and thus would rather attempt something new than try to fit the original Beckettian mold. In attempting a Beckett work as originally written, I feel that the only way to achieve "success" is to execute the stage directions exactly. The script is an instruction manual, anyone who can pay attention and follow directions can produce Beckett. The fun part for me, though, comes in applying performance as research, coupled with new design and acting choices, and observing how the play's meaning changes.

Camp also reviewed a production of *Happy Days* that ran in 2006 at the Comédie-Française–Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris, directed by Frederick Wiseman (Camp 485). The show was in French, but also incorporated bits of Americana, including an emergency alert system attention tone, similar to that played on American radio stations (Camp 487). This was used at the beginning of each act to call attention to the audience and Winnie, played by Catherine Samie (Camp 487). Wiseman is an American director, and played Willie himself, opposite Samie, a French actress, furthering the dichotomy (Camp 486). Winnie spends the show buried in sand, however the sand in this production was assigned to costume designer Paul Andreu, rather than the set designer (Camp 487). Andreu chose to place Winnie in a large hoop skirt to resemble the hill of sand (Camp 487). Camp writes, "[r]ather than appearing to be gradually submerged by the earth, she seemed to emerge from the abdomen of a huge insect" (487). Camp further noted that Winnie's movement was more restrained in the second act, but that her costume, overall, was odd and distracting (487). Similarly to the Marchand production, Wiseman's approach had the potential to be very close to Beckett's original, but was pulled away with layers of multilingual and multicultural context.

Joanne Akalaitis returned to Beckett in 2007 with the New York Theatre Workshop and a production entitled *Beckett Shorts*, which featured renditions of *Act Without Words I*, *Act Without Words II*, *Rough for Theatre I*, and *Eh Joe*, all of which featured Mikhail Baryshnikov (Goodlander 464). This time Akalaitis paid special attention to recurring tropes in Beckett's work, including repetition and a regard for the undeniable past.

About eleven strips of scrim stood between the audience and the stage as viewers entered, and were raised and lowered between each play (Goodlander 464). Between plays, still images of the previous show were projected onto the pieces of scrim, creating a repetitive loop (Goodlander 464). In *Act Without Words I*, the stage floor was covered in sand, so that the actors' footsteps were always visible, creating "visible traces of the actors' movements, giving a sense of past as it moves forward" (Goodlander 464). On the back wall, there was another projection screen, which alternated between live video feeds from each of the wings (Goodlander 464). This added a metatheatrical element, reminding audience members that they were only seeing from one perspective, and that all other spectators and crew members were each getting a unique view. While adhering to Beckett's general writing aims, Akalaitis deviated from many of the smaller, yet more specific, stage directions. For example, in *Act Without Words II*, the goad entered from stage left, rather than as scripted from stage right (Goodlander 464; *Collected* 49). Beckett's scenery directions for *Rough for Theatre I* state simply, "Street corner. Ruins" (*Collected* 67). Akalaitis, however, chose to place her actors on a bare stage. In *Eh Joe*, a woman's voice is heard, but she is never visible; Akalaitis placed her in a chair stage left, isolated by light from Joe on stage right (*Collected* 202; Goodlander 465). Placing the woman (played by Karen Kandel) onstage changed the meaning of the play greatly (Goodlander 464). Reviewer Jennifer Goodlander writes, "[a] play about individual suffering became a play about a woman scorned" (465). *Eh Joe* was also written for television, Akalaitis chose to compensate for this by projecting a live feed of Joe onscreen (*Collected* 200; Goodlander 465). These may seem like minute details, but

after the fiasco that was the 1984 *Endgame*, one would expect Akalaitis to be extremely cautious.

As part of my research, I travelled to Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, in October 2010 to observe their production of *Beckettshorts*, which featured *Breath, Act Without Words I, Rockaby, Act Without Words II,* and *Footfalls*, all directed by Dr. Jonathan Cole. As an educational endeavor, the Willamette production attempted to follow the original stage directions whenever possible, but was limited by resources and the performance space. The plays took place in the Willamette Playhouse, a newly renovated space with one large theater. The set was similar to Akalaitis's *Beckett Shorts* production, in that *Act Without Words I* was performed in a sand strip. The entire set was covered in broken bricks and pieces of cardboard, as there was not much movement blocked across the stage.

Breath, the first show each night, was utterly unsuccessful. The play calls for a stage covered in miscellaneous rubbish, which was accomplished by the bricks and cardboard. *Breath* consists of darkness, the cry of a baby, lighting that slowly fades in, and then out, and then the baby's cry is repeated. Beckett describes the cry as an "[i]nstant of recorded vagitus," or the first cry of a newborn baby (*Collected* 211). After recording a crew member in a few attempts at a realistic sounding vagitus, the Willamette company chose to cut the element altogether. *Breath* was listed in the program as the first play, but was unrecognizable as such. Without the vagitus, the show was transformed from a play

about rebirth to a misplaced light cue. To those who were familiar with the original work, it was frustrating, and to those unfamiliar with it, *Breath* just incited confusion and questioning, leading an audience of students who were whispering to each other and frantically flipping through their programs into *Act Without Words I* baffled and surprised.

Act Without Words I came much closer to fulfilling the original text. The original music to accompany the piece was written by the playwright's cousin, John Beckett (*Collected* 42). The Willamette production, however, chose to use a piece by American composer Phillip Glass, as did the Akalaitis *Beckett Shorts* (Goodlander 464). In *Act Without Words I*, Cole stuck close to the original stage directions, and seemed only to be limited by the performance space. The text calls for various whistles coming from both wings and above; however, all whistles came from the same crew member, located on the catwalk. Student set designer Rachel Hohler used the catwalk and a system of pulleys to create a modified fly system, capable of flying props in and out. This worked fairly well for *Act Without Words I*, but proved distracting, because audience members could see each prop for the entirety of the production. After a prop was used, it simply flew back up and rested against the grid. The audience could see what was coming next, because it would start to wiggle as crew members began to work the pulleys. This also meant that several crew members were located on the catwalk for the entire show, and could only be masked partially, because they needed to be seen by the stage manager, while still being able to see the action onstage. These crew members, however, added an interesting

element to the play. We could see that Man was in fact not alone; rather, he was acted on by several outside forces. While the Willamette students regarded the play to be "[a] mime for one player," as written, there was a visible ensemble of antagonists. Another roadblock the Willamette company encountered was the pair of scissors used as a prop. The original text calls for tailor's scissors, which Man uses to trim his nails, and later uses to cut a length of rope that falls from the flies. The rope had to be strong enough for Man to climb on, and therefore was not thin enough to be cut by scissors. Cole instead chose to use gardening shears, which cut the rope easily, but looked awkward and painful when actor Dan Boarman used them to trim his nails in the beginning of the play. This presented an interesting obstacle that could only be found by employing performance as research, by attempting to produce the work. This is why performative research is important in my own work and experimentation; exploring a text using actors yields new opportunities and challenges that reading the text alone cannot provide.

For *Rockaby*, a rocking chair was placed downstage right, and controlled from underneath by a crew member who used a pole inserted through a trap door to manually rock the chair, echoing Beckett's "Slight. Slow. Controlled mechanically without assistance from w[oman]" (*Collected* 274). The chair was also covered in branches, in an effort to make it seem foreign and confining, which fit Beckett's direction of "[r]ounded inward curving arms to suggest embrace," but neglected to be "[p]ale wood highly polished to gleam when rocking" (*Collected* 273). Woman's costume and makeup, designed by Bobby Brewer-Wallin, fit the text description almost perfectly, but lacked

sequins. The actress, Acacia Danielson, looked prematurely old, with a pallid, sunken-in face and hands. *Rockaby* was Willamette's most successful show, in terms of following the original stage directions. It was also a good show to choose because it is confined to one actor, and the stage directions, though very particular in regards to casting, lighting, costume, set, blocking, and characterization, are detailed and easy to follow.

Act Without Words II followed *Rockaby*. The short play was performed on a boardwalk along the back wall of the space. Hohler wanted the set to feel like an abandoned Coney Island, and added a skeletal Ferris wheel behind the boardwalk, scattered with incandescent light bulbs (Hohler). This choice, though not expressly suggested or denied in Beckett's text, fit well with his description of how "[t]his mime should be played on a low and narrow platform at back of stage, violently lit in its entire length […]" (*Collected* 49). Beckett never explicitly states that both characters A and B should be men, but refers to them both as "his" throughout the script (*Collected* 49-50). Due to the demographic of the Willamette Theatre Department, and the actors who auditioned, A was played by Emily Golden, and B was played by Aaron Smith. The cross-gender casting of A added an element to the play, creating further contrast between the awkward, clumsy A and the energized, quick movements of B. Beckett also calls for a changing goad, that enters first "strictly horizontal," later supported by one wheel, then two (*Collected* 49, 50). Because of wing space and complications in constructing the goad, the Willamette production used only one goad, it had multiple wheels on two axles. In an interview with Golden, I asked how she remembered to perform each action,

and in order each night. I asked how leaving out something small, for example, if she forgot to eat the carrot, would change the piece, if it all. She felt that the integrity of the play would still remain, and that the minute stage directions had little to do with the tone of the piece, overall (Golden). In dress rehearsal the next night, she in fact forgot to eat the carrot.

Footfalls rounded out *Beckettshorts*, with Alex Kimmel as May and Margaret Smith as the offstage voice. Brewer-Wallin's costuming of May was not as seamless as his work with *Rockaby*. He placed Kimmel in a long, pale blue gown, with a train that only partially satisfied Beckett's "[…] worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing" (*Collected* 239). As if to remedy this discrepancy, Brewer-Wallin fitted the train with metal pieces, and the bottom of Kimmel's shoes with sandpaper, brilliantly achieving Beckett's "clearly audible rhythmic tread" (*Collected* 239). Hohler's design included a walkway longer than Beckett's original, as the stage in the space was very wide. This threw off the count of Kimmel's steps, but was only noticeable to a audience member following along with a script. While there were small inconsistencies with text, *Footfalls* overall was hauntingly beautiful and well executed.

My research at Willamette University provided insight on the rehearsal and performance process for a Beckett work, I learned just how much attention to detail is required to pull off such an endeavor. Even with the slight deviations from the original scripts, and the obviously missing vagitus in *Breath*, none of the faculty seemed concerned about a

lawsuit, or even an appearance by a representative of the Beckett estate. There is a belief in educational theatre that it is a safe space, a haven for exploring alternative readings of Beckett's original texts.

CHAPTER IV

REHEARSING BECKETT AND CONCLUSION

In my work with Beckett, I chose to use performance as a way to research *Play*. The show calls for two women and one man; I cast one man and one woman in each role, creating an ensemble of six. Through a series of thirteen exercises over the course of four days, we were able to explore the script through various casts and various acting techniques in multiple locations.

Play was first written in German, as *Spiel*, in late 1962-3, and translated into English in 1964 by Erika and Elmar Tophoven (*Collected* 146). The stage directions are quite extensive and precise; the script also includes specific notes regarding the lighting, set, and line delivery (*Collected* 158). The original text stipulates that each actor should perform from inside an urn one yard tall, with Woman 2 stage right, Man in the center, and Woman 1 on stage left (146), with a spotlight shone on each actor's face (158) as they speak (*Collected*). Beckett's makeup design is also intricate, involving faces "lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns" (*Collected* 147). Requirements like these were impossible for me to attempt with a limited budget, time, and workforce. Instead, I chose to manipulate the text in order to see how *Play* changed when elements like cast members, line pacing and delivery, and performance location changed. I wanted to practice different techniques with the text, to learn from the rehearsal process.

I cast three men and three women so that I could experiment with the original casting and reverse casting (two men and one woman), along with an all-female cast, an all-male cast, and simultaneous and overlapping castings. We chose to meet for two hours an evening on August 9-12, 2011, using theatre department space, along with other locations on the Texas A&M University campus, and in the community. Actors were asked to come in familiar with the text; most of them were also familiar with Beckett from their class work and individual research in preparation for rehearsal. Thus, I had a cast of six, who had a basic knowledge of Beckett's works and Absurdist theatre conventions.

On the first day, I met the cast in department's green room on campus for our first read. The first time through, I had the original script cast read, while the alternate cast watched. We then swapped, and the alternate cast read aloud. While I found it very interesting to hear the text live, the cast members did not seem to gain much further understanding from the exercise. It felt like a normal first read for them, a chance to discuss the show together for the first time, find out more about the project, and skim the text as a group. By just reading, however, the actors did not seem to gain any knowledge or insight they did not come in with previously. This fits with Fleming's VARK model, and necessitates further exploration into the text.

After the read-throughs, I took the female cast to H_2O Fountain on campus, a site I had been very excited to work with. The fountain is shaped like a water molecule, with three

large brick bowls. I had originally wanted to place one actor in each bowl, and watch the performance from a few yards away, so that I could simultaneously gauge the response of other students who walked by. The site looked especially promising at the time because there was no water in the fountain, which I thought would add a level of actor comfort. I placed the actors in the order the script dictates, Woman 2, Man, and Woman 1, from audience left to right. I stepped back and set up a camera, hoping to get video footage of the cast and passersby. Construction in the area, however, made it impossible for me to hear the actors' voices. I began to walk around the perimeter of the fountain, and soon realized the actors could not hear each other, either. They were floundering, their faces looking to me confused and frustrated. I let them go on a few minutes longer, and watched how they adapted. Woman 1 and Woman 2, played by Tori Dominguez and Kara Poole could not hear each other at all, and thus were looking to Man, Jamie Betik, for cues. All the while, not wanting to stop performing until I told them to do so, all three actors tried to time the placement of their lines among those of the other two. In the space between their lines, the actors would break character entirely, trying to scoot closer to each other, and motioning to me that they couldn't hear their cues. It was no longer a performance for them, it was muddling through an unsuccessful experiment. But the performance presented a new read on the script, a trio of disjointed figures, who could do nothing but yell their lines, desperately hoping for acknowledgment and understanding. It was as if each character was speaking a different language, looking for me to translate or intervene. The actors saw this exercise as a mess, a interesting attempt,

but not worth completing. We stopped just less than halfway through. But without using performance as research, we could not have distilled this unique version of *Play*.

After the (assumed) fiasco of the fountain, I took the actors to the Sterling C. Evans Library, the main library on campus. We sat in a study area in the lobby, among other students reading, working on computers, visiting with each other, and walking through. I sat the actors on three couches, with Man in the middle, facing forward, Woman 2 to her right facing Woman 1 directly across from her, on Man's left. I sat a few feet away to observe and take video footage. I told the actors to speak softly, so as not to disturb anyone, but to finish the entire play, regardless of disturbances or acknowledgement from passersby. Not to my surprise, the cast was largely ignored, probably presumed to be just another study group in the lobby. The performance had no defined captive audience, but everyone who walked past at least glanced to see what was happening. The moments where the cast spoke in unison captured the most attention, because their collective voices were louder than the surrounding conversations and the noncolloquial language stood out as foreign. One man who had been studying on a couch directly behind Betik stood to pack his backpack, became distracted, and watched the action for about a minute. He then dismissed the group, and walked away quietly. The library work served as a good icebreaker, getting the cast used to performing in public.

We then walked next door to the Library Annex, and performed in a bank of elevators. We took turns riding an elevator to the top floor and holding it there, so that we could

eventually occupy each elevator by calling it on the first floor. I placed one actor in each of the building's three elevators. Each actor was isolated from the others, and was told to read their lines aloud, and those of the other two silently, so as to the keep the timing close to consistent. I sat on the top floor waiting for the cast to finish, and occasionally calling an elevator to observe the actor inside. After they finished performing, each actor was instructed to push the button for the top floor, where we would all meet back up. Dominguez finished first, closely followed by Betik and Poole. This was version a of *Play* I only caught glimpses of, and thus relied heavily on what the actors had to say about the process.

I was very surprised at how dedicated each woman was to maintaining her character, despite being in close quarters with new and ever-changing spectators. Despite rather vague instructions from me on how to react to other students, none of the actors spoke to anyone, and interacted very little when spoken to. I was especially surprised that after the fountain exercise, where the women continually broke character, looking around at each other and me, trying to hear and be heard, they were so willing to be alone in an elevator, knowing going in that they would not be able to hear each other at all. They each stood in a corner of the elevator, Betik and Poole in the backs of theirs, and Dominquez in the front of hers. Betik had the most interaction with others, some asked if she was in theatre, to which she simply shook her head yes (Betik A). One student recognized her from a previous departmental show; Betik replied with a smile (Betik A). Another student asked what she was doing, and rather than speak, Betik tilted her script

so that the student could see what she was doing (Betik A). Poole said that people in her elevator tended to talk over her, making small talk with each other in order to avoid an awkward interaction with her, although one person looked at her and said, “This is weird” before quickly leaving the elevator (Poole A). The actors said that a few students mentioned seeing another actor in an elevator previously, and that for the most, they were left alone. They also mentioned that going into the exercise, they were skeptical and unsure, but that by the end, the performance was fun and worthwhile.

From where I was sitting on the sixth floor, I had no interaction with students riding the elevators. By repetitively calling the elevators, however, I could view the actors alone, and watch how they reacted to the process and me. The actors became so enthralled in reading and timing themselves, and the elevator stops were so frequent, they did not always notice that they had stopped directly in front of me, or that they were being watched. To my amazement, the timing of the elevator doors opening and closing worked very well with the timing of the lines. On multiple occasions, the doors would open just as a line was beginning, and would end just as the doors began to close. For the actors, this was uncontrollable, they did not request any stops, and had no way to know when or where the car would stop next. The performance served as a very interesting and engaging way to experience *Play*; I could follow along in the script to get a general idea of where the actors were, and was surprised at how close they stayed throughout the process. All three finished within a minute of each other. The actors also talked about how they could occasionally hear the person next to them as the cars passed each other.

They couldn't usually hear well enough or consistently enough to cue off of each other, but could at least find where the other was in the script. This created an ominous spectacle, magnifying the eerie tone of the original script. I was also surprised that we weren't asked to leave. We were in a public space, and had commandeered every elevator in the building to make art. We were encroaching on students' personal space, and holding audience members captive until they reached their floor. Aside from Poole's experience with one particular student, no one complained to the actors or the library staff. Perhaps this was because we performed during the summer, when library traffic was lower and the staff was smaller, or perhaps because people dismissed the actors as theatre students doing another nontraditional class project. No matter the reason, the experiment taught us how performance not framed as such can be easily dismissed or overlooked, and how easy it is to get away with Absurdist performance in plain sight.

Day two of rehearsal began with the male cast performing at a local Starbucks. The cast was told to go in, order drinks if they wanted to, casually sit together at a table, and to begin reading when I walked in. I was accompanied by Dr. Kirsten Pullen, Texas A&M performance studies professor and my research advisor. We also sat casually at a table near the cast and watched. Brock Hatton, Andrew Roblyer, and Lee Barker played Man, Woman 1, and Woman 2, respectively. The three sat a circular table in the middle of the room, surrounded by other students and community members. They read no louder the other conversations going on around them, and were largely ignored by the customers in the busy coffee shop. Pullen and I walked through the store, pretending to look at

merchandise so that we could see the actors from all angles. The men momentarily caught the eye of a barista when they were speaking in unison, but he quickly dismissed them. The only person who really seemed to take notice was an older man sitting across the room, who watched them absent-mindedly off and on through the performance. He may have found it interesting, but didn't find the idea strange or out-of-the-ordinary enough to point it out to the other man he was having coffee with. The group fit in seamlessly, they appeared no different than the study groups that frequent that particular Starbucks.

The actors were quite uncomfortable with the experience. Roblyer had especially strong grievances, because the performance took place in a public place of business without Starbucks's prior knowledge or permission (Roblyer A). Roblyer, a personal friend, went so far as to say that if the exercise had not have been for my research, he would have refused to participate (Roblyer A). Hatton also felt nervous during the exercise, and chose to highlight his lines in the script throughout the performance, in an effort to appear as though he was doing homework. He said that highlighting made him feel better, more like he was there for a purpose (Hatton A). This was interesting to me because the exercise seemed much less disturbing or intruding on other people's space than the elevator exercise with the women the previous evening. The few customers and employees who actually noticed the male cast seemed not to care at all; no one approached them or asked about the performance. The actors were not the most conspicuous group in the coffee shop that evening. There was a group of three girls in

matching t-shirts representing an organization on campus, sitting at the next table, have a normal conversation. They were louder and more animated than my cast, who had been directed to deliver their lines monotone and quickly. The girls, however, were also ignored; the customers seemed to keep to themselves, and were most concerned with their own conversations and company. Performing in this way was another example of how a theatrical performance, even of a piece as strange and dark as *Play*, can be completely overlooked in public.

After leaving Starbucks, we met up with the female cast at College Station Cemetery. Pullen led a discussion of the script and of the project up to that point, and fielded questions from the cast. Afterward, she led an ensemble building exercise with the cast and me. We all sat in the grass in a circle facing outward shoulder to shoulder. Pullen directed us to take a moment to focus, then to each tell a story to the group. We sat in silence for several minutes before anyone spoke. In that time, we became as one, the group melded into a single entity of body and voice. I was sitting between Poole and Roblyer; Roblyer was the first to speak, and by the time he did, I had forgotten whom I was sitting next to. The first round of stories were long and incongruous, they were disjointed fragments of each person's day or past. When we had all told our first story, Betik began to tell another. We continued going back and forth, telling multiple stories apiece. The stories became shorter, more anecdotal, and related to each other. One person would tell a story, and someone else would immediately follow with a story on a similar topic. At first, we felt that our stories were bad or not worthwhile, but got more

comfortable as time went on. We realized that the exercise was not about the stories or their content, but rather about coming together as a group, feeling each person's story in all our bodies. Pullen noticed that in the space between the first and second rounds of stories, birds began to sing for the first time in the evening. I was so focused on the ensemble, however, I neglected to notice. The performance of our stories helped the cast come together and be comfortable with one another, the cast performed better and was more dedicated to the exercises for the rest of the week.

The third day of rehearsal consisted of work on campus with no audience. I worked first with the alternate cast reading with inflection, as per their request. This was neglecting the stage directions completely in order to find new meaning in the script. I told each actor to develop a character for themselves, and a backstory if they felt it would be helpful. They then read through the script, each actor performing as his own unique character. The script repeats once entirely, and after the first time through, I stopped the actors and had them switch characterizations with each other. They used the pieces of characterizations they heard from each other to build their own. Betik adapted that of Barker, Roblyer that of Betik, and Barker that of Roblyer.

The actors found the exercise especially helpful in discovering meaning in the text. Simply reading the original text, even as the stage directions instructed, did not yield the vivid characterizations the actors applied to them. Roblyer found that the inflection made the script easier to understand because it gave the play context (Roblyer B). Barker

remarked that switching characterizations caused him to pay more attention to the text (Barker A). When asked about his backstory for Woman 2, Barker said he had decided that "the man forced himself into the relationship;" Betik incorporated the characterization as "timid and submissive" (Barker A; Betik B). Betik identified her original version of Man as a "pretentious guy, and entitled;" Roblyer distilled that to "British and uppity" (Betik B; Roblyer B). Roblyer played his Woman 1 as "indignant and angry" and accidentally applied a Southern accent; Barker incorporated this as "Southern, but more of a whore than a debutante" (Roblyer B, Barker A). Roblyer found Barker's accent especially convincing, saying, "It was weird to hear that voice come of Lee [Barker] because I had just done it" (Roblyer B). The gender politics in this exercise were the most interesting element to me. This was the alternate cast, and therefore cross-gendered from the beginning. Each actor created a characterization for their assigned gender, but did not adopt a new gender with the new characterization. Betik played Barker's timid and submissive woman as a timid submissive man, and so forth. From an observer's perspective during the second characterization, I was watching Betik, a woman, play Man, with the characterization I had just seen portrayed by Barker, a man playing a woman. Having a passive Man changed the entire tone of the piece, as compared to the original script and the first rendition with inflection. By performing these different roles, and compounding them by applying them to each other, the cast was able to develop several new reads on the text, and the exercise created opportunities for limitless others to arise.

Next, we brought in the original cast and began to play with having both casts perform simultaneously. I staggered all six actors in front of mirrors in the department's green room, in the hopes that both casts would watch each other, creating a sense of community between the two. I put the alternate cast closest to the mirrors in the order Beckett suggests, Barker, Betik, and Roblyer, from left to right. Original script cast members Poole, Hatton, and Dominguez, were each placed just behind and to the right of their script cast counterpart, to create visual windows so that each actor could see the reflections of the others. I told the actors to read monotone and fast, and to identify with their casts, rather than their character counterparts. The actors did the opposite. A certain solidarity developed with the counterparts, when someone would stumble over a line, the counterpart would pause and wait for him or her to catch up. If an actor got lost entirely, the counterpart would continue on, steadfast, and the lost actor would jump back in mid-line. The voices of the counterpart characters melded into one, and when all six actors spoke at once, the lines were utterly unintelligible. There were times when the character counterparts, at first the two Women 1 and then the two Men, seemed to take the lead of the group, raising their volume to be heard and give cues to the other four actors.

Because they were reading, the actors tended to look down at the script rather than at each other. When asked about the influence of the mirrors, Poole remarked that she never looked up, while Hatton said he would look to his counterpart "after a long line was over, and I was proud of us for getting through it" (Poole B; Hatton B). Dominguez described the simultaneous performances saying that it offered her character a "second

insight" and that her character "had a conscience and could hear itself" (Dominguez A). Roblyer found a sense of camaraderie in his counterpart, describing the characters as "two people with the same story seeking the same thing from each other," and mentioned that it was much easier to keep his voice monotone (Roblyer B). Betik and Hatton seemed to develop a strong character counterpart bond during the reading, Betik said that when all six actors read at once, she concentrated on Hatton's voice and relied on him to pull the pair through (Betik B). I asked the cast if they felt like they could rely on their counterpart, and Betik replied, "Yes, it's okay if I mess up, he's there. It's reassuring" (Betik B). Hatton also noticed that during most of the performance, he and Betik breathed in unison (Hatton B). I designed the exercise as two casts simultaneously performing two plays, but the actors viewed the resulting performance as one play with a double cast. Using performance as research allowed each cast members to work with their character counterparts, creating a *Play* of dialogue and relationship beyond the cast outlined in the original text.

In an effort to have the actors identify as separate casts, I had the two separate from each other, and perform again, this time racing. Each cast sat very close together on opposite sides of the room and performed, monotone and fast, as in the mirror exercise. They read through the script up to the repeat, a sequence that usually took eleven minutes; the casts finished in five minutes, forty-five seconds. The two began disjointed, but synced up fairly early on. Once the casts were together, they never separated again for very long. One would pull ahead, but the other would shorten the time between lines and close the

gap. As the play went on, the actors began to again identify with their character counterpart once again. At one moment, Barker and Poole, representing Woman 2 from each cast, stumbled over the same line and hesitated before continuing, in perfect unison. Betik (Man, alternate cast) said she noticed herself waiting for cue lines from Dominguez (Woman 1, original script cast) (Betik B). Roblyer described the exercise as creating a "defined sense of urgency" (Roblyer B). The actors reacted physically as well, mentioning that by the end they were sweating and their abdominal muscles were engaged (Hatton B; Roblyer B). They also noticed that certain buzzwords in the script, like "Liptons" and "mower" were spoken more loudly, almost in a subconscious effort to keep the two casts aligned (Barker A, Hatton B, Roblyer B). While specifically instructed to work as a cast, in competition with their counterparts, the actors still aligned vocally with their counterparts and both casts finished within a fraction of a second of each other. Perhaps this was because the exercise immediately previous had set a standard, or perhaps this phenomenon happens often in this type of situation. Regardless of cause, this event would not have even been observable without employing performance as a research method.

The final day of rehearsing began at College Station Cemetery. I overlapped the casts, using two 2 Men, 2 Women 1, and 1 Woman 2. I placed the actors standing in a horizontal line between two rows of graves, each actor about ten feet apart, using Barker's Woman 2 as the center pole, flanked by Hatton and Betik as Men to his sides, and Roblyer and Dominguez as Women 1 beyond them. The actors were told to cue off

Barker, as the leader and center. The actors could not always hear each other speak, but could always hear Barker, who kept the cast on track. Having one Woman 2 seemed to have a drastic affect on the story being told in *Play*. The original text calls for Man to the be in the center as the focal point, whereas this exercise privileged Woman 2, Man's mistress. Betik described Woman 2 as "one single voice, opposite group chanting" (Betik C). Roblyer remarked, "[Woman 2] was the center of the piece. I saw her story pop more. The piece became about how the others related to her" (Roblyer C). When asked if, and how the setting affected the performance, Hatton mentioned he realized the gravity of where he was when a man drove by, staring at the group (Hatton C). The overall tone of the piece was somber, although the actors' volumes were higher, in an effort to be heard across distance. Performing with an overlapping, cross-gendered cast also served to create new meaning in the text, distinguishing a marked protagonist.

In our penultimate exercise, I instructed each of the actors to walk to a spot on the property they found particularly interesting, and to read solely their lines, as a monologue. Each actor chose a headstone to read to, and incorporated the deceased into their individual characterizations. Roblyer returned to his headstone from the previous exercise, and found that the reading "changed the context, but not the point of the story" (Roblyer C). Dominguez read in front of a double headstone for a man and wife. She imagined the couple as herself (Woman 1) and Man. She played the character as passive/aggressive, dwelling on "so many plans that didn't happen" (Dominguez B). She created a Woman 1 who desperately wanted to be with Man when she was alive, but no

longer wanted to lay with him for eternity once they were dead (Dominguez B). Barker began his monologue at the foot of another man's grave and later turned, squatted at the headstone, and told him the story directly. Barker said that the deceased man absorbed the roles of both Man and the light mentioned in the original stage directions (Barker B). Betik played her monologue as a "free-love hippie," to the headstone of a man who died in the 1970's (Betik C). She noted that she made the characters and the situation seem more innocent, and found the missing chunks in the script to be strange, but attributed the inconsistency to hippie drug culture (Betik C). Hatton chose the grave of a doctor, and imagined him as man with "a secret home life, and skeletons in his closet" (Hatton C). Hatton played Man as a godlike character, and laid on the grave, in the man's place, and said that he, Man, and the deceased doctor "felt as one in the same" (Hatton C). This exercise created yet another endless list of opportunities for characterization and inspiration. Most of the actors, including Barker and Betik, transformed the dead into characters to play opposite. This works well with the original text because Beckett's characters never speak directly to each other. Other actors, like Dominguez and Hatton, used the exercise to embody the deceased. The characters of *Play* are dead individuals relating their stories; we can use performance as research to learn more about what that means for actors, characters, and audience members by using the tangible graves of the deceased as inspiration, almost as a form of participant observation.

The final exercise of the week proved to be one of the most insightful. The cast and I went to the Walmart in College Station to experiment again with public performance.

Cast members present included Dominguez as Woman 1 and Barker as Woman 2, with Hatton and Betik switching off as Man. Each cast member walked behind one of three shopping carts, in a single file line, casually meandering through every department of the store during the course of the twenty-minute play. The actors were instructed to trade leadership and alter the cart order as they progressed; they did this casually and seamlessly. The carts were noisy, so the actors compensated by raising their voices when needed.

To our utter shock, the performance went almost entirely unnoticed. Many people interacted with the actors, by only on a customer-to-customer level. Some people would stand patiently while the three carts passed, waiting for their turn to walk by; others would cut between the actors and go about their shopping, having no clue they were walking right through a performance. At one point, a customer with a cart started following the trio, but quickly became frustrated at the crowded aisle, and walked around the group, never acknowledging that they were reading the same text simultaneously. Over the course of the exercise, we counted five people who even noticed the actors were together, none of which said anything, to anyone. I even walked behind the actors at some points, filming them and the obliviousness of the other customers, and was totally ignored. A few children watched us as we passed, one baby waved at Dominguez, but nearly every adult in the store was too preoccupied to observe the performance walking right past them. We were even invisible to the Walmart employees, who should be the most likely to pick up on disturbances in their store. At

one point, Dominguez accidentally ran her cart into a pole, and yet was still invisible. It was a busy Friday evening, and nearly every customer and employee went about their business, unaware. Hatton found the experience unsettling, saying, “No one cares what you’re going through. We really could’ve been dead, or ghosts, and no one would’ve noticed” (Hatton C). This performance echoed the through line of the early exercises in the elevators and in Starbucks, proving once again that a performance, whether subdued or overt, can be hidden in plain sight and largely ignored by the general public.

By using performance as a research tool, we were able to develop a strong ensemble with multiple levels of characterization and varied casts. We then took these techniques and applied them to acting exercises on campus and in found performance spaces within the community. By doing so, the actors and I were able to distill multiple new meanings from the text each night, something that I believe is vital to *Play*, but an approach Beckett specifically condemns.

In my research and rehearsal process with stage directions in the works of Samuel Beckett, I examined performance as a research method and previous productions of Beckett works. I paid special attention to productions that deviated from Beckett’s original text, both those closed down by Beckett, his publishers, and his estate, and those that slid by unacknowledged. I also travelled to Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, to attend rehearsals and conduct interviews with actors, designers, and the director of their production of *Beckettshorts*.

That research informed my work with Beckett's *Play*, in which I used an ensemble of actors to explore multiple acting techniques using performance as research. By performing in different locations with varied casts, we were able to explore multiple meanings of the play. I explored new possibilities with *Play,* and discovered that Absurdist theatre can be performed unnoticed in plain sight.

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