

Matters of Memory in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*

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Krapp's Last Tape (1958) embodies memory and the dislocations of time; in *Not I* (1972) even the "body" disappears—"whole body like gone"—and only a dislocated memory, visualized as a "subjectless" mouth, is left us. Theatrically, we have here the break between a mimetic theatre (however reduced), and postmodern dissolutions. Krapp may be drawn as a metaphor for man as clown or bum—white face, purple nose, short pants, large shoes; but for all the pregnant minimalism he still retains a distinct character, a discernable story, a room, a name. Mouth obviously has none of these; she also has no body or head attached to the red orifice we see, no logical placement on stage—floating as she (it) does eight feet above stage level—no context or frame, beginning or end to the unstoppable monologue we hear her speak. Separated by fourteen years, these related plays both attempt to objectify memory within highly visual—and very different—organs of remembrance. It is this difference, and the world-views signified through this difference, that will interest me here. I will claim that Beckett's ever-moving fragment of body, Mouth, recalling a being which slips away and disperses even as it is being evoked, reflects an ontologically different notion of memory and self than does the static memory-machine (the tape-recorder) we find in dialogue with Krapp. Inversely, we might say that this changed perspective governed Beckett's reformed strategy (in *Not I*) for imaging and theatricalizing memory.

There was never a lack of "rememberers" in Beckett's theatre: Hamm's ongoing story of a remembered life, probably his own (*Endgame*); Winny's struggle to remember bits of her cultural past (*Happy Days*); the divergent testimonies given by the three complicit figures of *Play*. But in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the past remembered is already problematized through Beckett's experiment in physically *imaging* memory and memory processes on stage. Thus we must negotiate between two tenuously connected versions of self—Krapp, the banana eating body; and Krapp the memory-box. The externalized ontological dualism found in this play is a basic Beckettian motif, here applied specifically to the relation between selfhood and recall. With *Not I* and Beckett's ensuing set of

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short plays, scattered between 1972 (*Not I*) and 1980 (*Ohio Impromptu*), this dualism is itself problematized and a completely different view of memory, and selfhood, is advanced through a range of dramatic strategies. Beckett grapples in these late plays with formalizing devices, with ways of giving theatrical shape to the process and posture of remembrance; and to the subsequent problems of reception. It is not the memories revealed or the words which suddenly “come” that are of the essence. Rather, it is the complex net of memoried states of being—the interplay of inner voices, the pluralisms of self-perception, the complexity of agency, of volition or its lack, the simultaneity of pasts and present, the multiple modes of repetition and recall, of traces and patterns: which evoke a sense of our own trivial yet inevitable multiplicity, simultaneity, fragmentedness. In a discussion of these late plays, Bernard Beckerman wrote that: “As we concentrate to make sense out of the alternating strands of memory, we face the question . . . Are we anything other than listeners to our own memories?”¹ Through a study of the similarities—but especially of the differences—between *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I* (which in a loose sense can be seen to represent some of the common traits of these late plays, especially in terms of memory and selfhood), we can perhaps trace a break between a mimetic, dualistic theatre—and a theatre of dispersal, plurality, and irreducible fragmentation.

In *Krapp*, memory is imaged as a large two-spoiled (double-lobed) tape-recorder. This choice of metaphor—a mechanical, material box—presupposes and shapes the way we view the memory function, and thus the “self,” in *Krapp*. It also entails a set of concepts and dramatic moves—mechanistic, dualistic, basically still mimetic—which, I will claim, are no longer relevant in *Not I*. Memory in a box means memory localized, thrillingly present within a concrete, material form. No longer elusive or diffuse, memory seems self-contained, redeemable, depending for its “use” on finding the right reel, twisting the right levers, locating the desired section of tape. The comic ironies wrested by Beckett from *Krapp’s* difficulty in locating the exact memory he seeks (his need to fast forward and rewind), only underscore the dualism of rememberer and memory, where memory is imaged as an objectified “other” which cannot be completely controlled. *Krapp*, “a wearish old man,” sits in his den trying to record his impressions of the past year—as he does every year on his birthday—but is instead drawn to listen, again, to a recording from his past, the memory of “farewell to love.” The past that *Krapp* seeks is elicited from his box at will; it is also ironized and contextualized through *Krapp’s* present behavior: his visual doubling of the traits described in memory (eating bananas, drinking, writing notes on an envelope), his difference from the self in memory (more lonely still, more depleted, and there is also forgetting). This objectification of memory is a brilliant

way to theatricalize dual consciousness; it is also a way to give a one-man play—"company." *Krapp* presents us not only with the act of remembering a life: it is also a dialogue between living and remembrance, present and past—Man and his Memory.

Remembering is, in a sense, an inherently dualistic activity. The one part of the mind REcalls, brings up the past; while the other watches, listens, is reminded, reacts, sometimes refuses the memory brought up and rejects it (Mouth: "try something else . . . think of something else"²). Memory, writes St. Augustine,

is like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses . . . When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is something quite different [Mouth: "not that either? . . . nothing to do with that either?" 22] . . . These I brush aside from the picture which memory presents to me, allowing my mind to pick what it chooses, until finally that which I wish to see stands out clearly and emerges into sight from its hiding place. . . . and as their place is taken they return to their place of storage, ready to emerge again when I want them.³

For Augustine, the will ("I") is lord, sending messengers into memory to recover neatly stored, sometimes more deeply interred but still redeemable, always restorable remembrances. Although *Krapp*, like Augustine, can retrieve his buried past, it is no longer clear which is master: the will or the memory. The easy sway of Augustine's present "I" over stored and malleable memory is no longer the working assumption. *Krapp* will finally forego the attempt to record his immediate impressions and allow the voice of the past to speak instead. The voice of memory will prove stronger than *Krapp*'s own.

Memory seeps into most of Beckett's late plays. In his film-script *Eh Joe*, Beckett, in an almost paradigmatic demonstration of the hold of the past over the present, has the mocking voice of memory invade Joe's room even after he carefully (and literally) locks all entrances and seals all cracks. For Joe, as for *Krapp*, memory is still a "material" other, which can hopefully be excluded through lock and key; for Joe, as for Mouth, memory "comes" uncalled in a

flood of uncontrollable words. Beckett's rememberers, like Augustine's, are often dual beings, split dramatic character—body and mind (memory-box), voice and ear, Reader and Listener, the perceiving subject and the perceived object. But in Beckett, duality (and, as we shall see, shattered multiplicity) suggest a multiplied cast of characters vying and negotiating for a determination of self. This chasm within being—the impossibility of perceiving the self without turning the self into an object—and thus the impossibility of unity, is a basic trope of remembrance. “Because of this disjunction,” writes Linda Ben-Zvi, “all of Beckett's people have the continual sense that they are being watched, if only by themselves.”⁴ In *Krapp's Last Tape* this duality is turned into a refracting dialogue within an externalized self, and thus made dramatically explicit. In *Not I*, duality is both assumed (Mouth/Auditor) and shown as an insufficient, perhaps a useless model for the dispersed and centerless contemporary consciousness.

Augustine in his *Confessions*, analyzes the function of memory through a simple example that aptly parallels the mechanistic images of Krapp's memory-machine: the recitation of a psalm. When we recite, Augustine writes, the mind “performs three functions, those of expectation, attention, and memory. The future, which it expects, passes through the present, to which it attends, into the past, which it remembers.” As the recitation of the psalm gets on the expectation grows shorter and the memory grows longer; this is true too, Augustine continues, of every part of the psalm, and of life itself.⁵ Augustine's description of the movement of future into past is like the “decantation” of self of which Beckett writes in *Proust*: “The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.”⁶ This same “movement” is given visual form in *Krapp*. James Olney has suggested that the two spools of Krapp's magnetic tape-recorder, in their iconic movement, offer a visual parallel to Augustine's description of time's passage from future into past. Krapp “listens to the narrated episodes of his life pass from the spool of expectation on the left across the head of the tape player, which corresponds to the present narration, to be taken up by the spool of memory on the right - which, when rewound, becomes once again the spool of expectation.”⁷ Applying Augustine's spacial description of time to Krapp's tapes allows us to easily visualize concepts such as “returning” to the past (rewind), or “seeking” a different memory. It also underlines the dualistic view of memory as a present “I” (the agent) interacting with a dormant but available past stacked up before him, as in Augustine's images of a memory “storehouse.”

In *Not I*, memory is less easily compartmentalized, its movement less easily visualized. A disembodied mouth hanging eight feet above stage level is the

organ of memory, its externalized form; the “agent” or initiator of recall (such as Krapp), is missing—thus we no longer have an obvious “dialogue.” Unlike *Krapp* which begins in pantomime, in comic gropings that acquaint us with the present Krapp (“characterize” him) before we hear of (and from) the voice of Krapp past, Mouth is found from the first *in medias res* of an already ongoing discourse. Mouth is supplied without context or frame; her mawings begin before she, or we, begin to listen, they continue after. All we will see is red lips endlessly moving, lit by a spot, and downstage left a tall figure, “sex undeterminable,” standing fully gowned in a long hooded djellaba, facing Mouth, almost unmoving, and silent throughout. Mouth’s logorrhea is offered without preamble or explanation. It is not her birthday, as it is Krapp’s, this is not a ritual occurrence, a yearly word-letting, as it is in *Krapp*, there is no external, narrative explanation for what we see—aside from what may be gleaned, gradually and at our peril, from Mouth’s text which suggests a sudden and involuntary “coming” of speech to the lips of an old woman at the moment of the body’s demise.

Several dualisms and seemingly mechanical repetitions are initially apparent in *Not I*. Mouth and body positioned on stage certainly suggest a mind/body dualism, just as they suggest the division between speaker and auditor in consciousness, parallel to Krapp and his voice-machine. Iconigraphically, Mouth seems to represent absolute speaker; the second figure, Auditor, so named and physically positioned towards Mouth, would thus seem to image absolute listener. But Auditor does not listen as Krapp listens—choosing the memory (“allowing my mind to pick what it chooses”), judging whether he’s interested, returning to a given section. Nor does he (she?) listen as does Listener in *Ohio Impromptu*. S/he may, philosophically, be a Berkeleyan perceiver objectifying and maintaining the existence of Mouth, but (unlike Berkeley’s God) s/he functions as a witness without being an implicit source of what s/he sees; is, indeed, an affective mediator only for the audience. Unlike Listener in *Ohio*, who intervenes physically through knocks which affect the spoken text, or Krapp who manipulates memory physically through lever and reel, Auditor is totally outside the cognizance, or function, of Mouth, and in no way modifies the workings of memory itself.⁸ Auditor comments on Mouth’s monologue four times: through four small gestures expressing (so Beckett tells us in his text) “helpless compassion.” These gestures are physically directed towards Mouth, but affectively aimed at the audience. Thus Mouth, who would seem to be a speaking and not a listening organ, would seem to be the one half of a dualistic pair—mouth and ear—is, I will claim, actually both, and much more.

Mouth, like Krapp’s “box,” is a self-repeater, returning again and again to the same texts as though in a loop (“and now this stream . . . not catching the

half of it . . . not the quarter . . .” repeats, for example, five times in this short text). Often the repetitions seem obsessive; but they are never mechanical, never mere spoken recordings. Each repetition is also an addition to and variation of the previous texts, always a “clothed” repetition—to use Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between mechanical “naked” repetitions which confirm sameness, and “clothed” repetitions which, through variation, uncover difference.⁹ Not only is each repetition of key texts (“tiny little thing . . . out before its time . . . godforsaken hole”) slightly (at least) reworded, each also leads to an additional moment of remembrance. Still, one of the central texts in the play—the text that gives the play its name—is indeed repeated five times with little variation, and underscored through (almost identical yet depleting) gestures made by the otherwise static figure of Auditor. This is the passage which Beckett describes as Mouth’s “vehement refusal to relinquish third person” and to which Auditor reacts with “helpless compassion.” Five times Mouth rejects the word “I” through the formula: “and she [found herself in the—] . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . .” followed by a pause and (except for the fifth time) a movement by Auditor. This precisely repeated section (except for the fifth repetition, when the word she! is followed by SHE! . . .) certainly suggests an unheard dialogue, indeed, an inner dualism, between voice (who narrates), and some further inner voice bringing words—such as the word “I”—which mouth refuses to say: “no!” Thus Enoch Brater, for example, concluded that “Mouth is hell-bent on obliterating any relationship to a questionable past.” Brater develops this mimetic image into a figure of duality with the words: “The staging of the play suggests . . . a literally dislocated personality: an old woman listening to herself, yet unable to accept that what she hears, what she says, refers to her.”¹⁰ Old woman versus inner voice.

But once we begin attending to Mouth’s words (not an easy task in performance), we note that the unheard inner voice trying to say “I” and vehemently rejected by Mouth, is not the only “dislocated” figure proffered or described, not the only intruding piece of self. Nor is “her” only problem—the only dualism of a “hell-bent” will—a division between the spoken “she” and the proposed “I.” Indeed, once we meet the entire inner cast and crew we will have gotten to know voice (speaking), mouth (moving on its own), “she” (wherever she may be located), the unheard inner voice suggesting “I,” a possibly additional inner voice intervening periodically in Mouth’s narration, brain “raving on its own,” and the constant buzzing—but we will have completely lost sight of “I.” Mouth tells us of the voice, presumably the voice we are now hearing, which “she” suddenly hears and “did not recognize . . . at first . . . so long since it had sounded . . . then finally had to admit . . . could be none other . . . than her own . . .” (18). Words “were coming” of their own, voice was speaking of its own

volition. The words seem not to be identified with “she” since she—wherever she may be located—has a hard time hearing or understanding “this stream . . . not catching the half of it . . . not the quarter . . . no idea . . . what she’s saying . . . imagine!” (18). Nor can she stop mouth, or mouth can’t stop itself—“no idea what she’s saying! . . . and can’t stop . . . no stopping it” (19). We next learn that “lips . . . cheeks . . . jaws . . . never— . . . what? . . . tongue? . . . yes . . . lips . . . cheeks . . . jaws . . . tongue . . . never still a second” are also moving on their own, forming words without recourse to “she,” wherever she may be located. Thus the ear (straining to hear) the lips (moving) the voice (speaking) all seem to be working independently, autonomously, neither understood nor mediated by “she.”

In a number of sections of the play we find a seemingly dialogical relationship between Mouth and an inner (unheard) voice which suggests changes to Mouth’s monologue. The pattern is constant: each time this occurs Mouth listens, repeats the suggestion, and then self-corrects her speech: “she did not know . . . what position she was in . . . imagine! [. . .] whether standing . . . or sitting . . . but the brain— . . . what? . . . kneeling? . . . yes . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . but the brain— . . . what? . . . lying? . . . yes . . .” (15). This inner voice suggesting additional positions to the ones Mouth had already named (the same voice, perhaps, that suggests adding “tongue” to Mouth’s list of “lips . . . cheeks . . . jaws . . . never— . . . what? . . . tongue?”), may be the same inner voice trying to say “I,” but we have no way of knowing. In addition to the speaking voice, the occasionally intervening inner voice(s), the self-moving lips and tongue, the “she” straining to hear—there is also the brain, “the whole brain begging . . . something begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop . . . pause a moment . . . if only for a moment . . . and no response . . . as if it hadn’t heard” (20). Brain is another important player in this drama; for while it begs Mouth to stop, it is also “raving away on its own . . . trying to make sense of it . . . or make it stop . . . or in the past . . . dragging up the past . . . flashes from all over” (20). Does brain have a memory of its own? aside from the memory of voice which is also “dragging up the past?” So it seems; for we now hear of scenes from the past of some life (“walking all her days . . .”), which Mouth (paradoxically) claims are occurring in *brain*, not in voice: “the brain . . . flickering away on its own . . . quick grab and on . . . nothing there . . . on to the next . . . bad as the voice . . . worse . . . as little sense” (20). Like voice, brain too flickers through memories of a fragmented and “senseless” past and Mouth, or voice, or “she,” is critical. All the while, even as voice speaks and brain flickers and “she” strains to hear, there is an inner “buzzing”—“dull roar like falls” (20), accompanying all the rest.

Paul Lawley writes that “the whole of the monologue, insofar as it is a denial—‘Not I’—is a lie, a refusal to acknowledge the fragmentary nature of the self.”¹¹ But WHO, we must ask, is doing the “refusing”? To assume a potential “acknowledger” who can “acknowledge the fragmentary nature of the self,” is to assume the existence of a unifying center of being, an ontological ground *everywhere* denied in this play. *Not I* invests in every form of fragmentation and splintering, imaging through text, figure and performance a consciousness so divided against and within itself, so incapable of integration or of being imaged as other than a whirl of fragments, that we literally have a portrayal of the *being* of a “Not I.” This demonstration of a splintered consciousness torn asunder in a multitude of ways, produces far more than a double consciousness or an opposition between unified I and fragmented self. Mouth is both cognizant of self-fragmentation (and seemingly gives it some united “form” through the formless, instantly disappearing medium of voice), and herself captive to a non-unitary logorrhea which she did not initiate and cannot stop. Moreover, and increasingly as the play continues, the words which have “come” are contested and denied by, perhaps, additional fragments of self. We find an urge to forget, to erase, to censure and thus change parts of the memory being produced: “think of something else.” Mouth strains under the demands of both an involuntary confessional voice, and the voice of resistance, refusing to reveal or denying the memories being offered. Each attempt at speech produces a refusal—“what? . . . not that? . . . nothing to do with that? . . . nothing she could tell? . . . all right . . . nothing she could tell . . . try something else . . . think of something else . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash . . . not that either . . . all right . . . something else again . . . so on” etc. (22). The attempt to give voice to the memory of “how it was . . . how she— . . . what? . . . had been? . . . yes . . . something that would tell how it had been . . . how she had lived” (21) is continuously disrupted by the difficulties of *how it IS to remember*: the inner fragmentation, the different voices intervening, the strains of recall and, not least, the need to forget which constitute the activity of remembrance itself. Not only is “she” internally fragmented, she is internally conflicted. This division into speaking voice and inner censorer (repression) may suggest a territorialization of consciousness similar to the Freudian model; but this spacial image (parallel to Krapp’s “tapes”) dissolves and interpenetrates into further fragments even as we try to analyze it. Memory here is not, as Augustine had thought, “a spacious palace, a storehouse” in which “everything is preserved separately, according to its category”¹²—perhaps on (not always well-marked) magnetic tapes. Memory, like consciousness, is split and cracked and redoubling, lacking agency or telos, with various and contradictory agendas.

Inner fragmentation, multiplication, refraction are only a few of the play's many strategies for signifying dispersal and centerlessness. Another track is through temporal fracturing. At the start of the play, the monologue is heard as a sort of "buzzing" for at least 10 seconds before we begin to understand the words;¹³ this repeats for at least 10 seconds at the end, after we cease to understand. Clearly, we hear but a fragment of an ongoing monologue which repeats both internally and entirely, dispersing mimetic coherence and creating a dramatic equivalent for the endless loop. The monologue is possibly being spoken out of an immobile, insentient body—"whole body like gone"—after its collapse ("in the field . . . April morning . . . face in the grass"); yet the words repeatedly refer to some future time, after this event. One of the play's most common verbal patterns, repeated in nine slight variations, is: "her first thought was . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash." An additional four (near) repetitions go to the phrases: "when suddenly . . . gradually." How are we to understand this? "Long after . . . sudden flash" implies a time long after the occurrence being related, but well before the narration we are hearing now: that is, it implies a long, ongoing stretch of time. Yet the description of "lips moving" and words "coming" seems to imply that the event being described is coextensive with its description. The physical image of the disembodied mouth reinforces the sense of simultaneity between the incident ("whole body like gone") and the narration. Further, the repetition of the words "suddenly . . . gradually," like "long after . . . sudden flash," create temporal disorientation through their contradictory senses of time, simultaneously given. This sense of splintered temporality is recaptured in the structure of the play. Mouth's text seems to be a narrative, beginning as it does at birth, telling of collapse, recall, memories. However, the feeling of a forward movement is vitiated by the inner repetitions of whole sections of text, creating inner cycles ("tiny little thing . . . out before its time. . ."), and by the fact that the ending obviously returns us to the start of the narrative which had itself started before we began to listen. Beckett so much as tells us in the last words of the play that the monologue, which may have fooled us into a sense of a forward moving narrative, is in a loop: "hit on it in the *end* . . . then *back* [. . .] *back* in the field . . . April morning . . . face in the grass . . . nothing but the larks . . . *pick it up*—" (23, my emphases). This section too has been repeated a number of times within the monologue, so that the "return" is not signified as a mechanical repetition of the whole, as in *Play*, but as a continued cycle within the cycles of "clothed" repetitions and new revelations of the play.

Thus the monologue moves in a number of directions both "suddenly" and "gradually," fusing contradictory senses of temporality. This fluid simultaneity of times parallels the "profound paradox of memory"¹⁴ which is so

central to the writings on memory of the philosopher Henri Bergson. In his book *Matter and Memory*, Bergson differentiates between two types of memory: habit memory, and “pure” or spontaneous memory.¹⁵ In *Mouth* we have an approximation of Bergson’s concept of “pure” memory, unlike Krapp’s memory-machine which is closer to Bergson’s description of “habit” memory. Habit memory is mechanistic, functional, reflecting a view of time which is serial and consecutive: basically a *spatial* and analytic concept of time, like the image of the movement of Krapp’s tape. Pure duration—or pure memory—on the other hand, is intuitive, multi-directional, simultaneous, spontaneous; Bergson speaks of “interpenetration,” of flow.¹⁶ Mary Warnock rephrases Bergson’s theory through a concise example: learning a Horace Ode by heart employs “habit memory”; recalling the hot summer day when I lay in the field learning the Ode by heart is closer to “pure” memory.¹⁷ How can we overlook the radical difference, Bergson writes, “between that which must be built up by repetition and that which is essentially incapable of being repeated?”¹⁸ The former, the memorized ode, or the passage on “recital” (Augustine) cited above, is locked into a spacial image of time, repetition, process. The latter type of memory, key to Bergson’s vitalist rejection of dualism, is unanchored in temporality; it has neither chronology nor image. In Gilles Deleuze’s arresting formulation: “The past is ‘contemporaneous’ with the present that it *has been*. . . . The past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is.”¹⁹ *Mouth*, viewed through this paradox, exists both in her present disembodied form, throbbing on stage, and is equally present in the forms of all the memories which she animates and of which she is constituted. In Bergson’s spontaneous memory we are free from the segmentation and one-directionality of perception which is the prisoner of the corporeality of body (of which *Mouth* is almost freed), and of the tainted specificity of language (which *Mouth* almost overcomes through her fragments of speech). Spontaneous memory occurs when the brain’s defenses are down, outside the control of consciousness. In its purest (ideal) form, we would have a “pure intuition of how things are, and were, without the restriction of space, or of time.” In it we would “know ourselves But, unfortunately, exactly what we know can never be adequately expressed.”²⁰ If *Mouth* can be seen as something like Bergsonian “pure” memory, then what she perhaps gets to “know” but cannot express (“nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express”²¹) is the complete *absence* of a center of being; that is: essential fragmentation.

Diffusion and simultaneity in *Not I* extend of course beyond the textual to the performative and receptive aspects of the play as well. The textual images are, clearly, preceded and anchored in visual fragmentation—the mouth, the figure; and their odd positioning, decentered, dislocated, floating above stage at

a height both unreasonable and hallucinatory. The fracturing continues through the theatrical self-referentiality of Mouth's text which seems to reflect the dramatic production we see. Mouth's description of "lips moving [. . .] the cheeks . . . the jaws [. . .] the tongue in the mouth" (19) parallels the production of sound on stage; her talk of "this ray or beam [. . .] always the same spot" (16) mirrors the spotlight in fact aimed at Mouth; the "whole body like gone" reflects Mouth's absence of body, as well as Auditor, a body gone from Mouth, or from consciousness. Thus the text doubles up as narrative and metanarrative. This same doubleness also encourages us to hear the text as reflecting the activity of auditing which the spectator experiences. Not only "she" but the spectator too hears "the buzzing . . . so-called . . . in the ears"; and faced with the speed and fracture of the words, will be "straining to hear . . . to make something of it" (19). This is as much a description of the *audience's* difficulty in auditing and perceiving Mouth and text, as of "her" difficulty.²² The "steady stream," the words "coming," the "whole body like gone," the "mouth alone" on stage, all these, as has been often remarked, reflect metadiscursively on the text we hear, mirror reflexively the physical performance we see, parallel the strain of reception we feel, and still have referential import for the "stories" being told. And all these multiple functions and implications, dramatic and metadramatic, need to be held in the viewers' memory, simultaneously. Like "brain" or "she" (wherever she may be located), should the spectator want to "make sense" of the play, to "piece it together," he or she would likely need to replay the pieces in her/his own memory. The performance enacts the multiple dislocations of narrative from consciousness; thus, to see the mouth as a person and the voice as its life, would be a mimetic act only realized in the imagination of the spectator.²³ Any reading of the play must reconstruct from fragments; and a reconstruction for a mimetic reading can only be done through a mis-remembering of the disparate fragments themselves. The swirl of competing fragmentations can, on the other hand, also free the spectator from representation and allow for an intuition of centerlessness and flow. "The great achievement of *Not I*," writes Keir Elam, "is to free the spectator's *imaginaire*" so as to allow a "blurring" of the competing images and senses of Mouth's body (and being), in the body's very absence.²⁴

This same experience of fragmentation is, in addition, endured by the actor of Mouth. Billie Whitelaw, who played Mouth in London under Beckett's own direction, was strapped into a chair, head anchored for the spot, body and eyes covered to prevent reflection of the light. Whitelaw speaks of being turned physically into a Mouth, deprived of her other senses—resulting at first in an "out-of-body" experience which is like the extracted mouth we see, inducing hysteria and hallucinations. The speed at which the piece needed to be said gave

her jaw-pain, and she had difficulty remembering the text.²⁵ Thus the actor too experiences fragmentation and memory strain, as does the audience, replicating the experience of the fractured “self” on stage.

Beckett’s late “memory plays”—from *Not I* to *Ohio Impromptu*—all impress a strong, evocative single image onto our memories, images (a displaced mouth, a floating head, a steadily pacing ghostly figure, a dressed-up rocking woman, two identically dressed men at a table) which are disturbing and not easily forgotten. In production, writes Enoch Brater of *Mouth*, “one is all but overwhelmed by the sheer persuasiveness of the image: a mouth staring out at us from otherwise ‘empty’ theater space. Disembodied, suspended in space, and throbbing with a constant pulsation of lips, teeth, tongue, and saliva.”²⁶ “You may find nothing in it,” said Jessica Tandy who played *Mouth* in the 1972 New York production, “but I suspect you will never forget it.”²⁷ The texts spoken by or above these images provide the emotional and intellectual substrata, but are less easy to penetrate or recall. “I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility,” Beckett told Jessica Tandy when she complained that his suggested speed for the monologue made the words unintelligible. “I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect.”²⁸ The image, unnerving, functions as a memory trigger, evoking the sense and sensations of the piece, the “nerves” rather than any plot or narrative line. It is through the image, in this case a grotesquely displaced fragment of an absent body, pathetically trying to recreate itself through speech, that we intuit the complexity of the drama of absence and fragmentedness. And while we may not “get the half of it . . . not the quarter,” we are not likely to forget the image of mouth/memory recalling a self that slips away and dissolves even as its absent parts are being named.

Beckett’s play of fragments invites us, I think, to “think” intuitively, through the fragmented images themselves, and through the additional fragments produced by text, by voice, by metadiscursive devices, by strategies of reception. Billie Whitelaw tells how she cried when she first read the play “not understanding one word of it, may I say, intellectually,” but intuitively recognizing the mode of *Mouth*’s existence.²⁹ The nature of *Mouth* is perhaps not given to rational cognition, to penetration through the will. Every aesthetic decision in the play suggests a poetics of dissolution and fragmentation, meant to be grasped intuitively in something like Bergson’s “pure” memory. *Mouth* creates and erases herself, is constituted and evaporated in ways very like S. E. Gontarski’s description of Beckett’s creative process: “What remains is the trace of an author struggling against his text, repenting his originary disclosure, effacing himself from the text, and thereby creating himself.”³⁰ Compared with this, the series of selves in *Krapp* is relatively easy to grasp. The fractured memory of “farewell to love,” replayed in three separate fragments, interrupted

by additional pieces of Krapp's past, refracted through Krapp's present personality and his own attempts at recording, does finally coalesce into a story and a history which reflect poignantly on Krapp's present loneliness. *Not I* boggles the imagination in its bottomless, unending production of splinters and fractions resistant to mimetic reconstitution and impervious to closure. Thus, while *Krapp* may be thought of as a series of distorted and "distilled" selves, as, perhaps, a hall of distorting mirrors in which versions of the self view and reflect previous and subsequent versions; *Not I* is perhaps better thought of as a flow of aporias, each opening onto interiority (within Mouth, within the actor, within the viewer), each partial image of self displaced or erased or redoubled by a further fragment in a *mise en abyme* of ontological fragmentation and simultaneity. In *Krapp*, the self may indeed already be a series of mobile utterances creating, to quote Connor, "a web of mutually enveloping, self-quoting moments, each endlessly displaced from its originating context, and regrafted elsewhere,"³¹ but the "regrafted" pieces continue to reflect each other (the laugh, the bananas, even the signature loneliness) hinting, even strongly suggesting, some minimal self which survives through time—and thus justifying the material metaphor of a memory "box." In *Not I* we really *cannot* locate a source, a moment, a place at which an I, a self, resides.

Beckett's careful shaping of the fragments of memory in *Not I* is in many ways paradigmatic for postmodern memory-theatre. As can be said of some of his subsequent memory-nuggets (*That Time*, *Footfalls*, *Ohio Impromptu*), *Not I* reshapes our notions of theatrical space and time, enacts a multiple dissolution of the boundaries of the (mostly absent) self, stresses the process of viewer reception over the self-sufficiency of the text, performance over narrative, the parts over the whole; it is self-reflexive, open-ended, indeterminate, forever incomplete. Thus, that hallucinatory fragment of body, the never-still and thus never "formed" Mouth, a perhaps distorted (or "misremembered"³²) and virtually immaterial version of Krapp's memory-machine, becomes a fittingly flighty "emblem" for contemporary ontological dispersal and centerless being.

Notes

1. Bernard Beckerman, "Beckett and the Act of Listening," *Beckett at 80 / Beckett in Context*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 158.

2. Samuel Beckett, *Not I*, in *Ends and Odds: Eight New Dramatic Pieces* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1976) 22. All references are to this edition, and will be cited parenthetically within the text.

3. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1961) 214 (section X.8).

4. Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 6.

5. St. Augustine 277 (section XI.28).
6. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957) 4-5.
7. James Olney, "Memory and the Narrative Imperative: St. Augustine and Samuel Beckett," *New Literary History* 24 (1993) 864.
8. Auditor's unclear function is attested by the fact that Beckett directed a French version of the play in 1975, omitting the figure altogether. He also allowed the play to be filmed by the BBC that same year, again without the figure of Auditor. See Ben-Zvi 244 and 245.
9. See Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968); and more specifically, Steven Connor's application of Deleuze to Beckett's use of repetition in his *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), especially Chapter 1.
10. Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater* (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 23.
11. Paul Lawley, "Counterpoint, Absence and the Medium in Beckett's *Not I*," *Modern Drama* 26/4 (1983) 412.
12. St. Augustine 114 (section X.8).
13. Beckett asks for "Mouth's voice unintelligible behind curtain" even before the house lights go out. It continues "unintelligible behind curtain, 10 seconds" and is replaced by ad-libbing from the text until "curtain fully up and attention sufficient" (p. 14). This must take at least 20 seconds.
14. A phrase used by Gilles Deleuze about Bergson's theory of memory, in his study of *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988) 58.
15. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1911).
16. Chapter 2, especially 89-92.
17. Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987) 29-30.
18. Bergson 95.
19. Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 58-59. Italics in original text.
20. Warnock 30.
21. Samuel Beckett, "Dialogue Two," *Proust and Three Dialogues With Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1965) 103.
22. See, for example, Charles R. Lyons, "Beckett, Shakespeare, and the Making of Theory," *Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Postmodern Drama*, eds. Enoch Brater and Ruby Cohn (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1990) 97-127; Keir Elam, "*Not I*: Beckett's Mouth and the Ars(e) Rhetorica," *Beckett at 80* 124-148; Lawley, "Counterpoint."
23. Cf. Lyons 117-19.
24. Keir Elam 147. I slightly "mis-remember" Elam's sentence here, which has a more specific cast in his rich article. In the original it reads: "The great achievement of *Not I* is to free the spectator's *imaginaire* ('imagine!' says Mouth repeatedly) so as to operate the same kind of 'blurring' of the oral, anal and genital' aspects of the body in the body's very absence." The "blurring" reference is actually to Melanie Klein on "infant confusion" and the "blurring of the oral, anal and genital impulses," *Envy and Gratitude: A Study of Unconscious Sources* (London: Tavistock, 1957) 3.
25. See "Billie Whitelaw: Interviewed by Linda Ben-Zvi," *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1990) 3-10; and Toby Silverman Zinman, "Billie Whitelaw: What Beckett Said to Me," *American Theatre* 11/4 (April 1994) 24-25.
26. Brater, *Beyond Minimalism* 18.
27. 19; quoted by Brater from an interview with Tandy.
28. Cited by Enoch Brater in "Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*," *Modern Drama* 18 (March 1975) 53.

29. "Billie Whitelaw: Interviewed by Linda Ben-Zvi" 4.

30. S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 2.

31. Connor 130.

32. H. Porter Abbott has suggested that Beckett, in (especially) his last pieces, evolves "through a deliberate process of recollection by distortion . . . a kind of misremembering in successive works of elements from those that went before." This would also allow us to see *Mouth* as a sort of "misremembered" version of Krapp's memory-machine. In "Late Modernism: Samuel Beckett and the Art of the Oeuvre," *Around the Absurd* 75.

